The Great French Revolution

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Introduction

'From this place and from this day forth commences a new era in the world's history, and you can all say that you were present at its birth' [1]

With these words the poet Goethe consoled his dejected Prussian companions after their defeat by the French revolutionary army at Valmy on 20 September 1792. Massenbach, a Prussian officer, agreed: 'We have lost more than a battle. The 20 September has changed the course of history. It is the most important day of the century'[2]

The invading Prussian army was disciplined and respected throughout Europe and its commander, the Duke of Brunswick, the most renowned general of the day. But at Valmy they faced a force of a new type: a mass popular army where enthusiastic volunteers fought alongside seasoned veterans.[3] All were fighting not for a king but for *La Patrie*—their 'homeland'—an idea with a power new in history. The Prussians complained: 'Their unbelievable enthusiasm and above all their exasperation against us are beyond all measure and exceed the means at their disposal', and were shocked when civilians hid in woods and set up ambushes—quite outside the normal rules of 18th century warfare.[4]

The spirit of the French was fired by the words of the revolutionary leader Georges Danton, speaking in Paris a few weeks earlier, 'We need audacity, more audacity, always audacity and France will be saved.' [5] A month earlier the Parisian masses had risen, for the third time in three years, and finally overthrown the monarchy. On the very day of victory at Valmy, a National Convention elected on new democratic principles met in Paris. The next day it declared a republic.

The revolution then unfolding in France represented a sharp break with the past—and the participants knew it. The revolutionaries adopted a new

calendar. Years were no longer counted from Christ's birth. They declared September 1792 the beginning of Year 1—the start of a new era in world history (see appendix on revolutionary calendar). Less symbolically, the links with the old order were cut when the king, Louis XVI, was sent to the guillotine in January 1793.

The impact of the French Revolution was immense. Just as the Russian Revolution of 1917 is the pivotal event of the 20th century the French Revolution shook the world a century earlier. And 200 years later it still has special importance for Marxists. Firstly, it was the event, above all others, which shaped the political world in which Marxism developed. A glance at the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin or Trotsky will illustrate the point. Secondly, it was the first real *mass* revolution in modern history, and the 'forcible entrance of the masses into the realm of rulership over their own destiny'[6] not only reshaped French society but spread internationally. Finally, the French Revolution was the decisive political conflict in the birth of the modern bourgeois world. To understand it can help us look forward to and work the better for the international revolution which will send that society to its grave.

The aim of this article is to present in an accessible form the main events and developments of the revolution. This means a number of important arguments will be left to one side—those interested in pursuing them can find signposts in the footnotes.

Absolutism

On 14 July 1789 a mass insurrection swept Paris. Between 180,000 and 300,000 people were under arms.[7] At the height of the insurrection the Bastille, the ancient royal fortress and prison, was stormed. Its fall marked the victory of the uprising—but only the beginning of the revolution. Why was there a revolution?

France in 1789 was an absolute monarchy. All power was, in theory, centralised in the person of the king, Louis XVI. From his palace at Versailles he presided over a myriad of officials. Although the king supposedly ruled by divine right, in practice there were a host of checks and balances on his power. Nevertheless it was still immense. He could summon a *lit de justice*, where he lay on a bed of cushions and read his orders out which then had the force of law. And he could issue *lettres de cachet*, warrants by which he could imprison anyone indefinitely without charge.[8] This 'absolutist' state, which had arisen across much of Europe but reached its peak in France, had grown out of a profound crisis in feudal society.

Feudalism in Europe was essentially based on local production and, therefore, a decentralised political structure. Local lords battened on a peasantry who were usually (though not always) serfs—legally tied to the land and compelled by the use, or threat, of force to hand over part

of their labour or produce to the lord. The Catholic Church was the ideological cement in this society and a feudal landowner in its own right. No centralised state was possible. Kings had to balance the rival claims of local rulers who had a monopoly of armed force in their domains. Land was the central form of wealth, and warfare as a means of acquiring land, was endemic.

Though not as dynamic as capitalism, feudalism was not a totally stagnant society. Trade, commerce and new techniques *were* slowly developed.[9] This had two important consequences. Firstly it increasingly knitted together, economically and socially, larger regions. Alongside this the decentralised political structure of feudalism meant the towns which developed as centres of trade and commerce were able to become *relatively* independent of local feudal lords—new classes, political structures and ideas began slowly to develop in them.

Such changes clashed with a political structure which had grown on the basis of fragmented, feudal, local production. This coupled with revolts from below to produce a series of profound crises and social upheavals across Europe. The Black Death, Hundred Years War, Reformation and Counter-Reformation, Thirty Years War and a wave of massive peasant revolts (in England in the late 14th century, Germany in the early 16th century and so on) were expressions of this.

Feudal rule was restabilised after these upheavals, but on a new basis with the growth of centralised absolute monarchies. In France this process began in the aftermath of the violent civil wars of the late 16th century, known as the Wars of Religion, in which the whole social order had threatened to disintegrate. These conflicts naturally took the ideological form of religious differences—splits within the then dominant ideology. To restabilise society the king, Henry IV, began to construct a centralised state and curb the independent power of the local nobles. The process was continued under Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin in the first half of the 17th century before its completion by Louis XIV and his chief minister, Colbert. The civil wars called the Frondes (1648-53) were the last fling of the local feudal lords against this centralisation.

Economic and social life had begun to outgrow the local horizons of feudalism and to lay the foundations for a 'national' economy. Absolutism was a partial recognition of this. The monarchy's curbing of much of the independent power of local feudal rulers was the price paid for maintaining their political domination in society. But absolutism was much more than a simple reconstitution of feudal rule. It also incorporated elements of the growing bourgeoisie, as the new class based on trade and commerce in the towns was called in France.[10]

The French state under Loius XIV pursued vigorous 'protectionist' economic policies (called mercantilism) designed to serve the interests of the state in its conflicts with its rivals. But they were also designed to help French trade, commerce and manufacture—and thus the

bourgeoisie. Significant elements of the bourgeoisie used their wealth and influence to obtain lucrative positions within the growing bureaucracy of the absolutist state. These positions often conferred noble status on the holder, and therefore increased their political influence.

In short, the absolutist state was an adaptation to, and partial incorporation of, the bourgeoisie but within a reshaped and restabilised feudal political structure. It is worth looking at this structure in more detail.

The Church

On the eve of the revolution French society was legally divided into three 'orders' or 'estates'. The first order was the (Catholic) clergy. They were exempt from paying the most important direct taxes—instead meeting once a year in an assembly to vote a 'voluntary gift' to the state. The ideological role of the Church was vital, especially in the countryside where most people had few other sources of ideas and information than the pulpit. The Church had a monopoly on education and it was also a central part of the state apparatus through its functions of registering births, deaths and marriages.

But the clergy were not a homogeneous block. The upper echelons, bishops and so on, were part and parcel of the nobility. All bishops were nobles in 1789. They were enormously wealthy, owned vast amounts of land and collected various dues and taxes from the peasants. At the bottom were parish priests, many little better off than the peasants they served. For instance the Bishop of Strasbourg had an income of 400,000 livres, and a typical parish priest only 1,000. The resentment of the lower clergy against the bishops is well summed up by one parish priest's comment: 'While the Bishop plays the great nobleman and spends scandalous sums on hounds, horses, furniture, servants, food and carriages, the parish priest has not the wherewithal to buy himself a new cassock. The burden of collecting the tithe falls on him, but the Prelates, not he, pocket it. The Bishops treat their priests, not as honest footmen but as stable-boys.'[11]

The Church was riven with ideological conflict rooted in these social divisions. One split was between the Gallicans—loyal to the emerging national state— and the Ultramontanes—loyal to Rome and the Pope, who was still an important though dwindling temporal power. Resentment among some lower clergy and the bourgeoisie at the ostentatious wealth and privileges of the top of the Church plus opposition to royal power from a section of the nobility around the legal corporations called Parlements joined behind the austere Jansenist heresy. In essence this was an expression of emerging French nationalism and had much in common with Calvinism, which had played such an important ideological role in the earlier bourgeois revolutions in England and the United Provinces. When the Jansenists secured the expulsion of the Jesuits from

France in 1764 it was a major blow against one of the pillars of the Catholic Church and the old order.

Another important split in the Church, the Richerist heresy, was based on the division between poor parish priest and rich bishop. This had a democratic edge in its insistence on the right of ordinary priests to play an equal role in Church decision making—a political point not lost on the flocks of Richerist priests! Such conflicts within the Church began to erode the ideology of the old order.

The Enlightenment

The attack was deepened and a new ideology fashioned in its place from another quarter—the Enlightenment. It is worth a break from the survey of the social structure to consider it. There were many different aspects within this current of ideas which grew in the 18th century, but the general thrust was to argue for the reconstruction of society on more 'rational' lines. The roots of the Enlightenment lay in the 16th and 17th century revolution in understanding the world—the scientific ideas that culminated in Newton's theories and the breakdown of the old religious view of the world which had dominated feudal society. Of course this shift in ideas had material roots. The economic and social changes already mentioned created the conditions in which this transformation of ideas could take place. The new ideology and new social reality found expression in philosophy in the ideas of people like Locke. Growing knowledge of the world on the back of trade and commerce further undermined the idea that the world and society were uniquely ordered according to a divine plan.

Centred in France in the 18th century a group of *philosophes* (as they called themselves) began applying what they saw as rational, scientific principles to social and political questions.[12] The key figures were Voltaire, Diderot and D'Alembert, who were the force behind the *Encyclopedia*, Montesquieu, Beccaria and Rousseau. Their attack on the old ideas was summed up by Diderot in a letter to Voltaire—'Our motto is: No quarter for the superstitious, for the fanatical, for the ignorant, for the foolish, for the wicked and for the Tyrants.'[13] Much of their work was negative—an attack on what existed, above all religion as represented by the Catholic Church. Despite this they all (apart from a few deterministic atheists like Helvétius and D'Holbach) thought that some form of religion, usually one based on nature, was necessary for the mass of people, or else social order would be threatened.

There were many variations in the positive ideas put forward. Voltaire advocated an enlightened monarchy as the force to construct a more rational society. Montesquieu—whose book *Spirit of the Laws*, published in 1748, was probably the most influential of all— looked to a balance of powers between the king and the aristocracy as the best way to ensure a reformed rational society. What they all had in common was a

belief in natural, rational law before which all were equal. Previously, natural legal inequality of people and arbitrary justice were the hallmark of society. The clearest example of this shift is Beccaria whose approach to law outlined in his *On Crime and Punishment* is the foundation of modern bourgeois law, so much so that it is now common to refer to pre-Beccarian justice, meaning that which existed before modern bourgeois society.

The *philosophes* were intermittently persecuted by the authorities—occasionally imprisoned, their books banned and burnt. But over the course of the 18th century they gradually battered down the ideological defences of the old order. Though many of the individual *philosophes* were clergy or nobles, their ideas as a whole represented the coming of age of the bourgoisie. The social and political order evisaged by the *philosophes* was one which would be free—in the sense of freedom from abtitrary power, freedom of speech, freedom of trade, freedom to realise one's talents, in other words, a bourgeois freedom. Their ideas filtered down through the new academies, reading societies and public libraries that sprang up in most towns across France and in the salons of fashionable Parisian society. When the crisis which resulted in revolution came, the ideology of the old order had already been fatally undermined by the *philosophes*. The outlines of ideas that fitted a new bourgeois society were already at hand.

Rousseau

A special mention should be made of the Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. His ideas, more than any others, were to be the ideological weapon of the future revolutionaries. In particular the Jacobins and Robespierre fashioned the ideas of Rousseau's *On the Social Contract* into a revolutionary ideology. The opening sentence of Rousseau's work gives an indication why: 'Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.'[14] Rousseau argued that the basis of the social order is a conditional contract between the rulers and the citizens. There is no divine right or any other justification for a particular form of rule. The citizens each have an equal say in formulating the General Will, which is the only legitimate basis of a state. Sovereignty rests with the people, they exercise it directly, not through representatives, and they are perfectly justified in removing any form of government of which they no longer approve. He attacks all subjugation of one person by another—slavery is 'incompatible with the nature of man'.[15]

But once the General Will is expressed each citizen must submit to it. They have entered into a contract and are bound by it as long as the General Will upholds it. Rousseau does not lay down what particular form the state should take. A monarchy is possible—but not by divine right, only on the basis of the General Will. But it is clear that a democratic republic is the most favoured. 'Were there a people of gods,

it would govern itself democratically.'[16] And Rousseau ideally wants a people of gods, or virtuous citizens. This virtue is to be based on a society of independent property owning individuals where no one has too little property and no one too much: 'No citizen should be so rich as to be capable of buying another citizen, and none so poor that he is forced to sell himself.'[17] But given that people can be fooled and misled Rousseau allows for 'guides' who may in certain conditions represent the General Will: 'By itself the populace wants the good, but by itself it does not always see it.'[18]

More than one political interpretation of Rousseau's ideas is possible, but it should be clear that they were profoundly subversive of the existing order. And it takes little imagination to see how they could be fashioned into a justification of revolution, popular democracy and also revolutionary dictatorship by a minority. As we will see, this is precisely how Robespierre and the Jacobins used them, and the ideas also allowed them to forge an alliance between the bourgeois class they represented and the mass movement of smaller petty bourgeois property owners, in the towns and the countryside, which was to play a central role in the French Revolution. But this is running too far ahead.

What is important is that the ideas which would be used to motivate and justify action had been developed before the revolution and the destruction of the ideas of the old order was well under way. None of the great *philosophes* of the Enlightenment lived to see the revolution—and in battle it is by no means obvious where they would have lined up—but their ideas played an important role in preparing the ground for the revolution.

The nobility

The second order in French society after the clergy was the nobility. They too battened on the peasantry and were exempt from the most important direct taxes. They also had countless other privileges, including a monopoly on higher posts in the Church, state and army.[19] They were divided into two groups. The nobility of the sword were the descendants of the old localised feudal rulers. They ranged from the grand nobles, enormously wealthy with huge amounts of land, to local *hobereaux*, many deeply in debt to the new men of wealth springing from the bourgeoisie. Little separated some of these local nobles from better off peasants—but this little they were all the more determined to hang on to. On the other hand many grand nobles were heavily involved in trade and commerce and increasingly merged with the richer commercial bourgeoisie.

The other group was the nobility of the robe. To raise money the king sold, and created specifically for sale, a whole series of positions which conferred noble status—and therefore social privileges and tax exemption. Wealthy bourgeois helped themselves liberally to this avenue of

advancement. It was the central mechanism by which the absolute monarchy incorporated elements of the bourgeoisie into the feudal political structure.

Some of these nobles of the robe sat in the Parlements (not to be confused with the English parliament which, by now, was an entirely different creature). These were great legal corporations in the cities and provinces of France. They had to register royal decrees before they had the force of law and, along with a host of lesser courts, they played a role in the administration of the complex 'feudal' laws. The Parlements had, especially in times of weak central government, amassed considerable power by blocking and holding up royal edicts.

The Third Estate

The rest of society was legally lumped together in the 'Third Estate'. They paid the taxes the other two orders were exempt from. Naturally this covered a vast range of classes. At the top were rich bourgeois who, fast as the monarchy created them, had not yet secured a position which conferred nobility. They included the traders and merchants of the great cities and ports and the new industrial regions—where merchants were developing industry on a putting out basis. There were only a few factory owning 'industrialists' among them—there was little factory production as yet and many basic industries were effectively controlled by the absolutist state. They also included large numbers of professionals—lawyers, doctors, civil servants and the like. Many of these had positions connected with the state apparatus. But they often found their rise to a position merited by their talents blocked by the grip of the privileged orders.

Absolutism's centralisation, improved bureaucracy, road and canal construction, building programmes, protectionist policies, war—with lucrative supply contracts—overseas trade and colonial production formed the basis of bourgeois wealth. But in a society where land was still the principal form of wealth, and the one on which the whole political structure was based, many bourgeois used their wealth to invest in land at the first opportunity—often deserting commerce in the process. They often brought more ruthless, businesslike methods to bear on the exaction of feudal dues attached to the land.[20] Many bourgeois also became involved in operations such as tax farming. They would pay the monarchy a fixed sum for the right to collect certain taxes and dues. Then they kept as profit whatever they raised over the amount paid the king. This, naturally, made them more efficient and ruthless at squeezing taxes out of the peasantry. Peasants thus had good reason to resent bourgeois landowners and tax gatherers as much as, if not more than, traditional nobles.

Nevertheless the incorporation of the bourgeoisie within the feudal political structure only operated up to a point. Some bourgeois, those

involved in tax farming or who had secured royal monopolies for instance, were totally tied to the absolutist state and the old order. But the expanding economy meant there was a real growth in a class based on new forms of wealth. Between the 1720s and the revolution French trade grew by over 400 percent, production of wool cloth by 61 percent, linen by 80 percent, iron by 300 percent and coal by over 700 percent.[21] Much of this wealth was based on overseas and colonial trade and was concentrated in the growing Atlantic and Mediterranean ports such as Marseilles, Bordeaux, Nantes and Rouen.[22] These were the great centres of the commercial and merchant bourgeoisie and, though many bought their way into the nobility, no matter how fast the near bankrupt monarchy created offices for sale, supply could not match demand. The result was the exclusion of large layers of the bourgeoisie from the privileged orders.

Towards the end of the *ancien régime* there was also a closing of ranks among the nobility. Resentful of the dilution of their privilege by the inflow of upstart bourgeois they tried to close the doors. They forced through a series of laws to restrict further access to the nobility and above all to give the existing nobility a monopoly on key positions in the Church, army, state bureaucracy and so on. One example was the *Loi Ségur* of 1781 which excluded commoners and those recently ennobled (meaning those with less than four generations of noble status behind them) from all army ranks of captain and above. This seems to have been a move by the poorer hereditary provincial nobility, for whom the army was often the chief source of lucrative employment, to maintain their privileges.[23] Similar motives, along with a reaction to philosophical attacks on the whole notion of 'orders' and privilege, lay behind the growth in the importance attached to lineage by sections of the nobility in the 17th and 18th centuries. This even extended to the invention of racial myths, like that which claimed the old nobility were descended from Frankish knights whose privileges derived from their conquest and subjugation of the native Gauls.[24]

The limits of absolutism's ability to incorporate the bourgeoisie within feudal political structures were being reached. This led to a growing feeling of resentment among the bourgeoisie against the privileges of the first and second estates. Emmanuel Sieyès, a clergyman later to play an important role in the revolution, wrote: 'In one way or another all the branches of the executive have been taken over by the caste that monopolises the Church, the judiciary and the army. A spirit of fellowship leads the nobles to favour one another in everything over the rest of the nation. Their usurpation is complete, they truly reign.'[25] And he accused the privileged orders of saying to the Third Estate, 'Whatever your services, whatever your talents you shall go this far and no further.'[26] Even some nobles—especially those whose wealth partially oriented them in a bourgeois direction—joined in on the side of the

bourgeois critics. At this stage none of the bourgeoisie advocated revolution to resolve their grievances.[27] But when society was plunged into crisis in the late 1780s, elements of this class began, in the course of struggle, to articulate a programme to reshape society in their interests.

At the bottom of French society were the peasantry—the vast bulk of French people. At the top they shaded into the bourgeoisie—wealthy peasants who owned a plough and draught animals, the 'roosters of the village'.[28] Sliding down the scale we find a host of intermediary layers with varying amounts of land. At the bottom were sharecroppers and landless labourers. There were complex variations in the structure of peasant society across France. But most peasants were no longer serfs and owned at least some land, though often not enough to survive without recourse to wage labour for part of the year.[29]

All peasants resented 'feudalism'. What they meant by this was quite simple: the array of taxes and dues they were compelled to pay to their landlords, the Church and so on.[30] There were obligations to pay the lord (or 'seigneur') if you bought or sold land, or if you inherited it. Then there were compulsory labour services for road building and the like as well as direct personal taxes. And there were heavy indirect taxes such as the hated *gabelle* or salt tax. Seigneurs also had exclusive hunting rights over certain areas as well as monopolies called *banalités*. These gave them the exclusive right to operate a mill, oven or wine press in a particular area which peasants were compelled to use, and pay for. They also gave the seigneurs considerable power by giving them priority in the sale of wine and allowing them to decide the date of the harvest. The precise taxes and dues varied from region to region but the burden on the peasantry was universal.

The final area to examine is the towns. Though the French Revolution was the first in which mass urban action was central to events, it is wrong to see the urban masses in the French Revolution as the forerunners of the Russian workers of 1917.[31] In the towns the bourgeoisie shaded into a vast petty bourgeoisie who had a much greater social weight than they do today. Shopkeepers, independent artisans, small merchants and traders formed the core of this group who were of fundamental importance in the revolution. There was a large wage earning working class but it is important to be clear about its nature and the objective limits on its ability to coalesce or act as an independent force. A few factories apart, it was concentrated in small workshops. Master craftsmen and retailers made up approximately 30 percent of the population of the average town. Wage earners accounted for about the same proportion but few of these were in 'industrial' establishments and about one third of them were domestic servants.[32]

There *were* a few large workplaces. For instance in Paris Réveillon's wallpaper factory in the Faubourg St Antoine employed 350 workers and there were three textile factories in the north of the city employing

279, 314 and 800 workers. More typical was a blanket manufacturer who employed 400 workers—but only 80 of these were in his factory the rest were outworkers in Paris and the surrounding countryside. But all of these were exceptional, the average number of workers per employer in Paris was about three.[33] Workers often lived in the same house—though on separate floors—as the 'boss'. The ambition of many, and not yet an altogether impossible dream, was to become an independent master in their own right. At some points in the revolution the particular demands and struggles of wage earners *did* come to the fore, but this was always temporary. It was impossible for this diffuse and embryonic working class to act independently in any consistent fashion. Wage earners' conditions of existence, both numerical and social, and their relationship to the petty bourgeoisie meant that they acted largely under its political leadership and ideological sway.[34]

Wages were fairly stable and people's immediate concern was shaped by their position as consumers rather than producers. So the supply and price of bread was the key issue in fomenting mass discontent. In a largely pre-industrial society with poorly developed agriculture and transport the supply of grain to the towns was fragile and the price therefore volatile. And this was an issue which blurred class lines between the petty bourgeoisie and wage earners. The result was a common hostility to hoarders, speculators and the big bourgeois who profited at the expense of ordinary people and threatened to drive small workshops and the like out of business. The petty bourgeois layer became known as the *sans-culottes*—so called because of their habit of wearing trousers buttoned onto their coat as opposed to the aristocratic (and bourgeois) habit of wearing knee breeches—and developed a distinctive ideology which was to profoundly influence the revolution.

The political division of society into estates had arisen on the basis of old class divisions under feudalism but now no longer fitted the real class structure of society. But the privileged orders were not about to simply surrender their privileges and political power.

Class divisions and division into estates were not the only ones in France. It is wrong to speak of France as a nation state in any modern sense before the revolution. The state was dependent on the person of the king—people owed allegiance to him not some largely undeveloped idea of the nation. This of course had a material basis. Absolutism *had* begun to construct a unified national economy and state but France was still internally divided. Whole chunks of the country spoke different languages with about one quarter of the population unable to understand French. And various groups, usually the nobility, resolutely defended their particular regional privileges. This was especially so in areas like Brittany, and others recently added to the French crown. This localism was also reflected in innumerable internal tolls and customs barriers. These included the hated gates around Paris erected by the tax officials.

All goods passing through these had a variety of dues levied on them. There were around 360 different legal codes operating in different parts of France and a bewildering variety of weights and measures. The centralisation of the absolutist state and the growing economic unity inside France only served to make all these divisions and barriers even more irksome to those engaged in trade and commerce as well as the mass of urban people who paid higher prices as a result.

The crisis

The years leading up to 1789 saw this society slide into a crisis which opened the path to revolution. Why? The world in which this French absolutism had developed was already changing still further. In England and the United Provinces (the Netherlands) revolutions had swept away the central aspects of the old order and reshaped society in the interests of the bourgeoisie.[35] The French state—the largest and most populous in Europe—was locked into a developing global conflict with these powers. The problem for France was that its political structure increasingly limited its ability to match its rivals.

The Seven Years War (1756-63), perhaps the first global conflict, underlined the problem. It was fought, in essence, between England and France, the world's two main powers by then. France lost out badly in India, the West Indies, Canada and Europe. This seriously undermined the French ruling classes' confidence in the exisiting regime. The Comte de Ségur was reflecting a general view when he commented: 'The government no longer possessed any dignity, the finances any order and the conduct of policy any consistency... The French monarchy ceased to be a first-rank power'.[36] The strain of such conflicts plunged the French state into enormous debt.[37] French intervention (1778-1783) in the US War of Independence—because of rivalry with England—was helpful to the Americans but pushed the French state debt to unprecedented levels.[38]

The monarchy was forced to look to reforms to try and sort out the approaching bankruptcy. On several occasions king's ministers pushed reforms through but the king backed down after the privileged orders mounted opposition. The most determined efforts were spearheaded by Turgot, a leading physiocrat. The physiocrats were a group of economists influenced by the dynamic (compared to France) example of English agriculture. They believed that the products of the land were the only source of new value and in the free use of landed property. This meant they wanted to do away with restrictions on individual landowners pursuing their self interest and they favoured free trade in grain. The state's job was to create the environment for efficient production of wealth, which in turn would fill its coffers. Free trade, a market free from restrictions and privileges, was their aim, '*Laissez faire, laissez passer*' their slogan. In 1776 Turgot, the king's chief minister, made proposals to

open up trade, abolish guilds and spread the tax burden more evenly—including introducing a land tax on the privileged orders. The outcry from the privileged orders coupled with popular revolts against the consequences of free trade in grain forced the king to drop the reforms and sack Turgot. The monarchy had first gone along with the reforms but, at the first sign of serious opposition, backed off. It wanted reform but was tied to the existing structure of society. As the Queen, Marie Antoinette, put it, 'The nobility will destroy us but it seems to me that we cannot save ourselves without it.'[39]

This inability to carry through reforms in France should be put alongside three other events in 1776. That year saw the American Declaration of Independence which, with its talk of universal rights and republican government, was an example which began to influence those seeking an alternative to the growing crisis of the existing French regime. Meanwhile in the same year, across the Channel in Britain, Adam Smith published his *Wealth of Nations* and James Watt unveiled his new steam engine. The new industrial capitalist world these heralded stood in stark contrast to the *ancien régime* with its privileges and orders in France. Though the French economy was growing rapidly, as fast as the British in fact, the growth in quantity was not matched in qualitative change. In 1789 Britain had over 20,000 spinning jennies, 9,000 of the newer mule jennies and 200 Arkwright mills. The equivalent figures for France were: fewer than a thousand, none and eight![40] The strain created by this qualitative gap was growing and was brutally exposed by the imposition of a 'free trade' treaty with England in 1786 which opened up French markets to English textiles. This had a catastrophic effect on French industry, and the textile centres of Lyons and the north of the country were badly hit by their inability to compete with the more efficiently produced English products.

This inability of the French state to match the bourgeois states in England and Holland, militarily and economically, is a fundamental cause of the crisis which resulted in the revolution. A more immediate factor, which was partly a result of this underlying problem, was the severe crisis which hit the French economy on the eve of the revolution. Economic growth meant the periodic and devastating famines of the previous century had largely disappeared during the first half of the 18th century—though for most people it meant the replacement of famine with hunger. But this improvement ended some 20 years before the revolution, partly because of the external factors discussed above and partly due to limitations imposed by the relatively backward nature of French agriculture. The increased hardship which resulted was keenly felt by those who remembered the slightly better times.

Then, on the eve of the revolution, the economy lurched into sharp crisis. Prices of essential items rocketed. Bread alone accounted for 58 percent of the budget of the bulk of the Parisian population at the

beginning of 1789. This rose to 88 percent during the summer. At the same time wheat hit record prices across most of the country. The uprising of 14 July came at the highest point reached by prices over the entire 18th century.'[41]

Such conditions led to riots and risings before the revolution. The most significant was the 'flour war' of 1775 where urban riots involved a score of cities.[42] The movement focused on mass invasions of markets and fixing the price at fair levels, but it did not become a revolution. The reasons why are important. Firstly, it did not spread to the vast mass of the peasantry. Secondly, the movement was not supported by any significant section of the bourgeoisie. Without the peasantry and a challenge by the bourgeoisie to the existing order there could be no French revolution.

The monarchy had repeatedly backed down from pushing reforms through. But by the late 1780s the desperate financial situation gave it no choice but to try once again. Calonne, a noble and now Finance Minister, said France was 'in its present condition, impossible to govern'[43]. The old order could no longer continue to rule in the old way and the political and social tensions, growing in response to the economic crisis, were to prove an explosive mix when the king's renewed attempt to reform aggravated them. As the 19th century historian Alexis de Tocqueville commented, 'experience shows that the most dangerous moment for a bad government is generally that in which it sets about reform.'[44]

The revolt of the nobles and the calling of the Estates General

In 1787 the king made another attempt to increase the state's revenue by spreading the burden of taxation to the privileged orders. He even went so far as to exile the Paris Parlement, but he had to back down after it mobilised popular support by posing as the defender of liberty against royal and ministerial despotism. A similar attempt to browbeat the nobility (convened in a special Assembly of Notables) in 1788 was again blocked and the king agreed to summon the Estates General to break the deadlock. This body had last met in 1614 and consisted of three assemblies, one for each of the orders. The king hoped to use it to sort out the financial mess by pushing through changes in the tax structure.

