The Left and the French Revolution

MORRIS SLAVIN
The Left and the French Revolution
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The Left and the French Revolution

MORRIS SLAVIN
FOR MY FRIENDS

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Acknowledgments

It is a pleasure to acknowledge permission to republish a number of essays in this collection that appeared first in the following journals:

“Théophile Leclerc: An Anti-Jacobin Terrorist” and “The Terror in Miniature: Section Droits-de-l’Homme of Paris, 1793–1795” in The Historian 23, no. 3 (May 1971) and 39, no. 2 (February 1977), respectively.


“Section Roi-de-Sicile and the Fall of the Monarchy” has been previously published in Bourgeois, Sans-Culottes, and Other Frenchmen, ed. Morris Slavin and Agnes M. Smith (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1981), 59–74.

“Jean Varlet as Defender of Direct Democracy” in the Journal of Modern History 39, no. 4 (December 1967), published by the University of Chicago Press, © 1967 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved.


Abbreviations

A. de P.  Archives de Paris
A.D.S.  Archives de Département de la Seine
A.N.  Archives Nationales
A.P.  Archieves Parlementaires
A.P.P.  Archives Préfecture de Police
B.H.B.P.  Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris
B.N.  Bibliothèque Nationale
B.V.C.  Bibliothèque Victor Cousin
Br.M.  British Museum
J.R.L.  John Rylands Library

Several articles cite references to the British Museum, rather than to the Bibliothèque Nationale. These articles were written before my sojourn in Paris, that is, before I was able to examine the vast collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale.
Introduction

The essays included in this collection present individuals and groups who championed the aspirations of the sans-culottes and who fought against the growing bureaucratic and centralizing trends of the Jacobin dictatorship. None of these spokesmen or spokeswomen were counterrevolutionaries; none supported the restoration of the Bourbons. Although many favored a policy of terror against the old ruling classes, they never embraced Robespierre's policy of wedding “Terror” to “Virtue.” Yet they did not oppose the principle of using terror against royalists, monarchists, or moderates. Only when they realized that “the sword of the law” was a two-edged blade, that sans-culottes and their spokesmen could be victims of the Terror no less than counterrevolutionaries, did they turn against the revolutionary government.

In a time of crisis, however, when the revolutionary government was desperately struggling against a foreign coalition bent on returning the Bourbons to the throne of France and when the Vendée and Brittany had risen in rebellion against Paris, “a single will” seemed more essential than ever in order “to live free or die.” In addition to these revolts, two-thirds of the departments had mutinied against the Convention in the summer of 1793. At the same time the hierarchy of the Church continued to support intervention and counterrevolution. Thus the situation in revolutionary France had become more critical than ever. To agitate against the Montagnard Constitution of 1793 under such circumstances, as Jacques Roux did, seemed irresponsible to many French patriots.

Equally irresponsible, it appeared, was a policy of dechristianization that closed down the churches in Paris as well as in many other towns. Dechristianization seemed to divide needlessly an already divided country. There was no need “to trouble the earth in the name of Heaven.” The Committee of Public Safety and, especially, Robespierre denounced the Hébertistes-Cordeliers for launching this action. Jacques-René Hébert, through his journal *Le Père Duchesne*, and Anaxagoras Chaumette, the head of the Paris Commune, continued to hurl thunderbolts against the Church, and in consequence the Convention and its Great Committees turned against them.

At the same time the sans-culottes were suffering, especially from shortages of the essentials in daily life—bread, meat, butter, candles, fuel, and other necessities. The assignat continued to fall in value, which aggravated the growing inflation. At the same time the *maximum*, the price ceiling on goods of prime necessity, could not provide bread and wine. But the Enragés’
agitation against speculators and hoarders and Hébert’s attacks on profiteers struck at all merchants. Commerce itself became suspect. This further divided the urban masses as consumers. Moreover, the maximum did nothing for the countryside. Peasants were reluctant to exchange agricultural products for worthless paper as the assignat continued its downward plunge. As a result, the government was forced to requisition supplies for the army and for the consumers of the towns, which further aggravated the split between rural France and its urban centers.

The growing misery of the petites gens, the little people, was paraphrased by Hébert in his *Le Père Duchesne* in the spring of 1793: “We no longer believe anyone. They steal from us, plunder us as in the past. We no longer have any money or provisions. There is no bread, f— it, at any price. We are without work. For four years now we have suffered. What have we gained from the Revolution?”

The Enragés asked the same question. “Enragé,” literally, means, madman,” in this case, as some conservatives would state it, “a rabid socialist.” Peter Weiss, in his powerful drama *Marat/Sade*, presented their leading spokesman, Jacques Roux, in a straitjacket, shouting and gesticulating like a madman. Weiss has Roux demand “granaries of plenty” to be opened for the needy, the nationalization of workshops and factories, the establishment of schools in the empty churches, and an end to the war. Obviously only a madman would insist on feeding the hungry, opening schools, and ending war.

The historic Jacques Roux was a well-educated priest who taught philosophy and physics before leaving the seminary. Possessed of a strong sense of social justice, he labored to help the poor and the unfortunate. This commitment drove Roux to denounce the Terror, under which broad categories of “suspects” were imprisoned. He wrote:

> Barbarians who kill the true republicans with your slanders, the time is not far off when the sans-culottes will abjure their errors, and trample under foot the traitors who have seduced them. You can oppress patriots, but you cannot enchain the mind. You may place people in a state of arrest, but you cannot arrest the course of irrefutable principles of freedom. Injustice merely hastens the triumph of humanity and reason. Persecutions will make converts for the cause of equality, and the vengeance which you gratify at the expense of men of goodwill is the signal for insurrection against the tyrants and the traitors.

How have revolutionaries been treated?, he asked, and he replied:

> The hypocrites have made use of Leclerc, of Varlet, of Jacques Roux. . . . They have made use of the Revolutionary Women, of Lacombe, of Colombe. . . . and of many other republicans to break the scepter of the tyrant, after which they hope to overthrow the faction of the Hommes
d'Etat [the politicians]. It would be easy to convince oneself that liberty under the reign of the tyrants no longer exists except between the pages of the Republican Constitution.3

Théophile Leclerc, the young Enragé, also denounced the Terror, which concentrated so much authority in the Committee of Public Safety, “creating a Capet of nine heads in place of the one who is no more.” He also criticized the new “aristocracy”:

To the noble and sacerdotal aristocracy has succeeded the bourgeois and mercantile aristocracy. This class, which forms a sort of intermediate caste between the former and the people, has acquired thanks to its wealth as many needs and consequently as many vices as the upper class. It sees a fine prospect in a revolution which will make it the peer of the other class. . . . With their immense riches they engross the means of subsistence. . . [and] produce an artificial scarcity of bread. . . in order to blame the revolution.4

When Robespierre attacked Leclerc as an agent of England and Austria, Leclerc replied by denouncing “despots who insult public opinion” and he counterattacked:

To what a state have we fallen if we cannot speak the truth without incurring proscriptions? They pretend to speak of freedom of the press providing one speaks neither of the government, nor of the men in office; neither of the old nor the new Committee of Public Safety. . . nor of the scoundrels who had enriched themselves or the scoundrels who wish to enrich themselves.5

Then he directed the following barb against Robespierre:

Some public figures are like petty tyrants. They want to be flattered. To propose measures which are not their own, or which displease them, is a crime. Whatever good reasons one may cite, he is forced to keep silent. The victim, often poor and pure, is accused of being in the pay of Pitt and Cobourg, by men of wealth and ease whose fortune dates back only from 1789 and often from the month of August 1792, by people who can be suspected of anything but disinterest.6

The revolutionary government could not allow the Enragés to continue their denunciations and arrested their spokesmen and partisans. This action failed to end dissent, however. A far more serious threat from the Left arose—that of the Hébertistes. Although historians have given this opposition Hébert’s name, he was only the best known of the men who challenged the Convention and its Committees. Jacques-René Hébert, in addition to being the publisher of the most popular journal in Paris, was an assistant procureur of the Paris Commune, as well as a leader of the radical Cordeliers Club.
This society was a rival, at times, to the Jacobins, although a number of its members belonged to the Jacobin Club as well. Hébert, for example, was both a Cordelier and a Jacobin.

The president of the Cordeliers, Antoine-François Momoro, was a printer-bookseller by profession. Upon the overthrow of the monarchy, Momoro was elected to the directory of the Paris department. The author of numerous pamphlets, he advocated "equality of wealth" or property, and as a result was accused of preaching "la loi agraire," that is, a redivision of the soil. Still, the government used him to promote its policies by sending him on a mission to the Vendée. In a short time Momoro became convinced that the reason the war was going badly for the Republic was because of the sabotage of the professional officers. He urged the promotion of sans-culottes to positions of command instead. Upon returning to Paris he was elected president of the Cordelier Club and of his section, the former Théâtre-Français, now called "Marat." He was now in position to promote demonstrations against the Convention, as well as the Paris Commune so long as the sans-culottes suffered shortages and high prices.

The third Cordelier leader who enjoyed much authority was François-Nicolas Vincent, secretary of the War Department under the minister of war, Jean-Baptiste-Noel Bouchotte. Vincent was an ardent and fiery revolutionary who often employed violent language against his opponents, whether they were deputies of the Convention or members of the Cordelier society. His policy in the War Department was to give employment only to good sans-culottes or to proven patriots. He never hid his disdain for members of the Committees of Public Safety or of General Security whom he considered to be moderates or conservatives.

Among the leaders of the society was also a military man, Charles-Philippe Ronsin, a cooper by profession and a failed playwright. He was elected captain of the bourgeois guard in his district, and after the overthrow of Louis XVI was appointed to help organize the defense of Paris. Shortly thereafter he fought in a number of battles and as a result was promoted to head the Republic's army in the Vendée. After the powerful demonstration by the sections of the capital for a Revolutionary Army (among other demands), on 4 and 5 September 1793 Ronsin was appointed its commanding general. The chief duty of this armed force was to suppress counterrevolutionary uprisings in the interior of France, to promote republicanism by establishing popular societies in the provincial towns, and to assure supplies for the capital by requisition when necessary.

The Cordeliers, thus, inherited much of the program championed by the Enragés. In promoting the interests of the sans-culottes as they perceived them, these men clashed with moderates or Indulgents, as they are called by some historians. Among the latter were Georges Danton and his many
supporters. The political situation was aggravated by the conflict over how to conduct the war in the Vendée, how to assure food for the hungry sans-culottes, and against whom to continue the Terror, coupled with personality clashes and the usual ambitions of politicians. The revolutionary government led by the Committee of Public Safety concluded that it could not establish that “single will” without destroying the two factions, that of the Hébertistes and that of the Dantonists.

While the Committee of Public Safety was readying an attack on the Cordeliers, the latter played into the hands of their enemies by threatening to launch another insurrection in March 1794. No effort was made to organize such an uprising, however; nor was it clear what its goals were to be or precisely against whom the Cordeliers were to call out the sans-culottes. The government, of course, took this warning seriously, despite the fact that the Hébertistes merely threatened and blustered. It ordered its public accuser, Antoine-Quentin Fouquier-Tinville, to indict the Hébertistes, and “to amalgamate” the Cordelier leaders with true counterrevolutionaries. The Hébertistes were arrested during the night of 13–14 March, then given a mock trial, and executed on 24 March 1794. This execution was followed by a repression of almost all militants and revolutionaries who had promoted the Revolution. Thus, the popular phase of the French Revolution came to an end.

In addition to the discussion of the popular movement several essays consider the nature of the French Revolution. Modern “revisionists,” as is well known, deny the traditional characterization of the French Revolution as “a bourgeois revolution.” In their adoption of the term “political culture” to explain the events of 1789–1799, they do more than turn their backs on much that has been written and accepted by historians of an earlier day; they even deny that social classes, not only the bourgeoisie, had much to do with it.

This is not to disavow the important contribution made by the revisionists to the study of the French Revolution. A number of them have opened new fields with an insight and imagination that could be envied by all scholars. Nor is it necessary to stress that differences of interpretation and ad hominem attacks have little in common. Few scholars, Marxist or otherwise, would deny that much of the old orthodoxy that explained the French Revolution must be modified or rejected today. Marx himself might have termed some of these stale beliefs “vulgar Marxism.”

Yet many admit that it is impossible to understand the French Revolution without an insight into the class structure of society on the eve of 1789 and during the dramatic days thereafter. The French Revolution, these scholars hold, was fundamentally a social movement. This conviction does not reject the influence of politics, of political culture, or the weight of that whole complex we call culture on the revolutionaries or their Revolution. The role of social classes, as seen by historians, has a long history.
Those who have read Thucydides will recall that he explains why revolutions occurred in the ancient Greek world. According to him, revolutions took place when "the people of the coast" and "the people of the hills" combined against "the people of the plain." To put his characterization into our own language, we would say that merchants, craftsmen, ship builders, and artisans joined the marginal farmers, sheep grazers, and crofters against the landlords and their dependents who constituted the ancient nobility and their supporters. In many city-states this led to the rise of tyrannies, and later, as in Athens, to democracies. More than two millennia after Thucydides, James Madison described the various "interests" that "divide them into different classes."³

A current study by E. J. Hobsbawm demonstrates that until recently the French Revolution was accepted universally as of unparalleled significance, and that the class that led it and that benefited from it was, without question, the middle class.⁴ He cites Augustin Thierry, among others, who wrote:

The bourgeoisie, a new nation, whose manners and morals are constituted by civil equality and independent labor, now arose between nobles and serfs, and thus destroyed forever the original social duality of early feudalism. Its instinct for innovation, its activity, the capital accumulated [emphasis added], formed a force that reacted in a thousand ways against the power of those who possessed the land.⁵

François Guizot traced the birth of the bourgeoisie from the emancipated burghers of the medieval towns; François Auguste Mignet added that it was the bourgeoisie that formulated the Constitution of 1791, and de Tocqueville concluded that there was a struggle to the death between the aristocracy and the new middle class.⁶

These concepts, accepted for so long as self-evident truths, are rejected by today's revisionists. They no longer see the nobility as parasitic and reactionary but rather as dynamic, entrepreneurial, and progressive. The nobility never deprived the commoners of social and economic benefits, they write. On the contrary, they held out their hand to them to share in their good fortune. In fact, according to François Furet, the French Revolution was unnecessary—it was all a dérapage, a skidding off course, from history as it was meant to be. If the bourgeoisie became revolutionary, it was because it suffered from a kind of plot psychosis, a "Figaro syndrome," that could not recognize its true friends, according to Simon Schama.

It seems that the revisionists want to reduce the French Revolution to political history, with society left out. A critic points out how William Doyle, Norman Hampson, Michael Fitzsimmons, and Simon Schama treat the events of 4 August 1789 on the abolition of feudalism, for example. The peasants are left out of the events, and the National Assembly "is hermetically sealed
off from outside social influences.” Furthermore, “from Donald Sutherland’s account . . . . one gains the impression that nine tenths of French society in the 1790s was objectively counterrevolutionary,” and Douglas Johnson insists that if there was a popular revolution it was the counterrevolution.\textsuperscript{13}

That the French middle class had a long history before 1789 has been convincingly demonstrated by a host of modern writers, not only “classical historians” of the nineteenth century. Moreover, revisionists argue that the great mass of eighteenth-century French were “traditionalists,” embracing the seigneurial system and rejecting the new capitalism. Much of this argument is based on the claim that the French economy was backward in contrast to the British. This view is being repudiated today, with a number of scholars arguing that in many respects France was ahead of Britain economically.\textsuperscript{14} Colin Jones declares that French industrialization was not inferior to Britain’s only different. Moreover, he is critical of what he terms Arthur Young’s “bias” against French agriculture. Between 1700 and 1789 the French population increased from 21.5 million to 28.6 million, that is, by a third. This means that French agriculture succeeded in feeding that many more mouths. The so-called seigneurial reaction, he argues, was more a diffusion of businesslike capitalist methods. But it was now seen through the eyes of “a market conscious peasantry.”\textsuperscript{15}

Jones insists that the social origins of the French Revolution were anchored in the bourgeoisie of the Old Regime. This is proved by the commercial development of capitalism in the eighteenth century, the spread of a consumer society (the universal possession of the lowly umbrella is a case in point), the growing professionalization within the service sector of the economy, and the appearance of civic sociability. Far from being “traditional” or “pre-capitalist” or impeded by “archaic forms,” the progress of commercialization and the spread of a consumer society suggests a relative “bourgeoisification” of Old Regime France. But the conflict over privilege and the implication of citizenship was endemic. “Yet though civic sociability had achieved much, it had signally failed to capture control of the state apparatus. This was to be the achievement of the men of 1789,” concludes Jones.\textsuperscript{16}

Although Albert Soboul always defended the thesis that the French Revolution was a bourgeois revolt which brought the middle class to power, the same argument expounded by Colin Jones, Soboul stressed the complexity of the movement, which often took on antibourgeois characteristics.\textsuperscript{17} Contending that feudalism was not abolished until 17 July 1793, he showed its exploitive nature as experienced by the peasant. The revolt of the peasantry in 1789 against this system constituted, in a sense, the last jacquerie in France. Thus, Soboul wrote, although the French Revolution was bourgeois, it also crowned the struggle of the French peasantry against feudalism.\textsuperscript{18}

If the movement in the countryside between 1789–1791 was essentially
antifeudal, it was no less directed against the bourgeoisie now in power. It was largely responsible for the split that occurred between on the one hand, the moderate bourgeoisie allied to the liberal aristocracy attached to feudal forms still persisting in the agrarian economy, and on the other, the radical bourgeoisie and peasantry hostile to compromise with defenders of the Old Regime. This hostility in 1790-1791, Soboul contends, accounts for the instability of the political system erected by the Constituent Assembly. Furthermore, he raises the question of whether it might not be necessary to surrender the classic explanation of the French Revolution as bourgeois and speak of a “peasant-bourgeois revolution.”

Although united against the remnants of feudalism, the peasantry was split between proprietors who had benefited by purchasing the confiscated lands of the aristocracy and the Church, and those who remained without property and worked for wages. But in addition, many continued to struggle to retain the benefits of the traditional village community—the use of common lands, limitations on private property, rights of usage, date for harvesting, and many other such customs and regulations. Thus, in destroying feudal relations, the Revolution also put an end to the village community, a contradiction within the bourgeois revolution.

That there were contradictions within the bourgeois revolution was recognized by many liberals of the nineteenth century. Guizot, for one, blamed reactionaries for risking the reawakening of the popular revolution by their unwillingness to compromise. Many wanted to restrict the suffrage to “the enlightened.” Only a few, like de Tocqueville, realized that democracy was implicit in liberalism, but that it need not have a Jacobin form.

A recent study by Georges Comninel declares that the conflict between “bourgeois liberals and aristocrats” was the central political fact of the French Revolution, and that social interests were behind the revolutionary conflicts. Comninel concludes, however, that the bourgeoisie was not a capitalist class (by his definition of capitalism). Lawyers and owners of non-noble state offices—notaries, bailiffs, lower-ranking magistrates—plus private professionals formed the largest group within the bourgeoisie. The next largest group was composed of rentiers who lived off the income they gained from property. Of the remainder, the largest group was made up of merchants in commerce and manufacturers in industry. Land was the most important form of property, but Comninel comes to the surprising conclusion that there was no barrier between the nobility and the bourgeoisie except for noble status itself, which could be purchased. And since bourgeois patterns of efficient estate management had become widespread among the nobility, there was no need to break “feudal fetters” (Comninel’s quotation marks).

This conclusion is in direct contradiction to what Marxists and the so-called classical historians have always thought. If there was no need to break
"the feudal fetters," what was 1789 all about? This brand of Marxism has little in common with the historical materialism (not "economic determinism") of Marxist scholars. Moreover, Comninel's belief that because French agriculture unlike British was "not fully proletarianized" it was "blocked from technological progress" is at variance with many current studies of this process. Colin Jones, for example, concludes that the peasant "orientation of the rural economy acted as a kind of holding operation," which "avoided a mass rural exodus" and "a classic Malthusian trap."  

That Comninel has borrowed many weapons from the arsenal of the revisionists is clear. In repudiating both Lefebvre and Soboul, he insists that the struggle was not to uproot the remnants of the feudal system but rather to allow the bourgeoisie to win a larger share in the political control of the state. He is convinced, moreover, that "the Marxist interpretation of the French Revolution has been exploded." There was no class struggle between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, he writes; it was, rather, "a movement of national renovation." The crisis of 1789 was not really fundamental; it was a crisis "of a superstructure in transition." And the reason Marx was confused in analyzing the French Revolution was because he adopted the liberal conception of class, which cannot be reconciled with the conception of historical materialism.  

A number of Marxist scholars have criticized Comninel's work as essentially a capitulation to revisionism. Henry Heller asserts that Comninel's view of capitalism has little in common with Marxism, and when Comninel compares England and France he is contrasting "a post-revolutionary society [England]" with "a pre-revolutionary one [France]." Moreover, just because French agriculture was not entirely "rational" does not mean it was not capitalist. Heller adds that Comninel's analysis would deny "the whole period of transition from the 16th century to the Revolution" during which the peasantry suffered an expropriation by the propertied classes. In addition, Comninel's view of capitalism is so "restrictive" that it loses historical meaning, as his definition of capitalist appropriation "to the realm of profit" makes clear. The collection of rent and the taking of interest is as much a form of capitalist accumulation as is the making of profit, writes Heller. Finally, the reviewer declares: "Like most of the revisionist school, Comninel deals with this real revolution of the streets and the countryside by ignoring it."  

In addition to the critique of Comninel above, a more fundamental repudiation of the revisionist challenge is undertaken by Ricardo Duchesne, who declares that "the productive forces [abbreviated to 'PFS'] asserted their 'primacy' over feudal relations from the sphere of circulation." He argues that it was the merchants who established new relations of production, and he cites Marx in support by quoting from the latter that "the sphere of commodity circulation was the strictly bourgeois economic sphere at the time."
finds Comninel's assertion that circulation was subordinated to "the domi-
nant mode of production" fallacious. Instead, he argues that a merchant
who intervenes between two commodity producers, one being wealthier
than the other, actually appropriates the surplus value created by the pro-
ducers without 'employing' them." The profit would originate not from the
agricultural surplus, he writes, "but in a transfer of new value created by the
simple commodity producers to the merchant!" And although Duchesne
agrees with Comninel that the conflicts over state offices "were a key vehi-
cle to the net product, and that competition for these offices was the main
point of friction between the bourgeoisie and the nobility," he criticizes
Comninel for not identifying the economic side of this struggle. As he puts
it: "There was a conflict about the competing claims of two different forms of appro-
priating the net surplus product: one based on birth rights, the other on contractual
relations." In addition, merchants and peasants-artisans were in conflict that
was "mediated by prices and 'at the point of consumption rather than on the
point of production." Equally important, it should be remembered that noble
and bourgeois did not share a single form of property: One was seigneurial
production, the other was merchant's capital. One operated according to cus-
tomary law, the other according to principles of free contract. Thus,
the eighteenth-century "elite" had different class interests, unlike what revisionists
argue. When Comninel categorizes the French Revolution as "an intra-class
conflict," he can be challenged because this characterization implies that
the bourgeoisie (formerly the Third Estate) did not differ essentially from
the nobility (formerly the First and Second Estates). In addition, this explanation
omits the important inter-class conflict between the sans-culottes and the
aristocracy of birth as well as of wealth, and the struggle between the peasantry
and the seigneurs in their chateaus.

It seems premature, therefore, to argue that because one school, in this
case the revisionists, holds the field in explaining the origins of the French
Revolution, its victory is permanent. Some of us have seen "explanations" come and go. If anything, these differences demonstrate, yet again, that in
Clio's house there are many mansions.

Notes

2. B.N., Lc227 bis, *Le Publiciste de la République française par l'ombre de Marat,
   l'Ami du peuple*, no 266, n.d.
3. Ibid., no. 268, n.d.
5. Ibid., no. 11, 14 August 1783.
6. Ibid., no. 13, 21 August 1793.

8. This interpretation is also true of our own history. J. Franklin Jameson's classic study is entitled *The American Revolution Considered As a Social Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1926). A recent work, Gordon S. Wood's *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1992), stresses the social aspects, especially the egalitarian feelings of Americans during and after the Revolution.


10. E. J. Hobsbawm, *Echoes of the Marseillaise: Two Centuries Look Back on the French Revolution* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990). Chapter 1 is entitled “A Revolution of the Middle Class.” Hobsbawm quotes Colin Lucas, whose work is often cited by revisionists, to the effect that if there were no distinct and antagonistic classes in 1789 “we have to decide why, in 1788–1789, groups which can be identified as non-noble, combatted groups which can be identified as noble” (p. 8).

11. Hobsbawm, *Echoes of the Marseillaise*, 10. Augustin Thierry (1795–1858) was a highly regarded historian who worked in primary sources on the early history of France.

12. Ibid., 10, 11, 14, 15.


15. Ibid., 83 and note 42, and 86–87. Contrary to what revisionists say, many rural areas were gripped by a severe social conflict, as may be demonstrated by the rising litigation of the peasants against their seigneurs. The sense of unfairness was heightened by the new commercial nexus, and as Clausewitz might have put it, the peasant revolution of 1789 was litigation by other means, writes Jones.

16. Ibid., 109–10. It is interesting to note that Boris Porchnev, in his study *Les Soulèvements populaires en France de 1625 à 1648* (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1963), contends that the period under consideration reflected the *feudalization* of the bourgeoisie, in contrast to the “bourgeoisification” of eighteenth-century France, as argued by Jones and others. In general, Porchnev holds that seventeenth-century society was characterized by feudal economic relations and feudal forms. Absolutism defended this society. Thus, he concludes that 1789 was “a counterrevolution against absolutism”


19. Ibid. Soboul wrote that the peasant fury that broke out in the winter of 1791 and the summer of 1792 was more violent than ever. Peasants attacked feudal vestiges as well as those they termed "counterrevolutionaries," "aristocrats," "fanatics," and "suspects." But in addition to these the peasants began to assault those they called "aristocrats of wealth": bourgeois proprietors, wealthy farmers, and merchants.

20. Ibid. Soboul discusses these problems in part 3, entitled "Révolution et Communité." Needless to say, this study raises many important problems on the relationship between the peasant revolt and the bourgeois revolution which cannot be discussed in this brief Introduction. R.H. Tawney, in his The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century (New York: B. Franklin, 1961), discusses the same conflict as it occurred in the English countryside between those who championed the new commercial capitalism that had made its appearance and the defenders of "ancient customs and liberties." Many English peasants were opposed to surrendering the benefits they were accustomed to by what was termed "hospitality."


23. Ibid., 185–86. It may be true, however, as Comminel argues, that "the whole body of traditional peasant community practices" retarded technological innovation. Comminel is correct, it seems to me, when he points out that capitalism requires "a system of commodity production... the reduction of labor to labor power, wholly subjected to dictates of capital" (ibid., 193).


25. Comminel, Rethinking the French Revolution, 11; for a brief summary of Comminel's theories, see George Rudé's "Foreword," ibid., 3.


27. Henry Heller, review in Science and Society 54, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 376. Heller asks whether Comminel would deny that the domestic system of manufacture was capitalist because it, too, like French agriculture, "operated with little or no technical innovation or fully proletarianized work force."

28. Ibid, 377. In defending Soboul, Heller writes that Comminel "fails to grasp that it was the lower middle class of manufacturers, artisans, and commercial peasants that led the mass movement of the revolution, both in towns and in the countryside" (p. 378).


30. Ibid., 300–301. The merchant seizes "the difference between the individual labor time and the socially necessary labor time." "

31. Ibid., 304, Duchesne's emphasis, and 306–7. Limitations of space prohibit a fuller discussion of Duchesne's critique, not only of Comminel but of the revisionists in general.

32. Comminel, Rethinking the French Revolution, 200.
Modern revolution engender a well-known paradox—the opposition of devoted revolutionaries who break with the regime they help to establish. The English had the Levellers and John Lilburne in the seventeenth century. The Russians produced the Workers’ Opposition of Aleksandr Gavrilovich Shlyapnikov and Aleksandra Kollantay, followed by the Left Opposition of Leon Trotsky. The Chinese let a hundred flowers bloom only to cut them down when they produced such weeds as Mu Fu Cheng and Chang Kuo-t’ao, who followed in the steps of Chen D’hui Su (Chen Duxiu). The Yugoslavs gave birth to Milovan Djilas. The French had their Enragés. Why this occurs is a theme in itself and deserves more space than can be devoted to it in this article. It should be noted, however, that this phenomenon accompanies every important social revolution.

Marx wrote that “the revolutionary movement which began in 1789 in the Cercle Social [a masonic lodge that promoted various democratic demands], which in the middle of its course had as its chief representatives Lerlerc and Roux [Marx could have added Jean Varlet], and which finally with Babeuf’s conspiracy was temporarily defeated, gave rise to the communist idea which Babeuf’s friend Buonarroti reintroduced in France after the Revolution of 1830.”¹ Who were these men that according to Marx were the “chief representatives” of the revolutionary movement “in the middle of its course”? They have been dubbed enragés by historians.²

Enragé, literally, means “madman”; in this case, as some conservatives would state it, “a rabid socialist.” Peter Weiss, in his powerful drama Marat/Sade, presents Jacques Roux (1752–1794) in a straitjacket, shouting and gesticulating like a madman.³ In reality, Roux was a well-educated priest who taught philosophy and physics before leaving the seminary. He was thirty-seven years old when the Revolution broke out, and he supported a jacquerie in the countryside where he lived. Accused of preaching “the dangerous doctrine which declared to the people that the land belonged equally to all,
[and] that they ought not to pay their seigneurial dues any longer," he was forced to abandon his home for Paris.  

Shortly after arriving in the capital he joined the radical Cordeliers Club, preached in Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs, an important church in section Gravilliers, and wrote and published a number of brochures. At first he was a mild monarchist, no different from hundreds of others, but as the crisis deepened he became a staunch republican. After the fall of the monarchy, he began to attack counterrevolutionaries ever more frequently and to demand a policy of terror against speculators and engrossers.

Equally important was Jean Varlet (1764–1832), a young man of twenty-five when the Bastille fell, with an independent source of income, which enabled him to publish pamphlets at his own expense. When the Revolution broke out he welcomed it enthusiastically, composed patriotic songs, addressed crowds in the Palais Royal, and bore petitions in defense of popular causes.

He was present at Versailles when the Declaration of the Rights of Man was adopted, and he helped prepare the Champ de Mars for the Festival of the Federation in the summer of 1790. After Varennes Varlet became widely known for his sharp attacks against “the perjured king.” The massacre of Champ de Mars on 16 July 1791 intensified his hatred of Lafayette. “Sovereign people,” he wrote, “Lafayette, is, was, and always will be a villain, a traitor to his country. I come forward as his accuser. A citizen who is not afraid.”

He continued to agitate in the public squares, initiated various petitions against Lafayette and the king, and played a key role in presiding over the insurrectionary committee (Comité central révolutionnaire) that overthrew the Gironde (31 May–2 June 1793).

In a remarkable essay written in 1792, Varlet criticized the Jacobin Club for its undemocratic procedure, its contempt of sister societies, its cold behavior to outsiders and members alike, and its lack of moral ardor. His objections were based on his own experience of having been prevented from expressing his opinions on several different occasions. Among other things, he proposed that legislators and common citizens alike mingle in the halls of popular societies so that they might share experiences. Since deputies were revocable under the constitution, and in order to prevent the revival of a new, privileged aristocracy, he advocated frequent rotation in office and an extension of the electorate.

The third Enragé was a young man named Jean-Théophile-Victor Leclerc, only eighteen years of age in 1789. After serving in the National Guard of Clermont-Ferrand, he embarked at Bordeaux for Martinique to join his two brothers there. Shortly after his arrival a civil war broke out between the planters and the “patriots” who were under the influence of revolutionary ideas from the fatherland. After the arrival of Jean-Pierre-Antoine, the count of Béhague, whose troops ended the civil strife, Leclerc was arrested
together with other "patriots" and held on board a vessel converted into a prison ship before finally being shipped back to France in the summer of 1791.  

In his address to the Jacobins in the spring of 1792, Leclerc attacked moderate adherents to the Revolution. His argument was that since their intentions could not be known, in contrast to the designs of open enemies, they ought to be feared even more. This suspicion of *modérantisme* was to characterize his political conduct throughout his revolutionary career. He began to call for what he termed a "popular Machiavellianism," that is, a policy of terror. After a sojourn in Lyons, where he met Joseph Chalier, the leading Jacobin of the town before the latter's execution, Leclerc became more convinced than ever that "a Machiavellian policy" had to be applied against "aristocrats," a broad term that included a wide variety of the government's opponents. On 29 May 1793 he was elected to the *Comité central révolutionnaire* and helped launch the insurrection against the Girondins. But he was dissatisfied with its progress, and on 4 June told the General Council of the Paris Commune that it was wrong to think that the revolution [i.e., the insurrection of 31 May–2 June 1793] was finished. For one thing, suspects had not been imprisoned. "Why are you afraid to spill a few drops of blood?" he demanded. He was immediately recalled from the tribune amidst "universal indignation," and a motion was passed that anyone proposing to shed blood would be considered a "bad citizen."  

Leclerc, like Roux and Varlet, was to repudiate the Terror shortly thereafter.  

In addition to these men were two remarkable women: Claire Lacombe and Pauline Léon, who founded the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women (Société Républicaines Révolutionnaires). This organization played an important role in seconding the demands of the Enragés for various social measures, in promoting the cause of feminism, and in verifying that the price of necessities conformed to the *maximum*. They helped in the insurrection against the Girondins, and, as a result, earned the commendation of the Parisian authorities. The Jacobins, too, praised their courage and devotion to the Revolution, only to damn them shortly thereafter.

Claire Lacombe was twenty-four at the outbreak of the Revolution, a beautiful and talented actress with a great ability to speak in public. She was born in Pamiers (4 March 1765), near the Spanish border, and by her early twenties played in the theaters of Lyons, Marseille, and Toulon, before leaving for Paris in March 1792. Upon arriving in the capital, she plunged immediately into political work, and by the summer of 1792 played a prominent role in overthrowing the monarchy. On 25 July 1792 she delivered an important address in the Legislative Assembly, attacking Lafayette and demanding a purge of the army's general staff. A few days after the overthrow of Louis, she received a rousing testimonial for her heroic action in the attack on the
Tuileries palace from Pierre-Louis Manuel, the *procureur-syndic* of the Paris Commune. Manuel wrote:

We, the president and secretary of the general assembly "des frères, amis de la liberté et de l'égalité," certify and attest that Mlle Claire Lacombe was present in person at the affair on the 10th [of August], that she not only fought the satellites of a perfidious court, but by her courage and gallantry, formerly less common among other persons of her sex, she rallied the citizens under continuous fire, and gave them glittering proof of ardor, in recognition of which we have delivered the present certificate, sublime emblem of the liberty that she has so gloriously defended.14

A year later she was still being praised for her courage as the president of the session in the Jacobin Club gave her "the republican embrace."

François Buzot, a leading Girondin, slandered her and her club in the following words:

A society of lost women, collected from the dirty alleys of Paris, whose brazenness was equaled only by their lewdness, monstrous females who possessed all the cruelty of their sex . . . these women played a great role in the Revolution of 1793. An old streetwalker of Paris commanded them, and their daggers belonged to whoever would pay them more. It seems that Lacombe, their chief, had great authority; and in the debates between Robespierre and his friends and Danton and his, this lewd female would often tip the balance in favor of that party for which she would declare herself.15

Jacques Roux, unlike Buzot, praised these women in the General Council, where he attributed to them "in part, the glory of having saved the Republic during the *journées* of 31 May and 2 June." A few days later (30 June 1793), the authorities of the Paris department and commissioners of the sections also adopted a strong resolution commending them. "The Républicaines révolutionnaires have merited well of the country," they declared.16

Lacombe's coleader of the Société Républicaines Révolutionnaires was Anne-Pauline Léon. She was born in Paris in 1768, and was thus under twenty-one when the Bastille was stormed. She was to marry Théophile Leclerc in the fall of 1793, after the dissolution of her club. Lafayette aroused her early suspicion, and she enjoyed the rare pleasure of tossing his bust out when she led a group of women against a monarchist's house.17

In March 1791 she petitioned the National Assembly for the right to arm and drill a battalion of three hundred women. Léon argued that it was impossible to pretend that the Rights of Man did not apply to women. Why should women not add to the defense of the country?, she asked. The women would rather die than live in slavery, she exhorted the deputies. "[A] dagger, directed against their breast, would deliver them from the ills
of slavery! . . . . They will die, regretting not the loss of [their] life . . . but the futility of their death . . . in not being able to dip their hands into the impure blood of their country's enemies."18

She was as good as her word, for on the very eve of the king's overthrow she spent the night in her section of Fontaine de Grenelle armed with a pike "to combat the tyrant and his satellites." It was only after some desperate pleas by her fellow sectionnaires that she surrendered her weapon to an unarmed sans-culotte. Throughout the spring and summer of 1793 she continued to speak before popular societies and huge crowds. On the eve of the 31 May insurrection Léon addressed large gatherings in the faubourgs Saint-Antoine and Saint-Marceau, the radical suburbs of Paris, calling for "the sacred insurrection that [would deliver] the Mountain from its shackles," that is, from the Gironde.19

As the revolutionary government became intolerant of dissent, it began to dissolve the women's clubs. Then, in the fall of 1793, it decreed that women had no political rights, that their place was in the home, and that they had no right to join popular societies. "Each sex is meant for a type of occupation which is proper to it," the law declared; "a woman should not leave her family to embroil herself in the affairs of government." The Paris Commune also condemned the women "who run in the streets in red hats and who want to govern the Republic in place of occupying themselves with their housekeeping."20

How did these Enragés differ from other revolutionaries, and why did they come to oppose the revolutionary government that they had sacrificed so much to establish? Most historians agree that they formed a distinct group despite the differences among them. They were not mere Left Jacobins or Cordeliers. Nor were they Hébertistes, followers of Jacques Hébert, the radical editor and publisher of Le Père Duchesne, the most popular journal in France until its suppression. Many of them did belong to one or several of these factions. In a sense, perhaps, they composed a transitional "party" between the bourgeois revolutionaries and the plebeian followers of Gracchus Babeuf. Unlike the Jacobins, they rejected the axioms of laissez-faire economics, but they differed from the future Babouvists in accepting the necessity of private property. What they denounced with a passion that bordered on fanaticism was the free and unregulated market in the necessities of life, especially in bread.

It was this concern with la vie chère, the high cost of living, that separated them from the Jacobins. The Revolution taught them certain facts of economic life. One of these was that it was impossible to enjoy a laissez-faire economy while the army was requisitioning foodstuffs, while thousands of Frenchmen were fighting on various fronts, and while the counterrevolution was still raging in many departments of the country. To put an end to shortages and
high prices, they demanded the adoption of a *maximum*, that is, price controls on the necessities of life. The Montagnards were forced to accept this demand; but they did so only with reluctance and misgiving, for the application of such a measure, had it been carried out to the letter, would have led to the nationalization of commerce in cereals and the manufacture of bread. Furthermore, it would have converted bakers into municipal workingmen tied to their jobs, as in some instances it did. In short, the *maximum* threatened to modify profoundly the economy of private property. The Convention, of course, never ceased affirming its adherence to the latter institution and continued to denounce what deputies termed "*la loi agraire,*" the agrarian law, which implied the redivision of the soil.  

Although leading Jacobins, like Robespierre, agreed that property was a social category, hence subject to the rule of law, few analyzed it with the care applied by Jean Varlet. He reached the conclusion that it was the possession or lack of property that made for inequality of condition. He wrote that four types of wealth could be recognized in civil society. The first and most sacred was that which guaranteed the right of existence. The second, no less essential, was that which administered for the poor and the helpless. The third was the product of commerce and agriculture, or the earnings from a public or private position. Finally came the property which was the result of patrimony or a gift. The right of existence came first; therefore, any activity that menaced this right had to be curbed. No one could deprive the *menu peuple* of the means by which they lived. Property was a social category placed under the protection of the public, hence subject to its regulation. Moreover, the propertyless possessed an inherent obligation to defend themselves against "the oppression of the rich." This meant that society had the duty to set limits on the ambition of the rich to acquire property. When necessary, Varlet added, society had the right to level, "by just means, the enormous disproportion of wealth."  

It was true, of course, that everyone had the right to dispose of his property as he pleased. Yet this right, too, was limited by the prior title of society. It could be exercised only "*if its use did not threaten the destruction of society,*" Varlet emphasized. Wealth acquired at the expense of the community by theft, by speculation, or by engrossment was to be nationalized outright. Thus, once again, social utility took precedence over an individual's right to property. Varlet did not raise the question of who would determine if a particular accumulation did, in fact, endanger society. Presumably, the sovereign people themselves would decide. In any case, the principle that social utility took precedence over an individual's right to property contained potentially explosive elements that threatened to shatter traditional views of property rights.  

Like other revolutionaries, Varlet did not limit his constitution to justifying
a normal and peaceful political process. Article 22 boldly declared that “resistance to oppression is the precious right of insurrection; it ought to recognize no law but that of necessity.” He then defined a state of oppression as one wherein the sovereignty of a nation was usurped by kings, dictators, or the ambitious; wherein a military regime became the predominant form of a state; wherein the authorities went beyond the limits prescribed for them by the Social Contract; and wherein national funds were wasted and public credit undermined.

“In such a state of things a universal insurrection becomes the safeguard of independence, the most legitimate of rights, the most sacred of duties.” Who was to judge whether conditions prevailed that met his criteria, and thus made insurrection a duty? Who was to call the people to arms? These questions Varlet left unanswered. It is possible that the brevity and formal nature of his document precluded an answer to these problems.

If the attack on the sanctum sanctorum of the bourgeoisie did not yet prove just how mad the Enragés were, their insistence that the assignat should be made fiat money convinced their enemies that they were, indeed, insane. The Enragés recognized that the precipitous decline of this bond, backed by the lands of the Church, was responsible for the relentless inflation. While enriching speculators and profiteers, it brought misery and suffering to the great mass of urban consumers, and, especially, to the poor sans-culottes. “Why should the money of a republic be worth less than that of a monarchy?” asked Théophile Leclerc. It was because there was widespread distrust of the assignats, he wrote, that they were converted into real values. The return of confidence would extinguish the mass of this paper currency in circulation, and he proposed concrete measures to raise their market value.

Leclerc insisted that the government had to fix prices on all goods of prime necessity and make speculation a capital crime. To prevent engrossment and hoarding he proposed the following law: “The French Republic declares itself to be the purchaser of all grain deemed to be in its territory; henceforth no one may sell [to anyone] but to the state the goods of prime necessity.” The Republic, he argued, had enough grain to feed all, but it was ridiculous and horrible to see grain sell, in some parts of the country, for four and five times its value. This was due to speculation, which could be halted if those departments or districts that produced a surplus would supply those that did not produce enough. This surplus should be stored in “granaries of abundance,” he wrote, and its price was to be fixed by the Convention at a level affordable by all. The poor, however, should not have to pay for grain. Society should assure them the right to survive by distributing this grain free, and he suggested that the cost of this measure should be borne by a tax on luxury products purchased by the wealthy. Besides, no one had a right to possess more than he or she could consume from one harvest to the next. He went on to note
how disagreeable the word "indigent" sounds, and that France had a hundred times more grain than was necessary to nourish the people. Raise the value of the assignats, and the Federalists themselves (that is, the departments in revolt against Paris after the insurrection of 31 May–2 June 1793) would sell them grain.26

In addition to these differences as to whether to regulate the economy and the currency, there was one fundamental principle that separated the Enragés from their political opponents. The Enragés were democrats in a Rousseauistic sense. Like Rousseau they believed in direct democracy, in the idea that la volonté de tous was different from la volonté générale, and that the general will cannot be represented. Rousseau had written in his Social Contract:

Sovereignty cannot be represented, for the same reason that it cannot be alienated. It consists essentially in the general will, and the will cannot be represented. . . . . The deputies of the people, therefore, are not and cannot be its representatives; they are only its commissioners; they can conclude nothing definitely. Every law that the people personally do not ratify is null and void; it is no law at all. . . .

In any case, the moment a people allows itself to be represented, it is no longer free: It no longer exists.27

The key to this principle of direct democracy was embodied in the term mandat impératif. Under the Old Regime a deputy was expected to defend the interest of his own class, not to represent all France. Since each estate, theoretically, knew its own interests, it could direct the mission of its delegate. This obligation which the electors imposed upon their delegates, to vote in a predetermined manner upon questions considered in advance, was what was meant by the term mandat impératif.28

A few months after the fall of Louis, in an address later published as a brochure, Roux warned his listeners against "the senatorial despotism [which was] as terrible as . . . [that] of kings." He exhorted them not to allow their delegates to "forget for a single instant that their duty is to consult the voice of the people." More explicit was Leclerc's reminder that a people represented was not free, as he urged his readers not to lavish the title "representative" on their mandatories. Magistrates, whoever they might be, were mere proxies of the people's will, he wrote, and he warned that "from the abuse of words followed the abuse in deeds."29

Leclerc was especially frightened by the concentration of power in the hands of the Committe of Public Safety and, like his fellow Enragés, called for suspending the Terror by putting the abortive Constitution of 1793 into effect. He warned:

If there is a measure dangerous, impolitic, and subversive of all social order, it is without doubt that which has been proposed at the National
Convention, to convert the Committee of Public Safety into a committee of government. I see in this proposition a usurpation of powers which appears to me to be badly conceived by its author. I consider it an outrage against liberty, an indirect blow aimed at the Revolution, and a step toward dictatorship.\textsuperscript{30}

In reply, Robespierre launched a sharp attack on Roux and Leclerc in the Jacobin Club the day after the latter's critique appeared (8 August 1793). He accused Leclerc of being somehow responsible for the death of Charlier and called his two critics traitors and "emissaries of Coblenz or Pitt."\textsuperscript{31} Leclerc counter-replied in his next issue and challenged Robespierre to prove his charges:

The people will never be enlightened on their true interests . . . so long as men continue to be cowardly enough to bow down slavishly under whatever despot happens to insult public opinion, or so perverted as to intentionally follow the perfidious suggestions of some individuals, although they know perfectly both their maneuvers and their schemes.\textsuperscript{32}

Varlet, too, denounced the despotic power of the Committee of Public Safety. As early as 13 May 1793 he addressed the Jacobins:

One truth is well demonstrated: Man by his very nature, full of arrogance in the higher positions, inclines necessarily toward despotism. We sense now that we must hold in arrest, in check, the established authorities, without which they become all-oppressive in power. Let us not seek to counterbalance them by each other; all counterweight which is not that of the people itself is false. The Sovereign ought always to direct the social body; it is worth nothing when someone else represents it.\textsuperscript{33}

His experience under the Girondin-led Convention only reaffirmed his conviction, which he had stated as an axiom in his writings of the previous year, that the sovereign people had to control their deputies to prevent them from erecting a new despotism. No artificial system of checks and balances could obstruct this tendency. Only the sovereign people itself could prevent it. "Whatever our mandatories cannot or will not do, let us do ourselves; let us give these gentlemen some lessons in republicanism," he continued.

His own version of the Rights of Man held that liberty was a moral concept and that equality was the direct result of liberty. Sovereignty appertained to all nations; it could be delegated but could never, never be represented. The established authorities were mere emanations of the sovereign nation and, consequently, had to remain subordinate to it. This concept was further elaborated in Article 23 of the \textit{Solemn Declaration of the Rights of Man}:

When a sovereign nation constitutes itself into a Social State, its diverse
Sections send Deputies invested with explicit mandates; assembled in common, these agents of power elucidate the intentions of their Constituents, convert their propositions into Laws; if the majority accept them, these fundamental Conventions frame a whole, called the Social Contract.\textsuperscript{34}

In addition to these rights of the collective body, Varlet elaborated those of the individual. The individual was to be guaranteed liberty of thought and of worship, and was to enjoy the right of suffrage and security of person and of property. Women were not included in this scheme, however, because like so many of his fellow revolutionaries, Varlet remained a male chauvinist. Finally, social rewards were to be measured by the services performed and to be accorded solely on the basis of merit and common utility.\textsuperscript{35}

The people’s representatives did not want to become mere proxies, however. In June 1793 they had adopted a democratic constitution, that was, however, destined to remain abortive. Roux attacked it violently for not proscribing speculation and hoarding:

Liberty is but a vain phantom when one class can starve another with impunity. Equality is but deceit when the rich, by their monopoly, can exercise the right of life and death over their fellow men. The Republic is but a vain illusion when the counterrevolution can operate day after day, through the high cost of goods, which three-fourths of the citizens cannot acquire without shedding bitter tears.\textsuperscript{36}

The outraged deputies hooted him down. Robespierre denounced Roux three days later (28 June) in the following words:

They slander the Jacobins, the Montagnards, the Cordeliers, the old champions of liberty. A man covers himself with a cloak of patriotism, but whose intentions, at least, one must suspect and insults the majesty of the National Convention. Under the pretext that the Constitution contains no law against monopolizers, he, therefore, concludes that it has nothing of value for the people . . .

