A SHORT HISTORY OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION 1789-1799

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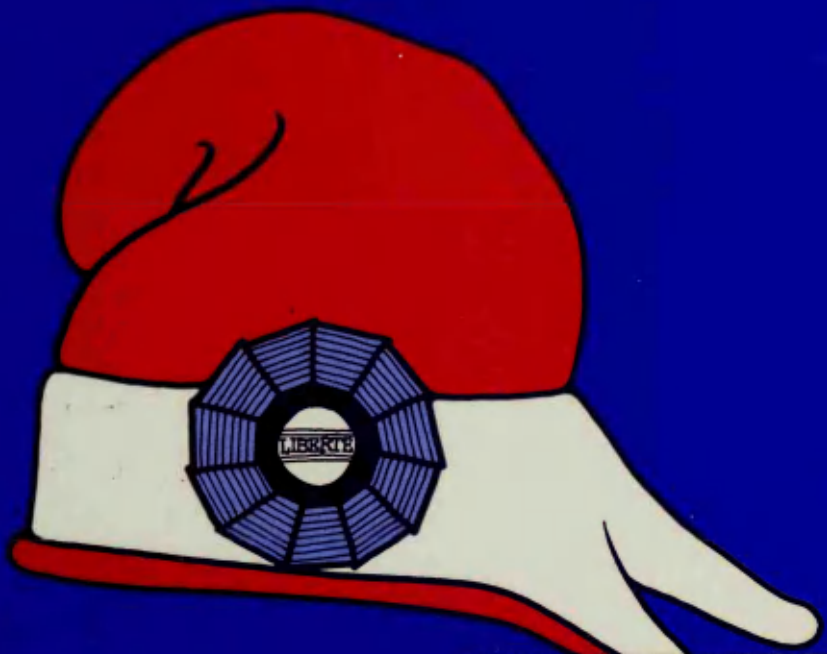

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Albert Soboul

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Translator's Preface

Albert Soboul has held the Chair of the History of the French Revolution at the Sorbonne since 1967, a position formerly occupied by such illustrious figures as Georges Lefebvre, Albert Mathiez and Alphonse Aulard. Soboul may therefore be considered one of the most eminent historians of the French Revolution working in the present generation, and he is probably the leading Marxist scholar in the field today. He has written extensively on the history of the Revolution, and on the problems of its historiography: his most important single contribution is his brilliant monograph on the Parisian Sans-Culottes in the Year II, published in 1958. In addition to this he has produced a number of other specialized studies, as well as several general histories of the Revolution, and he is editor of the leading journal devoted to French revolutionary studies. Of late his work has focused on the neglected topic of the role of the peasantry during the Revolution, and on the continual groundswell of rural insurrection that punctuated its history.

Until recently Soboul's work was known to English-speaking students only through a translation of part of

his study of the Sans-Culottes, which appeared in 1964. Then in 1975 his *Précis d'histoire de la Révolution Française* was translated under the title of *The French Revolution 1787–1799* (New York: Vintage Books). The work translated here may be considered in some ways a shorter version of the *Précis,* but while it covers the same period it omits much of the detail that enriches the larger work, and it stresses the wider implications of the French Revolution for the rest of Europe and for the world at large. It should be read as an analytical essay rather than as a narrative of events: it has a special value in that it presents a convenient synopsis of Soboul's interpretation of the history of the Revolution, centering on its most crucial developments. Since so much current historiographical debate on the French Revolution concerns Soboul's work, and since he challenges many of the assumptions that dominate French revolutionary studies in the English-speaking world, I feel that this translation will be useful to students of the period, for it offers a concise summary of Soboul's views to a wider public.

Soboul began his career as a pupil of Georges Lefebvre, the *doyen* of French revolutionary historians in his own generation. Although their views diverge on some crucial points, Soboul pays constant tribute to his master's influence, which is evident throughout his work; in fact he sees himself as being in a sense the continuer of that tradition of French revolutionary historiography in which Lefebvre holds a central place. Lefebvre's work embraced the whole field of French revolutionary studies, and his contribution was above

all to enrich our understanding of the social forces lying behind the apparent confusion and flux of political events. In his researches he sought always to illuminate the interaction of social classes and groups that ultimately decided the direction of political development; in other words, he set out to write the history of the Revolution not merely in political and constitutional terms, or as the tale of the heroic deeds of its great leaders, as had generally been done up to then, but as the outcome of massive social pressures and concerted popular action. Lefebvre really inaugurates what we may term the scientific study of the Revolution "from below," and in his work, for the first time, the masses move to center stage. Whereas before even sympathetic historians like Michelet had treated the popular movement as at best a shadowy abstraction, Lefebvre anatomized it and revealed the multiplicity of often conflicting forces that it comprised. The new direction that he was to impart to the study of the French Revolution emerged clearly in his first major work, the classic account of the peasantry of the Nord, published in 1924. In it he demonstrated that the peasant population, far from being the undifferentiated mass that most earlier writers had assumed, was actually split by economic interests and social aspirations into a number of disparate groups, each with its own well-defined political objectives.

Lefebvre went on to analyze the collective psychology underlying mass action in his careful reconstruction of the Great Fear—the panic that swept rural France in the turbulent summer of 1789. In this and a host of other

studies of the popular movement, Lefebvre explained and documented what had only been known sketchily before, so that since his time it has been impossible to write the history of the French Revolution without taking account of deep-seated social forces and the political action of the masses. This is the historiographical tradition that Soboul has continued and developed, along with the new generation of historians, some of them also former students of Lefebvre's, like George Rudé and Richard Cobb. Soboul's investigation of the Parisian Sans-Culottes—the mass movement that played a decisive role in the crucial years 1793–94; Rudé's detailed studies of the composition and objectives of the Parisian crowd during the Revolution; and Cobb's account of the "Revolutionary Armies" or institutionalized vanguard of the popular movement; all these have contributed materially to enhance and broaden the historiographical tradition that stems from Lefebvre. Their work is based on new source materials, hitherto largely unexplored, such as the police archives or the records of the Paris Sections (or districts) which became the institutional base for the popular movement, and studies like these open a new perspective that is completely altering our understanding of the Revolution.

The interpretation that Soboul offers here is essentially Marxist, as he makes clear from his very first sentence. He maintains that the French Revolution can only be understood and explained as a class struggle, in which the bourgeoisie, backed by the still inchoate force of the lower classes, wrested power from the aristocracy,

overthrew the old order, and restructured the state to fit its own interests; these events in turn opened the way for the final triumph of mature industrial capitalism in the next century. For Soboul, class analysis is the only satisfactory way to interpret the enormous complexity of the French Revolution and to comprehend the movement as a whole, rather than as a series of disconnected events without real meaning. His account of the intricate relationship between the different social classes and sub-groups clearly reveals the advantages to be gained from such an approach, and shows that the conception of the Revolution as class conflict is far more than the simplistic device that its critics claim it to be, a device incapable of doing justice to the rich variety of historical material that goes to form the Revolution. Soboul argues that the Revolution was more than just a straightforward conflict between the old dominant force of the aristocracy and the emergent power of the bourgeoisie, borne upward by the expansion of trade and industry: things were more complicated than that. At certain crucial moments the masses intervened, under the pressure of famine and dire economic necessity, or impelled by their own vision of social and economic justice. Their action was decisive in bringing down the Old Regime and assuring the final victory of the bourgeoisie. The peasant revolution of the summer of 1789, and the uprisings of the Parisian masses in 1789, in 1792, and again in 1793–94, tipped the balance of forces against the government and the aristocracy, and marked turning points in the course of the Revolution. Without this mass support it is unlikely

that the bourgeoisie could have achieved its goals and destroyed the old order.

The part played by the peasants, workers and artisans in the struggle between bourgeois and aristocrats thus adds an extra dimension of complexity to the picture of the Revolution as a class conflict, but Soboul's analysis of the problem goes a stage beyond this, in order to expose the rifts and divergencies within each class. He shows that the bourgeoisie cannot be regarded as a simple monolithic entity, united in pursuit of its goals, but rather as a class divided within itself, split by conflicting economic interests into a series of groups and parties each with its own political program. Different segments of the bourgeois class thus came to adopt different political stances, ranging from compromise with the old order to outright hostility towards it, and open alliance with the popular movement. Nor can the popular movement be seen as a single homogeneous force. The interests of the peasants and urban workers often clashed, while within both these general categories a fundamental line of cleavage separated the more substantial farmers and artisans from the mass of propertyless farmhands and journeymen. Out of this economic disunity arose the fundamental weakness of the popular movement, its inability to define a common social and political program, which led in the end to its collapse. For Soboul, therefore, the course of the Revolution and its final outcome—the defeat of the aristocracy, the triumph of the bourgeoisie, the fragmentation and subjugation of the popular movement—are the result of a complex interplay taking place

simultaneously on many levels between the social classes and the groups that composed them, each with its own strengths, weaknesses and social aspirations.

As Soboul makes plain in his concluding chapter, he believes that this interpretation of the French Revolution is the only one that will bear critical scrutiny. Here he takes issue—as he has elsewhere on numerous occasions—with what he regards as revisionist attempts to deny or play down the significance of class conflict in favor of alternative interpretations. He places his own work within a tradition that he has named "the classical historiography of the French Revolution," which he traces from its founders in the mid-nineteenth century, Michelet and de Tocqueville, through the work of Jaurès, Aulard and Mathiez, to that of Lefebvre and his school. The thread of continuity uniting all these different historians, according to Soboul, is their common espousal of a social interpretation of the Revolution, however divergent their individual terms of reference may be. Michelet and de Tocqueville, for instance, differed in their political views and their analyses of the causes of the Revolution; but they both sought those causes in the underlying transformations of society that altered the balance between classes and so made political change inescapable. In the same way, Aulard and Mathiez disagreed on many points, but both strove to penetrate below the surface of political events in order to come to grips with the social factors that explained them. Within "the classical historiography of the French Revolution," each successive generation of historians has added fresh insights and

new meaning, deriving from its own historical experience, to the cumulative tradition: fresh perspectives constantly broaden and deepen our understanding of the social forces at work in the Revolution. Michelet's views were conditioned by the political struggles of the times in which he lived, and especially by the Revolution of 1848; Mathiez, writing during the First World War, was the first to comprehend the full impact of wartime economic strain and government regulation on the course of political events; Lefebvre and his followers were made conscious of the part that the masses played in the Revolution by the advent of mass political movements in our own century.

This is the tradition of French revolutionary historiography that commands Soboul's allegiance; as he proudly acknowledges, his own interpretation of the Revolution as a social movement follows in a direct line from it. Echoes of its influence can be detected throughout the work translated here, when the author refers to the work of his predecessors, and builds on their conclusions to create a new interpretation of his own, or when he vigorously defends his master Lefebvre against those critics who have tried to undermine the validity of his work. Soboul's conscious espousal of a tradition of interpretation that accords primary importance to social factors gives the present essay a particular value. The work is at once an account of the social conflicts that decided the course of the Revolution, a commentary on French revolutionary historiography, and a vindication of the author's interpretation against his critics. As such, it will be of interest to all those

students of the period whose acquaintance with Soboul's work has hitherto of necessity been largely at secondhand.

Since this work was originally intended for an audience familiar with the main events and personalities of the French Revolution, the author's references to these are in some cases briefer than English-speaking readers might wish. I have therefore added a chronological table at the beginning of the work, and appended footnotes to the text where further explanation seemed to be called for. In most cases I have suppressed the author's footnotes, save where they make reference to works available in English. I have also added a short bibliography of important recent works on the French Revolution available in English; for his help in compiling this, I must record my debt of thanks to Mr. Norman Mandelbaum.

Chronology of Principal Events

1787

Feb. 22-May 12	Assembly of the Notables
April 8	Calonne dismissed: replaced by Brienne

1788

May-Sept.	Abortive reform of Parlements: government restricts their powers, but then restores them
June 7	"Day of the Tiles" at Grenoble: riot in support of Parlement
July 21	The Estates of Dauphiné meet at Vizille and demand reform
August 8	Government orders the Estates General to meet next year
August 25	Necker becomes Controller-General of Finance

1789

March onward	Rural and urban unrest increases, while elections for the Estates General take place
April 27	Riot in the Faubourg St.-Antoine (Paris) destroys Réveillon's wallpaper works

May 5	Opening of the *Estates General*
June 17	The Third Estate assumes the title of *National Assembly*
June 20	Oath of the Tennis Court
June 27	Louis XVI gives in to the Third Estate's demands and orders all three Estates to deliberate together
July 9	National Assembly proclaims itself the *Constituent Assembly*
July 11	Dismissal of Necker: this leads to riots in Paris
July 14	Fall of the Bastille
	Emigration of nobles begins. Rural revolts gather momentum. National Guard formed. Paris Commune set up, and other municipalities revolutionized
July 20-Aug. 6	The Great Fear
July 22	Lynching of Bertier de Sauvigny and Foulon de Doué
August 4	Constituent Assembly votes to abolish feudalism
August 26	Assembly votes the Declaration of the Rights of Man
September 10	Assembly votes against a Second Chamber of the Legislature, but accepts a suspensive veto for the king
October 5-6	The Parisian women march on Versailles: Louis XVI and the court are installed at the Tuileries in Paris
October 12	Assembly moves to Paris from Versailles
October 29	Assembly votes to establish constitutional distinction between "active" and "passive" citizens
November 2	Church lands nationalized

November 29	First "Federation" takes place at Valence
December 14	Creation of *assignats,* secured on national lands
December 22	Local government reform: Departments established

1790

March 15	Decree of the Assembly laying down conditions for redemption of feudal rights
April	Formation of Cordeliers Club
May 21	Paris municipal government reorganized into Sections
July 12	Civil Constitution of Clergy voted by the Assembly
July 14	Festival of Federation at Paris, presided by Lafayette
August	Mutiny and repression of garrison at Nancy
October 28	Assembly debates question of German princes' lands in Alsace
November 27	Decree ordering clergy to swear loyalty to Civil Constitution

1791

March-April	Papal Brief and Bull condemning Civil Constitution of the Clergy
March 2	D'Allarde law abolishing guilds
June 14	Le Chapelier law outlawing unions and strikes
June 20-21	The Flight to Varennes: Louix XVI tries to flee the country. Assembly suspends him, but then votes to reinstate him on condition that he accept the Constitution

July 16 Foundation of Feuillants Club: rallying-point for moderates

July 17 Massacre of the Champ de Mars: troops led by Lafayette fire on crowd of Republican sympathizers. This is followed by the "Tricolor Terror" directed against the democratic movement

August 27 Assembly votes to raise property qualification for the franchise

Declaration of Pillnitz issued by Emperor Leopold II and King Frederick William II of Prussia, indicating their readiness to intervene in France if other sovereigns would support them

Sept. 12 Avignon annexed to France

Sept. 14 Louis XVI swears to uphold the Constitution

Sept. 30 End of the Constituent Assembly: it is replaced by the *Legislative Assembly*

Nov. 11 Louis XVI vetoes two decrees of the Assembly against the émigrés

Dec. 9 Ministry formed by leaders of the Feuillants

1792

January onward Mounting unrest caused by rising food prices, punctuated by counter-revolutionary uprisings in some places

March 3 Murder of Simoneau, mayor of Étampes, during food riot

March 15 Ministry formed by Girondins

April 20 Declaration of war against Emperor Francis II. French armies soon begin to suffer reverses

April 24 Rouget de Lisle composes *La Marseillaise*

June 13	Girondin ministry dismissed: Feuillants reappointed
June 20	Demonstrations against Louis XVI at Paris: the crowd invades the Tuileries
June 27-29	Lafayette tries to close the Jacobin Club and overawe the Assembly
July 11	Assembly votes "the fatherland in danger." Demands grow for the removal of the king
July 25	Manifesto issued by the duke of Brunswick, commanding the allied armies, threatening total destruction of Paris
August 3	47 out of the 48 Paris Sections vote for abolition of the monarchy
August 10	Uprising at Paris overthrows the monarchy. National Convention is summoned. The Sections purge the Paris Commune. Dismissed Girondin ministers reinstated
August 14	Lafayette flees after trying to persuade his army to march on Paris
August 17	Establishment of the Extraordinary Tribunal to judge counter-revolutionaries
Aug.-early Sept.	A series of defeats leaves France in extreme danger of invasion
Sept. 2-6	Massacre of prisoners in Paris: the "September Massacres"
Sept. 20	French victory at Valmy averts threat of invasion. *Convention* meets
Sept. 21	Convention votes to abolish the monarchy: Year I of the Republic begins
Nov. 27	Annexation of Savoy by France
Dec. 11	Louis XVI placed on trial before the Convention

1793

January 21	Execution of Louis XVI
February 1	Declaration of war against Britain and Holland
February 24	Decree ordering levy of 300,000 men for the army
Feb. 25-26	Food riots in Paris
March 7	Declaration of war against Spain
March 9-10	Riots at Paris against Girondin government
March 10	Outbreak of rebellion in the Vendée
March 18	French defeat at Neerwinden: General Dumouriez conspires with Austrians, then goes over to them (April 5)
April 5	Establishment of Committee of Public Safety. Convention also begins to send out Representatives on Mission
May 4	Decree empowering Department administrations to regulate grain prices
May 29	Outbreak of counter-revolutionary revolt at Lyon
May 31-June 2	Parisian uprising, leading to overthrow of Girondins and assumption of power by Montagnards
June 7 onward	"Federalist" revolts in Normandy, at Bordeaux and elsewhere
June 24	Convention votes a new Constitution and a new Declaration of the Rights of Man
July 13	Murder of Marat
July 17	Convention abolishes feudal rights without compensation
July-August	Series of defeats on northern frontier renews threat of invasion
July 26	Decree authorizing death penalty for hoarders and speculators in grain

July 27	Robespierre elected to Committee of Public Safety
August 23	Decree ordering the *levée en masse* (full conscription)
August 29	Counter-revolutionaries at Toulon hand the city over to the English
Sept. 4-5	Popular uprising at Paris: the Convention makes the Terror "the order of the day"
Sept. 11	Establishment of a national maximum price for grain
Sept. 17	Convention votes the Law of Suspects
Sept. 29	National maximums fixed for prices and wages
October 5	Convention adopts the revolutionary calendar

Year II

October 9/ 18 Vendémiaire	Suppression of revolt at Lyon
October 10/ 19 Vendémiaire	On St.-Just's motion, government is voted "revolutionary until peace"
October 16/ 25 Vendémiaire	French victory at Wattignies
October 24-31/ 3-10 Brumaire	Trial and execution of Girondin leaders
Oct.-Nov.	De-Christianization movement begins
November 21/ 1 Frimaire	Robespierre denounces de-Christianization
December 4/ 14 Frimaire	Decree establishing the Revolutionary Government
December 12/ 22 Frimaire	Defeat of Vendée rebels at Le Mans
December 19/ 29 Frimaire	Recovery of Toulon

1794

February 4/ 16 Pluviôse	Convention abolishes slavery in French colonies
February 26/ 8 Ventôse	"Ventôse decrees" to aid "needy" patriots"
March 3/ 13 Ventôse	
March 4/ 14 Ventôse	Abortive revolt by Cordeliers Club against the Revolutionary Government, followed by execution of Cordeliers' leaders (March 24/4 Germinal)
March 30/ 10 Germinal	Arrest of Danton and his supporters
April 1/ 12 Germinal	Provisional Executive Council replaced by Commissions dependent on Committee of Public Safety
April 5/ 16 Germinal	Execution of Danton and his supporters
May 7/ 18 Floréal	Robespierre institutes Cult of the Supreme Being
May 22-23/ 3-4 Prairial	Assassination attempts against Robespierre and Collot d'Herbois
June 10/ 22 Prairial	Great Terror Law: Revolutionary Tribunal procedure streamlined
June 26/ 8 Messidor	French victory at Fleurus opens way for conquest of Belgium
July 23/ 5 Thermidor	Paris Commune fixes maximum levels for wages
July 27/ 9 Thermidor	Fall of Robespierre and his supporters
July 28/ 10 Thermidor	Execution of Robespierre and his supporters, after failure of insurrection by Paris Commune. "Thermidorian Reaction" sets in

July 30/ 12 Thermidor	Committee of Public Safety reorganized. Other changes in the Revolutionary Government follow

Year III

Nov. 19/ 29 Brumaire	Jacobin Club closed by government
December 24/ 4 Nivôse	Decree abolishing price regulation
Dec. 1794- Jan. 1795	French conquest of Holland

1795

April 1/ 12 Germinal	Attempted anti-government insurrection at Paris
April 6/ 17 Germinal	Peace of Basel between France and Prussia
May 16/ 27 Floréal	Peace of The Hague between France and Holland
May 20-22/ 1-3 Prairial	Last great popular uprising at Paris defeated by government forces
July 22/ 4 Thermidor	Peace of Basel between France and Spain
August 22/ 5 Fructidor	Convention votes Constitution of Year III
August 30/ 13 Fructidor	"Decree of Two-Thirds" voted by outgoing Convention

Year IV

October 5/ 13 Vendémiaire	Abortive royalist revolt at Paris, suppressed by Napoleon
October 26/ 4 Brumaire	Closure of the Convention: replaced by the *Directory*

November 7/ 16 Brumaire	Opening of Pantheon Club: focus of left-wing opposition
	1796
February 19/ 30 Pluviôse	End of issue of *assignats*
March 18/ 28 Ventôse	Government issues land bonds to replace *assignats*. Rampant inflation
April	Napoleon begins his victorious campaign in Italy against the Austrians
May 10/ 21 Floréal	Arrest of Babeuf and Buonarotti, leaders of "Conspiracy of the Equals"
	Year V
November 17/ 27 Brumaire	Napoleon wins decisive battle at Arcola in N. Italy
	1797
March-April/ Germinal	Elections leading to defeat for Directorial candidates, strengthening of monarchists
May 26/ 7 Prairial	Babeuf condemned to death
September 4/ 18 Fructidor	"Coup d'état" by Directory, annulling elections of Germinal
	Year VI
October 18/ 27 Vendémiaire	Treaty of Campoformio with Austria, negotiated by Napoleon
	1798
March-April/ Germinal	Elections lead to defeat for Directory's candidates, increase in strength of Jacobin opposition

May 11/ 22 Floréal	"Coup d'état" by Directory, annulling previous elections and restoring control over assembly
May 19/ 30 Floréal	Napoleon sails for Egypt
August 22/ 5 Fructidor	Formation of Second Coalition (Britain, Austria, Russia) against France
	Year VII
winter 1798-1799	France forced onto the defensive, losing ground in Italy and Germany. Napoleon cut off in Egypt
	1799
June 18/ 30 Prairial	"Coup d'état" by assembly against Directory: ministry overthrown
	Year VIII
October 9/ 17 Vendémiaire	Napoleon returns to France, having abandoned his army in Egypt
November 10/ 19 Brumaire	Coup d'état by Napoleon, who is named *First Consul*

Introduction:

The Causes and Nature of the French Revolution

The Revolution marks the advent of bourgeois, capitalist society in French history. Its essential achievement was the creation of national unity through the destruction of the seigneurial system and the privileged orders of feudal society; as de Tocqueville observed in *The Old Regime and the Revolution* (published in 1856), the Revolution's "real purpose was to do away everywhere with what remained of the institutions of the Middle Ages." Its final outcome, the establishment of liberal democracy, provides a further clue to its historical meaning. From this double point of view, and considered within the perspective of world history, it may be regarded as the definitive model of all bourgeois revolutions.

The history of the French Revolution thus poses two different kinds of problems. First, problems of a general nature, concerned with the historical laws governing the

transition from feudalism to modern capitalism. Second, more specialized problems deriving from the specific structure of society at the end of the Old Regime, and giving rise to the particular character of the French Revolution when compared with other forms of the "bourgeois revolution."

Here it would be as well to define our terms. We know that our use of the term "feudalism" will be criticized; Georges Lefebvre suggested during a debate on "the transition from feudalism to capitalism" that this usage was unsuitable. How then are we to define the type of social and economic organization that the Revolution destroyed? It was characterized not only by the survival of vassalage and the fragmentation of public authority, but also by the lords' continuing direct appropriation of the surplus produced by the peasants—for example, through the labor services *(corvées),* or the dues and taxes, both in money and in kind, to which the latter were subject. To call this "feudalism" perhaps imparts a wider meaning to the word, embracing the economic substructure of the system as well. But this was how the men of the time understood it—perhaps not the lawyers working through existing institutions or the political theorists concerned above all with the division of public power, but certainly the peasants who bore the burden of the system and the revolutionaries who destroyed it. This was the way in which de Tocqueville, the most acute observer of all, understood the term; as he wrote in *The Old Regime and the Revolution,* the revolution swept away "everything that, in the earlier society, derived

from aristocratic and feudal institutions." We shall use the term "feudalism," therefore, not in its narrow legal sense but as a concept of social and economic history, defined by a particular form of property ownership and by a system of production based on landed property, preceding the modern system of capitalist production. It is hardly necessary to point out that "feudalism" in this sense appears under different forms according to the stage of historical development that it has attained and the country or region in which it is found. The French Revolution's historical role was to assure the transition to capitalist society, by destroying the whole fabric of feudal society as we have defined it here.[1]

I. FEUDALISM AND CAPITALISM

At the end of the eighteenth century the structure of French society remained essentially aristocratic. It still bore the stamp of its origin in an age when land formed the only basis of wealth and, consequently, gave those who owned it the power over those who tilled it. After a long struggle, the Capetian monarchy (which ruled France from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries) had deprived the lords of their political autonomy, but it left their social and economic privileges intact. The

1. On feudalism in the more restricted sense, see M. Bloch, *Feudal Society,* trans. L. A. Manyon, foreword by M. M. Postan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968). On the wider question of the transition to capitalism, see P. M. Sweezy (ed.) *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism: A Symposium,* with contributions by M. Dobb, H. K. Takahashi, R. H. Hilton and C. Hill (London and New York, 1954).

seigneurs' rights remained a constant proof of the peasants' subjection.