But the summoning of the Estates General provided a focus for all the grievances and discontent beneath the surface of society. And it forced various classes and groups to begin to define programmes for the resolution of the impasse in France. Crucially, there were to be national 'elections'. In effect the vast bulk of the population were entitled to attend primary assemblies where they would draw up lists of grievances and elect delegates to a higher body. There was, naturally, a property qualification on those eligible to be elected. These delegates in turn elected

delegates to the Estates General, who were subject to a further property qualification. This procedure was for the Third Estate. The nobility and clergy of course elected their own delegates. It meant people in every town and village were drawn into a discussion on the problems facing society, and possible solutions. Expectations were awakened among millions of people that change for the better would be the outcome of the Estates General. An English traveller in France at the time reports a peasant's comment: 'People say that the great ones are going to do something for us poor people now, but may God send us something better for all these dues and taxes are crushing us.'[45]

Opinion polarised over an argument about the constitution of the Estates General. Would the three orders meet and vote separately, as in the past, or together? And should the Third Estate (in effect the bourgeoisie because of the electoral procedure) have double representation compared to previous occasions? The latter was conceded—a telling reflection of the growth of the bourgeoisie over the previous century and a half. But the nobility of the Parlements and the king insisted that the three orders should meet and vote separately.

At once the pretensions of the nobility to defend 'liberty' were stripped bare. Despite general agreement by the nobility on the need for some reform their insistence on separate voting meant a commitment to the old structures. They blocked any possibility of ending their privileges. The double representation of the Third Estate was useless unless a common assembly allowed them to use it to outvote the other orders. This deepened the grievances of the bourgeoisie against the privileged orders and united popular opinion behind the 'Third Estate'. A journalist wrote in January 1789: 'A change has come over the public dispute... now the main thing is a war between the Third Estate and the other two orders.'[46]

The argument forced the bourgeoisie to begin to put forward clearer ideas. They were, in common with the nobility, part of the exploiting classes, but they were an oppressed class as long as the old structures remained intact. Pamphlets started to appear in unprecedented numbers. The sharpest was *What is the Third Estate?* written by the Emmanuel Sieyès—a clergyman rejected by his own order for the Estates General who went over to the Third Estate: 'What is the Third Estate? Everything. What has it been until now? Nothing. What does it demand? To be something.'[47]

In this heightened political atmosphere the mass of the population began to stir. A poor harvest in 1788 led to hunger in early 1789 which provoked peasant rebellions. Peasants had revolted before of course, but now the arguments over reform and the Estates General gave their '*jacquerie*' a political focus.[48] The rising was directed at the taxes, dues and monopolies of seigneurs. The revolt grew and by July 1789 from Normandy to Alsace peasant bands were storming chateaux and burning

the rolls on which lists of their dues were kept. They also began attacking capitalist minded farmers who had been enclosing common land.

The lists of grievances (*cahiers de doléance*) drawn up for the Estates General made peasant discontent on these questions clear. The lists of the nobility and the bourgeoisie were agreed on the need for reforms which spread the burden of direct taxes more equally—the nobility were prepared to concede this much. But when it came to abandoning 'feudal' rights and privileges the split between the bourgeoisie and the privileged orders was clear—the nobility were not prepared to surrender their privileges.[49]

Discontent was not confined to the countryside. The high price of bread led to riots in towns in the spring of 1789. In April a particularly serious outbreak occurred in Paris. Réveillon, a wallpaper manufacturer employing 350 workers in his factory, made a speech attacking the level of wages. Thousands of workers rioted in protest—storming Réveillon's house in fierce fighting with troops sent to protect it. The majority of those involved were wage earners, though not Réveillon's own workers. This was the only 'day'—as the major urban uprisings became known—of the revolution when wage earners were in a majority. Significantly, though, their demands focussed on the price of bread.[50]

From the National Assembly to the storming of the Bastille

When the Estates General finally met on 5 May the old feudal structures were flaunted in the bourgeoisie's face. The king insisted that each order march in separately, appropriately attired—with the Third Estate bringing up the rear of course. For five weeks a slow manoeuvre was played out. The Third Estate demanded that all should meet in common but the others refused. The king vacillated. This, coupled with the growing sense of crisis, encouraged the bourgeoisie. So too did the signs that the assembly of the clergy, where parish priests outnumbered bishops by five to one, was beginning to rally to the Third Estate.

On 10 June the bourgeoisie grasped the nettle. They formally invited the other orders to join them. A few priests did so and on 17 June, on the proposition of Sieyès, they declared themselves the National Assembly. This was accompanied by defensive measures—a decree that if the Assembly was dissolved all taxes would become invalid. Three days later the Assembly found itself locked out of its usual meeting place (apparently by accident!) and marched to a nearby indoor tennis court where all but one of them took a solemn oath not to disperse until a constitution was granted. This defiance now won over the bulk of the clergy (pushed by the parish priests) who voted to join the Assembly.

The bourgeoisie were still only demanding reform—but reform from a system not prepared to concede it. After his earlier vacillations the king now moved. He called a special session to order the estates to resume separate assemblies and hoped to overawe the Third Estate by a show

of force. On 23 June the meeting took place, in a hall ringed with royal troops, and the king's orders were duly read out. They made it clear he was determined to block any real change: 'The king wishes the ancient distinction between the three orders of the State to be preserved *in its entirety* as being *essentially linked* to the constitution of his kingdom.'[51]

Meanwhile, rumours of the king's action had fed discontent in Paris and thousands now marched to Versailles, the royal residence a few miles outside Paris where the Assembly was sitting. The troops refused to fire on them—a sign that the armed force of the state was crumbling. Emboldened by this, Mirabeau, a noble who had gone over to the Third Estate and been elected for that order, rallied the Assembly: 'We are here by the will of the people, only bayonets will force us from our seats.'[52]

Faced with this defiance the king backed down—but only in order to play for time. The defiance also won over a minority of the nobility; 47 of them led by the Duc D'Orléans joined the National Assembly. The conflict at Versailles had further heightened popular expectations of change. And the swelling discontent over bread supplies and prices in Paris now began to be shaped and directed by more militant and clear sighted sections of the bourgeoisie. The Duc D'Orléans—a claimant to the throne who, for a variety of reasons, opposed the existing monarchy—owned gardens and cafes called the Palais Royal. These were frequented by popular bourgeois orators and journalists such as Georges Danton and Camille Desmoulins who were now stirring up the thousands who flocked there. The 'extreme revolutionary party'[53] was still diffuse and unorganised, but beginning to emerge. Meanwhile the 407 bourgeois electors—who had decided the Third Estate's Paris delegates for the Estates General—began to meet at the city hall. They constituted themselves as a Commune, or city council.

The king now moved to crush the growing defiance. He summoned 20,000 troops to an area near Paris and prepared a military coup. The signal was given when he sacked his chief minister, Necker, who reputedly favoured reforms. It was a clear provocation and a sign that the king was intent on clamping down on all demands for change. This, and rumours about the troop movements, provoked demonstrations in Paris on 12 July in support of Necker and the Assembly, and over bread supplies and prices. They were spurred on by radical orators like Desmoulins, who is said to have issued a call, 'To arms, citizens', from the Palais Royal. Crowds, fearing troops were about to arrive and restore 'order', began hunting for weapons.

The bourgeois electors at the city hall faced a dilemma. They feared popular discontent might get out of hand and threaten 'law and order'—and more particularly their property. But they also feared the king and his troops. So they stepped in to form a 'national guard' or citizens' militia

to defend themselves against both threats. Thousands were quickly enrolled—the poorer petty bourgeois and wage earners were excluded. In the words of Assembly deputy Barnave it was composed of 'bonne bourgeoisie'.

But the upsurge from below continued. The search for arms was the key impulse, but also the hated toll barriers around Paris were attacked and burnt down. Then 30,000 muskets were seized at a monastery—along with flour. This turned the focus of the developing insurrection to the Bastille on 14 July. The fortress was a hated symbol of despotism, but as there were only seven prisoners more immediate matters were involved.[54] Muskets are not much use without powder, and it was thought there was plenty of that stored in the Bastille. And the fortress's guns were trained on the Rue St Antoine—leading to the large popular quarter of that name in the east of the city. They would cause havoc if used.

The bourgeois electors had no intention of taking the Bastille by force and wanted to negotiate its surrender. The governor invited a delegation to breakfast while they negotiated terms but, when they were slow to return, the crowd swelling outside feared a trap. They surged forward into the outer courtyard whereupon the defending troops opened fire, killing 98 people. The battle was settled when two regiments of mutinous soldiers turned up with cannon. The fortress surrendered and the governor was killed by the crowd as he was escorted away. The insurrection had won.

The bourgeoisie had been pushed from below. Their fear of the monarchy meant they did little to oppose, and some grudgingly encouraged, the insurrection. But what was the class basis of the revolt from below? A look at the composition of those involved in the storming of the Bastille reveals this[55]: respectable family men, average age 34, overwhelmingly composed of artisans, tradesmen and shopkeepers. Some wage earners are present, but vastly outnumbered by such petty bourgeois. The leading figures were often rather more than 'petty' bourgeois. For instance Santerre (later to lead the insurrection which overthrew the monarchy in 1792) was a wealthy brewer.

The news of the fall of the Bastille had an explosive impact in the country. In city after city 'municipal' revolutions took place. Old noble dominated authorities were swept aside or simply disappeared and new bourgeois dominated forces took over.[56] In many cases the new authorities were forced to concede a reduction in the price of bread to popular movements which brought them to power. Bourgeois National Guards were formed in most places, again to deal with the twin threat of the old order and to prevent popular mobilisations going too far. The events of July struck the first decisive blow in the transformation of society. The king was forced to recognise the National Assembly and even to go to Paris and accept the tricolour cockade—the symbol of the

victorious insurrection—from the mayor.

Unrest continued in Paris after the storming of the Bastille, mainly around the question of bread. On 22 August two leading officials of the city—hated as speculators in grain—were seized by a crowd and killed. Some sections of the bourgeoisie were outraged. But Barnave, at this point the most clear sighted of the bourgeois leaders, defended the action, saying, 'Was then the blood which was shed all that pure?'[57] Some of the nobility understood very well the significance of what had happened—they emigrated and began plotting counter-revolution.

The Great Fear and the 'abolition of feudalism'

Rural revolt was already under way before the July insurrection. But the uprising in Paris and its local imitations deepened the rebellions. Many peasants thought the news gave them legal authority to put an end to feudalism. Manors and *chateaux* were invaded, hedges and ditches of enclosing landlords destroyed, tax rolls and deeds burned. Out of this exploded the Great Fear.

The itinerant bands of hungry wandering the country and worries about disbanded troops fuelled rumours that 'brigands' were about to descend on the villages. This now exploded into a certainty that their arrival was imminent. Peasants responded first with panic and then with armed defence against the brigands. The Fear rolled from village to village along six well defined routes across the country between 20 July and 6 August. Towns, fearful of brigands and armed peasants, responded by strengthening their organisation and National Guards and in some areas bourgeois National Guards violently suppressed peasant revolts. The brigands never came, but the impulse of organisation reaching down to the lowest village was immense. After the Fear passed the armed peasants put their organisation to good use. They often went on to attack local chateaux.[58]

It was against this background of 'fires of sedition'[59] that the Constituent Assembly (as the National Assembly had renamed itself) met on 4 August. The deputies voted to 'destroy the feudal regime entirely', but in the weeks that followed the reality was less clear cut. The decrees which emerged fell far short of abolishing what the peasants meant by feudalism. Some things were abolished outright—including the surviving pockets of serfdom—and legal equality of all individuals before the law was decreed. But a distinction was drawn between rights and privileges which were considered 'feudal', including the hated *banalités*, and those which were considered 'property' rights, such as rents and dues held to derive from a lease. The bourgeoisie was most reluctant to interfere with the latter. They were not abolished but, instead, made redeemable. Peasants could have them annulled if they paid 20 times the annual due in cash or 25 in kind. This they could rarely afford to do. It was a cruel disappointment to most peasants.

But many only heard the first words of the decree abolishing the 'feudal regime'. Over the next few years until 1793 (when all dues were abolished without compensation by the Jacobin revolutionary government) the peasantry conducted a long drawn out fight to turn these words into reality. Sometimes this involved open resistance and refusal to pay, at other times less spectacular defiance such as delayed payment, refusing to transport payment in kind to the landlord's barn and so on.[60] For the bourgeoisie 4 August was an attempt to disentangle property rights dependent on contract and money, which were very dear to them, from relics of feudalism or rights positively harmful to bourgeois interests, such as noble monopolies. The attempt failed largely due to the resistance of the peasantry.

Liberty, Equality, Fraternity

The new order emerging after the July insurrection was reflected in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen on 26 August. The form of this was partly inspired by the American example—Thomas Jefferson was then in Paris and Lafayette, who played an important role in drafting it, had fought in the US War of Independence. The Declaration was also based on the 'natural law' philosophy of people like Locke, Montesquieu and Rousseau. Such general principles were, though, tailored to fit the specific needs of the French bourgeoisie—and the right of rebellion was implicitly sanctioned, a recognition of the real basis of the Constituent Assembly's power.

Based on the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity the Declaration has become one of the central legacies of the revolution. Most of its principles were enshrined in laws and the constitution over next two years. These principles and measures illustrate precisely the bourgeois basis of the new order.

Liberty meant, above all, freedom to dispose of property, engage in trade and the like without restriction. Guilds and monopolies were abolished—including trading monopolies and privileges such as noble *banalités*. Internal tolls in most of the country were also abolished. External trade was freed from restriction by cancelling most of the trade monopolies that existed under the old regime. Liberty included 'freedom to work'—ie no strikes or unions. The *Le Chapelier* law (passed in June 1791) banned unions or workers' associations and forbade strikes—of course this did not stop them happening.[61]

Liberty also meant personal liberty, in the sense of a guarantee of freedom of speech, and an end to arbitrary arrest and gratuitous torture by the authorities. Strange as it may seem now, the introduction of the Guillotine, named after a doctor of that name, was a humane reaction against the barbarity of the old order. One member of the Constituent Assembly, Maximilien Robespierre, a provincial lawyer from Arras, proposed the abolition of the death penalty but was not supported.[62]

Equality meant simply equality before the law. A person's treatment should not depend on their birth—'Men are born and remain free and have equal rights'. But this did not yet extend to slaves in the colonies. At this stage only the most radical of the bourgeoisie, such as Robespierre and those who would later form the Jacobins, opposed slavery. Only when the Jacobins came to power and the slaves in what became Haiti, led by Toussaint L'Ouverture, revolted would bourgeois equality be extended that far.[63] Careers should be 'open to the talents'. But there was no question of economic equality—the right to property was enshrined in the Declaration.

Fraternity was about the creation of a unified national state and market. All were now French citizens. Internal barriers to trade and commerce were gone and class antagonism could be blurred under the patriotic ideal.

All of this is not to say the Declaration was cynically drawn up to fool people. The bourgeoisie of necessity had to present its interests as those of society as a whole, as universal. This consciousness was a necessary part of them achieving power and mobilising popular support. They certainly believed they were acting in the interests of the whole of society—and in a historical sense they were. As Marx wrote,

> *Each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in an ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones. The class making a revolution appears...not as a class but as the representative of the whole of society... It can do this because, to start with, its interest really is more connected with the common interest of all other non-ruling classes.*[64]

The October days

Louis, though forced to back down in July, was still king—and most of the bourgeoisie wanted him kept there as a guarantee of order. There were few republicans yet. But he would not accept the direction of the bourgeois Assembly. He refused to ratify the August decrees 'abolishing' feudalism: 'I will never allow *my* clergy and *my* nobility to be stripped of their assets'.[65]

This fed into an argument over the future structure of government. Some wanted the king to retain an absolute veto over legislation while others only wished him to have a suspensive veto—i.e. allowing him to block legislation for a time but not indefinitely. The latter position won an overwhelming majority in the Assembly.

The open monarchists and the king then started organising to restore royal authority by force. The king summoned troops to Versailles, where, on 1 October 1789, they attended a banquet intended to whip up counter-revolutionary sentiment. The king, queen and *dauphin* (crown prince)

were mystically received, the national tricolour cockade trampled underfoot and replaced with the black cockade of the queen. In the charged atmosphere the event, though small, provoked an immediate reaction.

As in July, bread shortages and high prices provided the combustible material. Some bourgeois leaders such as Danton and Desmoulins had already urged action against the king. Now, faced with the threat of a royal coup, key leaders such as Barnave withdrew their previous objections to using force to compel the king to submit to the Assembly. They thus encouraged the developing movement.

The women of the central Paris markets rose on 5 October. They first invaded the City Hall demanding bread and searching for arms. Then, several thousand strong, they marched off to Versailles—where the king and Assembly still resided—'armed with broomsticks, lances, pitchforks, swords, pistols and muskets'.[66] At their head was Stanislas Maillard, who had played an important role in the storming of the Bastille and who the women had persuaded to lead the demonstration. The women invaded the Assembly and extracted a promise of bread. Louis then attempted to head off the movement by finally sanctioning the August decrees—but it was too late. In Paris 20,000 bourgeois National Guards had gathered and compelled their commander, Lafayette, to lead them after the women.

The women, joined by the National Guard, camped overnight at Versailles. Some penetrated the palace and killed a few of the defending royal troops. The crowd then took up the demand, formulated by the bourgeois leaders, that the king and his family be brought to Paris. This was an eminently sensible move which would lessen the danger of counter-revolution. The king had little choice but to comply. The National Guard and the people set off in a procession taking 'the baker, the baker's wife and the baker's son back to Paris'.[67] Some in the crowd carried loaves of bread on pikes. Others stuck the heads of royalist troops on their pikes.

This second insurrection shifted the balance of power again. The king's position was seriously weakened, as was that of the openly monarchist faction of the bourgeoisie—some of their leaders soon emigrated to add to the growing numbers of counter-revolutionaries plotting abroad.

The attempted compromise

From October 1789 until the summer of 1791 there was a long drawn out attempt by the bourgeoisie to reach a compromise with the king and the nobility. New leaders emerged in the National Assembly who headed this attempt, men like Mirabeau and Lafayette. But already a more organised coherent 'left' was developing. A new organisation called the Society of Friends of the Constitution had developed out of a group of Breton deputies to the Estates General. It was soon to be known as the

Jacobin club.[68]

Among its emerging leaders was Maximilien Robespierre who, one deputy exclaimed, was dangerous because 'he believes everything he says'. He would soon be labelled an 'incorruptible'. Then there were those radical bourgeois who spoke for the popular movement—such as Jean Paul Marat with his newspaper *The Friend of the People*.[69]

For the moment compromise looked possible. The king went to the Assembly to declare that he accepted the new set up. But the unity was weak. In May 1790 the splits were revealed in an argument over who had the right to declare war—the king or the Assembly. A fudge was agreed, but it was a sign that fundamental issues had not yet been resolved.

Lafayette, 'the hero of the old world and the new' (so called from his exploits during the American War of Independence), was emerging as the strong man of the new regime. In the National Guard he was attempting to construct a military force which would allow him to impose a settlement. Nominally he was in favour of a constitutional monarchy but many feared he was planning to become 'a new Caesar'. Both Lafayette's position and the unity of the revolution seemed strengthened by the Festival of the Federation in July 1790. Delegates from National Guards all over France attended a ceremony, on the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, designed to emphasise national unity. Lafayette was at the head of proceedings. The federation movement had built up over the previous six months. National Guards of different towns and areas, beginning in the south east, came together to swear oaths of mutual support. It was a concrete expression of the developing national consciousness of the bourgeoisie—and was supported by the mass of the people.

But behind the facade of unity the old order was once more preparing to strike back. Despite the king's public appearance he was set on crushing the revolution and restoring the old regime. He planned to flee abroad and rally a counter-revolutionary army (foreign if need be) to march on Paris. Meanwhile supporters of the old regime began to have some success in fomenting counter-revolutionary outbreaks. One was suppressed in Lyon in July 1790 and counter-revolutionaries provoked an uprising in Nîmes by playing on divisions between Catholic and Protestant. At Jalès, again in the south, 20,000 armed National Guards assembled in August 1790 and, at the instigation of a committee of nobles, issued a counter-revolutionary manifesto.

The same month soldiers in Nancy rebelled over pay arrears and were supported by local 'patriots', as the revolutionary bourgeoisie now styled themselves. Lafayette used it as the pretext for a crackdown—ordering that 'a great blow be struck'. The revolt was crushed, with 300 killed. Marat's headline in his *Friend of the People* was 'The Awful Reveille'. The king, on the other hand, welcomed the repression. The unity of the

revolution was being exposed for an illusion.[70]

Municipal change and the crisis in the Church

One of the major, but usually underplayed, changes brought about by the revolution was the wholesale restructuring of local government.

In early 1790 all the old divisions and areas with their particular privileges and structures were scrapped. They were replaced by a uniform national structure in which the country was divided into 83 *départements*, with these in turn divided into cantons and communes (the whole structure more or less survives to this day). It was the practical expression of the founding of a unified national state. Elections were held at every level. One historian writes that 'before 1789 there was not a single truly elected assembly in the country, only government officials; in 1790 there was no longer a single official, just elected bodies'. This is overstated but the point is well made.[71]

Even though the electoral procedure was in stages, with property qualifications on those eligible for election, the impact on daily life was massive. About 1 million people were elected to various posts in the localities. Parish priests summoned people to the village church and there they would discuss and elect officials. The process transmitted the revolution down to the remotest corner of the country and the smallest village.[72]

Alongside such changes the Assembly moved to sort out the financial mess which the old regime had created, by confiscating Church property in November 1789. Interest bearing bonds (called assignats) backed by this land were issued. Land could be purchased on their surrender. The sale of such land went on throughout the revolution and there is still argument among historians about who benefitted from it. In many areas the bourgeoisie crowded out the peasants and got the lion's share. These sections of the bourgeoisie thereby had a very material stake in opposing any return to the old order. This is an important factor in understanding the tenacity with which, despite all the twists and turns of the various regimes later in the revolution, all were opposed to any restoration. But though the bourgeoisie got the lion's share, peasants did gain from the sales—often by banding together to bid in auctions.[73]

Difficulties with the assignat scheme meant they soon ceased to be bear interest and became paper money circulating alongside coins. But lack of confidence in them, because the land which underpinned their value was liable to be lost in the event of a restoration of the old order, and inflation meant they depreciated rapidly. By May 1791 they were already down to 73 percent of their face value. This continual financial instability was to plague the revolutionary governments—with the partial exception of the Jacobin republic of the Year II.

But having confiscated its land and abolished tithes there remained the problem of how to finance the Church. The solution the bourgeois

leaders came up with was the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. In essence this made all priests and bishops paid state officials. At first the bishops and the king sanctioned it. But the Pope, who had already denounced the Declaration of the Rights of Man, dragged his feet because he was manoeuvring over the status of the Papal enclave inside France at Avignon. Finally, exasperated, the Assembly unilaterally imposed the constitution in early 1791 and required all priests and bishops to take an oath of loyalty. This produced a violent schism in the Church. Most of the bishops and around half of the priests refused—putting loyalty to the Pope and the old order first. From then on the 'non-juring priests', as they were called, slipped into the arms of counter-revolution. In a society where the Church was of major ideological importance this was a potent force.

This crisis was coupled with a renewed surge of activity from below in both towns and countryside. In Paris there were no food shortages, due to a reasonable harvest. But now there were strikes by journeymen carpenters, farriers and printers for higher wages. The growing turmoil prompted the king to write, 'I would rather be king of Metz than remain king of France under these conditions, but it will soon be over'.[74] The main bourgeois leaders still hoped for a compromise with the old order. They were concerned above all to stabilise society. Duport, one of their main spokesmen (along with Barnave and the Lameths), put their programme clearly: 'The revolution is over. We must preserve it while resisting excesses. Equality must be restrained, liberty reduced and public opinion controlled. The government must be strong, solid and stable'.[75] Unfortunately, for them, the only force they could see to cement a stable order was the monarchy. So they leaned on the king even while he was plotting counter-revolution.

Meanwhile, as the discontent from below grew, a new type of political organisation was developing. Paris had been divided into 48 electoral divisions called sections. They were based on direct democracy—all eligible voters in the area attended a meeting to select delegates for various municipal and government bodies. Now these sections began to meet regularly and take on a range of political and administrative functions. And as they controlled the local units of the National Guard they had their own armed force. A similar pattern of organisation grew in other towns and cities.[76]

Alongside, giving political direction to these organisations, grew the clubs. The Jacobin club was fairly exclusive—its high subscription at this stage ensured that its members tended to be, typically, Assembly deputies, professionals (doctors, lawyers, writers and so on), merchants and the like. But in April 1790 a club called the Society of Friends of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was founded. It would soon become known as the Cordeliers, after the place where it met. It was led and dominated by radical bourgeois—Marat and Danton were associated with

it at first. But it had relatively unrestricted admission, concerned itself with issues such as unemployment and took an active role in the surveillance of suspected hoarders and so on. In the localities popular 'fraternal societies' of a similar nature also began to spring up. By May 1791 the Cordeliers and these societies in Paris federated and formed a central committee. A new type of organised politics from below was entering the stage.

The flight to Varennes

The King had written (in secret) to the Prussian king in December 1790 asking him to convene a 'European congress backed by an army' to re-establish his authority[77] and at Easter 1791 he took the sacraments from a 'non-juring' priest. Marat, vigilant as ever, was insisting that an attempt by the king to escape and mount an armed counter-revolution was imminent. He was right.

On 20 June 1791 the king and his family escaped from Paris in disguise. They were heading for the border where they hoped to rally troops, émigrés and foreign mercenaries, and march on Paris. The plan was foiled by Drouet, a village postmaster, who recognised the king, and the escape was halted at Varennes. Silent, sullen crowds gathered as the king was escorted back to Paris. A count who came out to pay his respects to the king was murdered by his peasants. Many old illusions were being shattered.

Faced with the king's attempted flight and the spectre of counter-revolution a section of the bourgeoisie moved sharply to the left. Danton wanted the king dethroned and a regency of the Duc D'Orléans decreed. Robespierre argued for the king to be dethroned—but fudged on whether he favoured a republic. The Cordeliers club declared the monarchy to be incompatible with liberty and demanded a republic. This was accompanied by an upsurge of similar sentiments across the country and a wave of petitions from the provinces demanded the king be dethroned. All this terrified the bulk of the bourgeoisie who wanted order at all costs. Barnave, still a key leader in the Assembly, summed up their feelings when he exclaimed, 'Are we going to stop the Revolution or are we going to start it again? To take one step further would be a disastrous and culpable act. One step further in the direction of liberty would mean the destruction of the monarchy; in the direction of equality, the destruction of the concept of property.'[78]

The right rallied behind this banner and responded to the king's flight by a crackdown on the popular movement. The story was invented that the king had been kidnapped and he was reinstated after promising to accept the new constitution in future! Electoral qualifications for the Legislative Assembly, which was to succeed the Constituent Assembly, were raised to exclude about two fifths of adult men—the poorest. The crackdown became violent in July. A petition from the Cordeliers club

calling for the king to be dethroned was being signed at a mass meeting on the Champ de Mars. Some 6,000 had signed when martial law was declared and National Guards led by Lafayette shot down 50 of the crowd. Wholesale repression was unleashed. Marat, not for the first or last time, went into hiding and Danton had to flee to England for a time.

The Jacobin club, until then the central focus for all but the monarchist faction of the bourgeoisie, now split. Most of the deputies who attended the club split away to form the Feuillant club under the banner 'The Revolution Is Over'. They took with them 1,800 out of the 2,400 members in Paris. Only four Assembly deputies, led by Robespierre, remained with the Jacobins. But they held on to the organisation which had grown up around the Jacobins and so its links with the popular movement. Above all, the national network of affiliated clubs remained loyal.

The Constituent Assembly broke up after adopting the new constitution and was replaced by the Legislative Assembly.[79] And though for the moment the right appeared to be dominant the impact of two years of struggle had shifted and clarified ideas enormously. In 1789 Marat was writing only that: 'Public liberty should never depend on the virtues of the prince but on the legal controls imposed on him to prevent him abusing his power'. Now he could write: 'the King of the French people is less use than a fifth wheel on a cart'.[80]

Political organisation and the press[81]

Before moving to the crisis which resulted in the overthrow of the monarchy it is worth saying a little on political organisation and the press.

As already mentioned, the Jacobin club emerged out of meetings of a group of Breton deputies to the Estates General. As the revolution developed in late 1789 and into 1790 similar groups sprang up across the country. They went under a variety of names though usually some variant of the 'Society of Friends of the Constitution'—after the overthrow of the monarchy many changed to 'Society of Friends of Liberty and Equality'. Some of the provincial clubs actually predated the Paris club but they always acknowledged it as their 'mother society', though the bigger regional clubs such as that in Marseille and the Recollets Society of Bordeaux were important in their own right and relatively autonomous from the Paris club. The clubs mirrored the more 'official' organisations—the sections, Communes and so on. In December 1789 the Jacobins agreed to accept affiliation from such clubs. The numbers grew rapidly. From 32 such clubs in March 1790 they grew to 213 by November of that year, 543 the following March and 921 by July 1791. A central activity at the meetings, which gradually became more frequent and eventually almost daily, was the reading of newspapers—often aloud for discussion. The clubs corresponded with each other and sent out circulars. All the clubs had a host of elected committees for

correspondence, surveillance, education, welfare and so on.