Do you believe that such a priest, who, with the Austrians, denounces the best patriots, can have pure motives? If he had been a member of the Mountain during the past four years . . . do you think he would have remained firm? Guard your faith and subject it, at least, to as long a proof. Do you think that one can conquer with one blow Austria, Spain, Pitt, the Brissotins, and Jacques Roux? No, citizens\textsuperscript{37}

Shortly thereafter Roux was expelled from the Jacobin Club and from the Cordeliers and was removed from the editorial board of the Commune’s official journal, \textit{Affiches de la Commune}. None of this silenced him, however. On 16 July 1793 he launched a journal in which he denounced the government, writing that one cannot “love and cherish a government which dominates men by terror.”\textsuperscript{38}
When the Convention adopted its Law of Suspects, a measure so broad that it was bound to lead to abuses, Roux denounced it in the following terms:

The suspects are arrested on orders of gentlemen even more suspect. . . . It is the height of cruelty to imprison as suspects . . . those who have had the misfortune to displease a commissioner of a section, a spy of the police, a garçon of an office, a secretary of the treasury, a doorkeeper of the National Convention, a turnkey, the president of a popular society, and a harlot of a man of position.39

He was especially bitter against the revolutionary courts, whose members exercised the power of life and death over their victims. "Who are the members of these commissions?" he asked, and he replied:

Those who can read and write. That means in the country the large landowners, the farmers, the late privileged classes, the gentlemen of the robe. In the towns it is the financiers, the big merchants, the lawyers, the curmudgeons of the Old Regime. The result is that the fate of patriots is in the hands of the enemies of the Republic . . . that the arrest of suspects is confined to scoundrels, to counterrevolutionaries, who have draped themselves in the cloak of civisme to kill freedom in the person of its most zealous defenders.40

To the question of whether men were equal before the law he replied:

They are if they are poor, but are not so if they are rich . . . the aristocrat who has a full pocketbook is soon released. Imprisonment has become a trade within the state. . . . The great always swallow up the little . . . but the sans-culottes rot in dungeons for revealing harsh truths . . . and because they have not praised sufficiently some clubistes who flatter the people in order to ruin and enchain them.41

Roux continued to blame the revolutionary government for doing nothing against speculation and engrossers. "At the head of administrations are only the rich, the propertied, the men who occupy themselves with nothing but how to fill their pocketbooks," and, he wrote, the result was that a speculator would not denounce another speculator, or a monopolizer denounce a monopolizer.42

The Committees of Public Safety and of General Security could not allow him to go on attacking the government. They agreed with Saint-Just that "no one can rule guiltlessly." Roux was arrested, released, and arrested again. He died a suicide. Perhaps he wrote his own epitaph when he declared: "At all times, people have used men of great character to make revolutions. . . . When they no longer have need of them, they broke them like a glass."43

Varlet, too, began to denounce the revolutionary government. He was
arrested on 18 September 1793, the day following his address to the Convention, shortly after he had convinced his section of Droits de l'Homme to refuse the proffered forty-sous subsidy voted by the Convention to reimburse the poorer of the sans-culottes, who had been under arms for three days during the uprising against the Gironde and who thus lost their wages. Varlet's argument was that "in a free state the people cannot pay themselves to exercise their rights," and he refused the aid voted "in the name of the sans-culottes of Paris." As a result he was imprisoned "for having made a counterrevolutionary proposal."

In a brief brochure Varlet replied to his detractors:

He who on 21 June 1791, on 10 August, on 31 May conspired with the people against royal and legislative tyranny, is he an agent of Pitt, of Cobourg, capable of exciting uprisings for them?... Reply, Collot d'Herbois, Robespierre,... Jacobins, Cordeliers, and you, sans-culottes.... I am a patriot and am in irons....

I have suffered in prison, forgotten and alone, after having sacrificed all for my poor country—parents, friends, fortune....

Varlet was expelled from the Jacobins, from the Cordeliers. Varlet is an intriguer, Varlet is paid off, Varlet is driven out, Varlet this, Varlet that. The brisk fountainhead of slander is discharged, flows, and never stops. Sovereign dispensers of blame or of public favor, petty actors in the night, what are your names? Come forth. What have you done during the Revolution; what are your title-deeds?... Why don't you bring charges publicly before the revolutionary tribunal?45

As a result of his appeal Varlet's section took the initiative to free him. It was joined by other sections and individual Jacobins in an appeal to the Committee of General Security, which released him on 14 November 1793 [24 Brumaire, Year II].

Shortly thereafter Varlet attacked the deputies, charging: "You decree the rights of man and you dishonor them." After being released and rearrested he concluded that despotism had merely passed from the purview of the king to that of the Committee of Public Safety. In the fall of 1794, after the execution of the Robespierristes, he analyzed the events of 2 June 1793, that is, the insurrection, and concluded that "the true republicans" in the Comité central révolutionnaire had been emasculated by "the most destructive of factions... the league of Caligula," that is, the Robespierristes, who saw nothing in the overthrow of the Girondins but the possibility of realizing their own ambitions. He admonished his readers not to seek beyond the revolutionary government for the origin of the oppression under which the Republic suffered, and he explained the disappointment in the outcome of the 31 May insurrection in the following way:
The Enragés and the French Revolution

The insurrectionary committee [that is, the Comité central révolutionnaire] contained the germ of a revolutionary government, conceived secretly at the start. The false insurgents substituted Robespierre for Brissot [a leading Girondin and head of the Diplomatic Committee]; for federalism, a revolutionary dictatorship, decreed in the name of public safety. As for me, I was too honest to be initiated [into it]; I was set aside.46

In denouncing the terrorists Varlet acknowledged his love of moderation, a term of opprobrium that Varlet, like other revolutionaries, had used to attack their more conservative opponents. Now, he confessed, he loved moderation because it made him “human, tolerant, reflective.” True, he had rebelled against the revolutionary government of 31 May because he had felt a duty to combat it, but “the horrible dictatorship of Robespierre does not justify at all the tyranny of Brissot,” he wrote, refusing to repudiate his own past. Now, however, personal hatreds were destroying thousands of innocent citizens. The Thermidorian government corrupted in order to rule, while “the criminal tribunal” condemned everyone. “The ears are assailed by one cry: la mort! la mort!”; the temple of justice became “the haunt of cannibals,” and, yet, “the monsters responsible for all this speak in the name of humanity.... Long live the rights of the sovereign people!... Down with the usurpers! let the revolutionary government perish rather than a single principle!” he cried.47

What was the way out? Varlet coined a new slogan which embodied his opposition to the Terror and yet retained his commitment to the Revolution: “Long live the dictatorship of the Rights of Man.” This dictatorship would be exercised by the sans-culottes because they were virtuous and pure. He paid tribute to them in the following words:

If I can flatter myself for having conceived any useful ideas, I should thank the People Sans-Culottes for them. For four years, always on public squares, among crowds of people, among the sans-culotterie, among the ragged whom I love, I learned that innocently and without coercion the poor devils of the garret reason more surely, more boldly than the best gentlemen, the great speech-makers, the groping savants. If they [the latter] wish to attain true knowledge, let them go as I have, among the people.48

Varlet survived the Thermidorsians, the Directory, Napoleon, and the Restoration, and even lived long enough to welcome the Revolution of 1830. He had been living in Nantes, had married, and had fathered one son. When the Revolution of 1830 broke out Varlet was chosen as an elector. By then he had also become a landowner. He died in Corbeil, in 1837.49

Leclerc also continued to criticize the revolutionary government. Like Varlet, he addressed the Convention, urging:
Do not estrange yourselves from the people; you cannot but gain to see them at close hand, and three hours spent at the door of a baker would make a better legislator than four years of residence on the benches of the Convention.

In the old days we said to the despots: Enter the cottages and do not flee from the appearance of poverty; they [the poor] will give you great lessons in government.50

"Yes," he admitted, "we demanded the arrest of suspects, but we did not include among them... the patriots; we did not intend to use this as an instrument of personal vengeance."51 In the last number of his journal Leclerc wrote: "They demand to place error on the order of the day. They have invoked the deadly spirit of vengeance and of personal hatred. The strong crushes the weak and puts him under lock and key."52 It was in this issue that he predicted his own arrest. Leclerc joined the army shortly thereafter, and together with his wife, Pauline Léon, disappeared from history.

What can be concluded from all this? Although the Enragés were not yet socialists, they were willing to modify the regime of private property in favor of the sans-culottes. To guarantee the right of existence they urged measures that would have curbed the anarchy in production and distribution and which, thus encouraged profiteering, on the one hand, and shortages and inflation, on the other. Yet, they had little to say in favor of the poor and middle peasants. Their faith in the petites gens of the towns encouraged them to insist that deputies of the National Convention were mere proxies of the voters, not representatives. This was why they demanded that the revolutionary government suspend the Terror and apply, the democratic Constitution of 1793.

This is also why they became the first victims of the Terror, that is, victims of the Left. In this respect, our own epoch can furnish numerous examples of a similar experience—from Stalinist Russia to Khomeini’s Iran. It seems that the revolutionary Hamlet cannot understand the Machiavellian Fortinbras. But if this is true, neither can Fortinbras comprehend Hamlet. The Enragés helped forge the sword of justice (la glaive de loi), thinking that its sharp edge would be used only against counterrevolutionaries of the Right. Unfortunately, as we have seen, a revolutionary government can strike with this weapon to both right and left. For, as Saint-Just reminds us, "No one can rule guiltlessly."
Notes


3. The full title of Weiss’s drama is *The Persecution and Assassination of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*. Roux says the following, on the state: “We demand that granaries of plenty be opened to the needy. We insist that all workshops and factories be transferred into our possession. We ask that schools be established in the churches so that once and for all something useful be disseminated there.”

4. A.N., F7 3664, letter of Turpin, commissioner of the king, to the minister of the Interior on the riots in which he implicated Roux, 30 April 1790.


12. For Lacombe see A.N., T1001 1–3 (sequestered papers); for Léon, A.N., F7 47749 (sequestered papers of Théophile Leclerc and Pauline Léon).


14. A.N., T 10012, signed by Manuel, president.


16. *Journal de la Montagne*, no. 22, 21 June 1793. A.N., T 10012, in which the resolution continued: "Their zeal is indefatigable; their surveillance penetrates plots, their activity exposes them, their defiance wards off intrigues, their audacity warns of dangers, their courage overcomes them; they are, finally, republicans and revolutionaries."


20. *Moniteur*, 18 no. 59, 17 November 1793, in the Commune, 450–51. "The Revolutionary Women had become a danger to Robespierriists unable to satisfy the demand of Paris for bread." The Jacobins now broke with their former partners and began to suppress their critics, "including those who were in fact more revolutionary than themselves. The Society of Revolutionary Women was among those who paid the piper" (Scott H. Lytle, "The Second Sex [September 1793]," *The Journal of Modern History* 27, no. 1 [March 1955], 25).

21. There is a vast literature on the subject of the *maximum*, which can be consulted in many sources on the French Revolution, including the works on the Enragés, cited in the notes above. Among the standard accounts that impinge on the political situation, and thus on the involvement of the Enragés, can be men-

23. Ibid., Article 19, p. 19, Varlet’s emphasis.
26. Ibid., no. 10, 10 August 1793, and no. 12, 17 August 1793.
30. Ibid., no. 7, 4 August 1793.
32. B.N., *L'Ami du peuple*, no. 9, 8 August 1793.
34. Ibid., Articles 1, 6, 8, 23; pp. 13, 15, 20–21.
35. Ibid., Article 6, pp. 12–13.
39. Ibid., no. 265, n.d. In the same issue he wrote: “Today... some insolent demagogues who have made themselves popular, in order to tyrannize others, divide between themselves the scraps of the royal purple, and you [the people] forge little by little new chains for yourselves.”
40. Ibid., no. 267, n.d.
41. Ibid., no. 266, n.d.
42. Ibid., no. 260, 24 August 1793.
43. A.N., W 20 d. 1073, “Roux à Marat.”
47. Ibid., 7, 8, 9, 11, 14–16.
50. B.N., L'Ami du peuple, no. 17, 30 August 1793.
51. Ibid., no. 22, 11 September 1793.
52. Ibid., no. 24, 15 September 1793.
Section Roi de Sicile and the Fall of the Monarchy

In his monumental study of the Paris Commune, Fritz Braesch analyzed the political oscillations within the general assemblies of the sections during the last days of the monarchy. Characterizing some sections as conservative and others as democratic, he concluded that Roi de Sicile was "moderately conservative." His judgment was based on the position taken by its general assembly in regard to Mauconseil’s resolution to no longer recognize Louis as king of the French. That Braesch was uncertain of his representation may be determined from his admission that "during the night of 9 to 10 [August 1792], one finds, not without astonishment," the section’s representatives sitting in the Hôtel de Ville.¹ This "astonishment" on the author's part raises the question whether his analysis of the section’s political complexion is valid. Furthermore, it suggests the possibility of utilizing other standards (in addition to the section’s position on the Mauconseil resolution) which might more accurately gauge the political shifts in Roi de Sicile. It is the purpose of this essay, therefore, to examine the political fluctuations and the revolutionary leaders responsible for them, in order, if possible, to arrive at a more accurate judgment of Roi de Sicile's political tendencies. A closer examination of the struggle within section Roi de Sicile, moreover, ought to reflect, in general, the course of this contest in other sections of the capital.

Section Roi de Sicile, known later as Droits de l’Homme, had been formed out of district Petit-Saint-Antoine and a portion of Blancs-Manteaux.² Located in the center of the capital, not far from the Hôtel de Ville,³ its thirty-one streets and alleys covered an area of approximately 1.1 square miles⁴ and contained 12,000 to 14,000 inhabitants.⁵ In 1790 its active citizens numbered 1,699, slightly more than 2 percent of all the active citizens of Paris.⁶ The Marais quarter as a whole, of which the section was a part, reflected wide differences in wealth. While the nobility, which formed but 5 percent of the population, held almost 75 percent of the real and personal
property, the artisans who composed 17 percent of the population had a mere 1 percent of the wealth. The flight of the nobility during the early days of the Revolution, therefore, was bound to disorganize the economic life of the section because all classes were linked to it. In 1791 there were at least 1,031 working people employed by sixty-seven master craftsmen or merchants in the section. The poor made up about 10 percent of the population.

It was the political and military crisis during the summer of 1792 that radicalized section Roi de Sicile. On 11 July the country was proclaimed to be in danger. The distinction between active and passive citizens began to disappear as the sections and the National Guard became more democratic. It was impossible to maintain the old distinction between citizens when all Frenchmen were expected to shed their blood equally for la patrie. The agitation for universal male suffrage now mounted in intensity. On 13 July the Legislative Assembly reinstated the mayor of Paris, Jérôme Pétion, who had been suspended for his alleged role in permitting the armed demonstration of 20 June 1792 against the king. The Fédérés (troops from the departments), issued their famous address demanding the suspension of Louis on 23 July and the same day commissioners of thirty-three sections created an organ of insurrection, virtually an illegal Commune.

The sections had been made “permanent” on 25 July, that is, they were given the right to convene themselves and to meet as often as they deemed necessary, without the prior consent of higher authorities. The grenadiers, the elite troops of the National Guard, were suppressed on 30 July. This egalitarian tendency was strengthened further by the admission into the armed forces and the sectional assemblies of workers and petty bourgeois with their pikes. To coordinate this movement a Central Bureau of Correspondence was established by the municipality stimulating the energies of the sections by its circulars and reports. Shortly thereafter the revolutionaries received help from an unexpected source: The duke of Brunswick’s manifesto, threatening the total destruction of Paris, helped set the stage for the overthrow of the king.

During the decisive days preceding the fall of Louis, section Roi de Sicile became an arena wherein republicans and monarchists fought one another. This may be seen as early as 20 June 1792, the anniversary of the Tennis Court Oath, when armed demonstrators invaded the Tuileries in a vain effort to force Louis to surrender his veto powers. Although a number of officers and privates (the professional soldiers), were critical of the role of the municipal government, the vast majority of the section’s armed force had marched in support of their comrades-in-arms from faubourgs Saint-Antoine and Saint-Marcel. Yet its general assembly had passed a motion to send delegates to the two radical faubourgs “to invite them to maintain the peace and the most perfect solidarity, without which society could not exist.”
This conservative resolution illustrates the divided feelings of section Roi de Sicile. While some in the section were invading the king's chateau, others were admonishing the demonstrators to maintain law and order.

During the last week of July the section had adopted a resolution stating that it would act according to circumstances. This noncommittal position reflected the indecisive struggle between the two factions. On 31 July section Mauconseil adopted its famous motion for the dethronement of the king. Section Roi de Sicile declared its adherence to this resolution on 2 August. The following day it participated in the delegation of the sections, with mayor Pétion at their head, bearing a petition to the Legislative Assembly against royalty. The appeal demanded the dethronement of Louis, in line with Mauconseil's resolution, and had been signed by section Roi de Sicile's president and future police commissioner, Pierre Auzolles. This trend was completely reversed the next day, 4 August, and on the following day the section called on the municipal authorities to maintain order. The directory of the department gratefully acknowledged this conservative position and congratulated section Roi de Sicile for its resistance to the "deviations of a factious section."

The course of this struggle is made even clearer in the adoption and partial repudiation of Jean Varlet's motion to dethrone the king, which he introduced in the general assembly on 5 August. The petition embodying this resolution was presented to the Legislative Assembly signed, appropriately enough, on the Champ de Mars, by Fédérés and a great number of ordinary citizens. It began, "The country is in danger; these terrible words mean that we are betrayed." The orator then launched into a sharp attack on royalty and on the role of Louis. "Gentlemen," the speaker challenged, "among you sit some favorites of the court." This brought on a violent outburst from the deputies of the Right. The petitioner continued to attack the "monstrous" power of the king to corrupt and to veto legislation. When he denounced the one-sided "contract" between the people and the king, the deputies of the Left and their supporters in the galleries burst into applause. Varlet ended his discourse by proposing to veil the Declaration of the Rights of Man as symbolic of the political state of France, to dethrone Louis, to convene the primary assemblies, and to introduce universal male suffrage. His petition, unanimously adopted by section Roi de Sicile's general assembly, was to be communicated to the other sections by twenty-four commissioners selected from its assembly.

That Varlet himself was not clear as to the outcome of the struggle may be gathered from his statement that "the section . . . [was] yielding to judgment which it [the petition] has undergone, and desir[ed] to let public opinion decide on this work." On 7 August conservatism was accentuated further in the section by the resignation of Auzolles as president and his replacement
by the local justice of the peace, Louis Fayel. The following day Roi de Sicile repudiated the 4 August resolution of section Quinze Vingts, which threatened to launch an insurrection if the king were not dethroned. The conservative majority argued that Quinza-Vingt's proposal was unconstitutional because, according to the municipal code, sections could not concern themselves with anything but municipal matters, and the use of force was reserved to the mayor and municipal officers. In less than a week Roi de Sicile had made a complete turnabout from its resolution of 2 August. That the conservatives held the initiative at this time may be gathered from the attack made by a citizen of Mauconseil on Varlet's petition, which, he charged, had originated in a popular society. Many of the signatures were fraudulent, he accused, and he cited two names to prove it.

If the democrats had their spokesman in Varlet, the conservatives had their champions as well. One, who simply signed himself "A Citizen of Section Roi de Sicile," argued that, although the section contained more than 2,000 active citizens, only 100 to 130 had bothered to vote on the question of the king's abdication, and he charged that among the voters were passive citizens and even nonresidents. Accusing the opposition of intimidating the monarchists and then forcing through their own petitions, he revealed that they employed the extraordinary commission formed by the thirty-three radical sections since 23 July, thus bypassing the legal Commune, where they were outnumbered.

Throughout the evening of 9 August the struggle within Roi de Sicile's general assembly continued. Fayel, as president, frustrated the demands of the insurrectionists by adjourning the session and carrying off the register of the proceedings to his home. The revolutionists then installed their own president, Paulet, a constitutional priest (that is, one who took the oath to support the newly adopted Civil Constitution of the Clergy). Only at 3 A.M. did the assembly, which must have been a mere rump, send three commissioners to the Hôtel de Ville. One of them, Paul Henri Pollet (not to be confused with Paulet), resigned his commission at 8 A.M. on 10 August. The radicals' victory was inconclusive, therefore, until the very moment of the insurrection.

Historians of the insurrection have noted the confusion attending the installation of the extraordinary commissioners who replaced the legally elected Commune and who guided the attack on the Tuileries. It is no wonder, then, that lists of participants who made up the illegal Commune differ. Section Roi de Sicile, for example, sent three commissioners to the General Council during the night of 9 August or the early morning of the following day. Another three were sent on 10 August. All were endowed with full powers to do whatever was necessary to save public affairs.

Who were these men? Most seem to have been family men with fixed
residences in the section, holding local government posts, enjoying modest incomes as members of the liberal professions or as artisans with small shops of their own. Paul Henri Pollet, for example, was thirty-two years old, a schoolteacher, residing on rue Roi de Sicile, and a future member of the section's civil committee. He was replaced almost immediately, on 10 August, possibly because he was lukewarm to the attack on the Tuileries. His substitute was Jean Chevalier, who was appointed by the General Council together with three other men to serve at Temple prison, where Louis and his family had been confined. In November Chevalier, with his colleagues, was given police powers to maintain order in the prison.

Etienne Pierre Leclerc was fifty-seven years old when he sat on the General Council during the night of 9–10 August. Residing on rue des Juifs he was the father of three children, two of whom participated in the attack on the Tuileries. Because he was serving as police commissioner of the Commune at the time of the September massacres, he was attacked by the Thermidorians as having been somehow responsible. Employed as clerk-registrar in the Hôtel de Ville and as an assistant to the head of the Bureau of Provisions before 14 July 1789, he was sent to the insurrectionary General Council by his section. As the Revolution unfolded he joined the Cordelier and Jacobin Clubs, the Société Fraternelle des Deux Sexes, and the Club Central et Electoral, the more politically conscious societies of the capital. It was as a member of the Club Central et Electoral that he prepared for the insurrection. Moving from one modest post to another, he occupied a seat on the revolutionary tribunal of the third arrondissement, became director of the jury for six months, and then sat on the criminal court. He claimed always to have been on good terms with patriots and was an intimate of Marat.

Leclerc was accused of having stolen a watch from a victim of the September massacres, but he successfully refuted this “slander” and was confirmed as a judge shortly thereafter. On 1–2 July 1794 (13–14 Messidor, Year II) he was arrested by the Committee of Public Safety and sent to La Force prison, where he remained until 9 Thermidor. Although released by the Committee of General Security he was refused rearmament, and, consequently, was not returned to his former position in the office of the National Estates. Leclerc stressed his devotion to the Revolution, a devotion which had begun with the wrongful and unexplained seizure of his property by a bishop. In a summary of his revolutionary conduct, he revealed that as one of the commissioners appointed to watch over the imprisoned king he had insisted that Louis be moved into less comfortable but more secure quarters. Protesting that he had never signed any petition which threatened to compromise liberty, he asserted that he had always behaved properly. He was rearrested by the Thermidorians of the section on 25 May 1795 (6 Prairial, Year III) and was accused of being somehow responsible for a letter
sent by the police which, allegedly, had encouraged the massacres. A more specific charge was that he had manifested “indecent joy” at seeing victims of “tyranny” go to their execution. He was then sixty years old. Although there are no documents which mention his ultimate fate, it can be assumed that he was freed with other victims of Thermidorian reaction shortly before the attempted royalist coup of Vendémiaire.

Jean Baptiste Pierre Lenfant resided on rue Saint Antoine. He was elected to the Commune on 10 August and was appointed assistant police administrator at the end of the month. As an administrator of clothing (Administrateur de l’Habillement) he was arrested, probably on a charge of peculation, on 1 January 1794 (12 Nivôse, Year II) by order of the Committee of General Security. Found innocent, he was released on 11 March (21 Ventôse).  

Like Leclerc, he was rearrested on 25 May 1795 (6 Prairial, Year III) by the Thermidorian assembly of section Roi de Sicile for having signed “an infamous letter” as a member of a police administration that had defended the September massacres. Lenfant wrote an eloquent denial of this charge, protesting that he had never denounced any “unfortunates,” although being aware that many reputations had been made in the section by “vociferous declamations against them.” During the unfortunate events of September he had never left theHôtel de Ville, nor had he ever been a judge in any prison while these horrors were taking place.

The civil committee confessed that it knew no witness who could testify that Lenfant had indeed signed the notorious letter, and admitted that no such signatures existed. After the surveillance committee of the seventh arrondissement recommended that Lenfant be freed, the Committee of General Security ordered his provisional release under the surveillance of the section’s authorities. Shortly thereafter, two representatives endorsed Lenfant’s appeal for full freedom. There is no indication of the final outcome of his appeal, although it can be assumed that the Committee of General Security would hardly have ignored a petition signed by deputies of the Convention at a time when it was releasing prisoners with far fewer endorsements.

Claude Coulombeau was a forty-year-old lawyer, residing on rue des Francs-Bourgeois. He was elected a commissioner on 10 August and shortly thereafter became secretary-registrar of the Commune, in which position he served for more than a year. Arrested as a Dantonist in April–May 1794 (Floréal, Year II), he was released after the death of Robespierre. Coulombeau was a prodigious worker, as a glance at the thousands of documents transcribed by him reveals. When the General Council complained about certain irregularities, he wrote that his work was “immense, beyond human power... I am usually at work fourteen hours in theHôtel de Ville; very often I spend 18 to 20 hours there.”

Mareux, Père, resided on rue Saint Antoine. Nothing is known of him
except that he was appointed to the assembly by commissioners during the night of 9–10 August.\(^40\) The last name listed on the Tableau Général is that of Rumel. He was already sitting in the Hôtel de Ville during the night of 9–10 August (possibly as an observer), when he was elected by the section on 10 August. Nothing more is known about him,\(^41\) nor about a commissioner by the name of Berle who was also elected the same day.\(^42\)

According to the General Council, of the commissioners listed, all but Pollet and Rumel had fulfilled their duties by remaining at their posts.\(^43\) After 17 August additional commissioners were elected to the Commune, some serving without a clear mandate and others remaining only briefly. In addition to Chevalier, mentioned above, an F. Giraud served as president of the General Council after 6 September. He might have been François Giraud, who became a member of the Commune on 2 December. An order for the arrest of an apprentice baker was signed by him on 6 September.\(^44\)

Philippe Hardy was thirty years old, a shoemaker by trade and a captain in the armed forces, residing on rue des Juifs. He was arrested on 21 September 1793 for allegedly giving asylum to a member of the former nobility and for helping a Princess Talmont make her escape from Paris. At the time of his arrest he was employed as a registrar in the police court. On 2 October the revolutionary committee reported that after an examination of his papers it found nothing suspicious. Hardy petitioned for his release from La Force prison, citing deputy Real who could testify to his poverty. On 4 November 1793 (14 Brumaire, Year II) the assistant public prosecutor wrote a letter in his favor, countersigned by the judge of the court of the seventeenth and first arrondissements.\(^45\) It can be assumed that he was freed shortly thereafter.

These commissioners from Roi de Sicile sat with others from the “ultra-democratic” sections (to use Fritz Braesch’s characterization), representing those sections which marched against the Tuileries. Collectively they constituted the core of the revolutionary movement against the monarchy. Of the twenty-three “moderately democratic” sections, only eight failed to send representatives. On the basis of this analysis it seems difficult to argue that a section which did not send commissioners to the Hôtel de Ville at the decisive moment of 9–10 August was “moderately democratic,” while one which did, like Roi de Sicile, was “moderately conservative.” Is it not possible to hold that what determined the political complexion of a section was not so much its position on the resolutions of sections Mauconseil and Quinze Vingts but, rather, its ultimate action during the night of 9–10 August? Most conservative sections remained silent and awaited the outcome.\(^46\)

In an apology written shortly after the insurrection in response to accusations made against it by Quinze Vingts, Roi de Sicile regretted its equivocal conduct in the past. Appealing to its critics as old friends who had also shed
blood against "tyranny," it admitted that there had formerly been two sec-
tions—that of patriots and that of counterrevolutionaries. Now, however,
there was but one section of patriots, whose deliberations were open to the
public. The authors hastened to repudiate all past resolutions contrary to the
principles of liberty as the work of the former "cabal" in the section.47

Roi de Sicile's intention in making the apology was to dispel the charge
of uncivic behavior made against it and to reassure its friends in the neighboring
sections that the conservative element had, indeed, been defeated. Indirectly,
the apology must have acted as a warning to the former members of the
"cabal" that the democrats were firmly in control, as manifested by the
unanimous support of the active sectionnaires who adopted the address.
Moderation, at least as defined in pre-10-August terms, was now out of
favor; conservatism, needless to say, was even more so.

The revolutionary waves, however, were to display troughs as well as
crests. One could never be certain, after all, of a decisive victory. The mil-
itants surely must have known that in times of flux nothing was permanent.
When Pétion resigned as mayor, after being elected to the Convention,
section Droits de l'Homme (as Roi de Sicile was called after 21 August
1792), together with Quatre Nations, Faubourg Montmartre, Luxembourg,
and Arsenal, asked him to remain in his former position. Had the moderates
in these sections raised their heads again? They seem to have found their
voice, for Pétion was not the leader of the more militant revolutionaries.48
After the September massacres there was a predictable reaction in some sec-
tions, and a number of them sent their commissioners to the General Coun-
til on the evening of 9 September to discuss the matter. Among these were
deleagtes of section Droits de l'Homme.49 The vacillation of the section was
to continue, despite "unanimous" resolutions to the contrary. Democrats
and conservatives were ultimately dependent on the general course of the
Revolution, as its history was to prove.

The commissioners of the sections, the "illegal Commune," sat in a room
adjoining the room in the Hôtel de Ville where the legal Commune was
holding its sessions. At first they waited for a majority of delegates to ar-
rive. After some preliminaries, however, the legal Commune approved the
action of the sections which had replaced their representatives to the Gen-
eral Council. Then the newly elected representatives passed a resolution
stating that "the assembly of commissioners of the majority of the united
sections with full powers to save public affairs" decrees that all power for-
merly held by the Commune should be transferred to itself; that it provi-
sionally suspends the powers of the General Council of the Commune, and
maintains the mayor, the procureur, and the sixteen administrators in their
functions.50

The commissioners had directed their sections to take political and
administrative steps to consolidate the success of the insurrection. They ordered the closing of shops, authorized the call to arms, and launched the arrest of suspects. The commissioners from section Roi de Sicile, Claude Charles Pointard (who was to be elected justice of the peace in Fayel's place) and Philippe Hardy, were authorized by the General Council to requisition the delivery of mattresses from La Force prison to bed down "citizen-soldiers" from another commune. Although the section's military detachment, the battalion of Petit-Saint-Antoine, had appointed six commissioners to demand weapons and cartridges from its two former commanders (now suspended), there is no indication whether the commissioners were successful. Two of the battalion's commissioners signed the proclamation of the Legislative Assembly to take measures of public safety.

The general assembly of the battalion of Petit-Saint-Antoine elected commissioners to recover the weapons and cartridges in the hands of Jean Baptiste Herbault and Pierre Mussey, ex-commanders of the battalion. The following day section Roi de Sicile convoked its citizens to hear Herbault justify his actions and to elect a new commander if need be. On 13 August the provisional commander, Norman, invited the battalion to hear the reading of an address to the Legislative Assembly and requested the section to convok its general assembly for the purpose of electing a military committee of twelve members that was to act as a disciplinary body over its armed forces. On 22 September the general assembly censured its former commanding officers, although the battalion's exact role during the morning of 10 August remained unclear. A coachman declared that he had heard the cannoneers cry "Vive le Roi" as they attended the king's review of Swiss troops. This was corroborated by a volunteer serving in the battalion, who added that his comrades and he had difficulty in leaving the chateau. This report was contradicted, however, by another witness who claimed that the cries were "Vive la Nation." What probably happened was that while the officers of the armed forces remained loyal to the monarchy, the men were hostile and manifested their opposition as best they could. Lieutenant Amable Antoine Picard declared to the surveillance committee that Roederer, the procureur-général-syndic of the department, warned the troops at 7 A.M. against riotous assemblies, but that a municipal official told them to repel force with force. An hour later the fight with the Swiss troops broke out. A number of looters were arrested and brought before justices of the peace and police commissioners. Some had silver objects that had been stolen from the palace. On 11 August the authorities of the department of Paris, various committees of the sections, secretaries, and police commissioners were all suspended, and justices of the peace were summoned to the bar to justify their conduct. The sections then proceeded to elect new members to replace the suspended officials. This reorganization of the sections, Commune, and
department was paralleled by and intensified by the change in the method of voting. More and more often the vote was taken as an open voice vote, a sure means of intimidating the moderate and royalist opposition. Droits de l'Homme decided to elect the mayor and the procureur in this manner. Other sections shared this way of voting, and demands were raised that all administrative bodies hold their sessions in public so that the people might know those who had their welfare at heart.

The General Council also moved in the direction of closer control of the sections' delegates. By insisting that the sections report on their expenditures and receipts since 10 August, the Council began to supervise their activities more closely. This demand was first transmitted to the general assembly of section Droits de l'Homme on 22 October. On 2 November the Commune demanded a list of the names and residences of all commissioners appointed since 10 August.

Section Roi de Sicile was bombarded by the decrees and ordinances of the new authorities. Citizens were ordered to remain under arms, but on 11 August they were free to reopen their shops. The following day the Commune decreed that ecclesiastical garments be prohibited in public. On 13 August the general assembly was convoked to elect twelve commissioners who would assume newly granted powers under the municipal code. The provisional commander of the battalion asked the militia to hear an address to the National Assemble, and to elect a delegation to present it. That same day it was ruled that citizens were free to leave the city if they wished, although a few weeks later the section was authorized by the General Council to take all necessary measures to prevent suspects from escaping across the Seine. On the whole, however, the tensions engendered by the insurrection were beginning to ease.

Varlet, as one of the leaders of the republican party, advocated prompt measures to dethrone the king, without awaiting the formal convocation of the primary assemblies. In addition he suggested the removal of the dauphin from the care of those whose influence might corrupt him. Blood ties, he pointed out, were more important to him at present than the future of a great empire. Only a different type of education could change his present loyalties, which could be accomplished by a tutor who would teach him that the duty of kings was to defend the weak. Varlet added in his petition to the Legislative Assembly a demand that it enact laws against profiteering and speculation in currency. "Universal peace to all people; harsh war against all tyrants," he concluded.

While petitions and resolutions were being presented to the municipality and the National Legislature, the section's general assembly appointed a commission to take back its register from the former president, Fayel. On 21 August the section requested permission to change its name from Roi de
Sicile to Droits de l'Homme, the name it was to retain until 1796. This was accorded by the General Council. "Droits de l'Homme" ("Rights of Man"), obviously, held meaning, while the obscure "Roi de Sicile" ("King of Sicily") no longer did. On 2 September Varlet was elected with two other members by the general assembly to make judicial investigations (pour faire des perquisitions) and to receive testimony and declarations by anyone who wished to lodge complaints or give reports of recent events. These would be directed, of course, against moderates and other opponents of the revolutionists in the section.

Throughout the month of September the section adopted measures to regulate its internal life. Its citizens did everything—from patrolling the barriers to finding lodging for the Fédérés, from demanding uniforms for volunteers to making haversacks. On 2 September the section was authorized by the General Council to seize horses from persons who had not been licensed by the municipality after 10 August. Its new military officers, confirmed in their election on 22 September by the general assembly, reviewed troops departing for the front. The following day, the section's civil committee distributed new civic cards, destined to play an important role in the life of private citizens. On 27 September the section unanimously hailed the proclamation of the French Republic, and on the thirtieth drafted an address to the newly elected Convention.

The address reflected suspicion of the preceding two legislative bodies, and, at the same time, patriotic support for the newly constituted Convention. Pointing to past "betrayals" of the people by former legislators who cloaked their evil machinations under the mask of patriotism, the petitioners boldly announced that all this was changed when "the whole people" rose up guided by the slogan "The annihilation of kings: Live free or die." Although the events of 10 August were bloody, they had their effect. The question now was whether the Convention was worthy of its sublime mission. Within the Convention itself were speculators and the factious, whose very existence threatened the whole of France. However, the Convention's decree abolishing the monarchy had saved France. Millions of men stood ready to support the Republic, ready to spill their blood for the safety of the country. The Convention could rely on them as they swore "to live free or die." Thus ended this declaration which began critically and concluded on a note of warm support for the new legislature. Yet, it must have occurred to more than one deputy sitting in the chamber to wonder—Who enjoyed the real power, the National Convention or the sections and their Commune?

The political tendency of section Roi de Sicile on the eve of 10 August 1792 was uncertain. Two factions, the constitutional monarchists and the republicans, balanced each other. The "unanimous" resolutions adopted by the general assembly prove little, as each side was able to intimidate, expel,
or outmaneuver the other. It is possible that in number of adherents they were nearly equal.

In revolutionary situations, however, statistics alone cannot determine the outcome of the struggle. Action, commitment, determination, organization, and leadership—these are more important. The most decisive factor proves to be the general political climate, itself a product of social and economic forces within the country and the fortunes of war without.

This is not to say that the republicans were mere conductors of the revolutionary current. Men act as resistors, as well as conductors. The general revolutionary dynamics help determine the actions of some men; others act as dynamos, generating the revolutionary current themselves. The men who represented section Roi de Sicile in the Hôtel de Ville were patriots who became republicans partly out of conviction and partly under the pressure of circumstances. Having suppressed the "cabal" in the section, they were to become victims of this same group after the fall of Robespierre, and, more especially, after the abortive insurrections of Germinal (March–April) and Prairial (May–June), Year III. Among the Thermidorians there were not a few former monarchists. This was in the future, however. For the next two years it was the patriots who would determine the political tone of section Droite de l'Homme and push it in a democratic and egalitarian direction.

Notes

2. For the organization of the districts, see A. de P., 1AZ 113, Etats-Généraux convocation des habitants du Tiers-Etat de la ville et faubourgs de Paris (15 April 1789), 24 pp.; B.H.V.P., 100.65, Districts (en général), a collection of twenty-three brochures. See no. 110 bis, Supplément de la feuille, no. 23, 1153 (20 April 1789), and 1160–61.


8. Fritz Braesch, “Essai de statistique de la population ouvrière de Paris vers 1791,” in *La Révolution française*, 1912, 63:289–321 gives the figure of 1,028 (p. 315) but is in error by 3. The list of workers utilized by Braesch is A.N., F30 145, “Administration des finances: Echanges d’assignats contre numeraire pour faciliter la paye des ouvriers.” It is incomplete, as it omits eleven bakers, thirty-five butchers, and sixty-seven cobblers. See A. de P., 4 AZ 53, 20 October 1793; A.N., D III, 2563, d. 10, pièce 59, 19 Prairial, Year III (7 June 1795); and A. de P., 4 AZ 356, 9 Vendémiaire, Year III (30 September 1794).


10. A.P., 46: 110–11, 4 July 1792. The definitive text appeared the following day (133–34).

11. Ibid., 47:69–70.

12. Ibid., 47:143, on a motion of Thuriot. A.N., AD XVI, 70, 28 July 1792; B.H.V.P., 104,095, 28 July 1792, a printed sheet headed “Loi relative à la permanence des Assemblées de Section [sic] dans Paris.”


14. A.N., BB30 17, “Pièces relatives à l’événement de 20 Juin 1792.”

15. B.H.V.P., MS. 806, fol. 300, 23 June 1792.


19. Mortimer-Ternaux, *Histoire de la Terreur, 2:430. Mortimer-Ternaux lists fourteen sections as adhering to the resolution, sixteen rejecting it, ten taking no action on it, and eight leaving no record of their vote (ibid., 2:443–44). The Assembly rejected the resolution and invited all to abide by the law (A.N., AD XVI, 70, 4 August 1792).

21. Ibid., 4, no. 2076, 9 August 1792. The letter was written by Roederer, the procureur-général-syndic of the department, to sections Roi de Sicile and Jardin des Plantes. The contents of their resolutions were communicated to the Assembly, where they were heard "with interest."


23. Ibid., 341.

24. B.N., Lb19 10728, Vœux formés par des français libres (Paris, 1792), 8 pp.; Br.M., F65* (2), same title, place, and date of publication. Varlet's version of his program varies slightly from that contained in the Moniteur. He makes sixteen demands instead of twelve. No. 7, for example, asks for 250,000 troops instead of 400,000, but it is essentially the same in all other respects. Braesch gives the full title of the brochure and the three editions that he found of this work (La Commune du dix août, 165, n. 2).

25. Cited by Braesch, La Commune du dix août, 166, italicizing the last clause.

26. A.N., C 161, 350, pc. 26, 8 August 1792, "Extraits des registres des délibérations de l'Assemblée générale de la section des Droits de l'Homme." The motion to repudiate Quinze-Vingts' resolution was adopted unanimously and was to be communicated to the National Assembly to demonstrate that the section abided by the constitution. It was signed by Fayel, president, and Ruquet, secretary. Tuetey, Répertoire général, 4, no. 1991, 8 August 1792. This was done under the pretext that Roi de Sicile had no reason to deliberate on the resolution, and Roi de Sicile invited Quinze Vingts "to confine itself within the precise provisions of the Constitution"; not necessarily a harsh condemnation of its action. Mortimer-Ternaux called this action "an energetic protest" (Histoire de la Terreur, 2:431).

27. Moniteur, 13, no. 222:357, 9 August 1792. Charles Brunot is the citizen mentioned. Tuetey, Répertoire général, 4, no. 1987, 6 August 1792 gives the name as Bruneaut.

28. B.H.V.P., MS.104.095, Observation sur la demande qui a été faite de la déchéance du roi ([Paris], 6 August [1792]–). 4 pp.

29. Mortimer-Ternaux, Histoire de la Terreur, 2:431. The author says that Pollet feared the responsibility but offers no proof for this remark. This resignation did not prevent Pollet from playing a role as a member of the civil committee, nor from being elected to the Commune.

30. A. de P., 1 AZ 146, Tableau-général des commissaires des 48 sections qui ont composés la conseil général de la Commune de dix août mil sept cent quatre-vingt-douze l'an premier de la République française (Paris: 10 August 1792), 21 pp. This is the list referred to by Buchez and Roux, Histoire parlementaire, 16:410, which formed the basis for Braesch's study, "Liste, par ordre alphabétique, des individus ayant fait parti du conseil général de la commune, du 9 août, à minuit, au 17 août soir," in his La Commune du dix août, 245–64. Mortimer-Ternaux's work differs in some essential respects from the above. The list of 288 names contains more names than the total membership on the General Council because of the confusion immediately following the events of 10 August (ibid., 265).

31. The Tableau-général gives no information on Pollet.

32. Tuetey, Répertoire général, 8, no. 720, 10 September 1792. See also, ibid., 6, no.
418, 30 August 1792.

33. Ibid., 8, no. 781, 18–21 November 1792. Braesch’s reference to Tuetey, Répertoire général, 6, no. 569, is in error, as it deals with a justice of the peace, Le Chevalier, mentioned by the committee of section Roule, presumably its surveillance committee.

34. A.N., F 4774, d.1, “Réponse au questions proposé à par le Comité de Sureté Générale pour Etienne Pierre Leclerc ci devant administrateur de la police de la Commune de 10 Août et depuis juge du tribunal du 3e arrond de Paris détenu à la Force”; Tuetey, Répertoire général, 5, Introduction, pp. x–xiii. See also the scattered references to him in Braesch’s La Commune du dix août.

35. A.P.P., A A/136, fol. 49. Auzolles lifted the seals from his papers on 30 March (10 Germinal).

36. A.N., F 4774 d.1, 8 Prairial, Year III (28 May 1795). The procès-verbal was signed by Grandjean, president of the assembly, and Boudard, secretary. It was revealed that although the letter in question had not been found at Robespierre’s home, none of its signatories denied its existence when it had been disclosed to the Convention. This type of reasoning foreshadowed totalitarian frame-ups in our own day. On the obverse side of this the procès-verbal was a notation that Leclerc recognized the existence of the letter in question, that he had only denied signing it, not its existence. Lenfant’s denials bear no date, although Tuetey, Répertoire général, 5, Introduction, p. xiii, places it as sometime in Thermidor.

37. B.V.C., MS. 120, fols. 163–65, 7 Prairial 1795 (27 May).

38. A.N., F7 477417. Lenfant was released on 7 August 1795 (20 Thermidor, Year III).


40. His name appears in the Tableau-général. Braesch added the “père” and considered the possibility that his name might have been Mareuil (La Commune du dix août, 258).


42. His name is not mentioned in the Tableau-général, nor by Mortimer-Ternaux, B.N., MSS, Nouv. acq. fr. 2691, fols. 143–44 mentions him, however. Braesch cites this source in his La Commune du dix août (246). Mortimer-Ternaux lists only Lenfant, Coulombeau, and Rumel as commissioners, but quotes Buchez and Roux as including Pollet, Leclerc, and Mareux. Braesch accepts the list of Buchez and Roux as constituting the “illegal Commune” rather than the list given by Mortimer-Ternaux. According to Buchez and Roux, twenty-eight sections sent representatives to the Hôtel de Ville, to make a total of eighty-nine commissioners. Huguenin of section Quinze Vingts presided over the assembly to which section Roi de Sicile sent a representative (Braesch, La Commune du dix août, 222–24).

43. This is indicated by an asterisk placed before each name in the Tableau général.

44. Tuetey, Répertoire général, 7, no. 1234, 16 September 1792. Braesch is careful to explain that his “Liste des membres de la Commune révolutionnaire nommés après le 17 août 1792” is quite tentative and uncertain La Commune du dix août, 641–43).

45. A.N., F7 479, d. 1; A.P.P., A B/327, p. 420, 22 September 1793. It is difficult to say if this Hardy was the same man who was elected to the civil committee.

47. B.N., Lb 3246, Adresse des citoyens de la section du Roi de Sicile à leurs frères de la section des Quinze-Vingts et de toutes les sections de Paris (Paris: n.d.), p. 1. The apology was signed by Pollet, president, Huguet, secretary, and three hundred citizens of the section. It must have been published between 10 August and 21 August 1792, when the section changed its name.

48. Braesch, La Commune du dix août, 539: “The moderates wanted to utilize this name [Pétion’s], still popular, to bring about a change in feeling in their favor.”

49. Feuille de Paris, 10 September 1792, cited by Braesch, La Commune du dix août, 638. The other sections were Tuileries and Invalides.

50. A.N., C 156, 304, p. 27, 10 August 1792.

51. A. de P., 4 AZ 959, “Commissaires de la majorité des sections réunis avec pleins pouvoirs pour sauver la chose publique,” 11 August 1792. The call was signed by Huguenin as president and Coulombeau, secretary (B.N., MSS., Nouv. acq. fr. 2691, fol. 131, n.d.).

52. Fifty-eight mattresses were to be delivered by the concierge of La Force for the soldiers of Montalban (Buchez and Roux, Histoire parlementaire, 18:278).


54. B.N., MSS, Nouv. acq. fr. 2691, fol. 143, 10 August 1792. The proclamation began “The National Assembly considering that the dangers to the country have reached their high point . . .” and then spelled out in eleven articles the steps to be taken. The first was that “all houses shall be illuminated.” This was signed by “The Commissioners of the section of Roi de Sicile at the General Assembly of the forty-eight sections.” It was signed by (Etienne) Leclerc and Berle.

55. Tuetey, Répertoire général, 4, no. 2176, 10 August 1792.


57. Tuetey, Répertoire général, 4, no. 2268.

58. B.V.C., MS. 120, fol. 132.

59. Tuetey, Répertoire général, 5, no. 3988, August 1792.

60. Ibid., 4, no. 2307, 11 August 1792. Lebeque reported to section Arcis that when the review passed before the king, cries of “Vive le Roi” were heard.

61. Ibid., 4, no. 2309, 11 August 1792, Report of Phulpin of rue de la Verrerie. He claimed that they had to threaten an officer to get out of the Tuileries.

62. Ibid., 4, no. 2328, 15 August 1792.

63. BB 18, “Journée du 10 Août/15 Août 1792.” The General Council decreed that of the 1,600 livres recovered by citizen Soubiran of section Droits de l’Homme, a sum of 100 livres be given him (A.N., F7* 4408, d.2, 29 October 1792).


65. Braesch, La Commune du dix août, 618. Arsenal reported that delegates from Droits de l’Homme had informed them that the election of the mayor and procureur had taken place by roll call. The assembly of Arsenal applauded and adopted a similar resolution (F7* 2501, fol. 142 v°, cited by Braesch, ibid., 618, n. 3).

66. B.N., MSS, Nouv. acq. fr. 2691, fol. 139. Seven commissioners of the Commune reported that, after meeting with representatives of the Legislative Assembly, the open voice vote “had been happily employed since the regeneration of 10 August.” In A.N., D III, 251–52, d.5, pcs. 47 aux 48, dated 28 February
1792, there is a petition of 222 names urging the Legislative Assembly to make administrative bodies public.

67. B.V.C., MS. 120, fol. 133. When the commissioners met on 13 December, only two were absent from the total representing the forty-eight sections.

68. B.N., MSS, Nouv. acq. fr. 2691, fols. 147, 151. Many of the notices and decrees in this collection are addressed to section Roi de Sicile, but these circulars are of a general nature and are meant for all sections.

69. [Noell Charavay, ed., Catalogue d'une importante collection de documents autographes et historiques sur la Révolution française depuis le 13 juillet jusqu'au 18 Brumaire An VIII (Paris, 1862), 5e arrête de la Commune, 2 September [1792], 1 p. in folio.

70. A.N., C 161, 351, 12 August 1792; Tuetey, Répertoire général, 5, no. 17. Many citizens endorsed this petition by their signatures.


72. Tourneux, Procès-Verbaux, 49. “This request was received by lively applause.”

73. B.H.V.P., MS. 748, fol. 119.

74. B.V.C., MS. 120, fols. 132 and 133. The first entry is for 10 September 1792. On the requisition of horses, see A. de P., 4 AZ 966, 2 September 1792. It may be taken for granted that there must have been confusion and overlapping in the sometimes frantic efforts to establish a functioning administration after the insurrection. A letter from the procureur-général-syndic to section Droits de l'Homme and to other sections, for example, rejected their complaints that they were not receiving copies of the laws and decrees adopted by the Commune. The failure, he wrote, was due to their own negligence, as the municipality was distributing sufficient numbers of copies (B.N., MSS, Nouv. acq. fr. 2691, fol. 221, 13 September 1792).