From the tenth century, however, the revival of commerce and the development of handicraft production had created a new form of personal, movable wealth giving rise to a new class, the bourgeoisie, whose importance was recognized by its admission to the Estates General in the fourteenth century.[2] Within the framework of feudal society, this class rose with the development of capitalism, which was stimulated by the great discoveries of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the opening up of colonial empires, as well as by the financial exigencies of a monarchy that was always pressed for money. By the eighteenth century the bourgeoisie had taken the lead in finance, commerce, and industry, while it also provided the monarchy with the administrative personnel and resources required by the developing machinery of the state. The aristocracy, whose actual functions were steadily declining, still occupied the first place in the social hierarchy, but by now the nobles were ossifying into a caste, while the bourgeoisie was growing in numbers, in economic power, in culture, and in political consciousness. The advance of the Enlightenment undermined the ideological foundations of the established order and strengthened the bourgeoisie's

2. The Estates General was a parliamentary assembly first convened during the reign of Philip IV (1285–1314); its three "Estates," or Orders—Clergy, Nobles, and Third Estate—met separately and voted *par ordre,* or as groups, not individually. Its last meeting before the Revolution was in 1614.

consciousness of itself as a class. This consciousness was positive: a rising class, with a belief in progress, the bourgeoisie saw itself as representing the interests of all and carrying the burdens of the nation as a whole. As a progressive class, it came to exercise an unfailing attraction over the popular masses and the disgruntled elements within the aristocracy. But the ambitions of the bourgeoisie, grounded in social and economic reality, were thwarted by the aristocratic spirit that pervaded laws and institutions.

This situation was not peculiar to France alone. All over Europe the bourgeoisie had risen at the expense of the aristocracy, within the framework of feudal society. But the different European states had evolved at varying speeds toward a capitalist economy, so that they were affected in different degrees by the conflict between bourgeoisie and aristocracy. Although Holland and England had already achieved their bourgeois revolutions in the seventeenth century, in the great monarchies of central and eastern Europe the bourgeois were still few in number and limited in influence.

In France during the second half of the eighteenth century, the growth of capitalism, which formed the basis of bourgeois power, was held in check by the feudal structure of society and by traditional systems of regulation affecting property rights, production, and exchange. "These chains had to be broken," wrote the authors of the *Communist Manifesto,* "and they were broken." This leads us to the question of the transition from feudalism to capitalism—a question which did not escape the more perceptive minds of the period. The

revolutionary bourgeois, far from being motivated by abstract idealism as Taine imagined, had a very clear idea of the economic realities that gave them their strength and determined their victory.[3]

Half a century before Marx, Barnave had already formulated a theory of bourgeois revolution.[4] He had lived for a time in Dauphiné, amid the burgeoning productive activity that was turning that province into one of the most concentrated and diversified industrial regions of France (if we are to believe Roland, the Inspector of Manufactures, who wrote in 1785). From this experience Barnave came to believe that the growth of industrial wealth would lead the class that possessed it to assume political power. In his *Introduction to the French Revolution* (written in 1792 but not published until 1843), he laid down the principle that the ownership of property influences the development of institutions, and he concluded that the institutions created by a landowning aristocracy obstructed the emergence of a new social order. "The reign of the aristocracy will be maintained as long as the agrarian population remains ignorant or neglectful of productive skills and as long as land remains the sole source of wealth. . . ." Elsewhere Barnave observed: "Once industry and commerce have begun to establish themselves among the people, and provide a new means of

3. Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893), historian, author of *The Origins of Contemporary France* and other works.

4. Antoine-Pierre-Joseph-Marie Barnave (1761–1793), lawyer and politician; Constitutional Monarchist prominent in the early phases of the Revolution.

enrichment for the class of toilers, 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; they achieve their liberty. . . ." By "the people" Barnave here meant the bourgeoisie. And after this clear assertion of the necessary link between political institutions and economic development, Barnave went on to extend the relationship to intellectual development as well: "As the arts of industry and commerce enrich the class of workers among the people, reducing the wealth of the great landowners and equalizing the fortunes of the different classes, so the advance of education equalizes their customs and manners, and restores, after a long period of oblivion, the primeval notion of equality."

The bourgeoisie, however, wanted more than just equality with the aristocracy. It demanded liberty; not just political liberty, but even more, the idea of economic liberty, of free enterprise and profit. Capitalism required liberty in all its forms as an essential condition for its development: personal liberty as the condition permitting the emergence of a work-force of wage-earners; liberty of property to guarantee its free mobility and disposal; intellectual liberty as the necessary condition for the pursuit of scientific and technological discovery.

The Dutch revolution of the late sixteenth century and the English revolution of the mid-seventeenth had

already amply demonstrated that the fundamental causes of the bourgeois revolution are to be sought in the surviving elements of feudalism and in the contradictions inherent in the older form of society, which obstructed the development of new methods of production and exchange. But this alone does not fully explain the specific form taken by the French Revolution. Only by examining the particular features of French society under the Old Regime will we be able to understand why the French Revolution formed the most dramatic and most violent episode in the entire class struggle that brought the bourgeoisie to power.

II. SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

1. *Social Antagonisms.* The existence of the aristocracy (which included the higher clergy as well as the nobles, since the clerical order had no internal cohesion) constituted both a social and a political problem.

Socially, it is important to emphasize the aristocracy's fundamental unity, rather than any cleavages and dissidences that appeared to divide it, and to point out its distinguishing features—so evident in comparison with the English aristocracy, which lacked both fiscal privilege and the concept of derogation.[5] Certainly the French nobility was not totally homogeneous, for its historical development had led to considerable differentiation within the ranks of the order—between the old

5. Derogation was the principle by which an aristocrat forfeited his status if he engaged in trade or manufacturing.

nobility of the sword and the newer nobility of the robe,[6] or between court and provincial aristocracies, both of which were of noble blood but whose modes of life were very different. More significantly still, during the eighteenth century money became more important within the nobility and began to dissolve the bonds uniting it: a nobleman, even of ancient lineage, counted for nothing if he was poor. Wealth was essential both to acquire and to maintain noble rank. Within the upper strata of the aristocracy, a minority tended to gravitate towards the bourgeoisie, drawn by the pull of money, business enterprise, ideas, and manners. Most nobles, however, remained untouched by this movement of renewal, sticking stubbornly to their privileges and traditional outlook.

Even though this aristocratic exclusivism was not new, nonetheless it became far more marked toward the end of the Old Regime. The army officer corps was closed to non-nobles (the most important measure in question being the Ordinance of 1781), as were the highest offices in the Church (in 1789 all the bishops were nobles) and the highest posts in government (the reign of the "vile bourgeoisie" here had ended).[7] "In one way or another," wrote Sieyès in his pamphlet

6. The nobility of the robe was the class of senior magistrates who had emerged as an aristocratic caste parallel to the old nobility during the seventeenth century. A residual distinction between the two forms of nobility was still maintained in the eighteenth century.

7. This phrase was used by the duke de Saint-Simon (1675–1755) to describe the ascendancy of low-born ministers like Colbert during the reign of Louis XIV.

What Is the Third Estate?, "all the branches of the executive have been taken over by the caste that monopolizes the Church, the judiciary, and the army. A spirit of fellowship leads the nobles to favor one another in everything over the rest of the nation. Their usurpation is complete; they truly reign."[8] Community of interest ensured the rapid fusion of the old aristocracy of the sword, the new aristocracy of the robe, and self-made financiers of recent vintage, for the diversity of their origins was overshadowed by the privileges they shared. The lesser provincial noblemen remained even more strongly wedded to their status, which formed the very essence of their way of life: to give up their seigneurial rights, or merely to pay taxes, would spell their ruin. The prejudice embodied in the principle of derogation condemned younger sons to poverty, since primogeniture reserved the entire inheritance for the heir to the family name. In some provinces a real "noble plebs" (to borrow Albert Mathiez's expression)[9] remained bound by its traditions and hostile to any idea of change. Where within the nation, asked Sieyès, "are we to place the caste of the nobility?" The nobility would form the least valuable of all the Estates of the realm, composed as it was of "a whole class of citizens who pride themselves on remaining still in the midst of

8. Abbé Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès (1748–1836), pamphleteer and politician.

9. Albert Mathiez (1874–1932), one of the foremost historians of the Revolution, author of *The French Revolution* (trans. C. A. Phillips; New York, 1929).

general movement, and who consume most of what is produced, without contributing in the slightest way to the effort of production. Because of its idleness, such a class forms no part of the nation." And once the whole system of privilege was called into question, could the king, "the first gentleman of the realm," resign himself to abandoning "his loyal nobles?" For the monarchy, as for the nobility, there could be no other choice but counterrevolution.

Politically, however, the aristocracy had opposed royal absolutism in the eighteenth century, stubbornly undermining its foundations. The age had been marked as much by a countercurrent of aristocratic thought represented by Boulainvilliers, Montesquieu, and Le Paige, as by the rise of bourgeois philosophy and the brilliance of the Enlightenment.[10] This aristocratic intellectual tradition justified feudalism by the right of conquest, arguing that the nobles were descended from the Frankish conquerors whose armed might had reduced the Gallo-Roman population to serfdom. Aristocracy was thus older than the monarchy, and the kings had originally been elected. Throughout the eighteenth century, the aristocracy kept up its attack on royal authority, drawing strength from these doctrines of aristocratic supremacy, solidly entrenched in the

10. Like Montesquieu, Boulainvilliers (1658–1722) and Le Paige (1712–1802) wrote extensively on the origins and development of the privileged orders—the nobles and the great magistrates—evolving a theory of the French constitution as a kind of aristocratically dominated republic or limited monarchy.

armed camps of aristocratic exclusivism constituted by the Parlements, the Provincial Estates, and the Assemblies of the Clergy,[11] and exploiting the Parlements' rights of registration and remonstrance in order to veto royal edicts. The Parlements and the local Estates blocked every effort at fiscal reform by posing as the defenders of the taxpayer while actually upholding fiscal privilege against any attempt to reduce it. In 1771 Louis XV's reforming Chancellor Maupeou broke the power of the judicial oligarchy, but Louis XVI restored it when he came to the throne; the oligarchy then helped bring about the fall of Turgot, another reforming minister.[12] From this time the attack broadened, with the aristocracies of the sword and the robe making common cause against the central power, in the name of aristocratic liberty, and with the Parlements and

11. The Parlements were the highest courts of the realm, staffed by the hereditary magistrates of the nobility of the robe. The Provincial Estates were local representative assemblies, which survived actively in Languedoc and Brittany, and were dominated by the local nobility. The Assemblies of the Clergy were composed of delegates from all over France, among whom however the bishops and higher clergy enjoyed preponderant power and influence. All these bodies asserted their privileges against the monarchy: the Parlements were in an especially strong position to do so because of their right to "register" or approve royal edicts, and to issue "remonstrances" if they felt these edicts conflicted with the fundamental laws of the land. Adroitly used, this power could paralyze royal authority by denying the validity of the government's legal and fiscal enactments.

12. Maupeou (1714–1792) abolished the Parlements, as the chief obstacle to reform, and replaced them with high courts shorn of political power. In 1774 Louis XVI dismissed Maupeou and restored the Parlements, which then systematically blocked the economic reforms put forward by the enlightened Turgot (1721–1781), minister of finance from 1774 to 1776.

provincial Estates supporting one another against their mutual enemy, the Crown.

This aristocratic opposition came to a head in "the noble revolt," as Albert Mathiez called it, or what Georges Lefebvre termed "the aristocratic revolution" of 1787-1788. As Châteaubriand put it, "the patricians started the revolution; the plebeians finished it." The privileged classes' opposition became overt and unequivocal in February 1787 when Calonne summoned the Assembly of Notables to deal with the financial and political crisis.[13] The Notables failed to produce any constructive proposals, and their antagonism to the government was reinforced by the hostility of the Parlements in Paris and the provinces. Calonne's successor Brienne was consequently forced to seek another way out of the crisis and in July 1788 issued orders for the Estates General to meet in the following May. On September 23, 1788 the Paris Parlement handed down a decision requiring the Estates General to meet as it had in 1614: each of the three Orders was to have the same number of delegates and was to vote as a block, not as individuals. In this way all the reforms put forward by Calonne and his successors were systematically blocked: the aristocracy had finally imposed its will on the government.

The phrase "aristocratic revolution" seems ambiguous. But even though the nobles accepted the idea of a

13. The Assembly of Notables was an advisory body selected by the king, but drawn mainly from the aristocracy. It had last met in 1626. Calonne (1734–1802) was minister of finance between 1785 and 1787; after his fall, he was replaced by Loménie de Brienne (1724–1794).

constitution and the voting of taxes by the Estates General (as their *cahiers*—the lists of grievances and proposals they drew up to guide their deputies—would soon reveal); though they demanded that the administration be handed over to elective provincial assemblies (for they knew they would dominate both the local Estates and the Estates General as long as these bodies kept their aristocratic structure); and though they showed concern for individual liberty, they were still unwilling to admit the principle of fiscal equality and were united in defense of their seigneurial rights. The issue thus became clear: the aristocracy had undertaken the struggle against absolutism in order to recover its political dominance and preserve its outworn social privileges. The aristocracy's aims in this struggle were to lead, in strict logic, to counterrevolution.

A recent study[14] of this "intermediate stage" has stressed not so much the social issues involved as the monarchy's attempts at reform: the tax reforms planned by Calonne and taken up again by Brienne, or even more the vast body of reforms begun by Brienne, embracing the financial and commercial administration, the armed forces, the provincial assemblies, judicial procedure, and the legal status of non-Catholics. Loménie de Brienne and his assistants courageously undertook to reform a doomed political system; to change its social composition, however, was beyond their power. The majority of the privileged classes were not ready to make sacrifices; however partial and

14. J. Egret, *La pré-révolution française, 1787–1788* (Paris, 1962).

restricted, any reform would hurt their interests and threaten their prerogatives. So even though the reforms put an end to the seigneurial administration of justice, they left feudal rights intact. The reform of the armed forces did not attack the prerogatives of the court nobility and still barred non-nobles from commissioned rank. To satisfy the aristocracy, the Intendants'[15] powers were divided up and given to the new local assemblies, within which the social orders were kept separate and the leading positions were reserved for the privileged. Although the nobles and the clergy might have lost some of their fiscal privileges, they retained their social predominance, and the clergy kept its traditional administrative autonomy. The proposed reforms consequently did not attack the aristocratic structure of the Old Regime; and though they formed the prelude to a bourgeois revolution, can we really call this period the "pre-Revolution"? An interpretation of this "intermediate stage" should, therefore, place less emphasis on the attempted reforms than on the aristocracy's successful resistance to them. But in the meantime the nobles failed to see that by whittling away the power of the monarchy they were destroying the natural protector of their privileges. Their rebellion opened the way for the Third Estate to assert itself.

The Third Estate comprised within its ranks the entire non-noble population—96 percent of the nation

15. The Intendants were the chief officials in local government, responsible directly to the Crown; they were instituted in the early seventeenth century.

according to Sieyès. But this legal grouping concealed wide social divergences which were to come out into the open as the Revolution progressed.

Today, everyone knows that the bourgeoisie led the Revolution. In eighteenth-century society, however, the bourgeoisie did not form a homogeneous class. Some elements had found a place in the structure of the Old Regime and shared to a greater or lesser degree the privileges of the dominant class, whether through the possession of landed wealth and seigneurial rights, through administrative office in the state, or through a commanding position in the traditional forms of commerce and finance. All these elements would consequently suffer to a greater or lesser extent from the changes that the Revolution brought about.

It is essential to form an accurate idea of the part played by the great commercial and industrial bourgeoisie in the society of the Old Regime and during the Revolution. Capitalism was still fundamentally commercial, dominating a significant part of productive activity both in the towns and in the countryside, where merchants controlled cottage industry through the putting-out system. Although historically it represents a transitional phase, commercial capitalism of this type would not necessarily revolutionize the old system of production and exchange, in which it was partially integrated. So once the Revolution had begun, those elements of the bourgeoisie connected to commercial capitalism soon emerged as supporters of compromise solutions. Here a certain logical continuity can be seen from the Constitutional Monarchists to the Feuillants,

and ultimately to the Girondins.[16] Mounier, the spokesman of the Constitutional Monarchists, wrote later that he had intended "to follow the lessons of experience, to oppose sweeping innovations, and not to propose any changes in the existing form of government other than those needed to preserve liberty."[17] When we come to the Girondins, whose connections with the bourgeoisie of the great ports and large-scale colonial trade are well known, the example of Isnard reveals their social and political alignment.[18] Elected to the Convention as deputy for the Var, famous for his tirade against Paris and its insurrectionaries on 25 May 1793, Isnard was a wholesale dealer in oil, an importer of grain, proprietor of a soap factory, and owner of a silk mill. He provides a useful example of the way in which commercial capital dominated industry without altering the traditional relations of production; socially and economically, the industrial sector remained subordinate.

Already one of the distinctive characteristics of French society was the existence of a large class of small and middling bourgeois. Most local production was still in the hands of artisans, independent producers, and dealers. But the class of artisans was marked by an extreme diversity of legal and social status; an infinite

16. The Feuillants were a club of political moderates, important in 1791, who took their name from the Feuillant monastery where they met. On the Girondins, see below, pp. 79ff.

17. Jean-Joseph Mounier (1758–1806), one of the leaders in the early phase of the Revolution; emigrated 1790.

18. Maximin Isnard (1751–1825), a leader of the Girondins and later a supporter of Napoleon and Louis XVIII.

number of gradations separated the middling bourgeoisie from the "little people" who worked with their hands. The members of some guilds, like the *Six Corps* of Paris for instance, were accorded a place in the Assembly of Notables. Such distinctions ran deep. Take, for instance, the oft-quoted remark of Madame Lebas, wife of a member of the Convention,[19] friend and hostess to Robespierre:[20] she recalled that her father, the "carpenter" (or rather carpentry contractor) Duplay was so conscious of his social position that he would never allow one of his "servants" (that is, his workmen) to sit at his table with him. This provides an indication of the gulf that separated the Jacobins from the Sans-Culottes,[21] or the petty and middling bourgeois from the real masses of the people. But it is hard to say precisely where the dividing line came. In the society of the Old Regime, with its aristocratic values, the different social groups lumped together under the general heading of the Third Estate were not clearly distinguished from one another. The system of handicraft production and retail distribution by small shopkeepers covered an endless series of imperceptible

19. Philippe-François Lebas (1762–1794) was a member of the Committee of General Security from September 1793 and an ardent supporter of Robespierre.

20. Maximilien-François-Isidore Robespierre (1758–1794), a lawyer from Arras, deputy to the Estates General and successive assemblies, member of the Jacobin club; one of the leaders of the extreme democratic wing, and the dominant figure in the government from mid-1793 until his fall in July 1794.

21. On the Jacobins, and on the Sans-Culottes, or popular movement, see below, pp. 92ff.

transitions from the popular masses to the bourgeoisie. A journeyman would live and work in the same shop as a small craftsman, sharing his outlook and economic condition. The craftsman in turn was separated from the entrepreneur by a series of fine distinctions and subtle gradations. At the top of the hierarchy these almost imperceptible distinctions gave way to a sharp cleavage. Here was the frontier that marked the beginning of the bourgeoisie proper, where booksellers, printers, apothecaries, postmasters, and a number of contractors stood apart, distinguished by the scale of their businesses or by some connection with the liberal professions, or by the special privileges and rules of their trade. Though they might look down on shopkeepers and journeymen, they did not like to be treated in the same way by the established bourgeoisie.

These intermediate social groups were deeply affected by the contradictions arising from their ambiguous position. Linked to the lower classes by their way of life and often by their poverty, the artisans nevertheless owned their workshops and their little array of tools, while the supervision they exercised over their journeymen and apprentices tended to give them a more bourgeois outlook. But at the same time their place in the system of petty production and direct sale to customers set them apart from the mercantile bourgeoisie and commercial capital. The artisan felt threatened by competition from bigger manufacturers, and feared above all that he would be forced to work for some merchant entrepreneur and reduced to the status of a wage-earner. Hence the contradictory aims that

motivated the craftsmen and retail traders who formed the vanguard of the popular movement. They opposed the concentration of property in the hands of the big manufacturers, yet they were themselves property-owners; they demanded regulation of the prices of food and raw materials, but at the same time they sought to preserve their own freedom to make a profit. The aspirations of these artisan and shopkeeper groups burst out in the form of impassioned complaints and surges of rebellion, which were particularly effective in destroying the old society. But all this could never add up to a coherent political program.

The lowest social groups of all lacked any real sense of class solidarity. Scattered among myriad little workshops, as yet without any special skills because of the rudimentary state of technological development, not yet concentrated in great factories or industrial districts, often indistinguishable from the peasantry, the workers were no more capable than the artisans of conceiving effective ways to overcome their poverty. The weakness of the journeymen's associations testified to this. What held the working classes together was a hatred of the aristocracy and an unyielding hostility to the rich and to "big men." When the lower classes were roused to action by bad harvests and the economic distress that inevitably ensued, they did not behave as a separate class but acted in conjunction with the artisans and followed the lead of the bourgeoisie; this was the combination of forces that dealt the most effective blows to the society of the Old Regime. But victory for the masses could not lead to anything but the ultimate triumph of the bourgeoisie, since the latter only

accepted the alliance of the popular masses against the nobles because the masses remained under its control. Had things been otherwise, the bourgeoisie would probably have refused the support of such potentially dangerous allies, as it did in nineteenth-century Germany or to a lesser degree in Italy.

The peasants played an equally significant part in the French Revolution; this was one of its most distinctive characteristics. In 1789 the vast majority of the peasantry had long been free, for serfdom only survived in a few regions, chiefly the Nivernais and the Franche-Comté. It remains true nonetheless that the feudal mode of production still dominated the countryside, as is evidenced by the rents and dues paid to the seigneurs, and the tithes paid to the Church. Tithes had frequently been diverted from their original purpose and furthermore aroused the odium that always attached to taxes in kind; in periods of rising prices their profitability increased, while in times of shortage they were levied at the expense of the peasant's own subsistence. The surviving seigneurial dues were even more unpopular and were just as heavy. Some historians have tended to minimize the weight of seigneurial exactions at the end of the Old Regime, but de Tocqueville anticipated their arguments long ago in the chapter of *The Old Regime and the Revolution* entitled "Why Feudal Dues Were More Hated in France than Anywhere Else." If the peasant had not owned his land, he would not have felt the weight of the exactions that the feudal system laid on landed property.

Certainly a distinction must be made between what was feudal in strictly juridical terms and what was

seigneurial. Feudal rights derived from the contracts governing the tenure of fiefs. The hierarchy of fief-holding remained, as is indicated by the requirement for a "declaration and enumeration" of the property and by the payment of a tax each time it changed hands. When non-nobles acquired fiefs—which was quite frequent in the south—they had to pay a special levy called the *franc-fief.* Seigneurial rights, on the other hand, originated in the suzerainty exercised by the lords during the Middle Ages. What remained of seigneurial authority were the administration of some form of justice, high or low, which was the distinguishing mark of the seigneur; certain honors and prerogatives symbolizing the seigneur's social superiority; monopolies like exclusive hunting rights, or the *banalités* by which the peasants were compelled to use the lord's mills, ovens, or wine-presses. Some seigneurial dues were levied on the person, such as the *corvées* (compulsory labor services), while others were assessed on real property and expressed the eminent (or "direct" as it was still called) right of ownership enjoyed by the lord, for the peasant possessed only the use of the land. Some of the dues levied on landed property were annual (the *cens* and *rentes,* paid in money; the *champart* or *terrage* in northern France and the *agrier* in the south, all of which were paid in kind); other dues were levied at irregular intervals, such as the *lods et ventes* paid whenever the property changed hands.[22]

22. These terms are difficult to render in English: the *cens* and *rentes* were forms of rent, and the *agrier, terrage,* and *champart,* all roughly equivalent, were a proportion of the peasant's crop levied at harvest time.

(The agronomist and political economist Boncerf, in his *Inconveniences of Feudal Rights,* published in 1776, listed no less than three hundred different kinds of dues.) This, then, was the *complexum feudale* as it was called in legal terminology, or "feudalism" in the common parlance of the day. The fact that the peasants, united in their detestation of feudalism, destroyed it and in so doing dealt a mortal blow to the aristocracy proves that it formed the fundamental, definitive characteristic of society under the Old Regime. As de Tocqueville noted, "Feudalism had remained the most important of our civil institutions even after it had ceased to be a political institution. In this form it aroused still greater hatred, and 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."

The rural community was solidly united in opposition to feudal exploitation in its various forms—by the seigneur, by the tithe collector, by royal taxation. Yet in the background, behind this fundamental conflict, were the first signs of struggles that would break out in the nineteenth century, once feudalism and the aristocracy had been swept away. The rural community had long been marked by growing social inequality, and now it was beginning to break up. In regions of large-scale cultivation, capitalist methods were being used to intensify production and meet the demands of a wider market, and this transformation had tangible effects on the condition of the peasantry. In the last years of the Old Regime there was a rapid increase in

the social group of big farmers, who did not buy up great concentrations of landed property but instead tended to lease the rights to cultivate a large number of farms. As a result, the peasants living in the grain-growing areas around Paris complained in their *cahiers* of the joining together of farms under the control of a single entrepreneur, and continued vainly to demand that these farms be broken up, right down to Year II of the Revolution.[23] Conflict was already under way between rising agrarian capitalism and a peasantry on the way to proletarization. Without land of their own, and progressively stripped of their rights over the common land by the extension of private ownership and large-scale cultivation, the smaller peasants came to swell the ranks of a poverty-stricken, volatile proletariat, as ready to rebel against the big farmers as against the lords in their châteaux.

