

Marxism and the **Great French Revolution**

**Paul McGarr, Alex Callinicos
and John Rees**

**INTERNATIONAL
SOCIALISM** 

Quarterly Journal of the Socialist Workers Party

Marxism and the Great French Revolution

by Paul McGarr, Alex Callinicos and John Rees

Published June 1989

International Socialism, PO Box 82, London E3.

Copyright © International Socialism

Issue 43 of International Socialism,
quarterly journal of the Socialist Workers Party

ISBN 0 905998 67 7

ISSN 0020 8736

The cover shows Marat being carried through the street in triumph after his acquittal by the Revolutionary Tribunal.

Designed by Ken Olende

Printed by BPCC Wheatons Ltd, Exeter, England

Typeset by East End Offset, London E3

The Socialist Workers Party is one of an international grouping of socialist organisations:

AUSTRALIA: *International Socialists*, GPO Box 1473N, Melbourne 3001

BELGIUM: *Socialisme International*, 9 rue Marexhe, 4400 Herstal, Liege

BRITAIN: *Socialist Workers Party*, PO Box 82, London E3

CANADA: *International Socialists*, PO Box 339, Station E, Toronto, Ontario M6H 4E3

DENMARK: *Internationale Socialister*, Morten Borupsgade 18, kld, 8000 Arhus C

FRANCE: *Socialisme International*, BP 189, 75926 Paris Cedex 19

GREECE: *Organosi Sosialistiki Epanastasi*, Menandrou 50, Omonia, Athens

HOLLAND: *International Socialists*, PO Box 9720, 3506 GR Utrecht

IRELAND: *Socialist Workers Movement*, PO Box 1648, Dublin 8

NORWAY: *Internasjonale Sosialister*, Postboks 5370, Majorstua, 0304 Oslo 3

UNITED STATES: *International Socialist Organization*, PO Box 16085, Chicago, IL 60622

WEST GERMANY: *Sozialistische Arbeiter Gruppe*, Wolfgangstrasse 81, D-6000 Frankfurt 1

Marxism

and the

Great French Revolution

Paul McGarr, Alex Callinicos
and John Rees

Contents

Paul McGarr	<i>The Great French Revolution</i>	15
Alex Callinicos	<i>Bourgeois revolutions and historical materialism</i>	113
John Rees	<i>The algebra of revolution</i>	173

Editor: John Rees. **Assistant editors:** Pete Binns, Alex Callinicos, Chris Harman, John Molyneux, Lindsey German, Pete Green, Pete Alexander, Steve Wright, Ann Rogers, Costas Lapavitsas, Colin Sparks, Mike Gonzalez and Sue Clegg.

Editorial Address: PO Box 82, London E3.
Phone 01-538 1626.

Distribution and subscriptions: Bookmarks, 265 Seven Sisters Road, Finsbury Park, London N4 2DE.
Phone 01-802 6145.

Subscription rates: Britain and overseas (surface): individual £8.50 / institutional £17.00. Air speeded supplement: North America nil / Europe and South America £1.00 / elsewhere £2.00.

Note to contributors: The deadline for articles intended for issue 45 of International Socialism is 31 July 1989. All contributions should be double-spaced with wide margins. Please submit two copies. If you write your contribution using a computer, please also supply a disk, together with details of the computer and program used.