75. A.N., C 233, 190, 30 September 1792. A slightly different version is in B.N., Lb49 1796, and in Lb40 1796 A, Adresse présenté à la Convention Nationale le 30 septembre 1792, l'an 1er de la République française, par les citoyens Gattrez, Oudart, Pointard, Gasnier (Paris, 1792), 4 pp. This is reproduced in A.P., 52:243.
Jacques Roux: A Victim of Vilification

Slander, as De Quincey proved of murder, is a fine art. Its application in destroying political opponents is at least as old as the ancient Greek polis. Thucydides was certainly aware of it when he cited Diodotus’s reply to Cleon opposing the destruction of Mytilene. “A man,” said Diodotus, “is not honest if, seeking to carry a discreditable measure, and knowing that he cannot speak well in a bad cause, he reflects that he can slander well and terrify his opponents and his audience by the audaciousness of his calumnies.”¹ We have witnessed the Cleons of our own day utilizing calumny to bludgeon their rivals into silence, and, sometimes, into the very tomb. Character assassination, like political murder, has been developed by some societies into an art.

Few periods in man’s political growth can testify to a more extreme employment of this “art” than the French Revolution. Political factions of every hue and coloration painted their opponents in the darkest colors. The all too familiar charges of “counterrevolution,” “suspicious conduct,” or “l’incivisme” were hurled indiscriminately by French revolutionaries against their opponents of both the Right and the Left. No attempt was made to differentiate between genuine enemies of the Revolution and its critical supporters. Whether Girondins, Jacobins, or Thermidorians were supreme at the moment, their political rivals were transformed into criminals against state and society. Under such conditions a genuine political debate was impossible.

No group to the left of the Jacobins was more violently attacked or its leadership more bitterly denounced than the Enragés. This amorphous body was composed of genuine sans-culottes, the petites gens, the bras nus of the Parisian sections. They were artisans, craftsmen, petty traders, and modest shopkeepers. The disruption of trade, the growing unemployment, the sharp rise in prices, the continuing shortages and lack of bread—in short, la vie chère—intensified their awareness of “the social question.” They demanded
a price ceiling, the maximum, on all essential commodities, drastic penalties against speculators and engrossers, and the acceptance of the assignat as fiat money. Although they never perfected a consistent political program that might have differentiated them from the Left Jacobins, the Hébertistes, or the numerous adherents of the independent sectional clubs, they nevertheless formed a distinct group. The Enragés tended to champion those measures that strengthened direct, popular democracy, often at the expense of les hommes en place. Among the latter were politicians and officials from all layers of French society, including ambitious plebeians who were carving careers for themselves out of the Revolution. This partly accounted for the growing gulf between the Enragés and the Hébertistes. The political role of the former, though dramatic, was ephemeral, and they never broke out of the confines of a few Parisian sections.²

The heterogeneous social composition of the sans-culottes was reflected in the desultory leadership of the Enragés. No attempt was ever made to consolidate and unify their forces, publish a joint journal, or launch a common organization. On the contrary, despite their concurrent concern with the social and economic position of the sans-culottes, they often repudiated and denounced one another. Whatever cooperation developed among them was usually the result of pure accident, seldom of design. Yet Jacques Roux, Jean Varlet, Théophile Leclerc, Claire Lacombe, and Pauline Léon had more in common than they imagined.³ Not only were their social and political ideas similar, but their joint struggle against Louis and Lafayette, Brissot and Roland, Danton and Robespierre, assured them a common history and a common fate.

The best known of the Enragés, to both contemporaries and posterity, was and is Jacques Roux, a priest, who was born on 21 August 1752 at Pransac, in the diocese of Angoulême. He taught philosophy and experimental physics while at the seminary, served as chaplain in 1785, and performed the duties of a vicar for one year. When the Revolution broke out, Roux was in Saint Thomas de Conac, where he attempted to popularize the new ideas of liberty and equality and consequently was held responsible for a jacquerie launched by the peasants of the region. In 1790 Roux arrived in Paris and immediately plunged into revolutionary activity. By the end of the year he was already a member of the Cordeliers Club. As vicar of Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs, an important church in section Gravilliers, he became popular and was elected to represent his electors in the General Council of the Paris Commune in December 1792.⁴

What sort of man was Roux? Dr. Fritz Tögel, a graphologist, outlines his basic character as follows:

The nature of the writer is simple, uncontrived, not in the least intellec-
tual or academic. His [Roux's] dominant characteristic is the combination of an enthusiastic, strong, outgoing feeling and perceptivity with an indefatigable strength of will. This lends to him an unusual degree of inner stability, which can also manifest itself as a lack of flexibility. It seems impossible to influence J. R. against his will or to dissuade him from an acquired opinion or purpose. His uncompromising stand can lead to inflexibility.

J. R. is not a trifling, sociable person. Since everything inauthentic is foreign to him, he does not hide behind deceptive façades or veils in any situation, either in dealing with superiors or with inferiors. His manner of thinking is uncommonly quick. Reflection in abstract thought, purely theoretical concepts, and empty hair-splitting are alien to him. He reacts to sudden impulses, which may lead to exaggeration. It is difficult for him to keep a secret. He needs and seeks activity, contact, and associations, is capable of extreme enthusiasm, is self-sacrificing, affectionate, even sociable, open to the world and to man, endowed with imagination and a taste for contemplation and for the more subtle pleasures of life. Here one comes upon elements of a certain weakness and gentleness; his manner of dealing with and relating to people is, therefore, variable. He is completely free from the need for isolation, free of coldness, of apathy, and of inhibition, as well as being free from egotistical calculation and intent; although possessed of a strong sense of self-esteem, and a great ambition which drives him to seek success, recognition, and admiration, he does not seek a career for itself but rather to realize a feeling of a "calling," a great task predetermined by fate itself.

He allows himself neither to be deterred nor commanded. One can consider him modest only in the material sense. Not burdened by wavering or moodiness, he is yet unpedantic; nor is he a schemer. Never malicious or hateful, rather, good-natured, he lacks, however, a trait of adaptability and sympathy for people and conditions; his zeal may blind him. Too great a burden elicits apathy, resignation, and fatigue. But he forces himself to overcome such feelings at once. Perhaps he wreaks havoc with himself, since he cannot be considered of a robust nature.5

As Paris began to experience scarcity and high prices, Roux's frequent attacks on stockjobbers and monopolizers increased his popularity. When Louis XVI was condemned to death, it was Roux who conducted him to the scaffold. The growing gulf between the Gironde and the Mountain deepened his attachment to the latter. Yet he remained critical of the Jacobin social outlook. During the insurrection of 31 May–2 June 1793 against the Girondins, Roux was appointed one of four editors of the official journal of the Paris Commune, Affiches de la Commune. The victory of the Mountain left him dissatisfied and he immediately went into opposition by staging a dramatic protest against the Montagnard Constitution of 1793. He charged the Jacobins with neglecting the interests of the poor because they had not outlawed
speculation or hoarding. In his petition of 25 June 1793 to the Convention he stated:

Liberty is but a vain phantom when one class of men can starve another with impunity. Equality is but deceit when the rich, by their monopoly, can exercise the right of life and death over their fellow men. The Republic is but a vain illusion when the counterrevolution can operate day after day, through the high cost of goods, which three-fourths of the citizens cannot acquire without shedding bitter tears.

This harsh assault evoked a violent counterattack by the Jacobins against the spokesman of section Gravilliers. They labeled Roux's demands as "perfidious . . . provocative of pillage . . . provoking disorder," and their author as being a "secret agent of our enemies." Robespierre attacked him on 28 June 1793:

They slander the Jacobins, the Montagnards, the Cordeliers, the old champions of liberty. A man covers himself with a cloak of patriotism, but whose intentions, at least, one must suspect, and insults the majesty of the National Convention. Under the pretext that the Constitution contains no law against monopolizers, he, therefore, concludes that it has nothing of value for the people . . . .

Do you believe that such a priest, who, with the Austrians, denounces the best patriots, can have pure motives? If he had been a member of the Mountain during the past four years . . . do you think he would have remained firm? Guard your faith and subject it, at least, to as long a proof. Do you think that one can conquer with one blow Austria, Spain, Pitt, the Brissotins, and Jacques Roux? No, citizens!

Many citizens agreed with Robespierre. Since the Mountain was assailed by both William Pitt and by Roux, it followed that the prime minister of Britain and the delegate of section Gravilliers were joint conspirators against France. This linking of the Enragés to the foreign coalition was effectively used by the Jacobins to destroy their opponents. Robespierre was especially fond of fusing disparate political elements into one indistinguishable mass. The Enragés, the Hébertistes, and the Dantonists—all were to fall victims to this art of slander.

On the very next day, following Robespierre's denunciation, the General Council removed Roux as editor of the Affiches de la Commune. On 1 July, it decreed that Roux had lost its confidence. Between the time of his removal from the Affiches and his censure by the General Council, Roux had suffered a damaging defeat in the Cordelier Club, in a turbulent and bitter session on 30 June. In order to destroy his influence in the club which had supported Roux's petition of 25 June, the Jacobins decided to bring up their heaviest artillery. They sent twelve spokesmen to their sister
society, among them Robespierre, Collot d'Herbois, Bentabole, Thuriot—all accomplished orators and experienced polemicians. The session opened with the reading of a letter from Marat demanding the expulsion of Roux and several of his co-thinkers. Antoine-François Momoro, who presided, attempted to conciliate the factions, but without success. Roux was accused of fanaticism, of perfidy, and of every other crime in the colorful lexicon of the *clubistes*. His own partisans shouted bitter and sarcastic remarks at deputies of the Mountain, but neither he nor Théophile Leclerc, who tried to defend him, was permitted to take the floor. When the tumult had subsided, both Roux and Leclerc were expelled from the organization.\(^{12}\)

On 4 July, Marat published a lead article in his *Publiciste* in which he wrathfully castigated Roux, Leclerc, and Varlet.\(^{13}\) Warning his readers that false patriots were seeking to influence popular societies, he wrote that the “abbé Renaudi,” as he insisted on calling Roux, had offered him asylum when he was hiding from Lafayette, but only to boast later that Marat had stayed at his home. “Renaudi” had usurped the name of Jacques Roux and had admitted to Marat that he did not believe in religion, that religion was “a tissue of lies,” and that he was merely acting in this “holy comedy.” Furthermore, “Renaudi” had confessed to being only “a patriot of the moment.” To drive his point home, Marat published a letter allegedly written to Collot d’Herbois by a citizen Tessier, who claimed that he had been a resident of Angoulême when Roux was a curé there. Tessier described Roux as a bad citizen, a wanted man, a person of depraved morals who had been expelled from several homes, and a man whose conduct proved equally immoral when he had been forced to take refuge in Sainte. All honest men, he concluded, were aware of Roux’s crimes.\(^{14}\)

This violent attack destroyed whatever political influence Roux still possessed. Within ten days of his petition to the Convention, he had come under the fire of Robespierre and the Jacobins, of Marat and the Cordeliers, and of the General Council. One line of defense was still open to him—his own section. Gravilliers had long been a battleground between his own partisans and his personal enemies, many of them functionaries of the civil and revolutionary committees of the section. His personal enemies were members of a popular club which modestly called itself “La Société des Amis de la Loi, de la Liberté, de l’Égalité, et de l’Humanité,” better known as the Vertbois Club because it met at 17, rue Vert Bois. Neither Roux nor any of his followers belonged to this organization, which was under the influence of Léonard Bourdon, a member of the National Convention residing in section Gravilliers, and an enemy of Roux.\(^{15}\)

To combat the influence of the Vertbois Club, Roux’s followers formed their own society. They could hardly compete, however, with an organization which was affiliated with the Jacobins and whose members were welded
together by self-interest. Roux's partisans, in contrast, were united by a personal attachment to the "red priest."\textsuperscript{16} This personal regard for and loyalty to Roux was a source of both his weakness and his strength. While it assured him a warm friendship among the members of his society, it hardly encouraged the growth of a political organization.

Marat's denunciation incited Roux's enemies within section Gravilliers to strike at him through his friends. On 7 July, Elisabeth Marguerite Hébert, the widow Petit, was brought before the revolutionary committee of section Gravilliers, now in the hands of Germain Truchon, an unscrupulous and unprincipled intriguer.\textsuperscript{17} The charge against Roux was vague—extortion and misappropriation of charitable funds raised for the widow Petit. Mme Hébert testified that she was a garment-worker, fifty-three years of age, and that she had been a widow since 1778. She had first met Roux at the Cordeliers about two years earlier. Because of her extreme need, she had asked him to take up a collection for her, which he had willingly done, and he turned over to her a sum of fifty-five livres. When asked by the committee if she knew whether Roux had helped any other woman (Mlle Beaurepaire, discussed below), she replied that she did not, nor what sums, if any, he had raised. The interrogator then demanded to know how well she knew Roux. Mme Hébert replied that she had worked for him several times and had taken care of him during an illness, and she admitted to having spent one night at his home. Asked if this was before or after the collection, she replied that it had been before. She added that Roux had given her thirty livres the preceding January for taking care of him when he was ill. When asked whether she thought that this was done out of pure generosity, she replied in the affirmative and added that Roux had never demanded anything of her in return. The committee then inquired whether the payment she had received from Roux had come from collections made for her. She replied in the negative, but admitted that she and Roux had visited each other's homes. Upon swearing to the truth of her testimony, she was released. Roux, himself, was not interrogated at this time.\textsuperscript{18}

Marat's thrust had so upset Roux that he attempted a personal reconciliation with his critic. He was admitted into Marat's home on the afternoon of 9 July, only to receive a severe tongue-lashing for his pains. Marat accused him of using counterrevolutionary language at the bar of the Convention, of being a notorious "Tartuffe," and called him a dangerous enemy of the Revolution. Roux stalked out of the room, casting "a glance of indignation and fury" at his persecutor. Because of this incident, friends of Marat brought their suspicions before the Committee of General Security, immediately after the assassination of "l'ami du peuple." Questioned by the Committee, Roux admitted that Marat had reproached him for his address to the Convention. Roux had assured him, however, that since the constitution
had been adopted, he intended to abide by it and to employ all his powers in defending and sustaining it. The Committee found no evidence to warrant his further detention and dismissed him that same afternoon.19

Six weeks later Roux was arrested at his residence, on rue Aumaire.20 Among the charges against him was one which had barely been mentioned at the interrogation of the widow Petit: misappropriation of funds collected for a woman in need. The circumstances were as follows. The French commander of Verdun had refused to surrender the fortress in the summer of 1792 and had died in its defense.21 His survivor, a sister who bore his name, Beaurepaire, found herself destitute. She was introduced to Roux by a vicar of Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs, who suggested that Roux conduct a collection for her. Roux enthusiastically agreed to do so. He collected 81 livres, 3 sous for her at the general assembly of his section and informed her that a similar collection would be taken for her at the Electoral Assembly of the department of Paris, to which he had recently been appointed. He asked, however, that she share the approaching collection with a widow by name of Hébert, a mother of five children with no means of support. When Mlle Beaurepaire agreed, Roux gave her a letter addressed to the president of the assembly. A collection was duly made; the proceeds were tied in a white handkerchief and delivered to her.

Mlle Beaurepaire then accompanied Roux to his home, where she dined with her host. Before departing she insisted on leaving 6 livres for Roux’s adopted son, August Pierre Medard Masselin, and then counted the money, which totaled 146 livres, 6 sous. According to her agreement with Roux, her share was, thus, 73 livres, 3 sous, the other half being turned over to the widow Hébert. The minutes of the Electoral Assembly, however, recorded that the sum turned over to Mlle Beaurepaire was not 146 livres, 6 sous, but 179 livres, 3 sous. What had happened to the 33 additional livres?22

Roux appeared before the revolutionary committee of section Gravilliers on 24 August 1793. He admitted to having conducted a collection for Mlle Beaurepaire at the Electoral Assembly after she had “with joy” accepted his proposal to share the proceeds with the needy widow. Roux added that he had occupied himself with helping the poor of his section ever since he had become a resident of Gravilliers; that, moreover, his door was always open to the poor, as well as to all others. He had not touched the money collected, as it was wrapped in a handkerchief in plain sight of the whole assembly and given to her in person. Furthermore, she had declared to him personally that she did not believe him capable of taking a portion of the collection from her. If she had received a lesser sum than half, then either the secretary had made a miscount, or she had dropped or stolen some of the money herself. The widow Hébert had already testified before the committee that she had received her half of the collection. Moreover, when
Jacques Roux

Roux had been ill the past January, he had given her the sum of 30 livres for taking care of him. Roux added that he had disbursed among the needy a sum of 217 livres, which were his earnings from the sale of his patriotic writings. He had even petitioned the Convention to grant Mlle Beaurepaire a pension and had appealed to the Jacobins for help. The whole affair, he concluded, was nothing but a plot by his personal enemies.

Roux completed his testimony on 27 August. He denied responsibility for the slogan, "Death to engrossers," allegedly advocated in his section. When charged with slandering such "ardent patriots" as Robespierre, Roux replied that he had always held the highest regard for deputies of the Mountain. It was true, he had declared that the constitution lacked an article proscribing speculation and hoarding, but his petition had been misunderstood and had been badly received by the Convention. Yet he recognized the contribution made by the Mountain to the Revolution, and he stood ready to shield its members with his own body.

Upon the conclusion of the interrogation, the examiners of section Gravilliers decided to turn Roux's testimony over to the procureur of the Commune. In the meantime the prisoner was released in the custody of two residents of the section, his personal friends Albert Alexandre Guilmond, a turner, and Jacques Bourbon, a shoemaker.

It is doubtful that Roux's testimony had convinced his enemies. The interrogation, after all, was not a juridical process, but a political act. Nor is it possible to reconstruct the exact story of the Beaurepaire collection at this late date. None of Roux's opponents ever challenged the substantive portion of his testimony. Moreover, his devotion to the ideals of the Revolution would hardly encourage him to engage in petty thievery. Possibly his opponents hoped to intimidate him. If so, they misjudged their prisoner. Roux continued his denunciation of speculators, hoarders, and corrupt politicians and of the growing tyranny of the Committees. His attacks led to his rearrest less than a fortnight after his release. On 5 September, he was imprisoned again. On 14 January 1794 Roux was brought before the police tribunal, which ruled that it had no jurisdiction in his case and referred him to the Revolutionary Tribunal. The prisoner then thanked the court and, pulling out an open knife, he rapidly gave himself several blows. As he lay bleeding, the judge observed that he ought not to fear appearing before the Revolutionary Tribunal and reminded him that Marat had walked out of the court in triumph. Roux weakly replied that he had not the stamina of Marat, and, more important, that Marat had never been persecuted so severely as he had. In less than a month Roux inflicted new wounds on himself in Bicêtre prison and died a suicide on 10 February 1794. "La commedia è finita."
Notes


3. The sources for the above in A.N., are as follows: for Jacques Roux, W 20 d. 1073 and F 4775; for Jean Varlet, F 4775; for Théophile Leclerc and Pauline Léon, F 4774; for Claire Lacombe, F 4756 and T 10011-3.


7. Ibid.


11. Moniteur, 17, no. 185, 4 July 1793.


14. In his sharp reply to Marat, Roux accused him of slander: "You lie with impu-
nity, Marat. . . . I honor your civic virtues, but your self-esteem has been hurt because the Cordeliers Club named me 'le petit Marat'" (Roux, A Marat, A.N., W 20 d. 1073). Unfortunately for Roux, by the time his reply appeared in print, Marat had fallen victim to Charlotte Corday. He was, thus, striking at a martyr.

15. A.N., F7 4775; A.N., 20 d. 1073.
16. A.N., F7 2486. Among the charges against Roux was an accusation that he had used his society to convert the section to his own principles.

17. Truchon had been imprisoned in Bicêtre for seven years and was freed only on 13 August 1791. Married twice, he was engaged in lawsuits with both of his former wives. As a member of the Revolutionary Commune of 10 August and as a judge he had presided over the massacres of September 1792. Among other charges against him was one of misappropriating valuables seized from his victims. Blache, a police agent, employed him but complained of his immorality and called him a hypocrite and a rogue (A.N., F7 47753, cited by Albert Mathiez, The Fall of Robespierre and Other Essays [New York: Knopf, 1927], 169–70). Roux accused him of having fraudulently acquired a house in section Temple which brought him an income of 2,400 livres a year and of protecting bankrupts and various dishonest persons—for a price (J. M. Zacher, "Poslednie Period Deyatelnosti Jaka Roo" [The final period of Jacques Roux's activity], a reprint in my possession, but the name of the journal and place of publication are missing [possibly, Istoricheskie Nayki, Moscow], 171–73).

18. A.N., W 20 d. 1073; A.N., F7 2468.
20. A.N., W 20 d. 1073. Roux was arrested on 23 August by the police commissioner of his section, N. Froidure. All his papers, manuscripts, and effects were placed under seal, and he was interrogated on 23, 24, and 27 August.
21. Whether Beaurepaire, the commander of Verdun, was assassinated or took his own life has been the subject of a number of monographs. Lefebvre inclines to the former belief (Georges Lefebvre, La Révolution française, vol. 13 of Peuples et civilisations, ed. Louis Halphen and Philippe Sagnac [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951], 265, n. 1).
22. A.N., W 20 d. 1073. The minutes of the Electoral Assembly are dated 13 September 1792. Beaurepaire's testimony that she had agreed to share the collection with a poor woman and that her share was 73 livres, 3 sous, is dated 1 July 1793. It is interesting to note that Roux's enemies in the section must have been preparing a case against him even before his expulsion from the Cordeliers Club. Assuming that it took several days to gather the evidence, trace the minutes of the Electoral Assembly where the collection in question had been recorded, and find Mlle Beaurepaire and obtain her testimony, it is evident that Roux's petition of 25 June and Robespierre's violent reply must have added ammunition to their arsenal.

23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
Jean Varlet as Defender of Direct Democracy

The general will, like divine will, is subject to misinterpretation. Those who hold that "God's will and the people's will is one" must still identify this will. Nor does identification necessarily lead to its acceptance, for those who agree with James Madison that a given body of citizens must "refine" this will tend to clash with those who accept Rousseau's doctrine that the general will cannot be represented. Moreover, the French Revolution offers a striking paradox: While radical democrats sought to conform to traditional limitations on the powers of their deputies by means of the mandat impératif; their more conservative bourgeois opponents fought to free the national assemblies from this ancient restriction.

Under the Old Regime, a deputy was no more than a mandatory, in the strict sense of the world. He did not represent France as a whole but was the spokesman of a group that was reflected in his person. His mission was to defend the interests of his estate against the encroaching powers of loyal authority and of competing classes. Since each estate knew its own interests, theoretically, it could predetermine the mission of its delegate. To free himself from this restriction, Louis XVI, in convoking the Estates General, specifically asked the electors to confide in a representative assembly composed of deputies who would be free from instructions, a request he was to repeat on 23 June 1789. In other words, he broke with past tradition, that is, with the mandat impératif.

On 19 June 1789 Sieyès had already proposed a declaration of principles inviting the bailliages to free their deputies from "indiscreet mandates" and suggested that the Constituent Assembly refuse to recognize the mandats impératifs. This question was debated at length by various members of the Constituent Assembly. Sieyès argued that a mandat impératif would prevent a deputy from acting for the national good, since he would be limited by his own electoral district. Representatives, he pointed out, participated in the Assembly not to announce points of view already formulated by their con-
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constituents but to deliberate and vote freely on their deliberations. At the same
time, he distinguished clearly between democratic and representative gov­
ernment. The people, he stressed, lacked sufficient education and leisure to
occupy themselves with problems of government. Only representatives elected
by them could actually govern France.8

Students of our own constitutional debates can recognize many of the
same assumptions and arguments for rejecting direct democracy in France.
The Constituent Assembly was seeking to establish, a nation one and indi­
visible; it justly feared that direct democracy would stimulate the urban masses
to intervene in the legislative process, or, by encouraging private and local
interests, would convert the National Assembly into a mere congress of
plenipotentiaries. Certainly, it had no intention of reviving the ancient Es­
tates General. Yet, interestingly enough, it had to wrestle with its collective
conscience before adopting the modern doctrine, proposed by Barère, of
nullifying all limitations on its deliberations.9 On 8 January 1790 it expressly
forbade electoral assemblies to insert into their minutes or to draft separately
a mandat impératif.10 This prohibition was formalized in the Constitution of
1791 by Article 2, Title 3, and Article 7, Section 3, chapter i, Title 3.11
Together with the establishment of a property qualification for the suffrage,
it made the constitution essentially a conservative, bourgeois document.12

A conservative constitution and a popular revolution, however, are essen­
tially incompatible. The twin concepts of natural rights and popular sover­
eignty clashed radically with political restrictions placed on passive citizens.
Furthermore, thousands of pamphlets, articles, and orations had made a pop­
ular mystique out of the academic speculations of the philosophes.13 Bour­
geois assemblies might act as if they truly represented the popular will, but
radical journalists, popular orators, and devoted democrats were bound to
challenge the propertied classes and their spokesmen. Within the ranks of
the bourgeoisie itself, reformers, utopians, and disaffected radicals arose to
champion the aspirations of the menu peuple, the sans-culottes of Paris and
other urban centers of France. Under the impact of common problems and
common ideals, they began to join together in order to influence the rapidly
changing course of events. One organization which rapidly achieved popu­
ularity was a society formed to promote “the will of the people,” the Cercle
Social.

This club advocated political equality by championing the abolition of
distinctions between active and passive citizens; it put its trust in public
education, and dreamed of creating a universal brotherhood, les amis de la
vérité. Like other utopians, its members believed in human goodness and
boldly defended the principles of popular sovereignty. Early in 1790 it adopted
a program that stated, among other things:
The first and principal aim of the Cercle Social is to give the voice of the people all its force, so that it may exercise in all its fullness and unlimited extent the right of surveillance; the only power which it has never exercised, the only one molding general opinion which is always right and all-powerful, the sole power that guarantees its sovereignty, and which it alone can exercise beneficially by itself.\(^{14}\)

To popularize its program it launched a journal, *Bouche de fer*, and staged mass meetings which drew thousands to its hall. Its first gathering at the Cirque Nationale on 13 October 1790 attracted some five thousand Parisians and made quite a stir in the capital.\(^{15}\)

The academic program of the Cercle Social acquired an immediate expediency shortly after the overthrow of the king. As urban crowds, especially those of the capital, made known their will by insurrection, mass demonstration, and permanent session, they began to defend zealously their newly won sovereign powers. The more radical sections of Paris became ardent promoters of direct and popular democracy.\(^{16}\) When their delegates greeted the Convention on 14 July 1793 upon adopting the new, Jacobin-inspired constitution, they sat with the deputies and deliberated with them “as members of the sovereign body.” A number among them carried this principle of a popular referendum much further: They began to regard the Convention itself as an assembly for passing laws demanded of it by “the people.”\(^{17}\) Still others proposed the suspension of all laws until sanctioned by the voters in their primary assemblies.\(^{18}\) Yet others accepted the principle of the *mandat impératif*.\(^{19}\)

This right to recall unworthy deputies carried with it the need to judge their conduct in preceding sessions.\(^{20}\) Judgment, in turn, led to a jealous supervision not only of the laws passed or proposed but of the executive power and its various agents as well,\(^{21}\) including the generals and the military commissions. Several sections even sent their own envoys to establish contact with enemies of the Convention; others sought to crush these same enemies.\(^{22}\) In addition to keeping a close watch on the operations of military authorities, the sections demanded to examine the civic conduct of all public employees. Since the sovereign people had elected members of the constituted authorities, they believed that the right to purge these same authorities resided in the general assemblies of the sections.\(^{23}\)

Thus, purging, supervising, recalling, and initiating the sections, popular societies, radical journals, and individual revolutionaries popularized the doctrine of the people’s sovereignty. Much of this resulted from pragmatic experience, from concrete responses gained in the course of daily events. Some of the popular leaders were undoubtedly familiar with Rousseau, Mably, Morelly, and other writers who directly or by implication had raised many of the
questions which had now become burning issues. Many followed the debates in the national assemblies as these questions were raised. The problem of power had to be resolved concretely, but its exercise required a theoretical justification, especially by those who traditionally never shared in its operation.

Of all the revolutionary groups active in Paris, no group championed the idea of direct democracy more consistently than did the followers of Jacques Roux, Jean Varlet, and Théophile Leclerc, known as the Enragés. Students of the Revolution are familiar with their struggle for the maximum, for the conversion of the assignat into fiat money, for a stringent law against speculators and hoarders—in short, for the inauguration of a policy of economic terror against enemies of the revolutionary government. Less well known, perhaps, is their hostility to representative government as such—to the parliamentary system itself. Each of the three revolutionaries had supreme confidence in the natural goodness of the people; each suspected the motives of the deputies in three of the national assemblies of France. Feuillant, Girondin, or Montagnard; moderate or revolutionary; indulgent or terrorist—the Enragés fought them all.

Whatever differences existed among the Enragés—and, at times, these became quite sharp—they were united in their mistrust of representative government. They attempted to involve the people directly in politics, to sanction no law unless it had been referred first to the electors, to delimit the authority of the deputies, and to extend the scope and power of the sans-culottes through their sectional assemblies. As late as 10 March 1795, (20 Ventôse, Year III), Varlet wrote proudly from his cell in Pléssis prison that he had advocated granting “unlimited power to the sovereign people.” Roux’s attack on the Constitution of 1793 had led to his eventual arrest and that of his followers. After conducting an exhaustive interrogation of his partisans in section Gravilliers on 3 December 1793 (13 Frimaire, Year II), the revolutionary committee of the section accused Roux of subversive conduct and of having advocated the violent overthrow of the currently constituted authorities. It charged: “He mounted the tribune only to say that the people were sovereign, that they had the right to expel ‘les hommes en place’ [that is, the politicians], that their sovereignty ought to be established, and that they could pronounce themselves on all [the acts] of their mandatories.” The same accusation could have been leveled at Théophile Leclerc with equal justification. Although the revolutionary committee of section Halle au Blé stated that Leclerc’s opinions, character, and revolutionary conduct were unknown, it could easily have become acquainted with his politics had it taken the trouble to read his journal, L’Ami du peuple.

Of the three revolutionaries, Jean Varlet concerned himself more systematically with the problem of direct democracy than did either Roux or Leclerc.
This resulted partly from his own disenchanting experience with various factions in the three national assemblies and partly from his sympathy with Parisian crowds, which he often exhorted and sometimes led. The political support he so frequently received from the sans-culottes encouraged his belief in the natural goodness of common men. A Parisian by birth, he came from a family in easy circumstances, which enabled him to attend the College of Harcourt. When the Revolution broke out, he welcomed it enthusiastically, composed patriotic songs, addressed crowds in the Palais Royal, and bore petitions in defense of popular causes. He was present at Versailles when the Declaration of the Rights of Man was adopted, and he helped prepare the Champ de Mars for the Festival of the Federation in the summer of 1790.

After Varennes, Varlet began to bear petitions and to speak out sharply against "the perjured king." With the year he became widely known through his public address from the Terrasse des Feuillants in the gardens of the Palais Royal, his activity in the Jacobin Club, and his agitation in section Roi de Sicile. The massacre of the Champ de Mars on 16 July 1791 intensified his hatred of Lafayette and, at the same time, increased his devotion to revolutionary methods and procedures. On 29 May 1792 he sharply attacked Lafayette as a "villain" and a "traitor." In his address to the Jacobins of about the same time, Varlet denounced the court, the financiers, and "lying ministers." He was especially bitter against "the Nero of Nancy" (that is, Lafayette) whom he accused of propping up a tottering throne in order to satisfy his own "immeasurable ambition." The burden of his address, however, was to urge the Jacobins to become more responsive to petitioners and common citizens who looked to them for help. The habit of enjoying power ruined men, he warned. The danger was that a new aristocracy of office would succeed the old aristocracy of heraldry. One way of avoiding this threat, he held, was to extend the circle of electors and to introduce a frequent rotation of offices. Informal gatherings and frequent mingling of patriotic deputies with ordinary citizens would break down the artificial barriers between the two and enable each to learn from the other. In other words, he hoped to make the Jacobins more democratic.

On 20 June 1792 Varlet presented a petition to the National Assembly. He had been elected to the delegation of twenty by demonstrators from faubourg Saint-Antoine and the more radical sections who were commemorating the third anniversary of the Tennis Court Oath. "The people, the true sovereign is here to judge the [traitors]," the orator began. This petition was to serve as justification for the attack on the Tuileries—a dress rehearsal for the insurrection against the monarchy. On 6 August Varlet appeared again before the National Assembly in the name of the Fédérés who had adopted a petition on the Champ de Mars. Once again he de-
manded the abdication of the king, the dismissal of nobles from army staffs, the extension of the suffrage, a law against speculation and hoarding, and other revolutionary measures of a similar nature.37

Four days later, the insurrectionary Commune of Paris, together with the more radical sections, overthrew the monarchy of Louis. Here was concrete evidence, if Varlet needed any, of the power and energy of his sectionnaires. The people had spoken forthrightly, without equivocation. Should not their representatives carry out the people’s will? Varlet appealed to the deputies to recognize the pristine powers of popular sovereignty and to become what they were originally meant to be—mere mandatories of the people’s will. “Mandatories of the People,” he importuned, “the most glorious of our prerogatives lies precisely in the right to express our will.” The election of electors to elect deputies to the National Convention was a mere shadow of liberty. Since deputies were mandatories and not representatives, they had to follow the line of conduct prescribed for them, he repeated.38

“In a state where the people are all,” Varlet continued, “the first act of sovereignty is to elect; the second, to define the powers, the mandates, of those elected.” It was, however, on the question of power, of the “mandate” of deputies, that Varlet accused the representatives of becoming “as despotic as the king whom they had replaced.” He saw a tyranny being established without limits, of deputies without commissions who could easily substitute their own particular wills for the will of the people. Varlet then suggested a resolution to limit the powers of deputies and to invest delegates of the primary assemblies with the right to discuss all measures of public interest. He proposed an additional article to the Declaration of the Rights of Man stating that the sovereignty of the people was a natural right; that the people ought to elect all public functionaries without any intermediaries and ought to discuss their own interests; that the people draw up mandates for their mandatories to pass into laws; that they reserve the right to recall and to punish those who went beyond their powers or who betrayed their interests; and finally, that they examine all decrees (except those governing exceptional circumstances) which were not to be recognized as having the force of law until they had been sanctioned by the sovereign people in their primary assemblies.39 Thus Varlet suggested that there should be but one power in France, that of the people in their primary assemblies and in their mandates; the execution of laws should be confined to an executive composed of a small number of functionaries and revocable at the people’s pleasure.40

In order to carry out these rights and duties, Varlet proposed the creation of a popular institution to be known as “magistrats du souverain.” This association was to be composed of an “elite of patriots,” men tested and proven in their posts as legislators or municipal administrators.41 Such a society of
incorruptibles was to be a guarantee of the people’s will, constantly exercising an implacable watch over the machinations of their deputies. He assumed, obviously, that an elite band of patriots would not develop interests of their own that might be fundamentally different from those of the people over whose concerns they were to watch. Nor did Varlet’s proposal guarantee that these *magistrats* would not combine with the deputies of the people to promote their joint interests in the state. Yet, before condemning this proposal, it should be remembered that Varlet was struggling with a most difficult problem. He had seen two national legislatures “betray the confidence of the people” (from his point of view) when the Convention played out its role. On the other hand, this attempt to guarantee the purity of the original constitution and to prevent a domineering officialdom from extending its sway over the electorate was a problem which troubled a number of his contemporaries.42

It was not long before Varlet attempted to carry out in practice an insurrection staged by a self-appointed elite. The scarcity of bread, the decline of the assignat, the raging inflation, the growing unemployment—all had created a crisis by the winter of 1793.43 Chaumette, as the chief representative of the Commune, summarized the feeling of the sans-culottes:

> The poor, just like rich, and even more than the rich, have made the Revolution. Everything has changed around the poor; they alone remain in the same condition and have gained nothing from the Revolution but the right to complain of their misery. . . . The Revolution in procuring liberty for the rich has given them a great deal; it has also given liberty and equality to the poor; but in order to live freely, one must live; and if a reasonable proportion no longer exist between the wages of the poor and the price of goods necessary for existence, the poor can no longer live.44

This misery of the urban poor was given added poignancy when those in authority callously turned their backs on petitioner seeking help. A delegation of women asking to discuss the problem of shortages with the Jacobins was turned away amid tumult and confusion.45 Demonstrations and riots broke out on 24 and 25 February. Small shops were invaded and their contents were sold forcibly at prices set by the various leaders of the action.46 Order was temporarily restored, but the demands of war continued to aggravate the food crisis. By the middle of March, Dumouriez was to suffer his disastrous rout at Neerwinden, which exposed his friends among the Girondins to further attacks by Varlet and his friends.

Varlet had been ill during the latter months of 1792 but had recovered sufficiently by January 1793 to sing a hymn of his own composition to the Jacobin Club.47 By early march he had joined a group of Fédérés bent on
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removing the Girondists and closing down the journals of two of their spokesmen, Brissot and Gorsas, whom they charged with betrayal of France's interests. On 9 March they declared themselves to be in a state of insurrection and sent invitations to the more radical sections to unite with them against the "factions" in the Convention.48 The attempt to rally the sections and the Commune failed, but not one of the participants was punished for his role in this abortive uprising.

A week later Varlet publicly regretted the failure of his insurrection as he spoke again from the Terrasse des Feuillants (in the gardens of Palais Royal) and to the Jacobins. "Moderation is out of season toady," he declared, "insurrection is the most sacred of duties."49 By 27 March Varlet, as secretary of his section, took the initiative in calling upon his sister sections to elect delegates to a central committee which would sit at the Evêché (the archbishop's palace) and discuss means "to save the republic."50 It was this group which created the "Central Revolutionary Committee" of nine men that overturned the Gironde in the insurrection of 31 May–2 June. Varlet was placed at its head.

On 13 May 1793 Varlet delivered an important address to the Jacobins:

One truth is well demonstrated: Man by his very nature, full of arrogance in the higher positions, inclines necessarily toward despotism; we sense now that we must hold in arrest, in check, the established authorities; without which they become all-oppressive in power. Let us not seek to counterbalance them by each other; all counterweight which is not that of the people itself is false. The Sovereign ought always to direct the social body; it is worth nothing when someone else represents it.51

His experience under the Girondin-directed Convention only reaffirmed his conviction that unless the sovereign people controlled their deputies a new despotism would arise on the ruins of the old. Any attempt to limit the deputies' power by imposing some system of checks and balances was doomed in advance. Only the people themselves could serve as a counterweight to the usurping representatives. "Whatever our mandatories cannot or will not do, let us do ourselves; let us give these gentlemen some lessons in republicanism," he continued.52

In his own version of the Droits de l'Homme, he applied the principle of direct democracy to embrace all countries. Sovereignty, he wrote, appertained to all nations; it could be delegated "but never, never be represented." The established authorities were only emanations of the sovereign nations and had to remain subordinate to them.53 He essentially repeated his earlier proposals that direct elections should be held, that the electorate should collectively express their views to their commissioners, and that the electorate should "examine, refuse, or sanction the decrees which the mandatories propose to give the force of laws, and . . . render them executable." Varlet added "the
right of citizens gathered en masse in the state to review, improve, modify, [or] change the social contract when it pleases them."\(^{54}\)

This was further elaborated in Article 23, which stated:

When a sovereign nation constitutes itself into a social state, its diverse sections send deputies invested with explicit mandates; assembled in common, these agents of power elucidate the intentions of their constituents, convert their propositions into laws; if the majority accept them, these fundamental conventions frame a whole, called the Social Contract.\(^{55}\)

As we have already seen in chapter 1 (p. 14), Varlet did not limit his constitution to a purely political process. Direct democracy was not merely a political conception but a means to impose the people’s will, by military force if necessary.\(^{56}\) If Varlet thought about the practical matter of determining who would judge when insurrection was necessary, and against whom, there is no record of his conclusions. Perhaps his “elite of patriots” was to make the final decision!

His bold championship of insurrection and popular democracy caused his expulsion from the Jacobins a few days after his address (18 May 1793). The excuse was a little shamefaced—an “excess of civisme (civic conduct).”\(^{57}\) Less than a week later, on 24 May, Varlet was arrested with Hébert by the Girondin Commission of Twelve, only to be liberated by the outraged Commune and the radical sections in time for the decisive events of 31 May–2 June. It was he who signed the order to sound the tocsin and launch the insurrection.\(^{58}\) yet the success of the sections and Commune and the replacement of the Girondin leadership by the Montagnard did not satisfy Varlet. His committee had been subordinated to a majority of moderates, where he lost whatever influence he was developing on the eve of the decisive events. In the fall of the 1794 Varlet analyzed the events of 2 June 1793 and came to the conclusion that “the true republicans” in the Central Revolutionary Committee (Comité central révolutionnaire) had been emasculated by “the most destructive of factions . . . the league of Caligula,” that is, the Robespierristes. He wrote:

“The insurrectionary committee [that is, the Central Revolutionary Committee] contained the germ of a revolutionary government, conceived secretly at the start. The false insurgents substituted Robespierre for Brissot; for federalism, a revolutionary dictatorship, decreed in the name of public safety. As for me, I was too honest to be initiated [into it]; I was set aside.”\(^{59}\)

Varlet possibly had intended to go beyond the parliamentary system, if one can believe his retrospective analysis. Whether he had planned to substitute the Central Revolutionary Committee for the Convention at the time of
the fall of the Gironde is difficult to say. There seems to be no evidence that he had consciously attempted to influence the other members of the committee in this direction. It is more likely that his disillusionment with the Jacobin dictatorship made him see the possibilities of the Central Revolutionary Committee as a nucleus for that direct democracy for which he had launched the committee in the first place.

On 17 September 1793 he made a provocative and ill-timed speech in the Convention attacking the decree to limit sectional assemblies to two a dècade and indignantly rejecting the proposed subsidy of forty sous for the poorer citizens. “In a free state the people cannot pay themselves to exercise their rights,” he declared, and he refused the proffered forty sous “in the name of the sans-culottes of Paris.” His challenge of the Montagnards led to his arrest on the following day and his imprisonment in the Madelonnettes prison “for having made a counterrevolutionary proposal.” The young revolutionary seized the only weapon left him, his pen, and issued a stirring appeal against his detractors.

He who on 21 June 1791, on 10 August, on 31 of May conspired with the people against royal and legislative tyranny, is he an agent of Pitt, of Cobourg, capable of exciting risings for them? ... Reply, Collot d’Herbois, Robespierre, ... Jacobins, Cordeliers, and you, sans-culottes.... I am a patriot and am in irons....

I have suffered in prison, forgotten and alone, after having sacrificed all for my poor country—parents, friends, fortune....

Varlet was expelled from the Jacobins, from the Cordeliers. Varlet is an intriguer, Varlet is paid off, Varlet is driven out, Varlet this, Varlet that. The brisk fountainhead of slander is discharged, flows, and never stops. Sovereign dispensers of blame or of public favor, petty actors in the nights, what are your names? Come forth. What have you done during the Revolution; what are your title-deeds? ... Why don’t you bring charges publicly before the revolutionary tribunal?

His dramatic appeal aroused his friends in his own section of Droits de l’Homme. On 5 October 1793 the general assembly resolved that there was no basis for his arrest and urged the Committee of General Security to release him. By the end of the month, other sections, as well as individual Jacobins, joined the appeal. Hébert, who had denounced him in the past, now jointed the others. On 14 November 1793 (24 Brumaire, Year II) Varlet was finally released.

It is possible that his imprisonment had a sobering effect on the young revolutionary, for during the months when the government committees were preparing their attack on the Hébertises and the Dantonists, Varlet remained silent. Moreover, he might have sensed that he was no longer in a position to struggle openly against the Terror. Nor is it impossible that he had made
his peace with the Committee of Public Safety and the Jacobins, despite what he was to say later, after Thermidor. For immediately after the attempted assassination of Collot d’Herbois on 22 May 1793 (3 Prairial, Year II) a number of demonstrators marched through the all of the Convention bearing fiery resolutions and warm addresses of support for the government. Among the addresses was one adopted by section Droits de l’Homme which had been drafted and signed by Varlet as vice-secretary of the section.66

Varlet’s earlier opposition to the dictatorship of the Committee of Public Safety, however, did not save him from the vengeance of the Thermidorians. On 5 September 1794 he was arrested again and imprisoned in Pléssis prison. Within a month he published a defense of the insurrection of 31 May and of his own role as chairman of the Committee of Nine. He explained that he had been arrested because of his defense of the principle of direct democracy, and he attacked “a suicidal national government” in favor of the Declaration of the Rights of Man.67 It was not necessary to seek the causes of current evils beyond the origin of revolutionary government, he stated. This “revolutionary dictatorship, decreed in the name of public safety,” was responsible for the difficulties the Republic was suffering.

In denouncing the terrorists Varlet acknowledged his love of moderation, a term of opprobrium that revolutionaries used to attack their more conservative opponents. Yet, he did not repudiate his own revolutionary past. “The horrible dictatorship of Robespierre does not at all justify the tyranny of Brissot,” he wrote.68 Furthermore, he challenged the defenders of revolutionary government to give a precise definition of the term “revolutionary government,” and, in contrast to its defenders, admitted that he loved moderation because it made him “human, tolerant, reflective.”69 As for the Jacobin Club, he saw two types of people frequenting its meetings: those who paid dues and spoke in its halls, and those who did not pay, “the true people, the public, which is mute in its galleries.”70 The deputies, he warned, controlled the club and were conspiring to organize another 9 Thermidor against the Convention. He appealed to the people to destroy their tyrants: “Awake! Show Energy; dare all; destroy the tyranny.”71

Despite his repudiation of the Terror government, Varlet refused to apologize for his role during the decisive events of the Revolution. At the same time he begged the Thermidorian to bring him to trial. In a letter to the Committee of General Security he again admitted that he had advocated “the unlimited power of the sovereign people within the committee of insurrection of 31 May”72 (that is, within the Central Revolutionary Committee sitting in the Éveché). The Thermidorian, however, remained deaf to his pleas and refused to try him. Instead, they transferred him from the Pléssis prison to La Force. After the insurrection of Prairial (22 and 23 May 1795), Varlet was transferred to the Bicêtre prison with “other agitators where they could be guarded
more closely." Not until late October 1795, that is, after the journées of 4–6 October 1795 (12–14 Vendémiaire, Year IV), after which the Convention turned to the left, was he finally released. His papers were returned to him on 3 November 1795 (13 Brumaire, Year IV).

While in prison, Varlet had composed and published another brochure. Its slogan was most revealing: “Long live the dictatorship of the Rights of Man.” He attacked the “egoists” who turned the profits of nature to their own selfish ends. “Democrats, let us oppose these exclusive privileges,” he appealed. Having seen three legislatures come and go, not one of which had substantially improved the condition of the sans-culottes, Varlet reacted with growing suspicion to all representative government. If deputies of all shades, right or left, found themselves unable or unwilling to legislate for the benefit of the people, perhaps there was something inherent in the parliamentary system itself which prevented, the sans-culottes from reaping the fruits of their revolution. Perhaps representative government, as such, could not express the general will. This will resided in sectional assemblies, in democratic clubs, in revolutionary and civil committees of the menu peuple. By imposing their will on the deputies, by making their representatives mere stewards of their inalienable sovereignty, by establishing, in short, “a dictatorship of the Rights of Man,” only thus could the sans-culottes obtain their rights.

Long confinements in the various prisons of Paris had finally undermined Varlet’s revolutionary will. His appeals for justice reflect a curious blend of defiance and indignant repudiation of government by terror. Interspersed among his requests to be heard are pathetic appeals for mercy. In sharp contrast to his political brochures is an abstract philosophical essay written in Pléssis prison which outlines in great detail plans for a temple dedicated to young and old where virtue and civic conduct would be taught and honored. Yet he was not totally broken, if the few shreds of evidence can cast any light on his role during these trying months. Together with his fellow prisoners, he defiantly repudiated the charge of the Thermidorians that the unsuccessful insurrection of Germinal (the so-called hunger insurrection) had been a “conspiracy.” Once again he invoked the right of free men to rise against oppression.

Yet, he himself failed to “rise” when Babeuf launched his Conspiracy of Equals in 1796. Although he was acquainted with a number of leaders of the Electoral Club, which met in the Panthéon, unlike Babeuf, Buonarotti, and others he took no significant part in the political events of the day. Only when the Jacobin Club was reopened in 1799 did Varlet make a brief appearance, to address its members on the problem of the public debt and to condemn lotteries as being destructive of public morality.

For the next decade and more he seems to have abandoned all political activity and to have quit the capital for the town of Meaux. Although
Napoleon's police maintained a careful watch over potentially dangerous former revolutionaries, they no longer found it necessary to keep Varlet under close surveillance. Had they known his new political sentiments they would have had no cause to trouble themselves on his account, for Varlet had become a Bonapartist! When Napoleon returned from Elba, Varlet wrote a fable in which he appealed to his hero to stop "the Tartars" at the gates of Paris. Whether anyone read this, however, is doubtful, since the verses were not published until 1831.

How Varlet fared during the Bourbon Restoration we do not know, but somehow he managed to survive. Not until the overthrow of Charles X did he take up his pen again. The July Revolution found him in Nantes. Its citizens sent him to the electoral college, and, in return, he warmly championed the port's maritime interests. In a number of brochures he urged France to struggle for freedom of the seas and to model herself on British maritime might. Perhaps his last public act was a prayer composed for the young and directed to "Nature's God" and to free mankind; appropriately enough, it was dedicated to the memory of Voltaire. Whatever the vicissitudes of Varlet's politics, he remained a deist to the end.

What is one to conclude from a study of this man and his ideas? Obviously, there are two Varlets—the one young, militant, enthusiastic before Thermidor; the other, less fiery, less zealous, a bit withdrawn after his long prison experience. It is the younger Varlet who is the more interesting of the two, if only because he reflects so well the popular nature of the French Revolution. In his letter to the Committee of General Security dated 16 July 1795 (28 Messidor, Year III) he described himself as possessed of a "hot head and good heart," a laconic but penetrating analysis of his character and sentiments. Varlet was, after all, only twenty-nine when he first saw the inside of a prison (younger by a year if one counts his brief detention by the Commission of Twelve). His verses, his songs, his patriotic orations all reflect his youth and romantic spirit.