This incipient conflict should not be overemphasized, however. On the eve of the Revolution the majority of the land was still under small-scale traditional cultivation. But here too inequalities had begun to appear within the rural community. Since time out of mind, the communal ownership of land and the restrictions imposed by the community on the exploitation of private land had formed the foundation for communal life: fields could not be fenced off, and crops had to be rotated according to the dictates of the

23. The Revolutionary Calendar began with September 1792; Year II is thus September 1793–September 1794.

community; the communal rights of free pasture, gleaning, and stubble-cutting extended to privately-owned fields; the community claimed the rights to the second crop of grass in private meadows and to the use of the forests. But during the later eighteenth century, these communal rights were undercut by the pressure of individual agrarian enterprise, backed by the power of the government. Edicts were passed to permit the fencing-in of land and to divide up the commons; the nobles were the chief beneficiaries. But in each community a few farmers with sizable plots dominated the small farmers and laborers who depended on them for the hire of plow-teams or for their daily wages. The larger farmers were already producing more or less for the market; they took control of the communal administration and did away with the old system of cultivation. These property-owning peasants were just as hostile to the rural community that loaded them with communal obligations and restricted their freedom to make a profit from their lands, as they were to the aristocracy that burdened them with seigneurial exactions; they wanted to be free of all these curbs. The poorer peasants, on the other hand, lacking land and forced to make ends meet with the extra money they could earn working on other men's land or in cottage industry, clung all the more desperately to their communal rights and to the traditional system of production, because they felt that these were being taken away from them. The mass of the peasantry, therefore, demanded that cultivation be carefully regulated, and opposed any

extension of the individual owners' freedom to exploit their land.

The concept of a less than absolute right of private property, together with resistance to the concentration of large-scale enterprises, formed the essence of popular social aspirations and were a response to the economic conditions of the time. In the first place, the peasants and artisans needed freedom from their feudal superiors, from their bondage to the soil, and from the restrictions imposed on them by the guilds if they were to make the best use of their persons and their labor. Hence the bitterness of the popular masses against the aristocracy and the Old Regime, which provided the real motive force behind the bourgeois revolution. But whether they were primary producers or merely aspired to that condition, peasants and artisans linked their conception of property rights to individual labor, and dreamed of a society composed of petty producers, each with his farm, his workbench, or his shop; vaguely and half-consciously, they sought to forestall the concentration of wealth into monopolies, with their corollary of a dependent proletariat. These deep-seated desires explain the direction taken by the social and political struggles during the Revolution, with their advances and retreats and sudden changes of fortune. Between 1789 and 1793 the struggle of the bourgeoisie against the aristocracy intensified and was characterized more by the increasing participation of the lesser men and the popular masses than by any change in the actual issues at stake. It is consequently incorrect to talk of a "change of front" by the bourgeoisie after the fall of

Robespierre; both before and after Thermidor[24] the real enemy was the aristocracy, which never laid down its arms. Further proof of the aristocracy's continuing hostility is provided by the Law of 9 Frimaire, Year VI (29 November 1797), passed at Sieyès' instigation, which reduced all former nobles to the legal status of aliens. The French Revolution is consistent, all of a piece; it remains bourgeois and antifeudal through all its apparent shifts and vicissitudes.

With his customary lucidity, de Tocqueville pointed out the continuity and unity of the entire Revolution, the way in which it grew out of the realities of French society, its fundamental historical necessity: "Least of all was the Revolution a chance happening. True, it caught the world by surprise; but it was nevertheless the fruit of a long, painful development, the abrupt and violent culmination of a slow labor to which ten generations had contributed."

2. *Economic and Demographic Fluctuations.* Above and beyond the problems of social structure and the fundamental antagonisms that formed the underlying causes of the Revolution, there were various specific factors at work that explain its timing. The Revolution was inevitable—as de Tocqueville had observed—but why was it such a sudden explosion, "a convulsive and painful outburst, unheralded, immoderate, without warning or preparation"?

24. Robespierre and his supporters were overthrown on 9 Thermidor, Year II (27 July 1794); "Thermidor" is thus a convenient shorthand term for this vital turning point in the history of the Revolution. For a fuller explanation, see below, p. 00.

The Revolution of 1789 was born in an atmosphere of economic crisis. In his sweeping *Socialist History* (1901–1904), Jean Jaurès sought the underlying causes of the Revolution in "economic conditions, the forms of production and property."[25] But he perhaps oversimplified things by making the Revolution roll forward smoothly and evenly, borne along by the economic and intellectual strength of a mature bourgeoisie, and leading finally to the enshrining of its conquest of power in the new laws of the land. "Then," he wrote, "industrial and personal property—bourgeois property—were at the height of their power. The advent of bourgeois democracy was inevitable, and the Revolution was a historical necessity." But this explanation sheds no light on why the Revolution broke out when it did, or why it assumed such a violent character, as a result of aristocratic opposition and the sudden emergence of the popular masses as a political force. The French Revolution was far more than just the revolution of a prosperous bourgeoisie.

The eighteenth century was certainly a period of prosperity, whose high point came in the late 1760s and early 1770s. This was the "splendor of Louis XV," which was followed after 1778 by "the decline of Louis XVI"—an age of stagnation and then recession culminating in the cyclical crisis of 1787 with its resultant poverty and unrest. Jaurès did not deny the importance of famine as a trigger for the Revolution,

25. Jean Jaurès (1859–1914), was the leader of the French Socialist party, as well as the author of the *Histoire socialiste, 1789–1900,* and the *Histoire socialiste de la Révolution française.*

but he assigned it no more than a transitory role; he felt that the crisis, by arousing popular passions, mobilized the masses in support of the bourgeoisie, but that it was no more than an accident. In fact, the problem went much deeper.

The masses in the towns and the countryside were not stirred up to revolt in 1789 by bourgeois intrigues and agitation. This was the conspiracy theory put forward by the abbé Barruel[26] in his *Memoirs to Illustrate the History of Jacobinism,* published in Hamburg in 1798, and taken up again after a fashion by the historian Augustin Cochin in *The Philosophical Societies and the Revolution in Brittany* (1925). Nor did the popular masses rebel because of innate bloodthirstiness, as Taine argued in his *Origins of Contemporary France,* published in 1875, a splenetic and vituperative work. What aroused the masses was hunger; Michelet had already emphasized this self-evident fact ("Come, I pray you, and see the people lying down to sleep on the cold earth, patient as Job. . . . Famine is a normal condition of existence; hunger comes by royal decree"), and the work of C. E. Labrousse has now grounded it on a solid basis of scientific evidence.[27] The hunger that

26. Abbé Barruel (1741–1820), a former Jesuit, emigrated to England between 1792 and 1802.

27. Jules Michelet (1798–1874), the great liberal historian, wrote a massive *Histoire de France,* and a *Histoire de la Révolution française,* published between 1847 and 1853, the first three volumes of which have been translated by C. Cocks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967). C. E. Labrousse (b. 1895) is the author of two fundamental studies on the French economy during this period: *Esquisse du mouvement des prix et des revenus en France au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1933), and *La crise de l'économie française à la fin de l'ancien régime* (Paris, 1944).

afflicted the people came as the end product of a period of economic expansion and rising prices—a "Phase A" in the terminology of the economist François Simiand—but aggravated by the effects of cyclical and seasonal fluctuations, modified by the level of real wages, and subject ultimately to the economic and demographic conditions of that particular historical period.

Between 1733 and 1817 the movement of prices in France was generally upward, a "Phase A" which followed the "Phase B" of depression that had lasted from the mid-seventeenth century until about 1730. The expansive trend was gradual until 1758, became rapid between 1758 and 1770, then flattened out from 1778 to 1787, thus causing the economic problems that preceded the Revolution. Finally, a new wave of rising prices touched off the revolutionary movement in the period 1787–1791. If we take the period 1726–1741 as our base, the long-term price increase up to and including the cycle of 1771–1789 was about 45 percent, while for the shorter term from 1785 to 1789 it was 65 percent. The rise in prices varied from commodity to commodity; prices rose more rapidly for foodstuffs than for manufactured goods, and within the general category of foodstuffs the price index rose more quickly for cereals than for meat, as was natural in an economy that was still essentially agrarian. The purchase of cereals for food represented the main item in the budget of the lower classes, with increasingly serious consequences; for grain production was expanding only slowly at a time when the population was increasing quickly, and

imported grain had only a minimal effect on the market. Between 1785 and 1789 the price of wheat rose 66 percent, that of rye rose 71 percent and meat rose 67 percent, while firewood rose a staggering 91 percent. Wine was a special case, for it increased by only 14 percent; but this fall in profits had grave repercussions for the wine growers, who produced no cereals for themselves and had to buy their bread. Cyclical fluctuations (over the periods 1726–1741, 1742–1757, 1758–1770, 1771–1789) thus reinforced a general upward movement of prices, and the high point of the whole cycle came in 1789, with a total increase for the year of 127 percent in the price of wheat and 136 percent in that of rye, calculated over the entire period. The seasonal fluctuation of grain prices, almost imperceptible in years of good harvests, became violent in bad years, when prices might shoot up 50 or 100 percent between harvests. In 1789, the highest seasonal prices came in the first half of July, bringing the increase in wheat prices to 150 percent, while rye rose 165 percent. The uprising of 14 July thus came at the highest point reached by prices over the entire eighteenth century.

The cost of living for the lower classes was seriously affected by the rise in food prices, since cereal prices rose more quickly than prices for any other commodity. On the eve of the Revolution, the cost of bread accounted for 58 percent of the budget of the lower classes as a result of the general increase, and in 1789 this figure rose to 88 percent, leaving only 12 percent

for all other expenses. Yet while the mass of the people were crushed by rising prices, the better-off classes of society were hardly affected.

The level of wages made the impact of rising prices still harder for the lower classes to bear. The local wage-series established by C. E. Labrousse indicate that wages rose by a maximum of 17 percent between the base period 1726-1741 and the period 1771-1789, while in half the cases studied the increase in wages amounted to no more than 11 percent. Comparing the shorter period 1785-1789 to the base, the rise in wages totaled 22 percent, or even 26 percent in a few regions. The increase in wages varied from trade to trade, however. For building workers it averaged 18 percent over the whole period 1771–1789, and 24 percent for the shorter period from 1785 to 1789; but for farm laborers the increase was only 12 percent and 16 percent, respectively. The overall increase in wages was thus far less than the rise in prices, while cyclical and seasonal fluctuations made the gap still wider, since wages tended to move in exactly the opposite direction from prices. In the eighteenth century, food shortages led directly to unemployment, for a bad harvest reduced the needs and purchasing power of the peasantry, who formed the main market for textiles and manufactured goods. Agrarian crisis thus led immediately to industrial crisis, since the rise in the price of bread left less and less of the wages of the lower classes for the purchase of other commodities. If we compare the *nominal* rise in wages to the increase in the cost of living, it becomes clear that *real wages* in fact

decreased by about a quarter from 1726–1741 to 1785–1789, and by about a half, if we take into account the seasonal and cyclical high points in the general movement of prices. Since the marginal conditions of existence for the people meant that any fall in wages had a direct effect on their ability to buy basic necessities, rising prices during the eighteenth century spelled poverty: hunger mobilized the people for the Revolution.

The effects of rising prices were aggravated by a rise in the population, all the more remarkable since it followed a period of stagnation that had continued until about 1740. The long downward movement of population that lasted through the seventeenth century and left deep dents in the age pyramid gradually gave way to less serious demographic crises of shorter duration. The great famines that had marked the period before 1715 were slowly replaced after 1740 by concealed, latent crises whose effects were no longer mortal. Calamities no longer wiped out whole age-groups, and the population structure became regular and stable. The birthrate remained high, in the region of 40 per 1,000, but with a slight tendency to decrease, especially among the aristocracy. The death-rate still fluctuated from year to year, but always remained lower than the birthrate and had reached 33 per 1,000 by 1778. Average life expectancy at birth had risen to twenty-nine years by the time of the Revolution. The increase in population was more evident in the towns than in the country: the eighteenth century was an age of urban expansion. If we class as towns any center with

over 2,000 inhabitants, the total urban population rose by 16 percent. Since in the towns the birthrate was lower and the death-rate was higher, while there were more unmarried persons than in the countryside, this increase in the urban population must have been principally due to immigration from rural areas. By the end of the Old Regime France had a population of about twenty-five million. At the end of the seventeenth century, before the increase had begun, the population had been about nineteen million, so that the total rise was hardly dramatic—about six million, or roughly a third. Other countries—England, for instance—experienced a far more rapid demographic increase, but even so France was the country with the largest population in Europe. Although the increase in population may have been relatively small, and varied widely from one region to another, it still produced very important social consequences. By increasing the demand for agricultural produce, it contributed to the rise in prices. The growth of the towns stimulated the expansion of the textile industry, as new markets opened up, and this in turn attracted labor from the countryside. The growing population (and this was particularly true of the working masses in the towns) continued to suffer from periodic food shortages or subsistence crises, which had a grave social and economic impact, even though they were no longer deadly, as they had been in the earlier part of the century. In an economy that was still very backward, subsistence crises triggered off a process of impoverishment, followed by a drop in consumption, the contraction of the labor

market, unemployment, beggary, and vagabondage. The demographic increase tended to destroy the delicate balance between population and resources and so led to heightened social tension. In this way it formed an important, though not essential, factor in the immediate causes that lay behind the Revolution.

The irreconcilable contradictions within the society of the Old Regime had long ago raised the issue of revolution. The government could not control the economic and demographic fluctuations, which led to a sharpening of social antagonisms and created a revolutionary situation. Consciously or unconsciously, the overwhelming majority of the nation rose up against a social and political system that the ruling class no longer had the strength to defend. In 1788 the crisis reached breaking-point.

Many rural areas had already been adversely affected by a falling-off in the sale of wine, the price of which had dropped by a half in consequence of overabundant vintages; and though the situation improved slightly after 1781, the possibility of profit remained limited because of the low volume of subsequent wine harvests. Wine-growing was spread over a wide area of the country at that time, and a large number of peasants, for whom wine was the only source of income, suffered severely. In 1785 drought killed off a great quantity of livestock. The rural market that formed the essential outlet for industrial production now contracted, while at the same time the Anglo-French trade treaty of 1786 added to the difficulties facing the industrial sector—

although this factor should not be overstressed. The harvest for 1788 was catastrophic; from August of that year grain prices rose without interruption until July 1789. As the agrarian crisis further undermined the rural market, unemployment among the already swollen ranks of the workers increased, and wage levels fell. The drop in industrial production—and consequently the rise in urban unemployment—may well have been about 50 percent, and the fall in wages amounted to about 15 or 20 percent, while the cost of living rose by 100 or 200 percent. Poverty and food shortages aroused the masses in town and country, leading them naturally enough to blame the dominant classes and the government for the woes that afflicted them. Those with a surplus of grain—tithe-collectors, seigneurs who levied their dues in kind, grain dealers, millers, bakers—were all suspected of hoarding. Purchases of grain by the government lent credence to the hoary myth of "the pact of famine"[28] imputed to Louis XV. Economic theorists might prescribe lifting all restrictions on the grain trade as the only way to resolve the crisis—a solution that would chiefly benefit landowners and grain merchants—but the people continued to demand the traditional controls, backed up if necessary by the requisition of supplies and the pegging of prices. Although economic difficulties were not the original cause of the crisis that beset the monarchy, they made

28. The popular belief in the "pact of famine," apparently inspired by government efforts to free the grain trade and accumulate stockpiles for bad years, held that Louis XV and Louis XVI conspired to buy up grain in order to sell it abroad and raise prices at home for their personal profit.

its problems infinitely worse; and the monarchy's financial weakness gave increased leverage to its political opponents.

The financial crisis went back to the War of American Independence, which Necker had paid for by borrowing;[29] Calonne then used the same method to cover arrears in the revenues. The "budget report" submitted to the king in March 1788 estimated expenditure at 629 million livres, income at 503 million—a deficit of 20 percent. Interest on the public debt consumed 318 million livres, or more than half the total expenditure. The economic crisis had lowered the receipts from taxation, while the cost of purchasing grain abroad was raising expenditures. The state's credit was undermined. As the purchasing power of the mass of the population diminished, taxation—particularly indirect taxation—brought in less. A possible solution was to spread the fiscal burden equally throughout the population. Calonne went so far as to propose a "land tax" which would have fallen on every landed proprietor without exception. But the Assembly of Notables, by definition a group of aristocrats, met on 22 February 1787 and, after criticizing the planned tax, demanded a statement of the Treasury's accounts. Louis XVI dismissed Calonne on 8 April.

The political crisis and the fiscal crisis now merged: the monarchy was paralyzed by the revolt of the nobility, despite the reforming efforts of Loménie de Brienne who succeeded Calonne as chief minister, and

29. Jacques Necker (1732–1804), a Genevan financier, minister of finances 1777–1781, and again from August 1788 until 1790.

despite an attempt at judicial reform on 8 May 1788, which would have overruled the Parlements' obstructionism. With an empty Treasury and no hope that a public loan would attract backers in such troubled circumstances, Brienne was forced to give in. On 5 July 1788 he promised to call the Estates General for the following 1 May; his decision was confirmed by an Edict of the royal Council on 8 August.

The bourgeoisie, the leading element in the Third Estate, now took over. Its aim was revolutionary: to destroy aristocratic privilege and to establish legal and civil equality in a society that would no longer be composed of orders and constituted bodies. But the bourgeoisie intended to stay within the law. Before long, however, it was carried forward into more extreme action by the pressure of the masses, the real motive force behind the Revolution, whose energies were sustained by their own aspirations and by the persistence of the economic crisis down to the middle of 1790.

III. REVOLUTIONARY SPONTANEITY, REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION

1. *Hopes and Fears.* The summoning of the Estates General aroused the deepest emotions among the people; from this point on hope and fear succeeded one another with each ebb and flow of the Revolution, revealing the social motivations that formed its real causes and lay behind the diverse political events. As was to be expected, a revolutionary mentality first crystallized among the bourgeoisie, both individually

and collectively. True, the different elements within the Third Estate did not share the same goals and attitudes: peasants, artisans, and bourgeois suffered in different ways from the Old Regime, and food shortages tended to set the rich against the poor, producers against consumers. But in general the economic and social situation, and the inequities of the political system, arrayed the whole Third Estate against the aristocracy and the monarchy which formed the real guarantor of the structure of privilege. From the spring of 1789 the force of propaganda, and even more the weight of demands long rooted in the public consciousness and communicating themselves to each individual, created a revolutionary ferment of ideas and formed a potent incentive for action.

Hope raised the masses in revolt, united the disparate elements of the Third Estate for a moment, and long sustained the revolutionary energy of the best spirits. The call for the Estates General was received like the "glad tidings" that were to announce the dawning of a new age. A better future seemed to open up, fulfilling men's centuries-old yearnings. This feeling of hope maintained revolutionary idealism, stirred the patriotism of the Volunteers who marched forth to fight the invader in 1792, and cast a hallowed aura over the tragic deaths of the "Martyrs of Prairial" and the heroes of the Vendôme trials.[30] The thread of hope runs

30. Volunteers had already enrolled in 1791, but the outbreak of war in April 1792 and the subsequent threat of invasion led to massive enlistments of Volunteers in the summer of that year. The "Martyrs of Prairial" were the leaders of the last great popular insurrection, on 1–4

unbroken, from the old woman met by Arthur Young[31] on 12 July 1789, climbing the hill at Islettes in the Argonne, to Babeuf's last moments on the scaffold. "People say that the great ones are going to do something for us poor people now," said the old woman, although she did not know who was going to, or how; "but may God send us something better, for all these dues and taxes are crushing us." The same almost religious note appears in Robespierre's *Report on the Principles of Political Morality which Should Guide the Convention,* delivered on 5 February 1794: "In a word, we wish to fulfill the desires of nature, to bring to fruition the destiny of the human race, to make good the promises of philosophy, to acquit Providence of the long reign of crime and tyranny. . . . And as we seal our labors with our own blood, we may at least glimpse the first dawn of universal felicity."

Hope was accompanied by fear: would the privileged classes give up so easily? As the peasants saw things, the seigneurs had no choice but to cling selfishly to their marks of social superiority and their dues—which amounted to one and the same thing. The bourgeoisie felt the same way about the privileged classes. The behavior of the aristocracy lent weight to these suspicions, which were soon fully borne out by its opposition

Prairial, Year III (20–23 May 1795), who were later executed. At the Vendôme trials (May 1797), Gracchus Babeuf (1760–1797) and the other leaders of the Conspiracy of the Equals were condemned; on Babeuf, see below, pp. 137ff.

31. Arthur Young (1741–1820), English agronomist, author of *Travels in France during the Years 1787, 1788, and 1789,* a new edition of which appeared in 1969 (ed. J. Kaplow, New York).

to doubling the number of deputies in the Third Estate and to allowing deputies to the Estates General to vote on an individual basis rather than collectively as orders.[32] The people believed the king was "good," but that he was surrounded by a clique of unregenerate aristocrats. Uneasiness and rumor multiplied. "The nobles will mount their horses and take up arms"; they would call upon the king's troops; they would seek help abroad; they would recruit bands of the beggars and vagabonds driven to wander the roads by famine and lack of work. Popular fear of "brigands" was added to the fears aroused by the aristocracy. The economic crisis added to these fears, since the aristocracy was usually represented by the local seigneur with his dues and his tithes. The common people, lacking any way to understand the economic situation, blamed the famine, which they often called "artificial," on the aristocracy's desire to harm them and cause trouble. All these suspicions grew more and more tangible and were well founded, for early in July 1789 the court and the nobility were actually laying plans to dissolve the Assembly by force. Anxiety turned to fear once this "aristocratic plot" became known, and as long as the Revolution lasted this fear would persist, continually fed by plots, the intrigues of émigrés, the threat of foreign invasion, and the unending counterrevolution. Fear would subside from time to time, only to rise

32. Each Order in the Estates General had traditionally voted as a body; thus the Clergy and Nobility together could outvote the Third Estate. If the deputies were free to vote as individuals, however, the Third Estate, with twice as many deputies, would dominate.

again when danger threatened, as it did after the flight to Varennes[33] or in the summer of 1792, when it reached a climax in the massacres of the Terror.

Fear was general throughout society, but it sprang from a variety of causes. There was fear of the aristocracy and of the whole social ethos that it embodied. Taine, who was hardly a sympathetic observer, has painted a striking picture of the fear and rage that roused the peasants at the approach of the invaders in the summer of 1792. "They knew from their own experience the difference between their past and present states. They had only to look back in order to see in their mind's eye overwhelming taxes: royal, clerical and seigneurial. . . ." But the linking of the fear of "brigands," in July 1789, to the fear of the aristocrats, reveals another underlying motivation which was to gather strength until Napoleon's Brumaire coup d'état in 1799: the property-owners' desperate fear of the "dangerous" classes. Clearly the economic crisis, by swelling the ranks of the poverty-stricken, caused widespread insecurity which was finally attributed to "the aristocratic plot." The social overtones of this fear of "brigands" are equally clear: peasants who owned some land were afraid that their property was threatened, just as the Parisian bourgeois did when, on 12 July 1789, the royal troops withdrew to their barracks on the south bank of the Seine, leaving the city unguarded. The bourgeois city militia was then formed to

33. This was the royal family's abortive attempt to flee the country, on 20–21 June 1791.

protect the capital both from the regular forces of the crown and from any attack by social groups considered dangerous. Monarchists, Feuillants, and Girondins shared these fears to a greater or lesser degree—hence their desire to halt the Revolution by a compromise settlement. The bourgeoisie's fears help explain the reaction of Thermidor, in 1794; they reached panic proportions in the spring of 1795, during the Prairial uprising; they account for the ineffectuality of the Directory, which was forced to fight on two fronts; they formed the real reason for the electoral revisions of 1799; only Napoleon's Brumaire coup finally laid the notables' fears to rest.[34]

Fear provoked a defensive reaction. Although the people's fear might sometimes degenerate into panic, it usually impelled them to arm in self-defense. The news of Necker's dismissal, on 12 July 1789, provoked an outburst of rage, followed by vigorous countermeasures. The crowds pillaged gunmakers' shops, and the bourgeoisie took control of the movement, seeking to give it some regular form, by establishing a citizen militia. The search for weapons carried the people to the barracks of the Invalides, on the morning of 14 July, and from there to the Bastille. It made no difference that the king gave in and on 17 July accepted the tricolor cockade at

34. The fall of Robespierre in Thermidor, Year II (July 1794) marked the end of the most radical phase of the Revolution; it was followed by a reaction. The uprising of Prairial, Year III (May 1795), the last struggle of the popular movement, was suppressed by the army, the National Guard, and the more well-to-do citizens. Napoleon's coup in 1799 guaranteed that political stability would be underwritten in the future by military force.

the Hôtel de Ville;[35] fear persisted, bringing confusion and violence in its train. At the end of July 1789 the Great Fear roused the peasants to action and led the people to arm themselves more rapidly than ever; even in remote villages the militias were called out.[36] The warlike spirit of the Revolution revealed itself for the first time. The feelings of solidarity within the Third Estate were strengthened, and the customary password in July 1789 became, "Are you of the Third Estate?" This general mobilization of the people was a prelude to the enrollments of Volunteers after the flight to Varennes and in the summer of 1792. And a defensive reflex provoked by fear lay behind the popular demand for the *levée en masse* (general conscription) in August 1793.

A punitive reaction was part and parcel of this defensive reflex: the enemies of the people had to be rendered harmless, but punishment and vengeance were also to be wreaked on them. Hence all the hues and cries, the arrests, the sacking or burning of châteaux, the murders and massacres; hence, finally, the Terror. On 22 July 1789 the Intendant of Paris and the Ile-de-France, Bertier de Sauvigny, and his father-in-law, the financier Foulon de Doué, who were under arrest and being conducted to the Hôtel de Ville, were seized

35. The tricolor cockade, symbol of the Revolution, seems to have originated on this occasion. Red and blue were the colors of the city of Paris; white was the color of the Bourbons. The Hôtel de Ville was the Paris city hall.