Chronology of Events

- 1774 Louis XVI becomes king of France
- 1775 Grain riots ('The Flour War') in France
- 1776 American Declaration of Independence
Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* published
- 1778 France enters American War
- 1783 End of American War
- 1786 French 'free trade' treaty with England
- 1787
- February-May: Assembly of Notables
- August: Exile of Paris Parlement
- September: Recall of the Parlement
- 1788
- May: Renewed attack on Parlements by government
- June-July: Provincial revolts by Parlements
- 8 August: Estates General summoned for 1 May 1789
- 1789
- January: Emmanuel Sieyès' *What is the Third Estate?* published
- January-May: Preparation of *cahiers de doléances* (lists of grievances) and elections to Estates General
- March onwards: Peasant revolts
- 27-28 April: Réveillon riots in Paris
- 5 May: Opening of Estates General at Versailles
- 17 June: Third Estate declare themselves the 'National Assembly'
- 20 June: Oath of the Tennis Court
- 23 June: King tries to intimidate Assembly
- 9 July: National Assembly proclaims itself the Constituent Assembly
- 12-13 July: Riots in Paris grow into insurrection
- 14 July: FALL OF THE BASTILLE
- 15-31 July: 'Municipal' revolutions across France
- 20 July-6 August: Rural revolts known as THE GREAT FEAR
- 4 August: CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY VOTES TO ABOLISH FEUDALISM
- 26 August: DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN AND CITIZEN
- 5-6 October: Parisian women march on Versailles followed by National Guards. King and court taken back to Paris
- 2 November: Church lands nationalised

22 December: Local government reform

1790

January: Renewed peasant risings
Jacobin Club formed

17 April: Assignats issued

27 April: Cordeliers Club formed

21 May: Paris municipal government reorganised into Sections

12 July: Civil Constitution of the Clergy voted by Assembly

14 July: Festival of the Federation in Paris

18 August: Counter-revolutionary assembly at Jalès

November: Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* published

1791

March: Pope condemns the Civil Constitution of the clergy

May-June: Le Chapelier laws outlawing unions and strikes

20-21 June: Flight of royal family halted at Varennes

13-16 July: Assembly reinstates king

16 July: Feuillants separate from Jacobin Club under banner 'The revolution is over'

17 July: Massacre of the Champ de Mars: troops led by Lafayette shoot down republicans. Repression of democratic movement

27 August: Assembly votes to raise property qualification for franchise

September: King accepts new constitution. Constituent Assembly dissolves

1 October: OPENING OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

December-January: Debates at Jacobin Club between Brissot and Robespierre over war

1792

23 January-March: Food riots begin in Paris and other towns and peasant revolts grow again

15 March: Pro-War Brissotin administration formed

20 April: FRANCE DECLARES WAR ON AUSTRIA (Prussia joins war too)

April-May: Military defeats

12 June: Girondin administration sacked by king and Feuillants reappointed

20 June: Demonstration against the king, crowd invade Tuileries

27-29 June: Lafayette bids for power—but National Guards refuse to follow him

- 11 July:** Assembly declares 'the fatherland in danger' (decree proclaimed 21 July)
- 17 July:** Fédérés now in Paris demand removal of the king
- 25 July:** Duke of Brunswick, commander of the invading armies, threatens Paris with total destruction
Paris Sections declare themselves in permanent session
- 3 August:** Paris Sections demand dismissal of the king
- 9 August:** Assembly rejects petition for republic
'Insurrectionary Commune' set up in Paris
- 10 August:** **INSURRECTION IN PARIS OVERTHROWS THE MONARCHY**
National Convention summoned, dismissed
Girondin ministers are reinstated (with the addition of Danton)
- 11 August:** Universal Male Suffrage introduced
- 14 August:** Lafayette flees after trying in vain to persuade his army to march against Paris
- 23 August:** Longwy taken by Prussians
- 2 September:** Elections for National Convention begin.
Verdun falls to invading armies
- 2-6 September:** 'September Massacres'— as volunteers enrol for the front, popular tribunals set up to deal with counter-revolutionaries
- 20 September:** French victory at Valmy
Convention meets to elect its officers
- 21 September:** Convention votes to abolish the monarchy. Later this day is declared the beginning of Year I
- 25 September:** Republic declared "One and Indivisible"
- October-November:** French military victories culminating in occupation of Belgium
- 11 December:** Trial of king opens