At the same time, it must be admitted that his idealism was tempered by contact with the Parisian sans-culottes. There is no doubt that he learned much from them. On 13 May 1793 he paid his respect to the petites gens of Paris in the following revealing words:

If I can flatter myself for having conceived any useful ideas, I should thank the People Sans-Culottes for them. For four years, always on public squares, among crowds of people, among the sans-culotterie, among the ragged whom I love, I learned that innocently and without coercion the poor devils of the garret reason more surely, more boldly than the best gentlemen, the great speech-makers, the groping savants. If they [the latter] wish to attain true knowledge, let them go as I among the people.
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It is no wonder, then, that he endowed the people with total political virtue and hoped to make them the sovereign power of France.

In addition to supporting the *mandat impératif*, he enthusiastically embraced the doctrine of social equality. A warm partisan of Rousseau, in whose philosophy he found his own justification for democracy, Varlet was not an atypical product of the Enlightenment. He opposed tyranny whether it was justified by the apology of maintaining "law and order" or by an appeal to "revolutionary necessity." It was only after he had been broken by long confinement in the prisons of the Thermidorians, and after the retreat of the Revolution itself, that he embraced Bonapartism.

Above all, Varlet was a man of action. Not only was he a popular orator and a stimulating pamphleteer, but he was, primarily, a successful organizer. Though his ill-considered attempt to launch an insurrection in March 1793 smacked not only of romantic delusion but, perhaps, of political adventurism, few doubted his loyalty and devotion to the Revolution. Serious revolutionaries, about to place their own lives in jeopardy, would hardly have endowed him with the sensitive post of president of the Evêché Committee (on the eve of 31 May 1793) had they not possessed complete confidence in his devotion and ability. The Thermidorians, on the other hand, sensed his basic opposition to their course. Though they were aware of his rejection of terror and his championship of moderation, his politics and theirs had little in common. They had every right to mistrust him—for the very same reason that the revolutionaries trusted him. As long as there remained a possibility of another Germinal or Prairial, so long would a politically active Varlet continue to be dangerous.

Because Varlet was less than a philosophe, yet more than a sans-culotte, he remains interesting today. Active revolutionaries, by virtue of their all-consuming activity, leave few records behind. This is especially true of the lower echelons. Fewer still transmit an organized body of thought. Varlet, in this respect, is unique; for in him is embodied both word and deed. While promoting the political act he was at the same time analyzing it. Such a combination is rare in the history of a revolution.

As for his concept of direct democracy, it is difficult to accept it in the light of history, which repudiated both the ideal and its bearer after 1793. Given the precarious military situation, the primitive state of communications, the low literacy rate, the political inexperience of the sans-culottes, and the zealous and intolerant factional atmosphere, it is difficult to see how direct democracy could have worked in practice in revolutionary France. The political tendency was toward centralization, not fragmentation. Apart from the fact that the Jacobins represented the class interest of the rising bourgeoisie (in a general, historic way), they stood forth as bold champions of all revolutionary France struggling against reactionary Europe. Varlet, and all other defenders
of popular democracy, whether they willed it or not, reflected a diversionary program.

Theoretically, it is conceivable that Varlet's "dictatorship of the Rights of Man" might have been carried out had the active militants among the sans­culotterie gained a rapid political education. This, of course, presuppose an ever growing movement extending from the capital and reaching the vast majority of the 44,000 communes of France. It would have meant a jealous supervision of the deputies in the Convention (or any other parliamentary body), constant referendums on legislative measures, the recall of recalcitrant representatives, the initiation of legislation by means of petition or joint resolution, and the creation of a political party system to champion the program of groups as they differentiated themselves in the body politic.

For such a program to have succeeded, however, revolutionary France would have had to be what it was not. Either it would have had to become the Geneva of Rousseau's day, or it would have had to become the state of the future where modern technology makes possible (but only possible) the direct political participation of every individual citizen. Perhaps direct democracy may be realized in the future. Humanity has evolved diverse political forms to express its collective will. If this method should be society's way of governing itself tomorrow, Jean Varlet will have contributed a modest share to this future.

Notes

1. B.N., Lc² 649, La chronique du mois ou les cahiers patriotiques (Paris, 1792), 4, an article written by Nicolas de Bonneville, editor of the above journal and cofounder with Claude Fauchet of the Cercle Social, the significance of which will be discussed below (de Bonneville's emphasis).

2. The term "mandat impératif" refers to the obligation imposed by electors upon their delegates to vote in a predetermined manner upon questions considered in advance.

3. Camille Koch, LesOrigines françaises de la prohibition du mandat impératif (Nancy, 1905), 12. In 1321 delegates to Estates General had to refer to their mandates before replying to questions posed by the king. In 1468 delegates to the Estates General were given powers only to present their cahiers (grievances). Throughout the middle ages and into modern times as well, electors of towns demanded that their delegates consult them before voting on any matter (ibid., 13).

4. The call of 24 January 1789 stated: "His Majesty is convinced that the confidence owed a representative assembly of the whole nation would be impeded if deputies are given any personal instruction to halt or trouble the course of deliberations" (ibid., 18).

5. Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur depuis la réunion des Etats-Généraux, jusqu'au consulat (mai 1789–novembre 1799, 32 vols. (Paris: 1840–1845), 1, no. 10, 20–24 June. Article 6 held: "His Majesty declares that, during the following sessions of the Estates General, he will not allow that the cahiers or mandates ever be considered
as being *imperatifs*; they are to be considered only as simple instructions limited by the conscience and free opinion of deputies whom one shall have chosen."


7. For the arguments of Talleyrand and Barère, see A.P., 8:200–203, 205; *Moniteur*, 1, no. 15 (6–8 July 1789).

8. A.P., 8:592–97; *Moniteur*, 1, no. 54, (8 September 1789). "I conclude that each deputy is the direct deputy of his *bailliage*, and mediatory deputy of the nation; from which [follows] the title of representative of the nation," he explained.

9. Even Talleyrand admitted that deputies had obligations of conscience to their constituents and suggested that they appeal to the latter to free them from this obligation. Jérôme Pétion agreed on the necessity of establishing representative government only because the people could not act directly. If they could, he admitted, there would be no need for representatives or delegates, who could become dangerous ("Je dirai plus, ils seraient dangereux, A.P., 8:581).


11. The *mandat impératif* has a history that stretches from Rousseau to de Gaulle, as the following brief quotes indicate:

"Sovereignty cannot be represented, for the same reason that it cannot be alienated. It consists essentially in the general will, and the will cannot be represented. . . . The deputies of the people, therefore, are not and cannot be its representatives; they are only its commissioners; they can conclude nothing definitely. Every law that the people personally do not ratify is null and void; it is no law at all" (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social*, in *The Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 2 vols., ed. C. E. Vaughan [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915], 2:96).

"The nation from which alone all powers emanate, cannot exercise them by delegation. The French Constitution is representative . . ." (Article 2, Title 3; the Constitution of 3 September 1791).

"The representatives elected by the departments are not the representatives of a particular department, but of the whole nation, and cannot be given any mandate" (Article 7, Section 3, chapter i, Title 3; the Constitution of 3 September 1791).

"Every citizen has an equal right to concur in the formation of the law and in the election of his mandatories or agents" (Article 29; *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*, 24 June 1793).

"The members of the legislative body are not representatives which elected them, but of the whole nation, and one may not give them any mandate" (Article 42, Title 5; the Constitution of 22 August 1795).

"Every *mandat impératif* is null and void." (Article 27; the Constitution of 4 October 1958).

12. Alfred Cobban, in *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), challenges this traditional view and argues that it was largely a revolution against "an embryo capitalism," signifying the triumph of the land-owning classes. In reply to this view, see the following reviews: Jeffry Kaplow in *American Historical Review* 70, no. 4, (July 1965): 1094–96; Leo Gershoy in *Journal of Modern History* 37, no. 2 (June 1965): 242–43; and Crane Brinton in *History and Theory* 5, no. 3 (1966): 315–20.


15. B.N., Lc² 317, Bouche de fer (Paris, October 1790). Before long, enemies of the Cercle Social dubbed its newspaper "la bouche d'enfer" ("the mouth of hell")!

16. When, on 13 March 1793, a citizen of section Pathéon Français told his section's assembly that "We are menaced with a dictator," the assembly rose and swore to stab [the word is "poignarder"] all dictators, protectors, tribunes, triumvirs, regulators, or all others, under whatever denomination it may be, who might tend to destroy the sovereignty of the people" (A.N., A.D. XVI, 70, p. 37, quoted by Albert Soboul in Les Sans-Culottes parisiens en l'an II: Mouvement populaire et gouvernement révolutionnaire 2 juin 1793–9 Thermidor an II [Paris, Librairie Clavreuil, 1958], 506, n. 3). Unless otherwise identified, the following quotations are from the above work.

On 15 June 1793 the radical Jacobin François Chabot declared: "One great principle must never be ignored in a democratic Constitution: It is that the people must do for themselves all that is possible for them to do" (Moniteur 16, no. 168 [17 June 1793]).

17. A commissioner of section Contrat Social stated: ""The Convention is composed only of men paid to pass laws demanded of them, and when decrees do not benefit [us] they [the deputies] should proceed to the next order of business’’" (B.N., Lb⁴ 1781, p. 509, n. 20). The Convention itself had adopted a resolution that there could be no constitution unless it were first accepted by the people (Moniteur, 14, no. 266 [22 September 1792]).

18. A.N., B I, 15; and A.N., F⁷ 4718, p. 510, nn. 25 and 26. On 2 November 1792 the general assembly of section Piques resolved that "we alone should dictate our laws; their [the deputies'] special task is to propose them to us" (B.N., Lb⁴ 487, p. 511, n. 30).

19. On 25 August 1792 the general assembly of section Marché des Innocents held that "deputies shall be revocable at the will of their departments" and that "public functionaries shall be revocable by their constituents whose resolutions they shall be bound to carry out" (B.N., Lb⁴ 3166, p. 521, n. 83). Section Bonne Nouvelle held that the right "to recall their delegates [was] imprescriptible" (A.D.S., 4 AZ 698, p. 522, n. 84). On 8 September 1792 section Droits de l'Homme declared that it reserved the right to recall deputies "if in the course of their session they rendered themselves suspect of uncivic conduct" (B.V.C., MS 120). The same day section Poissonnière demanded that the constitution include the principle of recall of those elected to office "at the will of the primary assemblies" (B.N., Lb⁴ 2068, p. 522, n. 87). Section Réunion declared
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“that it expressly reserved the right to recall elected deputies, if in the course of their activities they committed any act which rendered them suspect of uncivic conduct or of seeking to introduce into France a government contrary to liberty and equality” (B.N., Lb 40 2098, p. 522, n. 88).

20. On 29 August 1793 section Halle au Blé solemnly affirmed “that only the sovereign [people] are fit to scrutinize the members of the constituted powers which they themselves have chosen” (B.N., Lb 40 1873, p. 525, n. 103). At the beginning of the Year II (September 1793), section Observatoire recalled again “that the sovereignty of the people comprises necessarily the right to recall its unfaithful representatives and all public functionaries unworthy of its confidence” (A.D.S., D 933, p. 526, n. 104).

21. On 14 December 1792 section Bon Conseil resolved “to watch without respite the activities of the executive power in all its ways of administration” (A.D.S., D 916, p. 526, n. 106). The resolution was supported by section Quatre Nations, but it was opposed by the more moderate section Gardes Françaises as tending “to weaken the individual responsibilities of ministers” (B.N., Lb 40 1844, p. 527, n. 107). On 15 April 1793 section Bon Conseil reminded Antoine Santerre, commander of the Parisian National Guard, that he derived his powers from freemen who would never be commanded like slaves (B.N., Lb 40 1964 [2], p. 527, n. 108).

22. Sections Fraternité, Molière, and La Fontaine sent envoys to Normandy and were denounced for this action by the Commune on 12 July 1793. Section Quatre Vingt Douze had sent commissioners to the departments of l’Eure and Calvados, as was reported in the Jacobin Club, 12 July 1793 (P. J. B. Buchez and P. C. Roux eds., Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution française, 40 vols. [Paris: Paulin, Libraire, 1834–1838], 28:306–7). On the other hand, section Gardes Françaises dispatched its commissioners to Tours for the purpose of combating the rising counterrevolution, 17 June 1793 (A.N., F 7 477416, p. 527, n. 110).

23. “It appertains to the sovereign power alone to purge members of the constituted authorities whom it alone has chosen,” wrote section Halle au Blé on 29 September 1793 (B.N., Lb 40 1875, p. 529, n. 120). Section Observatoire held that sovereignty entailed the right to recall not only unfaithful representatives but “all public functionaries unworthy of its confidence” and demanded of the Convention that it find “a means to recall all public functionaries who betrayed their duty” (A.D.S., D 933, p. 530, n. 121).

Other aspects of popular sovereignty—such as the permanence of sectional meetings, the degree of autonomy enjoyed by each section, the right to insurrection, open deliberations and open voting, the employment of collective petitions, and the function of popular societies—are discussed by Soboul, Les Sansculottes parisiens, 531–58, 567–70, 619–21, 637–39, and 647–48.


24. The Enrages are discussed usually within the larger framework of the sans­culottes movement. See, for example: Albert Mathiez, La Vie chère et le mouvement social sous la Terreur (Paris: Payot, 1927), passim; Daniel Guérin, La Lutte de classes sous la Première République, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1946), passim; Walter Markov, “Robespierristen und Jacquesroutins,” in Maximilien Robespierre, 1758–1794 (Berlin: Riitten & Loening, 1958), 159–217; idem, Jacques Roux

25. A.N., F7 4775⁴⁰. He had been arrested by the Committee of General Security for “boldly manifesting his opposition to the revolutionary government.”


27. A.N., F7 4774.⁹ Leclerc and his wife, Pauline Léon, were arrested on a warrant issued by the Committee of General Security, dated 2 April 1794 (13 Germinal, Year II).

28. Both Roux and Leclerc tried to capitalize on the popularity of Marat after his death. Roux began to publish a journal in the summer of 1793 entitled Le Publiciste de la République française par l’ombre de Marat, l’Ami du peuple. (The first issue appeared 16 July 1793.) Leclerc began issuing a paper entitled L’Ami du peuple. (The first publication appeared on 20 July 1793.)

29. According to Varlet, he was born on 14 July 1764 in Paris. This reference appears in a note to a brochure written by him some time after July 1830 (B.N., *E 1226, Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme maritime et du citoyen nautique [Nantes, n.d.]). We have no evidence either to sustain or to contradict his claim that he was born on 14 July—a most appealing date to a French patriot. Though he is constantly referred to as a young man (in 1793), neither his dossier (F7 4775⁴⁰) nor his brochures, some of which are autobiographical in parts, contain any data to this effect. The sole exception is the above note. J. M. Zacher, the late Russian scholar of the Enragé movement, accepted the date of Varlet’s birth as 1764. See his “Jean Valet at the Time of the Jacobin Dictatorship,” Journal of Modern and Current History, no. 2 (1959): 114. (The title in Russian is “Jean Varlet, vo vremya Jakobinskoe dictature,” Novaya i Noveshnaya Istoria.)

30. Some of his compositions in verse set to popular tunes are the following:

Brille par tout Liberté,
Nouveau soleil de ce monde;
Brille par tout Liberté,
Consoles l’humanité;
Vas, fais pâlir les Tyran[s];
Par ta morale profondes [sic]
Sur leur trônes chancellans,
Que leur orgueil se confonde
Brille par tout Liberté [etc.].

Rousseau, dans un écrit divin,
Fait voir le Peuple souverain;
Son livre est celui de Destin:
Qu’on le révère
Car c’est le Père
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Du genre humain.
Il faut les voir,
Péthion, Bauzot, Robespierre;
Il faut les voir,
Quand ils pulvérisent les Noirs [etc.].

These appear in B.N., Ye 53552, Pot-pourri national (Paris [?], 1791), 2, 3, 7.
32. Br. M., 1012 (6), Jean Varlet, L’Apostre de la liberté prisonnier, à ses concitoyens libres (Paris, 1793). In protesting his arrest by the Jacobins in September 1793, Varlet refers to his activities during the decisive days of the Revolution, one of which he reveals as having been 21 June 1791: “He who on 21 June 1791... conspired with the people against the royal und legislative tyranny” (p. 2; Varlet’s emphasis, but he does not explain just what he did that day).
33. A.N., F7 47754.
34. Alexandre Tuetey, Répertoire général des sources manuscrites de l’histoire de Paris pendant la Révolution française, II vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Nouvelle, 1890–1914), 5, no. 3578: “Sovereign people, Lafayette is, was, and always will be a villain, a traitor to his country. I come forward as his accuser. A citizen who is not afraid. Signed: Varlet.”
35. Br.M., 935 G 10, Jean Varlet, Plan d’une nouvelle organisation de la société mère des amis de la constitution suivi de la religion du philosophe dédiée aux indigens (Paris, 1793), 11–15, 17–18. Varlet criticized the Jacobin sessions as offering very little to their members and guests because they were “heavy and dull with calumny.” Too often the president concluded the session with the threadbare formula: “The society will taken in consideration, [etc.]: (Varlet’s emphasis, ibid., 25).
36. Moniteur, 12, no. 174 (June 22, 1792). Moniteur does not refer to Varlet by name as the bearer of the petition, but internal evidence and the reference to his activity on 20 June leave no doubt that the orateur of the delegation was Varlet. See, for example, his dossier, (F7 477540) and his autobiographical sketch in the brochures, L’Apostre de la liberté; and in B.N., Lb41 2979, Déclaration solennelle des Droits de l’Homme dans l’état social, “Note historique.”
37. Moniteur, 13, no. 220 (7 August 1792).
38. Br.M., R 97 (18), Jean Varlet, Projet d’un mandat spécial et impératif, aux mandataires du peuple à la Convention nationale (Paris, 1792), pp. 3–5. In a note he stated the following: “Almost always those who act as representatives imagine themselves to be really such; yet it is a principle that our inalienable sovereignty can neither be delegated nor respresented” (ibid., 5).
40. Ibid., 18.
41. Ibid., 19.
42. It is interesting to note that during the American Revolution, when various states were drafting frameworks of government, the Constitutional Convention of Pennsylvania, under the presidency of Benjamin Franklin, proposed to establish an institution to be known as a Council of Censors. Its duty was to inquire whether the constitution had been observed and to propose changes in it if thought desirable. Though it was never place in effect, the state of Vermont seems to have used the same institution to some advantage Edward Channing,
A History of the United States [New York: The Macmillan Co., 1949], 3:439–40). Students of the Russian Revolution may see a certain similarity with the above in an institution entitled the Workers’ and Peasants’ Inspection. It was formed on Lenin’s initiative in order to curb the growing power of the state and party bureaucracy. Within a short time, it, too, became part of the general apparatus utilized by Stalin in his struggle against his political enemies.

43. The condition of the urban masses in the winter of 1793 is a topic in itself and has its own rich bibliography. A classic treatment is that of Albert Mathiez in La vie chère: “For fear of displeasing the owners of property . . . the assemblies never demanded sufficient taxes. The Revolution triumphed upon the assignat, that is upon false money. One may say that the little people bore the expenses of the Revolution a much as the priests and the emigrés” (608, 613).


45. F. A. Aulard, La société des Jacobins: Recueil de documents pour l’histoire du Club des Jacobins de Paris, 6 vols. (Paris, 1889–97), 5:37,038. Augustin Robespierre objected that such a discussion would alarm the Republic, while Dubois-Crancé declared that it was necessary to win freedom before one could speak of cheap bread.

46. Moniteur, 15, no. 59 (28 February 1793); B.N., LC² 763, Le bulletin des amis de la vérité (Paris, 1793), 1, no. 57, 25 February 1793; Tuetey, Répertoire général, 9, no. 83.

47. Aulard, La société des Jacobins, 4: 648–49. Varlet had caught a chill while addressing a crowd. The Jacobins sent a delegation to visit him during his illness.

48. A.N., F7 4445. The Fédérés had organized themselves into “La Société des défenseurs réunis de la République,” and met at the Jacobins. The insurrectionary committee included Varlet and the future Hébertistes Charles-Philippe Ronsin and François-Nicolas Vincent. They had set the time of the coup for 5 A.M.

49. Aulard, La société des Jacobins, 5:85–86; Tuetey, Répertoire général, 9, no. 472.


51. Varlet, Déclaration solennelle de Droits de l’Homme, 4–5 (Varlet’s emphasis). The exact date of this address was given by the revolutionary committee of section Droits de l’Homme when it examined Varlet’s papers (A.N., F7 477540).

52. Ibid., 6.

53. Ibid., 13 (Article 8).

54. Ibid., 15 (Article 10; Varlet’s emphasis).

55. Ibid., 20–21.

56. It must be borne in mind, however, that an insurrection did not mean literally an armed uprising. Quite often it meant a demonstration, peaceable or militant, to let the authorities know the will of the sections. See, for example, the discussion by Albert Soboul, Les Sansculottes parisiens, 542–46. The motives of participants in various journées are discussed by George Rudé, The Crowd in the French Revolution (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959).

57. Tuetey, Répertoire général, 9, no. 603. At about the same time, he was physically attacked by an opponent in a public café. When a National Guardsman taunted him for his cowardice, Varlet replied: “I am a good patriot, and a good patriot knows how to bear an injury” (ibid.).

58. A.N., F7 477540. In summoning the Parisians to repeat their feats of 14 July and 10 August, Varlet urged the creation of a committee of insurrection to be composed of commissioners of the forty-eight sections and the communes of the department of Paris. He also demanded the reorganization of all administrations
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and bureaus whose members had not been elected by the people (B.N., Lb 5339, Mesures suprêmes de salut public, proposées aux citoyens du département de Paris [Paris, n.d.], Articles 2 and 15).

59. The John Rylands Library (Manchester), French Historical Tracts, Jean Varlet, Gare l'explosion (Paris 1794), 5-6. In chapter 8, "The Insurrection of May 31–June 2," in "Left of the Mountain," I discuss how the Jacobins were able to seize control of the Central Revolutionary Committee from the Enragés by adding some fifteen members from the department of Paris to the original Committee of Nine.

60. Moniteur, 17, no. 262, (19 September 1793); Buchez and Roux, Histoire parlementaires, 29:112.

61. Tuetey, Répertoire général, 9, no. 1336. One possible justification for Varlet's arrest lay in Robespierre's repudiation of Article 43 of the constitution, which declared: "The deputies may not be examined, accused, or judged at any time for opinions they have expressed within the legislative body." On 15 June 1793 Robespierre criticized the article because, under the guise of free speech, a deputy could betray the interest of the people and go unpunished. He had thought it possible, he confessed, that at the conclusion of a legislative session each deputy could be forced to render an account to his constituents of his conduct and character during the previous session. "But I recognized in this method a host of difficulties: I saw that if, in a particular case, the people's justice pronounced the verdict, in another case intrigue would dominate and stifle the truth" (Moniteur, 16, no. 168 [17 June 1793]). This meant that Robespierre repudiated that direct democracy for which Varlet was still struggling. It must be admitted, however, that he repudiated it not on constitutional grounds but rather on "practical" ones. "Henceforth the mandat impératif appeared definitely to have been condemned, in theory and in practice, by the partisans of representative government and by those of direct government, by the disciples of Rousseau and by those of Montesquieu" (Koch, Les Origines françaises, 101). In this connection, see the interesting essay by Gordon H. McNeil, "Robespierre, Rousseau, and Representation," in Ideas in History: Essays Presented to Louis Gottschalk by His Former Students, ed. Richard Herr and Harold T. Parker (Durham, NC: Duke University press, 135-56.

62. Varlet, L'Apôtre de la liberté prisonnier, 2, 6–7 (Varlet's emphasis).

63. A.N., F 477540. The Assembly promised that it would "watch him and even censure his imagination, his fiery patriotism, if it should compromise public affairs."

64. A.N., F 477540.

65. In his note to the pamphlet Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme maritime, Varlet states that he had been imprisoned for eleven months in 1793. Actually, as we have seen, he had been detained for two months. His much longer imprisonment did not take place until the following year, 1794–1795.


67. Varlet, Gare l'explosion, pp. 3–4. The pamphlet was issued 6 October 1794.

68. Ibid., 7.

69. Ibid., 11.

70. Ibid., 14.

71. A.N., F 477540.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid.

75. A.N., F77540, *Le Panthéon Français* (Paris, 1795). This essay is signed “Varlet-citoyen,” with “Varlet” in large letters and “Citoyen” in smaller, but it is crossed out and signed again with the size of the letters reversed, making “Varlet” small and “citoyen” large—an interesting psychological revelation.

76. A.N., W 548, cited by Kare D. Tønnesson, *La défaite des sans-culottes* (Paris: Librairie R. Clâvéreuil, and Oslo: Presses Universitaires d’Oslo, 1959), p. 375, n. 70. Varlet and three other internees wrote on 12 April 1795 (23 Germinal, Year IV): “We conspire! Is this the label one applies to so natural a feeling of every free and honest man to rise against oppression?”

77. *Moniteur* 29, no. 318 (5 August 1799 [18 Thermidor, year VII]).

78. On 28 September 1813 the prefect of police in Paris reported to the Minister of the Interior: “This man [Varlet], is in no way dangerous today. He has become very poor and, as he could not find any means of support, has quit the capital and we are assured he has retired to Meaux or its environs” (A.N., F 6586, cited by J. [M.] Zacher, “Varlet, pendant la réaction Thermidoriennne,” *Annales historique de la Révolution française*, no. 163 (January–March, 1961), 33.

79. B.N., Lb46 116, Jean Varlet, *Magnanimité de l’empereur des Français envers ses ennemis* (Imprimerie de Chaignieu Jeune, n.d.). This eight-page brochure contains neither place nor date of publication. According to the author, the brochure first appeared as an article in the *Gazette de France* 5 January 1814. It is an apology for “le héros” Napoleon’s “just as mild” treatment of his vanquished enemies, especially Austria. Varlet urged defiance and unity of all Frenchmen against the victorious powers.

80. B.N., Ye 53554, Jean Varlet, *Le Phénix, le hibou et les oiseaux de proie* (Nantes, 1831). The theme is that an owl (Louis XVIII), with the help of birds of prey (the European powers), had made himself master of the birds of the forest. When the phoenix (Napoleon) reappeared, however, the owl flew back into the shadows from whence he had come.

81. Archives de la Loire-Inférieure, 1-M-64-64, Liste Electorale de 1831 (Nantes, May 1831). He was elected from the second electoral arrondissement.

82. See, for example, the following: B.N., Lc61 720, *L’Étoile polaire de la marine Française* (Paris, July 1830), 8 pp. The title page bears this acknowledgment of the Revolution: “l’An 1er de l’héroïsme parisien.” Also see *Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme maritime*. This brochure was sold for the benefit of poor mariners. And B.N., Lb51 952, *Circulaire adressée aux habitants de Nantes* (Nantes, 1831), 3 pp.


The eighteenth century, like our own, had its “god that failed.” The nature of this failure is reflected in the political careers and ultimate defeat of a small number of French revolutionaries who met a common fate, the Enragés.¹ Champions of a regulated economy, advocates of direct democracy, partisans of popular terror, they clashed head-on with the regularly constituted authorities who defended economic laissez-faire, representative government, and an official terror under the Great Committees. The contest was unequal from the very beginning. The Enragés left behind only a memory, yet they raised some fundamental questions, namely, about the nature of revolutionary government, the goals of a regulated economy, the structure of democratic institutions, and the uses of political terror. Among their leaders was a young man who challenged the Jacobins by urging a policy of “popular Machiavellianism,” a kind of people’s terror. He was called Jean-Théophile-Victor Leclerc.

Leclerc was born in December 1771, at La Cotte, near the small town of Montbrison not far from the city of Lyon. He was the youngest of five children of Grégoire Leclerc, a civil engineer, married to Antoinette La Boulaye, a commoner like her husband.² Since the family was in comfortable circumstances, the children were educated at home, where the young Leclerc studied belles lettres. When the Revolution broke out, the Leclerc family was residing at Clermont-Ferrand. Théophile enrolled in the town’s National Guard, and despite his youth and slight physique was able to carry out his duties. In March 1790 he left for Bordeaux, from which port he embarked for Martinique as a merchant’s agent, to join his two older brother who had preceded him.³ There is a certain irony in Leclerc’s early career, for in the summer of 1793 he was to denounce all merchants as counterrevolutionaries.

At the time of his arrival, Martinique had a population of some 95,000
inhabitants divided into 14,000 whites, 5,000 mulattoes and free Negroes, and 76,000 slaves. The white settlers were split into two bitter factions based on traditional differences between town and country, producer and consumer, planter and merchant. St. Pierre, with its warehouses and banks, was the center of the island’s commercial activity. It was here that agents representing various mercantile establishments of the metropolitan port towns resided. In times of scarcity they sold goods at high prices and exploited the countryside. As producers of raw materials and consumers of finished products, planters were in debt to these brokers and were economically dependent upon them. This dependence gave rise to wide resentment among slave-owners against merchants, brokers, and townsmen in general. An additional source of irritation was the impact of disturbing ideas introduced by recent arrivals, like Leclerc, under the influence of revolutionary doctrines from the fatherland.

Parallel to the conflict between planters and merchants was another resulting from racial antagonisms between mulattoes and whites. Many mulattoes successfully competed with white workers in petty industry; others owned small coastal vessels and vied with white mariners. This economic rivalry was coupled with general white fear and suspicion of the large slave population, to which many Creoles were linked in the eyes of the whites. Despised and rejected by the patriots of the towns, the mulattoes were driven to the side of the planters. Advocates of the Rights of Man stopped short of applying their principles to men of color. Colonial governors and military commanders, royalists to a man, rejected the disturbing idea of “Rights of Man” whether applied to blacks or to whites. In Martinique they supported the conservative assembly elected by a small minority and dominated by planters.

This growing antagonism led to several armed clashes, in which most of the victims were Negro soldiers, recruited by the planter Assembly. The governor of the island, Viscount de Damas, deported some of the more militant members of the patriotic party, which Leclerc had joined upon his arrival. An uneasy truce collapsed in civil war when St. Pierre, supported by the garrisons of Fort Royal and For Bourbon, unfurled the national standard in defiance of the planter assembly and the governor. The arrival from France of Jean-Pierre-Antoine, the count of Béhague, with 6,000 troops, ended the siege of St. Pierre. Within a few weeks, however, Antoine revealed his sympathies with the planter assembly, denounced the patriots of the towns, and arrested and imprisoned the defeated party.

For six weeks Leclerc and thirty-two of his companions were held on board a prison ship. After much mistreatment, he was finally released and transferred to France in the summer of 1791. Debarking at Lorient, department of Morbihan, in July 1791, he found himself without resources or friends, but he was rescued from his plight by members of the town’s popular society.
Shortly thereafter, he joined the Jacobin Club and enrolled in the National Guard, in which he served until February 1792. An opportunity soon arose to broaden his political role. Grenadiers of the Fourteenth Infantry Regiment (LaForêt), stationed in Martinique, had been dismissed in disgrace by Governor Damas for their revolutionary conduct during the late rebellion. Upon arriving at Port Louis, they were promptly condemned by Louis Marie Narbonne, minister of war. The soldiers were in despair until the young Leclerc offered to become their spokesman. He appealed their case to the popular society of Lorient and then to the Jacobins of Paris. On 23 March 1792 Leclerc spoke before the latter society with the passion of a “Roman soldier.” He condemned Damas and accused him of seeking the commercial ruin of France by undermining her colonies and thereby inciting discontent in her maritime cities. The Jacobins promised their support and raised funds for the soldiers’ defense. Leclerc pleaded their case before the National Assembly and won their exoneration. His success as a popular tribune contrasted sharply with his failure as a patriot in Martinique. From Gracchus to Machiavelli was now but a short step.

In the course of his remarks to the Jacobins, Leclerc attacked moderate adherents to the Revolution. His argument was that since one could not know the moderates’ intentions as fully as those of professed enemies, one ought to fear them even more. This suspicion of *modérantisme* was to characterize his political conduct throughout the dramatic developments of the next eighteen months. Zealous revolutionaries who favored violent measures shared Leclerc’s mistrust of moderate conduct. A “popular Machiavellianism” was immune to compromise, however. Thus, the young Enragé was about to embrace extremist proposals to solve complex social problems.

On 1 April 1792 Leclerc spoke again before the Jacobins. This time his theme was the reactionary nature of the monarchy. Adopting a familiar tone, he addressed the king as “camarade roi” and taunted him with loss of power. The king, he declared, was no longer a lion, for the people, his former “sheep, had become elephants.” Leclerc reminded Louis of the fate of Charles I and warned him that it took but one determined man to enact the role of Brutus. He demanded that Louis expel Marie Antoinette and threatened him with a “holy insurrection.” At the same time he appealed to the king to lead the democratic party!

A week later the Jacobins applauded him when he reported his arrest for attempting to tear down placards in the Palais Royal which condemned mutinous soldiers. His battalion having been transferred to the Caribbean in April 1792, he enrolled in the Army of the Rhine. Since “intelligent and courageous men were needed to reconnoiter the strength of the enemy,” he volunteered for the intelligence service. For three weeks Leclerc posed as a young scholar and successfully carried out his mission. He was forced to
return, he testified, when Frédéric Dietrich, the mayor of Strasbourg, betrayed him. From May until November he worked in field hospitals. In November 1792 he obtained leave for three months to visit his two sisters, who had become destitute after the death of their father. At the end of his leave, he asked to be transferred to the Army of Italy and shortly afterwards started for Lyon.

When Leclerc arrived in Lyon he found a city in turmoil, torn by factional and party strife, and split between moderates and radicals, with reactionaries of royalist or bourgeois persuasion lurking in the background and the whole community engaged in a deadly class war. Its geographic position had made it not only an important manufacturing and commercial center but an object of counterrevolutionary currents that swept periodically over the Midi. In terms of economic and social experimentation, it was in advance of Paris. Its silk industry, whose origins can be traced back to the time of Francis I, employed 60,000 workers scattered among some 15,000 different enterprises, with a total capital investment of 60,000,000 livres. The miserable state of its population, which numbered 160,000 inhabitants on the eve of the Revolution and was dependent on the erratic fluctuations of the silk market, sharpened the conflict between its bourgeois entrepreneurs and its indigent proletariat.

The basis of its former prosperity, the silk trade, had been destroyed in the flames of revolution. The noble and sacerdotal aristocracy, the traditional users of silk, had fled or had been imprisoned. The resulting depression threw 30,000 workers into the street. This chronic unemployment was aggravated by the raging inflation caused jointly by the rapid decline of the assignat, the general uncertainty, the threat of war, and the unstable political conditions. The increase in the price of bread aggravated the catastrophe. Attempts to assist the city poor and to tide them over periods of extreme need by establishing warehouses of grain or flour ("greniers d'abondance") were not unknown even under the Old Regime. These temporary crises, however, now seemed to be perpetual and chronic. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that spokesmen for the unemployed sans-culottes should demand price controls on necessities, a rigid supervision of the quality of bread and flour, and severe punishment of speculators and engrossers in foodstuffs and other necessities.

These revolutionary demands, however, frightened the propertied classes and enhanced their suspicion of Girondins and Jacobins, the Legislative Assembly and the National Convention, Jean Roland and Joseph Chalier. Their antagonism (or indifference) to social reform and to the plight of the unemployed, in turn, created a belief in the need for government assistance. This belief was widely shared among revolutionaries of Lyon, some of whom set down their views in a systematic and logical fashion.
One of these was François-Joseph l'Ange, whose writings must certainly have been known to Leclerc.26 As early as 1789, l'Ange had formulated the basic ideas he was to express in his pamphlets of 1792. What he proposed in essence was the establishment of “greniers d'abondance” from which the poor would be supplied, the cost of which was to be borne by a moderate tax on bread at a fixed price based on the average price of the preceding twenty-five years.27 L'Ange also fought against the concept of “passive citizenship.” Those who work, he wrote, merit the right to be considered as active citizens, and he advocated the division of the land between its cultivators and the state at the expense of its idle owners.28

Ideologically linked to l'Ange were two other revolutionaries. The first was Philippe-Auguste Hidins (who adopted the prenomen of Rousseau), member of the city's General Council and later a “commissaire national.” He was a close political friend of Chalier and probably met Leclerc in the Club Central. On 2 December 1792 he drafted a long document entitled “Declaration of Rights” in which he urged the nationalization of the grain supply and flour mills, the abolition of private trade in grain, the strict regulation of bakeries, and a fixed price on all grain, flour, and bread throughout the Republic. The administration and regulation of this program was to be placed in the hands of a democratically elected body.29 The second revolutionary ideologically linked to l'Ange was Antoine-Marie-Manlius Dodieu, member of the tribunal for the district of Lyon. On 4 October 1792, he drafted a memoir which condemned charity in the name of justice for the working people of Lyon.30 Many of the ideas that were to appear later in Leclerc's newspaper, L'Ami du peuple, published from 20 July to 15 September 1793, are closely related to those of l'Ange and Dodieu and reflect a common source of origin, namely, the social-political crisis in Lyon in 1793 and 1794.

Before resuming his political activity, Leclerc was forced to enter a hospital in Lyon to be cured of a skin disease. Upon regaining his health, he joined the Jacobin Club and became associated with Joseph Chalier, the future Jacobin martyr, whom he had met previously in Paris. To further the interests of the Lyon Jacobins, he was sent as their emissary to the mother-society of the capital, where he arrived on 9 May.31 Within a few days, on 13 May, he addressed the Jacobins, urging them “to establish a popular Machiavellianism.”32 Robespierre, in reply to Leclerc and to several others who were urging the arrest of the twenty-two proscribed Girondin deputies and a purge of the Assembly, accused them of lacking political wisdom and of advocating extreme measures which would only compromise the Jacobins in the eyes of public opinion.33 Leclerc’s address, moreover, had antagonized the majority of the Convention, which refused to endorse the creation of a revolutionary tribunal in Lyon; it expressly forbade Leclerc’s friends to exercise power under the guise of defending the Revolution.34
This only served to confirm Leclerc's suspicions of the Montagnard deputies. More than ever he was convinced that salvation could not come from above, that “the people” must save themselves. On 16 May he addressed the Commune, complaining that “some Montagnards” were too weak in the face of the enemy and warning of a plot to exterminate patriots. The only way to save the Republic, he concluded, was for the people themselves to mete out justice, because “the people are never fooled.” The Jacobins, however, were not impressed and appointed a commission to examine Leclerc's political conduct. Whether because of his violent proposals or because of some personal quarrel, he was struck by unknown assailants on the Pont-Neuf three days after his appearance before the General Council.

The political situation in the capital, no less than in Lyon, was moving rapidly away from a policy of conciliation and compromise and toward an insurrection against Girondins and their moderate allies. Leclerc's program, therefore, found an echo in the minds of those sectionnaires who were seeking an end to the long political crisis. On 29 May he was elected to the Central Revolutionary Committee of the Evêché, which was destined to launch the insurrection of 31 May–2 June against the Girondin-led Convention. Two days later, Leclerc was appointed to the Commission of Posts, where he was empowered to censor mail during the insurrectionary days to follow.

The removal of the Girondins from the political scene, however, did not satisfy Leclerc and his friends. On 4 June he addressed the Commune and warned that it was a mistake to think that the Revolution had achieved its goals. For one thing, suspects had not been imprisoned. “Why are you afraid to spill a few drops of blood?” he demanded. This provocation produced universal indignation in the Commune and he was recalled from the tribune. Even Hébert denounced him, and the General Council passed a motion that anyone proposing the shedding of blood was to be regarded as “a bad citizen.” Leclerc persisted, however, in his belief that the goals of the insurrection had not been carried out. In the final issue of his paper he would return to the charge that no serious effort had been made to imprison the Brissotins because they had too many friends in the Convention. In support of this charge, he pointed to the ease with which the detained deputies were able to escape from their jailers, since each was under house arrest and guarded by but one gendarme. The confusion and division within the Mountain itself only gave further proof, he wrote, that its deputies were not free of reproach. On 11 June, exactly one week after criticizing the General Council, Leclerc was removed from his position in the Commission of Posts.

Loss of position, however, did not discourage the young revolutionary. On 27 June he spoke in support of Jacques Roux in the Cordelier Club and sharply attacked Danton and his supporter, Louis Legendre. Legendre, he charged, had discouraged the club from taking revolutionary measures during
the insurrection of 31 May and should be expelled from the Cordeliers. Despite considerable support for his motion, the members decided to hear Legendre's defense before acting on Leclerc's proposal. Three days later Robespierre, Collot d'Herbois, and other leading Jacobins attacked Leclerc in the course of their reply to Jacques Roux's criticism of their conduct; that turbulent session of the Cordeliers resulted in the expulsion of both Roux and Leclerc. On 4 July Marat published a sharp attack on Roux, Varlet, and Leclerc in which he accused them of playing a counter-revolutionary role. Denied access to the Cordeliers, removed from his position of influence in the Commission of Posts, refused a seat on the tribune in the General Council, Leclerc determined to launch a journal of his own. News of what had transpired in Lyon had become common knowledge. Surely the time had come to expose this false moderation, which only encouraged the counter-revolution. He decided to revive the title of Marat's newspaper, L'Ami du peuple.

The first issue appeared on 20 July 1793, with the motto: "Je pèrirai, Français, ou vous serez sans maîtres." The lead article described Marat's funeral and carried the publisher's pledge to promote the principles of the dead martyr. "I shall watch the conduct of public men; and, whatever will come, I enter firmly on this new career. A free man should serve the people," he wrote. Serving the people meant warning them of "traitors" in their midst. Leclerc demanded a purge of all nobles and priests from civil and military employment and the dismissal and trial of commanders, like Custine, Lavalette, Kellerman, and Berthier, who had the misfortune of losing battles.

Like his fellow Enragés, he demanded price ceilings on necessities and strong measures to curb speculation and engrossment in the essentials of life. Since everyone had an equal right to enjoy the fruits of the earth and since the Republic had enough to feed all, it was ridiculous and criminal to allow the sale of grain at prices four to five times its true value, he argued. The Convention ought, therefore, to purchase all grain and stop private speculation. Surplus grain should be stored in "granaries of abundance" ("greniers d'abondance") and sold at a standard price fixed by the National Convention. Since the poor could not afford to buy grain at any price, the state should distribute foodstuffs to them free of charge; the cost was to be borne by a tax on the luxuries of the rich, a proposal that recalls that of l'Ange.

To the charge of being blood-thirsty, Leclerc replied: "A revolutionary should cold-bloodedly be willing to sacrifice one hundred thousand scoundrels for the revolution if necessary. He justified mass terror in his next issue by recalling that when he and Chalier had proposed throwing 6,000 aristocrats into the Rhone, "many excellent patriots grew pale and trembled." The ruins of Lyon were eloquent testimony against that policy of moderation that had cost the republic 60,000 lives. During a revolution,
it was necessary to sacrifice 10,000 heads in order to save 100,000, he reiterated. There was no doubt in Leclerc's mind that "revolutionary necessity" demanded such sacrifices.

A "popular Machiavellianism," however, applied by the people themselves was not identical with a terror enforced by the governing committees. Leclerc became apprehensive that the power concentrated in the hands of the Committee of Public Safety would lead to a dictatorship. He warned:

If there is a measure dangerous, impolitic, and subversive of all social order, it is without doubt that which has been proposed at the National Convention, to convert the Committee of Public Safety into a committee of government. I see in this proposition a usurpation of powers which appears to me to be badly conceived by its author. I consider it an outrage against liberty, an indirect blow aimed at the Revolution, and a step toward dictatorship.

Concentration of power in the hands of nine men, no matter how pure, could lead to the overthrow of the Republic; "it is creating a Capet of nine heads in place of the one who is no more."

Robespierre replied the next day by coupling his name with that of Jacques Roux and accusing both of being traitors. Leclerc, he charged,

is a young man who demonstrates that corruption can penetrate even a young heart. He has a seductive appearance, a bewitching talent; it is Leclerc, the son of a former noble. He was at Lyon when the unfortunate Chalier was executed. He was, to a large extent, responsible for his death. . . . these two men denounced by Marat, as two intriguers, two emissaries of Coblenz or Pitt. . . . have assumed the name of Marat in order to betray it.

This uncompromising polemic, resorting to ad hominem arguments, held that since Leclerc was opposed to giving absolute powers to the Committee of Public Safety, and since Pitt and Cobourg were enemies of that same committee, it followed that Leclerc, Pitt, and Cobourg were linked in a common cause.

Leclerc counter-replied in his issue of 8 August. He labeled as slanders the charges that he was a nobleman's son, was receiving subsidies from foreign powers, or was associated with Roux, and he challenged his detractors to prove even a single one of these charges:

The people will never be enlightened on their true interests . . . so long as men continue to be cowardly enough to bow down slavishly under whatever despot happens to insult public opinion, or so perverted as to intentionally follow the perfidious suggestions of some individuals, although they know perfectly both their maneuvers and their schemes.

Robespierre made a further effort to silence this gadfly. On the same day, 8 August, Marat's "widow," Simone Evrard, appeared on the floor of the Convention. Denouncing Roux and Leclerc for misrepresenting her dead
husband as “an insane apostle of disorder and anarchy,” she pleaded with the Convention to silence these “calumniators.” Robespierre immediately moved that Mme Evrard’s petition be inserted into the Bulletin and that the Committee of General Security investigate the two individual named. Police action was about to become the ultimate resort in this political dispute.

It is difficult to understand Robespierre’s concern with the campaign of a young revolutionary publishing a modest journal and speaking largely for himself. One reason may have been the surprising popularity of L’Ami du peuple. Reporting to the minister of the interior (Jules-François Pare), the police observer La Tour-la-Montagne wrote that Paris was being inundated by a plethora of uncivic journals. One type sought to spread discouragement; the other sowed division and diminished confidence in the constituted authorities. Among the latter, he reported, was the journal of Leclerc of Lyon, which continually demanded the renewal of the Convention and attacked the duly constituted authorities. When Hébert swelled the chorus of those who favored the renewal of the Convention, Robespierre became alarmed. On 7 August he denounced “provocateurs,” referred to “artificial shortages,” and warned of pillage and the horrors of a new “September massacre.” This explains, partly, his role in the undignified farce with Marat’s “widow,” staged the next day in the Convention.

During the next two weeks Leclerc continued to call for the implementation of the Constitution of 1793 and an end to arbitrary rule. Only “scoundrels” dared argue, he wrote, that the constitution was merely a matter of form. “The constitution, the whole constitution, and nothing but the constitution” must be put into operation at once. The authority of seven hundred legislators was being reduced day by day by the seven or eight members of the Committee of Public Safety. Furthermore, the argument that if new elections were held a reactionary legislature would be returned was an insult to the people; it was a bogeyman to frighten children. Frenchmen had not chosen so badly in the past, he insisted. The trouble was that the meaning of words was being abused. People were deliberately confusing the advocacy of the Constitution of 1793 with the Feuillants’ advocacy of the Constitution of 1790. In their eyes a republican document was no different from a monarchist one.

In addition to his campaign for a maximum and new elections, Leclerc agitated for a system of direct democracy. “People,” he asked, “are you awaiting from the constituted authorities that revolutionary stroke in which you hope to find your safety? No, they are nothing but passive organs of the law; they can only preach its execution.” He cited Rousseau, stating that a people represented was not free and that they should not award the epithet of “representative” because the will cannot he represented. Acts of government were mere expressions of the people’s will, and magistrates were only the people’s proxies. He warned that the abuse of deeds too often
would follow from the abuse of words.\textsuperscript{58} If the Mountain was unable to help, the people would "be forced to save themselves" because "under the present regime as under the former . . . [officials] respect vice in a satin garment, but hang him who is in rags."\textsuperscript{59} The poor who were forced to wait in queues at the doors of bakeries as early as 3 A.M. were not the malintentioned, but good patriots who happened to be poor. "Do not estrange yourselves from the people," he appealed to the deputies, "you cannot but gain to see them close at hand, and three hours spent at the door of a baker would make a better legislator than four years of residence on the benches of the Convention."\textsuperscript{60}

In the final issue of his paper, Leclerc broke decisively with terror as a method of government. He wrote:

They [the government] demand that terror be placed on the order of the day; they have introduced the deadly spirit of vengeance and of private hate. The strong crushes the feeble and puts him behind bars. I await any moment the lettre-de-cachet which will shut me up.\textsuperscript{61}

Yet he ended on a note of hope, embodied in a poem of his own composition in which he praised the spirit of liberty and the struggle for a better world. Tyrants of the mind and body had to be destroyed so that the people of France might live.

On 18 November 1793 (28 Brumaire, Year II), Leclerc married Pauline Léon, cofounder with Claire Lacombe of the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women, the Société Républicaines Révolutionnaires. He had enrolled as a soldier in the Seventeenth Division and was serving as secretary to the adjutant general, Emile Rondet. His wife came to visit him in March 1794. On 2 April 1794 the Committee of General Security issued a warrant for their arrest, which was executed at the village of Fère in the department of l'Aisne. They were taken to the Luxembourg prison, where they remained until the fall of Robespierre. On 21 August they were finally released, and Leclerc was permitted to reclaim his personal papers on 11 September before returning to his posts. After this date they disappear from the stage of history.\textsuperscript{62}

Leclerc had broken with the policy of terror.\textsuperscript{63} Yet, there is nothing in his repudiation of Jacobin terror to lead one to conclude that he had surrendered his belief in a policy of "popular Machiavellianism." It is possible of course, that had been able to witness a "popular terror" in operation he would have found as much to criticize and reject as in the "official terror." A policy of terror is bound to give its directors special privileges—if for no other reason than because they enjoy such overwhelming power over "counterrevolutionaries," not the most precise term in time of revolution.