36. The Great Fear was a series of interrelated panics that swept rural France between 20 July and 6 August 1789, rousing the peasants to arms and provoking frequent anti-aristocratic revolts.

by the crowd and hanged from the nearest lamp post.[37] The revolutionary bourgeoisie approved the act: "Was their blood so pure?" Barnave demanded of the Constituent Assembly. Throughout the course of the Revolution, retributive violence was closely allied with fear. The count of Dampierre was murdered immediately after the flight to Varennes.[38] The September Massacres of 1792 came at the height of the panic unleashed by invasion and took place at the same time as the mustering of the Volunteers. When the danger to the nation grew grave once more in August 1793, massacre was discussed by the revolutionary Sections of Paris;[39] the Convention forestalled them by adopting the Terror as its policy. The urge to exact punishment sprang from a confused notion of popular justice. The revolutionary bourgeoisie, by no means averse to the use of violence, strove from 1789 to channel and control the people's wrath and to regularize the process of repression. On 23 July 1789 Barnave proposed the adoption of "legal measures to deal with crimes against

37. Both victims were reactionaries suspected of speculating in grain and of aiding the royal army sent to overawe Paris in July 1789; Foulon de Doué, moreover, had replaced the popular Necker as finance minister on 12 July.

38. The count of Dampierre, a reactionary and unpopular seigneur, was killed by his peasants after he rode out to greet the king returning from Varennes. See the translation of G. Lefebvre's article, "The Murder of the Comte de Dampierre," in J. Kaplow (ed.), *New Perspectives on the French Revolution: Readings in Historical Sociology* (New York, 1965).

39. The Sections (created in June 1790) were the forty-eight electoral districts that formed the Commune of Paris and were the basic units of Revolutionary organization in the capital. See also below, pp. 100ff.

the state." On the 28th, at du Port's instigation, the Constituent Assembly voted to establish a Committee of Inquiry—a real forerunner of the Committee of Public Safety—while the Commune of Paris, urged on by Brissot, set up a similar one which anticipated the Revolutionary Committees of Surveillance.[40] In 1792 Danton's influence[41] created the Extraordinary Tribunal of 17 August, which, however, was to remain a dead letter, for the wave of popular massacres which marked the late summer of 1792 only died down after the revolutionary government had been strengthened and the Convention had legalized the spontaneous repressive activity of the masses. Fear and its attendant violence did not disappear until the aristocratic plot and the counterrevolution had finally been defeated.

2. *Political Practice.* The spontaneous revolutionary action of the urban masses and the peasants, stirred by

40. Adrien du Port (1759–1798), a lawyer by profession, played a prominent part in drafting the legal reforms enacted by the Constituent Assembly. Politically a moderate, he emigrated in 1792. Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville (1754–1793) emerged in 1792 as the leader of the Girondins; he was executed after their fall from power. The Commune of Paris was formed by opponents of the government in late July 1789, to supersede the old city administration which was felt to be too monarchist in its loyalties. It was based originally on the sixty electoral districts of the capital, and later on the forty-eight Sections: these latter set up the Committees of Surveillance in August 1792 to suppress counter-revolutionaries. The Committees were imitated throughout the country and were officially recognized by the law of 21 March 1793.

41. Georges-Jacques Danton (1759–1794), a former lawyer and a great orator, was one of the leaders of the Revolution from August 1792 until his fall in March 1794. The Extraordinary Tribunal, formed to judge the enemies of the nation, moved too slowly to satisfy popular passions, and the September Massacres ensued.

poverty and "the aristocratic plot," destroyed the Old Regime in the months following July 1789, shattered its administrative structure, halted the collection of taxes, and gave free play to sentiments of local autonomy. The first tenuous forms of democracy and popular power began to appear. At Paris, while the Assembly of Electors to the Estates General, acting through its Permanent Committee, seized control of the city government, the citizens debated and acted in the sixty electoral districts. Soon they demanded control of the city government, and set up the Commune, for did not sovereignty reside in the people? As the old structures crumbled, through a kind of reflex action common to all revolutions, there arose new institutions and new political practices whose direction and objectives were clearly defined: from July 1789 the bourgeoisie was striving to stabilize and consolidate the Revolution and to direct the spontaneous action of the masses for its own ends.

Districts, and later Sections, were the administrative basis for political action in the towns from the spring of 1789 until the Directory. Their social composition changed according to the vicissitudes of the Revolution and the efforts of the counterrevolutionaries. In Paris, the electoral regulation of 13 April 1789 had divided the capital into sixty districts, which continued to meet even after the elections were over, and held discussions in their permanent general assemblies. The Constituent Assembly reorganized all the municipalities by its decree of 14 December 1789, but was unwilling to leave Paris its own special system since the capital displayed strong separatist tendencies. The decree of 21 May–26

June 1790 therefore divided the capital into forty-eight Sections, on the pattern of normal municipal government elsewhere; this became the city's basic political charter. Elsewhere the Sections varied in number according to the size of each municipality, and in theory coincided with the electoral districts; each Section was controlled by an assembly, or permanent sovereign. Each Section also possessed a primary assembly, in which all "active citizens" (during the period of restricted franchise)[42] were able to vote; at the request of fifty of their number the Section's general assembly could be convened for debate. The Sections acted as the basic administrative units of the urban communes, and for this purpose they were endowed with executive committees and officials elected by the active citizens. At the head of each Section stood a civil committee, serving as intermediary between the general assembly, to which it was responsible, and the municipality, whose orders it had to carry out—an ambiguous situation which frequently led it to take refuge in a discreet neutrality. Finally, each Section had its justice of the peace with his staff of assessors and a police chief, all elected. This organizational structure was in fact an uneasy compromise between the general tendency to local autonomy and the needs of workable municipal government. From 1790 onward its leaders formed the backbone of the revolutionary movement. The Sec-

42. The Constitution of 1791 limited political rights—notably the vote—to "active citizens," males over twenty-five years of age who paid at least the equivalent of three days' wages per year in taxes. The rest of the population, who enjoyed only civil rights, were designated "passive citizens."

tional organization underwent rapid changes, at first under the influence of the ideas of direct democracy current even among those who benefited from the system of restricted franchise, and then later on under the pressure of the masses who demanded a share of political power.

Here we should emphasize the importance of activist elements at this level of local government. From the outset of the Revolution only a minority of militants took part in the political life of the Sections, except at times of heightened tension or during the great outbursts of revolutionary action; this minority ranged from 4 to 19 percent of the active citizens in the Parisian Sections, during the period of the restricted franchise. At times of crisis, however, the minority would carry with it a large proportion of the masses.

When it came to mobilizing the masses, the political clubs played a decisive role, probably more important even than that of the Sectional organization from which they drew part of their leadership. The model for all political clubs, down to the myriad popular societies in the various districts of Paris or the provincial towns, was the Jacobin Club. It seems to have originated in a club formed by the Breton deputies in Paris following the revolutionary upheavals of October 1789, at the former Jacobin monastery in the Rue Saint-Honoré, under the name of the "Society of the Friends of the Constitution." The Jacobins were distinguished by their revolutionary ideology, which developed as the Revolution progressed and reached its most advanced stage in 1793–94; but they were even more notable for their political organization and methods, which channeled

and directed the revolutionary fervor of the masses, thus enormously increasing its effect. Through the system of "affiliations" and by means of regular correspondence, the mother club exercised control over its daughter organizations, which formed a great network of clubs spread throughout the country, composed of the most politically conscious elements of the population. In this way the Jacobins made themselves the mainspring of the country's political life, dominating it by the coordinated action of their network of clubs, which resembled the organizational structure of a political party. The central club passed resolutions, organized petitions and printed pamphlets and handbills: the affiliated clubs then followed its lead. The Jacobin Club kept a close watch on government administration, summoned officials to appear before itself, denounced counterrevolutionaries, and protected revolutionary patriots. According to Camille Desmoulins,[43] in his *Revolutions of France and Brabant* of 14 February 1791, the Jacobin Club "covered the remotest corners of all eighty-three Departments through correspondence with its affiliated societies." It was the Grand Inquisitor that terrified the nobles, and the supreme advocate that righted all wrongs: the Jacobin Club became the vital force behind the revolutionary movement.

The press in its various forms—newspapers and pamphlets, notices and handbills—expanded the audience for the competing political ideologies, especially

43. Desmoulins (1760–1794), journalist and revolutionary leader, one of the organizers of the storming of the Bastille; initially a supporter of Robespierre, he later rejected the Terror and was executed along with Danton in April 1794.

that of the revolutionary patriots. News and ideas were disseminated through public readings, at night in meetings of the popular societies or Sectional assemblies, in the streets and squares, and even on building sites like that of the Pantheon at Paris. In 1793, for instance, the *enragé* Varlet[44] broadcast his views from a mobile lectern, while much earlier one Collignon had assumed the title of "Public Reader to the Sans-Culottes." The popular press—like Marat's *The People's Friend,* from September 1789, or Hébert's *Le Père Duchesne,* from October 1790—consequently exerted far more influence than its circulation would indicate.[45] The press, like the political clubs, served to spread the revolutionary watchwords far and wide in the Departments and even among the ranks of the army.

From the springtime of 1789 the army had played a variety of revolutionary roles. First there was the troops' mass refusal to obey orders; then late in June 1789 the defection of the French Guards, stationed in Paris, was of vital importance. The common soldiers shared the outlook of the Third Estate, its hopes and its fears, and

44. The *enragés* ("angry men") were the extreme wing of the popular party; they demanded total war abroad against the enemies of the Revolution and tight economic controls at home. They rose to importance during 1793, but were suppressed early in the following year by Robespierre. Jean Varlet, an ex-postal employee, was one of their leaders and spokesmen.

45. Jean-Paul Marat (1743–1793), was originally a doctor; he became a journalist and revolutionary politician of the far Left, and was a prime mover in the overthrow of the Girondins in June 1793; he continued publication of *The People's Friend* until his murder in July 1793. Jacques-René Hébert (1757–1794) founded *Le Père Duchesne* in 1790; closely identified with the *enragés* and the extreme wing of the popular party, he was executed in Robespierre's purge of them in March 1794.

were extremely conscious of the people's poverty, which they shared: a proportion of the troops were billeted with ordinary householders. The breakup of the royal army, undermined by the spread of revolutionary ideas among the rank and file, and by the emigration of a large part of the officer corps, suspect because of its aristocratic origins, constituted an essential factor assuring the progress of the Revolution. Nor should we overlook the spontaneous revolutionary action of the soldiers, which assumed numerous forms ranging from active membership in the political clubs to riot and massacre. The part played in the Revolution by the National Guard, a new element in the situation, was equally important.

The National Guard was in essence a civilian institution endowed with military capabilities. In July 1789 the general assembly of Parisian electors debated the name to be given to it; since the word "militia" was laden with unpleasant memories, the term "guard" seemed preferable, to be further defined by the addition of the adjective "bourgeois," or citizen, following the traditional usage. Finally Lafayette[46] proposed the term "national" on 16 July, and the assembly adopted it. This citizen militia or National Guard was directed as much against the threat of the so-called dangerous classes, the turbulent mass of day-laborers and paupers, as against the mercenaries in the king's army. It was

46. The marquis de Lafayette (1757–1834), general and liberal politician, was one of the leaders of the rising in July 1789; later he inclined toward moderate royalism and emigrated after the overthrow of the monarchy in August 1792, returning after Napoleon's coup. He later played an active part in the Revolution of 1830.

recruited from those with a steady job, a bit of property to protect, and a stake in society. It constituted an organized force protecting the interests of the possessors and imposing bourgeois order on the unruly masses. The Parisian militia started to patrol the streets at noon on 13 July, disarming "undesirables" and giving "the city a peaceful night such as it had ceased to expect in view of the number of private individuals who had armed themselves." The Constituent Assembly made the bearing of arms a bourgeois prerogative, and only the "active citizens," who paid taxes equivalent to three days' wages, and thereby enjoyed a monopoly of political rights, were eligible for the National Guard. Robespierre protested in vain, in his speech of 27 April 1791, against the exclusion of "passive citizens" from the Guard. The Decree of 29 September 1791, which perfected the organization of the National Guard, defined its purpose as "to restore order and maintain respect for the law," for now the issue was to assure the supremacy of the victorious bourgeoisie. It is probably fair to say that the social composition of the Guard was actually more heterogeneous than the regulations would suggest, but a significant change did not come about until the revolutionary upheavals of July and August 1792, when the Guard's ranks were swelled by a massive enrollment of "passive citizens."

The act of "Federation" extended the scope of what had originally been a purely municipal guard, and made it truly "national." The various acts of Federation led to the establishment of a nation in arms, where town and countryside were mingled. The tricolor cockade became the national emblem, after having

been the insignia first of the Parisian Guard, and then of the various National Guards all over the country. The purpose of Federation was "fraternization," uniting all citizens in "the indissoluble bonds of fraternity." Town dwellers and countrymen fraternized initially in local Federations, swearing mutual aid. On 29 November 1789 the National Guards of Dauphiné and the Vivarais celebrated their Federation at Valence; the Bretons and Angevins federated at Pontivy in February 1790; there were other acts of Federation at Lyon on May 30, then at Strasbourg and Lille in June, and so on. This movement highlighted the revolutionary patriots' desire for national unity and made plain the nation's acceptance of the new political scheme of things. In this sense it was a highly effective revolutionary act directed against the Old Regime and the aristocracy. National unity was solemnly celebrated at Paris, in the Festival of Federation on 14 July 1790; and Merlin de Douai soon reasserted the principle during the dispute with the German princes who held possessions in Alsace.[47] Nevertheless, it is important to stress the real significance of the movement of Federation and to separate it from the undoubted popular enthusiasm that surrounded it. At the very moment when the theory of the nation as a voluntary association was taking shape, a

47. Philippe-Antoine Merlin de Douai (1754–1838), constitutional lawyer and moderate politician, prominent in the early stages of the Revolution and again after Thermidor. The German rulers of various territories in Alsace had protested in February 1790 against the annexation of their lands by France; in reply, the French leaders asserted the right of the people of Alsace to self-determination and union with France.

totally different social reality was being defined by the march of events. Lafayette's dominant part in the Federation movement reveals the direction it was taking: this bourgeois idol—"the hero of two continents," hailed by Mirabeau[48] as a second Julius Caesar—sought to draw the nobility into the Revolution. He desired a compromise, and the National Guard that he commanded was a bourgeois force from which all "passive citizens" had been excluded. At the Festival of Federation the mass of the people were present, but as spectators rather than participants; and although the Guard stood for the power of the nation in arms, this was to emphasize the contrast with the old royal army and to underline the bourgeois domination of the new political order.

National Guard and Federations, clubs and committees, districts and Sections—all these were institutional forms whose true significance was defined by their social content. The revolutionary bourgeoisie could not leave the vast reserves of strength represented by the masses in a raw, unorganized state. The bourgeoisie accordingly set out to tame and direct these forces, as much as it could, in line with its own interests, behind the deceptive facade of national unanimity, whose hollow symbol is still to this day "Seventeen-Eighty-Nine," the year of Revolution.

48. The count de Mirabeau (1749–1791), a powerful orator and dominant figure in the initial phase of the Revolution, gradually adopted a more monarchist stance and was virtually discredited by the time of his death.

I

1789:

Revolution or Compromise?
(1789–1792)

The Estates General convened on 5 May 1789. The next day, the nobility and the clergy gathered in the halls allotted to them to begin verifying their deputies' credentials and to deliberate separately. This marked the opening of the clash between the Estates, for the Third Estate demanded that all three Orders should verify their credentials together, which in turn meant that voting would be by the individual deputies and not by each order acting as a body. A split within the Estate of the clergy, plus its own tactical skill, allowed the Third Estate to carry the issue. On 17 June the Third Estate assumed the name of National Assembly, thus asserting its claim to represent the united and sovereign nation. This juridical revolution was approved by 491 votes to 89; one deputy in every six had recoiled from such a momentous step, causing an incipient split within the ranks of the bourgeoisie. On 20 June the Third Estate reaffirmed its zeal for reform in the Oath

of the Tennis Court.[1] The government now announced its program at a session presided over by the king on 23 June, which highlighted the fundamental conflict of views and prefigured the future course of the Revolution; even though the king agreed to rule as a constitutional monarch and proposed to abolish fiscal privilege, he intended to preserve the traditional social order, and in particular to maintain "tithes, and feudal and seigneurial payments and dues." The Third Estate's solidarity, however, again allowed it to carry the day; and on 27 June the king gave in, ordering the remaining minority of the clergy together with the Estate of the nobility to join the National Assembly. On 9 July the Assembly again changed its name, now becoming the Constituent Assembly.

This attempt at a peaceful bourgeois revolution, however, failed. Did it in fact ever have any chance of success? Within the Third Estate there was a conservative minority which had already made its presence felt on 17 June; and now, joining forces with the majority of the clergy, which favored moderation, and with the liberal elements of the nobility, this group opposed further changes and endeavored to bring about a compromise settlement. Toward the end of June the countermovement grew stronger, as anxieties were aroused by the threat of popular disturbances; soon it

1. The king had ordered that the hall where the Third Estate met was to be locked in order to prevent a group of deputies from the Clergy from joining them. They therefore moved to a nearby indoor tennis court and, on the motion of Mounier, swore not to disperse until they had drawn up a constitution embodying essential reforms. In the face of this united opposition, the king backed down.

found a leader in the person of Mounier. But every effort at compromise foundered on the obstacle of feudalism: the revolutionary bourgeoisie and the masses would not allow it to persist, while the aristocrats could not permit its abolition, for that would spell the end of their supremacy. The government responded by calling out the army to force the Third Estate into submission, providing one more proof—if any were required—of the aristocratic nature of the Old Regime. But the government was reckoning without the popular masses.

The continuing economic crisis had already provoked a spreading wave of insurrections. In Paris on 28 April the factories of the saltpeter manufacturer Henriot and the wallpaper maker Réveillon, both situated in the Parisian district of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, had been sacked. There were disturbances in the markets, seizures of grain shipments, attacks on toll booths. Popular "commotions" wore down the energies of soldiers and constables who were kept on constant alert, increasing the tension in the cities. Rumors of an "aristocratic plot" now began to circulate; this threat was all that was required to mobilize the mass of the people and rouse them to revolt. In Paris there were demonstrations by artisans, shopkeepers and journeymen, joined by guardsmen who had deserted their barracks and soon by the shock troops of the revolutionary bourgeoisie. The king's dismissal of Necker, which became known on Sunday, 12 July, provoked an immediate panic which was soon followed by measures of self-defense. The Parisian revolution and the capture of the Bastille on 14 July sparked a series of revolutions in

the provincial towns. Within a few weeks the old municipal governments had vanished and the country was held in the grip of a network of revolutionary committees which kept a close watch on suspects and swiftly stifled any aristocratic intrigue. Meanwhile, fears multiplied with the movement of troops returning to their garrisons, the first flight abroad of the nobles, and rumors of foreign intervention; all this was a spur to greater vigilance. At this point the peasants rose. In many areas they were already on the move—in the *bocage* country of Normandy, in Hainaut, Mâconnais, the Franche-Comté, Upper Alsace. As tension mounted and the economic crisis reached its climax, local incidents quickly exploded into six great chain reactions of panic that spread across Brittany, Alsace-Lorraine, Lower Languedoc, and elsewhere: the Great Fear convulsed the country from 20 July to 6 August, 1789 and damaged the edifice of feudalism beyond repair.

I. THE "ABOLITION" OF FEUDALISM

The foundations of the new social order were laid immediately after this great outburst of rural uprisings, about whose meaning the Constituent Assembly could have no doubt; coming as they did at harvest time, the revolts clearly aimed to stop the levying of feudal dues and were directed against the very existence of tithes and seigneurial exactions.

In theory at least, the bourgeoisie too was hostile to the system of feudal rights, which stood in the way of any capitalist transformation of agriculture and the whole economy. Such a transformation required that

the individual laborer be free, and therefore that serfdom be abolished; it required freedom of production and hence the destruction of seigneurial monopolies like the *banalités;* it required the free disposal of property, and hence the suppression of primogeniture, of the feudal right of repurchase, and of the *franc-fief;* it demanded the formation of a unified national market, and hence the abolition of internal tolls and tariffs. Although a few of the great nobles with a more liberal outlook were ready to accept the abolition of their rights, in return for compensation, and would even have agreed to the complete suppression of the most oppressive feudal rights without indemnity, the majority of the lesser nobles, who depended on those rights for the bulk of their revenues, stubbornly refused to countenance any proposal for their abolition. They did this not merely because of economic interest, but also because of their class spirit; they were accustomed to living "nobly" and could not contemplate a plebeian existence devoted to managing the capital they would have received in compensation for their rights, which would have deprived them of their marks of rank and placed them on the same social footing as the peasants. Their obstinate refusal seems to have led the bourgeoisie, already at loggerheads with the court, to make more concessions to the peasants, but without going so far as to support all their claims. Most of the deputies to the Third Estate were lawyers and therefore tended to regard seigneurial rights as a form of legitimate private property which could not be abolished without striking at the foundations of the bourgeois order of society.

The Third Estate therefore hesitated: on 3 August 1789 debate opened on a proposal for an edict affirming that "nothing can justify any interruption in the payment of taxes or any other form of dues." A compromise was now initiated by the liberal element in the nobility. Early in the famous session on the night of 4 August, the viscount de Noailles proposed that all feudal rights would be made redeemable for money or should be commuted "on the basis of a fair estimation of their value." The duke d'Aiguillon noted after him that "these rights are a form of property, and all property is sacred"; consequently, the seigneurs and owners of fiefs could not be asked "simply to give up their feudal rights," except in return for a "just indemnity." Once the essential part of their interests had been safeguarded in this way, the deputies could permit themselves to be swept away in a surge of good feelings: the privileges of individuals and social groups, of towns and provinces were abolished, and as a fitting climax to this splendid act of self-denial, at two o'clock in the morning Louis XVI was proclaimed the "restorer of French liberty."

The abolition of feudalism by the Constituent Assembly was, however, more theoretical than real. The decrees of 5–11 August 1789 implementing the resolutions voted on the night of 4 August, together with the decree of 15 March 1790, revealed how artificial the consensus on that night of self-congratulatory enthusiasm had been, how superficial the sacrifices made by the aristocracy, and how illusory the benefits secured by the bourgeoisie and the peasants. Feudalism had been

abolished in its institutional and juridical forms, but it lived on as an economic reality.

Article 1 of the decree of 15 March 1790 declared that "all honorific distinctions, powers and dominance deriving from the feudal system are abolished" and even went on to include "fealty, homage, and all other personal services to which vassals and tenants have been subject up to now." Primogeniture and the distinction between noble and non-noble land likewise vanished; personal equality was to be complemented by the equality of property. But while the principle of fiscal equality benefited everyone (Article 9 of the decree of 5–11 August), civil equality before the law worked to the advantage of the bourgeoisie, since the suppression of salable and heritable offices (Article 7) and equal access to all civil and military positions (Article 11) opened public office and the magistracy to the bourgeoisie. The common people, lacking the necessary "talents," could not hope for advancement.

The economic basis of feudalism persisted in a new guise, thanks to an essential distinction enunciated on 4 August and repeated in the decrees of 5–11 August, albeit with reservations and contradictions. "The National Assembly hereby completely abolishes the feudal system; it decrees that those feudal rights and dues consisting of mortmain, real or personal, and of personal serfdom, are abolished without compensation." But this was less sweeping than it looked, for serfdom only persisted in rare instances. At the same time, "all other feudal rights are declared to be redeemable";

they would therefore continue to be levied until compensation had been paid. Here was a significant limitation which in effect preserved the essential part of the aristocracy's prerogatives. The peasants had been freed, but they would have to pay for the emancipation of their lands. The decree of 15 March 1790, proposed by Merlin de Douai, reasserted this principle and gave it a consistent form, by elaborating the distinction between "dominant feudalism" and "contractual feudalism." The former consisted of rights assumed either to have been usurped at the expense of the central power, or conceded by it, or extorted by violence—such as honorific and judicial prerogatives, serfdom and mortmain, personal labor services, tolls and *banalités,* the rights to hunt or to keep dovecotes and rabbit warrens. These were abolished completely. The rights and dues of "contractual feudalism," on the other hand, were held to have been conceded by the peasantry in return for a grant of land at some time in the past; these were assimilated to the bourgeois concept of property and so became redeemable by compensation. They included annual impositions like rents, quitrents, and *champarts* "of all types and denominations," or occasional dues like the *lods et ventes,* levied on the sale or transfer of property. The question of tithes provoked a heated debate; they were finally abolished without compensation, except for "impropriated" tithes payable to laymen, which were to be redeemed by payment.

The amount of compensation was fixed by the decree of 3 May 1790 at twenty times the annual payment for

dues levied in cash, twenty-five times for dues in kind, while occasional levies would be assessed in proportion to their value. Redemption of dues was by the individual alone, and the peasants were obliged to pay any arrears due over the preceding thirty years. Moreover, the redemption of feudal dues only benefited those who owned their land, for they could pass on the cost to their tenants or sharecroppers. In the same way it was the owners of tithes who alone drew any profit from their abolition, since the decree of 11 March 1790 merely shifted the burden of compensation onto tenant-farmers and sharecroppers, "because an indemnity was due to the owner by way of compensation for the payments made in place of the tithe, and for which the tenants and sharecroppers were formerly responsible."

The redemption of feudal dues formed the cornerstone of the compromise with the aristocracy that a section of the bourgeoisie had been seeking since 1789. It is quite true that the abolition of "the general effects of the feudal system," as set out in Title 1 of the decree of 15 March 1790, and the suppression of feudal organization and property rights, along with the various judicial and administrative reforms, entailed the destruction of seigneurial power and laid the foundations of a unified national state. But the terms of redemption turned the abolition of feudalism into a compromise heavily weighted in favor of the aristocracy. In the end the real cost was to be borne by the tenant-farmers and sharecroppers. For although the peasants had been freed from the feudal system, they did not all benefit

equally from their new liberty; the social and economic differentiation of the peasantry, already well advanced under the Old Regime, now proceeded more rapidly still, while the solidarity of the rural communities was further undermined. For most of the smaller peasants, the sharecroppers and tenant-farmers, the abolition of feudalism turned out to be an empty exercise, or, in Georges Lefebvre's words, "a cruel disappointment."