At first they had an exclusively bourgeois membership, maintained by a relatively high membership fee.This meant parallel structures of more 'popular' clubs grew up. Such popular clubs could be large—in Lyon the 3,000 members had their own paper by the end of 1790. Later the various Jacobin clubs admitted poorer elements and they began to hold public sessions in 1790 and 1791 as well as a host of public ceremonies. The combination of centralised organisation within the network of Jacobin clubs and the flexible relationship these maintained with the popular societies frequented by poorer elements is extremely important in understanding the relative hegemony of the Jacobins within the organised popular movement. The Jacobins partly adapted to and incorporated, but always maintained a distance and independence from, the more popular clubs. The key Jacobin leaders understood the importance of this sophisticated political operation well. Jacobin hegemony was also due to the coherent ideology they propagated.in contrast to any alternatives thrown up by the popular movement. This ideology (after the successive splits with Feuillants and Girondins left Robespierre, St Just, and so on as the dominant force in the Jacobins) was inspired by Rousseau's writings. It centred on the idea of all citizens uniting in the common defence of the nation, the revolution and republic in which all should have a stake and some property.

As well as the explosive growth of political organisation the press also mushroomed. The French Revolution was the first in which the press played a central role. Newspapers such as Marat's *Friend of the People* have been mentioned but there were countless others all engaging in political debate. On the eve of the revolution there were about 60 periodicals across the whole of France. By the summer of 1792 there were 500 in Paris alone, although few had big circulations. The largest circulation was around 15,000, while Marat's had a couple of thousand at most. But public readings ensured these ideas reached far greater numbers. So the peasant oriented *Feuille Villageoise* is estimated to have reached up to 300,000 people fairly regularly.

The social basis of the Jacobins is worth stressing in the light of recent 'revisionist' questioning of the idea of a bourgeois revolution in France. The clubs were usually founded by small groups of bourgeois—four people started the Lille club—though the average was around 30. The composition of the Limoges club at its foundation is fairly typical: 11 lawyers, eight wholesale merchants, six clergy, five civil servants, four rentiers, three doctors, two administrators, two printers, one editor, one engineer, one surveyor and an army officer. In other words the bourgeoisie and professional classes—though usually the lower and younger elements of the bourgeoisie—formed the core of the Jacobins.

The size of individual clubs grew rapidly. By 1791 there were over 2,000 in Marseilles. In Tonneins nine founders grew to 204 within two

weeks. Officers of the clubs were usually subject to elections every month.In Lille for instance the three principal offices in late 1790 and early 1791 rotated between a salt merchant, a doctor, a lawyer, a wholesale merchant and a lace merchant. The clubs were male, though occasionally some allowed women to attend meetings. More often women's and youth's auxiliary societies were set up—later revolutionary women's clubs such as that led by Claire Lacombe in Paris developed.[82]

The size of this politically active minority varied enormously depending on the level of struggle. In areas like the south where counter-revolution was strong so were the Jacobin and associated popular societies. At its peak the numbers were huge. Some estimates put the numbers as high as one million at various points in the revolution. For instance fairly reliable estimates claim 10 to 15 percent of the population of a city like Marseilles were involved in Jacobin or associated popular clubs at the height of the 1792 crisis. More typical seems to be a figure of around 2 to 3 percent of the population in most towns in the years 1792 and 1793. This is still a huge number. The core militants who regularly attended outside of moments of crisis was of course much less but still large, in Paris in the period 1790-2 something in the region of 3,000 to 8,000.

This mass political organisation and its press were the backbone of the revolution. We know more about the events in Paris and in the Convention, but too often the fact that behind this stood real organisation right across the country, on a historically unprecedented scale, is forgotten.[83]

From social conflict to war

The Legislative Assembly sat from 1 October 1791 until the fall of the monarchy the following August. This period began with the right seeming to have carried the day behind the banner 'The Revolution Is Over'. But the growing social conflict, the determination of the old order not to accept a compromise but rather to restore its power by counter-revolution and, finally, the outbreak of war between the revolution and the rest of Europe combined to create a profound crisis which radicalised the revolution. The intervention of the mass of people, just as in 1789, was decisive. It was this which overthrew the monarchy, saved the revolution, and set it on a new course.

The Feuillant leaders were initially dominant in the Assembly and among the bourgeoisie as a whole. They all agreed that the revolution was over, even though there were splits between those around Lafayette and those around the triumvirate of Lameth, Duport and Barnave over how this closure was to be achieved. As mentioned already, they moved sharply to the right in the wake of the king's attempted flight in the summer of 1791. They were opposed by a smaller group around the

Jacobins. The Jacobins still embraced a wide spectrum from Marat through Robespierre on the left to Brissot and Vergniaud on the right.

Renewed price rises in the winter of 1791-2 fuelled by a poorish harvest and inflation were coupled with an industrial crisis—partly due to the disruption of building and luxury trades by the revolution. This resulted in riots in Paris over high prices in January and February 1792. More worrying was a new eruption of rural revolt. Armed bands of poorer peasants began descending on markets and fixing, by force, the price of corn and bread. In some areas, especially the south, this spilled over into renewed attacks on chateaux. In March Simoneau, the mayor of Étampes, was lynched by a crowd when he refused to order a reduction in the price of grain. Significantly, in many areas National Guards played an active role in the risings.

In the towns meanwhile the *sans culottes* were beginning to formulate clearer political demands. Price controls—the demand for the 'Maximum'—became the touchstone of this movement. In Paris these demands were articulated by new spokesmen and women such as the red priest Jacques Roux, the postal clerk Jean Varlet and the actress Claire Lacombe. They formed a grouping which was known as the *enragés* (literally the madmen).[84] They represented the radical petty bourgeois of the towns. Roux thundered against the big bourgeois and their 'equality', which 'is no more than an empty shadow so long as monopolies give the rich the power of life and death over their fellow human beings'.[85] The *enragés* were not against private property but against the logic of it—to foster large scale property owners at one extreme and propertyless wage earners at the other. Theirs was a utopian programme but it was an expression of the contradictions in the *real* situation of the urban sans culottes and it motivated revolutionary action. It was in the spring of 1792 that the *sans culottes* began to frequent the sections and clubs in larger numbers. Also at this time there was a worrying increase in hostility to the revolution in some parts of the countryside—especially in areas like the Vendée and Brittany in the west. Here nobles and non-juring priests were playing an active role in fomenting anti-revolutionary feeling.

In tandem with these social conflicts there began a debate over the possibility of war. This soon dominated all political debate. The threat of counter-revolution and armed intervention by foreign powers to restore the old order was the basic reason for a growing recognition of the likelihood of war. From England Edmund Burke had already launched his vitriolic attack on the revolution in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. The growing number of émigrés plotting and organising for counter-revolution on foreign soil added to the fears—had not the king tried to flee to take refuge with these forces and foreign kings, no doubt to make war on France? Behind all this the humiliation of Louis by the revolution and the principles it was preaching were an implicit challenge

to the basis of the old order of monarchies and aristocracies across most of Europe. In August 1791 the Austrian and Prussian emperors had made this clear with their Declaration of Pillnitz which invited European powers, if they could all agree, to unite and restore order in France. It was not a threat of immediate armed intervention but was nevertheless a clear signal.[86] All of these factors combined meant that war was more a matter of when rather than if.

But though war was likely at some stage the conflict was precipitated by a coalition of forces that emerged in France which positively advocated it. There were three strands, all with different reasons for wanting war. The most important was a section of the Jacobins led by Jacques Pierre Brissot. They had several motivations. First, they hoped that war would allow the deepening social conflicts in France to be diverted into unity behind the nation under a stronger regime and so help to stabilise the revolution—a scheme the bourgeoisie have frequently resorted to since. In doing so they also hoped to expose Feuillant leaders who were, correctly, thought to be intriguing with the king and foreign powers. Secondly, they were well connected with the commercial and financial bourgeoisie for whom war loans and supply contracts were likely to be highly profitable—they certainly had been in the past. They also hoped war would increase demand and so revive the economy, providing another stabilising factor. Thirdly, war opened up the prospect of winning control of the wealth of Belgium and Holland. 'Amsterdam will soon be your treasury', argued Pierre Cambon[87]. The war would be initially directed against Austria, which controlled Belgium. But behind this was the fact that French expansion into the Low Countries would be a challenge to the French bourgeoisie's main rival—England. Daniel Guérin rightly notes: 'When the mercantile bourgeoisie...set their sights on Vienna their ultimate target was London'.[88]

Others supported war for different reasons. Lafayette, who had recently failed in his attempt to become the powerful mayor of Paris, hoped it would allow him to emerge as a military strongman and impose a settlement. The court supported war in the hope that defeat would open the door to a restoration of their power. The Queen, Marie Antoinette, when hearing of Brissot's war plans, put it bluntly: 'The imbeciles do not perceive that they are furthering our plans'.[89] Although those around Lafayette supported war the dominant Feuillant leaders around Duport, Barnave and Lameth were lukewarm because they understood the truth of this (though the queen did not, of course, confide her feelings to them) and were busy intriguing with foreign kings and Louis to defuse the growing international tension.

But the most consistent opposition to the war came from Robespierre, who fought a long duel against Brissot in the Jacobin club.[90] He argued against any notion of the use of war to 'liberate' neighbouring countries—'no one likes armed missionaries'.[91] And he argued that the

war would go badly because the country was not prepared and this would plunge the revolution into a dangerous crisis with the possibility of counter-revolution. Robespierre was right on all counts, but lost the argument. Paradoxically the crisis which ensued would bring him and his supporters to power.

The second revolution

The war party was successful and the king called a Brissotin ministry to office. At its head were Jean Marie Roland and General Dumouriez. France declared war on the king of Bohemia and Hungary (in effect this meant Austria and Prussia) in April 1792 and Robespierre's predictions were rapidly borne out. The war was a disaster. Unpreparedness and disarray in the army led to defeat and large scale desertions. We now know that the French were not helped by the fact that the queen had leaked their plans to the enemy and Lafayette was trying to persuade the Austrians to suspend hostilities so he could turn his army against Paris, disband the Jacobins and establish a strong regime—with himself at the head.

The political backlash from military disaster, and the increased threat of counter-revolution as a result, exacerbated social and political conflicts within France. The Girondins—as the Brissotins were now becoming known because several of their leading members hailed from the Gironde region of south west France—thus found that the war they had advocated, far from stabilising the situation and helping them, was having exactly the opposite impact. The left, after losing the argument over war, now began to speak out again. Many, such as Marat, suspected treachery among the generals and the court. Robespierre warned the Jacobins: 'I do not trust the generals.. I say almost all of them are nostalgic for the old order of things... I have faith only in the people, the people alone'.[92] The Girondins lurched from left to right desperately trying to retain control of the worsening situation. But each twist and turn simply fuelled the crisis, did nothing to improve the military situation and thus pushed the popular movement and a section of the bourgeoisie towards the conclusion that decisive measures would be necessary to save the revolution.

First the Girondins tried to compromise with the Feuillant right and the monarchy against their critics from the left and the growing demand for radical measures. But they were rebuffed. The right and the king were hoping the chaos and military defeats would strengthen their hand. So the Girondins were forced to look elsewhere for support. This meant a sharp lurch to the left. They began attacking the 'Austrian committee' (meaning those around the queen, who was Austrian) for being in league with foreign enemies and began to stoke up the popular movement. The Girondins passed a decree allowing the deportation of non-juring priests and disbanded the 6,000 strong royal guard. They then summoned 20,000

fédérés (National Guards from the provinces) to a camp near Paris. The Girondins intended these as a counter to the National Guards from the richer quarters of Paris which were sympathetic to Lafayette and the right. The left feared they could be used by the Girondins against the Paris masses. Future events were to show that both had badly misjudged these *fédérés*.

These measures brought the Girondins into conflict with the king. Louis, thinking he would benefit from the military defeats and counting on support from the generals, now vetoed the decrees and sacked the Girondin ministers, installing a more right wing Feuillant team. On 16 June Lafayette stirred the pot further when he wrote to the Assembly from the front denouncing the 'anarchy' in Paris, and attacked the Jacobins for being just as dangerous as the enemy abroad

Faced with the threat of a coup from both the king and Lafayette the Girondins turned to the popular movement in Paris to save them. They further stoked up the popular movement and encouraged a show of strength to intimidate the right. They were supported by Pétion, the mayor of Paris—but Robespierre and others tried in vain to prevent what they felt would be a premature move. The result was that on 20 June an armed uprising of the Parisian *sans culottes*, led by people like the brewer Santerre, invaded the Tuileries—now the king's residence. The king was forced to drink the health of the nation and wear revolutionary symbols. But he refused to give way on his decisions to veto the decrees and would not recall the Girondin ministers. The right would not back down through mere threats. Stronger action would be needed.

The temperature was raised to boiling point on 28 June when Lafayette finally made his bid for power. He suddenly appeared before the Assembly demanding measures against the Jacobins and the popular movement. A coup looked likely, but the Paris National Guard refused to follow him and the king, thinking growing divisions in the Assembly and military defeat would continue to strengthen his position, refused Lafayette's invitation to join his troops and march on Paris. The king wanted to crush the revolution, but he had no intention of becoming a puppet ruler dependent on Lafayette.

In the growing turmoil the Girondins vacillated between denouncing royal treachery and trying to find a compromise. Fearing the right they had urged the popular movement on, but they feared it getting out of control and so now recoiled from the demon they had helped to summon. The Girondin leaders were paralysed, incapable of taking any decisive initiative. They were reduced to panic as the situation slipped out of their control and the mass of people moved to resolve the crisis by direct intervention. Vergniaud, a leading Girondin, wrote to the king desperately looking for a compromise. He warned: 'A new revolutionary explosion is rocking the foundations of a political system which has not had time to consolidate itself.'[93]

Vergniaud was right. The danger to the real gains of the revolution from external and internal enemies was awakening a massive popular mobilisation. On 21 July the Assembly, in view of the worsening war sitaution, had declared: 'A large force is advancing towards our frontiers. All those who hate liberty are taking up force against our constitution. Citizens, the fatherland is in danger!'[94] and called for volunteers to defend the country. The response was massive and immediate. Over 15,000 volunteers signed up in a few days in Paris alone and after the decree was read in public squares the pattern was repeated across the country. The patriotism of the masses was not the jingoism we associate with nationalism today. Defence of the homeland in France in 1792 meant above all defence of the revolution and the newly won and real, if limited, freedoms. The war was not against foreigners but against kings and tyrants who threatened the French, and their own people's, freedoms. Help and protection were offered to those who fought for liberty in their own countries.[95]

'Passive' citizens were now flooding into the clubs and sections everywhere. The movement did not confine itself to debates. In Marseilles and Toulon popular demonstrations and riots erupted and local officials were lynched. In Paris on 25 July the sections declared themselves in permanent session and on 30 July 'passive' citizens were admitted to the National Guard, radicalising this force and arming the more militant elements in the popular movement. Meanwhile, despite the king's veto of the Assembly's decree summoning them to Paris, *fédérés* were converging on the city from the provinces. Their temper was quite different to that expected by most in the Assembly. Many of them raised the demand for a republic and at the forefront were a group from Marseilles with their new marching song—the Marseillaise. The clubs in Paris also began to focus on the question of the king. The Cordeliers Club passed a motion demanding a convention to give France 'a constitution' and at the Jacobins Billaud-Varenne demanded the deportation of the king and elections on the basis of universal male suffrage. Links between the *fédérés* and the movement in Paris were cemented by providing officers for the provincial National Guards from Parisian clubs and setting up a central committee of *fédérés* (Robespierre was involved in these moves). Then, following the lead of the *fédérés*, the Paris sections passed resolutions demanding a republic and Pétion, the mayor of Paris, presented a petition in the name of 47 of the 48 sections to the Assembly on 3 August. It was clear that a decisive conflict was approaching.

The need for action had been made imperative by the manifesto issued by the Duke of Brunswick on behalf of the invading armies rapidly advancing on Paris. It warned of 'exemplary vengeance' and of 'handing over the city of Paris to the soldiery and punishing the rebels as they deserved'[96]. But the Girondins and the Assembly continued to

vacillate. Others however were organising—a co-ordinating committee from the Paris sections and the *fédérés* had been set up to prepare for a rising. The leading Jacobins gave varying degrees of approval, often after much vacillation. Robespierre did not commit himself publicly until 29 July but then he said, 'The state must be saved by whatever means, and nothing is unconstitutional except what can lead it to ruin.'[97] The message was clear enough—a section of the bourgeois leadership would back an insurrection. The other side however were also organising and thought they could win the fight. Nobles gathered with royalist troops at the Tuileries and were counting on National Guard units from the richer quarters of the city. On 9 August the Assembly, still looking for a compromise, rejected the sections' petition for a republic. This put insurrection firmly on the agenda. That night an 'insurrectionary commune', composed of delegates from the sections, was set up—replacing the official commune.

On the morning of 10 August 1792 National Guards from the more militant sections led by the *fédérés* with the *Marseillais* at their head marched on the Tuileries. At first things went well. The defending National Guards defected and joined the insurrection. This left only the nobles and the royal troops defending the king's residence—the king himself had fled to take refuge in the Assembly. The royal troops opened fire and held off the insurgents for a while. At last the *Marseillais* led the *fédérés* and armed *sans culottes* in a direct assault and after a bloody struggle the king ordered his troops to surrender—600 royalist troops and 390 revolutionaries had been killed but the insurrection had won.[98]

When the victory of the insurrection was clear the Assembly voted to suspend the king and recognised the insurrectionary commune of Paris. The commune was enlarged and assumed effective power, at least for the moment. It was composed of hitherto largely unknown faces from the ranks of the popular movement with a sprinkling of bourgeois leaders, including Robespierre, who was elected to it. It allowed the Legislative Assembly to remain until a National Convention, elected by universal male suffrage, could decide on the fate of France, the revolution and the king.

But the victory of the insurrection was only one half of the battle. There were still other dangers to be overcome. Lafayette had tried in vain to lead his troops against Paris a few days after the insurrection and then deserted to the enemy. And the enemy was still advancing on Paris. On 23 August Longwy fell to the Prussians and on 2 September Verdun too. The Prussians were now within striking distance of Paris and many expected their imminent arrival. Few had any illusions as to the consequences if this should happen—there were already reports of local officials being summarily executed by the invading armies.

The nominal government leaders after 10 August were the old Girondins, such as Roland, recently ousted by the king and now restored

on the back of an insurrection they had tried to avoid. But alongside the Commune the real power in the government was the newly installed provisional minister of justice, Georges Danton—whose appointment was meant to reassure the commune and *sans culottes*. He set about tapping the enthusiasm of the popular movement, rallying volunteers to march and halt the invaders. But as the volunteers set off for the front there was the still present problem of the counter-revolutionary forces in the rear. The king had been overthrown but was still in Paris. The city was full of ex-nobles and others who were ready to rise up, free the king and join with the advancing Prussians to crush the revolution. In particular the prisons were stuffed with royalists, often living in luxury despite their imprisonment, openly proclaiming their counter-revolutionary sentiments and under fairly lax security. It was, with good reason, feared they could break out and attack the revolution in the rear. In addition there were murmurings that the Girondin government planned to withdraw to the south of the country and leave Paris to the invaders, while the court set up to try royalists involved in opposing the insurrection of 10 August began acquitting them, which infuriated the popular movement. Already Danton had ordered a general search for arms in the houses of royalists and priests. Now as thousands set off for the front they decided that more decisive steps were needed.

In the first few days of September the gates of the city were closed, the tocsin, or alarm bell, rang, and well organised bands invaded the prisons and set up popular tribunals to deal with potential enemies behind the lines. Prisoners thought to be a danger to the revolution were executed on the spot—among them a large number of common criminals—while those not suspected of being a threat to the revolution were freed. In Paris around 1,000 to 1,400 prisoners are known to have been killed in early September. The tribunals were a popular initiative from below and were led by many of the key militants in Paris—Maillard, famous from the storming of the Bastille and the October Days in 1789, for example. And the Watch Committee of the Commune, of which Marat was now a key member, guided the movement. In the provinces similar reactions occurred and as the volunteers advanced to the front the same scenes were repeated with the support of local people in towns on the route. The motivation behind the executions is illustrated by events in Alençon, where wives of *sans culottes* went along and encouraged the tribunals to get rid of 'all those bloody aristocrats', saying, 'That gang would have taken up arms to slit our throats after the departure of our valiant youth.'[99]

Though almost all bourgeois leaders later disowned the September Massacres, it is clear that many tacitly encouraged them by not attempting to intervene—this is particularly true of Danton as minister of justice. But the fact that the tribunals had come from below and operated outside the direct control of the bourgeois leaders was an experience they were

determined not to repeat. Some like Marat defended the actions. 'What is the duty of the people?', he wrote in his newspaper. 'To present itself in arms before the Abbaye (a major prison in Paris), snatch out the traitors...and put them to the sword'[100]. Referring to the government's failure to take any action against the royalist threat, he argued it was 'because the conspirators have escaped the sword of justice that they have fallen under the axes of the people.'[101] However grisly the event there is little doubt that Marat was right. To have left the rear exposed as volunteers marched to meet the invaders risked disaster and the far more brutal vengeance of the counter-revolution which would have followed.[102]

The internal threat had been dealt with. Now the external threat was halted when the revolutionary army met the Prussians at Valmy on 20 September. Meanwhile the political significance of the second revolution was demonstrated, as elections, for the first time based on universal male suffrage, took place across France. The new National Convention met in Paris on the very day of victory at Valmy.[103] The next day the monarchy was formally abolished on the proposal of the Parisian Jacobin Collot D'Herbois. Shortly afterwards France was declared the 'Republic One and Indivisible'. Year One had begun. There was no turning back—the revolution had entered a new phase.

Girondins and Montagnards

The impact of the developing revolution and the war forced the clarification of at first vaguely defined programmes, and divisions in the Convention thus crystallised. Increasingly these corresponded to the diverging interests of different classes and elements of classes. The Girondins were the largest 'organised' group in the Convention—a testimony that the mass movement which had triumphed in August and September still represented a minority in the country. They represented the interests of the higher sections of the bourgeoisie—in particular the merchants and traders of the great Atlantic seaports.[104] Their politics were based on a profound hostility to economic controls and regulation, an intense anglophobia fuelled by commercial rivalry with England and hostility to the popular movement. In the end, as the events leading up to the overthrow of the monarchy had demonstrated, this political outlook meant they were unwilling to carry through the measures necessary to successfully prosecute the war of which they had been the main advocates.

Against the Girondins were ranged the Jacobins—known now as the Mountain because they tended to occupy the upper seats in the Convention. Significantly they included 23 of the 24 deputies for Paris, the heart of the revolution, including Robespierre, Marat and, on occasion, Danton.[105] They generally reflected the interests of the lower layers of the bourgeoisie and those who had benefitted from the sale of Church and noble lands confiscated by the revolution, i.e. those for whom

no compromise with, or restoration of, the old order was conceivable. They came to understand the need for centralisation and a more controlled economy if the revolution was to be defended against internal and external enemies. The central aspect of their politics was the idea of the 'Republic One and Indivisible'—the defence of the bourgeois nation state against all attempts to fragment it or restore the old order.

This position brought them close, at times, to the popular movement of the petty bourgeois *sans culottes*. 'Just look at how the rich are rallying to their support', said Robespierre of the Girondins. 'Well, they are the *honnêtes gens*, the respectable people of the Republic; we are the *sans culottes*, the rabble'.[106] The ideology of Jacobinism came to reflect this peculiar amalgam. They took on board large elements of a utopian petty bourgeois programme at the core of which was the idea of a republic of small property owners. No one should have too much property—hence a hostility to big merchants, landowners and manufacturers—but equally no one should have no property. There was no notion of collective ownership or control. This is clearly seen in the demands the Paris sections made on the Convention to 'regulate the profits of industry and commerce' and establish a maximum for personal fortunes. 'A single individual should not be permitted to own more than this maximum,' and 'No one is to own more than one shop or workshop', which 'would gradually do away with the excessive inequality of wealth and increase the number of property owners.'[107] The *sans culottes* also placed the question of a controlled economy with a maximum on prices of essential items of urban consumption at the centre of their demands.

The Jacobin bourgeoisie were prepared to acquiesce in this, partly under pressure from below but also because it came to correspond with their central policy of winning the war. For some Jacobin leaders the adaptation to this ideology was purely pragmatic. But others, Robespierre and St Just in particular, came to genuinely share the petty bourgeois dream of a republic of small property owners. In large measure it corresponded with the vision of society they, and other leading Jacobins, had derived from Rousseau. Robespierre's ideal of a 'virtuous republic' in which each citizen had some stake (i.e. property—though *not* equal amounts) but in which each was subordinate to the 'General Will' was directly derived from Rousseau's *On the Social Contract*. For a time this was the ideal vehicle for reconciling the *sans culottes* movement with the Jacobin dictatorship—representing the 'General Will'—in defence of the nation and the revolution. The whole ideology was essentially utopian. It rested upon the dream of a petty bourgeoisie upholding private property but opposing the logic of capital—which was to increasingly reduce independent small producers to dependent wage earners. But this utopianism did not prevent it from having the ability to motivate the most resolute revolutionary action.

In the Convention neither the Gironde nor the Mountain was in an

overall majority. The vast bulk of the deputies were solidly bourgeois but not committed to any defined policy or faction. Rather they were prepared to back whichever seemed best to defend their interests at any time. They were known as the 'Marsh' or the 'Plain'—and were occasionally referred to as the frogs of the marsh because they hopped between various positions. The more coherent groups were always a minority of the Convention, and a smaller minority still among the bourgeoisie outside. They depended on the support, or tacit acceptance because of the lack of any immediately apparent alternative, of the bulk in the middle. This is of major importance in understanding the development of the revolution. In particular it is impossible to grasp the Terror, later in the revolution, other than in the context of a minority of the bourgeoisie imposing a programme on the bulk of their class with the backing of a popular petty bourgeois movement.[108]

The execution of the King

After the overthrow of the monarchy and the victory at Valmy the French revolutionary army won further victories. Most spectacular was the victory at Jemappes on 6 November where, even more than at Valmy, it was the unprecedented mass combat of the French which carried the day. Shortly afterwards the French army led by Dumouriez crossed the border and occupied Belgium[109].

Such successes seemed to remove the dangers which had fuelled the mass movement. Now, with the National Convention elected, the situation seemed to have stabilised. The mass movement subsided and the Girondins maintained their dominance. They even succeeded in disbanding the Jacobin dominated Parisian revolutionary commune of 10 August. The harvest was now complete, which eased the situation further, although problems could be expected later due to the shortfall caused by the disruption of the war. The Girondins, partly through money, partly through influence as the governing party, established effective control over the majority of the press. This too worked to create the impression of a new stability. Robespierre complained bitterly of this control of the press and in October launched his famous 'Letters to his constituents' to 'smuggle out the truth'.

But the stability was an illusion. First there was still the problem of what to do with the deposed king. Robespierre, on behalf of the Jacobin Club, proposed that he be brought before the Convention and sentenced to death without further ado. 'The right of punishing the tyrant and of dethroning him are the same thing; they do not take different forms.'[110] But the bulk of the bourgeoisie, though having acquiesced in 10 August for fear of a restoration of the old order or a military dictatorship, wanted to spare the king's life. Many still hoped for a compromise or partial restoration along English lines.

Circumstances, however, made this difficult. A secret chest had been

discovered in the king's apartment which revealed his counter-revolutionary intrigues.[111] So the deputies had little choice but to record a unanimous verdict of guilty when Louis was brought for trial before the Convention. The Girondins then tried to manoeuvre for a stay of execution and argued for a popular referendum on the king's fate. But the Jacobins, who sensed the fundamental importance of the issue, successfully pushed for an open ballot where each deputy had to publicly record their views. This exposure to public scrutiny was sufficient to force many a reluctant bourgeois to vote for the king's death—to reprieve the king risked stirring the Parisian masses up again. Bertrand Barère carried much of the Marsh to vote with the Jacobins and by a majority of 70 a referendum was rejected and Louis condemned to immediate execution. He was guillotined on 21 January 1793.

The political significance of the execution was enormous. From now on, as publicly acknowledged regicides, the bulk of the bourgeois deputies had little choice but to defend the Republic, which was precisely what the Jacobins had sensed when they forced the issue. Robespierre's speech in favour of execution ended simply, 'Louis must die because the Motherland must live.'[112] The war now became explicitly what it had always been implicitly—a challenge to the old order of kings, queens and aristocracies across Europe. Any restoration or counter-revolution in France would now see many of the bourgeois leaders following Louis to the scaffold. 'We are on the way and the roads are cut off behind us', wrote the Jacobin Le Bas.[113]

The Girondin vacillation over the king's fate had compromised them further with the more militant elements of the popular movement. And though the temporary cessation of active combat in the war, because of the winter,[114] combined with the factors described earlier to create an appearance of stability, the problems, military and economic, were still real. In the early months of 1793 they resurfaced with a new sharpness. In February war was declared on England and then on Holland and Spain. France was now facing the combined might of all the major European powers. The opening of the spring campaign demanded still more troops, and the internal organisation of the economy to supply them, if the Republic was not to succumb.