Perhaps there was no solution to the dilemma in which Leclerc found himself. The Jacobins had to put down the counterrevolution or be crushed.
This required bold and dictatorial measures. The more successful they were, the more impatient they became of critics like Leclerc who were breaking the solid front against reaction. A "popular Machiavellianism," if it meant anything, demanded surrender of the tight, centralized direction of the internal and external war effort. To substitute popular control (by section, local commune, or political club) would have fragmented the Republic and weakened it in the struggle against the foreign coalition and the Vendées within. Leclerc could hardly have desired such an outcome.

Above all, to embrace the Constitution of 1793 and at the same time to call for a policy of popular terror was a contradiction that Leclerc could not resolve. Free elections might have introduced a regime well to the right of the Jacobins. The political history of France after Thermidor suggests such an outcome, and contemporaries, certainly, had every reason to be frightened by such a possibility. Had a Thermidorian or Directorial regime arisen as a result of such an election, it would have erased the libertarian and egalitarian ideals that motivated men like Leclerc—despite their violent language. The White Terror that followed the fall of Robespierre did precisely that. The murder of former militants and revolutionaries merely changed the direction of a terror now dictated by partisans of the Right.

In any case, people like Leclerc became victims of the official Terror long before the Jacobins struck against their rivals of the Left, the Hébertistes. These plebeians of the French Revolution often defended the same inchoate, anarchistic, and at time, irresponsible principles which Leclerc championed. Their destruction, however, ended the popular movement of the sans-culottes. The Thermidorians only completed the process. Leclerc, in a sense, is Hébert writ small. The same reasons which impelled the revolutionary government to suppress Leclerc's ideas motivated it to later crush the Hébertistes; the difference was only a matter of a few months.

One must also question the efficacy (ignoring the morality, for the moment) of Leclerc's proposal to throw six thousand aristocrats into the Rhone. How effective, after all, were the notorious noyades, the mass drownings of Jean-Baptiste Carrier, in repressing the future counterrevolution in Nantes? How efficacious were the bloody fusillades, the mass shootings in Lyon, directed by Collot d'Herbois and Joseph Fouche? The September massacres, when helpless prisoners were slaughtered out of hand, it can be argued, were a form of "popular Machiavellianism." How much did they contribute to the salvation of revolutionary France? Instead of terrorizing enemies of the Revolution, mass executions often made them indifferent to their own safety, while many who had been indifferent were revolted by these senseless butcheries. Oppositionists only became more prudent and cautious, biding their time to wreak vengeance on former terrorists.

In short, constitutional government and popular terror formed a contradiction
that Leclerc could not resolve. In this respect, of course, he was not unique. Robespierre, like Leclerc, tried to wed virtue with terror. History recognizes few men of virtue; rarer still are virtuous terrorists.

Notes


2. As late as 1792 Leclerc still styled himself Leclerc d’Oze, but he dropped this pretentious title as the Revolution turned republican. In the summer of 1793 he considered references to his alleged “nobility” as slanderous.

3. A.N., F7 4774. This sketch of Leclerc is based upon a document in his dossier entitled “Extraction, profession avant et depuis la Révolution, carrière politique et révolutionnaire, et état présent des affaires de Théophile Leclerc” (diacritical marks as in the original). This autobiographic sketch was dictated by Leclerc in prison and signed by him, after which he attached a brief postscript in his own hand. Unless otherwise noted, references to his early life are based on this document.


6. Ibid., 83–84.

7. Students of American history will recall an analogy with Nathaniel Bacon’s Rebellion of 1676. Though Bacon’s position was more democratic than that of Governor Berkeley, it was the latter who opposed (for his own ends) the massacre of Indians, who supplied him with beaver and otter furs.

8. Of the 3,337 active citizens scattered among twenty-seven parishes, a mere 61 voted for representatives to the assembly. The rest were either indifferent or too frightened to take a stand. Daney, Histoire de la Martinique, 5:82; Deschamps, Les Colonies, 172.
9. A.N., F7 4774. He testified that he remained with this group until 12 March 1791, "sharing their hardships and dangers."

10. Deschamps, Les Colonies, 173-74; Daney, Histoire de la Martinique, 5:97–240, passim. Daney wrote that "les planteurs avaient provoqué la guerre civile et l’anarchie pour se dispenser de payer leurs dettes aux villes et au commerce de France" (188). This argument is familiar to students of the American Revolution, many of whose historians observe that Southern planters joined the revolutionaries because of their debts to various mercantile establishments in London.


12. Upon his arrest by the revolutionary committee of section Halle-au-Blé on 3 April 1794 (14 Germinal, Year II), he testified that for the duration of his imprisonment on board ship his diet was limited to biscuits and water. The document is entitled "A notre comité" (A.N., F7 47749).

13. In his testimony before the revolutionary committee of section Halle-au-Blé, Leclerc stated that seventeen soldiers were dismissed (3 April 1794, ibid). The records of the Jacobin Club, however, cite twenty-five grenadiers as "victims of tyrannical conduct of the despot Béague" [sic]. F. A. Aulard, La Société de Jacobins: Recueil de documents pour l'histoire du Club des Jacobins de Paris, 6 vols. (Paris: Léopold Cerf & Libraire Noblet, 1889–1897), 3:447.


15. Ibid., 448.


18. Leclerc testified that he offered his services as an espionage agent to the municipality of Strasbourg and that, together with an eighteen-year-old man named Martin, he was given the sum of ten louis in specie. Just why the mayor "betrayed" him he does not explain (A.N., F7 47749). Dietrich might have found Leclerc's political views too radical to accept without protest.

19. It is probable that he had at some time before his fathers' death become the sole supporter of his two sisters, as his brothers remained in Martinique and his father was ill.


22. Jaurès described the city as follows: "Lyon was, I believe, in 1789 the most modern town in France, the most thoroughly, extremely bourgeois. Feudal influences were almost non-existent; obviously, it was upon industrial and
commercial production alone that the town rested. Here, the connection of all
wealth to industrial or mercantile enterprise is direct, obvious. The splendid
mansion is the outgrowth of a modest mill, the bright side of dogged and dull
labor. Furthermore, the whole life of Lyon depended on industry and on a
special type of manufacturing; the least economic change, a variation in style,
an outlet closed, a fluctuation in the price of raw materials and manufactured
products, everything dealt a direct, and, at times, a violent blow to the exposed
heart of the city. Hence, because of diverse interests, the frequent clashes. The
Lyon workers could not, like those of Paris, escape in an hour of crisis into
other occupations. Here it is within the precincts of one or two large industries
that their existence is locked up and their passions are concentrated” (Jean Jaurès,
II: 103 [La Constituante, 83–84]).

23. In 1728 Laurent de Gas, the provost (prévôt des merchands), established a grenier
d'abondance; in 1750 his son, Pierre du Gas, erected four public ovens to com­
bat distress. He had bread distributed to 15,000 unemployed silk workers. Just
before the meeting of the Estates General in April 1789, the central govern­
ment authorized the municipality to purchase grain and to subsidize bakers so
as to hold down prices. The General Council advanced a total of 1,016,156
livres, 6 sous, 4 deniers (Revue du Lyonnais [1869, vol. 1], cited by Gaumont,
_Histoire générale_, 27–28).

24. J. R. L., _Procès-verbal des citoyens du district de la Juiverie_ (Lyon, 30 June 1790),
1–14, passim. The problems of quality and bread, subsidy of bakers, the means
to avoid bankruptcy, and so on, continued to plague the city even after the
counterrevolution of 29 May 1793. See for example, J. R. L., _Rapport du Comité
des subsistances et finances de la municipalité provisoire de Lyon_ (Lyon, 10 June 1793), 11.

25. “If there was no social struggle in Lyon, there was among the bourgeoisie a
movement of ‘social fear.’ They believed that the property rights were threatened
and the fear of a new revolution pushed them into an alliance with
couterrevolutionaires” (Riffaterre, _Le Mouvement antijacobin_, 1:354).

26. Jaurès was the first to have uncovered the brochures of l' Ange, though as recently
as the summer of 1966 the _Annales historiques de la Révolution française_, no. 184
(April–June): 15–18 contains a newly discovered, brief, but important letter of
l' Ange presented by A. Ioannissian. L' Ange was born in Alsace in 1743 and
came to Paris when he was fourteen. He was elected as assistant judge and as a
representative to the General Council of Lyon in 1791. Because he retained
this minor position during the period of the counterrevolution in Lyon, the
Revolutionary Tribunal condemned him to death on 14 November 1793, de­
spite his obvious concern with the plight of the poor and his efforts to ease
their misery (Gaumont, _Histoire générale_, 35–37, 73–75). In 1789 l' Ange wrote:
“Les riches contracte une dette sacrée envers le pauvre dont il se faire servir”
(B.N., Lb39 4223, _Plaintes et représentations d'un citoyen décrété passif, aux citoyens
décrétés actifs_ [Lyon, 1790]; 6).

27. _Annales historiques de la Révolution française_, no. 184, 15–18. He repeated essentially
the ideas above in his _Moyens simples et faciles de fixer l'abondance et le juste prix
du pain_ (Lyon, 1792), 10–11 (B.N., Lb39 6133). A total of 30,000 granaries
and a national corporation of public providers (“compagnie nationale de pourvoyeurs
publiques”) would administer the proposed scheme. Each granary would be worth
eighty shares, or 1,000 livres, which would place 2,400,000,000 livres into
circulation. Later he was to explain that this sum would serve as capital for a
bank of credit, of foreign exchange, and of issue. l'Ange underscored the role of his private corporation in providing abundance for all (Moyens simples, 12, 14–16) and replied to twelve different objections raised to his proposals in Réponses aux objections qu'on a faites sur les moyens de fixer l'abondance et le juste prix du pain (Lyon, 1792), 30, passim (B.N., Lb 6134).

28. L'Ange objected to the status of passive citizenship because, among other indignities, it linked him to domestic, refractory priests, and former agents of the state treasury (Plaintes et représentations, 25).

29. Shortly after the insurrection against the Jacobin municipal authorities, Hidins either hanged himself or was hanged in his cell on 4 July 1793 (Gaumont, Histoire générale, 64–66, 68; Riffaterre, Le Mouvement antijacobin, 1:336–37; Trénard, Histoire sociale des idées, 1:340. The title was Au genre humain: Respect et Fraternité.

30. Gaumont, Histoire générale, 68.

31. A.N., F 4774 9. The Abbé Guillon paid the following tribute to Leclerc: “This young tiger born in Montbrison, called by Bertrand, a young Spartan, was the messenger and spokesman of the Jacobins of Lyon, before those of Paris. Cusset [a deputy] said of him to the Lyon sans-culottes: ‘He has talent, perhaps too much for you!’” (Aimé Guillon de Montléon, Mémoires pour servir a l’histoire de la ville de Lyon pendant la Révolution, 3 vols. [Paris, 1824], 1:241–42, n. 2).

32. “Citizens, they call you free, but you are slaves of poverty… It is necessary to establish a popular Machiavellianism. It is essential to erase from the surface of France all that is impure. Without this [action] you will be nothing but children” (P. J. B. Buchez and P. C. Roux, Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution française, 40 vols. [Paris: Paulin, Libraire, 1834–1838], 27:17–18). Montléon gives the date of this address as 12 May (Mémoires, 1:242).


35. Réimpression de l’ancien Moniteur depuis la réunion des Etats-Généraux, jusqu’au consulat, (mai 1789–novembre 1799), 32 vols (Paris: 1840–1845), 16, no. 139, 19 May 1793; Buchez and Roux, Histoire parlementaire, 27:73. It is impossible to say whether Leclerc knew of the coming counterrevolution in Lyon. Like other Lyon revolutionaries, he must have recognized the possibility that a violent showdown was fast approaching.


40. L’Ami du peuple, no. 24, 15 September 1793.


42. Buchez and Roux, Histoire parlementaire, 28:220.


44. Ibid., 5:281; Buchez and Roux, Histoire parlementaire, 28:231–32.

1. Le populaire: De Même que ses confrères Valet [sic] et Leclerc ses complices."

46. L'Ami du peuple, no. 1, 20 July 1793.
47. L'Ami du peuple no. 3, 25 July; no. 4, 27 July no. 5, 31 July; and no. 6, 2 August 1793.
48. L'Ami du peuple, no. 5, 31 July 1793.
49. "We must exterminate the enemies of liberty legally or illegally" (Théophile Leclerc, L'Ami du peuple, no. 16, 27 August 1793; L'Ami du peuple, no. 18, 1 September 1793).

50. L'Ami du peuple no. 7, 4 August 1793. That he expected to be attacked by the authorities for taking such a position may be gathered from his over-bold assertion that he was not afraid to criticize those "who by the force of their lungs, crush both their auditors and their antagonists. I shall not yield before the despotism of public opinion; I shall tear away their mask, even if it should cost me my life" (ibid).

52. L'Ami du peuple, no. 9, 8 August 1793. It is odd that Leclerc fails to see the contradiction between "popular Machiavellianism" and the despotism of "public opinion."


54. Tuetey, Répertoire général, 9, no. 1273, 11 September 1793.
56. L'Ami du peuple, no. 17, 30 August 1793; no. 19, 4 September 1793; no. 20, 6 September 1793.
57. L'Ami du peuple, no. 7, 4 August 1793.
58. L'Ami du peuple, no. 13, 21 August 1793.
59. L'Ami du peuple, no. 14, 23 August 1793.
60. L'Ami du peuple, no. 17, 30 August 1793.
61. L'Ami du peuple, no. 24, 15 September 1793. It was in this last issue that he warned of resorting to the "natural right," resistance to oppression, if he could not get justice in the courts. A week earlier, issue no. 21, he had justified his struggle by an imaginary conversation with Brissot, who visits him in prison. To Brissot's question as to why he had been arrested, Leclerc replied: "For not having believed in the virtue of certain individuals any more than in your; for having denounced some scoundrels who have powerful protectors; for having demanded the renewal of the legislature next January first; [for having urged] death to conspirators; and for having told the truth to the people."

62. A.N., F7 47749. R. B. Rose cities a Théophile Leclerc, an administrator of the department of Sarthe, who was dismissed by the Directory in 1796 for alleged excesses (Adresse au directoire exécutif, présentée par les administrateurs . . . de la Sarthe destitués de leur fonctions [Le Mans, 1796], in The Enragés, 55, n. 37).

63. In an article entitled "Théophile Leclerc e Ego 'Drug Naroda'" (Théophile Leclerc and his 'Ami de peuple'), the Russian historian J. M. Zacher argued that it was Leclerc's repudiation of the revolutionary dictatorship and terror that caused his decisive defeat in the inevitable clash with the Jacobins. Unlike the Jacobins, Zacher wrote, Leclerc was "profoundly mistaken" (Frantsozskii Yejegodnik [Annuaires d'études françaises, 1962, Editions de l'Academie des Sciences de l'URSS, Moscow, 1963], 72).
Feminists and Antifeminists in the French Revolution

So long as women did not mix in, there was no real revolution.

—Mirabeau

Long before the term "feminism" was coined, feminist stirrings had already appeared in France. Although supported by a minority of both sexes, a profound social revolution aimed at the destruction of privilege was bound to awaken aspirations of justice and equality for an oppressed sex as well. The shocking conditions under which women worked, the heavy labor, the isolation and dependence of domestic service, the illiteracy, and the legal discrimination all laid the basis for a feminist revolt. The few women who were aware of their inferior status and who were willing to commit themselves to the struggle for sexual equality demanded the right of divorce and an equal education. The politically more advanced among them petitioned for the suffrage.

Wages for women were extremely low. Single women were largely confined to domestic service, to heavy physical labor, or to labor-intensive industries like the lace trade, in which, eventually, they lost their eyesight. As a domestic a woman worked only for room and board, and, if she saved anything, it was only enough to buy linen for her dowry. Poor women carried heavy loads of soil, water, wood, or vegetables. In the larger cities they were employed as rag sorters, cinder sifters, refuse collectors, or assistants to masons and bricklayers. If no employment was available, women taught their children how to beg or hired them out to beg. Sometimes they smuggled salt to earn a few sous and, when conditions became unbearable, witnessed their husbands driven to alcohol, if they did not abandon their families altogether. Thousands of women went hungry so that their husbands and children could eat,1 while the fortunate few who possessed the skill to practice a trade could not do so unless a man "lent" his name or
sold his rights to the woman. The legal status of women on the eve of the Revolution was not much different from that of minors, imbeciles, or slaves. The power of the father over his family was absolute. Even grandchildren were under the domination of the grandfather. By an edict of 1684, parents could imprison their children by a simple request until the latter had reached the age of twenty-five, and those who married without their parents’ consent could be sentenced to death. Nobles had the right to imprison their children even if they were over twenty-five years of age. Women could testify in criminal and civil courts but not for notarized acts like wills. In general, they were under the authority of their fathers until marriage, after which they came under that of their husbands. Thus, they had no control over either person or property, and only the death of her husband could make a woman independent.

Before the Revolution women’s rights were already being debated by the philosophes. The title of one book on the subject speaks for itself: *The Woman Is Not Inferior to the Man*. Mme de Montenclos edited a *Journal des Dames* (1774), in which she demanded equal rights, writing that she wanted “to shatter our conventions” on women’s status. The new brochures of the 1780s argued that human beings were equal, that sexual discriminations was unnatural, that there should be equality in marriage, and that women deserved a better education and more highly paid jobs. Some stressed the need for women’s suffrage. Condorcet, for example, wrote that since women paid taxes and still had no representation, they had a right to refuse to pay them. One important pamphlet argued that just as nobles could not represent commoners, so men could not represent women.

Yet women enjoyed some political rights. The regency, for example, was open to women, and both the religious orders and noblewomen sent representatives to the Estates General. A number of women from the Third Estate also sat in the primary assemblies. With the disappearance of feudalism, male privilege of succession was abolished. The decree of 8 April 1791 ended the inequality of heirs and, finally, the legislation of 7 January 1794 (17 Nivôse, Year II) gave women a share in the division of the common lands. The attempt to establish equality between the sexes in marriage failed, however. the *Comité de législation* of the Legislative Assembly prepared a project in line with the above, but it was rejected outright by the deputies. “The woman is generally incapable of administration; the man has a natural superiority over her,” proclaimed Merlin de Douai.

The publication of Rousseau’s *Emile* (1762), according to the historian Jules Michelet, roused women to an awareness of two new faiths—humanity and maternity. Whatever the truth of Michelet’s observation, there is no question of women’s active role from the very beginning of the Revolution. Among the 870–900 “conquerors” of the Bastille, at least 16 were widows.
A number of women fell alongside the men, and Marie Charpentier, who fought valiantly at the siege, was maimed there. Shortly thereafter came the march of the women on Versailles (5–6 October 1789) and their subsequent penetration of the Flanders regiment to persuade the soldiers not to fire. Although some men played an important role here, this was almost entirely a women's chapter in the history of the Revolution. Some months later women helped prepare the Champ de Mars for the Festival of the Federation on 14 July 1790 and took part in the festivities. After Louis' flight to Varennes, there was talk that the women had brought the king to Paris but the men had let him escape! Women's signatures were solicited equally with those of men on petitions asking for the king's dethronement. Although a feminist press existed that carried on a campaign against sexual discrimination, publications were often ephemeral and disappeared after a few issues. An exception to this was *Journal de l'état et du citoyen*, published by Louise Félicité Robert-Kéralio, which championed liberty and equality and a hatred of tyranny. Mme Robert-Kéralio was responsible for drafting the famous petition calling for a republic on 1 July 1791, just prior to the Massacre of the Champ de Mars. Another journal worthy of mention is *La Mère Duchesne, journal des femmes*, which attempted to do for the women what the more famous *Le Père Duchesne* of Hébert did for the men. By 1791 certain journals like the Cercle Social's *Bouche de fer* came out in favor of feminism and helped establish women's political clubs. The feminist movement and the birth of these clubs coincided.

Most of the important societies were open to women and were called *sociétés fraternelles* (fraternal societies), a misnomer, of course. It was there that women took part in and learned politics. The terms "monsieur" and "madame/mademoiselle" were replaced by "frère" and "sœur" ("brother" and "sister"). By the summer of 1791 women had established political clubs in all the important cities of France. In Lyon "a considerable number of citoyennes held several assemblies," where they contributed money to redeem prisoners held for debt, then marched in procession and celebrated mass in the cathedral. After organizing a popular society they took an oath to be true to the nation, law, and king and swore to teach their children to prefer death rather than slavery. Women took an active role in Grenoble, where they demanded the withdrawal of troops. In Rennes (January 1789), they fought alongside the men in opposing the nobility. In February they intervened in Angers over the matter of subsistence, and in Chevanceau (Angoumois), they took part in the voting, proclaimed the right to work, and demanded admission into the Estates General. Women's patriotic societies sprang up in Civrai-en-Poitou, Bordeaux, Alais, Brest, Lille, and other towns, while Lyon contained thirty-one women's clubs.

Conservative journals, naturally, poked fun at the women when they did
not slander them. In Lyon there appeared a burlesqued Declaration of the Rights of Women, which sought to give the impression that women were addicted to talk, in contrast, evidently, to the rational activity of men. When France went to war, however, some of the bitterest critics of feminism were happy to accept women's help. After the Declaration of Pilnitz, which threatened the destruction of Paris, women's societies took on a new role. Whereas formerly they tended to emphasize charitable activities, now they assumed a more political course. They began to exercise the right of surveillance over aristocrats and their allies, watched the price of necessities, and denounced unpatriotic behavior or conduct thought to be unpatriotic.

In addition to their political role in the clubs, women sought to play a part in military matters as well. They organized military companies in several towns and received recognition and permission to arm themselves from the National Assembly. In some towns their companies formed part of the National Guard. A Mme de Moulins became a colonel of the National Guard in Mermanst (Seine-et-Oise), and in other places women assumed the name of "Amazones." About thirty women served in the regular armed forces, one of whom was sixteen (Anne Quatresols), another forty-nine (Madeleine Petitjean). They saw heavy combat with the Army of the West, were wounded, and several were taken prisoner. One of the more popular of the "Amazones" was Reine Chappuy of the Twenty-Fourth Cavalry Regiment, who was only sixteen when she enrolled "to combat tyrants." Her five brothers had all volunteered for the armed forces and she had to petition the Convention in order to remain in the regiment. She declared that all she wanted was to prove that the arm of a woman was equal to that of a man when "inspired by honor and thirst for glory." The Convention applauded her and gave her the honors of the session. Despite these accomplishments the role of women in military matters was limited. Their demands to arm themselves were often turned down, and, as will be seen below, Pauline Léon's attempt to organize an armed battalion was politely refused because "women's hands had not been created to bear iron, nor homicidal pikes."

The first club to advocate feminism was the Cercle Social, led by Nicolas de Bonneville and Claude Fauchet. Most of the important societies agreed and opened their doors to women. Among these were the clubs of the Indigents, of the Halles, of the Nomophiles, of the Minimes, of the Ennemis du Despotisme, and the sociétés fraternelles of the Jacobins and of the Canes. The best known of these, founded by Claude Dansard, a schoolmaster in early 1790, was the société fraternelle of the Jacobins, which took the name of Société Fraternelle des Deux Sexes (Fraternal Society of the Two Sexes). The presence of "numerous women" provoked ironic remarks in conservative journals, and the association was called "androgynous." Although the society established close ties with the Jacobins, the latter mistrusted women no less
than did their more conservative opponents. When the society was asked to receive a mixed delegation of men and women, the Jacobins replied "regretfully" that they would receive only the men delegates.26

Nevertheless, the Société Fraternelle des Deux Sexes was given the use of the library as the Jacobins occupied the church proper (29 May 1791). Here women deliberated and voted as a secretary of each sex sat before the president and six tellers (scoutateurs) were recruited from both sexes.27 A new member had to be presented by members of the society, and if no objections were raised, the person was admitted immediately. If there were objections, a Committee of Conciliation, composed of six members from each sex, judged the validity of the objections, then reported to the society, which ruled on the matter. "Amidst a religious silence" the new member was given an entry card and took an oath, replying "Je le jure." Any new member who broke the rules, was disorderly, or made grave, unproven charges against another member was expelled.28 Conservative journals opposed to political associations spoke of the society's meeting place as a "cave," a word which could suggest "lair" or "nest of pirates."29

Among the earliest feminists was Etta Palm d'Aelders, born in Groningue, Holland, in 1743, who arrived in Paris in 1774. In December 1790 she spoke before the Cercle Social, where she made a plea for women's rights. "Ah, gentlemen, if you want us to be zealous for the happy constitution that gives men their rights, begin then by being just toward us; that henceforth we should be your free companions and not your slaves." Justice, she went on, demanded that laws be impartially applied to all, but they were not, for power was in the hands of men. The result was that women were forced to use undignified (coquettish) means in order to obtain concessions. "Our life, our liberty, our fortunes are not our own," she concluded, asking that education for women be equal to that for men.30

In March 1791 she demanded that each section of the capital establish a feminine society, Amies de la Vérité (in contrast to "Amis"), which would be linked together for a common cause. Her immediate aim was charitable, rather than political. These societies were to distribute aid to the poor, visit the sick and the infirm, watch over the education of children, and monitor the choice of wet nurses so that healthy children might develop. Shortly thereafter she founded the Société des Citoyennes Patriotes, Amies de la Vérité, to promote her program, but not one section responded. In July she published a pamphlet, Appel aux Françaises, and was denounced by Gazette universelle as a "rabid democrat" (une démocrate outrée) and a Prussian spy. In April 1792 she headed a feminine delegation to the Legislative Assembly asking for the right of divorce for women aged twenty-one and over, political freedom, and equality of rights. The presiding officer replied that "the Legislature will avoid doing whatever could excite regrets among the citoyennes"—a
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formula that was bound to bury her suggestions in committee. The feminine society vegetated, and Etta Palm d'Aelders complained on 7 April 1792 that there was general indifference. In order to avoid arrest as a suspect she quit France, was imprisoned as an Orangist in 1795 for three years, then was released and disappeared from history.

A more important feminist than Mme Aelders was Olympe de Gouges, born on 7 May 1748 in Montauban. Her father, Pierre Gouze, was a butcher; her mother, Olympe Mouisset, was the daughter of an engraver. Olympe de Gouges married an officier de bouche of the intendant of Montauban, but despite her own humble origin, she felt she was above her husband's station and so left him. She then launched her career as a writer and produced many plays, brochures, petition, and essays. Among her more popular writings was a "Declaration of the Rights of Women and of the Citizennes" in seventeen articles, which she completed in September 1791. The following extracts characterize the document:

Article 1: The woman is born free and remains equal in rights to the man. Social distinctions cannot be founded on anything save common utility.

Article 6: The law is the expression of the general will; all citoyennes being equal in its eyes must concur personally or through their representatives in its formation. It ought to be the same for all; all citoyennes and all citoyens should be equally admissible to all dignities, positions, and public employment, according to their capacities and without other distinctions but their virtues and their talents.

Article 10: The woman has the right to mount the scaffold; she ought equally to have that of mounting the tribune.

Despite the logic and eloquence of her "Declaration," she exerted little influence. Her dramatic pieces were banal and her placards made no impression. The police spy Latour Lamontagne reported that when people looked at her wall posters they walked off saying, "Oh, it's only Olympe de Gouges!" Yet she proposed bold measures. In Article 11 of her "Declaration," for example, she argued that liberty of opinion and sexual freedom were inseparable, and she wanted to replace the marriage contract by a Social Contract. De Gouges was opposed to slavery and wrote a play which argued for its abolition. Furthermore, she showed a sense of solidarity with the people and proposed a program of public works for the unemployed. In another brochure she demanded the establishment of a women's theater where plays written by women would be performed.

Despite her progressive social policies, de Gouges was quite conservative politically. In 1789, when the heated debate over the question whether the Estates General was to vote by chamber or by head broke out, she made the incredible declaration that it mattered little to the people how this question
was resolved. Moreover, she supported the court until Louis’ flight to Varennes made her a moderate republican, as she called Louis a traitor and demanded his abdication. Despite these harsh words she still favored his absolute veto and opposed all reforms to curb his powers. When the Jacobins rejected a pamphlet of hers dedicated to them, she attacked them bitterly as “scoundrels.” Her conservative outlook may be gathered from her participation in the parade (La Fête de Loi), held in honor of the mayor of Etampes, Simoneau, killed in a jacquerie, who was denounced by Robespierre and the Jacobins as a profiteer. After the overthrow of the monarchy on 10 August 1792, She accepted the results and became a republican; but when Louis was about to be tried by the Convention, she boldly volunteered to defend him. In her long letter to the Convention, she insisted that Louis was a victim of his own weakness and of history, and that instead of being executed he should be exiled. Needless to say, the Convention ignored her petition.

In contrast to de Gouges’s defense of Louis was her sharp criticism of what she termed “the frivolity and idleness” of her sex. Yet she felt certain that, given the same opportunity and education as men had, women would improve. To break his dependence on men, she favored the holding of property by married partners in common and, in case of separation, the equal division of this property among children, not only of the marriage but of those born out of wedlock (“d’une inclination particulière,” as she put it). Illegitimate children would thus have equal rights to property and to the name of the father. Yet she showed no pity for prostitutes and wanted them “swept off” the streets by police. Evidently, “weakness and history” did not apply to them. De Gouges was arrested on 2 July 1793 for having written in favor of a limited monarchy, an opinion that carried the death penalty under the law of 29 March 1793. Brought before the Revolutionary Tribunals, she heard the judges decide the two questions posed before them by the prosecution: First, did her writings pose a danger of establishing a power detrimental to the people? And second, was she the author of these writings? The court ruled against her, and she was scheduled to be executed within twenty-four hours. She claimed that she was pregnant in the hope of staying her death. She was examined but no proof of pregnancy was found, and she was surrendered to the guillotine on 3 November 1793 (13 Brumaire, Year 11). The Feuille de salut public gloated, “It seems the law has punished this conspirator for having forgotten the virtues that suit her sex.” Chaumette, the procureur of the Paris Commune, also condemned her in the following words: “Recall that this virago, this woman-man, the impudent Olympe de Gouges, who was the first to institute women’s assemblies, wanted to politicize [them] and commit other crimes.” Chaumette, like many of his revolutionary colleagues, could not forgive de Gouges for daring to enter the field of politics.
More effective as a feminist than Etta Palm or Olympe de Gouges was Théroigne de Méricourt, born in Belgium in 1762 to a rich laboureur, Pierre Terwagne, and his wife, Elisabeth Lahaye. Her baptismal name was Anne-Josephe Terwagne. She was considered a beauty and probably because of this became the Marquis de Persan’s mistress after arriving in Paris in May 1789. On 19 February 1790 she appeared in the assembly of the district of the Cordeliers and proposed that a structure “more beautiful than St. Peter’s or St. Paul’s” (of London) be built on the site of the demolished Bastille and that it should be dedicated to the rights of man and of the citizen. Then she asked to be admitted to the district’s assembly with the right of consultative voice. The assembly, however, was not ready to grant her this right and simply thanked her as an “excellent citizen.” Furthermore, the gathering resolved “that Mademoiselle Theroigne and all of her sex are free to propose whatever they deem of advantage to the country,” but with regard to the matter of consultative voice, the assembly held that it was incompetent to rule and hence would not deliberate on it; instead, it appointed a committee, which included Danton and Camille Desmoulins, to report on it. Her motion was never discussed again and there is no record of the committee’s report.

After spending some time in Belgium as a prisoner of the Austrians, de Méricourt returned to Paris in January 1792. In March she spoke in the Jacobin Club on the need to form a battalion of “Amazones”—that is, to arm the women—but nothing came of her proposal. In March she tried to organize the women of faubourg Saint-Antoine to meet three times a week for political purposes. The Société des Défenseurs des Droits de l’Homme (Society of the Defenders of the Rights of Man) sent a delegation to the Jacobins on 13 April 1792 to protest and denounce her effort to form the assembly. Furthermore, they accused her of using the names of Robespierre, Collot d’Herbois, and Antoine Joseph Santerre, a well-known militant of faubourg Saint-Antoine, to promote her planned civic banquet (a preliminary step on the road to building a women’s club).

Among other charges was that de Méricourt used the signature of Mme Santerre, which commissioners of the Society of the Defenders recognized as de Méricourt’s. Robespierre followed by declaring that he had no connections of any sort with de Méricourt. Santerre explained that the alleged false signature of his wife was only her name on a list of persons who wanted to participate in the civic fête. As for the disturbance occasioned by the women’s club, it was all due to its members’ attempt to have the little girls of a nearby school (La Pitié) attend their meetings, an effort which the nuns who were in charge of the girls opposed. In other words, it was a conflict between the politically minded feminists who followed de Méricourt and the conservative religious teachers in charge of the school. Santerre then asked de Méricourt to give up her attempt to establish the women’s club, since it was opposed
by the inhabitants of his faubourg. Then he made his famous remark that “the men of this faubourg arriving from work prefer to find their household in order, rather than to see their women returning from assemblies where they do not always acquire a spirit of gentleness.” He felt certain, he said, that she would see the wisdom of complying with his suggestions and would renounce her project. She did, and the Jacobins moved on to the next order of business.

On 27 August, de Méricourt was presented with a civic crown, together with Claire Lacombe and Reine Audu, for their heroic role in the attack on the Tuileries palace on 10 August 1792. The honor was presented by the Fédérés, the armed battalions of the department that helped launch the insurrection against the court. After the September massacres she was accused of having participated in them; but there is no proof that she did so, although she did harangue crowds before this tragic event.

When the struggle between the Montagnards and the Girondins broke out, de Méricourt became an ardent defender of the latter. On 25 May 1793 she was attacked by the Jacobins and seems to have been mauled by a crowd sympathetic to Robespierre and Marat. She was arrested by the revolutionary committee of section La Pelletier on 27 June 1794 (9 Messidor, Year II). Her brother, Joseph Terwagne, wrote to the Committee of General Security that he was convinced his sister was suffering from a mental disturbance. A document signed officially on 20 September 1794 by the health officer in charge recognized the truth of this claim, and she was released, as a result, in her brother’s care on 11 December 1794 (21 Frimaire, Year III). The following year her brother was forced to commit her to an asylum. Shortly thereafter she wrote to Saint-Just asking for a loan of two hundred livres and informing him that she had much to tell him. By then it was obvious that she was no longer sane. On 9 December 1799 she was transferred to the asylum of Salpêtrière, where she remained until her death in 1817. Thus ended the career of a woman who was among the first to see the importance of feminine political clubs and the right of women to engage in armed struggle. A more sympathetic response by the opposite sex might have prevented her tragic end, but the men, too, were victims of history and their own weakness.

In addition to the three feminists described above were two women who founded the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women (Société Républicaines Révolutionnaires), Claire Lacombe and Pauline Léon. Unlike the earlier feminists, these two had gained much political experience in the turmoil of sectional disputes, had participated in the great journées of the past, and had marched side by side with the men in the mass demonstrations of the Revolution. Both women had drawn close to the Enragés.

Lacombe was born on 4 March 1765 in Pamiers, near the Spanish border,
to Bertrand Lacombe, a merchant, and his wife, Jeanne-Marie Gauche. She was described as being five feet, two inches tall, with chestnut-colored hair, brown eyes, an aquiline nose, an "ordinary" mouth and forehead, and a round chin and face. Men considered her a beauty, and many thought she was a fine actress. After appearing in the theaters of Lyon, Marseille, and Toulon, Claire Lacombe left for Paris on 30 March 1792 with a testimonial from the mayor and commune of Toulon on the purity of her morals.

Upon arriving in the capital she plunged immediately into political work and by the summer of 1792 was ready to play a prominent role in overthrowing the monarchy. On 25 July 1792 she delivered an important address to the legislative Assembly, attacking Lafayette and demanding a purge of the army's general staff. It was not enough, she declared, to have pronounced the country in danger. All officers who were responsible for this state of affairs ought to be discharged, including that "perfidious Cataline" (Lafayette). On 19 August 1792 she received a rousing testimonial for her heroic action in the attack on the Tuileries palace on 10 August. The procureur-syndic of the Paris Commune, Pierre-Louis Manuel praised her "courage and gallantry." A year later she was still being praised for her courage, as the president of the session in the Jacobin Club gave her "the republican embrace."

The coleader of the Société Républicaines Révolutionnaires was Pauline Léon, born in Paris on 28 September 1768, daughter of Pierre Paul Léon, manufacturer of chocolate, and his wife, Mathurine Teloliau. When the Revolution broke out, Pauline Léon was helping her mother, a widow with five children, to promote the chocolate business. She remained with her mother until her marriage to Théophile Leclerc, one of the Enragés, on 18 November 1793. Pauline Léon was active in rousing the citizens "against the partisans of tyranny" when news of the Bastille's fall reached her, and she became doubly suspicious of Lafayette after the events of 5–6 October 1789. Two years later she led a group of women against a royalist sympathizer and, after breaking into his house, tossed out the bust of Lafayette into the street.

On 6 March 1791 she petitioned the National Assembly for the right to arm and drill three hundred women who has signed a petition to this effect. It was impossible, she declared, that women had no share in the Rights of Man, impossible that they should permit themselves to be butchered like lambs without the right to defend themselves. She concluded by demanding permission to acquire pikes, pistols, and sabers, and even muskets for those who could service them, and for the right to drill and to be instructed by former members of the military force known as the Gardes-Françaises. After Varennes she denounced the king's flight and was almost killed at the Champ de Mars, where she and her mother had gone to demonstrate against the restoration of Louis to his throne.
She passed the night preceding 10 August 1782 in the hall of her section, armed with a pike (which she finally surrendered to an unarmed sans-culotte after much pleading by the men around her that her strength was not equal to that of the man). Throughout the rest of the year and beginning with the struggle between the Mountain and the Gironde, she attacked the latter and defended Robespierre, Marat, and other Jacobins. During the insurrection against the Girondins of 31 May 1793, she spoke and agitated in the radical faubourgs of Saint-Antoine and Saint-Marceau. At an important gathering of popular societies, she preached the necessity of "the sacred insurrection which delivered the Mountain from its shackles," and with Claire Lacombe she used the newly founded Society of Revolutionary Republican Women against the Girondins. After the successful insurrection, on 15 August 1793 Pauline Léon asked to affiliate her society to the Jacobins and was granted this right immediately. Thus, it appeared that the alliance between this women's organization and the Jacobins was solid; yet in a few short months it was to be broken and all the women's clubs were to be suppressed.

One important difference between the Société Républicaines Révolutionnaires and other clubs was that it was a purely women's society. It demanded that its members be of "good morals" and excluded those who could not meet this standard. Its members were mothers of families, and many were of the middle class and possessed property. Most were literate; they were not the disinherited and the poor, as their critics often charged. By the summer of 1793 nothing was more important for women with families than to feed them. The trouble was, however, that as the war continued and the counterrevolution periodically raised its head, inflation and unemployment grew, and supplies became ever scarcer. The high cost of living (la vie chère), therefore, became the focus of women's agitation. The Jacobins, now, in their turn, responsible for the country's well-being, began to lose patience with critics of the Left, including the revolutionary women. Since everything was subordinated to the war effort, the sans-culottes and their women had to be sacrificed for the goal of victory over the enemies of France. In short, consumers would have to fend for themselves.

This attempt by even the more radical Jacobins to ignore or to discourage the agitation against the high cost of living may be seen in the confrontation that took place on 22 February 1793. A delegation of women from section Quatre Nations arrived to ask the Jacobins for the use of their hall on the morrow in order to discuss the engrossing of supplies. The younger Robespierre objected that such a discussion would alarm the Republic. Cries were then heard that there were merchants and monopolizers in the society, and a great tumult broke out. After order had been restored, the president "explained" why the women could not use the hall. A leading Jacobin, Dubois-Crancé, stated that when he had presided over the Convention he had repudiated...
"with horror" the idea of limiting prices on goods. This statement precipitated the disorder anew. Another member then declared that "if they permitted the citoyennes to meet in this hall, thirty thousand women could excite disorder in Paris." Jeanbon Saint-André insisted that any popular society that discussed such matters ought to be expelled from the hall. Thus, even the Jacobins were frightened by the women's demands that the cost of living be limited. They gave in, finally, only when their struggle with the Girondins necessitated appealing to the sans-culottes for support.

The Constitution of June 1793, destined to remain abortive, granted universal male suffrage but said nothing about women's right to vote. A number of sections had granted them a consultative voice, but that was all. Women had participated actively in the struggle against the Girondins, whose defeat should have made the victors grateful, if not generous, for the help they had received. Instead, the citoyennes, especially the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women, soon came under attack from the deputies in the Convention, their erstwhile allies in the Paris Commune, and the Jacobins. The trouble began over what on the surface appeared to have little to do with politics. The Paris Commune had prescribed the wearing of the national colors, in the form of a rosette (cocarde) for all women. Opponents of the Commune refused to wear it and attacked those who did. On 13 September the Commune ruled that those who refused to display it would be excluded from public buildings and gardens. Those opposed argued that unless the Convention passed such a law they would continue to ignore it. The result was that quarrels and riots broke out between the more zealous citoyennes and their opponents, the fishwives of La Halle market.

Coupled with this agitation was the demand of Léon, Lacombe, and the Enragés that the constitution be put into effect by renewing the Convention; that is, by suspending the Terror and depriving the Committee of Public Safety of its repressive powers. On 7 September, Lacombe addressed the Convention, rejecting the idea that because Corday was a woman, all women were somehow implicated in the assassination of Marat. "Corday, was she a member of our society?" she asked.

When a woman by the name of Gobelin made some wild charges against Leclerc, Lacombe denounced her and demanded that she prove her accusations or be treated as a common slanderer. This was the excuse that some Jacobins needed to launch an attack against Lacombe. Two Jacobins, Chabot and Basire (who were to be implicated in the notorious affair of the Indies Company, in which they were proven guilty of bribery), now took the floor in the Jacobin Club and accused Lacombe of trying to free the ex-mayor of Toulouse because, allegedly, she was romantically involved with his nephew. Among other charges, Chabot declared that Lacombe had called Robespierre "monsieur" rather than using the proper revolutionary appellation of "citoyen."
When Lacombe attempted to reply she was hooted down, and in the fracas that broke out as a result, the president was forced to suspend the session. When it was resumed, the Jacobins adopted two proposals: The society must purge suspects from their leadership, and the suspects should be turned over to the Committee of General Security. Amendments were then adopted to send Lacombe before the Committee of General Security and to arrest Leclerc. Of course, the Jacobins had no legal authority to arrest an individual, but the time for legal niceties had passed. In a few months the club was to be integrated into the system of the Terror.

On the night of 16 September the revolutionary committee of section Halle au Blé (the section in which Lacombe resided) sealed her papers, and on the morning of the following day examined them. The committee reported that nothing of a suspicious nature was found; on the contrary, her correspondence and other papers "breathed the purest patriotism." Lacombe remained free until April 1794, free but isolated. Disturbances over the wearing of the cocarde continued, however. Although the Convention had decreed that the wearing of the rosette was mandatory (21 September) and that those who violated this law were to be imprisoned for one week on a first offense and were to be imprisoned for the duration of the war if they repeated the offense, the opportunity to strike at the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women was too good to pass up. A leading Jacobin, Fabre d'Eglantine, launched an attack on the women's societies as being composed not of mothers but of "a species of adventurers, of knights errant, of emancipated prostitutes, of amazon she-animals" (de grenadiers femelles).

The Convention applauded this antifeminist slander and decreed freedom of apparel. Why had it reversed itself in some five weeks' time? The day previous to its decree (28 October), a scuffle between the fishwives of La Halle and the Society of Revolutionary Republican women had turned into a violent riot. The women of La Halle attacked the society, broke furniture, left a number of the members bleeding or unconscious, and turned their hall into a bedlam. This proved to be the last session of Claire Lacombe's society.

The following day (29 October), Jean-Baptiste-André Amar, a member of the Committee of General Security, tendered to the Convention a report whose aim was to outlaw all women's clubs. The report was on the lowest level of male chauvinism. "What is the proper character of a woman?" he asked, and replied that both custom and nature had assigned women their functions. Nature, he affirmed, had made men to bear hardship, but women were made irrational and tender. Their passion and lack of education could easily mislead them and play into the hands of enemies of France. Their presence in clubs exposed them to error and to seduction. "Let us add that the women are disposed by their makeup to an exaltation which could be
deadly to public affairs and that the interests of state would soon be sacrificed to all that the intensity of passion can produce by deviation [from virtue] and by disorder." He then proposed two articles adopted by the Convention: Article 1 outlawed all women's societies; Article 2 ruled that all popular societies were to be open to the public. This was to prove but the first step in the total suppression of all popular societies in the spring of 1794.

Although women continued to sit in a number of sectional societies until the spring of 1794 and even to play an important role, their elan had been broken. On 17 November 1793 (29 Brumaire, Year II), a number of women appeared in the Commune wearing the bonnet rouge. The men present began shouting "Down with the bonnet rouge of women!" Chaumette then took the floor and pronounced, "Nature has said to woman: Be a woman... The tender care of infancy, the details of the household... the sweet inquietudes of maternity... here are your tasks." This was the accepted belief of men—and, it should be added, of most women as well.

Saint-Just thought that men alone were capable of governing and that nature itself had designated women for a different purpose. Louis Marie Prudhomme, publisher of the popular journal Révolutions de Paris, wrote that "women's clubs were the plague of domestic morals" and insisted that men were "the natural representatives of women," adding that "Nature did not create women to reflect, but rather to love and to be." Even Jean Varlet, the Enragé, believed that each sex was responsible for different duties—those of the men were of a public nature, while the women's were private. With such sentiments being widespread even among revolutionaries, it is no wonder that women were returned to the "Kuche, Kirche, und Kinder." They did make some gains in private life. Inheritance laws were changed to give equal rights to female children. Women now reached their majority at twenty-one; they could be witnesses in civil cases and could contract debts. Furthermore, they acquired a voice in the administration of property, as well as in decisions affecting children. Divorce was now allowed, and both sexes were treated equally; but women still could not serve on juries and were excluded from some tribunals. But none of this lasted for long. Napoleon's Code returned them to the status they knew before the Revolution.

Thus, like other modern revolutions, the French Revolution reflects a number of paradoxes. It seems that the more radical the man, the less progressive he appears on women's rights. Mirabeau spoke of "the irresistible power of [women's] weakness." Robespierre's sentiments were divided, while Saint-Just urged that girls be educated at home in order to preserve their chastity! (It should be recalled that he was the author of the pornographic poem Organt). Prudhomme, as seen above, was opposed to women in public life, while Hébert's sympathies were limited. Most male revolutionaries ignored
the women's struggle—Marat, Desmoulins, and Babeuf. Only the Enrages like Roux and Leclerc defended it, but such defenders may have been more an embarrassment than an advantage. Feminists, thus, appeared to be crackpots. In this respect, as Abray argues, the Revolution proved conservative.

Notes

1. Olwen Hufton, "Women in Revolution, 1789–1796," *Past and Present*, no. 53 (November 1971): 91–92, 93. "It needed only some everyday occurrence, a sickness of the main earner, his death, the drying up of domestic industry, the birth of a third or fourth child, to plunge the family into difficulties from which recovery was almost impossible" (Olwen Hufton, *The Eighteenth Century: Europe in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Alfred Cobban [New York: McGraw Hill, 1969], 300).


5. Ibid., 45, 46, citing the brochure by a Mme. B——B——, *Cahier des doléances et réclamations des femmes*.

6. Ibid., 44.


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15. B.N., 8° Lc² 2284. This journal was edited by Petronille Machefer, who wrote, “Let us prove to the men that we politicize [politiquons] just as well as they. We’ll put them all [men’s clubs] in their place [Nous ferons la barbe à tous les clubs]. We shall observe, we shall denounce everything which may be contrary to the Constitution and especially the rights of women, and we shall teach them that there is more spirit and dispatch in the little finger of a woman than in the whole body of a fat, stupid man [gros lourdaud], like my very dear and very faithful husband le père Duchesne” (cited by Marie Cerati, *Le Club des citoyennes républicaines révolutionnaires* [Paris: Editions Sociales, 1966], 12–13).
20. Article 1 states that “women are born, live, and die with the right to talk. They are equal in pretension in this regard. The distinctions between them cannot be established save upon the more or less lofty perfection of the instrument of speech.” Article 17 asserts, “The art of talking nonsense being to each woman an inherent and an imprescriptible right, no woman may be deprived of it until such a time as it pleases nature to create other creatures differently constituted” (cited by Wahl, *Les Premières années*, 365–66 n. 4):
21. Duhet, *Les Femmes et la Révolution*, 103–7, passim. The education of the young devolved more and more on the clubs, and the number of adolescent organizations of both sexes doubled. In general, it was the women who took over the civic education of the young (ibid., 109).
27. Louise Robert (Mme Roberts-Kéralio) became an active member of the Jacobins and demanded that administrators of poorhouses be elected by primary assemblies like other public officials and that commissioners who were to examine the records of those hôpitaux be composed partly of women, because the latter
were more aware of domestic details than were men (Bourdin, *Les Sociétés populaires*, 143–44).

29. Ibid., 28.
37. Ibid., 54–55.
38. Ibid., 57. Lacour calls this offer “the most sublime act of her life.”
39. Ibid., 57–59. De Gouges contrasted the execution of Charles I with the allegedly more effective (civilized?) way the Romans treated their exiled king, Tarquin the Proud.
40. Ibid., 79–83, passim, and 85–86.
41. Ibid., 88–89.
42. Ibid., 65, 67, 69–71.
44. There seems to be some disagreement as to her birthday and place of birth. Lacour writes that she was born in Marcourt, Belgium (hence Méricourt?) in 1762, while Lacroix (*Actes de la Commune de Paris*, 4:154 n. 1) gives her birthdate as 1759 and says she was born in Liège. See also Cerati, *Le Club des citoyennes*, 17.
45. Lacroix, *Actes de la Commune de Paris*, 4:154, 156.
47. The journal *Les Sabbats Jacobites*, no. 60, reported the session of 14 March when de Méricourt spoke and reproduced the verse she allegedly recited on arming the women (Lacour, *Trois femmes de la Révolution*, 258):

> Il faut pour être utile enfin
> A notre République
> Que chaque femme ait à la main
> Une superbe pique.