The peasant's struggle to free their land continued until 1793; it was a true civil war whose history still remains to be written. In the end it ruled out the possibility of any compromise with the feudal aristocracy and forced the bourgeois revolution onward.

II. BOURGEOIS LIBERALISM

The social and economic compromise over the abolition of feudalism offers an accurate measure of the Constituent Assembly's achievement: principles were stated with great solemnity but were adjusted when necessary to suit the interests of the property-owners.

Liberty was the bourgeoisie's primary goal. This meant above all economic liberty, even though it was not specifically mentioned in the Declaration of the Rights of Man in 1789, probably because to the bourgeoisie economic freedom seemed self-evident and did not require definition, but also because the lower classes were deeply attached to the old system of production which to a certain extent assured their livelihood through regulation and the fixing of maximum prices. Despite this, however, laissez-faire was

undoubtedly the guiding principle of the new institutions taking shape after 1789. Freedom to dispose of property followed naturally from the abolition of feudalism. Freedom from restrictions on methods of cultivating the land spelled a clear victory for agrarian individualism, even though the Rural Code of 27 September 1791 still upheld, inconsistently, the rights of free pasture and public passage over private land if they were founded on legal title or custom. Freedom of production made rapid headway through the abolition of guilds and monopolies; the d'Allarde law of 2 March 1791 did away with all corporations, guild masterships, and similar organizations, while also suppressing the old privileged manufactures. Freedom of internal trade and the unification of the national market were assured by the abolition of internal customs duties and tolls, and by rolling back the tariff frontier that had separated the more recently acquired "foreign provinces" from the rest of the country. External commerce was freed by canceling the privileges of the foreign trading companies. Freedom to work, so intimately related to the system of free enterprise, was established by the Le Chapelier law of 14 June 1791, which forbade unions and strikes, denying the right of free association. The free individual now possessed the liberty to create and produce, to seek profits and make free use of them. In actuality, however, this liberalism, justified by the assumption of social equality (which however remained purely theoretical), worked to the advantage of the strong: the Le Chapelier law, whose ban on strikes remained in force until 1864 and whose ban on unions

lasted until 1884, was one of the founding charters of free enterprise capitalism.

The concept of liberty naturally included civil and political freedoms. Article 2 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man (26 August 1789) defined liberty as a natural and inalienable right, limited only by the freedom of others. This liberty was above all personal: freedom from arbitrary accusation and arrest (Article 7 of the Declaration), backed by the presumption of innocence (Article 9). Now fully masters of themselves, men were free to speak and write, to print and publish, as long as the expression of their opinions did not upset public order and they did not abuse their liberty (Articles 10 and 11). Religious freedom, nonetheless, suffered some curious restrictions; minority cults were no more than tolerated. In political terms, bourgeois liberalism received its clearest expression in the Constitution of 1791, whose main provisions had already been passed late in 1789. National sovereignty and the separation of powers formed the basis for a representative system in which the legislative Assembly predominated. The same liberal spirit characterized the judicial reforms, the reorganization of the fiscal system, the decentralized administration, and even the reordering of the church under the Civil Constitution of the Clergy of 12 July 1790. A coherent and rational structure of local government was set up, in which all officials, and even the bishops, were elected by a limited franchise.

In the Declaration of the Rights of Man, equality was closely associated with liberty, which had been ardently demanded by the bourgeoisie in its conflict with the

aristocracy, and by the peasants in their opposition to the lords. But what resulted was no more than civil equality. As Article 6 of the Declaration proclaimed, the law was the same for all, and every citizen was equal before it; ranks and positions were to be open to all without regard to birth. Social distinctions were to be based in the future on service to the community (Article 1) or on virtue and talent (Article 6); taxes were to be distributed fairly among all citizens, in accordance with their ability to pay (Article 13). But the principle of legal equality was clearly contradicted by the perpetuation of slavery in the colonies; abolition would have hurt the interests of the big planters who constituted a very powerful pressure group with great influence in the Assembly. There could be no question of real social equality: Article 2 of the Declaration announced that property was a natural and inalienable right, disregarding the enormous mass of the population that possessed nothing. Political equality was likewise denied by the organization of the electoral system in which, by the law of 22 December 1789, suffrage was restricted to a small minority of property-owners, divided into three ascending classes according to the taxes they paid: "active citizens," who formed the primary electoral assemblies; "electors," who made up the Departmental electoral assemblies; and the class of "eligibles," who provided the deputies to the Legislative Assembly. "Passive citizens" had no vote, since they did not meet the required property qualification.

The new social order was to be greatly strengthened by two closely associated reforms, which the bourgeois deputies of the Constituent Assembly approved almost

in spite of themselves as a way out of the financial crisis. On 2 November 1789 the property of the clergy was placed "at the disposal of the nation"; and on 19 December, 400 million *livres* worth of clerical lands were put up for sale, matched by a similar sum in *assignats,* or bonds paying 5 percent secured on the state's credit and redeemable in clerical property. The operation was a total failure. On 27 August 1790, the *assignats* were converted into bank notes, which depreciated very quickly; inflation and the high cost of living began to cause a renewal of social unrest and undermined established fortunes. The sale of nationalized lands hastened by the collapse of the *assignats* led to a redistribution of landed wealth which reinforced the social trend that the Revolution was taking. The disposal of national lands was no more favorable to the mass of the peasantry than the redemption of feudal rights had been; it merely enhanced the dominance of the property-owners.

The Civil Constitution of the Clergy, passed on 12 July 1790, which was to have such serious effects on the course of the Revolution, revealed another aspect of bourgeois liberalism, and formed an essential part of the reform of the state and the administration. The regular clergy had been abolished on 13 Feburary 1790, and the Civil Constitution reorganized the secular clergy. The local government districts now became the framework for a new ecclesiastical organization: each Department became a bishopric.[2] Bishops and parish

2. The Departments, originally eighty-three in number, were the basic unit of local government, replacing the old provinces; they were set up in December 1789.

priests were to be elected like other officials, the former by the electoral assemblies of the Departments, the latter by the local district assemblies. Once elected, the clergy were to be consecrated by their superiors, bishops being consecrated by the metropolitans, and no longer by the pope. The French church became a national church. Its ties to the papacy were all but severed, papal briefs were made subject to government censorship, and the payment of papal taxation was stopped. While the pope still retained his primacy over the French church in spiritual matters, he lost all temporal jurisdiction. The Constituent Assembly, however, left the pope the option of "baptizing the Civil Constitution," or in other words giving it his canonical approval: a forlorn hope at best. The pope had already condemned the Declaration of the Rights of Man as impious, and he had plenty of cause for complaint against the new French government; Avignon had thrown off its allegiance to him and was seeking to be annexed to France. Pius VI therefore let matters drag on until, weary of waiting, on 27 November 1790 the Assembly ordered every priest in the country to swear an oath of loyalty to the Constitution, of which the Civil Constitution of the Clergy formed a part. Only seven bishops took the oath. Among the parish priests, those who took the oath formed a majority in the southeast, while those who refused were concentrated in the west; they were thus divided into two roughly equal groups, spread unevenly across the country. Papal condemnation of the Civil Constitution then set the seal on this division. The briefs of 11 March and 13 April 1791 anathematized the

Civil Constitution and all the principles of the Revolution, so that schism became inevitable. The country was now split; the clergy who had refused the oath added their voices to the counterrevolutionary agitation, and religious conflict paralleled and reinforced the political struggle.

The contradictions apparent throughout the work of the Constituent Assembly are proof of its members' realism; they had little concern for principle when it came to defending the interests of their class. Nevertheless, the echoes of the ideas enunciated in the year of Revolution, 1789, are still resounding down to the present day. The Declaration of the Rights of Man, voted on 26 August, set forth human and national rights with a feeling for their universality far surpassing the empirical statement of liberties made by the English revolutionaries of the seventeenth century. Similarly the American Declaration of Independence, although couched in the universal language of natural law, still contained limitations restricting the application of its principles. The bourgeois who formed the Constituent Assembly believed that their work was grounded in universal reason, and the Declaration expressed this clearly and forcefully. From now on, they felt, the "desires of the citizens, based on simple and incontestable principles," could only lead to "the upholding of the Constitution and the happiness of all"—an optimistic faith in the omnipotence of reason in keeping with the spirit of the Enlightenment, but by no means proof against the pressure of class interests.

III. THE IMPOSSIBLE COMPROMISE

For a long time the bourgeois of the Constituent Assembly strove to reach a political accommodation with the aristocracy, on the basis of the social and economic compromise represented by the redemption of seigneurial rights, and within a framework of liberal principles and limited suffrage which would secure property rights and the dominance of the rich. But in the end any chance of compromise was ruled out by the stubborn rearguard action of the lesser nobility, who depended on their seigneurial dues, and by the aggressive desire of the peasantry to have done with the last vestiges of feudalism; the situation could not be stabilized.

The first attempt at compromise was made in September 1789 by the Monarchists, or Anglophiles as they were called, who wished to establish an upper house of the legislature as a citadel for the aristocracy and to give the king full veto powers; this would have produced a settlement modeled on the English Revolution of 1688, with the nobility and the upper bourgeoisie in full control of the submissive mass of the people. Mounier believed he could win the approval of the three Estates for this limited revolution, as he had in 1788 at Vizille.[3] But this attempted revolution of the Notables failed. On 10 October 1789 Mounier left Versailles, and on 22 May 1790 he emigrated. Either out of ambition or

3. In July 1788 the Estates of the province of Dauphiné met at Vizille to demand national reforms and the confirmation of their local privileges; Mounier had been the leading spirit at this meeting.

from a failure to grasp the situation, Lafayette persisted in the same policy, hoping to unite the landed aristocracy and the commercial bourgeoisie under a constitutional monarchy of the English type. For most of 1790 Lafayette dominated political life, and the Festival of Federation on 14 July was a personal triumph for him. But he finally appeared in his true colors when he supported his cousin Bouillé's repressive measures against the rebellious garrison of Nancy, in August.[4] His popularity evaporated. Political leadership now passed to the Triumvirate of Barnave, du Port, and Lameth.[5] The social and political compromise they sought was defined most clearly by Barnave in his impassioned speech of 15 July 1791: "Are we to bring the Revolution to a conclusion, or are we to begin it all over again? . . . One more step forward would be a fatal and criminal error. One more step toward greater liberty would mean the destruction of the monarchy; one more step toward greater equality would mean the destruction of property rights." Aided by Lafayette, the Triumvirs planned to revise the Constitution, raise the property qualification for the franchise, and increase the power of the crown. Such a policy, however, demanded the support of the aristocracy as well as the

4. In repressing the mutiny at Nancy, the marquis de Bouillé executed twenty soldiers and sentenced forty others to the galleys. Popular revulsion at the harshness of these punishments destroyed Lafayette's prestige.

5. Alexandre de Lameth (1760–1829), a liberal nobleman and soldier, was an active reformer in the early days of the Revolution, but by early 1791 he and the other Triumvirs wished to halt any further movement and stabilize the regime as a constitutional monarchy. He emigrated with Lafayette in August 1792, returning in 1800.

agreement of Louis XVI. Both refused to adhere to it and preferred to seek aid from abroad, which led in the end to the outbreak of war and the final ruin of the policy of conciliation.

The aristocracy's unwillingness to compromise thus forced the bourgeoisie to turn to the masses for support. Most of the nobility remained completely intransigent, clinging stubbornly to their privileges and their unreasoning exclusivism; their feudal outlook was totally irreconcilable with the goals of the bourgeoisie. The monarchy's attitude showed clearly—as if this were still necessary—how much it was the tool of one particular class, the nobility. When the king and the court decided to call out the troops at the beginning of July 1789, they had intended to put a stop to the Revolution. The majority of the nobles then rejected the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the decrees of 5–11 August 1789, which began the process of dismantling the feudal system. "I shall never agree to the despoiling of my clergy and my nobility," Louis XVI had announced, but the popular revolts of October 1789 forced him to accept the Assembly's decrees nonetheless. So in 1790 the king resigned himself to making use of Lafayette even though he detested him, while the aristocratic resistance hardened. The intrigues of émigré aristocrats, the schemes of foreign governments, and the beginnings of the counterrevolution kept up their hopes, at the same time as agrarian insurrections against the payment of compensation for feudal rights increased their intransigence. The king's attempted flight on 21 June 1791, which ended ignominiously at Varennes, the gathering of armed bands of

émigrés along the Rhine, and finally the outbreak of war, actively sought since 1791, showed that the aristocracy preferred, out of class interest, to betray the nation rather than yield.

The policy of compromise between the aristocracy and the upper bourgeoisie had proved to be an illusion as long as any vestiges of the feudal system remained. The aristocracy refused to accept the final triumph of the bourgeois social order so long as there was any hope that absolute monarchy could be restored and feudal prerogatives with it. Only after the total destruction of feudalism by a new revolutionary upsurge in 1793 and by the Terror; only after the fifteen-year Napoleonic dictatorship, the defeat of the Ultra-Royalists, and the Revolution of 1830 had banished every chance of restoring the old order; only then did the aristocracy resign itself to a political compromise under the July Monarchy that admitted it to share power with the high bourgeoisie.[6]

With equal determination, the peasants rejected any compromise over the redemption of feudal rights. The Constituent Assembly, full of pious hopes, had expected the law it had passed on this question to bring about a speedy and equitable liquidation of the feudal system. The law itself aroused passionate interest among contemporaries, provoking debate and criticism, as the wealth of documents from the period indicate. Although the principle of redemption had been

6. The Ultra-Royalists were the extreme supporters of the Bourbon monarchy restored after 1815; they were especially strong in the reign of the reactionary Charles X (1824–1830). He was overthrown in 1830 and succeeded by the July Monarchy (1830–1848) of Louis-Philippe.

proclaimed on 4 August 1789, the peasants saw little evidence of their coming emancipation until the decree of 3 May 1790, which established terms for redemption of feudal dues in accordance with the law of 15 March. The first offers of compensation seem to have been made in June. Such delays angered even the mildest spirits. Faults in the drafting of the decree of 4 August, which began with the solemn assertion that "the Constituent Assembly has completely abolished the feudal system," added to the confusion. The peasants took this statement at face value and had no wish to consider the exceptions to it which the decrees themselves contained; they refused to accept the agrarian laws of 1790. In these circumstances it is easy to see that the terms under which the redemption was carried out would lead to trouble. By some strange oversight no special financial measures had been planned to ease the process, and no system of credit had been established to help the indebted peasants procure the money required for their emancipation. Most peasants could not make the payments: redemption revealed itself as an impossibility, save for the rich, and the promise of liberty proved hollow. Disappointment soon gave way to rage, all the more swiftly as the lords persisted in collecting not only the dues still in force, but the arrears of those that had been abolished. Feudalism was still far from dead, despite its abolition on the night of 4 August, and it had not been consigned to some imaginary realm of the past.

So from 1789 to 1793 a full-scale civil war was fought out between the peasants and the aristocracy, with

varying ferocity from region to region. In the Department of the Doubs, for example, where only a single incident of violence occurred after 1789, feudal monopoly rights had disappeared after that year, and arrears of dues abolished without compensation were no longer collected. From the later months of 1789, most rural communities there refused to pay dues assumed to have been abolished and gave help to peasants being prosecuted for nonpayment of dues. The payment of tithes seems generally to have ceased in 1790, and in 1791 a great many judgments were rendered against those who refused to pay. By 1792 unrest was simmering everywhere just below the surface. In many other regions the peasants' rebellion continued without interruption from 1789 to 1793, abating for a while, then bursting out with renewed fury when feudal dues were collected or when grain prices were high. Late 1789 saw violent insurrections in the Department of the Aisne, in the *bocage* country of Normandy, in Anjou, the Franche-Comté, Dauphiné, Vivarais, and Roussillon. In January 1790 there were uprisings in Quercy and Périgord, in Upper Brittany, from Ploërmel to Redon, then in May in the Bourbonnais; at harvest time in the Gâtinais the peasants refused to pay tithes and seigneurial dues. Quercy and Périgord revolted again during the winter of 1791–92; next spring it was the turn of the departments of the Gard, the Ardèche and the Lozère, the Tarn and the Cantal. In the autumn of 1792 there was an insurrection in the Ariège, while at the same time a massive uprising aimed at securing the regulation of prices shook the Beauce and its neighboring regions. In

July 1793 the sharecroppers of the Gers rose in revolt, and in July and August of the same year there were disturbances in the Department of Seine-et-Marne over the issue of feudal dues.

Certainly the payment of tithes and seigneurial dues was not the sole cause of all these revolts. A good harvest in 1790 greatly eased the tension, while riots in the marketplace and attacks on shipments of grain grew numerous again in the spring of 1792, as the fear of famine aggravated opposition to feudal exactions and to the payment of compensation for redeemed feudal dues. Sensing that they were increasingly under attack, the nobles became still more inflexible, and the clashes grew more bitter. Class antagonism in the countryside pushed the Revolution forward with just as much force as the popular movements in the cities.

The king's abortive flight to Varennes on 21 June 1791 provided a dramatic demonstration of the futility of any policy of compromise, and aroused a great wave of protest. The bourgeois of the Constituent Assembly responded to the popular outcry by unleashing the "Tricolor Terror"[7] and raising the property qualification for the vote, but to no avail. Social conflict grew worse, bringing fear, violence, and arson in its train. The count of Dampierre, who had gone to pay his respects to the king on his return from Varennes, was

7. The "Tricolor Terror" was a wave of repression in July 1791, directed by the moderates who controlled the government against their more radical opponents and the democratic movement.

murdered by his peasants as his carriage left Sainte-Menehould. From this moment the king appeared as the most dangerous foe to the mass of the people: the flight to Varennes had finally torn off the mask and revealed him in his true colors.

The aristocracy's last hope now lay in foreign war. "Instead of a civil war, we shall have war abroad," wrote Louis XVI on 14 December 1791 to his agent Breteuil, "and things will be much better." On the same day Marie-Antoinette wrote to her friend Fersen, describing the activities of the party in the Assembly that was pressing for war: "The fools! They do not see that they are playing our game." In the new Legislative Assembly that had convened on 1 October 1791, the Left was demanding war, urged on by a group of new men whom contemporaries dubbed "Brissotins" after their leader, and whom we have called Girondins ever since Lamartine gave them that name.

The Girondins represented the interests of the rich commercial bourgeoisie. They believed that the time had come to bring the Revolution to a close, particularly in view of the need to restore confidence in the *assignats* if business was to pick up again. War, which the nobles wanted in order to bring about a national defeat and thus spark the counterrevolution, had its appeal for the bourgeoisie too: army supply contracts had always been a source of impressive profits. War with England? This was not part of their plan, for the wealth of this segment of the mercantile bourgeoisie came from the traffic of the great ports—Marseilles, Nantes, and especially Bordeaux—the focal points of

the essentially commercial capitalist development of the period. The Girondins declared war on their continental enemies in April 1792 but did not go to war with England until February 1793, since a maritime war would threaten trade with the West Indies and undermine the prosperity of the port cities. A land war suited the Girondins' purposes much better. Their attack on the Old Regime in the rest of Europe brought the struggle against the aristocracy at home to a climax, unmasked its real aims, and finally forced it to submit. "Let us reserve in advance a place for the traitors," wrote Guadet on 14 January 1792, "and let that place be the scaffold."[8]

The bourgeois Girondins were incapable of fighting the aristocracy on their own; yet, out of class pride, they refused to ally with the people. Robespierre's warning, uttered in his great speech to the Jacobins on 2 January 1792, that the aristocracy must first be defeated at home before they could be fought abroad, was to prove amply justified. Already the Girondins, proclaiming that the war required national unity, had given their support to the policies advocated early in 1792 by Lafayette and the count of Narbonne, the minister for war.[9] They thus offered a dress rehearsal for the rule of

8. Marguérite-Elie Guadet (1755–1794), one of the leaders of the Girondins, who were coming to power at this time; later purged from the Convention in June 1793 and executed.

9. Louis, count of Narbonne (1755–1813), liberal aristocrat and soldier; minister of war December 1791–March 1792. Unlike Lafayette, who advocated war in the hope that it would strengthen the monarchy, Narbonne and the Girondins saw foreign war as the best way to unify the country and consolidate the Revolution.

the notables which was to follow the Revolution, in which the interests of the landowning aristocracy merged with those of the great mercantile bourgeoisie; this new regime was soon to be given its theoretical exposition by Madame de Staël, Narbonne's mistress.[10] But the series of defeats in the spring of 1792 warned the Girondins that they would have to make common cause with the masses if they were to secure victory, while at the same time revealing the ambiguities—or even the duplicity—in their outlook. They were willing to call on the people for assistance, as they did in the rising of 20 June 1792, but only so long as the people accepted the subordinate role reserved for them.

The threat to the nation posed by the outbreak of war, coming at a time of renewed economic crisis, sharpened the revolutionary fervor of the masses. Nationalism and revolutionary sentiments intermingled, and class hostility intensified patriotic feeling. The nobles tried to confuse the issue by setting loyalty to the crown above loyalty to the nation; meanwhile at home they prepared to welcome the invaders and abroad, as émigrés, they fought in the enemy's ranks. For the revolutionary patriots of 1792; therefore, the issue was to defend and develop the achievement of 1789: to continue the anti-aristocratic direction of the Revolution. At the instigation of the Girondins, the

10. Anne-Louise-Germaine, baroness de Staël (1766–1817), daughter of the finance minister Necker, Romantic author and publicist; active in politics, in which she espoused a liberal viewpoint and was associated with the Girondins; fled to Switzerland 1792, subsequently returning to France; banished again by Napoleon 1803 for opposing his regime.

"passive citizens" now armed themselves with pikes, decked themselves with the red cap of the Revolution, and founded new fraternal societies. But would this encourage them to overthrow the narrowly based political system and burst the bonds of the restricted franchise? The Girondin leader Roland[11] proclaimed in a famous letter to Louis XVI, on 10 June 1792: "The fatherland is not just a word for the imagination to conjure with; it is a being for which sacrifices have been made, which was created by great labors, which is rising amid troubles and fears, and is loved as much for what it demands as for what it promises." For the "passive citizens," however, the fatherland was inconceivable without real equality of rights.

As the national crisis fanned the flames of revolutionary feeling, it deepened the divisions within what had been the Third Estate. Even more than in 1789, the bourgeoisie grew alarmed. The rich were forced to make contributions to arm the Volunteers; inflation grew worse; food shortages threatened. The murder of Simoneau,[12] the mayor of Étampes, on 3 March 1792, made plain the irreconcilable opposition between the people's economic demands and the bourgeoisie's conception

11. Jean-Marie Roland (1734–1793), industrialist, political economist, and former Inspector of Manufactures under the Old Regime; one of the leaders of the Girondins, and minister of the interior, March 1792–January 1793. Went into hiding after the fall of the Girondins in June 1793; subsequently committed suicide.

12. Simoneau was lynched by a crowd in the marketplace of Étampes when he refused to order a reduction in the price of grain being sold there, on the grounds that price fixing was illegal; he may also have speculated in grain.

of trade and property. The popular program found spokesmen: at Paris in May Jacques Roux[13] demanded the death penalty for hoarders of grain, while on 9 June 1792 Lange, an official of the city of Lyon, drew up his "Simple and Easy Method for Ensuring a Steady Supply and a Fair Price for Bread" through price controls. Now the bourgeoisie was haunted by the fear of an "agrarian law" which would redistribute the land. And while Pierre Dolivier, the parish priest of Mauchamp, defended the rioters of Étampes, the Girondins ordered a great funeral in Simoneau's honor and decreed that his mayoral sash be hung in the Pantheon. So the battle lines were drawn that would soon divide the Girondins from the Montagnards,[14] and the first signs appeared of what historians discreetly call the "national failure" of the Girondins. Since they represented the interests of the bourgeoisie and upheld the concept of economic freedom, the Girondins took fright at the popular passions they had stirred up in support of their war policy; in them national sentiment was never strong enough to overcome the sense of class interest.

When the crucial moment came, the Girondins drew back, fearing to endanger property and the dominance of the rich; they recoiled from the popular insurrection

13. Jacques Roux, former priest and self-styled "preacher to the Sans-Culottes," was one of the leaders of the *enragés* and articulated the popular demand for rigid economic controls. He was arrested in the purge of extreme left-wing elements in early 1794 and committed suicide after his condemnation in January of that year.

14. The Montagnards emerged as the more radical opponents of the Girondins late in 1792 and eliminated their rivals in June 1793. Under Robespierre's leadership they held power until July 1794.

which they had at first encouraged, and which on 10 August 1792 overthrew the crown and the Constitution of 1791, demolishing the restrictive electoral system. The revolution of 10 August took place in spite of the Girondins, or at least without their support, and their inaction was to prove fatal to them.

The revolution of 10 August 1792 was an upsurge of nationalism, marked by the participation of fraternal contingents from Marseilles and Brittany; but it was equally a social movement. The old divisions within the nation were broken down. Already in July "passive citizens" had begun to play a large part in the Sectional assemblies and in the National Guard, and on 30 July the Legislative Assembly had recognized this by decreeing that "passive citizens" be admitted to the Guard. "While the fatherland is in danger," declared the Parisian Section of La Butte-des-Moulins, "the sovereign people (in Rousseau's terms) must stand to their posts: at the head of the armies, directing affairs, everywhere." The "second revolution" secured universal suffrage and armed the "passive citizens," marked the coming of democracy, and integrated the masses into the political body of the nation. After a series of vain attempts to stem the revolutionary tide, the advocates of compromise vanished from the scene. Dietrich tried to start a countermovement at Strasbourg, then fled;[15] Lafayette, abandoned by his troops, went over to the Austrians on 19 August 1792. But more important still, the emergence of the Sans-Culottes as a new political

15. Philippe-Frédéric, baron de Dietrich (1748–1793), mayor of Strasbourg from 1790; a political moderate and friend of Lafayette.

force strengthened the resolve of a particular section within the bourgeoisie, at the moment when signs of resistance had begun to appear against the democratic and popular republic that the "second revolution" of August 10 was ushering in. Striking a warning note, on 30 July 1792 the Parisian Section of the Théâtre Français declared: "One particular group of citizens cannot arrogate to itself the exclusive right of saving the fatherland."