Also towards the end of the winter the economic situation deteriorated sharply, the assignat fell to 50 percent of its face value and prices began to move up again—particularly those of colonial products like coffee, sugar, candles, soap and so on. But above all the price of bread rocketed.[115] By the end of winter grain circulation had virtually ceased and bread reached record prices, doubling in a matter of weeks. Bands of workers moved across the countryside enforcing price freezes. In the towns discontent exploded into riots in Paris, while in Lyons a movement developed in January demanding a maximum on prices. The riots usually took the form of 'popular taxation', crowds invading markets and shops

and fixing prices at what they considered a fair level.

All sections of the bourgeoisie united to condemn the riots—Robespierre attacked people for fighting over 'paltry merchandise'. But the pressure forced some concessions. The Lyons Commune effectively municipalised bread supplies in the spring of 1793 and the Paris Commune agreed to fix the price of bread by subsidies[116]. By May the Mountain had declared its support for a maximum grain price in each department. The Girondins however resolutely opposed such measures, deepening the popular movement's hostility to them. This hostility took the political form of a growing demand, first formulated by the enragés, for a purge of the Girondin leaders (known as 'appellants' from their attempt to have the king's fate put to a referendum) from the Convention. The economic and political questions began to fuse once again.

The *enragés*, with some backing from the Cordeliers Club, attempted to organise a 'day' on 10 March to push through their demands. But the Paris Commune and Jacobin Club refused to give it their backing and it fizzled out. With no working class capable of acting as an independent force the petty bourgeois popular movement, however militant and radical, was incapable of acting consistently without the leadership and backing of at least some elements of the bourgeoisie. This limit on the *sans culottes* movement would be underlined again and again during the revolution.

The Vendée and the fall of the Girondins

The failure of the popular movement in early March did not remove the cause of the discontent nor lessen the demand for something to be done. In the following two months the impact of the war was to deepen this pressure from below and, most importantly, push a section of the bourgeoisie into giving it direction and leadership.

The first major development was the outbreak of full scale civil war in the Vendée region of western France. This was provoked by the Republic's attempt to recruit ever larger numbers of troops to cope with enemies advancing from all sides to crush the revolution.

The backward peasants of the wooded '*bocage*' areas in the Vendée (and other such regions) were heavily influenced by the Church. The attack on the clergy, through the Civil Constitution and the subsequent persecution of non-juring priests, had pushed many peasants into hostility to the revolution. More importantly they had benefitted little from the revolution and in particular had seen the 'republican' bourgeoisie of nearby towns grab most of the land released by the sale of confiscated property. Though this had happened elsewhere it appears to have been particularly blatant in parts of the Vendée. The attempt to drill the peasants into fighting for the bourgeois republic was the last straw. In a fairly spontaneous movement they rose across the region and stormed a number of key towns between 10 and 15 March. The rising appears

to have caught nobles, plotting a rising of their own, by surprise. But they quickly assumed organisational and political leadership—revolt became counter-revolution. The Convention was panic stricken at the outbreak of civil war when it was already fighting against all Europe, but the Girondins vacillated over how to respond and it was not until May that significant military measures were taken to crush the revolt. The *Vendéens* meanwhile tried to connect the internal and external threats to the Republic by appealing to the English for help—who did not respond and so passed up what was probably their best chance of a decisive victory over the revolution. Even so, with French troops tied down on the front successive forces sent by the Republic to put down the Vendée revolt were only partially successful and the civil war in the west continued until late in the year and the advent of the Jacobin dictatorship.

The second development was a series of military disasters in the north followed by the treason of Dumouriez, the victor of Valmy and leader of the army. This was the catalyst for a new turn in the revolution. The unwillingness of the Girondins to take decisive measures to mobilise resources for the war effort was the basic reason behind the military reverses. French troops were driven out of Belgium, and Dumouriez, thinking he could succeed in the role Lafayette had failed to play, then concluded a deal with the enemy. He attacked the growing strength of the Jacobins and the popular movement in Paris as the cause of all the problems and tried to persuade his troops to follow him in a march to restore order in Paris. But for the second time the would be Caesar failed. Dumouriez' troops refused to follow him and so on 5 April he defected to the Austrians.

The treachery of the commander of the French forces, on top of everything else, provoked an enormous political crisis and a series of complex manoeuvres in the Convention. The Girondins, who had been closely associated with Dumouriez and who had basked in his earlier successes, attempted to deflect the wave of popular anger at the treachery of the general. They attacked Danton, who had been sent to negotiate with Dumouriez on the eve of his defection and was already—with some justification—suspected of wanting to make peace. But this forced Danton to defend himself and he finally broke with the Girondins and rallied to the Mountain along with his supporters—shifting the balance of forces in the Convention.

The Jacobins were rapidly coming to see that the war demanded revolutionary measures to avoid defeat. The Girondins had proved time and again they were unwilling to take such steps and so would have to be pushed aside. At first the Jacobins hoped to achieve this by 'parliamentary' means—winning the Marsh to support them. They had some success. Danton had pulled some elements behind the Mountain and now some conservative bourgeois like Lazare Carnot followed. Carnot was to become the key military organiser under the Jacobin

dictatorship of the Year II, and later a key architect of Thermidor and a Director. He put the situation clearly: 'No genuine peace can be expected from our enemies, even less from those within than from those outside...we must crush them or be crushed by them.'[117] A growing awareness of the truth of this was the basis for an increase in Jacobin support among the bourgeoisie.

But the Jacobins failed to make sufficient headway in the Convention. So they had to turn to the popular movement, already demanding a purge of the Girondin leaders, to allow them to secure dominance. They had no intention of allowing the popular movement to dictate the terms of any such alliance and some voiced the fear that a too drastic purge might ensue and the 'rump' of the Convention would be powerless to resist wholesale concessions to popular pressure. The Jacobins also feared (and they were essentially correct in this) that unless the Convention was preserved as the national sovereign body the operation could leave militant Paris isolated from the provinces and threaten internal disintegration of the republic. Their opposition to the earlier attempted 'day' promoted by the enragés and the Cordeliers had underlined that their backing was essential for success. This secured effective leadership for them.

On 2 April Maximilien Robespierre proposed that charges be brought against the 'appellants' but was rebuffed. Then on 5 April Augustin Robespierre (Maximilien's brother and close associate) publicly invited the sections to present themselves at the bar of the Convention and 'force us to arrest the disloyal deputies'.[118] Within a week the sections responded by naming 22 Girondin deputies whose removal would go some way to satisfy popular demands and give the Mountain a working majority. The Jacobins had skilfully channelled popular demands into a form which would secure Jacobin leadership of the revolution.

Meanwhile a Jacobin circular to its affiliated clubs around the country, signed by Marat as the club's current president, urged them to come to the aid of Paris threatened by counter-revolutionaries and external invasion. The Girondins began to fight this orchestrated campaign against them. They used the circular as the pretext to summon Marat before the Revolutionary Tribunal—created in March. It was a move which blew up in their face. The Tribunal, under popular pressure, acquitted Marat, who was carried through the streets in triumph.

At this point Robespierre moved to further tie the *sans culottes* to Jacobin leadership by proposing a series of amendments to the Declaration of the Rights of Man. He had already argued on 3 April at the Jacobin club for a 'revolutionary army composed of every patriot and *sans culotte*' to organise and secure the supply of grain to Paris.[119] But his new proposals were more radical. They included a limit on the amount of property any one individual was allowed to own as well as a proposal for a progressive income tax, the provision of 'work or...the means of existence to those who are unable to work' and the principle that: 'When

the government violates the rights of the people, the insurrection of the entire people, and of each portion thereof, is the most sacred of duties.'[120] The Convention refused to support Robespierre's proposal and the Girondin press denounced it as 'absurd and ruinous for industry'[121]. But they published it, which served to make it well known, and the Jacobin Club adopted it. The Jacobins had effectively tied the popular movement to their leadership just as conflict within the bourgeoisie was rapidly coming to a head.

But the Girondins were organising too, and round them rallied every opponent of the revolution from those favouring a restored 'constitutional' monarchy to open supporters of the old order. Richer elements began to organise in the Paris sections to back up the Girondins, while in Lyons, Bordeaux and Marseilles there were successful insurrections of 'moderates' against Jacobin led communes. The forces behind the pro-Girondin movement are illustrated by a spokesman agitating in their defence in the department of the Gard: 'Brissot, Pétion and Guadet are as much to be feared as Marat, Danton and Robespierre.'[122] Had the Girondins been victorious there is little doubt that it would have opened the door to full blooded counter-revolution.

The Girondins deepened the crisis by moving to openly attack the popular movement. Leading militants, among them the *enragé* Varlet, were arrested. Then the Girondins moved against Jacques-René Hébert, now a key figure in the Paris Commune and editor of the popular bourgeois paper *Le Père Duchesne*—named after a pipe smoking small merchant (of stoves) in popular theatre, which aptly sums up the social basis of its support. Girondin leaders threatened the popular movement of Paris with dire measures. Guadet demanded, in the Convention, the abolition of the 'anarchical' Paris Commune, which had infuriated the Girondins by ordering a progressive tax on the rich to help pay for the expenses of the war.[123] And Isnard threatened the destruction of Paris: 'People would be searching soon on the banks of the Seine to see if Paris had ever existed.'[124] The Girondins also reaffirmed their opposition to any but legal equality or any increase in economic regulation.

The ground was laid for a new trial of strength. The real fears of a right wing coup aroused by the Girondin attacks made the organising of a new 'day' an immediate question. Marat had already demanded a decree impeaching the Girondin leaders and threatened, 'If the decree is not enacted we will enact it ourselves.'[125] The Commune summoned delegates from the sections to a meeting at the Archbishop's palace and, as in the summer of 1792, an insurrectionary committee was set up. Command of the National Guard was turned over to the Jacobin François Hanriot and a militia of *sans culottes* enrolled—20,000 strong and paid by the Commune for loss of earnings while taking part in the insurrection! A first attempt to mobilise mass demonstrations on 31 May fell flat as, being a Friday, it was a workday. But then on Sunday 2 June the tocsin

sounded again and this time an enormous armed demonstration surrounded the Convention. After attempting a dignified exit the deputies crumbled and accepted the expulsion of 29 leading Girondin deputies and two ministers, who were placed under house arrest.

This left the way clear for the Jacobins to assume leadership of the revolution. They were still a minority in their class and the Convention, but by allying with the *sans culottes* had pushed the majority, who shared their aim of winning the war and saving the Republic, into accepting their leadership. The revolution had moved sharply to the left on the basis of another mass 'day', the best organised of any in the whole revolution.

From crisis to the Revolutionary Government of the Year II

After the overthrow of the Girondins the revolution was faced with a near terminal crisis which was only resolved by the emergence of the revolutionary government of the Committee of Public Safety.

The civil war in the Vendée continued and 75 deputies protested against the removal of the Girondin leaders while others left Paris to organise opposition to the new regime. These forces provoked a series of effective regional secessions from the Republic and the 'dictatorship' of Paris—hence the label of 'federalists' which they were given. Normandy, Franche-Comté and much of the south, including Lyons and Marseilles, broke away. The situation in Normandy was particulary perilous given its important role in the organisation of the Parisian food supply. The Convention just managed to scrape together a force which routed a rebel group that threatened to march on Paris. But in the south the rebels went so far as to hand Toulon over to the English along with a large part of the French Mediterranean Fleet. And in the north east a string of military disasters allowed the Austrians to occupy the department of the Nord. They promptly set about restoring much of the old regime complete with feudal dues. It looked as if the Republic was disintegrating and Paris would be left isolated. The example of the Nord made clear what could be expected if the Republic fell.

The dangers of counter-revolution were graphically underlined when in July Marat, the most popular of the Jacobin leaders, was assassinated in his bath by a young royalist called Charlotte Corday. The economic situation was little comfort to the Republic either. Prices were rising again and the assignat continued to depreciate—helped by the British government's attempts to destablise the economy by sending forged assignats into France.

At first the Jacobin leaders hesitated and were indecisive in the face of this crisis. But then the revolutionary government began to take shape as a series of measures were pushed through. The Convention had set up a Committee of Public Safety following the treason of Dumouriez. Its 12 members were re-elected every month by the Convention and it

was rapidly becoming the central body of government. It drew up a new constitution which was ratified in a referendum. It did not go as far as Robespierre's earlier proposals—though it did enshrine the right of insurrection against a government which 'violates the rights of the people'.

It made general welfare the aim of society, made poor relief an obligation of the state and insisted that education must be 'put within reach of every citizen'. It enshrined universal male suffrage, guaranteed 'asylum to foreigners banished from their homelands for the sake of liberty' and extended the vote to 'every foreigner who shall be judged by the legislative body to have merited well of humanity'. Finally it flung down a defiant challenge to the old order in the rest of Europe by declaring: 'The general force of the Republic is composed of the entire people. All Frenchmen shall be soldiers; they shall all be trained in the use of arms', and concluded that the Republic 'does not make peace with an enemy occupying its territory.'[126]

The constitution was put into cold storage until the return of peace. (This was not done formally until 14 Frimaire Year II, 4 December 1793, when the government was decreed 'revolutionary' until peace). But its central political purpose was achieved: to act as a rallying point against the prospect of a successful counter-revolution. On a more practical level peasants who were still conducting a fight to end the remnants of seigneurial dues, including those commuted to cash payments, had to be won to support the Republic. The civil war in the Vendée showed the danger of alienating them. So émigrés' property was confiscated, divided up into small lots and put up for sale. Common lands were allowed to be divided into small private plots. These measures were never fully implemented, not least because the division of the commons was actually opposed by significant elements of the peasantry[127].

More important was the decision of 17 July 1793 to abolish all feudal or seigneurial dues and rights completely with no compensation. At a stroke what the peasants had fought for since 1789 had been won by a combination of their own efforts and the needs of the bourgeois republic to secure itself. These measures were accompanied by the emergence of a new leadership. First Georges Couthon and Louis-Antoine St Just, militant Jacobins associated with Robespierre, joined the Committee of Public Safety. Then, in late July, Robespierre was added. These and other Jacobin leaders were joined on the committee by former members of the Marsh who had rallied to the Mountain because of their growing awareness of the need for exceptional measures if the Republic was to be saved. These included Carnot, who took charge of military organisation. The support of such people and Pierre Joseph Cambon, who took charge of finances, although not on the committee, was crucial in constructing the Jacobin dictatorship. But they only went along with it out of necessity. When the threat to the revolution seemed to be lifted

by the very success of the revolutionary government, they would withdraw support.

The Committee of Public Safety was re-elected every month by the Convention, but its real strength came from the political backing won for it by Robespierre, St Just, Barère and others at the Jacobin Club and from the network of affiliated clubs across the Republic.[128] In the summer of 1793 it suppressed stock companies, raised forced loans, forbade the export of capital and made bondholders pay the price of sorting out many of the state's debts. Such measures were, of course, none too popular with the class whose interests the Jacobin dictatorship was defending. Cambon was hated by his own class as the 'executioner of bondholders'[129] and for his comment, 'War on the *chateaux*, peace to the cottages.'[130]

The popular movement was also rapidly developing in the crisis ridden summer. The *sans culottes* conducted a long fight to gain the upper hand over the richer elements in the section assemblies. They were largely successful over the summer of 1793.[131] The sections were meeting almost daily and direct democracy—through attendance at meetings, accountability of representatives to the section assembly and so on—was a distinctive characteristic of the sectional movement.

The sections demanded Terror, to root out speculators, hoarders and so on. They also demanded a more controlled economy, in particular a maximum on consumer products—above all grain and bread. There was a degree of ambiguity in demands for price controls, as many artisans, retailers and small merchants did not want controls on their own products. For them the demand was aimed against big merchants and traders and the peasants whose produce supplied the towns. The demand for 'the maximum' grew ever louder from the Paris sections. Bread became more and more expensive, when it was available at all. By late August resolutions demanding price controls and action against hoarders and speculators were flooding into the Convention.

Matters were brought to a head when massive street demonstrations erupted in Paris on 4 and 5 September. But while the dominant petty bourgeois core of the popular movement focused on prices and their position as consumers, there were some who had the beginnings of a different set of priorities. On the morning of 4 September meetings of arms workers, building workers and workshop journeymen took place demanding higher wages. The workers invaded the commune's assembly rooms, whereupon the bourgeois leaders of the commune, Hébert and Chaumette, stepped in. They proposed that there should be a demonstration the next day to the Convention to demand measures against hoarders and political suspects. The Jacobin Club and Robespierre agreed to back *this* demonstration. That evening the commune gave orders to disperse the building workers. But it instructed all workshops in the city to close the next day so that small masters and workers could attend the

demonstration together.

A mass demonstration surrounded the Convention on 5 September. In response the Committee of Public Safety pushed through a series of measures which partially conceded the *sans culottes*' demands. Terror was made 'the order of the day'. On 17 September the Law on Suspects was passed. It institutionalised the sections' revolutionary watch committees power to check on possible counter-revolutionaries, speculators, suspected hoarders and the like.[132]

Within days the wearing of the tricolour cockade—symbol of he revolution—was made compulsory. Then price controls on grain and fodder throughout the Republic were announced. On 21 September a Navigation Act was passed, bringing external trade under a degree of government control. By the end of September the demands of the *sans culottes* seemed to be met when the Convention decreed the 'general maximum', regulating the prices of a whole range of basic commodities.[133]

The Terror was an integral part of this policy of a controlled economy. Much of the bourgeoisie (and the better off peasantry) were opposed to such control and regulation and had to be compelled to submit by the threat, or use, of force. In the words of the proclamation issued by Collot D'Herbois and Fouché at Lyon, 'The time for half measures and for beating about the bush is past. Help us to strike great blows or you will be the first to feel them. Liberty or Death: Reflect, and Choose.'[134] In part the Terror was directed against those who could become the focus for counter-revolution. So Marie Antoinette (the former queen) was sent to the guillotine on 25 Vendémiaire Year II (16 October 1793). Two weeks later 21 of the Girondin leaders, including Vergniaud and Brissot, followed.

The decisive measures taken by the Comittee of Public Safety began to have an effect. Slowly the tide was turned against the counter-revolution. Lyons was retaken by the Republic in Vendémiaire Year II (October 1793) and in Frimaire (December) Toulon was recaptured from the British—after a siege in which a young artillery officer, Napoleon Bonaparte, played an important role. Finally Marseilles was recaptured by the republic in Nivôse Year II (January 1794). In all cases wholesale repression followed. Some 2,000 people were shot out of hand in Lyons, for instance. Marseilles was renamed 'Town Without a Name', while Lyons was called 'Freed City' and the houses of the rich were demolished.

Meanwhile the revolt in the Vendée was finally brought under control in Frimaire and Nivôse (December 1793). And then in early 1794 the region was 'pacified' with ruthless repression. In Nantes thousands of rebel prisoners were drowned in the river on the orders of Carrier—the infamous 'noyades'. And Turreau unleashed his 'infernal columns' across the region. Thousands were killed as the Republic's troops criss-crossed

the Vendée adopting a 'scorched earth' policy designed to crush any further resistance and serve as an example to other would-be rebels.[135]

Another aspect of the Terror was the organisation of the Revolutionary Armies (*Armées Révolutionaires*). These had first been mooted back in April but had come to nothing. But now, after the September days, an army of Parisian petty bourgeois *sans culottes* were recruited. It consisted of some 6,000 men—including infantry, cavalry and artillery units. They were paid for service in the Revolutionary Army but remained an essentially civilian political militia. They were composed—especially the artillery units—of stalwarts of the Paris sections and often remained under the effective political direction of the section assemblies. Commanded by Charles-Phillipe Ronsin, their function was to ensure the compliance of the countryside in the controlled economy and maintain the food supply of Paris. They spawned some 56 other similar armies around the country whose total strength amounted to something like 30,000.

As well as their economic role they spread republican propaganda wherever they went and were heartily detested by the bourgeois merchants and traders and better off peasants against whom they were directed. The armies also repressed attempts to form 'combinations' and strikes for higher wages by carters and agricultural day labourers. Their central concern was to subordinate the economy to the war effort and above all to keep the food supplies coming to the towns. In this they were largely successful, often more by the threat of their intervention than anything else—their numbers were simply inadequate for any systematic supervision of grain supplies.[136]

But if all these measures seemed to indicate that the government had conceded to the *sans culottes*' demands, there was another side to the picture. Many of the *sans culottes*' demands fitted the needs of a war economy. Winning the war was the overriding concern of the Jacobin bourgeoisie and the Committee of Public Safety. The rising of 4 and 5 September had the backing of the Jacobins, who channelled it into strengthening the central government. Robespierre put the Jacobin aim clearly:

> *What we need is a single will. This rising must continue until the measures necessary for saving the Republic have been taken. The people must ally itself with the Convention, and the Convention must make use of the people.*[137]

The war

It is worth breaking the narrative to examine the question of the war and its connection with the internal development of the revolution in more detail. As Engels noted, 'the whole French Revolution is dominated by the war… all its pulsations depend upon it.'[138]

With the revolution confronted by all the major European powers the

war could only be successfully prosecuted on the basis of an unprecedented mobilisation. It was this which, in the end, enabled the French to beat off the invasions. Mallet du Pan explained the European powers' defeat simply: 'They feared their subjects almost as much as they feared the enemy.'[139] So they refused to match the French in arming the mass of their people and making the war a 'popular' fight. For the revolutionary army it was not a war to gain bargaining counters in a future peace conference, as was the norm. Outright victory and total defeat were the only options. This altered the character of the conflict. Mallet du Pan wrote at the time, 'It is a war to the death.'[140] St Just, when invited to parley with the enemy, replied, 'All that the French Republic receives from its enemies and sends them back is lead.'[141] These were the basic reasons for French victory.

The revolutionary character of the war was dramatically underlined on 23 August 1793 when a *levée en masse* of the entire nation was decreed. In memorable terms the Republic announced,

> *Young men will go to war, married men manufacture arms and transport supplies, women make tents and uniforms and serve in hospitals, children turn rags into bandages, and old people repair to the public squares, stimulate the courage of the warriors and preach the unity of the Republic and the hatred of kings.*[142]

Army battalions were instructed to march into battle carrying banners inscribed 'The French people rise up against tyrants'.[143] In all approaching one million men were enrolled in the army by early 1794—a number which dwarfed any previously mobilised in Europe. Mobilisation on this scale implied the transformation of the way the army was organised. 'Always use massive troop strength and be on the offensive...and keep pursuing the enemy until his complete destruction,' insisted Carnot.[144] It became a political force fired by ideas of nationalism. St Just told the army commanders, 'You must not expect victory from the numbers and discipline of soldiers alone. You will secure it only through the spread of the republican spirit within the army.'[145] And the real attachment to such ideas among at least part of the troops is shown by reports of wounded men blowing their brains out rather than surrender. Others, if captured, preferred to be shot rather than shout 'Long Live the King.'[146] Nor were such sentiments confined to the army. At Strasbourg St Just appealed for shoes for the army and the local population responded by handing over 20,000 pairs![147]

Of course the support for Republican ideas had a material basis. The largely peasant soldiers only had to look back and remember the old regime to see what the Republic meant to them. A foreign observer noted ruefully at the time,

> *Any attempt to detach the soldier from the cause of the Convention would be fruitless. Nowhere else could he find what he finds in France: liberty, pecuniary benefits and rapid promotion, subsistence, relief of all sorts... Despite their poor organisation, and their mediocre commanders, and despite their inexperience and indiscipline, they are holding their own against the best armies in Europe.*[148]

Effective leadership in the army often rested with the 'representatives on mission'—Convention deputies dispatched by the Committee of Public Safety to carry through its orders. Many of these representatives led the columns of troops into battle. On several occasions they were decisive in rallying the troops and turning potential defeat into victory. St Just at Charleroi and Carnot at Wattignies were particularly important in this respect. Soldiers participated in local political clubs, and revolutionary newspapers were widely read—in particular Hébert's *Le Père Duchesne*, distinguished by its coarse language. There was also a real degree of democracy within the army at the height of the revolution in 1793 and 1794. Officers were often elected by the rank and file they led, though this did not always happen and usually only applied to the lower officers.[149]

The necessary counterpart of such a force was the total mobilisation of the economy. Troops had to be enrolled and organised; food to be produced and requisitioned along with material for uniforms, transport and other raw materials. This job was made doubly difficult by the enemy blockade which cut off vital external supplies. This task, not political vindictiveness (or some eternal law that revolution must, like Saturn, devour its own children), was the real basis of the Terror.

Church bells were confiscated for making cannons. Saltpetre needed to make gunpowder, formerly imported, was collected from walls and floors in every village. Potassium salts were refined from household ashes and soda distilled from sea salt. All businesses were placed at the disposal of the Republic and the state initiated new factories, clothing workshops, munitions factories, tanneries and saltpetre refineries where needed. New agricultural techniques, the suppression of fallow, new crops and the like were encouraged. To help with food supplies pleasure parks and gardens such as the Luxembourg in Paris were ploughed up. Labour was effectively militarised. Despite this, military demands meant there was a labour shortage and so workers were often able to push up their wage rates. Scientists too were mobilised to help the war effort. The first airborne warfare occurred when the French revolutionary army used a company of balloonists at Fleurus on 8 Messidor Year II (26 June 1794) and a semaphore telegraph was installed between Paris and the north eastern front.

To mobilise such resources and to suppress internal counter-revolution 'representatives on mission' were sent to all areas of the country. Many

behaved in a bloody fashion—Carrier at Nantes, Fouché at Lyons, for example. But their central role was to organise the war economy. In this they relied on the local Jacobin Clubs and associated popular societies whose ranks formed the real backbone of the Republic and the revolution. One representative on mission(Dubois-Crancé) , when deciding on who to rely on in a particular locality, simply asked local Jacobins, 'What have you done to be hanged if the counter-revolution were to arrive?'[150]

I have already given examples of the size and composition of these clubs in the earlier part of the revolution. The numbers grew even larger in the summer and autumn of 1793. Some historians estimate there were over 1,000 clubs across the country directly connected with the Jacobins in Paris and this does not include the countless local and 'popular' societies. For instance in six south eastern departements alone (out of 83 in the country) there were over 1,000 such clubs in October 1793.[151] Total numbers involved in the clubs are difficult to estimate but a figure of over half a million is probably a reasonable guess. The *core* of Jacobin activists in the localities were middle class landowners, merchants and professionals. But as the size and number of the clubs expanded they drew in more petty bourgeois layers—shopkeepers, artisans and small tradesmen. Wage earners and peasants also flooded into some clubs at the height of the revolution.

It is important not to overstate the effective degree of control and centralisation the revolutionary government achieved. The Jacobins were bourgeois and preferred to deal with private contractors wherever possible rather than rely on direct state control. Many of the supplies to the army were organised by inviting contractors to tender and many made a healthy profit from the operation. Some areas, such as livestock sales, were never controlled at all. Again, despite the Terror, house to house searches for provisions in Paris were forbidden. And the Committee of Public Safety made almost no attempt to curb the developing black market in which the better off could buy at higher prices. Partly these limits to control and centralisation stem from the objective situation. The level of economic development, poor transport and communications and the like, set a limit to the degree of centralisation. An indication of the difficulties is that it took around two weeks to transport goods from Paris to Lyons, and 25 days to reach Marseilles.[152] Despite the immense difficulties over the winter of Year II the revolution succeeded in mobilising its resources, halting the invasions and crushing internal counter-revolution. It was a feat which astounded Europe.

It is worth putting the violent side of the Terror into context, as it has become exaggerated by counter-revolutionary mythology. Later reactionaries accused the Jacobins of being 'drinkers of blood' and of eating pies filled with human flesh—and they meant it to be taken literally. Around 40,000 people were executed during the Terror (i.e. not counting

lives lost in military conflicts). The vast bulk of these were executed in regions of civil war—71 percent in the west (Vendée) or south east (Lyons, Toulon etc). Around three quarters of executions were for armed rebellion. In two thirds of the 83 departements less than 25 people were executed during the whole course of the revolution. In Paris about 2,500 people were guillotined during the revolution—over half of these during the two months of the Great Terror, Messidor and Thermidor Year II. Interestingly the biggest single 'batch' sent to the guillotine on a single day in Paris was when the reactionaries of Thermidor sent Robespierre and the Jacobin leaders of the commune to the guillotine. Of course far larger numbers, estimated up to around half a million, were killed in military conflicts in regions of civil war. The Terror in the French Revolution arose out of the fact that a minority of the population (a large minority) was imposing measures to defend the Republic in a situation of internal and external war. And, it must be said, it was the work of amateurs compared to the violence of the modern bourgeoisie.[153]

The bourgeoisie and the popular movement

Though the Jacobins were prepared to harness and use the popular movement to achieve these results they had no intention of surrendering to it. At all times they retained their central purpose of subordinating everything, including the popular movement, to the war. So the measures outlined above were accompanied by an offensive against the independent initiative of the *sans culottes*.