Freely translated: “In order to be useful at last / To our Republic / Every woman should have in her hand / A splendid pike.”
49. As Lacour says, this was the "coup de grace" for the attempted feminine initiative to found a women's club (p. 267).


53. A.N., T 1001², a baptismal record in Spanish with an extract in French. This dossier is composed of papers seized in her home.

54. Ibid., 10 March 1794 (20 Ventôse, Year II), revolutionary committee of section Le Pelletier and the Paris Commune.

55. Lacour cited two observers, Baudot and Choudieu, as saying that Lacombe was considered beautiful, and quotes Proussinalle to the effect that she had "acquired a very great reputation in the theaters of the province" (*Trois femmes de la Révolution*, 327–28).


57. A.N., T 1001². See p. 16 for Manuel's words.

58. Ibid., 9 August 1793, in session of delegates from primary assemblies sitting in the Jacobins.

59. A.N., F 7 4774⁹ "Précis de la conduite révolutionnaire d'Anne-Pauline Léon, Femme Leclerc," 4 July 1794 (16 Messidor, Year II), after her arrest.


62. Ibid., 4.

63. A.N., F 7 4774⁹. This is the police dossier on Léon and Leclerc.

64. Ibid.


66. "The Revolutionary Women had become a danger to Robespierists unable to satisfy the demand of Paris for bread." The Jacobins now broke with their former partners and began to suppress their critics, "including those who were in fact more revolutionary than themselves. The Society of Revolutionary Women was among those who paid the piper" (Scott H. Lytle, "The Second Sex [September, 1793]," *The Journal of Modern History* 27, no. 1 [March 1955]: 25).


68. Tuetey, *Répertoire général*, 9, nos. 1306, 1314, 1348, 1352, 1355, 1356, reports of Harivel, Latour-Lamontagne, Béraud, etc.

69. Leclerc's newspaper, *L'Ami du peuple*, carried on this campaign all through the summer of 1793. Lacombe also demanded "the constitution, the whole constitution, and nothing but the constitution," and criticized the decree that declared the Republic in revolution until the peace (A.N., F 7 4756; this reference is to her police dossier).

70. *Moniteur*, 18, no. 18:69, 9 October 1793. "Our sex has produced but one such monster while during four years we have been betrayed, assassinated by the monsters without number whom the masculine sex has produced. Our rights are those of the people and if we are oppressed, we shall resist oppression," she concluded. But the fact that she had to make such an argument and utter such a warning was proof of how far the split between her organization and the authorities had developed.
Feminists and Antifeminists

71. Lacombe wrote a long report of this incident, which took place in the Jacobin Club on 16 September 1793, in A.N., T 1001\(^2\), copy in F\(^7\) 4756.


73. A.N., T 1001\(^2\) and F\(^7\) 4756.


76. Ibid., 299–300, 31 October 1793 (9 Brumaire, Year II). Albert Mathiez wrote with indignation of this episode: “To strike a Parisian society which had been a powerful support to the Enrages, the assembly did not hesitate to destroy all the numerous women’s clubs which had accomplished throughout the country a patriotic and civic task so meritoriously, so worthy of admiration! It paid with ingratitude those who had served with disinterest the cause of the Revolution. It threw them out of the city. It returned them with disdain to their housework, forgetting that it was also sending them back to the priest” ("La Fin des Enrages," *Annales révolutionnaires, Organe des études robespieristes* 15 (1923): 107).


78. *Moniteur*, 18, no. 59:450–51. He went on to warn them of the fates of Mme Roland and of de Gouges, as the men applauded his reactionary remarks.

79. Duheit, *Les Femmes et la Révolution*, 209. Everything was to be done by the state led by men, just like the Church, adds the author.

80. Cited by Lacour, *Trois femmes de la Révolution*, 265, Prudhomme’s emphasis. “Good God! Where would we be if the women did not adopt with confidence the tenets of their father or husband?” he asked.

81. A.N., F\(^7\) 4775\(^4\) in an address to the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women, 31 October 1793.


83. Abray, “Feminism in the French Revolution,” 61–62. When a Mme Roland could find “the title of author” by a woman to be “ridiculous,” it is no wonder that the society led by Lacombe and Léon could not overcome men’s prejudices.
“Terror chills the heart,” wrote Saint-Just in 1793. More than a century later Trotsky echoed him when he declared, “Intimidation is a powerful weapon of policy.” How do revolutionaries reconcile their striving for social justice with guillotining or shooting their enemies? A partial answer lies in their realization that there is no point in making a revolution unless the class that makes it, or those who act in its name, are willing to do everything to retain power. “No one can rule guiltlessly,” declared Saint-Just. Our own century has underscored this dictum. “Oh, Liberty, what crimes are committed in thy name!” exclaimed Mme Roland as she bowed her head before the guillotine.

It is hardly necessary to add that revolutionaries have no monopoly on terror as a weapon. Counterrevolutionaries resort to the same instrument. No social class is willing to surrender its position voluntarily. To maintain its privileges, the aristocracy of France was ready to intimidate its enemies, as was the bourgeoisie. The September massacres of 1792 had their counterparts in the prison killings of revolutionaries in 1795, which were carried out under the slogan of preserving law and order. The Cordelier Club replied to the catchwords “law and order” by hanging a banner in its hall which read: “The preservation of law and order is the preservation of the old law and the old order.” Court historians may speak of “the Glorious Revolution” of 1688 because the English people are absent from this event, but we know that this coup from the top would never have been possible had it not been for the Puritan Revolution of 1642. When Colonel Rainsborough declared during the Putney Debates, “I think that the poorest hee that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest hee,” he was replying to all the apologists of the old law and the old order.

Why did Jacobins and Bolsheviks have to execute those they perceived to be their class enemies? Why could they not simply imprison them until the victorious revolution had been consolidated? One answer lies in the stubborn
belief, held by both sides, that the victory of the opposing party could not be of long duration; a temporary imprisonment is a small price to pay so long as one's party will resume power. Since each side believes this, neither can be intimidated by arrest and incarceration. The certainty of being guillotined or shot, however, whatever the outcome of the civil war, in the long run, gives pause to all but the bravest of revolutionaries or their opponents. "Terror," indeed, "chills the heart."

Each side compounds the terror by bringing in supporters from the outside. French emigres sought the help of Prussians and Austrians; White Guards appealed to the Entente Powers; both were ready to betray their internal enemies to the external foe. Long before modern times, Thucydides described this phenomenon:

[T]he whole of the Hellenic world was convulsed with rival parties in every state—democratic leaders trying to bring in the Athenians, and oligarchs trying to bring in the Spartans. . . . So revolutions broke out in city after city, and places where revolutions occurred late the knowledge of what had happened previously in other places caused still new extravagances of revolutionary zeal, expressed by an elaboration in the methods of seizing power and by unheard-of atrocities in revenge. To fit in with the change of events, words, too, had to change their usual meanings. . . . [A]ny idea of moderation was just an attempt to disguise one’s unmanly character. . . . Fanatical enthusiasm was the mark of a real man, and to plot against an enemy behind his back was perfectly legitimate self-defense. Anyone who held violent opinions could always be trusted, and anyone who objected to them became a suspect.²

When the Montagnards adopted the policy of placing terror on the order of the day, the French Revolution was threatened with annihilation. France had been invaded from all sides: In the north were the British and the Austrians; the Prussians were in Alsace; Spain and Piedmont threatened Lyons and Roussillon in the south. The reactionary monarchs of old Europe were threatening to exterminate everyone who had taken an active part in the Revolution. The emigres were hurling thunderbolts of their own, rejecting every proposal for compromise. There was no reason to doubt their commitment to the counterrevolution. No serious historian doubts that France, and especially Paris, faced a bloodbath. If in addition to the above we add the savage civil war raging in the Vendée, and if we observe that neither side took prisoners and that victims on both sides numbered in the thousands, we get a glimpse of the kind of settlement that would have prevailed in France had the Foreign Coalition and emigre allies been victorious.

By the summer of 1793 most of the departments were breaking away from the central government in the so-called Federalist revolt. Paris was left with about one-fifth of French territory under its control. Those priests
who had never accepted the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, which had
wiped out their privileges and had returned the Church’s lands to the nation,
were now calling in the counterrevolutionaries under the guise of saving the
Catholic religion. Meanwhile there was hunger and starvation in French streets
and homes. If force had not been used in the countryside, the Revolution
would have starved to death. Without drastic action aimed at the counter-
revolution, the French would have succumbed to their old ruling classes.
What could the revolutionaries do in light of the above? In order to beat back
the Foreign Coalition, the Jacobins were forced to adopt harsh measures and
actions for public safety. Terror was proclaimed to be the order of the day.

How many French became victims of this policy? It has been estimated
that about 300,000 suspects were imprisoned during the course of the Rev-
olution. About 17,000 death sentences were issued against them. If those
who died in prison or on the battlefield are added to this number, there
must have been a total of 35,000 to 40,000 dead. The surprising thing is
that by far the largest number of these were members of the former Third
Estate, that is bourgeois, artisans, and peasants who totalled 85 percent of
the victims. Members of the old nobility numbered 8.5 percent and of the
clergy, 6.5 percent.3 Georges Lefebvre explains this by writing that “in such
a struggle turncoats are treated more harshly than original enemies.” And
Soboul agrees, writing that “the revolutionaries detested them [members of
the Third Estate who had fled the invasion or the Terror], as much as the
aristocrats, perhaps even more.” From March 1793 until 10 June 1794, 1,251
persons were executed in Paris; but between 7 July 1794 and 26 July that is,
less than three weeks, 1,376 people were put to death during this period of
“The Great Terror.”4

The law under which so many were sentenced to death was that of 10
June 1794 (22 Prairial, Year II). It was so vague and unclear in describing
“enemies of the people” that abuses were certain to arise. It struck, for
example, at those who “sought to depreciate the National Convention,”
impede supplies to Paris, cause scarcity, promote discouragement, spread false
news, mislead opinion, deprave morals, or corrupt the public conscience.
The penalty for all this was death. Since every kind of evidence was acceptable,
“either material or moral or verbal or written,” which could “naturally secure
the approval of every just and reasonable mind,” the possibility for injustice
was immeasurable. Judgment was governed by “the conscience of the jurors
enlightened by the love of the fatherland.” Our own century is all too
familiar “with the conscience of jurors.” In times of revolution it is too
often sacrificed for “raisons d’état.” When these reasons of state embrace
such sacred concepts as “the fatherland,” “the Republic one and indivisible,”
or “the Republic of Virtue,” it is not difficult to believe that balanced and
critical judgments by juries must have been rare indeed.
It is interesting to compare this policy aimed at enemies of revolutionary France with policies aimed at opponents of the American Revolution. It has been estimated that about 125,000 émigrés were expelled from France, whose population then numbered about twenty-five million people. The proportion of those expelled, therefore, was about 1 to 200. If we examine the figures for our own Revolution, we find that approximately 100,000 Tories, or those deemed to be such, were forced to leave their homes. The population of the United States numbered then about two-and-a-half million. This makes the proportion of those expelled about 1 to 25—a much higher ratio than that of France.

If, in addition to this, we bear in mind that many of the émigrés returned to France, while not one Tory was able to come back to the United States, we get a clearer picture of our own “terror.” It is true, of course, that the kind of systematic violence that was practiced against the opposition in France did not occur in our own country, for reasons that are partly historical and partly accidental. Nevertheless, the confiscation of millions of dollars worth of property was an irreparable loss to the American émigrés. From this point of view, our own brand of “terror” was more drastic and thorough than that of the French Revolution. And what would have happened to the internal politics of the United States had the 100,000 American émigrés returned in 1786, as the French had in 1795, or in 1800, as the French did in 1815 after Waterloo? It is not probable that their prestige, their political experience, their wealth, and their family connections would have created turmoil, an irreconcilability of means and ends, a spirit of vengeance and intolerance for the new state of things that, luckily for the people of the United States, they were able to avoid? In short, if our “terror” was milder than that of the French, the lasting result of our policy of expulsion was more thorough and less compromising.

It used to be fashionable to hold Robespierre alone responsible for the Terror. We know, of course, that despite his great prestige it was the whole Committee of Public Safety and ultimately the Convention that was accountable. But in addition, after Robespierre’s fall on 9 Thermidor (27 July 1794), an equally great terror followed against the former revolutionaries. The so-called White Terror, which was introduced by the Thermidorian reactionaries, was just as violent, just as unreasonable as the worst of the so-called Red Terror. If anything, it was even bloodier and far less justifiable than its predecessor. France was in a more secure position, militarily. The Vendée had long been pacified. With the demise of the Enragés and the Hébertistes, there was no organized opposition from the Left. What, then, justified the mass killings and executions in the fall of 1795? For the most part it was nothing but personal vengeance. Louis Blanc in his History states that the White Terror "surpassed in horror even the September massacres, even Collot
Albert Mathiez pointed out that this terror “lasted for more than a year, quite as long, that is, as the Red Terror.” And he made this judgment of it: “The White Terror belonged rather to the category of private wars, such as were familiar in the Middle Ages, than to that of civil war. It was butchery inspired by no ideal.”

If the French Terror can be explained partially by the unceasing attempts of counterrevolutionaries to restore the Old Regime, much the same can be said of the Bolshevik Red Terror. After the collapse of the peace efforts at Brest-Litovsk, Soviet Russia was invaded simultaneously or in turn by Germans, Austrians, Czechs, Poles, Ukrainians, Romanians, French, British, Americans, Japanese, Finns, Estonians, and Lithuanians. In addition, the White armies of Kolchak, Yudenich, Denikin, and Wrangel were supported financially and militarily by the European powers. Add to this the assassination of such Bolshevik leaders like Volodarsky and Uritsky, the wounding of Lenin, and the attempt of the Left Social Revolutionaries to involve the Soviets in a war with Germany by assassinating the German ambassador, Count Mirbach. Furthermore, the irregular bands fighting under various banners—like those of Nestor Makhno—and the attempts of anarchists and their supporters to stage uprisings against the Soviet authorities added to the chaos. Finally, the country was being strangled by the Allied blockade and decimated by famine and typhus. Throughout this period there were daily acts of terror: plots, uprisings, destruction of railroads and bridges. It became obvious to the Bolshevik leaders that in order to save the Revolution they would have to resort to the same policy that the Jacobins had adopted under similar circumstances.

It is interesting to note that when the Second Congress of the Soviets abolished capital punishment, Lenin condemned the measure by asking, “How can you accomplish a revolution without shooting?” Shortly thereafter Trotsky warned opponents of the dictatorship that “in not more than a month’s time terror will assume very violent forms, after the example of the great French Revolution. The guillotine and not merely the jail will be ready for our enemies.”

On 19 December 1917 Lenin wrote to Feliks Dzerzhinski, the future head of the Cheka, that the propertied classes were resorting to criminal measures, plying the declassed elements with liquor, and bribing others in an effort to destroy the Revolution and the Soviet state. At the same time high government officials of the former tsarist regime, bank clerks, and others were sabotaging the new government and threatening to aggravate the famine. He suggested, therefore, that special measures be adopted to defend the Bolshevik regime. The following day was formed “the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Struggle with Counterrevolution and Sabotage,” known as
the Cheka. Among its duties were to examine the press, seize saboteurs and strikers, and watch Social Revolutionaries, right-wing parties, and individuals who supported them. Penalties included confiscations, confinement, deprivation of food cards, publication of the names of so-called enemies of the people, and other such measures.

One of Cheka's founders, Martyn Ivanovich Latsis, wrote that the Soviet government had no means to reeducate the people "who were still imbued with the old spirit. . . . Hence the necessity of an apparatus for compulsion and purification." As for how to determine whether a person was harmful to the Soviet government, Latsis gave the following advice: "Do not ask for incriminating evidence to prove that the prisoner opposed the Soviet either by arms or by word. Your first duty is to ask him what class he belongs to, what were his origin, education, and occupation. These questions should decide the fate of the prisoner. This is the meaning and essence Red Terror." The French revolutionaries who drafted and adopted the Law of 22 Prairial, Year II, would have understood Latsis's advice 125 years later. In condemning individuals because of their class origins, the Jacobins persecuted too many "aristocrats," while the Bolsheviks convicted too many "bourgeois."

When the Germans began their advance, after the collapse of the Brest-Litovsk negotiations, the Soviet government on 22 February 1918 proclaimed "the socialist fatherland in danger." Just as the foreign invasion had forced the Legislative Assembly to proclaim "la patrie in danger" in July 1792 and to adopt measures of self-defense, so the Soviets adopted a policy of terror against their enemies. The Cheka ordered all local soviets to shoot enemy agents on the spot. Maxim Gorky's paper, Novaia Zhizn (New Life), reported in April 1918: "Executions continue. Not a day, not a night passes without several persons being executed."

The following month the Right Social Revolutionaries (SRs), meeting in Moscow, adopted a resolution "to overthrow the Bolshevik dictatorship and to establish a government based on universal suffrage and willing to accept Allied assistance in the war against Germany." The Mensheviks, meanwhile, were torn by dissensions between those who favored a pro-German stance and those who supported a pro-Allied orientation. Their resolution, adopted in June 1918, however, was uncompromisingly hostile to the Bolshevik regime. Shortly thereafter the Executive Committee of the Soviets decreed the exclusion of Right SRs and of Mensheviks from it ranks for associating with counterrevolutionaries. On 6 July 1918 two Left SRs assassinated the German ambassador, as mentioned above, and followed this act with uprisings in Moscow, Yaroslavl, and other towns. Later Boris Savinkov, the assistant minister of war under Kerensky, and an active anti-Bolshevik SR, admitted that he had planned the uprisings with the financial support of the French military attaché in Moscow.
The suppression of these uprisings in July 1918 led to executions by the Cheka. In Yaroslavl, for example, some 350 individuals were shot, followed shortly thereafter by the killing of the tsar and his family. In August Lenin ordered the Cheka “to put into effect an unsparing mass terror against kulaks, priests, and white guards, and to confine suspects in a camp outside the city” of Penza, where another uprising had occurred. He also recommended the taking of hostages, who would “answer with their life,” as a way to guarantee the prompt delivery of grain to the starving towns.15

After the attack on Lenin by the Left SRs the Executive Committee of the Soviets replied with a resolution on 2 September 1918 for a “mass terror against the bourgeoisie and its agents.” Like the French Terror after 2 September 1792 following the threat of the duke of Brunswick to execute all revolutionaries, the Red Terror became a deliberate instrument of state policy in the Soviet Union. In September 1918, 512 “counterrevolutionaries and White Guards” were executed in Petrograd. In Moscow former tsarist ministers and other high officials were shot. In Kazan only seven or eight persons were shot because all of the bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, and priests had fled the city. The terror had become all-inclusive, aimed not only at individuals but at the whole propertied class.16

The Bolsheviks had become sole rulers now. “Yet a strong reluctance remained to use that power without restraint,” wrote Carr. They still tolerated other political parties. The Kadet newspaper, Svoboda Rossii, for example, was still being published in Moscow during the summer of 1918, despite the fact that the party had been outlawed in 1917. The Menshevik paper, Novyi Luch, had been suppressed in February for its campaign against the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, yet it was allowed to appear under its new name of Vpered. Anarchist journals also continued to be published. The Sixth Congress of the Soviets, held on the first anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, ordered an amnesty and the release of all detained unless the prisoners had specific charges against them. On 30 June the Executive Committee of the Soviets annulled the resolution of the previous June that had excluded the Mensheviks from the soviets. It was a sincere attempt to check the growing power of the Cheka, wrote Carr.17

As could be expected, the power of the Cheka clashed with that embodied in the system legally established in the Commissariat of Justice. The latter was bent on applying legal procedure in the courts, including the revolutionary tribunals. The minutes of the Commissariat of Justice for July 1918 reflect this conflict. One of its members accused the Cheka of having its own administration of justice side by side with that of the revolutionary tribunals. He confessed, “One has to acknowledge that they [the Cheka] tend to control all institutions of justice,” and demanded that its powers be curbed. Another admitted that in the provinces the Commission did what it
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pleased, and he quoted its head in the city of Orel: “I am responsible to no one; my powers are such that I can shoot anybody.” A third member revealed that while the Cheka filled the jails and kept people there indefinitely, the Commissariat of Justice could point to its decree limiting detention to forty-eight hours. When victims came to the Commissariat, however, its officials confessed, “we are helpless to interfere . . . we do not know what to say.” Only one member admitted that justice had to be subordinated to police action. Finally, after a long debate, it was resolved that the Cheka should be placed under the control of the Executive Committee of the Soviets.18

By mid-1921 the Cheka numbered over a quarter of a million men. These were divided into a civilian staff of 30,000, frontier troops of 94,000, and 137,000 agents responsible for internal security. By 1922 it held 60,000 inmates in 132 labor camps. As for the number of persons executed by the Cheka, it is estimated that about 140,000 people became its victims, with about the same number killed in suppressing various insurrections. This contrasts with the 14,000 executed under the tsar from 1866 to 1917.19

What can we conclude from all the above? It is obvious that in order to put an end to the Old Regime, whether in France of the eighteenth century or in Russia of the twentieth century, organs of repression had to be created to fight the counterrevolution. Conservative historians condemn the Red Terror in both revolutions, largely ignoring the equally violent White Terror.

The events of 1989 in Eastern and Central Europe have demonstrated that it is possible for a “velvet revolution,” that is, a relatively nonviolent revolution, to bring down an Old Regime without terror—providing the Old Regime’s officialdom is willing to accept, no matter how reluctantly, the new order of things. Had the old ruling classes been willing to tolerate the results of the uprisings of July 1789 or of March 1917, it is questionable if a terror policy would have been adopted by either government. This is not to say that all would have been sweetness and light. Intra-class struggles could have sharpened the conflict, just as well as the more traditional class struggles did. Individual acts of vengeance or of violence could certainly not be ruled out, but the kind of systematic terror pursued by the Great Committees, the revolutionary tribunals, and the revolutionary committees in 1793–1794 would not have been necessary. It is instructive to recall what the duke of Dorset, England’s ambassador to France, wrote immediately after the fall of the Bastille:

The regularity and determined conduct of the populace upon the present occasion exceeds all belief and execration of the Nobility is universal amongst the lower order of people. . . . Thus, . . . the greatest Revolution that we know anything of has been effected with, comparatively speaking, if the magnitude of the event is considered, the loss of very few lives; from this
moment we may consider France as a free Country, the King a very limited Monarch, and the Nobility as reduced to a level with the rest of the Nation.20

It was the harshness and menace of the foreign war, the terrible shortages and high price of the necessities of life, and the internal counterrevolution that forced the Convention to declare terror as "the order of the day."

The same can be said of the Russian Revolution in 1917–1920. Had the socialist adversaries of the Soviet regime been willing to become a "loyal opposition" instead of calling on the Entente Powers and fomenting a civil war, the Bolsheviks might never have been forced to establish a Cheka. Most observers agree that the Bolshevik uprising on 7 November in Petrograd and in the provinces, on the whole, was a relatively peaceful event. Trotsky wrote that had the enemy accepted the outcome there would have been no terror; but encouraged by the Entente Powers a vicious civil war began. Had the November revolution taken place "a few months, or even a few weeks" after the proletariat established its rule in Germany, France, and England, he continued, the Russian Revolution would have been the most peaceful in the world.21 History, however, ruled otherwise.

These beliefs may well be too optimistic. The French aristocracy did not want to be reduced "to the level with the rest of the Nation," that is, to commit suicide as an independent Estate. Nor could the Russian bourgeoisie acquiesce in surrendering its property to a collectivist regime. This, obviously, was not a matter of volition. Both privileged classes, or orders (in the case of the French nobility), had to defend their position in society. Created by history itself, they could not unmake themselves to please a new, usurping class. But neither could the spokesman of the new class surrender what they considered was their historic task—hence, the Terror. Therein lies the tragedy of the two epochs.

Notes

1. The Clarke Papers, Secretary to the Council of the Army, 1647–1649, ed. C. H. Firth (Camden Society, 1891), 1:301.
3. Donald Greer, The Incidence of the Terror in the French Revolution: A Statistical Interpretation (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935). Greer shows how circumstances and geography often governed the Terror. Some departments recorded no executions at all, while those that suffered foreign troops on their soil had by far the largest number of victims.

5. Gordon S. Wood, in his recently published *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1992), contrasts prerevolutionary America, with its hierarchy and the deference of the great mass of people for their “betters,” with postrevolutionary America, after the great psychological change that occurred after 1783 when all (white) men began to feel they were as good as those socially and economically above them.


10. Bunyan and Fisher, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, 297–98. A leading official of the Cheka, Martyn Ivanovich Latsis, claimed that during the first half-year of its existence the Cheka shot only 22 persons. In contrast to this, S. P. Melgunov, who investigated the period under dispute, wrote that he had found that at least 884 persons had been shot by the Cheka (ibid., 574, n. 27).


17. Ibid., 1:177–78, 179. The Sixth Congress took steps toward conciliation with non-Bolshevik socialist parties. Lenin asked only “neutrality and good neighbor relations,” adding that it was important “to make use of those hesitating elements which the bestialities of imperialism are driving toward us” (ibid., 1:180).


That the French Revolution, like Cronus, devoured its own children has long been recognized by students of this event. In our own day the gulag archipelagoes give further proof that the gods remain hungry. Posterity is acquainted with the chief victims of the Revolutionary Tribunal—Brisot, Danton, Hébert, Robespierre. Less well known is the fate of local militants, the political activists in the forty-eight sections of Paris. It was their agitation, coupled with growing shortages, high prices, and military defeats, that made terror "the order of the day." Ironically, these zealous revolutionaries were to be among the earliest victims of the Terror. This chapter discusses the fate of the revolutionary committee and of four representative victims of section Droits de l'Homme—a conservative judge, a militant Jacobin and member of the committee, an Enragé, and a humble employee of a charitable institution—in an attempt to see the Terror from below. All were residents of Droits de l'Homme, a neighborhood in the Marais quarter, which is the setting for the drama that follows.¹

In the weeks preceding the fall of the monarchy the section vacillated between republicanism and a moderate royalism.² Its ideology varied from the social radicalism of Jean Varlet, the young Enragé, to the monarchism of an anonymous pamphleteer defending what he termed a policy of moderation.³ Throughout the evening of 9 August the struggle within the sectional assembly continued. The conservative president of the section, Louis Fayel, adjourned the session and carried off the official register of the proceedings to his home. The republicans then installed their own president, Paulet, a constitutional priest. Not until 3 A.M. did the assembly, which must have been a mere rump, send three commissioners to the Hôtel de Ville to participate in the insurrection.⁴ After the dethronement of Louis, political sentiment shifted
markedly to the left. Shortages, high prices, military defeats, and betrayals or rumors of betrayal radicalized the section. By 20 May 1793, partisans of the Gironde were removed from positions of authority and supporters of the Mountain took their place.5

Two months prior to this political transformation, the Convention had decreed the establishment of revolutionary committees, destined to act as organs of the Terror. These were composed of twelve members and six assistants to be elected by simple plurality of voters.6 At first aimed at the surveillance of foreign residents, the law was greatly extended on 17 September 1793. Revolutionary committees were now authorized to issue warrants of arrest and to seal papers of a broad category of people loosely defined as “suspected persons.”7 After the destruction of the Hébertistes, the Committee of Public Safety began to appoint their members, in spite of protests by the general assemblies. The Thermidorians maintained the essential features of a centralized government and, at the same time, domesticated the local authorities by reducing the number of committees to one-fourth of their former total, thus grouping four sections into one arrondissement. The committees’ political and police powers were now limited,8 and their social composition was changed by replacing former sans-culottes with men of property or from the liberal professions.

Although it is difficult to give an exact analysis of the class nature of the revolutionary committee of section Droits de l’Homme, because not all members listed their occupation, a general picture does emerge. After the fall of the monarchy, the largest group was composed of nine artisans and shopkeepers. These were a wigmaker, three jewellers, a caterer, a mason-entrepreneur, an upholsterer, a shoemaker, and a clockmaker. Six of these were artisans, while three were master-workers or craftsmen who were also engaged in commerce.9 Five were members of the liberal professions: a schoolmaster, a surgeon-dentist, two painters, and a surveyor.10 Two were government employees.11 The occupation of two others is unknown.12 After the section was reorganized by partisans of the Mountain on 19–20 May 1793, eight of the eighteen members remained on the committee throughout the period of the Terror, until Thermidor. When the section became part of the seventh arrondissement, it sent three members to the new committee: a chandler, a wine merchant, and a hatter.13 The committee as a whole reflected the trend to replace artisans and petty shopkeepers (the sans-culottes) with merchants, master-workers, or rentiers.14 The change in social composition echoed the political transformation after the fall of Robespierre.

The revolutionary committee of section Droits de l’Homme began meeting on 28 March 1793. It kept daily minutes of its proceedings until 5 November 1795 (15 Brumaire, Year IV), an unbroken record of two years and seven months.15 It is this register, more than any other single source, that presents
a picture of the Terror in the section. The duties of the committee, although varied, tended to be repetitive. Neither changes in personnel nor in political climate seemed to affect their pursuits. They were limited, largely, to investigation of those individuals who had come under suspicion because of their political activities, their lack of zeal for the Revolution, their attitude toward the authorities, their signatures on former petitions, or, simply, by accident of class or profession. The committee spent much time in enforcing decrees requiring identification, proof of residency, or cards of civic conduct. Many citizens apprehended by armed patrols were found to be negligent, forgetful, or careless about their numerous personal documents. Time and again the committee issued warnings to ordinary citizens who failed to carry proof of their identity; on occasion it arrested them.16

A pressing concern of the committee was the supply and orderly distribution of provisions. Riots and violence, often the result of long queues, broke out periodically in the section. The committee sought, therefore, to control crowds. Occasionally an individual appeared before it and, having been properly admonished, was not heard of again. At other times an individual might reappeared at several sessions until discharged from further investigation. After the adoption of the maximum, incidents arising from its enforcement or circumvention appear regularly in the minutes. Confiscation and sale of contraband goods, mostly food, were also recorded. Records of persons displaying symbols of royalty or, more correctly, failing to remove them, appeared occasionally. At times the commandeering of horses and wagons for the army became a duty of the committee.17

Every two weeks the election of its officers was duly recorded in the procès-verbal, together with salaries paid and the expenses of the office. Often two commissioners of the committee were sent to seek information, make arrests, or affix seals on papers and effects of suspects. They recorded the interrogation in a procès-verbal of their own, which was then incorporated into the minutes of the committee. At times the script of its secretary became less than elegant, if not illegible; nor are the orthography, the punctuation, or the diacritical marks always reliable. As the composition of the committee changed after 9 Thermidor so did the script of its secretary, becoming more legible in contrast to the untrained hand of his predecessor.

In addition to the revolutionary committee, the Terror utilized the services of the section's police commissioner. Elected by simple plurality for a term of two years with the right to succeed himself, his duties included the interrogation of the accused, the affixing and removal of seals, and the delivery of passports.18 From 8 October 1792 to 17 October 1795 (25 Vendémiaire, Year IV), this position was held by Pierre Auzolles. He was a former teacher, had been an elector, was president of the section for a time, and belonged to its popular society.19 In addition to the customary police functions, he
enforced the economic terror in the section, that is, the laws of the maximum.20

Denunciations, interrogations, and arrests of those suspected of violating the maximum from the time of its promulgation, 29 September 1793, to its abrogation on 24 December 1795 (4 Nivôse, Year III), hardly changed. Often these accusations against individual merchants or peddlers were false or exaggerated. Many must have resulted from individual malevolence or personal pique. Confiscation of goods seized in contravention of the law invariably yielded modest sums, and the individuals involved were often small retailers, hawkers, or widows trying desperately to feed large families. Their customers, however, were often in the same dire circumstances or even worse. Moreover, standing in line for hours only to find the shelves empty or having been forced to pay an extra sou beyond the price ceiling produced short tempers on both sides.

A typical example is the following: A widow Marigny, seventy-five years old, was accused of demanding twelve sous for potatoes that should have gone for ten. She admitted that she had asked the higher price in an effort to move a larger quantity but denied that she had refused to sell at the smaller rate. Auzolles confiscated one-half bushel of white potatoes found in her greenhouse and deposited the proceeds of its sale in the treasury of the Commune.21 She was denounced again the following month for not selling her eggs on the open market. Her excuse was that the pressure of the crowd would have broken them. Moreover, she had bought the sixty-four eggs in question above the maximum and tried to sell them for three sous per egg instead of two sous as the law allowed. Her eggs were confiscated and the sum of five livres four sous was deposited in the treasury.22 This not atypical example illustrates the pathetic nature of the “profiteers” in the section. Needless to say, the real profiteers, the large wholesale merchants, engrossers, and speculators do not appear in the pages of the police commissioner’s reports.

These grim proceedings are relieved occasionally by amusing incidents which show that, Terror or no Terror, life went on. In one such instance, Auzolles was called to the Theater of the Marais to reestablish order. The altercation involved two young men who had paid their money for seats up front, not to see the play, as they confessed, but to view an actress in the performance. Having bought their tickets, they were conducted to their seats, which turned out to be toward the rear of the theater. In rage and disgust they threw their tickets to the floor and demanded the return of their money. The young men were conducted to the revolutionary committee, where Auzolles tried to reason with them, after the manager had given his version of the fracas. Although neither possessed his citizenship card, each was returned to his home in custody of his parents, chastened, if not purified.23

That there were irrational elements in the Terror is unquestionable. It is
possible to argue that terror was a necessary weapon in the struggle against counterrevolutionaries. How can it be defended, however, when it struck against individuals who had long since been deprived of power and influence and who represented no conceivable threat to the Revolution? Even the September massacres can be explained, if not excused, by the terribly tense atmosphere that prevailed in Paris following the fall of the king. It is more difficult to justify the mass arrests of whole classes and categories of former officials and activists whose devotion to the Revolution was beyond question.

Antoine-Ignace-François Descombes is a classic example. Few in section Droits de l’Homme had a more distinguished career. Born in Besançon, he earned a degree as a master of languages at age nineteen. From the beginning of the Revolution he was a partisan of the Jacobins; he became an elector in 1792, served as a representative to the General Council, and was elected secretary and president of his section, as well as to its revolutionary and civil committees. The Girondin Commission of Twelve denounced him by name in the spring of 1793. Like his fellow militant, Jean Varlet, he attacked Lafayette and was arrested for demonstrating against the king on 20 June 1792. It was he more than any other individual who imposed more radical policies on the section by organizing a number of invasions of moderate sections by his supporters. These so-called fraternizations expelled the moderates from positions of authority on the eve of the insurrection against the Girondins. He was elected one of four commissioners to the Évêché, the archbishop’s palace, to launch the uprising of 31 May–2 June 1793. Above all, it was his prodigious and devoted work on the Commission of Subsistences that earned for him the numerous commendations from his own revolutionary committee and the Administration of Provisions of the capital. His political reputation was impeccable—purer than that of the most incorruptible of men.

Yet Descombes was arrested in December 1793 on a trumped-up charge of peculation and for manifesting what was called a “false and dangerous patriotism.” A cursory glance at his thick dossier reveals how absurd was the first accusation. More serious was the second indictment—but favorable to Descombes’s sense of humanity. What did this “false and dangerous patriotism” consist of? Descombes had been moved by the pitiful plight of the former justice of the peace of the section, Louis-Gille-Camille Fayel, and had given him a favorable letter of introduction to the authorities of Arcueil, a town in the Seine department south of Paris, to which Fayel had moved his family after being released from prison.

Who was Louis Fayel? He was born in Drieux, in the department of Eure et Loire, sometime in 1748, and had been an avocat and procureur to Parlement before the Revolution. After the formation of the National Guard, he became captain of the Fourth Company of the battalion of district Petit-Saint-Antoine. In 1790 he was elected justice of the peace and served as one of seventeen
The Terror in Miniature

electors the following year. After the demonstration against the king on 20 June 1792, he presided over a court of five judges which tried a number of demonstrators. Assuming a correct legal position in holding that both the mayor, Jérôme Pétion, and the municipal officials had acted under duress, he opposed summoning them before the court. His correct behavior did not erase the stigma of directing a tribunal which was defending law and order. The preservation of law and order, as the Cordeliers noted, was the preservation of the old law and the old order. Furthermore, as president of the general assembly he had carried off the register book on the eve of the attack on the Tuileries. He was accused of making contemptuous remarks against patriots, calling them canaille. All this led to his arrest and imprisonment.

Upon his release he decided to leave Paris for Arcueil because he had no means of livelihood. He was rearrested in December 1793 by the revolutionary committee of section Droits de l'Homme, and the procès-verbal was transmitted to the public accuser. On 19 December 1793 (20 Frimaire, Year III) Fayel was condemned to death and his property was confiscated.

It was Descombes's letter on Fayel's behalf that had brought the charge of a "false and dangerous patriotism." Descombes testified that although he had given the ex-judge the letter in question, he had also written to the municipal authorities of Arcueil informing them of Fayel's past conduct and reputation and warning them to keep him under surveillance. He admitted, however, that he had congratulated Fayel for having escaped the September massacres, defending his position by arguing that this showed he harbored no personal hatred for the man. As for the massacres, he thought they had been unfortunate "because humanity . . . was trodden under foot," as he phrased it, and they had given an extra weapon to enemies of the Revolution.

Nor was Descombes alone in feeling pity for Fayel and his family. Shortly after her husband's first arrest, Mme Fayel petitioned the general assembly to allow her and the children to visit him in prison. According to the procès-verbal, those present were "touched by her state and that of her children." The assembly elected commissioners to request the authorities to allow Mme Fayel this visit.

The arrest of Descombes aroused indignation and efforts to free him. He was heatedly defended in the general assembly and in petitions from his native town of Besançon. The Administration of Provisions recalled "the important services rendered to public affairs by Descombes." The sectional assembly paid homage to his patriotism, holding that his arrest had expiated "a weakness of which men are not exempt." The popular society of the section resolved that the revolutionary committee should urge the Committee of General Security to release him.

While his friends were mobilizing, Descombes was being interrogated by Claude-Emmanuel Dobsent, president of the Revolutionary Tribunal. The
questions put by Dobsent were ominous, as they implied that the prisoner
had plotted against the security of the Republic. This took a more serious
turn when Etienne Lasne, commander of the section's battalion, reported to
the revolutionary committee Descombes's observation that he did not expect
to be released by the same committee that had incarcerated him in the first
place, and that if there were five or six good patriots like himself in prison
he would be out in a few days. This alleged remark was turned over to
the public accuser, Fouquier-Tinville. That was all the latter needed to link
Descombes to the supposed Hébertistes' plot to create shortages.

The final blow came when the section's revolutionary committee sent
four commissioners to the Committee of General Security to express its
regrets for having requested the release of Descombes. Now that he was
accused of plotting against the very security of the state, it seemed to them
that he was "greatly guilty." Two days before his conviction, Descombes
wrote a letter to his wife expressing the feeling that he would be freed
shortly. On 24 March (4 Germinal) he was guillotined.

Another example of the intolerant and irrational nature of the Terror
involved the son of the section's police administrator, Jean-Charles-Hubert
Le Roy, fils. He was employed in the Mont de Piété when he was arrested
at age twenty-six. Accusing the authorities of shedding blood, he declared
boldly that he would give five hundred francs a month "to see the end of
the revolutionary government." A fellow employee reported that he had
remarked "that we were not free, that we were more enslaved than ever."
When his colleagues objected, he had called them "des Jean Foutres."

The head of his office testified on the "irregular conduct" of the young
man, charging him with carelessness in his work and harsh manners toward
the public. The paymaster wanted him dismissed after he had been transferred
from one office to another, fearing that all employees would be compromised
if he continued in his position. Le Roy, he declared, suffered from a "restlessness
of spirits," and had shown signs of derangement. Another employee added
that his parents thought he was a hothead. His younger brother admitted
that Le Roy had "moments of restlessness." Another fellow worker thought
him "cracked."

When Le Roy appeared before the revolutionary committee, he gave quite
a contrary version of the reports against him. Admitting that he had been
suspended by his department, he claimed that the circumstances were quite
different from what had been described. According to him, two citizens had
complained of bad treatment received at the hands of a fellow employee.
He had gone to the latter in a friendly spirit to try to resolve the complaints.
His coworker had grabbed him by the wrists to bring him to his knees. He
had protested that "a republican does not kneel down." This shrewd remark,
although it did not change Le Roy's ultimate fate, does not exactly reflect a
troubled spirit, at least not at the moment when it was made. Furthermore, he denied having made counterrevolutionary proposals, although he admitted that after the execution of an employee named Rogé he had discussed the meaning of the word “liberty” with two colleagues. Le Roy asserted that liberty had been more effective before the establishment of the revolutionary government. When he realized that neither of the two men understood him, he had simply walked away. This testimony, too, does not reflect a deranged mind. Nevertheless, the committee found him strongly suspect of counterrevolutionary suggestions and sent him to Luxembourg prison. The Committee of General Security freed him two months later.40

Upon his liberation Le Roy appealed to the Committee of General Security to help him recover his former job with the Mont de Piété, since he did not want to be a burden on his poor parents. This request remained unanswered. On 15 July 1795 (27 Messidor, Year III) he was picked up by a patrol of section Montreuil for not having his security card. The police commissioner, Pierre Auzolles, sketched his biography. His father had been arrested; his mother had died. Le Roy fils was destitute, and he was forced to live on credit, eating often in restaurants and then confessing that he had no money to pay for his meal. He had been brought before the police commissioner in the past, Auzolles reported. Although Le Roy was hotheaded, he could be useful to society, having had a good education. It was true, moreover, that he had been arrested for opposition to the regime of Robespierre. Now he needed a security card to begin his rehabilitation.41 There are no documents to trace his ultimate fate. One thing seems certain: If Le Roy fils was “cracked,” he was “timbré” like King Lear’s fool.

Jean Varlet, an early advocate of terror and one of its first victims, was discussed in chapter 4; during the crisis of Ventôse when the Hébertistes came under attack, Varlet remained silent. This silence did not save him from rearrest by the Thermidorians. It was enough that he retained his revolutionary ideals for this new terror to strike at him. His long imprisonment broke his spirit. He was eventually released, drifted with the tide, became a Bonapartist, somehow survived the Restoration, and lived to welcome the end of Bourbon rule in 1830.42

After the failure of the Prairial insurrection (20–23 May 1795), former members and employees of the civil and revolutionary committees, together with all militants who had been prominent in the section before 9 Thermidor, were arrested by the general assembly, now made safe for the local Thermidorians. All were conveniently labeled “agents of tyranny” according to the happy formula hatched by the new rulers. If no proof of “tyranny” existed, it was sufficient that the accused had been partisans or friends of those who had administered the section before the fall of Robespierre. Jean-Baptiste-Eloy Grandjean, a leading Thermidorian, who presided at the sectional
assembly of 24 May (5 Prairial), set the stage for the arrests that followed.\textsuperscript{43} It was high time, he declared, to purge the section of "the men of blood" who had dishonored it. They demonstrated their perfidious intentions in the late revolt. The assembly needed no urging and promptly voted the arrest of thirty-four of its members.\textsuperscript{44}

By the evening of 30 May (10 Prairial), forty-seven revolutionaries, or persons accused as such, had been arrested in the section and another eighteen had been disarmed. The elimination of sixty-five militants, former officials, members of the section's popular society, and general dissenters pushed the section, politically speaking, to the right. A number of those imprisoned or disarmed were relatively unknown, having held no post and not having been conspicuous by their political activity. It was enough, evidently, that they had supported or befriended those who had led the section in the past. The reasons for their denunciation, although varied, were essentially that they had been "members of the tyranny" that had dominated the section in the days of Robespierre.\textsuperscript{45} The Terror, thus, had not ceased; it had merely taken a different direction. Its new victims were not to be freed until the very eve of the attempted monarchist coup of 4 October 1795 (13 Vendémiaire, Year III), when the Convention had need of former "terrorists" again.\textsuperscript{46}

This release of former militants indicates, to some extent, the nature of the repression in the section. Although there were no executions for violating the \textit{maximum}, nor for contravening the decree against profiteering (26 July 1793), the fines and confiscations levied by the police commissioner and the bureaucratic intervention of the revolutionary committee in enforcing the decrees of the Convention must have aggravated the traditional relationship between buyer and seller. The pathetic nature of the "profiteers" who appear in Pierre Auzolles’s records are further proof of the unpopularity suffered by the local authorities in enforcing the regulations of the economic terror. If, nevertheless, the treatment of those guilty of selling beyond the price ceiling established by law was relatively mild, one explanation lay in the character and experience of the men who served on the revolutionary committee. Small shopkeepers, skilled artisans, or sans-culottes—all knew, often at firsthand, the problems caused by shortages, high prices, and long queues. A majority of the committee members had been or were engaged in trade and commerce, surely a contributing factor in their approach to enforcing the law.

Whether the political Terror in section Droits de l'Homme was harsh or mild is more difficult to assess. From the point of view of numbers it could be argued that the Terror, after all, struck down only a few individuals. On the other hand, the impact of the execution of Fayel and Descombes on conservatives and radicals alike must have been profound. Both men had supporters in the neighborhood; many in each party must have been intimidated, while others were undoubtedly confused. The bolder must have cursed deeply,
if not out loud, determined to take vengeance at the first opportunity. There is no question that the Hébertistes in the section disappeared as a political force after the execution of Descombes. The arrest of Varlet seven months before must also have depressed the freer political spirits in the section who supported his efforts to go beyond the limits of a middle-class revolution. It is interesting to note, on the other hand, the hostile reaction of the coworkers of Le Roy, fils. Although it can be assumed that some must have been interested in maintaining their jobs, and thus were willing to condemn the dissenter among them, the nature of their depositions and the zeal with which they defended the Terror (as evidenced by the testimony of Le Roy himself), is proof, to some degree, that they had accepted the arguments of the revolutionary government that political opposition and counterrevolution were closely linked.

The experience of section Droits de l’Homme during the Terror reflects in miniature the gamut of the Revolution in Paris. Royalist, conservative, moderate, radical, reactionary—the political rhythm of the Revolution found responsive waves in this neighborhood. Fayel, Descombes, and Varlet each rose on the crest of the wave and fell with the trough. In so doing they reflected, in part, the various stages of the Terror. In this sense, at least, each will probably remain the measure of the Revolution.

Notes

8. See the debate in the Convention against proposals to allow primary assemblies
to elect members of the revolutionary committees. Moniteur, 21, no. 332–525–27, 19 August 1794 (2 Fructidor, Year II); 548–50, 22 August (5 Fructidor); no. 339:581–83, 26 August (9 Fructidor); no. 343:610–12, 30 August (13 Fructidor). The law was adopted on 31 August (7 Fructidor).

9. Duclos, a wigmaker; Dupamier and Guéneau, jewellers; Houdaille, a master jeweller; Temponnet, a mason-entrepreneur; Charbonnier, a shoemaker; Mazin, an upholsterer; and Eude, a clockmaker. The references for the above are in A.N., F7* 2497; A.N., F30 145; and B.N., Lb42 232, Babeuf’s list.

10. Descombes was a schoolmaster (master of languages); Pommer, a surgeon-dentist; Bernard and Dassin, painters; and Gervais, a surveyor.

11. Bergeret was in the police administration, and Pinet was employed in the post office.

12. Their names were Donzel and Pétaud.

13. These were Desgrouard, Godard, and Vivien.


15. A.N., F7* 2497 is a journal of 146 pages that begins on 28 March 1793 and concludes on 18 September 1794 (2 Sans-Culottide, Year II). This register is formally closed the next day. The second journal begins on 20 September 1794 (4th complimentary day, Year II) and runs for 409 pages. The last entry is for 5 November 1795 (15 Brumaire, Year IV). It is designated under A.N., F7* 2498.

16. Ibid., passim.

17. Ibid., passim.


22. Ibid., fols. 87, 88, 26 Floréal (15 May).

23. Ibid., fol. 9, 26 December 1792. Charles Cuel, a volunteer, and Alexandre Decorbie, both age twenty, were the young men in question.


25. Descombes was accused of diverting elsewhere the grain and flour destined for Paris that is, of peculation. The original charge seems to have been brought by a grocer named Chollet, whose store was in faubourg Saint-Antoine, but who resided in section Droits de l'Homme. Whether this was done in collaboration with the Public Accuser as the latter was preparing his indictment of the Hébertistes is impossible to say. Chollet might have clashed with Descombes over many of

The second charge, a "false and dangerous patriotism," was made against him by Eugene-Honoré Gervais, a member of the revolutionary committee and a surveyor by profession (A.N., F7 477445, d. 2). Gervais was the only member of the committee whose frequent absences and refusal or inability to carry out his duties called forth a sharp censure by his colleagues and a threat to report him to the Committee of General Security (A.N., F7* 2497, p. 85, 19 Pluviôse, An II [7 February 1794]); and p. 114, 26 Floréal, An II [15 May 1794]). Gervais could have been open to pressure by the police committee to collaborate with it by implicating Descombes in the "plot" of the Hébertistes.

Gervais was seconded in his accusation by Jean-Pierre Carron, the commissioner against profiteering in the section. Carron was a mason by trade and was arrested after Thermidor for attempting to prevent the removal of the bust of Marat from the assembly hall (A.N., F7 4634, d 3). He might have been a personal enemy of Descombes or a friend of Gervais.

26. A.N., F7 4704, d. 1, 14 and 15 Frimaire, An II (4 and 5 December 1793); Charavay, *Assemblée électorale*, 1:49.

27. A.N., BB30 17, 30 June 1792. Fayel cited the law of 24 August 1794 (Title 2, Article 13), which forbade judges by reason of their functions to summon administrations before them. See the law of 16 August 1790, A.P., 18:104–10. Fayel hedged, however, in that he declared that it was the responsibility of the directory of the department to take the proper action.


31. B.H.V.P., MS 748, fol. 9, 13 August 1792.


34. Ibid., 10, nos. 2643, 2644, 1 Germinal, An II (21 March 1794). A member of the revolutionary committee, Daupaumier, confirmed this remark on 3 Germinal (23 March) in A. N., T 724, LIasse 4.