II

1793:

Bourgeois Republic or Popular Democracy? (1792–1795)

In the battle that was now joined between revolutionary France and the aristocracy of Europe, one element of the bourgeoisie recognized that victory was impossible without the support of the people. The Montagnards therefore allied with the Sans-Culottes. But the irruption of the people onto the political stage posed an overwhelming threat to the interests of the upper bourgeoisie; articulating these fears, Brissot declaimed against "the hydra of anarchy." "Your property is in danger," warned Pétion at the end of April 1793, rousing the possessing classes to action.[1] "Equality is no more than an empty shadow," retorted Jacques Roux,

1. Jérôme Pétion de Villeneuve (1753–1794), deputy to the Third Estate in 1789; mayor of Paris, 1791. One of the Girondin leaders, he was proscribed after their fall in June 1793; after vainly trying to stir up insurrections against the government, he died on the run in June 1794.

the *enragé,* on 25 June 1793, "so long as monopolies give the rich the power of life and death over their fellow human beings." So spring 1793 witnessed the opening scenes of the drama in which the imperatives of bourgeois revolution were finally to destroy the popular republic that the Sans-Culottes confusedly desired. These were the first signs of the irreconcilable contradiction between the aspirations of a particular social group and the objective state of historical necessity.

I. THE DESPOTISM OF LIBERTY

1. *Girondins and Montagnards (1792–1793).* The conflict between Girondins and Montagnards bears the mark of class antagonism, in spite of both groups' bourgeois origin, because of the different political choices that confronted them. As spokesmen of the commercial bourgeoisie, the Girondins strove to defend property and economic liberty against the controls demanded by the Sans-Culottes—regulation of prices and production, requisitioning of essential commodities, a fixed rate of exchange for the *assignats.* Very sensitive in matters of social rank and status, the Girondins instinctively recoiled from contact with the masses and felt that government should be a monopoly of members of their own social class. In his *Appeal to All the Republicans of France,* written in October 1792, Brissot denounced the Jacobins and Montagnards as "those disorganizers who wish to level everything: property, leisure, the price of provisions, the various

services to be rendered to society." Robespierre had already counterattacked in the first of his *Letters to his Constituents* (20 September 1792), in which he excoriated the false patriots "who only want the Republic for themselves, and who plan to govern only in the interest of the rich." The Montagnards, and especially the Jacobins, sought to endow the concept of nationhood with a positive appeal calculated to win the support of the common people. Speaking on the question of food supplies on 29 November 1792, Saint-Just[2] emphasized the need to "raise the people up from the uncertainty and poverty that are corrupting them. In a single instant you can give the French people a real fatherland," by halting the ravages of inflation, assuring the supply of food, and "intimately linking their welfare and their freedom." Robespierre's speech on the grain riots in the Eure-et-Loire, delivered on 2 December 1792, made things clearer still. "The most fundamental of all rights is the right of existence. The most fundamental law of society is, therefore, that which guarantees the means of existence to each person; every other law is subordinate to this." Nationalism and the exigencies of the war drew the Montagnards into alliance with the Sans-Culottes. The critical situation

2. Louis-Antoine-Léon de Saint-Just (1767–1794), son of a soldier, was elected to the Convention in 1792 and immediately aligned himself with Robespierre; elected to the Committee of Public Safety in June 1793, he became one of the guiding forces—together with Couthon and Robespierre —of the revolutionary government, spending much of his time on missions to the armies on the frontiers. He fell from power at Thermidor and was executed on 28 July 1794.

demanded extraordinary measures which could only be carried through with the backing of the masses, which in turn could only be secured by a new social policy.

The trial and execution of the king made the gulf unbridgeable between Girondins and Montagnards, and pointed the way toward a new political order. Saint-Just was the first to envisage the problem of Louis XVI's trial in nationalist terms: "We want the Republic, independence and unity. . . . Louis XVI must therefore be judged as a foreign enemy," he announced on 13 November 1792. The king's execution on 21 January 1793 delivered a decisive blow to royalist sentiment and liberated the idea of the nation from its former identification with the monarchy. The act ruled out any possibility of compromise between the regicides and the group called the "appellants," who had followed Vergniaud's[3] proposal for an appeal to the people as a way of saving the king. By fighting to save Louis XVI, the Girondins had hoped to limit the conflict with the European powers, while at the same time inclining, consciously or not, toward a compromise with the aristocracy at home—an inconsistency on the part of men who, in November 1792, had eagerly preached a war of propaganda to spread the Revolution. For the nation, however, now identified with the Republic and based on the alliance of the Montagnards with the Sans-Culottes, the king's death left no alternative but a fight until victory.

3. Pierre-Victurnien Vergniaud (1753–1793), one of the Girondin leaders; executed in October 1793.

The military defeats of March 1793, the revolt of the Vendée[4] and the dangers which ensued from it combined to seal the Girondins' fate. Right up to the end, however, they refused to make concessions. On 13 March 1793 Vergniaud was still arguing that "equality for man as a social being consists solely in the equality of his legal rights," thus upholding the dominance of property and wealth. The series of popular uprisings between 31 May and 2 June 1793, during which the Parisian Sections purged the Girondins from the Convention, were motivated by both social aspirations and patriotic fervor. Jaurès has denied the element of class antagonism that lay behind these uprisings; he felt that the Girondins were bound to lose "quite simply because of their narrow party spirit which was that of a faction or a clique." This is no doubt true if the parliamentary events of those revolutionary days are considered alone, but the social undercurrent is made evident by the vital role played by the Parisian Sans-Culottes in driving the upper bourgeoisie from power. This period of violent revolutionary upheaval was another aspect of the nationwide defensive reflex, exacting retribution for yet another manifestation of the aristocratic conspiracy. The spread of the separatist

4. The rebellion in the province of the Vendée, in western France, against the central revolutionary government, broke out in March 1793 and remained a grave threat for about a year; less serious outbreaks continued down to 1800. See C. Tilly, *The Vendée: A Sociological Analysis of the Counterrevolution of 1793* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964). Following the outbreak in the Vendée, separatist or "sectional" opposition to the government appeared in many parts of the country.

movement into Departments all over the country was a warning of what was to come: concealed behind the veil of Girondin opposition, at Bordeaux, Marseilles, and especially Lyon, the nobles' counterrevolution was raising its head once more, under the guise of "Federalism."[5] This marked a new stage in the development of the civil war, begun by the sectional (or separatist) movement in May 1793. The social program of Federalism was even more significant than its political goals. In part it drew its strength from the tradition of regional particularism, but still more it was the product of shared class interests. Among the Federalist rebels were numbered the supporters of the Old Regime, the Feuillants with their desire to return to the old limited franchise, and every bourgeois who feared for property and the freedom of profit. The Girondins rejected the alliance of the Vendéan rebels and the enemy abroad, out of patriotism and an attachment to the principles of 'Eighty-Nine. But because of their distrust of the masses and their unwillingness to allow them full participation in the political life of the nation, the Girondins were bound to align themselves in the end with the aristocracy and the coalition of France's foreign enemies.

5. The "Federalist" revolts of the summer of 1793, directed against the ascendancy of Paris and the tight control of the central government, were further aggravated by the fall of the of the Girondins during 31 May–2 June; the arrest of some of the deputies encouraged their provincial constituents to revolt, and a number of the fleeing Girondin leaders helped foment the rebellions in the provinces, joining forces with royalists and other counterrevolutionaries.

2. *Montagnards, Jacobins, and Sans-Culottes (1793-1794).* Once the Girondins had been eliminated from the political scene, in June 1793, the Montagnards found themselves caught between two fires. On the one hand, the counterrevolution was gaining a new lease of life from the Federalist revolt, while on the other, pressure from the popular movement was accentuated by high prices and the shortage of food. It soon became clear that the government had lost control of the situation; instead of fighting, Danton and the Committee of Public Safety tried to negotiate. While the Montagnards vacillated, already trapped by the irreconcilable ambiguity of their position, the masses, impelled by dire need and profound hatred, forced through the decisive measures needed to save the nation; the first of these, on 23 August 1793, was the *levée en masse,* or general conscription.[6] A revolutionary government was now more necessary than ever, both to control the surge of popular feeling and to maintain solidarity with the bourgeoisie which alone could provide the required leadership. So between July and December 1793, the revolutionary government began to take shape, basing itself on the dual foundation of Sans-Culottes and bourgeois Montagnards and Jacobins.

6. This decree, ordering total mobilization, began as follows: "The young men will go forth to fight; married men will forge weapons and transport provisions; the women will make tents and uniforms, and serve in the hospitals; the old men will be carried to public places to rouse the warriors' courage, preach hatred for kings and uphold the unity of the Republic." By the spring of 1794 conscription had raised the French Revolutionary armies to well over three-quarters of a million men.

Its most clear-sighted leaders aimed above all to preserve the revolutionary unity of the old Third Estate, which was now the unity of the whole nation.

Now, in Year II of the Revolution, two principal orders of problems confronted the government. One was political: how to pursue a program acceptable to the Sans-Culottes while at the same time preserving the revolutionary dictatorship and meeting the needs of national defense—or in other words, how to combine popular democracy with a revolutionary regime. The other problem was social: how to reconcile the economic demands and aspirations of the Sans-Culottes with those of the bourgeoisie, which was still the directing force behind the Revolution—or in other terms, how to solve the problem of the relation between the masses and the property-owning classes. But were the men who formed the government capable of overcoming the contradictions inherent in such an alliance? For a moment the threat to the nation's existence pushed this question into the background, but it was obvious that once victory was assured the contradictions would reassert themselves.

Popular pressure remained strong into the autumn of 1793, forcing the unwilling Convention and its hesitant committees to promulgate vital revolutionary measures. On 5 September the Terror was made official policy.[7]

7. It is important to remember that the Terror meant more than the institutionalization of revolutionary violence in the interests of unity and security; it also included a series of economic controls and measures directed against speculators and hoarders, particularly of foodstuffs.

On the eleventh a national maximum price for grain was voted. On the seventeenth the law of suspects was enacted.[8] Finally, on 29 September the "general maximum" was decreed, placing the economy under government direction. All this represented a victory for the masses, but also for the government; legal forms had been preserved, and judicial Terror had superseded direct action by the people. The Committee of Public Safety had at first resisted popular pressure, and then made timely concessions of its own accord; as a result its authority was enhanced. The extreme wing of the popular opposition, the *enragés,* was eliminated; the opposition within the Convention was reduced to silence in the great debate of 25 September; de-Christianization was halted on 6 December by a solemn reaffirmation of the principle of religious liberty.[9] Meanwhile, Republican armies defeated the Austrians at Wattignies on 16 October and won a victory over the Vendéan rebels at Le Mans on 13 and 14 December. On 10 October 1793, at Saint-Just's instigation, the Convention declared that the government would be "revolutionary until peace," and on 14 Frimaire, Year II (4 December 1793), it voted the decrees establishing the revolutionary government. The pressure of events had

8. The law of suspects ordered the arrest of Federalists and "enemies of liberty," in particular nobles and émigrés; it was also aimed at those who aided foreign enemies.

9. The attack on Christianity had gathered momentum in the tense summer and autumn of 1793. Robespierre and the government found it necessary to put a stop to this movement lest it alienate a large part of the population.

led to a renewal of centralized control, a restoration of administrative stability, and greater power for the central government—the essential conditions for the victory that the Committee of Public Safety worked so stubbornly to achieve. But this meant the end of any freedom of action for the popular movement.

Subordinating everything to the dictates of national defense, the Committee of Public Safety had no intention of giving way either to the claims of the masses, which would have undermined national unity, or to the demands of the moderate bourgeoisie, which would have meant abandoning the economic controls vital to the war effort and calling a halt to the Terror, which assured the obedience of every citizen. The problem, however, was to find a point of balance between these conflicting pressures.

The elimination of the *enragés,* the end of de-Christianization, and surreptitious attacks on the popular organizations—particularly the Sections—punctuated the autumn of 1793, indicating the Committee of Public Safety's desire to detach itself from the mass movement which it had so far followed rather than led. But this very policy forced it to seek a new power-base in the Convention, which in turn laid it open to attack by its enemies in the Assembly and among the public at large. Danton had supported Robespierre against the de-Christianizers, in part for reasons of his own; he was trying to weaken the energies of the revolutionary government. His "indulgent" policy was the exact opposite of the program put forward by the popular party under Hébert and his friends from the Cordeliers

Club.[10] They were demanding an intensification of the Terror, the tightening of economic controls, and total war. The government's curbing of the de-Christianization movement and the slackening of the Terror in the Departments from January 1794 were evidence that the Committee of Public Safety was now seeking to reduce the influence of the extremists, even though it had no intention of crushing them completely, as the Indulgents demanded. The same purpose was apparent in the committee's quiet undermining of the democratic Sections and in its plans to wind down the Terror, while still keeping it available as an instrument of policy. The Committee's attitude thus worked in favor of Danton's attack on the entire system of the Terror.

The struggle between the factions broke out openly just at the moment, late in the winter of 1793–94, when the food crisis took a sudden turn for the worse. The situation in Paris deteriorated, and an outburst of popular fury seemed likely. Political crisis, coming on top of growing social discontent, threw all the contradictions of the regime into sharp relief; their consequences were to prove fatal to the popular movement, to the revolutionary government, and in the end to the Revolution itself.

10. The Cordeliers (who took their name from the former monastery building in which they met) were a political club of more advanced popular and democratic sympathies than the Jacobins. The club was suppressed and its leaders executed after an abortive insurrection in March 1794.

II. GREATNESS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE REPUBLIC OF YEAR II

1. *The Social Direction and Political Methods of the Popular Movement.* From June 1793 until the winter, the Parisian Sans-Culottes' action created the conditions for stabilizing the revolutionary government and consolidating the Jacobin dictatorship of the Committee of Public Safety, while at the same time forcing the refractory Convention to enact the measures needed to improve the lot of the common people.

When we examine the active membership of the Parisian Sections during Year II or the part played by the people of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine during the Revolution, we find that the revolutionary vanguard was not composed of a proletariat of factory workers but by an alliance of small employers and the journeymen who lived and worked with them. This mixed social composition gave the popular movement certain characteristics, a certain pattern of behavior, and a series of contradictions that derived from its inherent ambiguity. The workers' view of the world was dominated by that of the petty-bourgeois craftsman, which was ultimately that of the bourgeoisie. Thus, the workers did not form an independent group either in the realm of thought or of action. They failed to realize the connection between the value of their labor and the level of their wages; for them, wages were still determined by the price of basic commodities, and they had not fully realized the social function of labor. The Sans-Culottes of Year II did not make the question of production and

labor the central element in their program; instead, they were far more concerned with their position as consumers. Although they demanded the regulation of food prices, they rarely went so far as to demand the establishment of a minimum wage. The Parisian militants demanded price regulation all the more vehemently because their Sections were under pressure not only from the working people, but also from a great mass of indigents close to starvation. In early spring 1794 roughly one inhabitant in ten in Paris was a pauper on relief, while in the district of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine the figure was one in four. And this takes no account of the many poor people too ashamed to beg or accept relief.

Hunger was the bond that held together such varied groups as artisans, shopkeepers, journeymen, and day laborers, giving them a common hostility to big merchants, entrepreneurs, and hoarders of grain, whether noble or bourgeois. Compared to current sociological terminology, the name "Sans-Culottes" may seem a little vague; but in the social conditions of the time it was an accurate definition of the group it described. Other motives, too, determined the behavior of the masses: hatred of the nobles, belief in an aristocratic conspiracy, the desire to overthrow privilege and establish true equality. But in the end these divergent aspirations boiled down to a demand for daily bread, to which was joined, in many cases, a variety of political demands. "While Robespierre reigned," said the Parisian carpenter Richer on 20 May 1795, "blood flowed and no man went short of bread." The policy

of the Terror was indissolubly linked to these social demands.

The people's social aspirations emerged with clarity in the struggles they waged to win their demands. In 1793 they demanded a maximum price for grain in order to bring bread prices into line with wages, or in other words to enable the Sans-Culottes to survive; their basic argument was that of the fundamental right to existence. Direct social demands preceded and stimulated theoretical reasoning, which was then used to intensify the struggle, but no really coherent system of ideas emerged. One essential theme was the concept of equality: the conditions of life should be the same for all. In opposition to absolute property rights, which were the basis of social inequality, the Sans-Culottes demanded the "equal right to enjoy the fruits of property," which naturally led them to a critique of the unrestricted exercise of property rights. The actual right to own property was never questioned; but as small independent producers, the Sans-Culottes believed that property ownership should be based on individual labor and attacked the rich and the powerful. On 2 September 1793, when popular agitation was at its height, the Sans-Culottes in the Section of the former Jardin des Plantes demanded that the Convention not only "regulate the profits of industry and commerce" by a system of controls, but also that it should establish a legal maximum for personal fortunes, "and that a single individual should not be permitted to own more than this maximum." How much was it to be? The unit was based on the normal property holding of an average

artisan or shopkeeper: "No one is to own more than one shop or workshop." This radical measure "would gradually do away with the excessive inequality of wealth and increase the number of property-owners." Nowhere else in the history of the Revolution does the people's social program appear with greater clarity; it was an ideal precisely suited to the mentality of the craftsmen and small retailers who comprised the leadership of the Sans-Culottes. It was equally suited to the mass of small consumers and petty producers in the cities, who resented every dealer in foodstuffs, whether wholesale or retail, and every entrepreneur whose capitalist tendencies threatened to reduce them to the condition of dependent wage-earners. It was, moreover, an ideal fundamentally opposed to that of the bourgeoisie leading the Revolution, for it sought to limit the implications of private property rights while still upholding them.

The Sans-Culottes' political aims were likewise at odds with those of the bourgeoisie. For the Sans-Culottes, sovereignty was vested in the people; this principle formed the basis for action by the militants of the popular party, who regarded it not as a political abstraction, but as a concrete reality manifest in the Sections where the people met and exercised their full political rights. The most politically conscious sought to establish direct democracy. In legislative matters they demanded, and on occasion practised, the approval of laws by the people. Mistrusting representative government, they demanded that elected officials be accountable to their constituents and subject to recall. For the Sans-Culottes, the sovereign people were to be supreme

judge as well as supreme legislator, and during the September Massacres of 1792, they set up popular tribunals to put this claim into practice. Since armed force was another essential attribute of sovereignty, the people could not be left unarmed; when in Year III the militants of the Sections were stripped of their weapons, this was a clear sign of their political collapse. A people in arms recovering their rights through insurrection—this was the ultimate application of the principle of popular sovereignty. And having demonstrated their sovereign power through revolution, the people could then redelegate their authority to representatives worthy of their trust, as on 2 June 1793, when the people of Paris overthrew the Girondins and put the Montagnards in power.

Tight organization made the Sections highly effective in carrying out their program. Using the municipal administration established by the Constituent Assembly, but giving it a new orientation; working through the revolutionary committees forced upon the unwilling Convention; finally, creating the Sectional Societies in the autumn of 1793 as a special instrument of the popular party, the Sans-Culotte militants endowed the Parisian mass movement with an effective and flexible organization. Between spring and autumn 1793 it proved its worth in the struggle against the moderates, contributing significantly to the establishment of the revolutionary government. From July 1792 until September 1793 one of the crucial elements in this organization was the permanence of the Sections; each Sectional assembly met every day at five o'clock. The decree of 9 September 1793 put an end to these daily

meetings, permitting no more than two per week—later two per *décade*[11]—but the assemblies reappeared in another form as the Sectional Societies. These latter maintained continuity with the past, and during the winter of 1793 they took over the function of the general Sectional assemblies, reducing them to a purely formal role. But of all the revolutionary institutions, the Revolutionary Committees best symbolize the ideal of popular power. They appeared spontaneously in a number of Parisian Sections after 10 August 1792 and became widespread during the crisis of March 1793. The Convention legalized them on 21 March. Their functions, initially very limited, increased swiftly. The Law of Suspects of 17 September 1793 gave legal recognition to powers that the Committees had in fact already arrogated to themselves; in each commune or Section they drew up lists of suspects and issued arrest warrants. Their sweeping powers were further extended by the Paris Commune's very broad definition of "suspect activities." In time the Committees freed themselves from the control of the Sectional assemblies, threw off the tutelage of the Commune, and came to dominate every aspect of the life of their Sections.

Backed by armed force and choosing their own officials, electing their own magistrates and committees, the Parisian Sections had thus become autonomous political organizations in the heart of the capital. Lacking a central directing institution, they made up for it by the system of "correspondence" between Sections

11. The *décade* was the ten-day week of the new Revolutionary calendar.

in normal times and by "fraternization" in periods of crisis. As a result they came to form an organizational structure paralleling the municipality of Paris and constituting a powerful political force that threatened to overwhelm the various government committees, and tip the precarious balance of social forces in favor of the Sans-Culottes, thus destroying the foundations on which the revolutionary government rested.

2. *Revolutionary Government and Jacobin Dictatorship.* Slowly through the summer of 1793 the revolutionary government gathered strength, until by the decree of 14 Frimaire, Year II (4 December 1793) it reconstituted itself along lines far removed from popular democracy.

The theoretical basis of the revolutionary government had been set forth by Saint-Just in his report of 10 October 1793, and by Robespierre in his statements on 25 December 1793, "On the Principles of Revolutionary Government," and 5 February 1794, "On the Principles of Political Morality which Should Guide the Convention." Significantly, none of these expositions of principle discussed popular sovereignty; instead, they made all authority stem from the Convention, "the sole source of governmental initiative." Government committees were to follow its orders, and in fact only two of these bodies possessed any independent authority: one was the Committee of Public Safety, "the heart of the Executive," "the source of government proposals, laying before the Convention the most important measures"; the other was the Committee of General Security, charged with "particular concern for all

matters pertaining to individuals, and for general police measures." The revolutionary government was a wartime government, for "the Revolution is the war of Liberty against her enemies." Its aim was to found the Republic; once victory had been won, there would be a return to constitutional government, which would be a "government of peaceful and victorious freedom." Since it was waging war, "the revolutionary government has to act with extraordinary energy," "like lightning," for "the same system cannot apply in peace and in war, in sickness and in health." The government could therefore use "coercive force," specifically the Terror. "Shall force be used only to protect crime and cover wrongs?" No; the revolutionary government would offer "nothing but death to the enemies of the people." The Terror, however, was to be used only in the service of the Republic; and virtue, "the fundamental principle of democratic or popular government," would guarantee that the revolutionary government would not degenerate into tyranny. Virtue, according to Robespierre, was "the love of one's country and its laws," "that self-sacrificing devotion which blends every private interest into the interest of the community."

The purpose of the Terror was to defend the nation and the Revolution. Against the constant threat of aristocratic conspiracy, it exemplified the Third Estate's will to defend itself and punish its foes, but now under tight legal and governmental control; in this connection it is important to realize that the Great Terror law of 22 Prairial, Year II, was a response to the attempted

assassinations of Collot d'Herbois and Robespierre.[12] A statistical analysis by Donald Greer[13] confirms this, indicating that the Terror was most pronounced where the counterrevolution had provoked armed insurrection or open treason. Only 15 percent of the death sentences were handed down at Paris, while 71 percent were issued in the two chief centers of civil war—19 percent in the southeast, 52 percent in the west. The charges on which the sentences were based confirm this: 72 percent of the sentences were for rebellion. It has been observed, however, that 85 percent of those condemned to death came from the Third Estate, with only 8.5 percent from the nobility and 6.5 percent from the clergy. "But in a struggle of this kind," Georges Lefebvre has noted, "turncoats are treated less tenderly than avowed enemies." Like the civil war, of which it formed one element, the Terror purged the nation of groups considered to be socially unassimilable, either because of their aristocratic origin or because they had thrown in their lot with the aristocracy. The Terror also helped to build up a feeling of national solidarity, by momentarily suppressing narrow class sentiments and imposing on every citizen the sacrifices needed for the public good.

12. Jean-Marie Collot d'Herbois (1750–1796), ex-actor, member of the Paris Commune and the Convention; with Robespierre on the Committee of Public Safety; sentenced in 1795 to deportation to Cayenne, where he died. The Great Terror Law (10 June 1794) speeded up and simplified judicial procedures for dealing with counterrevolutionaries.

13. D. Greer, *The Incidence of the Terror during the French Revolution: A Statistical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935).

The instruments at the disposal of the Revolution had thus grown more efficient, but now they were wielded by the government alone. The central Jacobin Club became the linchpin of revolutionary organization and gradually curtailed the autonomy of the popular revolutionary societies. The Jacobins came from the middle ranks of the bourgeoisie; they had often purchased nationalized lands and were firmly committed to the Revolution, resolutely defending the achievements of 'Eighty-Nine in the face of every danger, and to this end they allied with the masses and the Sans-Culottes. Although they believed in a free economy, they accepted price regulation and controls as emergency measures and as concessions to the demands of the people. As the Revolution progressed and successive purges took effect, the membership of the Jacobin Club became slightly more democratized; but within it the middling bourgeoisie always predominated. In 1793 and 1794 the entire Republic was covered by a tight, efficient network of clubs affiliated to the Jacobins in Paris. Their total number is hard to calculate. In the southeast, where the counterrevolution threatened for a time, they seem to have been especially numerous: 139 popular revolutionary societies for a total of 154 communes in the Department of the Vaucluse, 258 clubs for 355 communes in the Drôme, 117 clubs for 260 communes in the Basses-Alpes. These societies played a decisive part in defeating the domestic enemy and in establishing the new revolutionary institutions.