1793

- 21 January:** King executed
- 1 February:** Declaration of war against Britain and Holland.
- 24 February:** Decree ordering levy of 300,000 men for the army
- 25-27 February:** Food riots in Paris
- 7 March:** War declared on Spain
- 10 March:** Creation of Revolutionary Tribunal
Outbreak of Vendée rebellion
Riots against Girondin government in Paris
- 18 March:** French army defeated at Neerwinden
- 6 April:** Committee of Public Safety set up (includes Danton)
- 24 April:** Marat, tried by order of the Convention after summoning 'patriots' to Paris to defend the revolution, is acquitted

- 29 April:** Anti-Jacobin rising in Marseilles
4 May: Decree allowing Départements to impose price controls on grain and flour
29 May: Anti-Jacobin insurrection in Lyons
31 May-2 June: PARISIAN UPRISING OVERTHROWS GIRONDIN LEADERS
7 June: 'Federalist' revolts begin
24 June: Convention votes a new, more radical, constitution and Declaration of the Rights of Man

27 June: Paris stock exchange closed
10 July: Danton removed from Committee of Public Safety and Jacobin influence on it increased
12 July: Successful royalist rebellion in Toulon
13 July: Marat assassinated by Charlotte Corday
17 July: All feudal and seigneurial rights and dues abolished

26 July: Death penalty decreed against food hoarders
27 July: Robespierre elected to Committee of Public Safety

23 August: *Levée en Masse* decreed
25 August: Republic recaptures Marseilles
27 August: Royalists hand Toulon over to British
4 September: Workers demonstrate in Paris demanding higher wages

5 September: Paris Commune and Jacobins back march on Convention, which makes Terror 'the order of the day'

9 September: Decree establishing Parisian Armée Révolutionnaire

11 September: National price controls on grain
17 September: Law on Suspects
29 September: Maximum General: National price controls on commodities and wages

5 October: Revolutionary Calendar adopted

YEAR II

- Vendémiaire:*** De-christianisation campaign opens
18 (9 October): Lyons retaken by Republic
19 (10 October): Government declared revolutionary until peace
25 (16 October): Marie Antoinette executed
Brumaire
10 (31 October): 21 Girondin leaders executed
16 (6 November): Municipalities allowed to renounce Catholic worship

20 (10 November): Festival of Liberty and Reason
Frimaire: Government steps up campaign against popular movement
 Women's societies suppressed

- 1 (21 November):** Robespierre attacks de-christianisation and atheism
- 3 (23 November):** Paris Commune closes churches
- 16 (6 December):** Ban on 'revolutionary taxes' on the rich
- 22 (12 December):** Vendéens crushed at Le Mans
- 29 (19 December):** Toulon recaptured
- Nivôse:*
- 1 (21 December):** Collot D'Herbois defends the Terror, marking start of swing back to left by government
- 28 (17 January):** General Turreau's 'infernal columns' begin to ravage the Vendée
- Pluviôse:*
- 13 (1 February):** Ten million francs allocated for poor relief
- 16 (4 February):** Slavery abolished in French colonies
- Ventôse:*
- 14 (4 March):** Abortive revolt by Cordeliers Club and Hébertists
- Germinal:*
- 4 (24 March):** Execution of Hébertists
- 7 (27 March):** Armée Révolutionnaire disbanded
- 16 (5 April):** Execution of Danton
- Floréal:*
- 11 (20 April):** Austrians take Landrecies
- 22 (11 May):** National Welfare Register created
- Prairial:*
- 20 (8 June):** Festival of the Supreme Being
- 22 (10 June):** Revolutionary Tribunal reorganised ('Great Terror' instituted)
- Messidor:*
- 7 (25 June):** Toussaint L'Ouverture, leader of slave revolt in Saint-Domingue, comes out in favour of the French Republic
- 8 (26 June):** French defeat Austrians at Fleurus
- 20 (8 July):** French enter Brussels
- Thermidor:*
- 4-5 (22-23 July):** Attempts to reunify government fail
- 9 (28 July):** FALL OF REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT
- 10 (28 July):** Execution of Robespierre and supporters after failed insurrection by Paris Commune
- Fructidor:*
- 7 (24 August):** Government reorganised, power of 'great' committees curtailed