36. A.N., F7 4672, 3 Germinal, An II (23 March 1794); Tuetey, *Répertoire général*, 10, no. 2648, 3 Germinal, An II (23 March 1794); A.N., F7* 2497, p. 96.


38. A.N., F7 477419, d. 4, 6 and 7 Thermidor, An II (24 and 25 July 1794).

39. Ibid., 7 Thermidor, from the *procès-verbal* of the administration of the department in which Le Roy was employed.

40. He was arrested on 25 July 1794 (7 Thermidor, Year II) and liberated on 11
October 1794 (20 Vendémiaire, Year III). Ibid., 29 Brumaire, An III (19 November 1794).
41. Ibid.
44. B.V.C., MS 120, fols. 161–63, 5 Prairial.
45. A.N., F7 477445, d. 2 (dossier André Michel), which carries thirty-four names, not thirty-three as reported by the secretary of the general assembly; and A.N., F7 477446, d. 2 (dossier J. F. Millet), which carries an additional thirty-one names, thus a total of sixty-five names.
46. B.V.C., MS 120, fol. 169.
The September Massacres, de Gaulle, and Hollywood

Of all the pejorative terms hurled by revolutionaries against one another, "septembriseur" was, perhaps, the most injurious. It refers to the well-known incident when unknown Parisians from various sections of the city invaded the prisons on 2 September 1792 and began their summary "trials" and judgments of the inmates. Those deemed counterrevolutionaries were lynched on the spot; those declared innocent were given the fraternal embrace and freed from confinement. Priests and nobles were automatically judged guilty, and those who could not prove their patriotism, a sentiment not easily interpreted in time of revolution, became victims as well. When these massacres were finished several days later, a commissioner of the Paris Commune declared that "the people in exercising its vengeance also rendered justice," a belief shared by many revolutionaries.¹

Is there any rational explanation for what obviously was an irrational act of vengeance? Pierre Caron and Fritz Braesch, who have written at some length on those events, describe the universal hysteria, the fear, and the desire for vengeance that had seized the Parisians.² Victims of the attack on the Tuileries, stormed a few weeks earlier (10 August 1792), filled the hospitals, and funeral processions for the dead inflamed the passions of Parisians still further. Hatred of the Swiss defenders of Louis XVI, accused of firing nicked bullets and glass buttons, aggravated the situation. Sections held masses for the dead, and the Commune staged a mass funeral just a week before the invasion of the prisons.

Popular slogans to avenge the dead and defy the invaders were in evidence everywhere. At the same time the discovery of compromising letters sent by emigrés and crude publications urging or describing alleged acts of treason heightened the people's sense of insecurity. Many had not forgotten the threats of the Brunswick Manifesto made the last week of July. News of the investment of Verdun sharpened this threat further. Against this background appeared an alarming proclamation issued by the Paris Commune on Sunday,
2 September, at 2 P.M. warning that the enemy was approaching and calling on all to repel the invader.³

On the evening of the same day large groups of men invaded the prisons and began their summary judgments and executions. Since it was Sunday, thousands of Parisians were outdoors. It was hardly possible for them to have remained ignorant of what was transpiring behind the walls. Yet not one person interfered. Not one magistrate, not a single guardsman, not one member of the Fédérés budged. Efforts by commanders of the Parisian Guard and commissioners sent by the Legislative Assembly to halt the killing proved vain. It is difficult to believe, therefore, that these executions did not enjoy overwhelming support among the inhabitants of Paris.

Two months after these tragic events, on 4 November 1792, Robespierre, speaking in the Jacobin Club, described the tense moments that dominated Paris after the fall of Longwy and Verdun, keys to the defense of the capital. Brunswick was fast approaching the outskirts of the city. The tocsin sounded the alarm as the municipal authorities hastily armed 40,000 men and sent them off to Chalons. In the midst of all this, indignation, fear, and rage seized the Parisians. The desire to punish traitors before the defenders left their homes for the front became overwhelming. Magistrates could not interfere because, Robespierre made clear, it was a vast, popular movement. It was not sedition by a few scoundrels, paid to assassinate their fellows, as was ridiculously alleged, he emphasized. And, he asked, since it was a popular movement, how could the people be stopped? How was it possible that the National Guard and the Fédérés made no move to interfere? Everyone knew the vain effort made by the commanders of the armed forces and the commissioners of the Legislative Assembly who were dispatched to the prisons.

"I have heard people tell me coldly that the municipality ought to have proclaimed martial law," continued Robespierre. "Martial law at the approach of the enemy! Martial law after 10 August! Martial law for accomplices of the tyrant dethroned! What could the magistrates do against the popular indignation?" He concluded that all they could do was to urge the separation of those in prison for other causes than the conspiracy of 10 August.⁴

The popular indignation so vividly described by Robespierre does not excuse the lynching of helpless prisoners. The Girondins, like the Jacobins, remained silent and refused to condemn the participants in these events. It was only later, when the conflict between the two broke out over "the appeal to the people" on Louis XVI's fate, that the Girondins began to accuse leading Jacobins and their supporters in the sections of being septembriseurs. After Robespierre's fall the Thermidorianians employed this term against their political enemies, and countless police dossiers carried this accusation against former officials and active members of political clubs.

Nor should it be forgotten that there were mass killings of revolutionaries
imprisoned by the Thermidorians. On 14 May 1795, for example, the representative-on-mission, Goupilleau de Montaigu, formerly a bitter opponent of the sans-culotte commanders in the Vendée, wrote: “The massacres in Lyons . . . have just been repeated near here [that is, at Aix]. We learned last night that they had massacred fifty or sixty at Aix; we have heard no details, but we are assured that women and children have not been spared any more than men.” And in another letter he confessed: “Nowadays anyone who is attached to the principles of the Revolution is called a terrorist.”

Other historians, who have no love for the Jacobins or their sans-culotte allies, agree with Albert Mathiez and Louis Blanc that the White Terror was just as bloody as the Red Terror, with even less excuse for the White Terror’s “septembriseurs.”

As for executions in the armed forces, it should be recalled that the vast majority of regular officers left the army because of political pressure, either on their own initiative or under orders from civil authorities. During the height of the Terror, some six hundred officers were removed, but three hundred generals were executed (most of them because they were either incompetent or were unfortunate enough to have lost a battle).

After the liberation of France in 1945, Charles de Gaulle remarked that two categories of traitors “deserved no pity: talented writers and army officers.” During the fighting that led to the expulsion of the Germans and immediately afterward, a kind of frontier prevailed, with summary executions and improvised courts-martial, not unlike the September massacres. According to a Gaullist minister in 1945, some 105,000 French men and women were executed as traitors. De Gaulle estimated that there were 10,000 such executions; these are official figures as well. During the Nazi occupation some 60,000 French were executed on French soil, and 150,000 were deported, never to return. Talleyrand remarked that “treason is a matter of dates.” Certainly, the term “septembriseur,” or “traitor,” is indeed a matter of dates. The victors always write their own history.

The debate on the French Revolution is a case in point. Immediately after the Bourbon Restoration writers such as de Maistre, Chateaubriand, Burke, Novalis, and others condemned not only the mildest and most rational of reforms adopted between 1789–1815 but they insisted that the Old Regime had the best of all possible governments. It took the Revolution of 1830 to reestablish the progressive role of the bourgeoisie as against that of the French aristocracy. Current events in the former Soviet Union reflect the same reactionary trends under the guise of anti-Stalinism.

This reactionary ideology is reflected in some older and more recent films. Some years ago there appeared a dramatic film under the title of Danton. Viewers were treated to a picture of a sickly, neurotic, physically repulsive Robespierre in contrast to a vigorous, generous, and gregarious Danton.
Robespierre reflected the totalitarian bureaucrat, anxious to repress the human spirit, and, in appearance, reminding audiences somewhat of the past ruler of Poland, Jaruselski. Danton, on the other hand, is friendly and open, not unlike Walesa or Kuron. Needless to say, the viewer cannot help but sympathize with Danton and despise Robespierre. There is no need to comment on the film's bad history—if it can called history at all.

Another French film, La Nuit de Varennes, purports to deal with a number of interesting characters during the flight of Louis XVI and his family from Paris in June 1791. This is an interesting and an imaginative film. It is ingenious to place the chronicler of Parisian night life Restif de la Bretonne, the passionate lover of women Casanova, and the American Tom Paine in the same carriage with Marie Antoinette's lady-in-waiting and her aristocratic escort. The contrasting views of the chief actors are both amusing and revealing, and the audience can sympathize with all of them, the aristocratic ladies no less than the republican Tom Paine. But the common people are largely absent from the events unfolding around Varennes. When the people do appear, it is only to riot and pillage. They make up a mob, never a crowd. Furthermore, during the one episode wherein a commoner confronts the aristocrat, he is only introduced as a seedy, drunken, lascivious character who is bent on embracing the beautiful, and therefore obviously virtuous, lady-in-waiting. But, unlike in a fairy tale, he never changes into a handsome prince; he remains an ugly toad throughout. This representation of the commoners encourages the audience to believe that the sans-culottes were, indeed, capable of crushing the virtuous and beautiful aristocrats.

This is even more obvious in the Hollywood version of the French Revolution as reflected in The Scarlet Pimpernel. We are encouraged to sympathize with Leslie Howard and Merle Oberon, the English and French aristocrats; never with the common people, who are presented as brutal, violent, and stupid. And no one is more repulsive than the commissioner of the Committee of Public Safety as portrayed by Raymond Massey. The same can be said of Hollywood's Marie Antoinette, as enacted by Norma Shearer. We cannot help but be charmed by this Marie, sympathize with the bumbling but good-natured Louis XVI as portrayed by John Morley, and admire Count Fersen in the handsome Tyrone Power. When the revolutionaries condemn Marie/Norma Shearer to the guillotine, after forcibly separating her from young son, who can be so hard-hearted as to remain unmoved by her plight? Is it a wonder that most viewers damn the French Revolution?

Few revolutionaries are so damned and condemned as are the Enragés. Peter Weiss's powerful drama Marat/Sade presents Jacques Roux, one of their leaders, in a straitjacket shouting and raving on the stage. Yet, if we listen to what he says, we cannot be certain that he is so disturbed, after all:
"We demand that granaries of plenty be opened for the needy. We insist that all workshops and factories be transferred into our possession. We ask that schools be established in the churches so that once and for all something useful be disseminated there. We appeal for a prompt effort from all to bring an end to the war." History has its own theater of the absurd, and it is often difficult to be certain who is sane and who is mad—especially in time of revolution.

A personal incident will illustrate further. One fine summer afternoon, as my wife and I were sitting outside a Parisian café with a glass of rosé, we were joined by an elderly English gentleman—clipped mustache, ruddy complexion, tweed jacket, and an amused light in his blue eyes. He could have stepped out of a nineteenth-century English novel. As our conversation ranged over cabbages and kings, he suddenly startled me by remarking, "You know, the French did an awful thing." What particular awful thing did they do? I asked. "Why, they executed their queen," he replied. I was about to remind him that the English had shortened Charles by a head some century-and-a-half earlier, thus setting an example for the French, but checked myself in time to avoid another Dreyfus affair, English style, of course. Yet, I can still recall the tone of indignation in which this Englishman reminded me of poor Marie’s fate.

It is possible that, like so many of us, this Englishman early formed his view of the French Revolution by reading Charles Dicken’s *Tale of Two Cities*. Dickens presents Paris during the Terror as a gloomy, oppressive, fearful place. Yet this was not true. Never were cafés and restaurants more crowded. Women wore pins in the form of guillotines and children played with toy guillotines, cutting off the heads of toy aristocrats. But if our attitude is shaped by Dickens’s novel, and if in addition we see nothing but the Hollywood version of the French Revolution, it is no wonder that so many embrace Edmund Burke and repudiate Tom Paine.

Notes


9. Stendhal in his great novel *The Charter House of Parma (Chartreuse de Parme)*, wrote that in order to clear himself of suspicion of being a liberal, his hero, Fabrizio, not only had to go to mass every day, but he dared not “consort with any man who had the reputation of being clever, and when occasion offered, he was to speak of rebellion with horror... he was to express dislike of reading in general, and he was never to peruse any work printed later than 1720” (New York: Heritage Press, 1955), 68. This is a good example of the counterrevolutionary ideology after Waterloo.

The Purge of Prairial in Section Droits de l’Homme

That the insurrections of Germinal and Prairial were caused primarily by hunger has been convincingly demonstrated by historians. The precipitous decline of the assignat, which fell to the low of 7.5 percent in May 1795, coupled with the abolition of the maximum on 24 December 1794 (4 Nivôse, Year III) raised prices to new levels, making it impossible for the government to supply food at controlled costs as it had in the past. The result was that consumers were forced to spend their last sou in the open market if they wanted to eat at all. The rise in the price of bread was especially disastrous, as it climbed from twenty-five sous per pound on 28 March (7 Germinal) to the incredible height of sixteen livres a pound on 18 May (29 Floréal), just two days before the last insurrection. At the same time real wages remained at a scale lower than they had been throughout the whole period of 1793-1794, and had perhaps even fallen “to the catastrophic level of the early months of 1789.”

Although these facts are well known to students of the Revolution, few if any studies exist of the Prairial insurrection in any single section of the capital. None has appeared on section Droits de l’Homme, which is the subject of this paper.

This neighborhood in the center of Paris, not far from the Hôtel de Ville, was among the hardest hit by the economic crisis. Its bakers were forced to rely on armed force to maintain order in queues before their doors. When flour failed to arrive in time they complained bitterly to the authorities. Many families lacked bread altogether; men and women spent whole nights waiting outside bakeries, while others had to accept spoiled or unleavened bread. Riots broke out several days before the Germinal uprising, and individuals made desperate by hunger sought to convene an illegal assembly. The police commissioner of the section, Pierre Auzolles, confessed that he could not stop these imprudent acts, but he finally persuaded the crowd to send a delegation to the civil and revolutionary committees of the section and to the Convention itself. On the day of the insurrection of 12
Germinal (1 April), police noted that there were people in some sections who had not eaten bread for three days—which means that they had not eaten at all.

Great crowds milled about the doors of the bakeries in the section, and women fought each other for a loaf of bread, snatching it from the hands of their neighbors. Meanwhile, processions and meetings were sweeping the capital. Yet the authorities seemed impervious to the crisis: In a letter to the revolutionary committee of the seventh arrondissement, in which the section was located, the Committee of General Security blamed the troubles on “the malevolent.”

Thousands of demonstrators had invaded the hall of the Convention, only to be persuaded by the Montagnard deputies to leave without accomplishing anything; those who had lingered were forcibly ejected by detachments of the National Guard, who had arrived from the middle-class sections of the west end. Paris was declared to be in a state of siege, and its armed forces were placed under the command of General Jean Charles Pichegru. Leaders of the sans-culottes were arrested in their sections together with former principal Thermidorians like Léonard Bourdon, André Amar, and Pierre Joseph Cambon; Barère, Billaud-Varenne, and Collot d’Herbois were condemned to deportation. Yet this did not stop the pillaging of shops as rumors of suicides swept the section. Women halted a wagon of flour and forced the commissioner of provisions to deliver to a baker on rue des Rosiers one sack that had not been meant for him. When police went looking for them, others emptied their chamber pots on the armed force. The revolutionary committee of the section admitted that the state of public feeling was “uncertain” in Droits de l’Homme.

A pamphlet entitled Insurrection du Peuple, pour obtenir du pain et reconquerir ses droits, published on the evening of 19 May (30 Floréal), gave the signal for the last popular insurrection of the Revolution. Beginning with a demand for bread, it launched into a fundamental attack on the Thermidorian system of repression and its organs of government, calling instead for the establishment of the principles of the Rights of Man and of the Constitution of 1793. Appealing to the troops to join the people, it also invited the forty-eight sections to convocate the primary assemblies to take control of the government. To force the Convention to do their bidding, the people were invited to march en masse upon their representatives and to do so without waiting to range themselves by section, but rather, in a “fraternal disorder.” No better expression of mistrust of sectional authorities could have been revealed than in this call for the people to march in irregular formation.

It is against this background that the action of the civil committee of section Droits de l’Homme may be viewed. Immediately after the sounding of the general alarm, the civil committee met with the revolutionary committee
to distribute bread in the section under guard of the armed force. Just as the committees began their session, several armed men forced their way into the room. Each wore the prescribed band in his hat with the slogan "Bread and the Constitution of 1793." Two spokesmen demanded that the committees place themselves at their head and march on the Convention. The spokesmen assured the committees that they had nothing to fear as the lives of the committee members were as precious to them as their very own.15

Meanwhile women bombarded the committees with complaints of shortages, and one remarked ironically that it was indeed strange to see them sitting in the room while their own husbands were under arms at the Convention. All that the besieged officials could reply was that they had no provisions. Yet they sent out patrols to see that whatever bread was available would be distributed and that the commissioners in charge of distribution were at their posts. The latter reported, however, that it was dangerous to apportion bread at the moment because of the great agitation of the crowds. The committees agreed to wait until calm returned to the section, even though it was already 8 P.M.16

The popular outburst was so spontaneous and powerful that the officers of the armed forces lost control over their troops. Fayolle, the second in command, who had played a major role in suppressing the supporters of the Commune on the 9th of Thermidor, was now swept along by the powerful current. At 10 P.M. he arrived with an armed guard to confront the committees, demanding that the procès-verbal be read out loud to the battalion in formation outside. Fayolle had heard that it contained an accusation against him and desired to know its contents. Actually, the Committee of General Security had ordered his arrest. The secretary of the civil committee was forced to accompany Fayolle, pen in hand, to read the proceedings of the joint committees. Upon his return the secretary reported of warning Fayolle he would be held responsible if any of the two committees' members suffered abuse. Upon completion of the reading of the procès-verbal, Fayolle observed critically that while the general alarm was sounding in the section the committee members had remained at their posts; that is, that they had refused to join the people. A few members of the battalion spoke up in support, but most remained silent.17

The joint committees admitted that the decree of arrest against Fayolle could not be executed because of the great excitement in the section. In fact, they had returned the writ to the Committee of General Security. After the suppression of the insurrection, various individuals testified against Fayolle. They charged that he had urged the general assembly not to execute certain allegedly unjust decrees of the Convention; that he had ordered a march on the Convention; and that he had taken the battalion in a direction where it might join with those of sections Quinze Vingts and Observatoire in a hostile act directed against the Convention. Fayolle argued in his own
justification that his express order (number 4 of the general staff) was to take the armed force of the section, including the cannon, to the Convention. This order superseded the previous one (number 3), which had been to take his men to the Temple, but the new order arrived after the order to march to the Temple. Moreover, he had been given a precise command by the general staff on where to take up his post. There is no reason to doubt, however, that Fayolle, like others, was swayed by the crowds of his own section, including men nominally under his command, to seek redress of grievances.

The Convention's decree enjoining citizens from marching armed to the various public squares of their respective sections could not be proclaimed. Commissioners charged with making this and other commands public at 10:30 P.M. were shouted down and threatened at rue Bourgtribourg and Place de la Droits de l'Homme. Among the participants was the battalion of the section. The armed detachment accompanying the commissioners was attacked and dispersed on rue Croix de la Bretonnerie, thus preventing them from proclaiming the decrees of the Convention and even from returning to the hall where the committees were sitting.

An hour later two workingmen reported that they had just returned from the Convention, where a large armed force had disarmed the crowd and had arrested those deputies who had defended the people's interests so well. Suddenly a cry was heard in the courtyard: "To arms! to arms! They are massacring the patriots and the honest representatives." Several men came rushing into the room demanding the key to unlock the hall of the general assembly. The committees refused, but the door had already been opened and a crowd had assembled there. The voices of Fayolle, of Jean-Pierre Carron (the former commissioner on profiteering), and of a musician by the name of Jean Michel Perrin were clearly heard. Members of the joint committees found it impossible to restore order and so informed the Committee of General Security, which then armed its own couriers with warrants of arrest against the three whose voices had been heard in the hall. Nothing tangible resulted from the hurried meeting of the assembly, however, and it dissolved itself as a large force of armed men arrived in the section. The officer in command observed that order seemed to have been restored in the section and he withdrew. It was then about 3 A.M.

At 5 A.M. members of the joint committees returned from a session with the Committee of General Security, which had commended their action and had even withdrawn the arrest warrants it had issued the previous evening. Evidently the government committees must have thought that the demonstration was over. At 8 A.M., however, several members of the civil and revolutionary committees returned, reporting that a more alarming movement was being organized, "that the agitators of the section are proclaiming loudly that blood will flow in great torrents today in Paris," and that committee
members were being threatened again. The leading disturber at the moment appeared to be the musician Perrin. He had entered the room with an invading force while most members of the committees had gone out to dine. A cry arose that the absentees were in contempt of the law, having deserted their posts, and that this infraction should be recorded in the minutes. Those who were present refused to act on this demand, however, and the intruders eventually withdrew. At 10 A.M. the joint committees were again reunited, awaiting “with calm and tranquility” the developments of the day, as they wrote in the procès-verbal, an exaggeration which must have been invented after the insurrection had spent its force.

While the committees were awaiting developments, the general alarm sounded in the section at 10 A.M., some five hours after it was first given in faubourgs Saint-Antoine and Saint-Marcel. Never had such huge crowds been seen in Paris, not even in the dramatic journées of the past. Police observers, although repeating the government's propaganda claiming that the uprising was largely a conspiracy of former Jacobins and Montagnards, and that the movement had been organized long ago, admitted that shortage was “the pretext,” but, “unfortunately,” a plausible one. Women took the lead and dragged the men after them. Many had been standing in queues as usual, sharing seditious utterances with the crowd.

Armed companies of the National Guard invaded the Convention, in support of the women of Saint-Antoine who had been ejected a few hours before. Cries of “Bread!” punctuated the general tumult as deputies of the Right were intimidated by the murder of Jean Féraud. The demonstrators carried all before them—but in the form of paper decrees and fatuous resolutions. The remnant of the old Mountain made no effort to organize the people, to arrest the leading Thermidorians, or to surround the hall with troops of the radical sections. More important: The insurgents lacked a Committee of Nine, which had assured the success of the insurrection of 31 May–2 June.

Given time so generously by the people and the Montagnards, the Thermidorians brought up troops from the loyal sections, and to the cries of “Down with the Jacobins!” they drove the insurgents from the hall. The deputies of the Mountain were immediately arrested, and the sections were ordered to disarm the “buveurs de sang” and “the agents of tyranny that had preceded 9 Thermidor.” Several days elapsed, however, before this could be carried out. On the second day of the insurrection the movement was more menacing than ever, as cannoneers and gendarmes of the Convention deserted the Thermidorians and joined the revolutionaries. A Jean Varlet might have quickly converted this tactical victory into a decisive triumph, but, unfortunately for the insurgents, there was no Varlet. Once again the insurrectionists, lacking leaders, retired with false promises and paper resolutions. They would have no other opportunity.
On 22 May (3 Prairial) faubourg Saint-Antoine was ringed with regular army troops and forced to surrender its arms. Military commissions carried out their task of repression while the Thermidorians in the sections settled old scores, incarcerating some 10,000 former revolutionaries. Militants and former employees of the old committees were now conveniently labeled "agents of tyranny" according to the happy formula hatched by the Thermidorians. If no proof of "tyranny" existed, it was sufficient that the accused had been partisans or friends of partisans of those who had administered the section before 9 Thermidor.

Jean-Baptiste-Eloy Grandjean, who presided at the sectional assembly on 24 May (5 Prairial), set the stage for the arrests that followed. It was high time, he declared, to purge the section of "the men of blood" who had dishonored it. They had demonstrated their perfidious intentions in the late revolt. The law itself demanded that they be unmasked. "Do not think that you can buy safety by keeping silent," he said to the assembly members who tried to remain neutral. If these men ever regained power, there would be no safety for anyone because "the men of Robespierre strike indiscriminately." The assembly needed no urging and promptly voted the arrest of thirty-four members, which constituted a purge of one-sixtieth of its total membership.

For the next few days the general assembly occupied itself with the purge. On 25 May (6 Prairial) the Committee of Public Safety ordered the section to continue disarming suspects and expressly forbade it to consider any other matter. The same day Etienne Pierre Leclerc and Jean Baptiste Pierre Lenfant, two commissioners of the section who had represented it in the Commune during the early hours of 10 August 1792, were arrested on trumped-up charges of being responsible for the September massacres. Jean Varlet, the well-known Enragé and president of the Committee of Nine on the eve of the insurrection of 31 May–2 June 1793, was also attacked with the rest. His enemies charged that during the September massacres he had urged that patriotic justice was above the law. Since Varlet was in prison at the time, what his enemies hoped to gain was to have him kept there as long as possible by concocting fresh charges against him. Finally, the battery of cannoneers was disarmed and their guns offered to the Convention. Had they been among those who had deserted the troops of the Convention and joined the insurgents on 21 May (2 Prairial)? There is no such charge against them. The Thermidorians must have recognized, nevertheless, that these were not their men.

By the evening of 29 May (10 Prairial) forty-seven revolutionaries, or persons accused as such, had been arrested in the section, and another eighteen had been disarmed. This elimination of sixty-five militants, former officials, members of the section's popular society, and general dissenters must have
pushed the section still further to the right. A number of those imprisoned or disarmed were relatively unknown; they had held no official post and had not been conspicuous by their political activity. It was enough, evidently, that they had supported or befriended those who had led the section in the past. The reasons for their denunciation, although varied, were essentially that they had been militant, conspicuous, or popular in the days before 9 Thermidor. Some were charged with having incited the people against the Convention or the bakeries; others, were charged with supposedly having been among the septembriseurs at La Force prison in 1792. A number had participated in an illegal assembly, while several were accused of having seconded Fayolle in threatening the joint committees during the events of Prairial.

Among those arrested was one Beudelot, who held no official position in the section. He was charged with having shown “a forced joy” at the execution of Robespierre and the chiefs of the Commune—how his accusers knew that his joys was forced is not explained. Leclerc had rejoiced at the execution “of unfortunate victims of tyranny.” Leleu was held responsible for the execution of a young patriot whom he had accused. Prou had been a former member of the revolutionary army. Barré had supposedly advocated calling a new primary assembly to replace the section’s representative, a new crime created by the Thermidorians. Two were women: Barbot (or Barbaut), who had left her section of Indivisibilité in order to hide in section Droits de l’Homme, and Le Blanc, who had been conspicuous in all “seditious demonstrations” by women, and who, allegedly, had forced a citizen Larue to beat the general alarm on 31 March 1795 (Germinal 11)—but whether by her charms or by threat of force was left unexplained.

Caval, Chartrain, and Monneuse were accused of having participated in the September massacres, with the last allegedly acting as a judge at La Force prison during these horrors. They were transferred by order of the Committee of General Security from Pléssis prison to the Conciergerie, and their procès-verbal was transmitted to the public accuser.

Diversin, a cannoneer, residing at 11, Bercy, was charged with threatening “to eat the heart of Grandjean [president of the section during the repression] with pleasure,” and inciting others to revolt. Diversin pointed out that not one of the charges bore a specific date and that he was not even acquainted with Grandjean, and claimed that the whole accusation was a piece of slander. On 3 August (16 Thermidor) the surveillance committee of the seventh arrondissement resolved to free him, as only one witness had testified against him. Three days later the Committee of General Security granted him provisional freedom. It can be assumed that he was restored to full citizenship, as were others before the attack of the royalists on 4 October 1795 (13 Vendémiaire). Among those restored to citizenship was Carnonkel, the garçon
de bureau, of the civil and revolutionary committees. He was accused of having insulted members of the committees and of having delivered the key to the hall of the general assembly to the insurgents.39

Toussaint Fouque was a saddler by trade residing on rue des Ecoffes. He was arrested because he had served in the Revolutionary Army, although he was charged with having excited citizens to march on the Convention. The civil committee admitted that it knew nothing of this but reported that he had indulged in wine, which made him suspect of upsetting public tranquility! Officers and noncommissioned officers, together with ordinary citizens, testified in his behalf. After the surveillance committee recommended his release, the Committee of General Security freed him provisionally on 16 August 1795 (29 Thermidor, Year III).40

François Gamain, a pastry cook residing at 121, rue dela Verrerie, had formerly been a member of the section’s relief committee. In August 1793 he had engaged in a fracas with another member of the committee and had been deprived of his functions for this act. The joint civil and relief committees testified that he had always been exacting in his duties and had shown warm concern for the welfare of the section’s poor. As a result he was released by the Committee of General Security.41

Antoine Joly, age sixty, a bailiff by profession, had been a member of the civil committee, residing on rue des Rosiers. He was denounced by one member of the assembly and on this basis alone was disarmed. The civil committee took no position on his demand for rearmament, surely a trimming of sails unusual even for the most cautious member of that body. Only on the eve of the attempted royalist coup did the surveillance committee request his restoration to full citizenship, which was promptly granted.42

Lelievre resided at 9, rue de la Verrerie and served in the section’s ninth company. He was denounced for allegedly having urged “measures” to punish the “guilty” on the eve of the September massacres. Since he had been disarmed by the assembly and was illiterate, his wife had to undertake his defense. The civil committee could only report that Lelievre often took the floor in the general assembly and spoke “with great passion.” Evidently, a spirited delivery was suspect. The surveillance committee noted that he had been accused without any proof and recommended his release, which was granted shortly thereafter.43

Louis Nicolas Vallée was probably a cobbler by trade. He was accused of having excited others to march on the Convention and of having been among the armed men who had accompanied Fayolle when the secretary of the civil committee was forced to publicly read its procès-verbal of 20 May (1 Prairial). Vallée replied that he had been with his battalion throughout the events of Prairial. As for his presence during the reading of the committee’s minutes, he had carried out an order of his superior officer, together with
nine other men, as ordered to do so by Fayolle. On the charge that he had attended an illegal assembly, Vallée denied any knowledge of such a meeting, adding, however, that supposing this were true, was he more guilty than others who were found there? The surveillance committee requested the Committee of General Security to rule on Vallée's arrest, and the latter committee granted him provisional freedom.  

According to the minutes of the civil committee, one of the voices clearly heard by its members was that of the musician Perrin as he sought to address the illegal assembly. He was charged, therefore, with being “one of the leaders of the revolt of 1 Prairial.” The Committee of General Security issued a warrant for his arrest and orders to seal his papers. The revolutionary committee of the seventh arrondissement, not finding him at home, examined and sealed his effects; the committee then heard a number of witnesses who implicated Perrin in the late insurrection. He was quoted as having rejoiced, shouting: “Here are the muscadins, f— them. There is Feráud killed; his head is being carried about. What a triumph for the patriots!” Others claimed that he had accused the Convention of being engulfed in blood, cried out against various commissioners, insulted members of the committee, and declared that all authority had been overthrown. Grandjean accused Perrin of wanting to open the hall of the general assembly. Furthermore, it was said to be one of Perrin’s comrades who had gone up and down the streets of the section with a bell summoning the people to assemble.

Perrin had gone into the country, probably trying to escape his persecutors, but he was arrested some time later, as his appeals for release testify. These appeals give a brief biographical sketch of his life. Born in 1764, he joined an infantry regiment at age fourteen and was mustered out five years later because of an infirmity. Upon recovering he rejoined the army and was demobilized as a sergeant in 1791. Then he turned to poetry and music and became proficient enough to command a subsidy to compose patriotic songs. Although enjoying the esteem of his fellow citizens, he wrote, he had never been employed in any official capacity, joined the Jacobins, or been guilty of an act of tyranny. His only elective posts had been as vice-president of the section, as its secretary on an unspecified occasion, and as an officer of the peace. Nor had he ever advocated the dissolution of the Convention or the restoration of royalty. He was able to submit a testimony of good conduct and patriotic behavior signed by members of the armed forces with whom he had served. The letter carried the names of officers and men, including that of his commanding officer. On 13 May 1795 (24 Floréal, Year III), the Committee of General Security decreed the return of his arms.

Among those arrested on 24 May (5 Prairial) was Nicolas Oudart, president of the criminal tribunal of Paris. What was the charge against him? He had presided over the assembly in November 1793 when Jean Varlet was freed.
Oudart recalled that when Varlet began reading his discourse, the assembly interrupted him before he was able to finish. Varlet held Oudart personally responsible for this slight and charged him with libeling the National Convention. Despite Varlet's attacks on him, Oudart admitted that he was pleased in having contributed to Varlet's release. It was Oudart who had proposed that the assembly intervene on behalf of the young Enragé and who had promised to watch his behavior. Nevertheless, Oudart wrote, Varlet continued to accuse him in the popular society of the section. He had no other relations with him. As for Descombes (executed with the Hébertistes), Oudart had never received him at his home.

On 30 May (11 Prairial) the criminal court testified that Oudart had been at his post during the insurrection of 1 and 2 April (12 and 13 Germinal) and on 21, 22 and 23 May (2, 3, and 4 Prairial). The civil committee summarized the charges against Oudart and his refutations of them for the Committee of General Security; among other charges was that he had spent the night of 9 Thermidor in the Hôtel de Ville. Oudart admitted it but gave a satisfactory explanation for his presence at the Commune. As for being appointed to the criminal tribunal because he was supported by the terrorists, Oudart claimed that he was nominated despite his express disclaimer of terrorism and submitted proof thereof. The Committee of General Security pointed to his own evidence and to the observations of the civil committee and ruled, therefore, that Oudart would continue "to enjoy his freedom."

Another of those arrested, in what seems to have been a comedy of errors, was André Michel, of 22, rue des Ecouffes, accused of having wounded and "gravely insult[ed]" a member of the civil committee, Rossignol. He was also charged with having roused the section to revolt. It is difficult to say who he was, exactly. He held no formal post in the section but was probably a militant active in the assembly and the popular society. Michel gave the following explanation of the incident: He met Rossignol at a time when he was in a slight state of intoxication. Thinking that the Rossignol was still a member of the civil committee, Michel urged him to return to his post. Rossignol took a step or two backwards away from him, but, unaware of a slight step, he stumbled over it and fell down. Michel staggered over to lift him up and fell on top of him. Fortunately for both, citizen Fouque came along to help them up. Rossignol received a head wound as a result of the accident. Michel insisted, however, that this was not his fault. The civil committee rejected his explanation as the common excuse of agitators and instigators of revolt, who always claimed that "I have drunk [too much.]"

Concerning the charge that he had excited citizens to insurrection on 20 May (1 Prairial), Michel asked the Committee to investigate his conduct. It would find that he had been on the side of the Convention from the beginning, he wrote. Then, warming to the subject, he went over to the attack against
the local authorities. This was how the best citizens of the section were treated during the first days of Prairial "by several so-called citizens, who only joined the band of thieves in the sections to spread alarm and terror." It would be easy to convince you of this, he concluded, if you only knew "the morals of all these vile accusers." There is no indication how long Michel remained a prison, but it can be assumed that he, too, was released before the royalist rising in Vendémiaire.

All members of the revolutionary committee who had served before Robespierre's fall were now denounced by local Thermidorians of the sectional assembly and arrested or disarmed. Among these were Bergeret, who resided at 124, rue de la Verrerie and had been attached to the police administration for the preceding three years. He was charged by two personal enemies in the section with having been "the most zealous agent of the system of terror." His wife, too, it was alleged, had excited to defiance the more dissatisfied women around her.

Bergeret replied that the registers of the sectional assembly and the popular society would prove that he had merely expressed his opinions like everyone else, without ever denouncing anyone. His arrest, he emphasized, was motivated by the vengeful action of two individuals who had been refused membership in the popular society and who held him responsible for their rejection. The civil committee observed that Bergeret often spoke like a terrorist, but that this might have been due to the influence of wine. Basically, he was a man of little education and of no principles, the committee held, for upon obtaining the post of police inspector he seldom attended meetings and rarely spoke. After being imprisoned for two months, he was released by the Committee of General Security and shortly afterward recovered his rights of citizenship.

Jean Charbonnier was a shoemaker residing at 24, rue des Ecouffes. He was accused of having excited the women against the authorities during periods of bread shortage, of having roused the people to march on the Convention, and, together with Fayolle, of having threatened the civil committee. Charbonnier replied in the form of a question to the Committee of General Security: Could a father of five children, with a pregnant wife, indulge in such extreme behavior? On the contrary, he had urged citizens to protect the Convention, not to march against it. The civil committee maintained that he had been widely known as a troublemaker and suggested that his commanding officer be consulted on whether he had fulfilled his military duty during the late insurrection. The committee saw him as "an agitator and an anarchist" whose "good intentions... do not free him from the crime of anarchy whose principles he sowed." The surveillance committee of the seventh arrondissement, on the other hand, took note of "his numerous family" and urged his release, which was granted under the direction of the local authorities.
Cordier, a caterer by profession, had been elected captain of the section’s armed force and had served on the revolutionary committee from its beginning. After an unspecified interval he was drafted again in June–July 1794 (Messidor, Year II). He had opened a shop dispensing soft drinks in section Arsenal, and requested to remain there. Cordier wrote to the Committees of Public Safety and of General Security that if another were not appointed in his place he would remain and do his duty. He was released with full rights several months after his arrest.58

Donzel resided on rue Bourgthibourg. He was charged with having been one of “the agents of Tyranny which preceded 9 Thermidor; of having vexed all citizens of the section; of having outraged all the unfortunates whom they threw into prison; of having been [one of the] tyrants of the section.” The civil committee heard five witnesses, who testified that he had helped “extinguish the flames” of the insurrection. In his own letter to the Committee of General Security, Donzel pointed out that not a single person had come forward to present charges against any of the arrested members of the former revolutionary committee—this despite the fact that a special commission had been appointed to receive denunciations against them. If citizens had been harassed by the former committee, why, he asked, were there no protests?

The civil committee admitted that it had no knowledge of any particular act of Donzel’s while serving on the revolutionary committee, nor did any witness interrogated by it have more than hearsay evidence on his role during the late uprising. Nevertheless, it refused to support his plea for release because he had “the character of an agitator and of an anarchist.” This was too much for the Committee of General Security, which restored him to full rights of citizenship and employment with the Commission of Subsistence.59

Eugene-Honoré Gervais was a surveyor by profession, residing at Place des Droits de l’Homme. He was accused of attacking the Thermidorian regime and of having “eulogized the former government.” It is to him that the hotheads of the section turned, the assembly charged when it arrested him. Moreover, he was charged with slandering the Convention and of having joined faubourg Saint-Antoine when its insurgents marched on the Convention.60 In the spring of 1794 Gervais had lost the respect of his colleagues because of his frequent absences and his refusal to share the duties of the revolutionary committee. It is difficult to say what his ultimate fate was, but it can be assumed that he was probably released on the eve of Vendémiaire.61

Guéneau was a jeweller by vocation, residing at 18, rue de la Tixeranderie (Tisseranderie). He had been appointed to the revolutionary committee at the time of its reorganization by the radicals (19–20 May 1793), and had been elected as its secretary during the same session. In his letter to the
Committee of General Security, he reminded its members that at the time of his appointment revolutionary committees received no pay, that his request to be relieved was refused by the general assembly, and that he had never joined the Jacobins or any other popular society. During the affair of 9 Thermidor, he had been the first to pledge support to the Convention and to persuade the cannoneers not to join "the rebellious Commune," thus avoiding a possible civil war. Although he did not explain why, exactly, he was disarmed during the journées of Prairial, he must have been a participant in the events like others.62

In reply to the charges against him, Guéneau pointed to their vagueness and anonymity. What kind of harassment was he guilty of?, he asked. Where were these acts committed? No one could prove a single case of personal vengeance against him, he asserted. The committee, he wrote, always tried to ease the plight of those it was forced to arrest. There was but one jail connected with the guardhouse (violon du corps de garde) in the section. Some of the prisoners were forced to spend the night on the premises of the committee, which always had two spare beds with covers for this purpose.

Referring to the many citizens freed after 9 Thermidor who had praised the humaneness of the committee, he claimed to have been among its moderates and cited a specific example as proof: Upon learning that an old man had been imprisoned by the section, he had had him remitted to his own home under house arrest—all this with the consent of the Committee of General Security. Adducing testimony of public health officials that his wife had suffered a nervous breakdown and could not be left alone, he requested provisional freedom. The civil committee admitted that nothing in particular was known against him and noted that several citizens had verified his humaneness. The Committee of General Security granted him provisional liberty and shortly thereafter (21 August 1795–4 Fructidor, Year III) restored him to full citizenship.63

Louis Houdaille was a merchant jeweller residing at 15, rue de la Verrerie. He became a member of the revolutionary committee in September 1793 and remained a member until it was replaced in Fructidor (August–September 1794). On 26 December 1794 (6 Nivôse, Year III), he was charged with having appropriated a saber from an arrested citizen who had appeared before the revolutionary committee. Houdaille was able to prove that he had paid for the saber in question although leaving it behind, eventually, on one of his missions. He was arrested in Prairial for his participation in the "tyranny" that allegedly ruled the section and for his harassment of citizens—the same accusation heard before. A new charge was that he had been one of the men responsible for the disturbance that had broken out in the assembly over the removal of the bust of Marat from the hall.64

Immediately after his arrest, Houdaille's wife obtained a certificate of his
good conduct from the civil and welfare committees, on both of which he had served. The joint committees admitted that Houdaille had discharged his duties with exactitude and "that he showed himself humane and fair towards the poor of the section." Furthermore, in time of danger he had shown much energy and had presented himself unarmed when the general alarm sounded on 20 May (1 Prairial). Although the civil committee acknowledged that there were no specific charges against him and even refuted the general charges that had been leveled against him, it asserted that "Houdaille constantly showed by his proposals and motions that he was a zealous partisan of terrorism; he was linked to all the terrorists of the section, whom he supported, just as they supported him."65 This was an unusually prejudiced conclusion by the civil committee, which often intervened on the side of the accused against the sectional assembly.

Houdaille wrote the Committee of General Security that his "crime in the eyes of some of his co-citizens was to have been a member of the revolutionary committee before 9 Thermidor." Three successive commissions, he pointed out, were appointed by the general assembly to examine the conduct of former members of the revolutionary committee, yet nothing was found against them. Could he be held as a criminal, he asked, for being a member of a committee whose conduct had been found to be irreproachable? His denunciation was the result of personal hatred, nothing else, he concluded. The Committee of General Security restored him to full citizenship on 16 September 1795 (30 Fructidor, Year III).66

Philippe Denis Pinet was a captain in the section’s armed force, employed in the post office and residing on rue des Billettes. He had been invited to serve on the committee primarily because of his fine script. Arrested as "an agent of tyranny," he protested that he had never harmed anyone and asked indignantly if it were not true that the revolutionary committee on which he had served was a legally constituted body. Was it right, he asked, to be destroyed because he had helped its members to keep minutes and address correspondence? Submitting a document carrying the signatures of his commander, noncommissioned officers, and privates to the effect that he had carried out his duties on 20 May (1 Prairial) with courage and exactitude, Pinet added that he was the father of four infants, the oldest being but three years of age. He was completely dependent on his salary of 2,400 livres. The Committee of Posts had ruled, however, that those who had been disarmed were to lose their positions. He had but two days to prove his patriotism, he pleaded. Although there are no other documents in his dossier, it seems reasonable to believe, on the basis of other rulings by the Committee of General Security, that he was restored to full rights of citizenship.67

Pommer (or Pommez) was a dental surgeon who resided on rue Regnault Lefevre. He was charged with having incited his company to march on the
Convention. Pommer appealed to the civil committee, which knew that his function had been limited to issuing security cards and passports. His testimony revealed how he had been swept up by the mass of demonstrators on 1 Prairial, an irresistible wave that carried everything before it. Pommer noticed that many men of his company had slogans written or chalked on their hats which read “Bread and the Constitution of 1793.” One demonstrator asked him to sketch a large slice of bread on his hat and to add “93,” confessing that he could not write. Then another dozen men presented themselves for the same purpose, as he still had the chalk in his hand. He observed others performing the same task at the demand of the demonstrators. Several times he tried to erase his own inscription, but the pressing multitude would not let him. Meanwhile, he continued to march with his company to the aid of the Convention. This could be verified by members of the company and by the sergeant major, he wrote.

The civil committee confessed that it had no knowledge of his inciting the company against the Convention nor of any instance of harassment on his part. In fact, several members could testify to his many acts of humaneness. The Committee of General Security granted Pommer provisional liberty and shortly thereafter restored him to full rights of citizenship.

Temponnet (or Tamponnet) was a mason-entrepreneur residing at 59, Vieille Rue du Temple with his wife and six children. He was charged with the usual “crimes”—being an agent of tyranny, harassing citizens, and agitating the demonstrators on 1 Prairial. For good measure he was also accused of mistreating a septuagenarian paralytic, although the civil committee admitted that it was not certain that the accused was present when the alleged incident took place. Temponnet replied in a “Tableau” tracing the history of his political conduct. In 1792 he had been appointed by the general assembly as commissioner to manufacture five hundred pikes, a task which he had fulfilled. On 10 December 1793 (20 Frimaire, Year II), he was elected a commissioner in charge of provisions. Since 10 August 1792 he had mounted guard in person. In September 1793 he was elected to the revolutionary committee despite his unwillingness to seek the post and an attempt to surrender it because it entailed a substantial sacrifice of income. The Committee of General Security refused to release him after all posts were frozen until the peace. He argued that all this proved that there had been no plot to make him a member of the revolutionary committee.

Furthermore, Temponnet denied having tyrannized over his fellow citizens or being guilty of arbitrary acts. He had always interpreted the law humanely, he wrote, and had helped the oppressed and the unfortunate. One need only examine the procès-verbal for proof of his defense as well as for his role on 9 Thermidor. As for his conduct on 1 and 2 Prairial, he had been in his usual place of business in faubourg St. Germain when he was disarmed.
Both the civil and surveillance committees admitted that the only charge against him was that he had been a member of the former revolutionary committee; nothing else existed against him. The Committee of General security granted him provisional freedom and then full rights of citizenship.70

Jean Baptiste Mazin, an upholsterer by trade, resided on rue de la Verrerie. He had been elected to the committee on 19–20 May 1793 at the time of its takeover by the militants. Like the others he was charged with being responsible for “arbitrary actions with his former colleagues” and being a partisan and agent of the former tyranny.”71 Although little else is known about him or his ultimate fate, it is quite probable that it differed little from that of his fellow members.

The arrest of former members of the revolutionary committee was caused partly by the aura of suspicion that clung to them shortly after Thermidor.72 This repression led them to suppress compromising records of registers.73

On 1 October 1795 (10 Vendémiaire, Year III), that is, on the very eve of the attempted royalist coup, there was a motion in the general assembly of section Droits de l’Homme stating that former members of the revolutionary committee had lost the section’s confidence. Another motion held that they had never enjoyed such confidence, and that the assembly had been violated in its rights by the committee. This proposition was adopted, and certificates of civic conduct were withdrawn from former members. Bent on vengeance, the reactionary assembly resolved to demand that the Convention disarm and expel these former officials from all civil and military functions.74 Only the failure of the royalist coup put an end to further attempts at vengeance.

In addition to Joly, one other member of the civil committee was arrested by the sectional assembly, a cabinetmaker by name of Antoine Simpsonien Roger who resided at 113, Vieille Rue du Temple. It is possible to argue that this was an instance of class bias shown by the Thermidorian, who surely were aware of the technical and administrative nature of the civil committee’s functions. Roger was charged with seeking to undermine the loyalty of his military detachment and of being a “partisan and agent of tyranny” preceding 9 Thermidor. The ex-commissioner replied that he had never quitted his post before the Convention even for an instant—a fact that could be verified by his commanding officer. Furthermore, he pointed out that fulfilling the role of soldier, civil commissioner, and assessor to the justice of the peace had left him little time “to court the tyranny.” As for the accusation that he had somehow compromised his colleagues on the civil committee, he asked: “My colleagues are men of education. Was it by my eloquence? Me ... a simple carpenter? ... Was it by intimidation? In one word, why didn’t they complain then? Why does this ‘inculpation’ appear only now?”75
Roger denied that he had deliberately deprived butchers in the section of a living by limiting the number who serviced the relief committee and cited the minutes of the joint sessions of the civil and relief committees to prove it. As for menacing the president of the section during the Germinal (March–April) uprising, Roger asserted that nothing of the sort really happened. As a matter of fact, it was he who had urged the crowd to bring their complaints before the civil committee and had helped close the doors of the chamber to prevent an illegal assembly. It was true that he had accepted some refreshments from Perrin, but this hardly constituted intimacy with the latter or made him a drunkard. Moreover, drunkenness was a vice, not a counterrevolutionary crime. Finally, he asked, can anyone imagine a committee being influenced by a drunkard?76

Signatures attesting to his probity were offered on his behalf. The civil committee admitted that he had always fulfilled his duties and had done his share to discourage riotous behavior before bakeries on 1 Prairial. Yet it could not help noting that Roger had personal links to those who had always considered themselves as the only patriots in the section prior to 9 Thermidor. Moreover, when warmed by too much wine he had expressed himself strongly in committee meetings; but the committee hastened to add, this was partly due to his lack of formal education. He was never really attached to “the agents of tyranny preceding 9 Thermidor” except insofar as “the agents” always attached themselves to those who indulged in drink, seeking to corrupt them. The “terrorists,” thus, could have used him. The Committee of General Security found these explanations sufficient to rule in his favor and released him.77

Officials who had been endowed with powers to enforce the law against profiteering (26 July 1793), must have made more than one enemy among the section's merchants and shopkeepers. This was the role of Jean-Pierre Carron (or Caron), the former commissioner on profiteering, who was described by the Thermidorians as “a man known for his ferocity and one of the zealous defenders of the tyranny of the triumvirs.” A mason by trade, residing at rue des Droits de l'Homme, he had come to the attention of the authorities over a fracas that broke out in the general assembly when a number of muscadins (conservative, middle-class youth) sought to remove the bust of Marat from the hall. Carron had risen to prevent one of them and had either seized him by the collar or struck him with his fist. This led to a general commotion, with partisans of both heatedly taking sides. The revolutionary committee condemned him and Roger for behavior unworthy of good republicans and recommended that they be reprimanded by the president of the section.78

The Committee of General Security took a far graver view of the riot in the assembly, however. It sent Carron to La Force prison and also imprisoned
Louis Houdaille, the former member of the old revolutionary committee. Letters to the Committee of General Security written by Carron and his wife followed soon after. The search of his quarters on 16 February (28 Pluviôse) had uncovered nothing but the usual revolutionary journals and the procès-verbaux of the commissioner on profiteering. Carron argued that he had never denounced anyone and declared that it was he who had prevented the armed force of the section from joining the "rebellious Commune" in Thermidor. He was released on 8 May 1795 (19 Floréal, Year III), only to be rearrested on 1 Prairial and sent to the Maison d'Arrêt Egalité, on rue Jacques. There is no indication how long he languished in prison after his arrest, but he was probably released about the same time as his colleagues of the section who had suffered a similar fate, that is, on the eve of the Vendémiaire coup.79

On 18 February 1795 (30 Pluviôse) the general assembly had resolved that no one was to resort to the application of such terms as "terrorist" in attacking his political opponents, pledging to respect the freedom of opinion for all.80 This pious resolution was never meant to be taken seriously, however. Ten days later a speech by a spokesman from section Bonconseil against "terrorists and men of blood" was loudly applauded by the same section that had just pledged not to abuse the meaning of words.81 On 11 March 1795 (21 Ventôse) the section resolved to approach the Convention on the morrow, demanding a report on the decrees that had suspended prosecution of the septembriseurs. Denunciations against those accused of being such continued. The order of the day was to let justice take its course.82 Needless to say, this justice had a Thermidorian face.