In September just as the government instituted the Terror and the Maximum it made the first moves against the popular movement. Section assemblies which had been meeting 'in permanence' were reduced to meeting twice a week—twice a *décade* when the new calendar was introduced. *Sans culottes* were now to be paid for attendance. This was the first step in the incorporation of a layer of *sans culottes* militants in the bureaucracy of the revolutionary government. The multiplication of official positions brought about by the Terror and the revolutionary government turned a layer of these militants into state functionaries subordinate to the Committee of Public Safety.

At the same time the government launched an attack on the enragés, the leading spokesmen of the popular movement. Jacques Roux was arrested and, after rotting in jail for months, committed suicide. Jean Varlet was arrested and then released but forced to remain silent. Theophile Leclerc too was silenced under threat of arrest. Women's societies—such as that led by Clare Lacombe which stood on the left of the movement—were suppressed. In Frimaire Year II (December 1793) the departmental revolutionary armies were suppressed and Ronsin and Vincent—leading figures in the Parisian revolutionary army and associated with Hebért—were temporarily arrested.

The popular movement was slowly being subordinated to the Jacobin

dictatorship by a combination of granting those demands that coincided with the war economy, incorporating a layer of the militants in the machinery of the government and removing the movement's independent spokesmen and women. The process was uneven and slow. For instance, the suppression of the 'permanent' sectional assemblies simply led to the setting up of sectional 'societies' which met on the days when the assemblies were not allowed to meet. In effect the assemblies continued to be active under this guise for a long while.[154]

A further conflict between the revolutionary government and the popular movement arose over the issue of de-Christianisation. This has to be understood against the background of the increasing identification of the Christian religion with the old regime and counter-revolution—and there was plenty to base that identification on. The revolution and the 'Republic One and Indivisible' were about breaking from the past, creating a unified state free from local particularism, superstition and identification with Rome (or any other idea but the nation). This was what lay behind the introduction of the revolutionary calendar and a host of other proposals such as the metric system of weights and measures, hostility to dialects, banning Latin in schools and so on.[155] The role of the Church was undercut by measures such as the introduction of divorce rights and rights for illegitimate children. Local communes were given the right to renounce the Catholic religion.

But despite hostility to Catholicism most of the bourgeois leaders were convinced of the need for religious ideas of some form as an ideological cement. Whatever their own private views they followed Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire in recognising the social function of a mass 'religion'. The main Jacobin leaders were profoundly hostile to atheism—Robespierre had the bust of Helvétius banned from the Jacobin Club. It was out of this contradiction between anti-Catholicism and wanting a mass religion that a new civic religion began to grow. In August 1793 a ceremony venerating the 'Holy Mountain' had taken place in Notre Dame. A girl played the role of the 'goddess' Liberty, revolutionary martyrs like Marat were idolised and Notre Dame was renamed the Temple of Reason. This had the approval of the key Jacobin leaders, as did the development of patriotic festivals with processions, speeches and singing where Republican and Jacobin virtues would be celebrated.

An example of ambiguous attitude of the *sans culottes* to religion is the new version of the prayer *Our Father* they used:

> *Our father who are in heaven, from whence you protect in such an admirable manner the French Republic and the Sans Culottes, your most ardent defenders.*
>
> *May your name be blessed and sanctified among us, as it always has been.*
>
> *May your steadfast will, making men live free, equal and happy, be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.*

> *Give us today the daily bread which we eat despite the vain efforts of Pitt, Coburg and all the Tyrants united to keep us hungry.*
> *Forgive us the faults which we have committed in supporting for so long the Tyrants from which we have purged France, as we forgive the Enslaved Nations, when they imitate us.*
> *Do not suffer them any longer to endure the fetters which restrain them and from which they are strenuously seeking to free themselves*
> *But may they deliver themselves, as we have done, from Nobles, Priests and Kings. So be it.*[156]

Some of the Terrorists—those bourgeois leaders allied to the popular movement who demanded more systematic attacks on the old order, stricter economic controls and more ruthless repression of counter-revolutionaries, hoarders and so on—wanted to take things much further. Leading figures began banning public religious ceremonies in areas they visited or where they had influence. They often replaced them with Republican celebrations in which figures such as Brutus from the Roman Republic were idolised. Fouché and Chaumette began this process in September 1793 at Nevers and then Chaumette pushed for similar measures in Paris where he was a key figure in the commune. They secularised funeral processions and cemeteries, posting signs such as 'Death is an Eternal Sleep' on graveyards. These measures had the support of many of the urban *sans culottes* who were profoundly hostile to the Catholic Church—identifying it with counter-revolution. In Paris the commune ordered the closure of all churches on 3 Frimaire Year II (23 November 1793). Other areas followed suit.

The factions

This seemed to the Jacobin leaders to be going too far. They sensed the de-Christianisation movement was headed by forces wanting to carry economic control and Terror further than the revolutionary government wanted. These forces were also identified with a greater degree of independent initiative for the popular movement than the revolutionary government would tolerate. So to attack de-Christianisation was to attack these forces and further strengthen the government. More immediately such outright hostility to Christianity ran the risk of pushing peasants under the influence of priests and into the arms of counter-revolution. One Vendée was quite enough.

Robespierre and the Jacobins began attacking the de-Christianisers from the beginning of Frimaire (21 November 1793). Many of the leading de-Christianisers, and certainly those advocating the extension of controls and Terror, were associated with the Paris commune and Hébert—through his newspaper *Le Père Duchesne*. And so this opposition to the Committee of Public Safety began to be labelled Hébertist.

Meanwhile an opposition to the revolutionary government was

developing from another quarter. It was centred around Danton and Desmoulins and became known as the Indulgents. In contrast to the de-Christianisers and Hébertists, the Indulgents wanted an end to the Terror and economic control. They reflected the interests of those bourgeois who, though they supported the revolutionary government, were resentful of the price they were paying. Danton in particular was believed to be intriguing for peace with England (he was). The Indulgents were increasingly hostile to the Hébertists and the popular movement's constant demands for regulation and control. Desmoulins founded a new paper, *Le Vieux Cordelier*, in which he attacked the Terror and the de-Christianisers, while Danton appealed to Robespierre to 'put up the barriers' against further concessions to the Terrorists and *sans culottes*.[157]

Faced with growing opposition from the Hébertists on the 'left' and Indulgents on the right, the Committee of Public Safety vacillated. At first they swung to the right and allied with the Indulgents to curb the popular movement and its Hébertist spokesmen.

In Frimaire (November-December) a decree was issued defending freedom of worship—though in practice most churches remained closed until after Thermidor. Ronsin and Vincent—associated with the revolutionary armies—were arrested and Robespierre gave Desmoulins' new paper his blessing. On 16 Frimaire (6 December) 'revolutionary taxes' on the rich, which some local communes and revolutionary committees had been using, were banned and shortly after some food speculators were released. These moves indicate that behind issues like de-Christianisation lay more material questions. These attacks on the popular movement encouraged the Indulgents. It looked as though Danton would return to centre stage as the representative of a united bourgeoisie clamping down on the popular movement and those wanting to carry the revolution further. By the end of Frimaire there were proposals from the right in the Convention for a purge of the Committee of Public Safety and an automatic rotation of one third of its members each month.

The Committee of Public Safety saw that its attacks on the Hébertists were strengthening the Indulgents to the point where they threatened to enforce their programme of winding down the Terror and the controlled economy and suing for peace. With the winter deepening, bread and other commodities were once again becoming scarce, fuelling discontent. There was a rash of strikes in the arms factories. Any relaxation of economic control threatened massive hardship and social discontent. With the decisive battles in the war awaiting the opening of the spring campaign any such disruption, or an attempt to sue for peace, would only encourage the Republic's enemies and threaten catastrophic defeat.

So following a robust defence of the Terror by Collot d'Herbois at the Jacobin Club on 1 Nivôse Year II (21 December 1793) the Committee of Public Safety veered back to the left. Ronsin and Vincent were released

in Pluviôse (January/February 1794) and Robespierre began denouncing Desmoulins' paper. St Just attacked the speculators (many were implicated in all sorts of shady financial dealings) who stood behind the Indulgents, 'Those who want to tear down the scaffolds are those who are afraid they might be forced to mount them.'[158]

The Jacobin leaders' gyrations reflected the real dilemma they faced. They were a minority of the bourgeoisie and rested on an uneasy alliance with the popular movement. They used this to impose a barely tolerated discipline on large sections of their own class to defend the bourgeois republic against counter-revolution and the restoration of the old order. The operation was inherently unstable, and it became more so the more the revolutionary government was successful in subordinating the popular movement to itself and the more successful it was in defeating counter-revolution and invasion.

The new swing to the left encouraged the Hébertists. And the Committee of Public Safety pushed through a series of measures which seemed like concessions to Hébertist demands. On 13 Pluviôse (1 February 1794) 10 million francs was voted for poor relief. Slavery was abolished outright in French colonies on 16 Pluviôse (4 February—the motion for abolition was moved by a black deputy from Santo Domingo and a black woman in the public gallery was invited to take the Assembly President's chair). Then on 3 Ventôse (21 February) a new General Maximum was decreed. Following these measures a series of decrees were announced which seemed to go further still—indeed further than many of the Hébertists or enragés had demanded. They are associated above all with St Just who presented the key report to the Convention and certainly inspired many of the ideas behind them.

The Ventôse decrees included the seizure of suspects' property for distribution among 'indigent patriots' and stiffer sanctions against food hoarders. They set out a scheme of pensions for the aged and infirm, allowances for mothers and widows with children to support and free medical assistance in the home. A scheme for poor relief in the countryside was devised—but this did not become a decree until 22 Floréal (11 May). Many of the decrees were never fully implemented—and the final versions were watered down by the Convention. But they achieved their primary purpose which was to secure wider support for the revolutionary government and the Republic at a time when it was becoming clear that the decisive battles in the war were soon to be fought. 'An unhappy people has no homeland,'[159] said St Just, spelling out the political importance of the decrees. 'Let Europe learn that you no longer wish French soil to harbour oppressors or oppressed.'[160] The decrees also partly reflected the dream of creating a republic of small property owners which was shared by the *sans culottes* and Jacobin leaders such as St Just and Robespierre.

The immediate political effect of the measures was to encourage the

Hébertists and the Cordeliers Club to believe that with only one more push they could come to power and implement their programme. Hébert began attacking Robespierre by name and Ronsin, leader of the Paris revolutionary army, began talking of the need for an insurrection. It is fairly clear that a lot of this was empty rhetoric, but when the commander of a military force talks of insurrection it is not surprising if people take him seriously! Yet again a new 'day', which would bring the Hébertists to the fore and push the revolution leftwards, looked on the cards.

But the imminent opening of the military campaign impelled the Committee of Public Safety to decisive action after their long drawn out manoeuvring between the Hébertists and the Indulgents over the winter. The war demanded 'a single will' and the factions undermined this necessary unity. But it was clear, from the experience of the winter, that to attack the left alone could strengthen the right to the point where they could impose their programme on the Republic. Similarly, the only solution to the government's dilemma was to crush both oppositions simultaneously. They carried this out successfully in late Ventôse and early Germinal Year II (March 1794), but it left the revolutionary government dangerously isolated on all sides when the emergency of the war appeared to pass.

First the government turned on the left. Hébert, Ronsin, Vincent and others were arrested and hurriedly executed on 4 Germinal (24 March) after a brief trial. Three days later the Paris revolutionary army was disbanded. Shortly afterwards the Paris Commune was purged and had its powers sharply reduced and the Cordeliers Club reduced to insignificance. Similar attacks on the 'Hébertists' took place across the country. Popular newspapers were burnt and from Lyons to Le Mans and Le Havre local communes and popular societies were purged and Hébertists arrested. The *sans culottes* did not respond to this attack on their spokesmen and their 'army'. Why?

Partly, the Hébertist leaders were not connected with the popular movement to the same degree as the enragés, whose leading spokesmen the revolutionary government had curbed several months earlier. The Hébertists were bourgeois whose difference with the main Jacobin leaders was one only of degree. True they articulated many *sans culottes* demands, but they were not *of* the popular movement itself. This difference is well illustrated by the fact that Hébert had denounced Jacques Roux at the Jacobin Club during the government's campaign against the enragé leaders (Marat too, shortly before his assassination, had attacked Roux). Secondly, the *sans culottes* agreed with the importance the Jacobin leaders placed on prosecuting the war. With the spring campaign about to open everything must be subordinated to that, the Jacobin leaders argued—the only hope of winning the war and defending the revolution was to preserve the authority of the revolutionary government. It was a powerful argument. Thirdly, the attacks on the popular movement of

the previous months had a real effect. The removal of key spokesmen such as the *enragés*; the curbing of the sectional assemblies; the incorporation of a layer of section militants into the administrative machinery of the revolutionary government; the thinning of the militant *sans culottes* ranks caused by the *levée en masse*, all these had sapped the will and independent initiative of the popular movement.

The victory of the revolutionary government over the popular movement was underlined when, under government pressure, a succession of sectional popular societies 'voluntarily' pronounced their dissolution in Floréal (April-May). The popular movement which had driven the revolution forward was exhausted. When the bourgeoisie decided the Jacobin dictatorship was no longer necessary, the Jacobins could no longer look to the popular movement for support against their own class, as they had done in the past. St Just prophetically noted the change in atmosphere around this time: 'The revolution is frozen solid.'[161]

But, more immediately, after crushing the 'left' the real danger was that the Indulgent right would now be irresistible. So six days after the execution of the leading Hébertists the leaders of the Indulgents, including Danton and Desmoulins, were rounded up. After a hurried trial—largely on trumped up charges like the Hébertistes—they were dispatched to the guillotine. Thus the Committee of Public Safety crushed all opposition and strengthened its authority in time for the decisive battles of the spring. But as Mallet du Pan wrote at the time, 'its tyranny will be forgiven by the bourgeoisie only as long as it is successful'. He could have said 'and only until it is successful'.[162]

Victory and Thermidor

When the military campaign of 1794 opened it went badly for the Republic at first. The strain of the total mobilisation was beginning to tell. Carnot expressed the general feeling when he said that the war must be finished that year or 'we should die of hunger and exhaustion'.[163]

Meanwhile despite successes against the counter-revolution in the south and west the internal threat was still present. On 26 Germinal (15 April) nobles and foreigners were banned from residing in Paris and fortified towns out of fear of counter-revolution. Then in Prairial (May) royalists attempted to assassinate Robespierre and Collot d'Herbois. This was followed by the two months of the Great Terror—which accounted for more than half the 2,500 victims of the guillotine during the revolution in Paris. It is often suggested that this was a measure of desperate vindictiveness, in revenge for these assassination attempts, by the isolated dictatorship of the Committee of Public Safety. Though the assassination attempts undoubtedly fuelled the atmosphere, the real reasons were rather different.

Firstly, as in September 1792, the enrolment of troops to go to the

front led to real fears about a 'fifth column' at home. In particular these fears were encouraged by the large number of suspected hoarders, *ci-devants* (as the former privileged orders were called) and the possibility of mass prison escapes. The nightmare was that internal rebellion would link up with the foreign invader. The consequences of military defeat were spelled out by the British prime minister, Pitt, who had 'concluded in favour of the total destruction' of the Republic—it was to be 'wiped off the face of the earth'.[164] Robespierre claimed he did not have the will to live and the situation looked desperate for the revolutionary government, so much so that St Just was summoned back to Paris from an important mission to the front.

Secondly, the decrees of Ventôse required a stepping up of the Terror in all its aspects. To identify suspects, assess their property and confiscate it and to identify the means of satisfying the other decrees meant using the state apparatus against a largely resentful bourgeoisie. Though the decrees were only implemented to a very limited degree, they had enough impact for St Just to be bitterly attacked by the richer bourgeois for 'despoiling the rich to shelter and clothe the poor'.[165]

On 22 Prairial (10 June) the Revolutionary Tribunal was reorganised to speed up the processing and sentencing of suspects. The only possible verdicts became not guilty or death. Couthon justified the new law because of the exceptional circumstances the beleaguered revolution found itself in: 'It is a matter less of punishing them (enemies of the revolution) as of annihilating them...it is not a question of making a few examples, but of exterminating the implacable satellites of tyranny or of perishing with the Republic.'[166]

But suddenly the entire situation was decisively altered when the French repelled the Austrians at the Battle of Fleurus on 8 Messidor Year II (26 June 1794). A French defeat would have been catastrophic and opened the way to Paris and counter-revolution. But victory turned the tide and the French resumed the offensive in the war. Within weeks they had cleared all the invading armies from France. The Spanish were forced back across the Pyrenees, while in the north French troops swept the enemy out of the Republic and reached Liège and Antwerp on 9 Thermidor (27 July)—a significant date. The subordination of the entire economy to the war effort by the revolutionary government had borne fruit. But with victory, the rationale for the revolutionary government had gone. The bulk of the bourgeoisie no longer felt the need to submit to the discipline of the controlled economy and the Terror. They felt safer in beginning to question the revolutionary government now that the popular movement and the 'wild men' of the Paris Commune had been curbed by the revolutionary government itself. The bulk of the bourgeoisie tolerated Jacobin dictatorship only while the alternative—defeat and the restoration of the old order—seemed worse. With that threat now, temporarily, lifted it only needed a suitable political crisis

to open the way to a decisive shift in the balance of power within the bourgeoisie.

The immediate cause of the crisis which led to the downfall of the revolutionary government was the growing division within the government itself. Robespierre, backed by St Just and Couthon, was moving to curb the most zealous Terrorists. This was not because he was against the Terror, far from it, but because he saw it as subordinate to the needs of the war. Controls on the economy and the like were an expedient, not an end in themselves. Already Robespierre and his allies had recalled a number of the most notorious Terrorists from the provinces, such as Fouché, Tallien and Barras, to account for their excessive zeal. They were attacked as rascals 'whose hands are full of the wealth of the Republic'[167]—Tallien, at Bordeaux, was widely suspected of corruption. On 26 Messidor (14 July) Fouché was expelled from the Jacobin Club and three days later Tallien suffered the same fate.

Alongside this development members of the Marsh were regaining confidence and increasingly resented the revolutionary government. And inside the Committee of Public Safety itself there was a growing split. Carnot, who rallied to the Mountain when the war demanded exceptional measures, was now rapidly moving away from the Jacobin 'ideologues' like St Just and Robespierre. On the other hand Collot D'Herbois and Billaud-Varenne within the committee identified with the threatened terrorists. Added to this was a series of squabbles over who was responsible for 'police' matters between the Committee of Public Safety and the other 'great' committee, that of General Security. Of course all these personal differences within the government reflected larger currents of opinion within the bourgeoisie.

In the face of these divisions Robespierre had withdrawn from the Committee of Public Safety at the end of June. From then until his downfall at the end of July he appeared exclusively at the Jacobin Club and, more rarely, the Convention. We still do not know precisely why he behaved in this fashion, fatal to him and the whole revolutionary government. The underlying explanation, whatever the immediate motives, is that he was paralysed by the situation itself. The revolutionary government had outlived its use and the 'virtuous Republic' he advocated was utopian.[168]

But what is certainly true is that Robespierre's behaviour allowed the various factions to present him as responsible for all the ills of the country and as harbouring ambitions for a dictatorship. In his role as President of the Convention he had overseen the Festival of the Supreme Being in Paris on 20 Prairial Year II (8 June 1794). This was an attempt to substitute an official 'natural' religion, based on reverence for nature, virtue and so on and derived from Rousseau's ideas—for Christianity. It was politically designed to mediate between the still powerful de-Christianisers and Catholicism. But Robespierre's presiding role and his

withdrawal from the Committee of Public Safety's day to day business allowed his opponents to present him as the would be 'Pope' of the new religion. They claimed that this was all part of his scheme to become a dictator.

As news of further French victories came, the lifting of the siege mentality further encouraged the divisions and squabbles within the bourgeoisie. Matters were suddenly brought to a head on 8 Thermidor (26 July) when Robespierre, after a long absence, appeared at the Convention, denounced his opponents and demanded unity of government. He called for the removal of a few people who were threatening the unity of the Republic and undermining the revolutionary government. His targets were almost certainly the Terrorists. When he repeated the same speech that evening to the Jacobin Club the 'few people' were easily identified by the Jacobins. They drove Collot d'Herbois and Billaud-Varenne—the leading Terrorists within the Committee of Public Safety—out of the club.[169] But in appealing to the Convention Robespierre made the bourgeoisie of the Marsh the arbiters of the fate of the revolutionary government, just at the time when they were coming to the conclusion that they need submit to it no longer. Though his speech in the Convention was well received at first, his obstinate refusal to name the 'few people' fuelled fears among the Marsh that a drastic purge of the Convention was intended. This threw the Marsh and the threatened Terrorists together in an alliance against Robespierre and his closest colleagues.

It was clear that the next day would be decisive. Robespierre and St Just prepared a lengthy report to the Convention. The Terrorists decided that unless they acted they were in danger of elimination. The Marsh was now ready to throw off the shackles of the revolutionary government. When Robespierre and St Just tried to speak in the Convention on 9 Thermidor (27 July 1794) they were drowned out by an organised disruption led by Tallien and Collot d'Herbois. Then, following a well organised plan, a motion was moved (by an obscure former Dantonist) to arrest Robespierre, St Just, Augustin Robespierre and Couthon. With the backing of the newly confident Marsh this was passed. Phillipe Lebas, a young associate of St Just, leapt to his feet: 'I will not share in the infamy of this decree. I demand to be condemned with my colleagues.'[170] They were all led away under arrest.

But the fight was not over. The Robespierrist Paris Commune declared itself in a state of insurrection and appealed to the sections to come to its aid. The Convention issued a similar appeal. All during the day conflicting orders to the armed force of the sections flew around the city and arguments and debates raged. At first it looked as though the Robespierrists were gaining the upper hand. The warders of the prisons refused to accept Robespierre and the other prisoners. They were set free and by the evening the accused Jacobin leaders reached the City

Hall and were joined by around 3,000 National Guards with 30 cannons—a formidable force. The Convention had also imprisoned the Jacobin commander of the National Guard, Hanriot, but he was released by a military raid.

The force defending the Jacobin leaders was confused and less than enthusiastic. And the leaders vacillated—the only way to save themselves and the revolutionary government would be to launch an outright attack on the Convention and disperse it altogether. But this would destroy the very body the revolutionary government existed to defend against counter-revolution. More immediately, to disperse the Convention threatened the unity of the Republic. Federal disintegration and civil war would surely follow and Paris would be left isolated. While the Jacobins' leaders vacillated, many sections rallied to the side of the Convention and more stayed neutral.[171] Why?

The government's attacks on the popular movement had taken their toll and have already been mentioned. Secondly the Maximum, demanded by the *sans culottes*, had in practice hit many of them as much as those they intended it to be used against. And the revised Maximum scales published in the spring of 1794 had increased the profits allowed to merchants and traders, undercutting popular support. Thirdly, on the eve of Thermidor the Robespierrist commune had finally applied the Maximum to wages after holding off for several months. Many workers had pushed wages up due to the labour scarcity created by military demand. To apply the Maximum would mean a real cut in wages of up to half for a large part of the population. The commune finally imposed the new rates on 5 Thermidor—a particularly ill chosen moment for the government.

The lack of popular enthusiasm for the revolutionary government and the lack of decisive leadership allowed the initiative to pass to the other side. They rallied many of the sections, particularly from the richer western half of the city. Slowly, after hours of inactivity, the force defending Robespierre and his colleagues began to melt away. By two in the morning of 10 Thermidor Paul Barras and a force loyal to the Convention entered the City Hall without resistance. Lebas and Augustin Robespierre committed suicide, while Maximilien Robespierre tried to shoot himself but only succeeded in shattering his jaw. He, Couthon and St Just were bundled away and executed. The next day the Jacobins were purged from the Paris Commune by the 'Thermidorians'—71 people were executed, the biggest batch on any day of the revolution. The revolution lurched sharply to the right after Thermidor. Robespierre, in one of his last speeches, had, prophetically, warned, 'Slacken the reins of the revolution for one moment and you shall see military dictatorship take over.'[172]

The meaning of Thermidor

Considerations of space mean the five years from Thermidor to Napoleon Bonaparte's coup d'etat of 18 Brumaire Year VIII (9 November 1799) will be dealt with more briefly than the earlier phases of the revolution.[173]

Many on the left of the popular movement welcomed the overthrow of Robespierre—including Varlet, the former *enragé*, and Babeuf (of whom more in a moment). They thought that now it would be possible to return to greater direct democracy and the promises of 'the constitution of 1793'. When Robespierre and his supporters were guillotined eye-witnesses report the crowd shouting, 'Down with the Maximum', thinking that an end to the controls of the revolutionary government would benefit them.[174] Equally the Terrorists who had been centrally involved in the direct organisation of Thermidor thought things would develop to their advantage. Barère argued on 10 Thermidor that the previous day's events were 'a slight commotion which left the government intact'.[175] Both groups were soon disabused of such illusions.

Whatever the immediate causes and forces involved, Thermidor represented the reassertion of power by the bulk of the bourgeoisie—the Marsh and former Dantonists and Girondins. They soon showed their dominance by dismantling the revolutionary government.

They moved cautiously and slowly. Gestures to the popular movement were made, such as placing Marat's remains in a place of honour in the Panthéon. But the real work of the Thermidorians proceeded systematically. The power of the two great committees was severely curtailed (7 Fructidor Year II—24 August 1794). An offensive against the Jacobins culminated in the closure of the Jacobin Club on 22 Brumaire, Year III (12 November 1794). This was accompanied by the return of the surviving Girondin deputies to the Convention (18 Frimaire Year III—8 December 1794). Meanwhile revolutionary committees and the like in the sections were sharply curbed and sans culottes systematically excluded and on 4 Nivôse, Year III (24 December 1794) the Maximum was finally abolished, giving free rein to bourgeois merchants and speculators again. The confidence of the new regime was bolstered further by the French occupation of Amsterdam on 1 Pluviôse, Year III (20 January 1795). Just over two weeks later the new order was symbolised when Marat's remains were removed from the Panthéon—one of the most powerful symbols of the radical phase of the revolution could be trampled on with impunity.

The right drew confidence from all this. They were further encouraged by the release of former 'suspects'. The *jeunesse dorée* (gilded youth)—bands of thugs composed of the sons of the richer bourgeois—began to systematically harass and beat up Jacobins. The Terrorists who had conspired to overthrown Robespierre had the reality of the new balance of

forces sharply brought home to them when on 12 Ventôse Year III (2 March 1795), Barère, Billaud-Varenne, and Collot d'Herbois—former members of the Committee of Public Safety—were arrested.

The dismantling of the controlled economy caused increasing hardship for the mass of the population in the winter of the Year III. Combined with the clearly reactionary nature of the new regime this began to awake the sans-culottes from the passivity with which they greeted the overthrow of the revolutionary government. Many began to regret the fall of Robespierre. An arrested carpenter put the growing feeling clearly: 'While Robespierre reigned blood flowed and no man went short of bread.'[176]

In the spring of Year III (March-May 1795), the popular movement rose for the last time in the revolution in an attempt to challenge the dominance of the Thermidorian bourgeoisie. First on 12 Germinal Year III (1 April 1795) thousands of *sans culottes* demonstrated in the Faubourg St Antoine and then marched on the Convention. They demanded 'bread and the constitution of 1793', the reopening of the popular societies and release of imprisoned Jacobins. But now the limitations of the petty bourgeois popular movement were graphically exposed. In the past such 'days' had been successful because a section of the bourgeoisie, albeit under pressure, had allied itself with the popular movement and given it leadership and a programme for government action. But with the overthrow of the Jacobins and the now united opposition of the bourgeoisie it was incapable of going beyond revolt. With no clear programme and leadership the movement fizzled out after briefly invading the Convention. The same night a decree was passed deporting Billaud-Varenne, Collot d'Herbois and Barère to the 'dry guillotine' of Guiana. The arrest of Cambon, another former member of the revolutionary government, was ordered. The bourgeoisie was destroying any possible rallying point for the popular movement.

But the conflict was still unresolved and the discontent which had fuelled the revolt continued. Growing hunger and food riots in many towns made it clear that a final and decisive trial of strength between the popular movement and the bourgeoisie was still to be fought. The bourgeoisie prepared well. Thousands of regular troops were brought into Paris—significantly, for the first time since 1789. The conflict erupted on 1 Prairial Year III (20 May 1795). The tocsin sounded and the *générale* was beaten in St Antoine for what was to be the last time in the revolution. Hungry crowds gathered and were joined by the armed force of the sections. An enormous crowd set off for the Convention. The crowd invaded the Convention and killed a deputy—sticking his head on a pike to try and impress the urgency of their demands on the deputies. But once again without the backing of a section of the bourgeoisie the movement was paralysed. The movement was demanding measures *from* the government. It did not have any notion of *overthrowing* the

government and taking power.[177] After a stalemate lasting several hours the Convention summoned troops and National Guards from the richer western sections and dispersed the crowd.

The next day was quiet but the Convention was assembling troops to crush the movement and the Faubourg St Antoine once and for all. Over 20,000 National Guards (selected from among those 'who had a fortune to lose'[178]) joined with regular troops and on the morning of 4 Germinal (23 May) marched on St Antoine. They were met with barricades and it looked as though a bloody battle was on the cards. But the same paralysis which prevented the movement from going forward also crippled the possibility of real resistance. After a few hours stand-off the troops were able to dismantle the barricades and occupy the Faubourg without resistance. It was the end of the popular movement in Paris and marked the consolidation of the new bourgeois order.