Jacobinism, which permeated both the theory and the practice of the revolutionary government, was

characterized by an ideology deriving from Rousseau and by certain political attitudes and techniques. The Jacobin outlook has been called a religion, even a mystique; but in simpler terms, the Jacobins maintained that liberty and equality were the marks of a society organized according to reason. Were they fanatics? Their rigidity and dogmatism were indications of the magnitude of the danger they faced and of their need for discipline when fighting an irreconcilable enemy. The Jacobins held the belief, which they never fully articulated, that democracy had to be directed from above, and that no reliance could be placed on the spontaneous revolutionary ardor of the people. As Robespierre observed, the people desire the good, but they do not always see it. The Jacobins believed that they must enlighten the people and even guide them. This led naturally to a type of political practice that subsequently fell into disrepute, in part because of hostile prejudice: the Jacobins perfected the use of small committees to define their course of action and political program, which they then expressed in slogans. They modified the results of the electoral process by means of purges or co-optation; once the electoral list had been narrowed down by a "corrective examination" to allow the club to assess the candidates' suitability for office, the electorate was left free to choose among them. All the citizens were held in the grip of a network of affiliated clubs which followed the lead of the central Jacobin Club, "the sole center of public opinion," just as the Committee of Public Safety formed the mainspring of governmental activity. But

the Jacobins did not take these principles to their logical conclusion. Although they formed clubs, they did not found a party; and above all they remained subject to a parliamentary assembly elected in a rather haphazard manner. Babeuf moved a stage further, seeking to create a party; and it was probably from his example, via the intermediary of Blanqui,[14] that Lenin drew his ideas on organization.

The economic controls set up in the autumn of 1793 at the demand of the masses did not result so much from the government's theoretical commitment to a particular social program, as from a recognition of what was required for national defense. The soldiers of the *levée en masse* had to be fed, equipped, and armed, and the cities had to be provisioned, at a time when foreign trade was paralyzed by the blockade and France stood like a besieged fortress. Governmental requisitioning of essential commodities burdened the entire country and encroached on economic freedom. As a necessary complement to the requisitioning, the law of 29 September 1793 imposed price controls, setting a ceiling on profits of 5 percent for the wholesaler and 10 percent for the retailer and helping to damp down the mania for speculation. Some forms of economic activity were nationalized, notably armaments, other war-related industries, and overseas trade; but regulation was really confined to immediate military necessities, for the Committee of Public Safety refused to

14. Louis-Auguste Blanqui (1805–1881), French revolutionary leader active in the revolutions of 1830, 1848, and 1870–71.

nationalize the system of provisioning for the civilian population at large.

Nevertheless, the essential features of a social democracy began to appear. The Montagnards and Jacobins however visualized that the mass of the population would eventually take its place in the bourgeois nation through the acquisition of property, according to the principles of 'Eighty-Nine. They had no intention of making the right to own property subordinate to the right to existence or of defining property rights as "a social institution guaranteed by the law," as Robespierre had proposed in his "Project for a Declaration of Human Rights" on 24 April 1793. Even so, the Montagnards met the peasants' demands by completely abolishing feudal dues without compensation on 17 July 1793; and another decree, on 22 October 1793, forbade landowners from requiring their tenants or sharecroppers to make any type of payment instead of the abolished dues. How far this decree was applied in practice is another matter. While these measures led to a redistribution of incomes, the shift in property ownership accelerated. The lands of the émigrés, sequestered on 9 February 1792 and put up for sale on 27 July of the same year, were divided into small parcels of 2 to 4 *arpents* (roughly 2 1/2 to 5 acres) by the decree of 3 June 1793, with the price payable over ten years; the period for payment was then extended to twenty years by the decree of 13 September. On 10 June a decree permitted the division of communal lands, if this was requested by one-third of the inhabitants of the

community. Taken together, all these measures tended to create a nation of small proprietors. This policy culminated in the decrees of 8 and 13 Ventôse, Year II (26 February and 3 March 1794) confiscating the lands belonging to suspect persons and transferring them to "indigent patriots": "any person who shows himself the enemy of his country cannot hold property there," said Saint-Just. But this did not add up, as Albert Mathiez believed, to "the program for a new revolution"; rather it was a political and social policy in harmony with the goals of the bourgeois revolution. Confiscation of property had never been anything but a weapon against the aristocracy, while the redistribution of land was a way to build up greater social solidarity. Believing as they did in economic liberty, neither Robespierrists nor Montagnards wished to take sides in the agrarian conflict; they paid no heed to the demands of the rural Sans-Culottes, and their plans never included the reform of the sharecropping system or the division of big farms into smallholdings. The same blend of boldness and hesitancy marked their attempts at social reform. The right to poor relief was laid down by the decree of 22 Floréal, Year II (11 May 1794); in each Department a "register of national charity" was to be kept, but only the "inhabitants of the countryside" were to be eligible for welfare payments. The decree also set out a scheme of pensions for the aged and infirm, allowances for mothers and widows with children to support, and free medical treatment at home—the first outlines of a system of social security.

"Let Europe learn that you no longer wish French soil to harbor oppressors or oppressed," Saint-Just declared on 13 Ventôse. "The idea of happiness is new to Europe."

III. THE UNACHIEVABLE EGALITARIAN REPUBLIC

1. *The Decline of the Popular Movement (Spring 1794).* By the end of the winter of 1793–94, developments that had been in the making since the foundation of the revolutionary government became clear-cut and pronounced. On one hand, the price regulation and economic controls, demanded by the Sans-Culottes and opposed by the property-owners, assured the supply of essentials—except bread—to the Parisian population, albeit amid infinite difficulties. On the other hand, the exigencies of national defense, a bourgeois political concept, forced the government increasingly to demand purely passive support from the popular societies and to recast the democracy of the Sans-Culottes in a Jacobin mold. By the beginning of the month of Ventôse (late February 1794) a social and political crisis was threatening the Sans-Culottes; their revolutionary program and even their very existence were at stake. Against this background of growing tension, the strife within the government between the "Indulgents" and the "Ardent Patriots" came to a head. A potential alliance between its extreme political opponents and the discontented masses confronted the government with a grave threat. By the

Ventôse decrees[15] it therefore sought to win over the Sans-Culottes, but the stratagem failed. The decrees lacked the psychological impact needed to resolve the crisis and regain the Sans-Culottes' support.

The situation now seemed ripe for the "Ardent Patriots," led by the Cordeliers Club, to get rid of the moderates, seize control of the vital government committees and dominate the Convention. But the Cordeliers' leaders had failed to learn the lesson of every previous uprising; they took little care to organize their own movement and did not secure the cooperation of the popular groups hardest hit by food shortages and most aware of the danger from the moderates. On 14 Ventôse, Year II, the Cordeliers proclaimed a "holy insurrection," which for them apparently meant no more than a mass demonstration. Their call attracted no followers. But their abortive uprising gave the revolutionary government the chance it needed to act. It eliminated both factions of the opposition, first executing the Cordeliers on 24 March 1794, then turning on Danton and the "Indulgents," who were guillotined on 5 April.

This dramatic clash proved to be a turning point, and events now began to move rapidly. After the execution of the Cordeliers and the suppression of *Le Père Duchesne,* which had expressed their views, the Sans-Culottes lost faith in the revolutionary government.

15. These decrees (8 and 13 Ventôse, Year II; 26 February and 3 March 1794) confiscated the property of émigrés for the benefit of "indigent patriots."

The execution of Danton and the moderates did not appease them and win back their confidence. The repression which followed these great political trials in Germinal, Year II (late March-early April 1794), although restricted in its scope, sent a wave of fear through the militants of the Sections and paralyzed their political activity. The close relationship between the government and the Sans-Culottes was destroyed.

Strong in the knowledge of its victory, the government now directed its efforts to bringing all the revolutionary institutions into line and to unifying every political group under its control. Under the threat of immediate danger it had accepted the alliance of the Sans-Culottes, but it had never agreed with their social objectives or political methods. Now it disbanded the revolutionary army,[16] abolished the commissioners of enquiry into grain-hoarding, and purged the Commune of Paris. An even more serious danger, from the standpoint of the popular movement, was the resumption of the government's opposition to the Sectional Societies. Speaking on 15 May 1794, Couthon[17] demanded the unification of public opinion, with every patriot following the lead of the Jacobins. Collot

16. The revolutionary armies were founded in 1792, at the instigation of the Sans-Culottes, to repress internal dissidents; they became an official arm of the government in 1793, and also enforced price regulations, punishing hoarders and speculators in grain.

17. Georges Couthon (1755–1794), lawyer, deputy to the Legislative Assembly and the Convention; close associate of Robespierre, with whom he served on the Committee of Public Safety, and whose political fate he shared.

d'Herbois stressed once more the incompatibility of the Sans-Culottes' democracy with the needs of the revolutionary government; the Sectional Societies, he said, "wanted to make each Section into a little Republic." Between the months of Germinal and Prairial (April-May 1794), thirty-nine Societies were suppressed on the orders of the Jacobins and the government; these were chiefly (twenty-nine out of thirty-nine) recently-founded Societies, composed in the main of "patriots of 'Ninety-Three," or "newly-hatched patriots," so-called to distinguish them from the "patriots of 'Eighty-Nine." By dissolving the Societies, the Central Committees of the government broke the back of the popular movement.

From Germinal to Messidor, centralization proceeded more swiftly still. The six-minister Provisional Executive Council was abolished,[18] to be replaced on 1 April 1794 by twelve executive commissions under the control of the Committee of Public Safety. On 19 April the representatives on mission were recalled, since the Committee now preferred to rely on its own emissaries.[19] The Terror was intensified by the law of 22

18. The Provisional Executive Council had replaced the crown as the central executive body after the fall of the monarchy on August 10, 1792; its members were chosen by the Assembly and were under its direct control.

19. Commissioners had been sent out by the government since 1790 to deal with emergencies; from 1792 the Convention made extensive use of the representatives on mission (drawn from its own members) to maintain order and ensure its control over the Departments and the armies on the frontiers. The Committee of Public Safety had its own representatives which it now sought to substitute entirely for the Convention's.

Prairial, Year II (10 June 1794): "It is not so much a question of punishing the enemies of the Revolution," said Couthon, "as of destroying them." The purged bureaucracy obeyed; the Convention voted the motion without debate. But what the government gained in "coercive force" it lost in trust and support, and its social base was becoming dangerously narrow. Documentary evidence from the spring of 1794 bears witness to the prostration of the popular movement. The assemblies in the Sections still placed questions of general policy on their agendas, but not for discussion; instead, they confined themselves to passing resolutions of congratulation and loyalty addressed to the government, as for instance on the proclamation of the cult of the Supreme Being by the decree of 18 Floréal, Year II (7 May 1794).[20] If the attempted assassinations of Robespierre and Collot d'Herbois revived the ardor of the partisans of the Terror, it was only for a moment; and the popular assemblies soon relapsed into their trivial daily routines. The victory of Fleurus on 26 June 1794 and the anniversary of the taking of the Bastille did little to restore popular enthusiasm. Behind an outward show of unity, indifference or outright hostility was eroding the vitality of the Sections, which were slowly suffocating in the grip of the bureaucratized revolutionary Committees. "The Revolution is frozen solid," noted Saint-Just.

20. Robespierre fostered the cult partly out of his own Rousseauist beliefs and partly as a move to head off the anti-Christian attacks of the extreme democrats, in the interest of political unity. The cult did not survive Robespierre's fall.

By emasculating the popular movement in this way the government Committees had delivered themselves from the specter of mass insurrection, but at the same time they had freed the Convention from the threat that hung over it, thus depriving themselves of the most effective weapon for keeping it in check. As the extent of the victory became clear, the Convention realized that it no longer needed to accept the government's domination. Soon the government was to find itself isolated, caught between the sullen hostility of the Sans-Culottes and the Convention's desire to be rid of its tutelage.

2. *The Fall of the Revolutionary Government and the End of the Popular Movement (Thermidor, Year II-Prairial, Year III).* In the early days of Thermidor, dissensions increased among the Montagnards in the Convention. Representatives on mission recalled from their duties and former supporters of Danton refused to forgive the Committee of Public Safety for what it had done. Their opposition would have had no effect if the two revolutionary Committees had remained united, but by now the old enmity between the Committee of Public Safety and the Committee of General Security was growing more bitter. The members of the latter, except for Lebas and David,[21] opposed Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety out of personal hostility

21. Jacques-Louis David (1748–1826), the painter, was at this time an ardent supporter of Robespierre and had organized numerous pageants and festivals in honor of the Revolution. He was imprisoned after Thermidor.

and also for reasons of principle. The respective jurisdictions of the two Committees had never been satisfactorily defined, and they had been enmeshed in a dispute over the direction of policy since the establishment, in the month of Floréal, of a police bureau taking its orders from the Committee of Public Safety alone. The Committee of General Security could easily have been neutralized if the Committee of Public Safety had not been divided within itself. Here the conflict was not merely, as Albert Mathiez suggested, over the application of the Ventôse decrees and social policy; there were also deep-seated political grudges and clashes of personality, as Georges Lefebvre has shown. Despite an attempted reconciliation between the two Committees at a plenary session on 4 and 5 Thermidor (22, 23 July 1794), Robespierre decided to lay the dispute before the Convention, thus making it the arbiter of the revolutionary government's fate at the very moment when victory over France's enemies had been won on the battlefield, and the internal threat from the popular party had been eliminated.

Robespierre faced this risk without taking any precautions. Nothing was done to secure the aid of the Paris Commune and the Sections in the event that the Convention might refuse to follow the Robespierrists. Worse still, just as the political climate was taking this dangerous turn, on 5 Thermidor the Commune of Paris (although Robespierrist in its sympathies), ignoring the social and economic crisis and deaf to the demands of the common people, published a table of maximum wages. The result was an arbitrary cut in wages which in

some cases could be very serious; a carpenter's income fell from 8 *livres* a week to 3 *livres* 15 *sous*. This still further widened the split between the revolutionary government and the Sectional militants, and between the Commune and the masses.

The trial of strength between Robespierre and his opponents in the Convention, on 9 Thermidor (27 July 1794), proved the efficacy of the government's centralization measures. Only ten Sectional committees came out in support of the Commune, which had declared for Robespierre, and persisted long enough to compromise themselves politically; twelve others vacillated; eighteen came out at once on the side of the Convention. In the Sectional assemblies, only a handful of militants obeyed the call for an uprising. The politics of revolutionary action, on which the leaders of the Commune had counted, were held in check by the tight mechanism of centralized control, which now proved the undoing of those who had worked so hard to create it—the Robespierrists and their Jacobin allies. The Sections, instead of providing the shock troops of revolt as in earlier uprisings, were now for the most part content to transmit the government's orders. Lacking any real popular support, the Robespierrists were isolated and defeated.

The revolutionary government did not survive Robespierre's fall. It was dissolved in the course of the summer of 1794, particularly by the decree of 7 Fructidor, Year II (24 August), which put an end to the concentration of governmental powers. As part of the same process, the Terror was brought to a halt, and the

government gave up its "coercive force" along with the other sources of revolutionary authority. Many prisoners were released. In Brumaire, Year III (November 1794) the Jacobin Club was closed, and soon a White Terror began to rage unchecked. Another part of post-Thermidorian policy consisted of the lifting of economic controls; the decree of 4 Nivôse, Year III (24 December 1794) abolished all maximums and fixed prices, putting an end to the directed economy. The *assignat* collapsed and inflation became rampant: by April 1795 the general index of prices stood at 758 compared with a base of 100 in 1790, while food prices stood at 819. In this sense, 9 Thermidor had proved to be a Day of Dupes for the Sans-Culottes. Discontented with the revolutionary government, they had failed to foresee that its fall would prove disastrous to themselves. Ten months after Robespierre's death, driven by poverty, famine prices, and the rigors of a particularly harsh winter, the Parisian Sans-Culottes rose for the last time, demanding a return to the controlled economy. Their initial uprising on 12 Germinal, Year III (1 April 1794) merely formed a prelude to the far more dramatic insurrections that took place on 1 and 2 Prairial, Year III (20, 21 May 1795). On the evening of 4 Prairial, worn down by hunger, their leaders gone, their organization destroyed, the people of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, mainstay of the Revolution since 'Eighty-Nine, surrendered without a fight.

Solid citizens could now breathe freely, and repression was unleashed. The defeat had been decisive: the popular movement, exhausted and disorganized,

composed of convinced republicans and supporters of the Old Regime alike, had been vanquished by the bourgeoisie, backed by the army. Its motive force destroyed, the Revolution was over.

The uprising of Prairial, Year III, like the events of 9 Thermidor, Year II, were the final tragic episodes in the class struggle fought between the different groups that had once comprised the Third Estate. To see this conflict in its true perspective, we must remember that the French Revolution was in essence a struggle between the entire Third Estate and the aristocracy of Europe as a whole, and that in this struggle the bourgeoisie held the commanding position. The Sans-Culottes were in fundamental accord with the revolutionary bourgeoisie on the essential issue: hatred of the nobles and the will to defeat them. They remained true to this principle, so that in October 1795 and September 1797 the most politically conscious elements among the people, overcoming their justifiable resentments, aided the post-Thermidorian bourgeoisie in crushing the counterrevolution. But in spite of this basic community of interests, a split would inevitably have appeared between the popular movement and the Jacobin dictatorship of the Committee of Public Safety, leading in the end to the downfall of the political system of the Year II. Although the pressures of war aggravated the conflict, it was still fundamentally the result of irreconcilable differences between two opposing social forces.

On the political level, war necessitated an authoritarian form of government; the Sans-Culottes recognized this and helped to establish the centralized

institutions needed to meet the crisis. But the exigencies of war conflicted with the ideal of democracy to which both Montagnards and Sans-Culottes paid homage, although with different emphases. The Sans-Culottes had demanded a strong government to crush the aristocracy, never imagining that the government, in its will to victory, would also bring them to heel. But above all, the form of democracy practised by the Sans-Culottes naturally tended toward direct democracy, with continual electoral control over representatives, the popular right of recall, and voting by voice or acclamation. These political concepts were the reverse of the idea of liberal, representative democracy that the Montagnard bourgeoisie held dear. The conflict of views was not just accidental; it stemmed from a fundamental difference in outlook.

In social and economic terms, the difference was just as insurmountable. Apostles of the free economy, the members of the revolutionary government—and most of all Robespierre—only accepted economic controls because they could not fight their war without price regulation and requisitioning. The Sans-Culottes, on the other hand, demanded and imposed the "general maximum" on prices in order to ensure their own survival. However democratic the Revolution might seem, it still remained bourgeois, and the government regulated wages as well as prices in order to keep a balance between employers and workers. Economic regulation required collaboration between the Montagnards and the Sans-Culottes, yet at the same time it struck at the interests of the bourgeoisie, even the Jacobin bourgeoisie, by shackling free enterprise and

curbing profits. The state-imposed maximum prices were therefore evaded, save in the case of arms and military equipment paid for by the government, and grain and forage requisitioned from the peasants. This led inevitably to conflict with the wage-earners who, hard pressed by inflation and food shortages, naturally tried to take advantage of the relative scarcity of labor in order to secure higher wages. Between autumn and spring of the Year II (1793–94), the Paris Commune turned a blind eye and failed to enforce the law fixing wages. After Germinal, Year II, however, the government redressed the situation in favor of firms whose profits had shrunk under the double pressure of regulated prices and illegal wage increases. This policy culminated in the maximum wage law of 5 Thermidor. At this point the revolutionary government negated the advantages that the wage-earners had built up and seemed to veer away from its position as mediator between workers and employers. The controlled economy of the Year II did not rest on a solid base of class interest and so proved hollow; after 9 Thermidor, it collapsed.

What was at issue here was not just the conflict between the Jacobin dictatorship and the popular movement; the ideology of the Sans-Culottes was flawed by inherent contradictions and carried within itself the causes of the downfall of the political alliance of the Year II. The Sans-Culottes were not a class, and their movement was not united by class feeling. Shopkeepers and artisans, journeymen and day laborers, with a small group of bourgeois, could form an irresistible alliance against the aristocracy. But within this

alliance there was antagonism between the artisans and shopkeepers, who lived by the profits they derived from private ownership of the means of production, and the day laborers and journeymen, who lived entirely on their wages. For a while the pressures of the Revolution imposed unity on the Sans-Culotte movement, pushing into the background the clash of interests that divided its members, but the division remained; drawn as they were from a mixture of social groups, the Sans-Culottes had no shared class consciousness to hold them together. Though they might all proclaim their hostility to capitalism, it was for divergent reasons. Craftsmen were afraid of being reduced to the condition of wage-earners: day laborers hated the speculators in grain who increased the price of their daily bread. Day laborers moreover had no consciousness of themselves as a distinct social group; their mentality derived mainly from that of the artisans, since capitalist development had not yet proceeded far enough to awaken an independent sense of class among them. They had a dim awareness of their unity, which was brought home to them by the similarity of the manual labor they performed, by their dress and their way of life. They also shared a lack of education, which instilled in them a sense of inferiority, even at times of powerlessness, so that when the "men of talent," the middling bourgeoisie of the Jacobin Club deserted them, the Parisian Sans-Culottes were lost.

The dialectical movement of the historical process further explains why the experiment of the Year II was doomed to failure. Five long years of revolutionary struggle wore out the best spirits, gradually exhausted

the popular movement's energies, and blunted its cutting edge, while hopes constantly deferred made the rank and file lose heart. "The people grow tired," Robespierre had noted; they longed to enjoy the reward for their struggles. "We are almost ready to regret all the sacrifices we have made for the Revolution," the Sans-Culottes of the Faubourgs Saint-Antoine and Saint-Marcel announced to the Convention on 17 March 1795. Month by month the conscription of men for the army had weakened the Parisian Sections, robbing them of their youngest, most ardent, and most politically conscious members, who felt that their first duty was the defense of the fatherland. The impact of this aging process on the revolutionary fervor of the masses is easy to understand.

At the same time, their very success in the spring and summer of 1793 had helped to dissolve the Sans-Culottes' leadership. Many militants, even though they were not motivated solely by ambition, regarded an official post as the just reward of their efforts. This was in fact the price that had to be paid for governmental efficiency. In the autumn of 1793 the administration was purged and filled with good Sans-Culottes. A new conformist attitude now began to appear, best exemplified in the revolutionary commissioners of the Parisian Sections, originally the most popularly-based and most pugnacious group among the new political men. Their economic situation and the successful fulfillment of their task made it necessary that they be paid a salary; and in the course of the Year II these militants from the Sections turned into administrative officials who were

especially responsive to government directives since they were afraid of losing their new-found positions. The revolutionary government was strengthened, but the popular movement was weakened and its relations with the government were transformed. The political activity of the Sections was checked, the democratic movement was undermined. The process of bureaucratization gradually paralyzed the fighting spirit and critical initiative of the masses. The people's grip on the apparatus of government began to falter, and the government moved more and more in the direction of authoritarianism. The Robespierrists, powerless to reverse this trend, could only stand by.

Thermidor and its epilogue, the uprising of Prairial, Year III, dashed the people's hopes for an egalitarian republic, and resumed the course of social development charted by the men of 'Eighty-Nine. But in the meantime, the situation had changed irreversibly: the Terror had struck a devastating blow at the old society, destroying it and clearing the ground for the emergence of new social relationships. The ascendancy of the bourgeoisie and the reign of the notables had dawned.

III

1795:

Liberalism or Dictatorship?
(1795–1799)

Of the two mass movements that in turn had pushed the bourgeois revolution forward, by 1795 one was crushed and the other had grown temperate. The common people of the cities were now on the defensive and were to remain so, despite the efforts of Babeuf and the conspirators of Year IV, until the revolution of 1830. The peasantry were hopelessly divided; for by abolishing feudal rights once and for all on 17 July 1793, the Montagnard leaders in the Convention had turned all peasant landholders into supporters of the status quo. The revolutionary ardor of the masses was quenched, the power of the aristocracy was broken, and the era of bourgeois consolidation was beginning.

After Thermidor the Convention bequeathed to the regime that succeeded it, known to history as the Directory, a legacy of war, a desperate economic situation, and an astutely balanced political system whose practical application was far more important than its

legal forms. Year II of the Revolution had left the bourgeoisie with frightening memories of restricted profits, impaired freedom, and power in the hands of the lower orders; this experience strengthened its class consciousness and stimulated it to secure its position. The primacy of the notables was reaffirmed, and the nation's political form was again defined by a narrowly based franchise. But a return to normal politics was impossible; the collapse of the paper currency provoked another wave of revolutionary opposition, and the counterrevolution at home and abroad stubbornly refused to come to terms. Political practice and administration were dominated by the need for emergency measures, which paved the way for the Consulate, under which they were institutionalized. From Thermidor to the empire of Napoleon there was thus a line of continuity which the coup d'état of Brumaire interrupted only in appearance.

I. THE LEGACY OF THERMIDOR: PROPERTY AND LIBERTY

The guiding principles that would ensure the social and political ascendancy of the bourgeoisie were clearly defined by Boissy d'Anglas in his speech presenting the projected new Constitution to the Convention on 23 June 1795. Its purpose was, he said, "finally to guarantee the property of the rich and the existence of the poor; to guarantee to the industrious man the fruits of his labor, and to assure liberty and security for all."[1]

1. François-Antoine de Boissy d'Anglas (1756–1826), lawyer and moderate politician; a leading figure after Thermidor.

Property was the foundation of the social order. The Convention must resist, "with courage the fallacious maxims of absolute democracy and unlimited equality, which are without doubt the most serious threats to true liberty. Civil equality offers all that the reasonable man could wish for. Total equality is an illusion; for it to exist, there would have to be complete similarity between the minds, the virtues, the physical strength, the education, and the fortune of every individual." Vergniaud had already put forward the same argument on 13 March 1793: "For man as a social being, the only equality is that of legal rights. There is no more equality of fortunes than there is of height, strength, mental capacity, energy, diligence, and labor." There is thus a notable continuity from the Girondins to the Thermidorians. Boissy d'Anglas would go further still:

We should be governed by the best among us; the best are the most highly educated, and those with the greatest interest in upholding the laws; save for the rarest exceptions, you will only find such men among those who, by reason of their owning property, are devoted to the land in which it is situated, to the laws that protect it, to the public peace that maintains it; who derive from that property, and the leisure that it affords, the upbringing and training that render them capable of discussing wisely and reasonably the arguments for and against the laws that will govern the fate of their country. The propertyless man, on the other hand, must strive endlessly if he is to achieve the virtue required to concern himself with a political order in which he has no stake, and to resist those movements that offer him hope.