After the insurrection, threats of a Jacobin revival caused panic in the ranks of the Thermidorians.83 Moreover, the assembly burned the list of citizens who had signed the adoption of the Constitution of 1793 with so much enthusiasm.84 It was clear that had it been published only the royalists would have reaped a political advantage. Too many Thermidorians and moderates, innocent citizens and apolitical residents of the section, had committed themselves to support a document now anathema to the Center and the Right. Before the Thermidorians could implement the Constitution of Year III, however, they had to crush the attempted royalist coup. Only then could section Droits de l'Homme appear safe for the new regime. Former revolutionaries and activists, local officials and militants, no longer had any political role to play. The goddess of Virtue enthroned by the Directory bore little resemblance to her more austere predecessor. Those who had worshipped her earlier form were unwelcome in the temple of the new one. Her new devotees in the section now embraced a different set of ideals.
Notes


2. S. E. Harris, *The Assignats* (Cambridge, 1930), 186. Pierre Caron, *Tableau de dépréciation du papier-monnaie* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1910), lii, gives 34 percent for July 1794. The fall of the assignat was uninterrupted from August 1794 to March 1796 when the *mandat* (a new currency) was substituted (Harris, *ibid.*).


4. Ibid., 1:610, citing *Messager du soir* of 8 Germinal. As there are 20 sous per livre, and since the average working man in Paris consumed about four pounds of bread a day, it is obvious that the sans-culottes and their families experienced serious hunger, if not famine. See also the reports on bakeries and pastry shops, 675, 715, 729. Tallien reported in the Convention that provincials in the southern departments were reduced to one-half loaf of bread per head. *Réimpression de l’ancien Moniteur depuis la réunion des Etats-Généraux, jusqu’au consulat (mai 1789–novembre 1799)*, 32 vols. (Paris, 1840–1845), 23, no. 178:700, 23 Ventôse, An III (18 March 1795), session of 25 Ventôse.


8. Ibid., 1:436, 11 Pluviôse (30 January); 1:514, 9 Ventôse (27 February); 1:585–86, 30 Ventôse (20 March); 1:599, 4 Germinal (24 March).


13. Aulard, *Paris*, 1:650, 21 Germinal (10 April); 1:652, 22 Germinal (11 April); 1:668, 29 Germinal (18 April); 1:657, 24 Germinal (13 April); 1:673, 1 Floréal (20 April); 1:687–88, 7 Floréal (26 April); A.N., F7* 2498, p. 295, 23 Floréal (12 May).

14. *Moniteur*, 24, no. 244:497–98, 4 Prairial, An III (23 May 1795). The slogan was “Bread and the democratic Constitution of 1793.” Whoever failed to carry this motto chalked on his hat was to be regarded as an enemy. An address to departments and to the army was also to be drafted. The manifesto was drawn up in the
form of resolutions beginning with “The people, considering that the govern­
ment allows them to starve inhumanely . . .,” and concluding in eleven separate
articles. See the discussion in F. Dieudonné, “Préliminaires et causes des journées
de prairial an III,” La Révolution française 44 (December 1902): 504–27. The
author cites the food crisis and objections to the reorganization of the National
Guard, along with the presence of regular troops, as important causes of the
insurrection. Both Babeuf and Brutus Magnier, who preached insurrection, were
in jail, he points out.
15. A.N., F7 4633, d. 4 (dossier Carnonkel), 1 Prairial, Year III, “Procès-verbal du
Comité Civil de la Section des Droits de l'Homme.” This document was brought
to my attention by M. François Gendron of the Université de Laval, Canada.
Because of the joint meeting with the civil committees, the
crimes of the revolutionary committee contain little of importance for its session of 1 Prairial.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. A.N., F7 4704, d. 1, 1, 3, and 7 Prairial (20, 23, and 27 May) (dossier Fayolle);
22 Thermidor, Year III (9 August 1795), “Réponse de Fayolle . . . du Plessis.”
Fayolle underscored the order of the general staff, signed by a commanding
officer, Nonnoille, which read: “You will take section to the Convention armed
with your cannon.”
19. Ibid., A.N., F7 4633, d. 4.
20. A.N., F7 4633, d. 4; A.N., F7 4704, d. 1, 1 Prairial, Year III.
21. A.N., F7 4633, d. 4.
22. A.N., AF II, 50, plaque 385, pièce 10, 3 Prairial, (22 May).
23. Moniteur 24, no. 244:497, 4 Prairial.
24 The Messager du soir of 2 Prairial wrote that such crowds had not been seen
since 1789, and the Courier républicain of 3 Prairial reported that Paris resembled
an armed camp. Never had such an immense armed throng been witnessed in
the capital, not on 14 July, 10 August, or 31 May. Cited by Aulard, Paris,
1:735, 1 Prairial.
25. Ibid., 1:733, 1 Prairial. One police spy listed the reestablishment of the Commune
as among the political demands of the insurgents. Rudé calls this “a piece of
deliberate embroidery by the police,” as no such demand occurs among the
slogans of the insurgents of either Germinal or Prairial (Rudé, The Crowd,
156, n. 2). The petitioners of section Quinze Vingts, however, raised the question
of why Paris still had no independent municipal government on the eve of the
Germinal uprising: “Why is Paris still without a municipal government?” (Aulard,
Paris, 1:623, n. 1). This petition is reproduced in the Moniteur, 24, no. 194:106,
14 Germinal, Year III (3 April 1795). The demand for an independent municipality
was raised indirectly in the form of a question.
27. A member of the revolutionary committee of the seventh arrondissement described
the “terrorists and partisans of tyranny” carrying the head of Féraud “in triumph”.
(A.N., F7* 2498, pp. 302–3, 3 Prairial; Moniteur, 24, no. 244:498–99, 4 Prairial;
no. 245:501–7, 5 Prairial; no. 246:510–15, 6 Prairial).
28. Moniteur, 24, no. 246:515–16, 6 Prairial; no. 247:517–24, 7 Prairial; and no.
248:525–26, 8 Prairial; and the appropriate references in Mathiez, Tonnesson,
and Rudé, as above.
29. A.N., F7* 2498, pp. 304–6, 4 Prairial. After a long discussion it was observed
by various members of the revolutionary committee that almost all of the par-
tisans of “anarchy” in the general assemblies of the sections and of the former local authorities were old Robespierrist.

30. B.V.C., MS. 120, fol. 161–63, 5 Prairial.

31. Ibid., fol. 163, from 12 noon to 7 P.M. by order of the Committee of Public Safety.

32. Ibid., fols. 163–65, 6 and 7 Prairial 1795. For Leclerc see A.N., F7 4774², d. 1; for Lenfant see A.N., F7 4774³, d. 1. These dossiers have been summarized by Alexandre Tuetey, Répertoire général des sources manuscrites de l’histoire de Paris pendant la Révolution française, 11 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1890–1914), vol. 5, Introduction, x–xiii.

33. B.V.C., MS. 120, fol. 163, 7 Prairial 1795. (“Varlet s’y opposa disant que la justice nationale devait avoir le dessus.”)

34. The ten officers and noncommissioned officers plus the forty-six cannoneers who had been arrested after the events of 9 Thermidor were still in prison at the time of the insurrection of Prairial. They had issued a justification of their conduct in B.N., Lb41 1476, Mémoire justicatif de la conduite de la compagnie des canonniers de la Section des Droits de l’Homme, à tous les républicains français (Paris, Brumaire, An III), 11 pp. The same work in B.N., MSS, Nouv. acq. fr. 2687, fols. 5–10.

35. The purge was completed by 10 P.M. of 10 Prairial, and on the following day several women denounced former members of the old revolutionary committee (ibid. fol. 166. A.N., F7 4774⁴, d. 2 [dossier J. F. Millet]). R. Cobb, “Note sur la répression contre le personnel sans-culotte de 1795 à 1801,” Annales historiques 26 (1954): 23–49, passim, points out that the repression of Prairial was against categories, not individuals.

36. A.N., F7 4774⁵, d. 2; see also A.N., F7 4597, plaque 8, 4e jour complementaire, Year III (20 September 1794) (dossier Beudelot).

37. Ibid.; A.N., F7 4774⁶, d. 3, 13 Fructidor, Year III (30 August 1795).

38. A.N., F7 4677, d. 5. Diversin was released on 6 August 1795 (19 Thermidor, Year III).

39. A.N., F7 4633, d. 4. He was restored to full citizenship by the Committee of General Security of 30 September 1795 (9 Vendémiaire, Year III). The procès-verbal of the joint committees during the insurrection of Prairial is deposited in his dossier.

40. A.N., F7 4710, d. 4.

41. A.N., F7 4715, d. 2. Among the signatures on his behalf was that of Grandjean. He was released provisionally at an unspecified date and appealed for the restoration of full rights on 12 July 1795 (24 Messidor, Year III).

42. A.N., F7 4750, d. 4. He was rearmed on 4 October 1795 (12 Vendémiaire, Year IV. A.N., D III, 256³, d. 10, pièce 68 gives his age.

43. A.N., F7 4774⁴, d. 5. The Committee of General Security granted him provisional freedom on 7 August 1795 (20 Thermidor, Year III).

44. A.N., F7 4775³⁸, d. 2. Vallée wrote to the administration of Provisions 22 Nivôse, Year III (11 January 1795), revealing that he was a father of two volunteers and that he needed a job because the scarcity of leather kept him unemployed. He was released on 6 August 1795 (19 Thermidor, Year III).

45. A.N., F7 4774⁶, d. 2, 1 Prairial; A.N., F7 2498, pp. 301–2, 4 Prairial.

46. A.N., F7 4774⁷, d. 2, 7 Prairial, Year III (26 May 1795). In the maargin of this document are written remarks like “this is true” or “this is false,” probably by Perrin.
47. Ibid., 2 Messidor (20 June); A.P.P., A A/22, pièce 367, 14 Messidor, Year III (2 July 1795).
48. "Section Droits de l'Homme... also submitted a patriotic song on the same subject [the taking of Toulon] composed by citizen Perrin" (B.N., Lc2 786, \textit{Journal de la Montagne}, no. 49, p. 387, 12 Nivôse, Year II [1 January 1794].
49. A.N., F\textsuperscript{7} 4774\textsuperscript{48}, d. 2, 14 Floréal, Year III (3 May 1795); 23 Floréal, Year III (12 May 1795).
50. A.N., F\textsuperscript{7} 4774\textsuperscript{49}, d. 2, 6 and 18 Prairial, Year III (25 May and 6 June 1795).
51. Ibid.
52. Gabriel Christophe Agnet Rossignol resided at 20, rue des Juifs, living off his investments. He was described as being "exact and honest" (A.N., D III, 256\textsuperscript{3}, d. 10, pièce 41).
53. A.N., F\textsuperscript{7} 4774\textsuperscript{45}, d. 2, 5 and 7 Thermidor, Year III (23 and 25 July 1795).
54. Ibid.
55. There are two documents containing the names, addresses, and charges of those purged. The first is A.N., F\textsuperscript{7} 4774\textsuperscript{45}, d. 2 (dossier André Michel), which carries thirty-four names, not thirty-three as reported by the secretary of the general assembly. The second is A.N., F\textsuperscript{7} 4774\textsuperscript{46}, d. 2 (dossier J. F. Millet), which carries an additional thirty-one names, a total of sixty-five names. Forty-seven of the people listed either were arrested or warrants had been issued for their arrest, while eighteen had been disarmed. Discussion of the members of the former revolutionary committee will refer to their individual dossiers in the F\textsuperscript{7} series. If no such individual dossier exists, the reference will be to the above two dossiers. A number of names appearing on the second document above were of those who had been arrested previous to the events of Prairial. I have avoided discussing a number of those listed above for whom individual dossiers do not exist or who were not members of the revolutionary or civil committee.
56. A.N., F\textsuperscript{7} 4592, d. 2. The observations of the civil committee are under date of 8 Thermidor, Year III (26 July 1795). He was released on 14 Thermidor, Year III (1 August 1795), and restored to citizenship of 11 Fructidor, Year III (28 August 1795).
57. A.N., F\textsuperscript{7} 4639, d. 3, 5 Prairial, Year III (24 May 1795). This is an abstract from the register of the sectional assembly. Charbonnier's reply is of 22 July 1795 (5 Thermidor, Year III). The letter of the surveillance committee is dated 13 Thermidor; the Committee of General Security released him the following day.
58. A.N., F\textsuperscript{7} 4653, d. 4. He was released on 31 August 1795 (14 Fructidor, Year II). There is no information on the precise date of his arrest nor of his removal from section Droits de l'Homme.
59. A.N., F\textsuperscript{7} 4679, d. 2, 7 and 13 Thermidor, Year III (25 and 31 July 1795). It is not clear from the witnesses whether Donzel had put out a real fire or whether the words like "torch," "flames," "extinguish," etc., were meant only in a figurative sense. Donzel was given provisional freedom on 13 August (26 Thermidor, and full freedom the following month.
60. A.N., F\textsuperscript{7} 4774\textsuperscript{45}, d. 2. Tuetey confused him with Jean Baptiste Lazare Gervais (A.N., F\textsuperscript{7} 4723, d. 2), who was arrested for shady dealing as a broker (\textit{broncanteur}) (\textit{Répertoire général}, 10, Index).
61. The committee's dissatisfaction with Gervais may be seen in A.N., F\textsuperscript{7*} 2497, p. 85, 19 Pluviôse, Year II (7 February 1794); and 26 Floréal, Year II (15 May 1794), p. 114.
62. A.N., F7 4734, "Mémoire du citoyen Guéneau"; F7* 2497, p. 24, 20 May 1793, when the committee elected him secretary.
63. A.N., F7 4734, "Mémoire" and other documents.
64. A.N., F7 4745, d. 1; F7* 699, Year III.
65. A.N., F7 4745, d. 1, 27 Messidor, Year III (15 July 1795).
66. Ibid. He was freed provisionally on 1 August 1795 (14 Thermidor, Year III), then appealed for restoration of full rights in an undated letter, and was re­armed on 16 September (30 Fructidor).
67. A.N., F7 47475d, d. 5, 5 and 19 Prairial, Year III (24 May and 7 June 1795).
68. A.N., F7 477578, d. 6. On 18 July 1795 (8 Messidor, Year III) the surveillance committee of the seventh arrondissement referred to his many acts of humanity in the past and endorsed the decision of the Committee of General Security to release him. He was restored to citizenship on 5e jour complémentaire (21 September).
69. A.N., F7 477526, d. 4, a dossier of 13 pièces. A.N., F7 477524 is a dossier of 2 pièces, which for some unaccountable reason is filed separately from the first reference above. One difference is that the latter is spelled Tamponnet rather than Temponnet. Temponnet spelled his own name with an e; see his "Tableau de la Conduite du Citoyen Temponnet détenue en la maison d'arretes 3 à Plessis," 5 Prairial, Year III.
70. Ibid. He was allowed to travel for twenty days in order to establish himself in his place of birth, Montgeron, despite the provisional nature of his release; that is, he was still under the surveillance of the local authorities. On 17 August (30 Thermidor) he was restored to citizenship rights.
71. A.N., F7* 2497, p. 24. His first name appears in A.P.P., A A/136, fol. 44, 2 Frimaire, Year II (22 November 1793). His occupation is given on Babeuf's list, B.N., Lb42 232. His dossier is A.N., F7 477445, d. 2.
72. A.N., F7* 699, no date. This is a loose sheet in the above register with a notation in the margin: "All citizens to be kept equally under surveillance." A.N., F7 4748, d. 2 (dossier Pierre Jacob), 24 January 1795 (5 Pluviôse, Year III) is an eight-page manuscript containing descriptions of former revolutionaries and observations on them. One heading is "Members of former bloody revolutionary committee."
74. B.V.C., MS. 120, fols. 160–61.
75. A.N., F7 477497, d. 1. These responses to the charges against him were written in Plessis prison on 18 June 1795 (30 Prairial, Year III).
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid. He was released provisionally on 19 July 1795 (1 Thermidor, Year III) and was restored to full rights on 14 Thermidor.
78. B.V.C., MS. 120, fol. 160, 20 Pluviôse, year III (8 February 1795); A.N., F7 4634, d. 3, 20 and 21 Pluviôse, Year II (8 and 9 February 1794); A.N., F7* 699, Year III.
79. A.N., F3 2498, pp. 198–99, 23 and 24 Pluviôse, Year III (11 and 12 February 1795); the second warrant of arrest is dated 1 Prairial and is acknowledged by the prison authorities of Maison d'Arrêt Egalité on 6 Prairial (25 May).
80. B.V.C., MS. 120, fol. 160.
81. Ibid., 10 Ventôse, 1795 (28 February).
82. Ibid., fol. 161. The section was also to offer its congratulations to the Convention on the return of the Girondist deputies shortly thereafter.
83. Ibid., fol. 167, 21 Prairial 1795. It was reported that an anonymous note preaching terror and raising demands to revive the Jacobins caused indignation when it was brought to the attention of the assembly.
84. Ibid., fols. 168–69, 1er jour complémentaire 1795 (17 September).
Robespierre used to chide his moderate opponents of “wanting a revolution without a revolution.” Simon Schama wants no revolution at all. In “shaking off the mythology of the revolution” (see the interview by Mervyn Rothstein in the New York Times, 27 April 1989), Schama has created his own mythology. He admits that he does not believe in a “pure objectivity”—what historian does? But the reader has the right to expect of him a fair treatment of the revolutionaries in the real circumstances of a profound social and political crisis. Unfortunately, as Thomas Paine said of Edmund Burke, “He pities the plumage, but forgets the dying bird.” Schama sees the Revolution as a series of scandalous events. In this respect his narrative is a sensational story. He seldom looks at the events from the revolutionaries’ point of view and never with sympathy for them. Instead, he judges the movement from the victims’ outlook; but the the victims are not the Girondins, Enragés, Hébertistes, or Jacobins of the Left, but, rather, the Malesherbes, the Neckers, and the Talleyrands. In addition, his book is badly skewed. The text is 875 pages long, but the fall of the Bastille does not begin until page 369. Part 4, entitled “Virtue and Death,” which covers the most important and in some respects the most meaningful developments for our own times, is a mere 170 pages. Yet this portion attempts to recite the dramatic events from the winter of 1793 through the fall of Robespierre in the summer of 1794. Schama has little to say on Robespierre and the Great Committees, and nothing but an “Epilogue” on the events after 9 Thermidor. As for his view on revolutions in general, he writes that “asking for the impossible is a good definition of a revolution” (322). This tells us more about the author’s approach, however, than it does about his subject.

Let us examine the text in more detail. Schama, like so many of his so-called revisionist contemporaries, never doubts that the Old Regime was “modern” or “bourgeois,” or that in any case, it was no longer feudal. Yet there are numerous references to the seigneurial system, to feudal dues, to labor obligations (corvées), and to other traditional feudal exactions throughout his text (see, for example, pp. 433, 434, 435, 437, and the feudal privileges surrendered on 4 August 1789 by the National Assembly, p. 438). He quotes
with approval a conservative French historian, Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret, who writes that “a noble was nothing more than a successful bourgeois” (116), and then contradicts himself by writing that “the one thing the Constituent Assembly was manifestly not was bourgeois” (478, his emphasis). But if the Assembly was not bourgeois, it must have been noble. (We can assume it is not necessary to demonstrate that it was not sans-culotte or peasant). Still, how could it have been noble when, according to Chaussinand-Nogaret and Schama, a noble was only a bourgeois?

Moreover, he ignores Louis XVI’s famous speech three weeks before the fall of the Bastille (23 June 1789). “All property without exception,” said the king, “shall be respected at all times, and his Majesty expressly includes under the name of property the tithes... feudal and seigneurial rights and duties [my emphasis], and, in genered, all rights and prerogatives, useful or honorary, connected with lands and fiefs, or appertaining to persons.” Yet Schama would have us believe that the Old Regime was “bourgeois.”

Unlike many historians who find the Old Regime full of archaic and irrational customs and practices (see Montesquieu’s The Persian Letters as an example), Schama argues that the French elite “was fluid and heterogeneous” (117), that the term “Old Regime” is a misnomer (118), and that at the very heart of this elite was “a capitalist nobility” (118). He is convinced that “a literary conspiracy” existed, which he calls “the Figaro syndrome,” that has been ignored by the modern historians and that helped the defeat of the misnamed Old Regime by people who did not really understand the ideas they were promulgating (175). And in a complete reversal of the many studies done on Louis XVI, Schama sees him as “lively” (not at all phlegmatic) and concerned with public business (188).

Schama is convinced, moreover, that the social structure did not cause the Revolution but that social issues did. Yet in listing the issues that allegedly caused the Revolution, he cannot avoid mentioning the structure (see 293–94). Indeed, how can social issues exist without a structure to give them form? Until the advent of the revisionists, historians always believed that one reason we call the events of 1789 a “social revolution” is precisely because one social class, loosely termed the ‘bourgeoisie,” replaced another, the “nobility” (the upper echelons of the Church were, with hardly an exception, noble). Schama argues to the contrary that no significant transfer of social power occurred, except for its loss by the Church. but if there was no transfer of power, why did so many nobles emigrate? And why were “aristos” so execrated? Was the “Restoration” limited to the return of the Bourbons alone?

The trend, writes the author, was from “nobles to notables.” And who were the latter? He replies as follows: “As landowners, state functionaries, departmental administrators, and professional judges and doctors, bankers and
manufacturers, they constituted a knot of influence and power that would effectively dominate French society for the next century" (521). But these are "bourgeois" within the meaning of the term. And the real question is not whether they dominated the century after the Revolution (no one doubts this), but whether they dominated French society during the century preceding the Revolution. Of course, bourgeois property forms, and relations based on them, were beginning to dominate the economic life of the country decades before the Revolution, but the bourgeoisie was still the Third Estate and, as such, faced discrimination from the upper two Estates. Furthermore, if Schama can demonstrate that a seigneurial estate, encumbered and limited by the law of entail and primogeniture, worked by unfree labor, is no different from a landed estate that can be bought, sold, or split up, that is, in short, to use a Marxist term, a "commodity," then, indeed, there is no difference between nobles and notables.

Although Schama is interested in symbols (literary and pictorial), and even blames the Romantic movement for encouraging the revolutionaries for stressing "passion over Reason" (861) and going from "euphoria to terror" (354), he cannot see the Bastille as a symbol of despotism. Instead, he repeats that old cliché that only seven prisoners were inside its walls when it was successfully besieged by what conservative historians still call "the mob." (The concept of "crowd," incidentally, is foreign to Schama as well.) The fact that this structure, by its high and thick walls, the gunpowder stored in its vaults, and the Swiss garrison, dominated the neighborhood of Saint-Antoine is ignored. More important, its fall led to the successful organization of municipal bodies throughout France, dominated by the bourgeoisie, as well as to the evolution of the National Guard from the bourgeois militia. These two developments destroyed the possibility of the king's military intervention against the newly formed National Assembly. But our author sees nothing of this. Instead, he speaks of "Gothic fantasies" enhancing the responsibilities of "despotism" (487). Schama's quotation marks around the latter term means that he denies its existence.

Moreover, he is at pains to demonstrate throughout his narrative that it was violence that characterized the Revolution and "made the Revolution possible in the first place" (436). Violence, according to him, "was the Revolution's source of collective energy," and it was "what made the Revolution revolutionary." And again: "Bloodshed was not the unfortunate by-product of revolution, it was the source of its energy" (615). Furthermore, in a statement that could have made Burke blush, Schama pronounces that "the Terror was merely 1789 with a higher body count" (477).

Two days after the storming of the Bastille, the duke of Dorset, England's ambassador to France, wrote a well-known report to his government praising "the regularity and determined conduct of the populace" and concluding
that “the greatest revolution has been effected with, comparatively speaking, if the magnitude of the even is considered, the loss of very few lives.” Schama is surely acquainted with this famous letter, as is every student of the Revolution, but to admit such evidence by an objective observer outside France is to undermine his thesis of “violence” or the “politics of paranoia” (436).

Schama finds in the September massacres proof, yet again, of his thesis that the Revolution “depend[ed] on organized killing to accomplish political ends” (637). He excoriates Pierre Caron, who wrote the definitive study of this tragic event, as being guilty “of intellectual cowardice and moral self-delusion” (631). And in an exhortation to such historians, he writes: “To those who insist that to prosecute is not the historian’s job, one may reply that neither is a selective forgetfulness practiced in the interests of scholarly decorum” (632). One can only agree—but as Robert Burns wrote, “O wad some power the giftie gie us / To see oursel’s as ither see us!”

Schama finds Talleyrand a model of maturity and good sense in rejecting the “extremes” of both Right and Left. Among the “extremes” of the latter are Thomas Paine’s proposals for a “welfare state.” What can one say to an author who thinks that Paine was extreme when he suggested that it was better to make the lives of the “140,000 aged persons” in England more comfortable than to waste “a million a year of public money” on the king? It’s a little late to defend the civilized proposals advocated by Thomas Paine for old age, unemployment benefits, and insurance against illness.

Nor is Schama against violence per se. He finds Charlotte Corday admirable, a heroine in every sense of the word, and he relishes the way she carried out her assassination of Marat. As for Marat, Schama despises him because of his “sanguinary hysterics,” his glorification of “rudeness,” and his effort to displease as many people as possible in order to demonstrate his “integrity” (661, 729–41). But if Marat was only a jealous, envious, rude person, it is difficult to account for his popularity among so many thousands of ordinary people, not only among the revolutionaries.

Marat is not the only revolutionary who earns Schama’s displeasure. He finds Robespierre equally unattractive, a “Missionary of Virtue” (834). In characterizing Jean Baptiste Cloots (who called himself “Anacharsis”) as “bizarre” and as among the “lunatics and thugs” of the Left, Schama makes a profound error (808, 816). It would be difficult to find a gentler and a more devoted French patriot (despite his Prussian and noble birth) than Cloots. He became a victim of French chauvinism and died in the frame-up of the Cordelier leaders. As for the Hébertises dying on the guillotine like “cowards without balls” (816), with the exception of Hébert himself, all died with courage and dignity. Besides, this stress on how revolutionaries and their adversaries died is too often overemphasized, when the more important question should
be, How did they live? Moreover, it is strange that Schama, who has so much compassion and concern for the conservative and moderate victims of the Terror, has none for the more radical spokesmen of the sans-culottes.

Schama concludes his book with the feminist revolutionary, Théroigne de Mericourt, in the mental institution of Salpêtrière. A sketch of her disturbed and pathetic visage is the last illustration in the book. Since Schama is keen on symbols, it is obvious that he sees de Mericourt’s end as a fitting close to the Revolution as well. Still, it is regrettable that such a capable historian as Schama, whose style and expression are enviable, who can tell a fascinating story with verve and drama, and who rivets the readers’ attention on the narrative, should be so prejudiced against the Revolution. Why is this so?

Like the rest of us, Schama is a product of our reactionary century. We are aware, of course, that its revolutions have turned out badly. The hopes aroused by the Russian Revolution and by social democracy turned into Stalinism and Hitlerism, respectively. The French Revolution, too, failed to establish the reign of “Virtue.” Goya’s famous painting The Dream of Reason Brings Forth Monsters reminds us that between dreams and nightmares there is a thin line. Yet the events in the late 1980s, from Beijing to Moscow, are proof, yet again, that humanity continues to dream and to strive for liberty, equality, and fraternity. These noble ideals of the French Revolution will continue to inspire men and women everywhere. In this respect the Revolution lives on.
The End of the Revolution from Below

In an interview with Boris Yeltsin on 11 September 1989, Jim Lehrer of the "MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour" asked what would happen if the people of the Soviet Union lost their patience with Gorbachev's perestroika. Yeltsin replied, "A revolution from below will begin." When Lehrer asked if it would be "an armed revolution?," Yeltsin explained, "No. Of course [not]. I prefer it to be bloodless, without a civil war, a peaceful revolution, but from below." This emphasis on "a revolution from below" has characterized the dramatic events in Central and Eastern Europe. The many reports in the newspapers and journals all spoke of "movements from below," or of "revolutions from below."

If popular revolutions of the past can shed light on current events, the latter can give an insight into the former, as well. William Doyle, in his recently published The Oxford History of the French Revolution, writes on the beginnings of the popular movement: "Power was to emanate if not from the bottom, then at least from below." In presenting several essays under the title of "Political Forms of Revolutionary Democracy," Peter Jones declares: "The main challenge to the liberal representative system came from below and took the form of constituent power, or what other speakers have termed direct democracy." Thus, the concept of a revolution from below, or power emanating from below, links 1989 with 1789.

A study of these movements leads some historians to conclude that no single man, group, or party makes a revolution, and certainly not the mass upheavals from below. Whatever political influence the famous "Society of Thirty" liberal nobles exercised, they could hardly have called out a mass movement. Lafayette and Maubourg, the alleged leaders of what one historian calls "A Conspiracy of Well-Intentioned Men," could never have had any impact on the court without the intervention of the sans-culottes on 14 July. Moreover, who could have predicted the attack on the Bastille? Louis, as is well-known, had entered the one word, "Rien," in his daybook for 14
July. The same can be said for Nicholas II, tsar of all the Russians, a century and a quarter later. On the very eve of the March Revolution, as the Romanov rule was coming to an end, he entered a brief note in his diary of having shot a sparrow and having had tea with his uncle. (It should be pointed out that the mass uprisings in March 1917 caught Lenin and Trotsky by surprise as well.)

As to how these revolutions from below are set off in the first place, we are uncertain. Trotsky speaks of these events as a kind of "molecular process," wherein one molecule impinges on another until millions of molecules—that is, men and women—are involved. In every case, these movements from below constitute spontaneous revolutions that catch future Jacobins as well as Bolsheviks by surprise.

Unlike insurrections that are conscious acts, revolutions from below are triggered by the most prosaic, conventional action: the wink of a Cossack on horseback, enough to embolden a demonstrator, or a toast drunk by a Garde Française in honor of the Third Estate. Of course, these actions only apply the match. Without the powder—that is, mass discontent, loss of respect for traditional authority, or a strong desire for change—the trigger will not fire "the shot heard round the world."

Even before the attack on the Bastille, a movement from below had already begun. The primary assemblies that met in April 1789 began by ignoring the royal instructions, expelled the prevot's (head magistrate's) officers from the hall, organized various bureaus and committees, drafted their cahiers, and appointed their electors. From the very beginning these assemblies, almost entirely composed of bourgeois, referred to their representatives as mandataires, that is, proxies who had no right to act independently of their constituents. In short, although not yet democratic in election or composition, they were acting as if all power emanated from below.

Here it might be well to recall that the concept of mandataire is rooted in the age-old practice of the mandat impératif. It is only a short step from this obligation, imposed by the electors upon their delegates to vote in a predetermined manner upon questions considered in advance, to the more radical idea that "the people's mandatories" must carry out the will of their constituents. This means that direct democracy, rather than a representative system, best expresses the will of the people. Thus power must emanate from below. Théophile Leclerc, the young Enragé, warned his readers, citing Rousseau, that a people represented was not free, because the will cannot be represented. Magistrates were only the people's proxies, not their representatives, and he cautioned that from an abuse of words could follow the abuse of deeds.

How did this direct democracy, this upsurge from below, manifest itself during the Revolution? On 12 July 1789 the Electoral Assembly sitting in
the Hôtel de Ville convoked the sixty districts of the capital to deliberate and act on the king’s threat to dissolve the National Assembly. The following morning the tocsin was heard throughout the capital as men sought arms and signed up for the bourgeois militia. The next day the Bastille was stormed.

The October Days that saw the women march on Versailles and bring back “the baker, the baker’s wife, and the baker’s boy,” that is the royal family, was also a movement from below. The Parisian National Guard forced Lafayette and his officers to follow the women. Camille Desmoulins, the future publisher of an important journal and a participant in the events of 14 July, saw and heard a grenadier threaten Lafayette with his gun, crying out, “General, to Versailles, or to the lantern.” Lafayette had to admit to the Paris Commune that he could no longer resist the demands of his troops before it authorized him to depart for Versailles. Thus, the common soldiers forced their officers to place themselves at their head, as they followed some hours behind the women. There could hardly have been a more conclusive example of power from below.

The overthrow of the king on 10 August 1792 was also the result of a movement from below, though this statement must be modified. We know that, unlike the preceding ones; this was no spontaneous uprising. Delegates of the sections and the Fédérés, the armed men from the departments, together with the Jacobins and members of the National Guard, had met for weeks before launching the attack on the Tuileries.

The same may be said of the insurrection of 31 May–2 June 1793 that removed the Girondin leaders from the Convention. For some weeks prior to this event moderates and radicals struggled for control of individual sections. Thirty-three sections authorized their delegates to launch this extra-legal move against the Convention. In a number of cases these delegates were given unlimited powers. Although the insurrectionary committee, called the Central Revolutionary Committee, (Comité central révolutionnaire), directed the uprising, the movement against the Girondins grew out of the agitation in the sections, the Paris Commune, and the Jacobin Club. In other words, the movement originated from below.

An even more spontaneous movement occurred on 4–5 September 1793, when workingmen, artisans, and small shopkeepers invaded the hall of the Paris Commune and sent delegates to the Convention demanding bread. This demonstration resulted in the maximum and the formation of a revolutionary army to requisition supplies for Paris and other towns of France. This was, perhaps, the high point of the popular movement, and the last time that the Convention bowed to a movement from below.

The last movement from below, a journée that failed, was the demonstration of 20–22 May 1795 (1–3 Prairial, Year III), when thousands of men and women from the sections invaded the Convention demanding “Bread
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and the Constitution of 1793." At first they swept everything before them, but unlike 10 August 1792 and 2 June 1793, they lacked an insurrectionary committee to direct the uprising. The Thermidorian were given time to rally their forces and to expel the demonstrators from the hall. Shortly thereafter they disarmed the revolutionaries of the sections and arrested their leaders.12

Between the events of September 1793 and May 1795 there occurred the abortive attempt at an insurrection against the Convention by the Hébertistes/Cordeliers in Ventôse, Year II (that is, February–March 1794). It was followed some four months later by the fall of Robespierre and his comrades on 27 July 1794 (9 Thermidor, Year II). (The latter event is outside the scope of this essay because the nature of the popular revolution, the movement from below, had been decisively curbed by the revolutionary government.) It is true, of course, that the Paris Commune, together with sections loyal to Robespierre, made a half-hearted attempt to defend Robespierre, Saint-Just, and Couthon from the future Thermidorian. But this effort was organized from above. It had little in common with the movements from below that had characterized the Revolution until the demise of the Hébertistes. It is the latter experience that needs to be explained.

Many historians are convinced that the Hébertistes were responsible for an abortive attempt at an insurrection. Actually, they made no serious effort at an uprising against the revolutionary government. They talked of insurrection, they threatened to rise, and this threat proved their undoing. One of the sections under their control, section Marat (formerly faubourg Montmartre), declared to the Commune that it was in a state of revolt so long as supplies of food were not assured. But although hunger, or the threat of hunger, had been responsible for movements from below in the past, in March 1794 section Marat stood alone. Why so?

A partial answer lies in the stubborn fact that France was under siege, engaged in mortal combat with the European Coalition. Patriotism, sometimes turning into chauvinism, permeated the urban population, especially the Parisian sans-culottes. Whatever weaknesses the Convention and its Great Committees demonstrated in being unable to assure food and other essentials to the consumers in the towns of France, their energetic defense of the country assured them wide support among the sans-culotterie.

If we examine the crisis of Ventôse, that is, the time of great shortages and high inflation (in February though early April 1794), we will find that the great mass of sectionnaires was still ardently responding to patriotic appeals. Proof of these manifestations is the wide presentation of saltpeter to the Convention, always accompanied by fiery orations and resolutions. Despite hunger and discontent, the sans-culottes continued to praise the Convention and its committees and to beg the deputies to stay on and continue their patriotic work. Even Antoine-François Momoro, a leading Cordelier and
president of section Marat, assured the Convention of his section’s support—while at the same time he was editing the procès-verbal of the Cordeliers Club on 4 March 1794 (14 Ventôse) that had contained threats of another uprising.

Among the paradoxes of the French Revolution is that a government that had itself arisen from a revolution from below had to suppress, this same movement from below. If only “a single will,” to use Robespierre’s famous phrase, could alone bring victory to France, any action that threatened this will now had to be repressed. The continued agitation over lack of supplies and la vie chère, the high cost of living, had to be curbed. Although the Cordeliers Club had played an important role in democratizing and popularizing the Revolution, and its leaders held important posts, the Committee of Public Safety now began to regard it and its leaders as a danger to that “single will.”

Before the decisive clash with the Cordeliers, the Convention had already suppressed two such popular movements from below: the Enragés of Jacques Roux and Jean Varlet, and the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women of Claire Lacombe and Pauline Léon. With their demise, the popular movement was now centered in the Cordeliers Club.

Lacking a solution to the food crisis of Ventôse, the Cordeliers could only threaten and bluster. Yet, if the Club were to continue as spokesman for the popular movement, it had to find enemies, real or alleged, who could be blamed for the crisis. This could well have been an unconscious reaction by the Cordelier leaders. For how could the crisis have been mitigated by executing the arrested Girondins sitting in prison? What solution to shortages was there in demanding the arrest of the so-called moderates? The Hébertistes demanded that the Convention intensify the Terror, a policy favored, incidentally, by some historians sympathetic to them. But whatever criticism may be leveled against the moderates, their arrest would not have ended shortages, nor interrupted the fall in value of the assignat, nor stopped the galloping inflation.

When the Cordeliers, therefore, called openly for another insurrection, in a fateful session on 4 March 1794 (14 Ventôse), the revolutionary government decided to end this menace. It arrested the Cordelier leaders, and in a frame-up trial that easily could have served as a model for the notorious Moscow trials against the Old Bolsheviks, it condemned and executed Hébert and his comrades. A week later it struck the Dantonists. The destruction of the Cordeliers ended the revolutions from below. The aborted journées of Prairial, in May 1795, only underscored this result. Deprived of popular support, and with its base shrunk, the revolutionary government, in turn, was overthrown some four months later on 9 Thermidor.

One question that needs to be examined is whether these movements from below contributed to the “political culture” of the Revolution. Everyone knows that our so-called revisionist historians have turned their backs on
the Marxist and semi-Marxist approach to the French Revolution. Instead of historical materialism and the class struggle as manifested in political conflicts, the latest explanation of what happened in France between 1789 and 1815 is embodied in the term “political culture.” The traditional interpretation is now regarded as being passé, and some revisionists even boast that they have triumphed over what Albert Soboul used to call “the classical school.”

One problem with the term “political culture” is its lack of a precise definition. The *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* defines political culture as “the set of attitudes, beliefs, and sentiments which give meaning to a political process and which provide the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behavior in the political system.” In short, political culture provides psychological and subjective dimensions to politics. The author of the article, Lucian Pye, writes that the concept of political culture has been criticized as being a new label for old ideas. He agrees that to a degree, this criticism is valid. Still, he observes that the central purpose of the theory is to search for a new way of connecting psychological theory to the political system. Moreover, he adds that there is a danger the term will be employed to fill in anything that cannot be explained in political analysis. The *Social Science Encyclopedia* cites R. C. Tucker on political culture as writing that “it assists us to take our bearings in the study of political life of a society . . . to raise fruitful questions for thought and research without explaining anything.”

In his recently published “inventing the French Revolution,” Keith Michael Baker, after rejecting the definition “in the social-scientific literature of the 1950s and 1960s,” offers, a “more linguistic” definition. It is, according to him, the activity through which individuals and groups in society articulate, negotiate, implement, and enforce the competing claims they make upon one another and upon the whole. Political culture is, in this sense, the set of discourses of symbolic practices by which these claims are made. . . . Thus political authority is, in this view, essentially a matter of linguistic authority.

Baker argues against those who see the French Revolution as a product of “social interests” by insisting that “‘interest’ is itself very much a political” term. This is true, of course, but let us not forget James Madison’s explanation of why interests struggle for control of modern legislation. “Those who hold and those who are without property have ever formed distinct interests in society,” he wrote. These interests may define themselves “linguistically,” but language expresses, or hides, the nature of these social, economic, or political interests. This does not mean, of course, that language does not play an important role in the political process, or fails to create a “culture,” but we ought to be aware of the “interests” that create this culture. Nor should we forget Goethe’s remark, “In the beginning was the act” (*Im Anfang war die That*).
An extreme example of revisionist thinking appeared in a recent issue of *French Historical Studies*. Among the "revisionist textbooks," as he calls them, Gary Kates, the author of the article "The Revisionists Come of Age," presents Simon Schama’s *Citizens*. Anyone who has read Schama’s book must realize that although Schama is a fine writer, he has shed the objectivity of a scholar in his violent hatred of the French Revolution. For this reason along he cannot be regarded as an important figure in French revolutionary studies, and those who praise him so highly reflect their own deep prejudices against revolutions in general and the French Revolution in particular. Schama knows Dutch history and art very well, but there is an embarrassing lack of riches in his study of the French Revolution.

Kates admits that "the demise of the Marxist interpretation of the French Revolution" is due to the "general malaise" in the age of Reagan and Thatcher. Historians, like others, no longer believe that liberty and equality can emerge from revolution; hence they de-emphasize the French Revolution’s importance, he writes, concluding that this brings into question why students should continue to study the Revolution.

If this is true, and some of us agree that it is, the “victory” of the revisionists turns out to be a Pyrrhic one. For if it is demonstrated that the lasting values transmitted by the Revolution had been won in the last decade of the Old Regime, as the revisionists insist, it is difficult to defend a traditional history course in the Revolution. Thus the revisionists, in a sense, have committed suicide. Their “victory” over the Marxist school has turned out to be hollow indeed.

There was a time when the Supreme Court of the United States was accused of “following the flag” rather than the Constitution. Will our historians be accused of following the crowd (or, is it, the mob?) as the latter follows Reagan and Thatcher? If so, then our boast of being “objective” in our scholarship comes to a crushing end. And instead of “the political culture” of the French Revolution rising in triumph, the political culture of Reaganism and Thatcherism proves victorious, after all. This is a consummation devoutly to be avoided.

It should also be noted that, at times, some recent revisionists’ prefaces or conclusions do not agree with their texts. A number of examples illustrate the above. Those who have read William Doyle’s beautifully written *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* will note that the text is not so radically different from traditional works by those whom revisionists see as their opponents. The role of the *petites gens*, for example, is never denigrated by Doyle as he shows how Artois (the youngest brother of Louis XVI, the future Charles X) and his coteries of reactionaries were foiled by “a wave of popular support” for the Third Estate, a movement which climaxed in the storming of the Bastille. As for the peasants, “It was they,” says Doyle,
“rather than the National Assembly, who really destroyed the feudal regime.” Doyle does not deny there was a feudal regime, and repeats what Marxist and other historians have been saying for many decades. Furthermore, Doyle declares that something even more important than feudalism was destroyed on 4 August. “Privilege, that fundamental principle of social and institutional life since time immemorial, had been renounced.” Thus, it seems that the French upper classes, that it is the two privileged Estates, were in conflict with the mass of the people, including the unprivileged Third Estate. Or take this statement of the conflict between the deputies and the people who had come to their aid: The former, writes Doyle, had no intention of sharing power with the latter, whom they were unable to control in July and the first days of October 1789. What is this, if not the struggle between the sans-culottes and the urban bourgeoisie so graphically described by Soboul? On the Girondin versus Montagnard struggle, Doyle writes: “The Girondin intransigence was complete. Their quarrel with Paris was paralysing the entire course of public affairs, if not endangering the very existence of the Convention.” But this is precisely the same point of view held by Mathiez, Lefebvre, Soboul, and others. Yet, when, for example, I leveled this widely accepted charge against the Girondins, a revisionist historian reading my manuscript for a university press before it it was published by the Harvard University Press denounced me for employing “retrospective slander.” “Retrospective slander”—there’s a phrase to conjure with!

In contrast to Schama, who believes that “violence made the Revolution possible,” Doyle states flatly: “It was resistance that made the Revolution violent.” Still, Doyle concludes that the Revolution was “in every sense a tragedy.” This could well be true if we believe that the Old Regime could have been put to sleep without the violence that marked the Revolution. But aside from Doyle’s conclusion, it is easy to agree with him. His “revisionism” is not difficult to accept.

I still believe that in Clio’s house there are many mansions. Without minimizing the contributions of the fine scholars who appear, for example, in the three volumes on “The Creation of Modern Political Culture,” it would be a serious mistake, it seems to me, to ignore or to minimize the works of Jaurès, Mathiez, Lefebvre, or Soboul. The first three, incidentally, were not Marxists, strictly speaking. They were socialists or social democrats, many of whom, were revisionists of the Bernstein school. In any case, they are and will continue to be not only useful, but indispensable to any student of the French Revolution.

Moreover, how can we understand a “political culture” without grasping the nature and development of the political conflicts that gave birth to this culture? Surely political culture must include the study of political ideologies and their roots in different social classes.
Some of us have witnessed trends in historical interpretations come and go. No one, in my opinion, has said the last word on the meaning of particular events, concepts, or individuals roles. I see no contradiction between Rude's explanation of the crowd and Colin Lucas's fine analysis of it, for example. Besides, if "revisionists" believe that "much of the Revolution was over before it began," we had better redefine what we mean by "revolution."

It might be well to remind the revisionists what Colin Lucas, one of the editors of the work cited earlier, says:

An approach which concentrates on seeking out the conceptual discourse by which the Revolution laid down fundamental elements of modern political culture runs the risk of becoming unjustifiably coherent. There is a danger that the real complexity of the revolutionary experience can vanish... There is a risk that, by seeking the origin of modern political culture, one may diminish and distort the true texture of the political culture of the Revolution. Moreover, no one has answered, as far as is known, the question of just when a practice, an ideology, or a tradition becomes a political culture. How long do these developments take? How long—a few years, several decades, or centuries?—before certain "experiments and forms" can be considered a country's political culture?

Bearing this caveat in mind, it seems reasonable to assume that revolutionary crowds were gaining both experience in and awareness of politics as the revolution developed. When a spokesman of faubourg Saint-Antoine, by name of Gonchon, declared that "the men of 14 July did not fight for goodies!" he meant that there were political and ideological matters that had moved them to risk their lives at the Bastille. There is little doubt that leaders of these revolutionary crowds, who had been shaped first by the proliferating political societies and by the sixty districts and then by the forty-eight sections, spoke for the community as a whole. Of course, no formal vote was taken to endow them with this or that mission, but there is little question that they represented the views of the neighborhood or community from which they stemmed. As Colin Lucas says in his perceptive essay, the crowd's "members were too weak to have a significant actions as individuals in regard to authority—whether state, social or economic authority—but collectively they could express their judgment and defend their interests. In this sense, the crowd invaded the public space not just physically, but also morally and politically."

In examining the French Revolution from below we can find numerous examples of contributions made by sectionnaires, sans-culottes, femmes révolutionnaires, or the thousands of members of political clubs. How many laws passed by the various legislative bodies of France had their origin in
resolutions, proposals, or suggestions made by anonymous men and women “from below”? How much of revolutionary policy was shaped by these popular bodies? How many antidemocratic notions were never proposed because the peoples’ deputies knew that the menu peuple would reject them? If there was a “political culture” during the democratic phase of the Revolution, then, perhaps, it would be more proper to speak of two different cultures. For is it not obvious that the aspirations and goals of those below were different from those of the new revolutionary bureaucrats embodied in the Jacobin Club? The paradox of the French Revolution lies in that the new bureaucracy felt it had to deprive those below from sharing power. “For ’tis a common proof,” says Shakespeare, “that lowliness is young ambition’s ladder.” But having turned their back “on the base degrees” by which they ascended the revolutionary ladder, bureaucrats were left suspended in midair. And once the rungs were broken the whole ladder came crashing down.

Notes


5. B.N., Lc 704, L'Ami du peuple, no. 13, 23 August 1793.


18. Ibid., 5.

19. See Madison’s famous essay, no. 10, in *The Federalist Papers*. He wrote: "The most common and durable source of factions [parties or “interests”] has been the various and unequal distribution of property. Those who hold and those who are without property have ever formed distinct interests in society.... A land interest, a manufacturing interests, a mercantile interest, a moneyed interest, with many lesser interests, grow up of necessity in civilized nations, and divide them into different classes, actuated by different sentiments and views."


22. Ibid., 238.


25. Ibid., 425.

29. Cited by Albert Mathiez, La Vie chère et le mouvement social sous la Terreur (Paris: Payot, 1927), 47.
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