Following Prairial a White Terror was unleashed against Jacobins and *sans culottes*.[179] In Paris alone 1,200 were imprisoned in a single week and 36 sentenced to death for their part in the Prairial rising. In the provinces the reaction was even worse—tens of thousands of Jacobins were rounded up. In the south east Companies of Jesus—right wing terror groups—hunted down Jacobins 'as though they were partridges'.[180] At Lyons, Marseilles and Nîmes and a host of other towns there were massacres of Jacobins, while in Toulon an attempted *sans culottes* insurrection was brutally crushed. The tide of reaction was now in full flow. The National Guard was purged to make it solidly bourgeois and the churches were allowed to reopen. Former federalist rebels were pardoned and property restored to many counter-revolutionaries who had been sentenced to death or deported. Non-juring priests flooded back into the country to foment open counter-revolution until 'they swarmed like the locusts of Egypt in every department'.[181]

The real danger of full blooded counter-revolution was shown when in Messidor Year III (June 1795) the English finally mounted an invasion at Quiberon in the counter-revolutionary stronghold of western France. Though this was quickly routed by the Republican armies, led by the former 'Maratiste' Lazare Hoche, attempts at royalist uprisings were made in Franche-Comté and the south, while the rebels in Vendée and the Chouans in Brittany once more took up arms. But now the real nature of Thermidor was revealed. It was reaction, not counter-revolution, a sharp move to the right, but on the basis of bourgeois rule, *not* a restoration of the old order.

In the face of the growing strength of openly counter-revolutionary forces the Thermidorian bourgeoisie began to change tack. They released former Terrorists and passed a series of decrees in early Vendémiaire Year IV (late September 1795): against anyone attacking the sale of 'national property' (church and other confiscated property from whose sale many bourgeois had benefitted); against anyone advocating a

restoration of the monarchy; confirming sanctions against émigrés and non-juring priests. These measures quickly brought matters to a head by provoking a royalist uprising in Paris, based mainly in the richer western sections and backed by a motley collection of landlords, racketeers and rentiers.

On 13 Vendémiaire (5 October 1795) 25,000 joined an armed royalist demonstration which marched on the Convention. Significantly, the *sans culottes* refused to join the movement. Despite their suffering at the hands of the Thermidorean regime they knew that a restoration would be far worse. The defence of the Convention was entrusted—as in Thermidor—to Barras. He was assisted by General Bonaparte—who until then had been kept out of any real role in the army after he was briefly imprisoned as a Robespierrist sympathiser following Thermidor. The 5,000 defenders were heavily outnumbered by the royalist insurrectionaries, but the troops stood firm and dispersed the insurrection with artillery fire—Bonaparte's 'whiff of grapeshot'. Around 300 were killed and the rising crumbled away. But repression was limited and most of the leading elements were allowed to slink away unmolested. Paris, however, remained under military occupation. The Convention had survived thanks to, and now depended on, the army—a telling pointer to the future.

Prairial Year III and Vendémiaire Year IV between them sum up the basis of the post Thermidor regime—the bourgeoisie firmly in the driving seat, dismantling the controls of the revolutionary government, crushing the popular movement but also still maintaining the gains of the bourgeois revolution.

The Directory

The Thermidorian bourgeoisie attempted to give shape to their new order through a new constitution, adopted on 1 Vendémiaire Year IV (23 September 1795). Boissy d'Anglas, introducing it in the Convention, summed up its basic arguments: 'A country governed by men of property belongs to the social order, whereas one governed by men of no property reverts to a state of nature.'[182] The Convention must 'guarantee the property of the rich' and resist 'the fallacious maxims of absolute democracy and unlimited equality which are without doubt the most serious threats to true liberty'[183].

The constitution was accompanied by a new declaration of Rights and Duties—the addition of duties is significant. The right of insurrection was withdrawn and, it declared, 'the maintenance of property is the foundation of agriculture, production, every kind of labour and the entire social order'[184]. The universal male suffrage of the Year II was withdrawn and the franchise restricted—though not as much as it had been in 1791. And it was still far wider than elsewhere in Europe. The Assembly was divided into two chambers: a Council of 500, all aged 30 or above, and a Council of Elders, 250 deputies aged 40 or above.

This was a deliberate attempt to shift control to older, more conservative elements in reaction to the memory of the youthful leaders of the Year II. Executive authority was vested in five Directors, each holding office for five years. The first Directors were Barras, Reubell, La Révellière, Letourneur and Carnot. All were regicides, a clear indication that restoration of the old order was out of the question. To guard against a royalist 'coup' through parliamentary means the Convention decreed that two thirds of the members of the new councils had to be existing Convention deputies.

But the new order remained chronically unstable. Though the war had moved from the defensive to a war of expansion fought outside France, it continued to feed financial and economic crisis at home. The instability was compounded by the election of one third of the deputies in the Councils each year. The constant series of elections amplified any shifts in the balance of forces. In the winter of Year IV (1795/96) the assignat finally collapsed, and its successor, the *mandat territorial*, suffered the same fate within six months. Even beggars refused paper money which was, literally, worth less than the paper it was printed on. Prices rocketed and the new rich flaunted their wealth during a winter that was unbelievably miserable for the poor. The bread ration in Paris fell to 75 grammes and the rice it was supplemented with could not be cooked for lack of firewood. In such circumstances the regime veered wildly from left to right, trying to balance between Jacobin revivals and royalists. Increasingly the regime relied on the army. The generals became the ultimate arbiters of political disputes.

Immediately after the crushing of the royalist uprising of Vendémiaire the Directory swung to the left. Many former Jacobins were released and the Club du Panthéon was founded—a new umbrella for Jacobins. Though its high subscription meant it remained solidly bourgeois, with around 7,000 members in Paris, it attracted growing numbers of ordinary people to its debates. But after their swing to the left the Directory now worried that the desperate economic situation would allow the revived Jacobins to connect with popular discontent. So, in Ventôse Year IV (February 1796), they clamped down and ordered the closure of the Club du Panthéon. The orders were carried out by General Bonaparte, despite his proclaimed Jacobinism. This display of loyalty to the regime played no small part in securing the position of Commander of the Army of Italy for Napoleon, from where he increasingly dictated the foreign policy of the Republic.

Babeuf and the Conspiracy of the Equals

Within the brief Jacobin revival of the winter of Year IV a radically new set of ideas developed. At the time it was only a minor episode but it is important as it pointed to the future. The key figure was Gracchus Babeuf, a parish clerk from Picardy, and his newspaper *Le Tribun du*

Peuple. Babeuf had earlier been attracted by the idea of the agrarian law—the equal division of the land into small private plots, supposedly based on the laws of the ancient Roman Republic. But now he argued that private property meant this would not help 'even for a day, since, on the morrow of the enactment of that law inequality of possessions would reassert itself.'[185]

Babeuf had grasped that private property and equality were incompatible and now argued that only a system of collective ownership could guarantee social equality. It was necessary

> *to establish the communal management of property and abolish private possession, to place each man in the craft for which his natural abilities fit him, to compel him to deposit the fruits of his labours in a common warehouse and to institute a simple method of distributing commodities in which a record would be kept of all persons and goods and the latter would be shared out with scrupulous exactitude.*[186] *...a people who had no property would have no need of the large number of laws which the societies of Europe groan under.*[187]

Production in Babeuf's society would still be on a largely individual basis and Georges Lefebvre correctly describes Babouvism as 'distributive communism'. Nevertheless it marks a decisive step beyond the utopianism of the popular movement in the French Revolution. But Babeuf is not just important for the revolutionary nature of his ideas. He had learnt the lessons of the defeat of the *sans culottes* movement in the Year III—after which he was imprisoned for a time. He recognised that if the mass movement was to be successful it needed an organised, determined and clear sighted leadership with a programme for reorganising society. So he set about organising the Conspiracy of the Equals, the first attempt to build a revolutionary political organisation committed to collective ownership of property.

A small tightly knit, and secret, group of revolutionaries formed the core. Around this were concentric layers of supporters and sympathisers who were only partly aware of the full aims of the Conspiracy. The idea was to launch an insurrection based on this minority of activists and institute a popular dictatorship which would set about building Babeuf's communist society. Babeuf claimed the Conspiracy could count on some 1,700 supporters in Paris. It issued pamphlets and posters and, as well as Babeuf's own paper, it used Maréchal's *L'Éclair du Peuple* and Antonelle's *Journal des Hommes*.

In practice the Conspiracy drew in a layer of ex-Robespierrists, such as Buonarotti and Darthé. It rebuffed advances by the Director Barras and the ex-Terrorist Tallien who wanted to use it to further their own ambitions. But however new the ideas and organisation of Babouvism the social basis of the Conspiracy was still the petty bourgeois *sans*

culottes—artisans and shopkeepers.[188] This gap between the ideas of Babeuf and the social base of the movement explains the ambiguity of the stated politics of the Conspiracy[189] and the gap between the nucleus of leaders and the followers.

In the winter of Year IV Babouvism briefly became a real force attracting the support of those driven to revolt by the harsh conditions. After the closure of the Club du Panthéon Babeuf decided that action was needed or the chance would be missed. He formed an Insurrectional Committee to prepare for a rising.

But the Conspiracy was smashed before it could put its plans and ideas to the test. The Babouvists had paid special attention to the military and had won influence in some regiments. This alarmed Carnot, who knew more than anyone the importance of the army, in particular and he played the central role in crushing Babouvism. Also in the eyes of many of the bourgeoisie Carnot was still tainted by his role at the centre of the revolutionary government of the Year II. He hoped to bury his 'black legend' by showing his class he would guarantee their order. A police spy betrayed the Babouvists' plans to Carnot and on 21 Floréal Year IV (10 May 1796), the key leaders were arrested.

In the aftermath of this repression those, mainly Jacobins, who had been waiting for the signal to action fell into confusion. A few months later some of them made one last desparate attempt to change the course of events by trying to initiate a mutiny in the army. In Fructidor Year IV (September 1796), a few hundred of them approached an army camp. Carnot knew of the plan and let it proceed. The Jacobins were met with a hail of bullets as they drew near. Thirty were shot out of hand and widespread repression followed. Finally, after a long drawn out trial Babeuf and Darthé were guillotined on 8 Prairial Year V (27 May 1797), while Buonarotti and six others were deported.[190]

It was impossible for Babouvism to bridge the gap between the notion of collective control of society and the real social forces which existed. But it was a pointer to the future and, in that sense, forms part of our tradition. Its limitations could only be overcome with the development of a new social force, the proletariat, which the success of the French Revolution helped create.

From the Fructidor Coup to Brumaire

The crushing of both Babouvism and the Jacobin revival fuelled a royalist upsurge. In the partial elections of Germinal Year V (March 1797), constitutional monarchists won most of the seats. The Assembly, born of the revolution, now had a royalist majority! Royalists were elected to preside over both Councils. It looked as if a restoration by parliamentary means was possible.

The bourgeoisie was still deeply split and many who had kept their heads down in the revolutionary storms of 1792 and the Year II now

re-emerged. The divisions were paralleled among the Directors. Carnot, rapidly moving right and now a near royalist, was joined as a Director by the constitutional monarchist Barthélemy. Barras vacillated while the remaining two Directors, Reubell and La Réveillère, favoured strong action to preserve the Republic. But what action? An appeal to the people conjured up the horrors of the Year II for the Thermidorian Republicans. And now the Jacobins were too weak to tip the balance. The generals were the only force the Republic could rest on. Generals Bonaparte and Hoche (both former Jacobins, the former an 'ex-Maratiste' the latter an 'ex-Robespierrist') backed the Republicans. Hoche sent part of his army to Paris, while Bonaparte sent his lieutenant, Augereau. Meanwhile Barras finally threw his lot in with his more determined colleagues on the Directory.

On 18 Fructidor Year V (4 September 1797), the Republic was saved by a military coup against the royalist majority in the Assembly. Barthélemy was imprisoned while Carnot escaped. Over 200 royalist deputies were purged from the Councils and dozens deported to Guiana. Hundreds of priests were deported and returned émigrés had to flee again. Bonaparte's role in the coup combined with his military victories in Italy to strengthen his hand further. He persuaded the Directory to send him on a mission to build a French Empire in the eastern Mediterranean by invading Egypt. He had already signed a peace treaty with Austria at Campo Formio on his own initiative and was slowly becoming the real master of the Republic's foreign policy.

But for the moment, with the royalists crushed and Bonaparte safely on his way to Egypt, the Directory looked to have stabilised the revolution. The financial system was reorganised on a sounder basis and a series of decent harvests eased the economic situation. The apparent confidence of the Directory was underlined when in the elections of the Year VI (1798) a new Jacobin revival was summarily dealt with by excluding over 100 deputies from the Councils.

But the war continued and the internal divisions, though temporarily subdued, were still there. French expansion in Egypt allowed England to pull together a new coalition of Austria, Turkey, Russia and Sweden which soon threatened the Republic once again. There was a series of military defeats and the Belgian provinces revolted against French control. In the west civil war erupted with the Breton Chouans again. The renewed danger revived the Jacobins for the last time in the elections of the Year VII (March/April 1799). Demands for 'public safety' were heard once more. Sieyès was elected as Director and Lindet, a former member of the great Committee of Public Safety of the Year II, even became Minister of Finance. Jacobin Clubs and the press reopened, while suspects were rounded up. Mass conscription was introduced and forced loans were imposed on the bourgeoisie once again. Echoes of the Jacobin dictatorship began to sound.

But then, as after Fleurus, the whole situation was shifted by military victory over the Coalition. The bourgeoisie heaved a massive sigh of relief that revolutionary measures were no longer needed to safeguard their Republic. But the problem was how to ensure some measure of stability? The Republic seemed condemned to an endless oscillation between the rock of the royalist counter-revolution and the hard place of the Year II. This looked to be confirmed when, once again, the royalist threat revived. In Thermidor Year VII (August 1799), there was a rising in the south west fuelled by resentment at conscription. The rebels almost seized Toulon before they were beaten and the Chouans briefly seized Le Mans and Nantes before they were defeated.

This continual instability could only be resolved by a strong regime capable of imposing a settlement after the years of revolution. And the military was now the only force capable of delivering that. The Directory had ceased to be credible even among the business circles which were its social basis. In this situation came news that Bonaparte had secretly returned to France. He appeared to many to offer a way out of the instability and as he now progressed towards Paris he whipped up support as the 'saviour' of France. He summed up the situation well: 'On my return to Paris I found division in all sources of authority and agreement on only this one truth, that the Constitution was destroyed and could not save liberty.'[191]

Sieyès, 'the mole of the revolution', had drawn similar conclusions and turned to Bonaparte. The Councils were persuaded, on the pretext of a terrorist plot, to meet outside Paris at Saint Cloud under the 'protection' of Napoleon's troops. The coup plot almost backfired. When the Councils met on 19 Brumaire Year VIII (10 November 1799),[192] they were reluctant to succumb to the demand to strengthen the executive. When Napoleon marched in uninvited and started haranguing the deputies, he was greeted with shouts of 'Outlaw him! Down with the dictator!'[193] Bonaparte lost his nerve and had to be helped out of the hall. But his brother Lucien, conveniently in the chair of the session, kept cool. He rallied the troops and they drove the Council of Five Hundred out of the hall. The Council of Elders then agreed to set up a strong executive of three Consuls—Bonaparte, Sieyès and Roger-Ducos.

In effect, and soon formally, Bonaparte was the new master. Robespierre's warning of five years earlier had been borne out—the bourgeois Republic could now only survive under a military dictator. The curtain had come down on ten years of upheaval. Three days after the coup the Consuls proclaimed: 'The revolution is established upon the principles which began it; it is ended.'[194]

Napoleon and the balance sheet of the revolution

Napoleon gradually consolidated his power and in 1804 the Republic finally ended when he had himself crowned Emperor. But whatever the form, the content of Bonaparte's regime remained bourgeois, consolidating the essential gains of the revolution. The founding of the Bank of France in 1800 symbolised this.

Three years later the structure of the new society was laid out in the Civil Code—renamed the *Code Napoléon* in 1807. It was a charter for bourgeois society. In around 30 countries is still the basis of the legal structure today. The *Code* preserved the 'principles of '89', but with a heavy emphasis on property rights. It was a unified national system compared to about 360 local legal codes in France before the revolution. This creation of a unified national state was the central legacy of the revolution.

The destruction of feudal privileges and structures was confirmed in the *Code*. So too was freedom from arbitrary arrest and liberty of internal trade and commerce. A modern educational system was established, including the Lycées—selective schools with provision for scholarships for the 'talented', whatever their social origins. In the Lycées there was a strictly secular curriculum controlled by the state. Workers, needless to say, were still denied the right to organise and a new law, in 1803, compelled them to carry passbooks stamped by the boss. But workers too had gained from the revolution. Despite the restrictions, wages were now between one quarter and one third higher than before the revolution.[195] The gains of the peasantry during the revolution were left intact, while measures to limit grain exports (and a revived Maximum in 1812) ensured stability in the towns and countryside. This meant Napoleon retained strong popular support throughout most of his rule.

Napoleon sought to stabilise society by compromising with forces which had opposed the Republic. In 1801 a Concordat was signed with the Pope, re-establishing the Catholic Church as the dominant religion in France. Napoleon put his motivation bluntly: 'In religion I do not see the mystery of the Incarnation, but the mystery of the social order.'[196] The Concordat, by incorporating the Church with the bourgeois state, did much to undercut an important source of opposition and helped prevent a renewal of revolts such as those of the Vendée and the Breton Chouans. It also helped pave the way for a compromise with émigrés who had opposed the revolution, many of whom now returned.

But this series of compromises were all conditional on acceptance of the new political and social order. On signing the Concordat, Napoleon insisted that the re-established religion 'must be in the hands of the government'.[197] There was to be no return to the *ancien régime*, and there was no question of returning confiscated Church property. The bourgeoisie (and the peasantry) were keeping the spoils of victory. Not

even Napoleon, even if he wanted to, would have survived in power if there had been any attempt to take them away. Napoleon represents a further retreat, after Thermidor and the Directory, from the high watermark of the revolution, but it is still a retreat which rests on a consolidation of the essential gains of the revolution.

Outside France Napoleon's armies were a historically progressive force—uprooting much of the old order across Europe.[198] After a short peace with England in 1802, war resumed in 1803. It was soon, once again, general and would remain so until Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo in 1815. The French armies were spectacularly successful. At its height the Empire stretched from Hamburg in the north to Rome in the south, and beyond this were a host of satellite and vassal states.

Virtually everywhere this resulted in irreversible blows to the old order. These were largely carried through from above—democracy was denied. There was no question of unleashing the mass forces which had pushed through social change in France itself. Across much of Europe variants of the Civil Code became the cornerstone of constructing new regimes. Serfdom was abolished wherever it survived and feudal dues were done away with. Single customs areas were created. Unified systems of justice and of weights and measures were constructed. Equality before the law and an end to feudal privileges were pushed through in many places. The Church was weakened, and civil marriages and secular education were introduced. In short, the spread of the revolution on the bayonets of Napoleon's armies laid many of the foundations of the modern bourgeois state in much of Europe.

With Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo the victorious European powers, led by England, met at the Congress of Vienna and attempted to unscramble the legacy of 25 years of upheaval. They restored monarchs, old state boundaries and divisions and many of the old structures. They agreed to maintain their new order in Europe by force against liberals, democrats and nationalists.

Yet the changes wrought by the revolution and the French armies were irreversible. In Germany, for instance, the old Holy Roman Empire was gone and the patchwork of 396 petty states and 'free' cities before the French Revolution was now reduced to 40, and many of these remained united in a customs union. In Naples the restored king did not dare restore feudal structures and retained the *Code Napoléon* intact. There was much unfinished work to complete the creation of a unified bourgeois state, but many important steps had been taken. In Rome the Pope was restored to his temporal power but he too had surrender this barely 25 years later as a united Italian state emerged.

In France itself the old monarchy was restored and it certainly attempted to turn the clock back. But the changes were too deep and all the essential gains of the revolution stayed intact. There was no return of feudal privileges, dues and monopolies, no return of the internal tolls

and divisions. In France, and elsewhere, these had been irrevocably destroyed. To be sure, there were further revolutions in France. In 1830 the July Revolution brought in a new monarchy—one prepared to accept that the changes were there to stay. A new bourgeois Republic emerged from the revolution of 1848 and then a Second Empire under Napoleon's nephew. These revolutions and regimes were all important in completing the victory of the bourgeoisie and facilitating the development of industrial capitalism in the middle of the 19th century. But the essential work of destroying the old structures and clearing the path ahead had been achieved by the Great Revolution.

As the 19th century progressed, the development of industrial capitalism, first in England and then France and elsewhere, also created a force which could look beyond this revolution and the limitations on the mass movement which had driven it forward. When the masses of Paris took to the streets in the 1848 revolution, they now called themselves not *sans culottes* but *proletaires*.

Marx and Engels, Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks all learned much from the Great French Revolution. It showed that revolution was at the very heart of social change. In particular Lenin praised the Jacobins for showing that conscious revolutionary organisation could be decisive in changing history[199] so, though they fought for a different class, a class which is our worst enemy today, we should not forget the Jacobins but, rather, learn from their example. In so doing we should remember the words of Gracchus Babeuf in *The Manifesto of the Equals* shortly before he was executed: 'The French Revolution is only the forerunner of another, greater, more serious and impressive revolution, which will be the last.'[200]

Appendix: Historians and the French Revolution

Many of the current arguments within, and challenges to, the Marxist view of the French Revolution have been dealt with, explicitly or implicitly, in the text and footnotes. But it is worth adding a few points. The French Revolution has been the subject of fierce debate for 200 years. The debate has *always* been a political one. In England the reactionary Edmund Burke first took up the cudgels in 1790 with his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. In it he damned the revolution and all its works. He attacked the whole notion of social change and urged that the revolution be crushed by force. His worst venom was reserved for the 'swinish multitude' which a conspiracy of ambitious men had unleashed in France. Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* was written in reply to Burke and was enormously influential in English radical circles and in the embryonic working class movement. But reaction had the upper hand in England and Paine had to flee to France to avoid arrest. There he was elected to the National Convention—though as a Girondin he

narrowly avoided losing his head as the revolution moved on. The story is worth telling because, though today's arguments are conducted in a more subdued and academic manner, they remain profoundly influenced by the politics of the participants.

For much of this century the idea that the revolution was a bourgeois revolution, driven by class conflict, which swept away the political structures of feudalism and cleared the way for the development of capitalism, was generally accepted. This idea was first fully formulated by Marx, though earlier figures, above all Barnave during the revolution itself, had partly developed a similar view. Not all those who advocated this view considered themselves Marxists, but their interpretations of the revolution drew heavily on Marxism.

Beginning with the Second International leader Jean Jaurès and then developed by people like Georges Lefebvre and Albert Soboul, the Marxist approach grew into the accepted orthodoxy.[201] These last two contributed, along with others such as George Rudé, to our understanding of the revolution through their research on the movements from below in the revolution (Lefebvre on the peasantry and Soboul and Rudé on the urban sans culottes). In recent years, though, this 'orthodox' tradition has come under sustained attack by what have become known as 'revisionist' historians. There are many parallels, both in the political background and the historical arguments to the similar trend in the interpretation of the English Revolution.[202]

The 'orthodox' tradition had its weaknesses. In particular the 'Marxism' it drew on was Stalinism. This meant a tendency towards a mechanical, deterministic approach. Reading some of their work one gets the impression that all was preordained, that history inevitably progresses and that, at the appointed hour, a revolutionary bourgeoisie with a fully formed consciousness of what it is fighting for springs up and seizes power. Too little room is left for conscious human intervention in making history. Not enough attention is paid to the fact that the consciousness of those engaged in the revolution developed in response to a crisis over which they had little direct control—and then went on developing in response to conflict and battles.

Fortunately Lefebvre, Soboul and others were good enough historians not to be totally derailed by these influences. Their work, especially on the movements from below, pulled in the opposite direction. Yet there was a tension between the real history and the distorted theoretical framework within which they tried to locate it.

Another weakness was a tendency to overplay the unity of the Third Estate against the old order. Again the real history uncovered showed all the conflicts and divisions wonderfully. The limitations on different movements and how they affected the revolution were brought out. Yet this sat in a framework which stressed Republican unity to an unwarranted degree. This is not an accident of course. It takes no leap of imagination

to see how such an idea of an all class alliance of the Third Estate against the old order fitted Stalinist Popular Front politics.[203] Despite these weaknesses, though, the tradition is one which is worth defending, if not uncritically. But these weaknesses undoubtedly made the job of the revisionists easier. In the article I have tried to present a view which overcomes some of these weaknesses and rebuts the main revisionist arguments. I will not therefore repeat the arguments here.[204]

The assault on the Marxist interpretation began with the English historian Alfred Cobban in his *Myth of the French Revolution* in 1955 and then his *Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* in 1964. Cobban had a peculiar view—that the revolution was led by an anti-capitalist bourgeoisie against a capitalist nobility. Needless to say this has found few supporters even among later revisionists.[205] But since then the attack has gathered pace through the work of George Taylor, Elizabeth Eisenstein, William Doyle and François Furet among others.[206] Their argument that the Marxist view of the revolution is wrong is fast becoming the new orthodoxy. Even many on the left who have taken up the arguments concede most of the revisionist case. This is true of Georges Comninel, for instance.[207] Comninel sums up the new consensus 'Virtually all non-Marxist historians have now been won away from the social interpretation (i.e. the orthodox Marxist account) essentially because its supposed historical foundations have simply been found wanting when subject to scrutiny... It must now be accepted that the long-standing claims to historical validity of the Marxist interpretation of the French Revolution have been exploded.'[208]

What is the argument which has 'exploded' the Marxist interpretation? Much of it is nakedly and unashamedly political and is a simple reflection of the general right wing trend of recent years. This should be seen for what it is and dealt with as such. The historical arguments vary. But the essence of it is that though the revolution was led by the bourgeoisie (most still accept this—facts can be stubborn things even for right wing historians) it was not a bourgeois class revolution against a feudal ruling class. They argue that in fact the nobility and bourgeoisie were part of a single ruling elite. Both were primarily landowning classes and there was no fundamental social divide or conflict between them. Indeed they were all in favour of reform and if only people had been a little more sensible political reform, without social upheaval, was possible. The revolution thus becomes a squabble over political power among this relatively homogeneous elite, not any kind of class conflict between the nobility and the bourgeoisie. It is now seen as a struggle fuelled by the 'autonomous political and ideological dynamic' of struggle between 'sub elites' (Furet).[209]

Some of the revisionists make the identification between the bourgeoisie and capitalism and industrial capitalism. They look for a class of factory owners leading the revolution and then claim Marxism is nonsense when,

naturally, they can't find one. Much of this argument is easily refuted. Marxism does not argue that a class of industrial capitalists fought a class of landowning nobles in the revolution.

But what of the main revisionist argument? The revisionists are right to say the bourgeoisie in France was partly a landowning class, but there was a real growth in wealth based on commerce, manufacture and trade. And all landowners, noble or bourgeois, were increasingly producing for the market. Of course this all took place within the existing structures of society. How could it be otherwise? So a landowner could be involved in commercial grain production, for instance, yet still be involved, directly or indirectly, in exploiting the range of feudal dues and privileges, internal tolls, taxes, monopolies and so on, to extract surplus, rather than accumulating through investment in technical improvements. The same is true of non-landowning bourgeois. In seeking to increase their wealth and position within society they would naturally attempt to exploit the existing structures in whatever way possible.

Nevertheless, for significant elements of the bourgeoisie, this process was hindered by the privileges and restrictions imposed on them by those very structures. Many bourgeois, hit by noble monopolies, internal tolls, unequal tax burdens and so on, had a very material interest in the destruction of these structures. Of course until a crisis in society opens the possibility of real change and throws people into struggle these interests can remain, at best, half formed. People will rather look for ways to adapt, not believing fundamental change is possible. Only in response to crisis and struggle do they become fully understood and expressed. So, for instance, Barnave, a good example given the relative clarity of his ideas by 1792, wrote that 'ideas which had engaged me when they were still the object of fruitless curiosity absorbed me totally when public events began to suggest that there was some hope for them.'[210]

New forms of wealth, new or growing classes and changing social relations meant that the real content within the feudal forms was changing. Eventually the old structures, which could adapt to new social relations up to a point, became an obstacle to further growth—the economy was in crisis. It could not match the more modern states of England and Holland either economically or militarily. In the crisis the old order attempted to reform without undoing the essential political structures of society. The attempt opened a space in which movements of all groups—and particularly from below—deepened the crisis further.

The monarchy was unable to push through reforms without attacking the whole basis of its power, while the nobility, though agreed on the need for change, was not prepared to surrender its power. Some of the bourgeoisie too was tied into defending the existing structure of society, but a large part of the bourgeoisie had everything to gain from breaking these structures and rallied around a programme for change. Buffeted

by opposition from the old order and pressure from below, this spilled over into revolution. As the conflicts deepened, classes and parts of classes rallied around diverging programmes, some seeking to halt change, others seeking to carry it further.