Year III*Brumaire:*

- 22 (12 November):** Closure of Jacobin Club

Frimaire:

18 (8 December): Surviving Girondin deputies, excluded on 2 June 1793, return to Convention

Nivôse

4 (24 December): Abolition of the Maximum

1795

Pluviôse:

1 (20 January): French occupy Amsterdam

20 (8 February): 'Depantheonisation' of Marat

Germinal:

12 (1 April): Popular rising in Paris fizzles out

Floréal:

15 (4 May): Massacre of imprisoned Jacobins in Lyons

Prairial:

1-4 (20-23 May): Last popular revolt in Paris, crushed.

17 (5 June): Massacre of Jacobins in Marseilles

Messidor: English invasion routed

YEAR IV

Vendémiaire:

1 (23 September): Proclamation of new constitution

9 (1 October): Annexation of Belgium

13 (5 October): Royalist rising in Paris crushed

Brumaire:

9 (31 October): Election of the executive Directory

25 (16 November): Opening of the Club du Panthéon

1796

Ventôse:

9 (28 February): Closure of Club du Panthéon, carried out by Bonaparte

12 (2 March): Bonaparte appointed commander of Army-in-Italy

Germinal:

10 (30 March): Formation of Babeuf's 'Insurrectional Committee of Equals'

Floréal:

21 (10 May): Arrest of Babeuf and supporters

Fructidor:

23 (9 September): Jacobins shot while trying to incite mutiny

YEAR V

Vendémiaire:

25 (16 October): Proclamation in Bologna of the Cispadane Republic

1797

Germinal:

1-12 (20-31 March): Elections to the Legislative Body result in royalist majorities

28 (17 April): Anti-French rising in Verona

Prairial:

7 (26 May): Royalist Barthélemy elected as Director

8 (27 May): Babeuf guillotined

Fructidor:

18 (4 September): Anti-royalist coup

YEAR VI

Vendémiaire:

26 (17 October): Bonaparte signs Peace of Campo Formio

Pluviôse:

27 (15 February): Roman Republic proclaimed

Floreal:

22 (11 May): Invalidation of newly elected Jacobin deputies

30 (19 May): French fleet leaves for Egypt

Fructidor:

5 (22 August): Formation of Second Coalition against France

YEAR VII

French forced onto defensive in war, losing ground in Italy and Germany, Bonaparte cut off in Egypt

Vendémiaire:

21 (12 October): Start of the 'War of the Peasants' against the French in Belgium

30 (21 October): Anti-French rising in Cairo

1799

Pluviôse:

7 (26 January): Neapolitan Republic proclaimed

Prairial:

Councils demand explanation of situation from Directory. Final revival of Jacobinism

Messidor:

18 (6 July): Jacobin Club refounded

Thermidor:

Royalist uprisings in south-west

YEAR VIII

Vendémiaire:

Bonaparte arrives in France

Brumaire:

19 (10 November): Bonaparte's coup. Bonaparte, Sieyès and Roger-Ducos designated consuls

1800	New Constitution with Bonaparte as First Consul
	Foundation of Bank of France
1800-1803	Bonaparte's major reforms in France
1801	Concordat signed with Pope
1803-8	Period of Bonaparte's major 'revolutionary' reforms in Europe
1804	Bonaparte crowned Emperor of the French
1805-7	Bonaparte's sweeping military victories in central Europe
1806-12	French economic blockade of England—the Continental System
1812	Bonaparte's disastrous Russian campaign
1814	Bonaparte's first abdication and exile to Elba
1815	'The Hundred Days' ending in Bonaparte's defeat at Waterloo and exile to St Helena
	Congress of Vienna