The revisionists reduce the political conflicts to 'elites' fighting for power. This makes a nonsense of history. Millions of people were engaged in real social conflict. Programmes for social and political change put forward by minorities grew out of such conflict and developed through it. They could only gain support if they reflected the real interest of significant social forces. The revisionists fail to ask why some programmes were taken up and others not—after all, there were countless schemes put forward. Robespierre's comment on the Girondins, 'Just look at how the rich rally to them', when generalised, is close to the truth.

The bourgeoisie *was* part of the exploiting classes in *ancien régime* France. Yet despite partial integration within the old order they remained oppressed. The destruction of the structures which oppressed them (i.e. their class interest) combined with the class demands of the peasantry and urban masses to push the revolution forward. The peasants and urban poor were not capable of forming an independent force capable of taking power in society. Only the bourgeoisie had the potential to be a new ruling class. This gave them hegemony in constructing the new order. So the urban *sans culottes* were incapable of imposing their programme, other than as a junior partner in a temporary alliance led by a section of the bourgeoisie.

In fighting for their class interests the different factions of the bourgeoisie were not always fully conscious of their actions. Some, Barnave for one, were—though of course even these necessarily saw their class interests as those of the vast majority of society. But once battle was joined the objectively clearer class consciousness of Barnave, for instance, was a block to mobilising the forces needed to win against the old order. It required a minority of the bourgeoisie—the Jacobins—whose ideas reflected a utopian mixture of bourgeois interests and petty bourgeois dreams, to do this.

The victory of the revolution elevated the bourgeoisie from an oppressed junior partner in the exploiting classes to the dominant class in society. With this went a state, legal structure and so on that reflected their interests, which were central in clearing the way for capitalism to develop fully. Those who reject the connection between the political conflicts in the revolution, class struggles, the outcome of these and the further development of capitalism should set themselves a simple test: try and imagine the mid-19th century industrialisation of France taking place with the essential structures of the *ancien régime* still intact.[211] One gets the impression reading much of the revisionists' work that the revolution had nothing to do with the future development of capitalism. Somehow it just came along in the 19th century, but the Great Revolution

had nothing to do with this. I hope it is clear from the arguments in the article that this is nonsense.

The most sophisticated of the revisionists, and the most influential, is François Furet, associated with the *Annales* group of historians in France.[212] He was a member of the French Resistance during the war and is an ex-member of the Communist Party. He is thus well placed to find the weaknesses in the orthodox tradition—which, it must be admitted, he does in a skilful way.[213] Furet argues that, while it may make sense to talk of a bourgeois revolution in describing the long transition from feudalism to capitalism over the course of several centuries, the Great Revolution is not a decisive part of this process. The long-term economic and social changes and the short-term political battles are separate and one should not try to relate the two. He does make a number of accurate criticisms of the orthodox tradition for compressing the two and overstating the degree of economic change brought about in the years of the revolution.

When discussing the events of the revolution, Furet introduces the now very fashionable notion of the *dérapage*—'skidding out of control'—of the revolution during the Year II.[214] This means that though the revolution was perhaps undertaking necessary political reform (but this is not about class interests and struggle) the fact that it was a revolutionary change had disastrous consequences. The revolutionaries tore 'France away from its entire past', 'revoked' everything that had been done in previous centuries and set out on 'the immense and utopian ambition to create an entirely new social order and a new set of institutions'.[215] This opened up a rupture in which the 'autonomous political and ideological dynamic' of struggle between 'elites' allowed the mass of ordinary people—led of course by the 'elite' of political activists—to take on a role for which they were ill prepared. This meant the revolution skidded off course away from the 'liberal' period into the 'despotic' period of the Jacobins. He now claims that 'the revolution is over' because all the important ideas of the 'liberal' phase of the revolution have triumphed. He recommends the 'American' concept of 'market society' because, he tells us, competition leads to balance! And Furet is delighted that, apparently, no Frenchman any longer believes that in order to change society you have to take over the state by force.[216]

It is fairly clear, I think, that this argument has as much to do with current politics as history.[217] In fact the argument is little more than a nicely dressed up version of Burke's tirade against fundamental social change and revolution of 200 years ago. Furet wants to bury the notion of revolution, and the Jacobins and sans culottes along with it.

Albert Soboul is now dead, but towards the end of his life he replied to the revisionists and, though I do not agree with all of his arguments, he was right on two counts. He wrote, 'The problem of feudal survivals and of the seigneurial regime is at the heart of the society of the *ancien*

régime: it remains at the heart of the French Revolution.'[218] And finally, 'Reform is not a revolution stretched out in time. Reform and Revolution are not distinguished by their duration but by their content. Reform or Revolution? It is not a question of choosing a longer or shorter route leading to the same result, but of specifying an end: to wit, either of the establishment of a new society, or of superficial modifications to the old society.'[219]

Note on the Revolutionary Calendar

The revolutionary calendar was decreed on 24 November, 1793, and was probably the work of the poet Fabre d'Églantine. It lasted until 1806. The calendar was backdated to the declaration of the Republic on 22 September, 1792, which was decreed to be the first day of Year I. The months all had 30 days and were named after natural phenomena. They ran as follows:

***Vendémiaire**, 22 September to 21 October, the month of vintage*
***Brumaire**, 22 October to 20 November, the month of fog*
***Frimaire**, 21 November to 20 December, the month of frost*
***Nivôse**, 21 December to 19 January, the month of snow*
***Pluviôse**, 20 January to 18 February, the month of rain*
***Ventôse**, 19 February to 20 March, the month of wind*
***Germinal**, 21 March to 19 April, the month of budding*
***Floréal**, 20 April to 19 May, the month of flowers*
***Prairial**, 20 May to 18 June, the month of meadows*
***Messidor**, 19 June to 18 July, the month of harvest*
***Thermidor**, 19 July to 17 August, the month of heat*
***Fructidor**, 18 August to 16 September, the month of fruit*

The five days 17-21 September (plus an extra one in leap year) were known as *sans-culottides*. Each month was divided into three *décades*, with the tenth day (*décadi*) a holiday. This abolished the biblically derived seven day week, Sundays and Church festivals. Of course one day off work in ten instead of one in seven is a fitting indication of the bourgeois character of the revolution!

Most writing on the French Revolution uses the revolutionary calendar for the period from the beginning of Year II (September 1793) to Bonaparte's coup of Brumaire, Year VIII (November, 1799). I have followed this, but give the dates in our current calendar in brackets.

Notes

I would like to particularly thank Paul Blackledge, Joe Hartney, Annie McMullen, Mary Black and Ian Birchall for drawing various articles to my attention, and assisting in obtaining others, and these and others for discussions and encouragement in preparing this article.

1 Quoted in J F C Fuller, *The Decisive Battles of the Western World* (Granada, London 1970), p58.
2 Ibid, p57.
3 At the time of Valmy there were about 400,000 men in the French Army. Of these only one tenth had been soldiers before the outbreak of revolution in 1789. At Valmy 34,000 Prussians faced about 52,000 Frenchmen. Despite the ferocity of the artillery fire, casualties were not high—about 300 on the French side and 184 on the Prussian. See Fuller, op cit, p56 and Marc Bouloiseau, *The Jacobin Republic* (Cambridge, 1987), p38.
4 M Bouloiseau, op cit, p42.
5 E Belfort Bax, *The Story of the French Revolution* (Swan Sonnenschein, London, 1907), p43.
6 As Trotsky characterised the 'most indubitable feature of a revolution' in his *History of the Russian Revolution*. The scale of mass involvement in the French Revolution dwarfs that in the earlier bourgeois revolutions in the United Provinces, England or the USA.
7 These figures are from G Rudé, *The French Revolution* (Weidenfeld, London, 1988), p56. France had a population of around 27 million people in 1789, by far the largest in Europe. Paris had a normal population of between 500,000 and 600,000, but in times of economic hardship large numbers of unemployed flooded in from the countryside, swelling the population. See, for instance, J de Vries, *The Economy of Europe in an Age of Crisis* (Cambridge, 1976), p156, and M Vovelle, *The Fall of the French Monarchy* (Cambridge, 1987), p44.
8 Though Louis XVI issued considerably less of these than previous rulers (Louis XV issued 150,000), he still managed around 14,000. See Rudé, *The French Revolution*, p14.
9 An indication of this process is given by the following list of innovations in western Europe: the invention of the horseshoe, padded horse collar and stirrup transformed the horse into a source of power, the watermill and windmill were introduced as productive forces at the end of the 12th century, gunpowder in the 13th century, the blast furnace—a major breakthrough—in the 15th century, the first use of magnetic compasses and navigation charts on ships towards the end of the 13th century, the invention of movable type printing in the 15th century—a development which was particularly subversive of the closed ideology of the time.
10 This whole account is a crude sketch of a process which is the subject of vigorous debate among Marxists. See the collection of articles in *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (Verso, London, 1976) and the more recent *The Brenner Debate* (Cambridge University Press, 1985).

On the specific question of absolutism the best starting point is P Anderson's *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (Verso , London, 1974). Anderson is right to question the tendency of Marx and Engels to see the absolutist state as holding 'the balance between the nobility and the class of burghers' (Engels, quoted in Anderson, p15). He stresses that it was rather 'the new political carapace of a threatened nobility' (p18). But he underestimates, I think, the degree to which Marx and Engels were right to point to the way absolutism was not simply this but also a specific adaptation to the bourgeoisie. Engels accurately summed up the essence of the matter, 'The political order remained feudal, while society became more and more bourgeois' (Anderson, p23). Anderson's account also suffers at times from his attachment to

'structuralist' concepts and language. He also grossly overstates the importance of things such as Roman law in the transition from feudalism to capitalism in western Europe.

11 L'Abbé Michel Lavassor quoted in L W Cowie, *The French Revolution: documents and debates* (Macmillan, London, 1987), p10. There were about 130,000 clergy in France at the time of the revolution. The Church owned over 10 percent of all land outright and collected feudal dues from the peasants who leased or worked it. In addition peasants had to pay the tithe (nominally a tenth of their produce, though in practice usually less) supposedly for the expenses of worship. In reality the higher clergy creamed off much of it at the expense of local priests. See Vovelle, *The Fall of the French Monarchy*, pp18-20.

12 The Enlightenment was a European wide phenomenon but was dominated by developments in France. For a summary see, for instance, N Hampson, *The Enlightenment* (Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1968).

13 E N Williams, *The Ancien Régime in Europe* (Pelican, London, 1984), p227.

14 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, in *The Basic Political Writings* (Hackett, Indianapolis, 1987), p141.

15 Ibid, p145.

16 Ibid, p180.

17 Ibid, p170.

18 Ibid, p162.

19 There were about 300,000 nobles in all and they owned about 25 percent of all land outright. See Vovelle, op cit, pp7-15.

20 This was a more attractive method of increasing wealth than investment in improved agricultural methods and is an important factor in the relative lack of a layer of capitalist market oriented landlord layer in France compared with the English Revolution. The consequences were that French agriculture, with only a few exceptions, was very backward compared with English. The example of the English agricultural revolution was an important factor in the growth of the French reforming economists and philosophers known as the physiocrats.

21 Vovelle, op cit, pp46, 47.

22 Apart from Paris, which dwarfed all other cities in France in size, with over 500,000 people, there were only around 45 towns with a population bigger than 15,000. One quarter of all towns with a population over 20,000 were ports. Ibid, p38.

23 T C W Blanning, *The French Revolution: Aristocrats Versus Bourgeoisie?* (Macmillan, London, 1987), p14.

24 A Soboul, *A short history of the French Revolution* (University of California Press 1977), p11.

25 Ibid, p10.

26 In his *What is the Third Estate?* (1789) (see *The French Revolution: Introductory Documents*, ed D I Wright, Queensland, 1980, p19). Other future revolutionary leaders expressed a similar resentment. Barnave recalled how his mother was evicted from a seat at the opera to make way for a noble. Madame Roland recalled being excluded from the dining room and sent to eat in the kitchen at a noble's chateau (both Barnave and Roland were wealthy). Danton said later, 'The old regime drove us to it [revolution] by giving us a good education without opening any opportunity for our talents' (for these examples see Williams, *The Ancien Régime* p223) One of the clearest (and most enjoyable) examples though is to be found in the plays of Beaumarchais especially *The Marriage of Figaro*.

27 The only exception seems to have been Jean Paul Marat who spoke of revolution in his *The chains of slavery* in 1774, see Vovelle op cit, p72. And a nobleman, the Marquis d'Argenson, wrote in 1751 'All the orders of society are discontented together...a disturbance could turn into revolt, and revolt into a total revolution,' see Blanning, op cit, p30.

28 Eighty five percent of the French population was rural and two thirds of these were

peasants. Recently some historians such as Robin, Postal-Vinnay, Ado and Soboul have argued, though in different ways, that a layer of better off peasants, 'yeoman or kulak types' (Soboul quoted in Comninel, p45), were pushing the development of agrarian capitalism forward, and use this to draw some parallels with the English Revolution. This may have some validity in the cereal growing Paris basin but the evidence is not, yet, entirely convincing. In particular, that any such layer played a key role in the revolution has not been demonstrated. For a summary of the arguments see, for example, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution*, P M Jones, (Cambridge, 1988), p124, and G Comninel, *Rethinking the French Revolution: Marxism and the Revisionist Challenge* (Verso, London, 1987), pp34-51.

29 Only in a few areas, such as Franche-Comté, did serfdom survive. About 95 percent of French peasants had legal personal liberty. The peasantry legally owned about 40 to 45 percent of all land (but this did not mean they were exempt from all dues on this land). There were, though, enormous variations within this average. An especially marked difference was between the north and east where the peasantry generally owned a small amount of land (and the burden of taxes and dues was much heavier) and parts of the south and the highland areas from the central plateau to the Alps where they often owned the vast majority of the land. (See Vorelle, op cit, pp5-13, for an overview of the structure of peasant society. For a detailed account see Jones, op cit.)

30 Many writers on the French Revolution tie themselves in knots over whether the structure of society in 1789 can be called feudal. Of course it would be stupid to simply equate it with 'classical' feudalism. But the essential political structures were derived from feudalism and a surplus was extracted from the direct producers in the countryside by extra-economic methods—compulsion backed by force.

The peasants themselves, and other contemporaries, had little doubt what was meant when they complained of 'feudal' or 'seigneurial' dues. Alexis de Tocqueville, a 19th century historian who generally argued that there was a continuity between the old order and the post-revolutionary society put it well: 'Feudalism had remained the most important part of our civil institutions...we should observe that the disappearance of part of the institutions of the middle ages only made what survived of them a hundred times more odious' (quoted in Soboul, *A Short History...*, p23).

31 Daniel Guérin in his *Class Struggles in the First French Republic: Bourgeois and Bras Nus 1793-1795* (Pluto, London, 1977—an abridged translation of his *La Lutte des Classes sous la première République: bourgeois et bras nus*, Paris, 1946) falls into precisely this ahistorical lapse. Much of Guérin's argument *is* true and a valuable corrective to most accounts of the French Revolution which tend to downplay the significance of conflicts between the Jacobin bourgeoisie and the mass movements in the towns. So, for instance, he rightly draws attention to the curbing of the popular movement by the Jacobin dictatorship and points out that there were significant strikes by wage earners—also repressed by the Jacobins. (pp222-237).

One also has to remember the context in which he wrote the work—part of a polemic against the Popular Front politics espoused by the bulk of the French left under the influence of Stalinism. The notion of 'Republican unity' in the Great French Revolution was a useful buttress for these politics. It is true that the tradition of 'Marxist' writing on the French Revolution associated with Lefebvre and Soboul incorporated elements of such ideas in their interpretations (along with a tendency to mechanical, deterministic 'Marxism' also derived from the Stalinist orthodoxy).

However, in his polemical zeal Guérin's historical judgments go wildly astray. He comes close to arguing for 'permanent revolution' based on an embryonic working class in 1789 (he does *not* in fact argue this, but sails very close, for instance in his use of Trotsky's analysis of the Russian Revolution on p4), despite the fact that the whole notion only makes any sense after the development of a world economy and world working class. He also grossly underestimates the revolutionary side of the bourgeoisie in the French Revolution because of his blinkered concern to

attack unity with bourgeois politicians in the 20th century. He bemoans the fact that the French Revolution brought 'the bourgeoisie to power in the end rather than the *proletariat*' (p2, my emphasis) and can write nonsense claiming that the French Revolution was the cradle of 'soviet democracy, the democracy of workers' councils' (p3) and refer to a situation of 'dual power' (pp29-31) in Paris in 1793!

32 Vovelle, op cit, pp56, 57.

33 see R B Rose, *The Making of the Sans-Culottes* (Manchester University Press, 1983), pp10, 11.

34 Thus on no 'day' (ie insurrection) of the revolution did wage earners amount to more than one quarter of the direct participants and they were far outnumbered by petty bourgeois. A similar balance is true for the composition of the various revolutionary committees which emerged later. It is worth stressing that though vagrants and unemployed amounted to up to 10 percent of the Parisian population at times, and no doubt played a role in mass riots and the like, they were not a central force in the revolutionary 'days' or in grass roots organisations—contrary to the myths of right wing historians. See, for instance, G Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford University Press 1959), and Albert Soboul, *The Parisian Sans-Culottes and the French Revolution, 1793-4* (Oxford University Press, 1964). Soboul estimates that 63.8 percent of the members of the Parisian 'revolutionary committees' (the cadre of the mass movement, if you like) which developed during the revolution were independent craftsmen or shopkeepers (p40).

35 Of course England still had a king. But to contrast England under William of Orange with France under Louis XIV shows the content of the monarchy was entirely different.

36 Quoted in Blanning, op cit, p30.

37 Again by way of contrast England and Holland could marshal their wealth through institutions like the Bank of England, founded after the settlement of 1688, or the impressive and developed financial institutions of Amsterdam. Yet in France money had to be raised essentially as the personal debt of the king. A Bank of France would not be founded until after the revolution in 1800.

38 In 1788 payment of interest on the state debt accounted for 51 percent of the national income. And the state's annual expenditure exceeded its income by about 20 percent. Vovelle, op cit, p76.

39 Quoted in E N Williams, *The Ancien Régime...* p242. For a good discussion of the attempts at reform by Turgot and others see Olwen Hufton, *Europe: Privilege and Protest 1730-1789* (Fontana, London, 1980), pp299-347.

40 Figures from Blanning, *The French Revolution: Aristocrats...* pp9-11.

41 Soboul, *A short history...* pp29-33, from the work of C-E Labrousse (*La Crise de l'économie française a la fin de l'Ancien Régime et au début de la Révolution*, Paris, 1944), whose research uncovered these facts.

42 The Flour War was partly a response to the first steps at introducing a free market in grain by Turgot, discussed earlier. I have deliberately emphasised the limits on *independent* activity by wage earners to guard against ahistorical judgements (which, for socialists living in a modern industrialised society, it is easy to fall into), but this does not mean that there were none.

In the years before the revolution there were near insurrectionary strikes by silk workers in Lyons as well as builders' strikes in Paris in 1785 and 1786 and a strike by printers and bookbinders for a 14 (!) hour day. The printing industry seems to have had a high level of conflict between workers and masters and Lyons, the most industrial city in France, seems to have had a particularly high degree of class conflict between wage earners and their bosses (see Rudé, *The French Revolution*, p34). There were repeated clashes during the revolution too.

The crucial point about the working class in the French Revolution is that though they did often fight for better wages and conditions and did use weapons of class struggle—strikes etc—they were not capable of consistently fighting for specifically

proletarian interests because of the objective conditions in which they existed. No political programme emerged representing their interests and it *could not* have done so—Babeuf's ideas were the nearest to such a development, but even these were a confused mixture which remained heavily marked by petty bourgeois ideas. The working class was not and could not be a class *for itself* in the French Revolution.

43 Quoted in L Huberman, *Man's Worldly Goods: The story of the wealth of nations* (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1963), p156.

44 Quoted in Rudé, *The French Revolution*, p14. The point is of more than historical importance in the light of current developments in the USSR and Eastern Europe. In this presentation I have somewhat separated the internal and external factors in the revolution. In reality the two were inextricably linked. Also I have deliberately emphasised the problem of French rivalry, economic and military, with England and Holland, as it is underestimated in most accounts. But this should not be taken to imply a crude parallel with the role of competition between states and national economies in the modern world of capitalist imperialism.

45 Soboul, *A Short History*... p40, quoting Arthur Young, *Travels in France during the years 1787, 1788 and 1789* (New York, 1969).

46 Mallet Du Pan, who emigrated early in the revolution and who, though hostile to the later course of the revolution remained a sharp observer. Quoted in E N Williams, op cit, p242.

47 See Wright, op cit, p2.

48 Peasant revolts were called Jacqueries from the nom-de-guerre Jacques Bonhomme (Jack Goodfellow) conferred on rebellious peasants in 1358 by nobles.

49 Much has been made by 'revisionist' historians (those who have mounted a sustained attack on the Marxist view of the French Revolution in recent years) of these lists of grievances, of which many survive. They argue that those of the peasantry do not attack 'feudalism' and that the bourgeoisie and nobility were agreed on the need for reform.

It is true that the peasant lists often do not attack 'feudalism'—though this is exaggerated by these historians. But they do complain on specific dues etc. And the electoral procedures meant that peasants were often drawing up the lists in meetings at which their lords, clergy etc were present. A flood of complaints that this meant specific peasants' grievances were omitted from the final lists descended on the government (see Jones, op cit, pp63-67).

Again, it is true the nobles were willing to reform. But when it comes to the crunch issue of seigneurial privileges the split is clear. For instance, T C W Blanning, op cit (Macmillan, London, 1987), reproduces a summary of the 'cahiers' of the nobility and the Third Estate. He comments that it shows 'if anything the nobles were more liberal than their bourgeois colleagues' and that the table 'provides the revisionists with their best evidence'. But on closer inspection this 'best evidence' is not what it seems.

On issues such as equality before the law, abolition of arbitrary arrest, establishment of a constitution, equalisation of taxes and liberty of the press there is general agreement. But, tucked away at the bottom of the table, we find that on 'more economic freedom' the Third Estate is clearly split from the nobility. And, crucially, on 'abolition of seigneurial rights' the Third Estate is against the nobility by five to one. Yet Blanning, in common with the revisionists and a few of their recent left critics, insists that 'it is impossible to infer any confrontation'! (See Blanning p35, 36 for these quotes and the table.) Also see Jones, op cit, p67, who calculates that over half the peasant lists called for the abolition of seigneurial monopolies and dues while 85 percent of noble lists were totally silent on these questions.

50 See Rudé, *The Crowd* ... pp34-44, for a detailed account of this incident.

51 See Cowie, op cit, p49, my emphasis.

52 Quoted in Vovelle, op cit, p102. Mirabeau's exact words are disputed but the general

point is clear enough.

53 As Sebastian Hardy, a bookseller living in Paris, who kept a diary of events, began to call it about now (quoted in Rudé, *The French Revolution*, p42).

54 The Bastille was the French equivalent of the Tower of London.

55 Rudé, *The Crowd*... p57. We know the composition of those who stormed the Bastille reasonably well, as they were given medals and pensions by the Republic later.

56 In some areas this took place before news of the Bastille. Rennes, and other towns in Brittany, as well as Grenoble and Dijon, had already had serious clashes between the Third Estate and the nobility earlier in the year. See Vovelle, op cit, pp106, 107.

57 Quoted in Vovelle, op cit, p106. Barnave though a leading member of the Assembly at this stage, would end up on the right later, as the revolution radicalised. He was guillotined in 1793. In 1792 he wrote his brilliant *Introduction to the French Revolution*, which is far and away the clearest exposition by a contemporary of the basis of the bourgeois revolution. His analysis is worth quoting at some length: 'Once industry and commerce have begun to establish themselves...the way will be open for a revolution in law and politics, a shift in the balance of wealth leads to a shift in the distribution of political power. Just as the possession of land once raised the aristocracy to power, so the growth of industrial property now increases the power of the people.' Of course by people he means the bourgeoisie!

And he went on in a striking passage—when one remembers this was written 50 years before Marx—'One may from a certain point of view consider population, wealth, customs, knowledge as the elements and the substance which form the social body, and see in the laws and the government the tissue which contains and envelops them...if the tissue expands in the degree that the substance grows in volume the progress of the social body will occur without violent commotion. But if instead of being an elastic force it opposes itself rigidly there will come a moment when proportionality will end and where the substance must be destroyed or where it must break its envelope and expand.'

For these quotes and a good discussion of Barnave's ideas see Ralph Miliband, 'Barnave: A Case of Bourgeois Class Consciousness', in *Aspects of History and Class Consciousness*, ed I Meszaros (London, 1971), pp22-46. Miliband's otherwise excellent article is marred only by his attempt to use the contrast between Barnave's clear bourgeois consciousness, which ended up as an obstacle to the bourgeois revolution, and the 'false' consciousness of Jacobins such as Robespierre, which carried it through, as the basis for opposing basing clear socialist politics today, and in particular building a revolutionary party.

58 See G Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France* (London, 1973), for a full account.

59 As the radical bourgeois journalist Jean Paul Marat put it.

60 It is not true, as is sometimes asserted, that the peasants simply refused to pay any dues after 4 August. See Jones, op cit, pp86-123, for an account of the struggle.

61 This law remained in force until 1884, one of the few from the revolution to survive unscathed through all the upheavals of the Great Revolution, Bonaparte, the 1830 Revolution, 1848 and the Paris Commune. For text of Declaration of Rights of Man see Wright ...*Introductory Documents*, pp58-61.

62 Until the revolution nobles were allowed the 'privilege' of execution by the sword, while commoners were subject to brutal tortures such as breaking on the wheel, disembowelment while still alive, having hands burnt off and sulphur rubbed in the wounds, and being torn apart by horses. Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*—whatever its faults otherwise—has some grisly, accurate descriptions of such methods.

63 The Jacobins attacked slavery as 'the aristocracy of the skin' and Robespierre insisted that 'the moment you pronounce the word "slave" you pronounce your own dishonour' (see Vovelle, op cit, p148). The relation of the French Revolution to the colonies is complex and I have not the space to deal with it here. By far the

best book on the slave revolt remains CLR James's *The Black Jacobins* (Allison and Busby).

64 Quoted from *The German Ideology* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1963, pp40-41) in *Essential Writings of Karl Marx*, David Caute (ed) (MacGibbon and Kee, London, 1967), p65.

65 Vovelle, op cit, p114.

66 Maillard quoted in Rudé, *The French Revolution*, p57. Also see Rudé, *The Crowd...* pp72-78, for a detailed account of the October Days.

67 Vovelle, op cit, p117.

68 The name derives from the convent where they met, and was originally used by royalist propagandists to attack them—they accepted the label.

69 Marat was the most consistent spokesman for the revolutionary movement until his assassination in 1793, but he was a spokesman for the interests of the most revolutionary *bourgeoisie* who understood the need to ally with the mass movement and was prepared to express many of their demands. It is wrong to see him as on the side of the masses and somehow opposed to the interests of the bourgeoisie as is sometimes argued—after all he became president of the bourgeois Jacobin Club.

70 See Vovelle, op cit, pp125-128, for a summary of the counter-revolutionary movement in the summer of 1790.

71 A Métin, *La Révolution et l'autonomie locale* (1904), quoted in Jones, op cit, p168.

72 Despite the electoral restriction something like 61 percent of adult males had the right to vote at a time when about 4 percent could do so in bourgeois England.

73 See Jones, op cit, p154-161 and Bouloiseau, *The Jacobin Republic*, pp167-171 and pp184-186, for the arguments on this.

74 Vovelle, op cit, p132.

75 Ibid, p133.

76 The power and composition of the sections changed at various stages in the revolution. Initially they were dominated by the better off bourgeois, the 'active' citizens allowed to vote in the restricted franchise in the years up to the fall of the monarchy in 1792. This restricted the vote to men over 25 who paid tax equivalent to three days labour—which amounted to about 60 percent of men over 25. They were later dominated by poorer petty bourgeois sans-culottes when the suffrage restrictions were abolished and became the vehicle for their movement. In practice such poorer 'passive' citizens became active in the sections well before the fall of the monarchy. The same evolution took place in the National Guard, initially a weapon of the richer bourgeoisie used against popular disturbances. See Vovelle, op cit, pp186-189.

77 Ibid, p140.

78 Ibid, p142.

79 Under a self denying ordinance proposed by Robespierre no members of the Constituent Assembly were entitled to be deputies in the new assembly. The suffrage was based on the distinction between 'active' and 'passive' citizens (see note 76). An even higher property qualification on those eligible to be elected to the Assembly was introduced.

80 In *L'Ami du Peuple*—both quoted in Vovelle, op cit, p147.

81 Most of the information in this section is from Michael Kennedy's two volume *The Jacobin Clubs in the French Revolution* (Princeton University Press, New Jersey)—*The First Years* (1982) and *The Middle Years* (1988). Apparently a third volume is planned dealing with the later years of the revolution which should be equally valuable.

82 Condorcet's *Essay on the Political Condition of Women* had argued in 1788 for women with property to be allowed to take part in the elections to the Estates General. In late 1790 he published an essay arguing for political rights for women which sparked off widespread debate. Also the Dutch feminist Etta Palm d'Aelders was active in the 'Cercle Sociale des amis de la verité' founded in October 1790, which

published her speeches calling for women's emancipation and circulated them to the provinces.

In February 1791 some Jacobin Clubs admitted women, but the mother Jacobin Club wrote that this 'does not appear to accord to the regime of liberty suitable to the Societies of Friends of the Constitution'. Fédérés (National Guards from the provinces) proposed at the Jacobin Club on 17 August 1792 that women be given the vote but again this was not taken up. Women's auxiliary branches of the clubs began to appear from late 1790, encouraged by men as a way of spreading republican propaganda, especially against the Church. At Dijon, for instance, the women's club forced the male society to send a circular to affiliated clubs urging the creation of women's clubs. At Lille the women's club won the right to attend the male society as a body.

The size of such clubs varied, but they could be large. There were around 400 at the founding meeting in Dijon and, according to contemporaries, 3,500 at one meeting in Bordeaux. Most seem to have ranged from a few tens up to a couple of hundred. Much of the activity of the women's clubs was 'instructional'—reading newspapers and the like. The women's organisations came to play an important role in whipping up patriotic sentiment—making flags, speaking to National Guards and soldiers before they set off to fight. They also played a role in fighting against the counter-revolutionary ideas fostered by the Church. At Grenoble they declared their purpose as 'to rally around the constitution those citizens led astray by fanatical priests'. At Dijon the women's Jacobin Club had a series of clashes with associations of Catholic women—including disrupting masses and the like. In Paris the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women led by Claire Lacombe played an important role in the sans-culottes movement. It closely allied with the enragés, particularly Leclerc and Roux. It held meetings in the library of the main Jacobin Club and played a key role in the campaign for stern measures against speculators, hoarders and so on. It also played a role in preparing the ground for the insurrection of May/June 1793. The club was closed down in the winter of 1793/94 as part of the general attack on the left of the movement by the revolutionary government.

83 I have dwelt on the facts about the Jacobins at some length in view of the arguments put forward by 'revisionist' historians (such as Alfred Cobban, George Taylor and William Doyle) that there was no bourgeois revolution in France in the 18th century. Unfortunately too many of the 'left' critics of these historians, such as Georges Comninel, concede much of their argument. Those who look at the composition of the various national assemblies and complain that you don't find the actual bourgeoisie so there cannot have been a bourgeois revolution fail to understand two things. Firstly, compared to most modern bourgeois parties the actual bourgeoisie was highly prominent in the various assemblies. Secondly, by concentrating solely on the assemblies they miss the real social basis in the localities which the national figures represented or came to represent in the course of struggle.

The revisionists also claim there was little if any difference or friction between the bourgeoisie and the nobility. They have a point, in that there was a real degree of merging of the two under the absolutist state. But they overstate it and miss the fact that there was real subordination of the bourgeoisie within the social structure. This is especially clear when you look down at the base of the movement. There was a real antagonism between the ranks of the bourgeoisie, and especially its lower ranks and the privileged orders—and the participants in the revolution knew it and said so themselves. That lawyers and the like are over represented among the prominent spokesmen of the revolutionaries (another revisionist argument) should not come as a surprise. Professional advocates of causes, keenly aware of the restrictions on 'men of talent' like themselves, they were (and still are) natural spokesmen for bourgeois interests.

The evidence from any serious study of the movement which formed the backbone of the French Revolution leaves no doubt about its class character. Michael

Kennedy's massive study of the Jacobin Clubs is worth quoting on this. He is an anti-Marxist, accusing Marxist historians of 'a kind of intellectual tyranny', and commends revisionist historians such as François Furet. But he concludes: 'Nevertheless my own studies of the clubs have led me to the conclusion that there is much truth in the radical-Marxist view of the Revolution, that class conflict was, indeed, a major determinant' (both quotes from Kennedy, *The Middle Years*, p368).

84 Though 'Maratiste' was usually used at the time, see Bouloiseau, *The Jacobin Republic*, p3.

85 My emphasis. See A Soboul, *A Short History*... p86.

86 See Wright ...*Documents*, p113, for text of Declaration.

87 Guérin, *Class struggles*... p50.

88 Ibid, p6. In this I think Daniel Guérin is correct. Others such as Albert Soboul (see his *Short History of the French Revolution*) think Brissot and his supporters wanted war against France's continental rivals, but not England, as this would involve naval conflict which would disrupt the trade of the Atlantic ports.

89 Wright ...*Documents*, p123.

90 See speeches at the Jacobin Club by Brissot and Robespierre in Wright ...*Documents*, pp114-133.

91 See Vovelle, op cit, p222.

92 Ibid, p224.

93 Ibid, p228.

94 Ibid, p229.

95 See, for example, the Sans-Culottes Paternoster (above p54) and the Decree on the Levee en masse (above p49). Also see the First and Second Propagandist Decrees quoted in Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Nationalism and the French Revolution*, in G Best (ed), *The Permanent Revolution: The French Revolution and its Legacy 1789-1989*, p32—though O'Brien's general argument, need it be said, is right wing drivel.

96 Vovelle, op cit, p230.

97 Bouloiseau, *The Jacobin Republic*, p9.

98 Figures given by Rudé in *The Crowd*... p105.

99 Bouloiseau, *The Jacobin Republic*, p12.

100 E Belfort Bax, *Jean-Paul Marat: The People's Friend*, (Grant Richards, London, 1901), p205.

101 Ibid, p210.

102 The best discussion of the aftermath of 10 August and the September Massacres is in Peter Kropotkin's *The Great French Revolution* (2 Vols, Elephant, 1986), Vol 2, pp302-329.

103 Following 10 August the right to vote was granted to all male French citizens over 21 who had a permanent residence and worked for a living—including domestics. Overnight around four million former 'passives' acquired the vote. The electoral procedure was in stages as on earlier occasions. The actual numbers voting in the election were fairly small due to the flood of volunteers to the front and the general disruption caused by the war. Around 10 percent of those eligible attended the primary assemblies. Sometimes the voting was by secret ballot, but in Paris it was conducted orally and was open to the public at all stages. The Jacobins intervened actively in the elections. They won almost all the positions in Paris, while Feuillants and Brissotins triumphed in the provinces. Some 749 deputies were finally elected to the Convention. Of these it is estimated that 142 were committed Jacobins, 178 Girondins openly opposed to the Jacobins, and the rest sat in the 'marsh'. See Bouloiseau, *The Jacobin Republic*, pp47-49, and A Patrick, *The Men of the First French Republic* (John Hopkins Press, 1972).

104 Recent historians have challenged this interpretation, usually from the right. But even George Rudé in his new book agrees with their argument, seeing the question of 'ideology' and personal rivalry as the central divide between Girondins and

Montagnards. The challenge is based on a detailed examination of the personal backgrounds of Giorondin and Montagnard deputies which allegedly reveals that there was little difference. In fact this is overstated. In general the Girondins do appear to have been more closely connected personally with the class forces referred to in the text (for instance Isnard, one of their leading figures, was a wholesale dealer in oil, a grain importer, owner of a soap factory and a silk mill).

However, the question of personnel in the Convention is entirely secondary. The key fact is that the political conflicts in the Convention can only be understood as developing in response to political and social divisions outside. Political groupings were forced by the pressure of events to define programmes which, if they were to command any real support, had to align themselves with a material force outside the Convention. In other words they had to articulate and express the real interests of a significant social group—a class or part of a class. In this light it is clear that the Girondins increasingly expressed the position of the higher layers of the bourgeoisie. St Just commented that 'the force of circumstances' was responsible for the divergent political policies of rival groups. Yes, and these circumstances were above all the conflict of different social groups in the developing revolution.

105 Danton, though earlier associated with the populist Cordeliers Club, was in effect to the right of the bulk of the Jacobins. His role in August and September in the defence of the revolution gave him real support and influence. He increasingly acted as a rallying point between the Gironde and the Mountain.

106 Bouloiseau, *The Jacobin Republic*, p50.

107 Petition of the *Jardins des Plantes* section to the Convention. See Soboul, *Short History...* pp99-100.

108 I use Terror, with a capital T, to denote the regulated, controlled economy with strict measures against counter-revolutionaries and those who sought to profit at the expense of the defence of the Republic. The use of force was part, a necessary part, of this, but not the whole. The term has a far wider meaning than it has today. Similarly Terrorist is used to describe those who advocated more controls and regulation, and the necessary force to back them up.

109 The French attempted to impose a new order on Belgium, confiscating Church property, abolishing tithes and seigneurial dues. But this was very different from a revolution and, as it was overseen by French comissioners, meant the Belgians were at best lukewarm about their new found freedom—though not desiring a return to Austrian control. No doubt the intention of the French to extract serious amounts of loot from the pockets of the Belgians to finance the occupying army etc played a role here too.

110 Rudé, *The French Revolution*, p82.

111 And implicated bourgeois leaders such as Barnave. This was to cost him his head.

112 Cowie ...*Documents and Debates*, p92. Robespierre's excellent speech in particular throws back at the right their refusal to support his earlier proposal to abolish the death penalty for ordinary crime yet now wanting to spare the king.

113 See Bouloiseau, *The Jacobin Republic*, p57.

114 The rhythm of military operation was still dictated by the seasons. Poor transport and the like meant that winter operations were all but impossible. This had a significant impact on the timing of the political crises of the revolution as the renewed demands of the war after the winter combined with the worst time of the year for grain supplies.

115 All these price rises were exacerbated by the scarcity in the markets caused by contracts and requisitions to supply the army and navy—the latter pushed up the price of firewood, essential for cooking.

116 The price was fixed at 50 percent above pre-revolutionary level, but as most wages had doubled by then it was of real benefit. The Convention hesitated to follow the example of the commune on a national scale partly out of hostility to any economic controls but also because of the financial scale of the operation. Many towns did

embark on similar schemes long before the General Maximum was imposed later in the year.

117 Lefebvre, *The French Revolution* (2 vols) (Columbia University Press, New York, 1964), vol 2, p48.
118 G Rudé, *The French Revolution*, p85.
119 R Cobb, *The People's Armies*, (Yale University Press, London, 1987), p21.
120 Wright ...*Documents*, pp155-161, for text of Robespierre's declaration.
121 Bouloiseau, *The Jacobin Republic*, p66.
122 Lefebvre, op cit, p52.
123 Wright ...*Documents*, pp165-167, for Guadet's speech.
124 Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution*, p418.
125 Bouloiseau, *The Jacobin Republic*, p66.
126 See Wright, *The French Revolution*... pp173-180, for text of Constitution.
127 As with much of the detail of the peasant movement during the revolution, there is real disagreement on this. Partly this stems from lack of knowledge—by its nature it is difficult to penetrate the motives of a rural, largely illiterate movement. Historians such as Georges Lefebvre stress the attachment of peasants in the French Revolution to collective rights. Others such as the Russian historian Anatoli Ado emphasise partial satisfaction of the land hunger of small peasants by the revolution and argue that this turned them into a class of embryonic capitalists.

Soboul adopted this view towards the end of his life, seeing these peasants, rather than large bourgeois landowners, as pushing agrarian capitalism forward. I think both views contain elements of truth—the peasantry was internally divided and like the urban sans-culottes had a contradictory ideology—wanting individual property *and* collective rights over the property of their well to do neighbours. But Lefebvre's arguments I find particularly strong. The defence of collective rights was successfully waged and enshrined in the Rural Code of September 1791. Despite many attempts at reform, the basic provision for collective grazing remains in force to this day. See Jones, *The Peasantry*..., pp124-166, for detailed discussion of these points.

128 The 12 members of the Committee who ruled in the Year II were remarkably young. Ten of them were under 40. Robespierre was 31 at the beginning of the revolution, while St Just was only 22.
129 Lefebvre, op cit, p67. Though Cambon was hated for the forced loans, he correctly understood that they tied the better off bourgeoisie to the Republic—if it fell who would pay their money back? In proposing the measure he made this clear: 'You are rich... I want to bind you to the revolution whether you like it or not; I want you to lend your wealth to the Republic' (quoted in Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution*, p431).
130 A Taylor, *Glimpses of the Great Jacobins*, (Cattell, London, 1882), p66.
131 A Soboul, *The Parisian Sans-Culottes and the French Revolution, 1793-4* (Oxford University Press, 1964), for the definitive account of this movement.
132 Wright ...*Documents*, pp188-189, for Law of Suspects.
133 Ibid, pp190-192, for full details. The Maximum applied to a range of goods including meat, soap, salt, wood, coal, candles, sugar, tobacco and 'the raw materials used for manufacture'. A Food Commission was set up to oversee and enforce it. Though it was partly successful, it suffered many shortcomings. In particular transport costs were ignored and the scales tended to favour the producer and hit small retailers, which did not go down well with large chunks of the sans-culotterie. The Maximum was amended in Germinal, Year II (March, 1794) by adding profit margins and other 'costs' to the 'general' prices.
134 Ibid, p197.
135 The rebellion smouldered on in the Vendée, and in Brittany the counter-revolutionary Chouans operated right down to Napoleon's rise to power. The best insight into this guerilla war is Balzac's novel, *The Chouans*. The crushing of the counter-revolution in the Vendée is becoming the centrepiece of a right wing attack on

the whole revolution as the bicentenary approaches. The tone is summed up by Pierre Chaunu, a leading French historian with regular access to the columns of the right wing paper *Figaro* and French TV. He argues that the Jacobins mark 'the foundation of a long and bloody sequence which runs from the genocide of the French Catholic west to the Soviet Gulag, the ravages of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the autogenocide of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia'. He now claims that the 'Genocide' in the Vendée 'was proportionately more effective than the Holocaust' (*Newsweek* magazine, 20 February 1989, p15). For a sensible discussion of the Vendée and a rebuttal of much of this right wing nonsense see 'Genocide and the Bicentenary: The French Revolution and the Revenge of the Vendée' by Hugh Gough in *The Historical Journal*, 30, 4 (1987), pp977-988.

136 Richard Cobb's *The People's Armies* (Yale University Press, London, 1987) is the definitive account of these armies.

137 Rudé, *The French Revolution*, p98.

138 In a letter to Victor Adler quoted in Rudé, *The French Revolution*, p73.

139 G Lefebvre, *The French Revolution*, vol 2, p38.

140 Bouloiseau, *The Jacobin Republic*, p125.

141 Ibid, p123.

142 Cowie, op cit, p106.

143 Bouloiseau, op cit, p145.

144 Ibid, p125.

145 Lefebvre, *The French Revolution*, p98.

146 Bouloiseau, *The Jacobin Republic*, p148.

147 Lefebvre, op cit, p102.

148 Bouloiseau, op cit, p144.

149 Ibid, p129, and Lefebvre, op cit, p96.

150 Bouloiseau, op cit, p163.

151 Ibid, p167.

152 See R Price, *An Economic History of Modern France 1730-1914*, (Macmillan, London, 1981), pp6-8.

153 Figures on the Terror from Lefebvre, op cit, pp119, 120, 136.

154 Despite the political problems with his whole approach Guérin's *Class Struggles...* is the best account of the details of this offensive against the popular movement.

155 The metric system of weights and measures we use today was introduced by the French Revolutionaries. They also planned to change the clock to a metric system—with the hours divided into 100 'minutes' and so on, but the revolutionary government did not survive long enough. Other measures were enacted in the autumn of 1793 to underline the end of the old order of privileges and deference. These included the compulsory use of the familiar 'tu' instead of the more formal 'vous' even in official documents.

156 Cowie, op cit, p98.

157 Lefebvre, op cit, p80.

158 Bouloiseau, op cit, p115.

159 Ibid, p192.

160 Soboul, *A Short History...* p111.

161 Ibid, p115.

162 Bouloiseau, op cit, p194.

163 Ibid, p150.

164 Guérin, *Class Struggles...* p241.

165 Bouloiseau, op cit, p188.

166 See Cowie, op cit, p111. The Great Terror was concentrated almost entirely in Paris. Elsewhere the period is not distinguishable from the rest of the Terror. And the targets in Paris are shown by the fact that the proportion of victims from the bourgeoisie doubled while that of nobles quadrupled in this period. See Bouloiseau, op cit, p211.

167 L Kelly, *Women of the French Revolution* (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1987), p145.

168 Robespierre seems to have recognised this and resigned himself to defeat. In his last speech to the Jacobins he said, 'The speech you have just heard is my last will and testament, I saw today that the league of the wicked is so powerful that I cannot hope to escape it. I submit without regret, I leave you my memory: it will be dear to you and you will defend it' (Guérin, *Class Struggles...*, p262). The argument that he was plotting to become a dictator and was directing the excesses of the Great Terror is, for instance, the view of some on the left such as Guérin and Belfort Bax as well as many right wing historians. It is an entirely unconvincing argument. Robespierre appears to have been the *only* person in the Convention to object to the excesses at the time (speech at Jacobin Club, 23 Messidor [11 July]). And he did not play any direct role in the government for almost six weeks before his downfall, and so on. This is not to paint a rosy picture of Robespierre—he was able to use the most ruthless methods when necessary—simply to reject the argument that the pre-Thermidor period can be understood in terms of a plot to set up a dictatorship by Robespierre (with St Just and Couthon). Equally ludicrous as an explanation is Guérin's 'Victory made him [Robespierre] bad tempered, afraid that somebody else might benefit from it'! (*Class Struggles...* p253.)

169 Text of Robespierre's last speech to the Convention, Wright, op cit, pp217-224.

170 Taylor, op cit, p107.

171 Ten sections rallied to the Robespierrists, 18 to the Convention, and the rest vacillated. But even in the pro-Jacobin sections only small numbers responded. See Soboul, *A Short History...* p118.

172 Bouloiseau, op cit, p224.

173 This period is one of amazing complexity, though usually, including here, it is treated as of only secondary importance, which is unfortunate. In particular it is in this period that the revolution had its greatest impact abroad through the war moving from the defensive to the offensive— ranging from Italy and Germany to an attempted invasion of Ireland. Though the Directory was internally reactionary, it was forced in its expansive wars to uproot aspects of the old order in a string of countries across Europe to achieve its goals. This process was continued under Bonaparte. Often this was done with the support of local 'patriots' (ie bourgeois revolutionaries) though they were strictly subordinated to the aims of the French and often suppressed when their national ambitions came into conflict with French plans. Republics were created such as the Cisalpine, Roman and Parthenopean in Italy or the Batavian Republic in Holland. I omit entirely any discussion of this. It is covered well in G Lefebvre's *The French Revolution* (Vol 2)—still the best account—and D Woronoff's *The Thermidorean Regime and the Directory*.

174 See, for instance, the account by A Hamilton Rowan in Cowie, op cit, pp111-112.

175 D Woronoff, op cit (Cambridge University Press, 1984), p1.

176 A Soboul, *A Short History...* p98.

177 Six former Montagnard deputies led by Soubrany spoke up in support of the demonstrators. They were later arrested and committed suicide or were executed.

178 D Woronoff, op cit, p18.

179 The term gradually acquired a wider political meaning during the revolution and came to denote all those who supported direct democracy and the utopian dream of a republic of small property owners regardless of whether they were actually petty bourgeois sans-culottes.

180 G Lefebvre, op cit (vol 2), p145.

181 D Woronoff, op cit, p23.

182 G Rudé, *The French Revolution*, p118.

183 A Soboul, *A Short History...* pp127-128.

184 Ibid, p132.

185 Ibid, p138.

186 Manifesto of the Plebians published in *Le Tribun du Peuple*, 9 Frimaire, Year IV

(30 November, 1795), quoted in ibid, p138.

187 Guérin, *Class Struggles...* p288.

188 This is clear from lists of subscribers to *Le Tribun du Peuple* and of 'patriots capable of taking command' discovered after the Conspiracy was smashed. See Woronoff, op cit, p49.

189 The question of private property was often fudged and the 'Constitution of 1793' elevated to major importance. See the documents in Wright, op cit, pp231-235.

190 The long delay was due to the fact that one of the leaders of the conspiracy was Drouet, a member of the Council of Five Hundred. This meant a lengthy constitutional procedure to allow the trial to proceed without raising the spectre of the purging of the Convention of the Year II. This Drouet was the village postmaster who had foiled the king's attempted flight at Varennes in 1791. He survived his trial and re-emerged as the leader of a Jacobin revival shortly before Bonaparte's coup in 1799. Buonarotti kept Babeuf's ideas alive and they would eventually be adapted by Blanqui in the 19th century.

191 Woronoff, op cit, p188.

192 The coup is usually referred to as taking place on 18 Brumaire, though in fact it took place on the 19th.

193 G Rudé, *The French Revolution*, p125.

194 Ibid, p126.

195 Lefebvre, *The French Revolution*, vol 2, p307.

196 Rudé, *The French Revolution*, p138. Similar concerns meant that he instructed his army not to interfere with Muslim religious practices in Egypt. He once said, 'If I were governing Jews I would restore the Temple of Solomon.' (Rudé, p139.)

197 Ibid, p139.

198 That this is possible—ie for a regime to be internally reactionary yet externally progressive—is a feature of the bourgeois revolution. It is an impossibility in the case of a socialist revolution.

199 See Trotsky, *Our political tasks* (New Park, London, nd), Appendix on 'Jacobinism and Social Democracy' pp121-128, for this and Trotsky's attack on Lenin's view.

200 Guérin, op cit, p287.

201 For the 'orthodox' tradition see the various works by Lefebvre, Soboul and Rudé referred to throughout. Rudé's *The French Revolution*, pp12-24, gives a useful summary of the changing views of historians.

202 See for these 'Revolution Denied' by John Rees in *Socialist Worker Review* (Issue 103, November 1987) and Brian Manning, 'Class and Revolution in Seventeenth Century England', in *International Socialism*, Issue 38. There are also important differences stemming essentially from the fact that France is a republic and most mainstream political currents in France derive their legitimacy from the revolution (though different phases of the revolution).

203 I am not accusing people like Lefebvre of being Stalinists! Rather the intellectual climate they operated in was permeated with ideas derived from Stalinist distortions of Marxism.

204 The work of recent French historians, in particular M Vovelle and M Bouloiseau, goes some way towards overcoming the weaknesses in the orthodox account. See works referred to throughout.

205 See A Cobban, *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 1965), pp172, 173, for this conclusion.

206 W Doyle's *Origins of the French Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1980) is probably the best summary of the revisionist case. G Comninel, *Rethinking the French Revolution: Marxism and the Revisionist Challenge* (Verso, London, 1987), despite his, in my opinion, badly mistaken conclusions provides a good summary of the various revisionist arguments and some of the attempts to reply. François Furet is easily the most important and influential of those attacking the Marxist view. See for instance his *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge University

Press, 1981). He has recently published two major new books which look set to dominate discussions during the bicentenary, but as yet I have not seen them.

207 Comninel, op cit. He ends up attacking Marx for being fooled by bourgeois liberal ideology and suggesting that the concept of a bourgeois revolution in France should either 'refer to 1871'(!) or 'it may be better simply to drop the idea of bourgeois revolution once and for all' (p205).

208 Ibid, p3.

209 Ibid, p23.

210 Miliband, 'Barnave...' p25.

211 The revisionists often tax Marxism with arguing that the French bourgeois revolution was an inevitable stage in the rise of capitalism. This is nonsense. It *was* an important part of that development, but history was, and is, made by human beings. Their scope for action, the possibilities, are circumscribed by objective circumstances but they *make* history by action within those limits. So Marxists will have no difficulty in agreeing with the revisionist William Doyle that the French Revolution 'was neither inevitable nor predictable. What was inevitable was the breakdown of the old order' (Doyle, op cit, p210). It is of course *possible* that this breakdown could have been resolved differently. But we are concerned with understanding *real* history with a view to making real history.

212 Whose general position is that what matters are long term changes—*'la longue durée'*—and not 'events'. Of course there is much of value in stressing the importance of long-term structural shifts in history, but not at the price of dismissing the importance of conscious human action, political battles, revolutions and so on.

213 He has the merit of writing well and has also made a serious study of Marx's writings on, and attitude to, the French Revolution (*Marx et La Révolution Française* [with Lucien Calvié] Flammarion, Paris, 1986). He has a particularly sharp understanding of the way Stalinism and the politics of the Popular Front influenced the 'orthodox account'.

214 Furet, *Interpreting...* p129.

215 Interview in the *International Herald Tribune*, 6 January 1989.

216 Ibid.

217 Which is why the conclusion of George Rudé's (otherwise quite good) new book, *The French Revolution*—'Has it not rather become a page from a history book, or a museum piece to be safely locked away or forgotten until the next National Day?'—(p183) is wrong.

218 quoted in Comninel, op cit, p43.

219 Ibid, p46.

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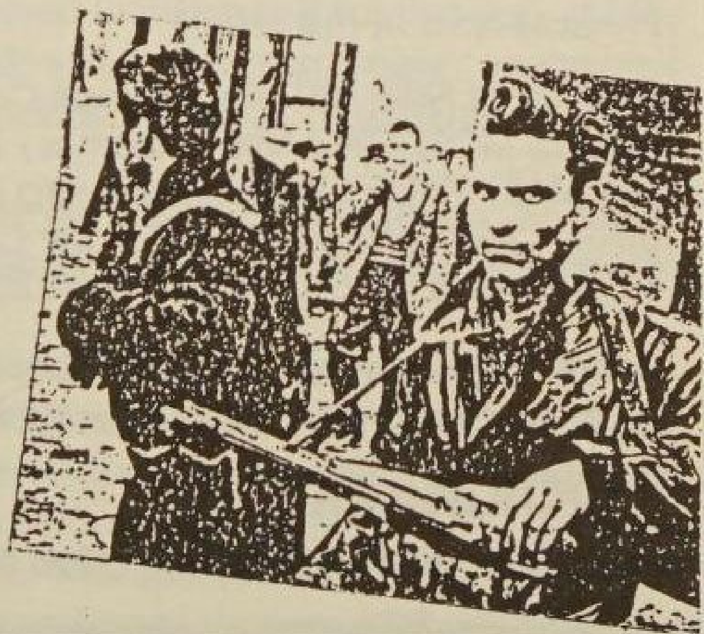

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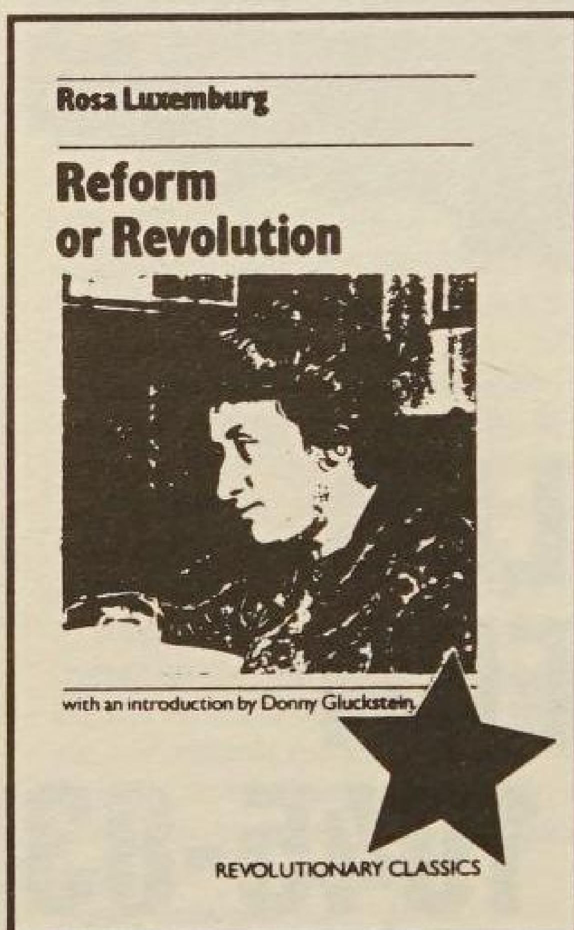

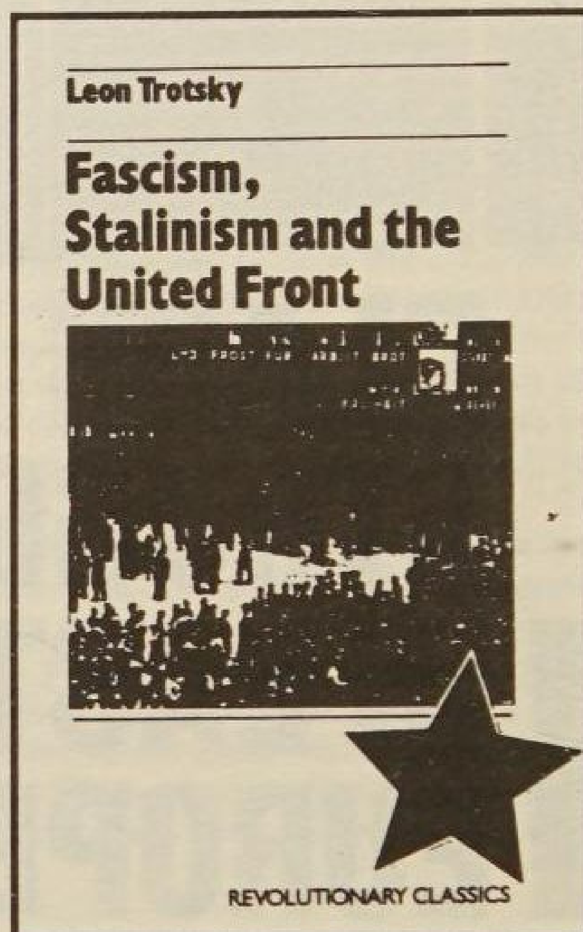

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