Economic liberty was a necessary corollary of property rights:

> If you were to grant unlimited political rights to men without property, and if they were ever to take their place in the legislative assembly, they would provoke disturbances, or cause them to be provoked, without fear of the consequences; they would levy or permit the levying of taxes fatal to trade and agriculture, since they would neither have foreseen nor apprehended the atrocious effects of such taxes; in the end they would precipitate us into dreadful upheavals which we would only overcome with great difficulty. . . . A country ruled by property-owners exists in a social state; one ruled by the propertyless is in a state of nature.

From now on the bourgeoisie intended to monopolize the exercise of property rights, which meant cutting off the lower classes from any hope of advancement. The chance to acquire landed property, opened up for a moment by the Montagnards' legislation, was now closed off to the unpropertied—especially the small peasants—in the name of liberal economic principle. Already on 22 Fructidor, Year II (8 September 1794), Lozeau, deputy of the Lower Charente, had pointed out the need for this when he presented the Convention with his report "On the Physical Impossibility of Making Every Frenchman a Landowner, and Furthermore on the Dangerous Consequences that Such a Change Would Bring About." Even if the Republic were able to make every peasant an independent farmer, he argued, this would not be a good thing, "for if we were to follow this hypothesis, if every man were

obliged to till his own land or vineyard in order to live, then trade, crafts, and industry would soon be destroyed."

The existence of a dependent proletariat is the essential condition for the maintenance of a capitalist economy and bourgeois society. Any attack on the privileged status of wealth is an implicit attack on the social order. The threat of an "agrarian law," the redistribution of landed property, remained as potent as ever; and the fear of this kind of social upheaval goes far to explain France's subsequent evolution toward military dictatorship. Inveighing against the establishment of a progressive tax in the Assembly of Five Hundred,[2] on 10 Frimaire, Year IV (1 December 1795), a certain Dauchy observed;

> States can prosper only through the greatest possible attachment to property on the part of their citizens. . . . A progressive tax discriminates against the more substantial citizens. . . . Its effect would inevitably be the division of estates into the smallest of parcels, a system which was followed only too faithfully in the sale of national lands. . . . To put it succinctly, this progressive tax is the seed of an agrarian law, which must be stifled at birth. . . . Only by inculcating a religious respect for [property] shall we be able to secure the allegiance of every Frenchman to liberty and to the Republic.

The Declaration of Rights forming the preamble to the Constitution of the Year III marks a distinct step

2. This was the lower house of the bicameral legislature established by the Constitution of Year III (1795).

backward in comparison with the Declaration of 1789. In the course of debate, on 26 Thermidor (13 August 1795), Mailhe[3] had drawn attention to the perils that would result from including in the Declaration any "principles opposed to those contained in the Constitution," and went on to observe that "we have been sorely tried enough by the misuse of words to have learned not to use them frivolously." Article 1 of the Declaration of 1789—"men are born free and equal in their rights, and so remain"—was set aside. "If you would have it that all men remain equal in the rights they hold," declared Lanjuinais[4] on 26 Thermidor, "you will incite to rebellion against the Constitution those whose civic rights you have suspended or revoked for the safety of the community." The Thermidorians, more cautious than the drafters of earlier Constitutions, specified that equality would be purely legal: "Equality consists in the fact that the law is the same for all" (Article 3). The social rights enshrined in the Declaration of 1793 disappeared, as did the right of insurrection. Property rights, however, which were not defined in the Declaration of 1789, were now described in the same terms as in the Declaration of 1793: "The right of property is the right to enjoy and dispose of one's goods, one's revenues, the fruits of one's labor and

3. Jean-Baptiste Mailhe (1758–1839), lawyer and moderate politician, originally elected to the Assembly in 1791; prominent in arranging the trial of Louis XVI, but voted to suspend his execution; increasingly reactionary after Thermidor.

4. Jean-Denis Lanjuinais (1753–1827), ex-Jacobin and Girondin deputy; after Thermidor inclined toward royalism.

industry'' (Article 5). This was economic freedom in its widest sense. The Thermidorians also saw fit to add to the Declaration of Rights a Declaration of Duties, which specified in Article 8: ''The maintenance of property is the foundation of agriculture, production, every kind of labor, and the entire social order.'' The franchise was narrowed, although the vote was more widely distributed than it had been in 1791: every Frenchman over twenty-one, who had lived in the same place for more than a year and paid any taxes, qualified as an ''active citizen.''

As a result, the social base on which the Thermidorians and then the Directory sought to consolidate the Revolution remained extremely narrow. Memories of the revolutionary action of the masses during Year II and fear of another upheaval contributed to the reactionary trend, and would lead finally to Napoleon's seizure of power in 1799. In the meantime, the more politically conscious elements among the masses refused to acquiesce tamely in their exclusion from the politically active part of the nation and from the Republic for which they had fought, as the Conspiracy of the Equals would soon demonstrate. But while the revolutionary movement shifted direction, uncertainly and hesitatingly, into new paths, the bourgeoisie's fears provided the government with a powerful weapon against its political enemies—what it called the ''exclusionists,'' the ''terrorists,'' the ''anarchists,'' the ''brigands,'' the ''bloodthirsty.'' Above all, the notables and solid citizens were afraid of a return to the way things had been in Year II, when the wealthy were automatically suspect, traditional social values were overturned, and

the democratization of politics had seemed to open the way to a leveling of social classes.

On the other side, the aristocracy remained excluded from politics, and certain elements of the bourgeoisie along with them. The law of 3 Brumaire, Year IV (25 October 1795) barred the relatives of émigrés from public office, and though this law was repealed by the royalist majority elected in the Year V, it was reenacted on 18 Fructidor. Shortly afterward, Sieyès proposed exiling all nobles who had held public positions under the Old Regime and reducing the others to the civil status of aliens. The law of 9 Frimaire, Year VI (29 November 1797) followed the latter proposal; and even if it was never implemented, its purpose was clear enough. Nor was it just the nobles who were shut out of political life: the men of the Directory, bourgeois of the middling sort, were equally mistrustful of the bourgeois who had been prominent under the Old Regime, on a higher social level, and closer to the aristocracy. So constitutional monarchists were excluded from politics along with the supporters of absolutism. The Thermidorians, and after them the Directory, intended their Republic to be bourgeois and conservative, but they rejected the support of the royalist element within the bourgeoisie for fear of an eventual restoration of the monarchy.

II. FINANCIAL CRISIS AND THE CONSPIRACY OF THE EQUALS (1795–1797)

In the end it was to prove impossible to consolidate the Revolution on the narrow foundation of property and a

franchise restricted to the bourgeoisie and those notables who were republican in their sympathies. Stabilization and permanence could only be achieved by solving the problems bequeathed by the Thermidorians: the war, and the economic and financial chaos at home. Although the Thermidorians had made peace with Prussia, Spain, and Holland in 1795, war continued with Austria down to the Treaty of Campo Formio (18 October 1797). The currency was ruined, the economy exhausted. A fiscal crisis was brewing: tax revenues fell and the Treasury was empty. In vain Reubell exhorted "even the indifferent . . . to rally around the Republic and unite with the great mass of republicans, in which every faction will disappear."[5]

Inflation touched its highest point shortly after the Directory took power on 4 Brumaire, Year IV (26 October 1795). An *assignat* with a face value of 100 *livres* was by now worth 15 *sous,* or .75 percent of its nominal value; but more and more were printed and soon they were worth less than the paper of which they were made. In less than four months the number of *assignats* in circulation doubled, reaching a total of 39 billion *livres* nominal value in February 1796. The levying of a forced loan on a progressive scale—really a tax on capital—payable in metal currency, grain, or *assignats* at 1 percent of their value, did nothing to ease the financial crisis; for by then the value of the *assignat* had fallen to a third or a quarter of that figure. On 30

5. Jean-François Reubell (1747–1807), leading politician after Thermidor; one of the Directors, 1796-1799.

Pluviôse, Year IV (19 February 1796) the issue of *assignats* was stopped and the monetary system based on them was abandoned.

A return to metal currency however seemed impossible; only about 300 million *livres* worth were circulating, as opposed to two and one-half billion at the end of the Old Regime. The plan for a national bank of issue was given up. The law of 28 Ventôse, Year IV (18 March 1796) created the "land bond," 2.4 billion of which were soon issued. Secured on national land not yet sold, the land bonds were exchanged for *assignats* at a rate of thirty to one, while at the same moment *assignats* were being accepted in payment of the forced loan at the rate of 100 to one. In six short months the land bond followed the same downward trajectory that had taken the *assignat* five years. From the first moment of issue the bonds lost 65 to 70 percent of their value, and the depreciation reached 90 percent by 1 Floréal (20 April 1796). Prices of commodities were now quoted in the three different forms of currency, which did little to facilitate trade or the supply of food. The piecemeal sale of national lands, on which the bonds were secured, helped to complete their ruin. The law of 6 Floréal (26 April 1796) authorized the resumption of the sale of public lands and specified the method to be followed: auction was not used, and land bonds were accepted in payment at their face value. A stampede to buy land ensued, a shameless display of land-grabbing which chiefly benefited government contractors and suppliers, who were paid in bonds. By Prairial, the price of bread calculated in *assignats* stood at 150 francs per

pound. Even beggars refused paper money when it was offered to them.

Things now speeded up. On 29 Messidor (17 July 1796) the fixed rate of exchange for bonds and *assignats* was abolished. On 13 Thermidor (31 July) it was decreed that payment for national lands was to be made in bonds at the current market rate, but this came too late to stop the squandering of the state's patrimony. By the end of Year IV (mid-September 1796) the fiction of paper money had completely collapsed. Metal coins began to reappear; but since the state now only accepted paper, it reaped no benefit. The law of 16 Pluviôse, Year V (4 February 1797) demonetized the land bond, fixing it at 1 percent of its nominal value: the state's bankruptcy was now officially recognized, and the saga of revolutionary paper money was finally over. The war had begun to bring in profits for the government, and the return to metal currency was made possible by the exploitation of the occupied territories. By 5 Germinal, Year V (25 March 1797) the Directory had received 10 millions in coin from the army of the Sambre-et-Meuse, and over 51 millions from the army of Italy.

The social effects of these developments were as usual disastrous for the lower classes. The winter of Year IV was appalling for wage-earners faced with the accelerating rise in prices. No grain was to be had in the markets, for the harvest of 1795 had been bad, the peasants would only take payment in cash, and the government was no longer requisitioning grain. The Directory was forced to buy grain abroad and to limit

home consumption. In Paris the daily bread ration fell to 75 grams, augmented by rice which the housewives could not cook for lack of firewood. Throughout the winter police reports indicated with a dreadful monotony the poverty and discontent of the common people, thrown into harsh relief by contrast to the flagrant luxury of speculators. Hostility to the Directory increased. At the Pantheon Club, the resurgent Jacobins debated the reestablishment of price controls. But at this point the revolutionary opposition assumed a new form under the guidance of Babeuf.

Babeuf's early book knowledge of millenarian communism had been deepened and vivified by reflection on the events through which he had lived and by the revolutionary activity into which he had thrown himself. He was the first figure in the French Revolution to transcend the contradiction that had so far proved fatal to the popular cause: the impossibility of reconciling the right to existence with the principles of private property and economic liberty. True, Babeuf's abortive Conspiracy of the Equals does not form part of the line of development of the bourgeois revolution; but, viewed in a wider perspective, it marks the crucial change from the older type of popular movement which had reached its peak in Year II, to a revolutionary movement born out of the contradictions inherent in the new form of society that was emerging.

Like the Sans-Culottes and the Jacobins, Babeuf held that the purpose of society was the happiness of all its members, and that the aim of the Revolution was to secure the equal enjoyment of life's blessings for all.

But the institution of private property inevitably led to inequality, which the "agrarian law"—division of the land into equal shares for all—could not remedy for "even a day," "since on the morrow of the enactment of that law, inequality of possessions would reassert itself." Thus, the only way to achieve real equality was "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 labors 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." This was Babeuf's program, outlined in the "Manifesto of the Plebeians" published in the *Tribune of the People* of 9 Frimaire, Year IV (30 November 1795). It was a renewal, or rather an abrupt transformation, of the ideologies of the Jacobins and the Sans-Culottes, both of which had been marked by their attachment to the petty ownership of property acquired by individual labor. Babeuf's conception of the community of goods and labor was the first form of a revolutionary ideology deriving from the new social conditions that the Revolution itself had produced. Babeuf transformed the hitherto utopian dream of communism into a coherent ideology, and through the Conspiracy of the Equals, it entered the realm of concrete political history.

Babouvism has been described by Georges Lefebvre as "distributive communism," and it is certainly true

that the problem of sharing the basic necessities of life, which was the overriding concern of the common people at that time, occupied a central position in Babeuf's social thought. As a former parish clerk and commissioner of land registers, specializing in feudal law, Babeuf had first-hand experience of the life of the peasants of Picardy and was well acquainted with their hardships and their desires. He had also seen for himself the workings of vigorous, aggressive village communities, with their sense of collective rights and customs, and this example had probably influenced his ideas in the direction of egalitarian communism even before the Revolution. Although in his *Perpetual Cadaster* of 1789 he had favored the "agrarian law" (or "socialism of distribution" as it was to be called in 1848), in a memorandum on large estates written in 1785 and in a letter written the following year, he envisaged the organization of "collective farms" or "fraternal communities." "Breaking up the land into small parcels of equal size for each individual," he wrote, "nullifies the advantage of large-scale cultivation, which can only be obtained through cooperative labor." Before the onset of the Revolution, therefore, Babeuf was examining the problem of the true equality of rights, which was partly the problem of the distribution of wealth but also the problem of production; this had led him to foresee the need for the collective organization of labor on the land. Had he failed to grasp the importance of capitalist concentration and the rise of industrial production? His preference for the older economic forms, especially for

the independent artisanate, and the lack of any reference in his work to a communist society founded on an abundant supply of consumer goods, helps to explain why he has been regarded as an economic pessimist. The particular economic conditions of his time, the still insignificant degree of capitalist concentration and the absence of any real system of mass production help to explain, along with Babeuf's own temperament and experience, why he tended to emphasize the weakness and stagnation of productive forms rather than their expansion and dynamism. Babouvism thus occupies a position between the moralizing, utopian communism of the eighteenth century and the industrial socialism of Saint-Simon.[6]

The Conspiracy of the Equals, in the winter of 1795–1796, was the first attempt to make the communist ideal a concrete political actuality. Its organization was a notable departure from the methods used up to then by the popular movement. Its directing nucleus was composed of a few well-tried militants. Around them were grouped a fringe of sympathizers, patriots and democrats loyal to the ideals of Year II, who were not admitted to the secret and who probably did not completely share the new revolutionary ideology, together with the masses, whose support was considered likely, given the economic crisis. The essence of the conspiracy was tight organization, but the problem of relations between the leadership and the masses was not

6. Claude Henri de Rouvroy, count de Saint-Simon (1760–1825), was one of the first theorists of a form of socialism adapted to the conditions of industrial society.

satisfactorily solved. The concept of popular insurrection here formed the starting point for a theory of revolutionary dictatorship which Marat had foreseen, even though he had never defined its specifics. According to this theory, once the people had risen and seized power, it would be naïve to hand things over to an assembly elected according to the accepted principles of political democracy, or even chosen by universal suffrage. Instead, the dictatorship of a revolutionary minority would be essential, since time would be required to recast society in a new mold and to create new institutions. This idea was handed down from Babeuf to Buonarotti,[7] then from him to Blanqui; and in all probability Lenin's concept and practice of the dictatorship of the proletariat derive ultimately from Blanquism.

The full significance of Babouvism and the Conspiracy of the Equals can only be appreciated today; during the Directory they were no more than fleeting episodes. For the first time, however, the idea of communism had become a political force. Fulfilling a promise to his friend Babeuf, in 1828 Buonarotti published, in exile in Brussels, his *History of the Conspiracy for Equality, Called that of Babeuf.* This work had a profound influence, for thanks to it, Babouvism took its place as a link in the development of communist thought and revolutionary organization.

7. Filippo Buonarotti (1761–1837), revolutionary; born at Pisa, went to France in 1792, was active in the revolutionary government until Thermidor; joined Babeuf in the Conspiracy of the Equals, imprisoned until 1806, then went into exile; returned to France in 1830.

III. POLITICAL PRACTICE: FROM THE LIBERALISM OF THE DIRECTORY TO THE AUTHORITARIANISM OF THE CONSULATE

Although the monetary crisis was over, economic depression persisted throughout the entire history of the Directory. Contrary to all expectations, the abolition of the paper currency did not produce an economic revival. The marketplaces remained empty; for although the peasants now were willing to sell, there was a shortage of buyers, and money was in short supply. The situation was completely reversed since the end of the inflation; the urban consumer now had the advantage over the peasant, who could no longer make a profit. According to an official report of September 1798, the people of Paris were getting what they had demanded in vain under the Old Regime: "bread at eight *sous,* wine at eight *sous,* meat at eight *sous.*" Now it was the turn of the country people to complain; grain prices were low, and the peasants' financial difficulties led, as usual, to general economic stagnation. Good harvests since 1796 and the shortage of metal currency after the deluge of paper probably go far to explain this depression. The concentration of population in the cities, which was still minimal, could not provide sufficient demand to raise the prices of agricultural commodities. Political factors played hardly any part in causing this situation; but the political consequences of the depression, which lasted three to four years (Year V to Year VII and probably to Year VIII as well), were fatal to the Directory. The general population harbored bitter

memories of this time. Peasants and businessmen looked to a change of government as a way out of their difficulties; workers hoped that the change would put an end to unemployment. Government officials were disgruntled with a regime that did not pay them regularly. Napoleon's government was to benefit from an upturn in the economic situation. In this atmosphere of general instability under the Directory, from 1795 to 1799, the Constitution of Year III could only function precariously at best.

Under the new Constitution the separation of powers had been subtly calculated, so that the executive could neither initiate legislation nor control the Treasury. Local government was decentralized once more. Instability was institutionalized by the law requiring frequent reelection of officials; every year, one-half of the officials in the municipalities, a third of the local councils, and a fifth of the Departmental administrations and of the Directory itself were to stand down. This came at a time when the Revolution was still not secure—the laws against émigrés and rebels were still in force—when the state was threatened with bankruptcy and the war was still going on. Even so, the Constitution of Year III did not leave the Directory as defenseless as is usually supposed; and at the political level, moreover, a number of practices were beginning to appear, prefiguring the system that would finally take shape under the Consulate. Steadily, from Thermidor and the Directory to Brumaire, the hegemony of the notables was growing, and the Brumaire coup, far from being the sharp break with the past that Napoleonic

legend proclaimed, was a decisive link in this very process.

The liberal electoral system was violated right from the start, with a cynical resort to co-optation on a wide scale. Laws of disenfranchisement and coups d'état systematically sabotaged the working of the Constitution, until under the Consulate these practices completely replaced the ballot. The "decree of two-thirds" (22 August 1795) perpetuated the ascendancy of the Thermidorians. "To whom shall be given the sacred trust of upholding the Constitution?" The decree provided the answer to this question: the electoral assemblies were obliged to choose two-thirds of the new deputies (500 out of 700) from among those already serving in the Convention. Another decree on 30 August then announced that, since the electoral assemblies had not complied with the law, the deputies reelected to the Convention would fill the vacancies that remained by co-optation. In this way the Thermidorians managed to oust both the former Montagnard deputies and the constitutional monarchist opposition. Finally the Directorial Councils were packed with 511 members of the Convention; the legal proportion of two-thirds was exceeded.

The endless so-called "coups d'état" which have done so much to give the Directory a bad name are in fact a part of this same political process. To remedy the unpredictable to-and-fro of the electoral system, the executive resorted to annulling elections, excluding candidates, and co-opting its supporters. At the elections in the month of Germinal, Year V (1797), to replace the first third of the deputies in the Councils

(half the "Perpetuals"),[8] the Directorial candidates were routed in all but a few Departments. Only eleven old deputies were reelected, and the newly elected third of the members greatly strengthened the monarchist Right. So by the coup of 18 Fructidor, Year V, (4 September 1797), the Directors modified the results of the election: in forty-nine Departments the elections were completely annulled, while in others a number of deputies were excluded. A total of 177 deputies were ousted and not replaced; of those who survived the purge, some resigned, while others adopted a prudent silence.

These methods of political management were further improved for the elections of Year VI (1798), when they took on a number of features that were to persist well into the nineteenth century. This time the stakes were higher, for the purging of deputies had raised the total number of vacant seats to 437, among which figured the second half of the "Perpetuals." As a preliminary measure, on 12 Pluviôse, Year VI (31 January 1798), the Councils arrogated to themselves the right to examine candidates' credentials, so that the 236 deputies who were standing down and the 297 who were to remain in the Convention could proceed to examine and purge the prospective new members. After

8. As we have seen above, the "decree of two-thirds" stipulated that two-thirds of the members of the Assemblies under the Directory (the Council of Five Hundred and the Council of Elders) were to be made up, in the first instance, of former deputies to the Convention: this to secure continuity and also to protect the Convention from possible reprisals. The former Conventionnels reelected under this law were known as "Perpetuals." In 1797 a third of the members of the Assemblies were due for renewal, or one-half of the ex-Conventionnels; the others would be replaced in the next year's election.

all this careful preparation and heavy pressure by the government, the elections were marked by splits and secessions in many of the assemblies, permitting the Directory to intervene and pick the candidates it preferred. The majority of the Assembly of Five Hudnred voted in favor of the list of candidates to be excluded, and the Assembly of Elders agreed. Finally, the law of 22 Floréal, Year VI (11 May 1798), annulled the elections in eight Departments, validated the choices of secessionist assemblies in nineteen others, and debarred another sixty candidates who were judges or government officials; a total of 106 deputies were thus "florealized." In the meantime, 191 government candidates took their place in the Councils: 85 commissioners and officials nominated by the Directory, and 106 judges and officials who had gone through the forms of election, but who had actually been put up by the government. The representative system, when it was not made a mockery by exclusion and co-optation, was corrupted by the official candidature of government nominees—a practice destined to a long and distinguished future in France.

The events of 30 Prairial, Year VII (18 June 1799) were not so much a government coup as a parliamentary uprising. The Councils now took their revenge on the government by legally forcing two Directors to resign.[9]

The Brumaire coup, by contrast, was a direct parallel to those of Fructidor and Floréal. On the very evening

9. Profiting from a wave of domestic discontent and a series of military reverses, the Jacobin deputies in the Assemblies were able to oust two Directors and almost all the government ministers. Any hopes that this would lead to a return to Jacobin policies were, however, soon dispelled.

of the coup, 19 Brumaire, Year VIII (10 November 1799), a majority of the Elders and a minority of the Five Hundred voted to exclude 62 deputies "for their excesses and constant attempts at subversion"; two Commissions of 25 members each were co-opted and ordered to draft proposals for "changes to be made in the constitutional system whose shortcomings and vices have been revealed by experience." The hypocritical manipulation of the Constitution by the Directory here reached a fitting conclusion.

Already in the spring of the Year V (1797), Benjamin Constant[10] had published a work, *On Political Reactions,* in which he called for "strength and stability in government." After the coup of Floréal (1798), Daunou,[11] although he had helped draw up the Constitution of Year III, inveighed against the frequency of elections it stipulated, which plunged everything into uncertainty every year. The Thermidorian bourgeoisie could not attack the principle of popular sovereignty, however, without denying its own right to political power and thus playing into the hands of the divine right monarchists. The problem was therefore to reconcile popular sovereignty with the need for a strong, stable executive. Sieyès envisaged balancing election by co-optation: the governing assemblies would be recruited by co-optation from among the most prominent citizens, lists of whom would be drawn up by the people. In this hypocritical fashion the sovereign people

10. Benjamin Constant (1767–1830), liberal author and friend of Madame de Staël.

11. Pierre-Claude-François Daunou (1761–1840), former member of the Convention, and later a supporter of Napoleon's Brumaire coup.

would regain the outward form of universal suffrage. Bonaparte naturally found this method to his liking, with the result that co-optation became the keystone of the Constitution of Year VIII establishing the Consulate (24 December 1799). The Senate was to complete its membership by co-optation, and to nominate the original members of the Tribunate and the Legislative Assembly; subsequently, all these positions were to be filled with persons chosen from the lists of "notabilities" elected on a multitiered system of universal suffrage. As it turned out, these lists (drawn up in Year IX) were never used: the Constitution of Year X (16 August 1802) abolished them and replaced them with electoral colleges. "The principles of our new electoral law," proclaimed Lucien Bonaparte on 24 March 1803, "will no longer be based on illusory notions, but on the very foundation of civil association, on property, which inculcates the will to preserve public order." Napoleon himself had already propounded the same principle more succinctly: "I am the sole representative of the people."

Control of the electoral process was accompanied by the renewed centralization of government institutions, for which Bonaparte generally receives the credit, although the change was already anticipated in the practices used by the Directory. The administrative system set up in Year III was more centralized than is generally assumed. The little rural communes were placed under the jurisdiction of the local cantonal administrations, while the big cities—notably Paris—were deprived of their communal administrations and their mayors, and split up into a number of

municipalities, thus losing their autonomy. The old district organization disappeared, and in the Departmental administration the Council was abolished and replaced by a central directing body of five members. With power concentrated in this way, the various levels of administration were arranged hierarchically; the municipal authorities were subordinated to the Departments, and the latter were controlled by the Ministers. The Directory possessed the power to reverse any decision by a local authority, to dismiss local officials, and to replace them when they failed to perform their duties, co-optation being the usual method adopted for such replacements. More important, the Directory was represented at the local level by specially chosen commissioners, removable at any time. These commissioners saw that the laws were carried out, attended meetings of the assemblies, and kept an eye on local officials. In an administrative system marked by the turnover of a considerable proportion of its members every year, they provided a certain measure of stability. Finally, the Departmental commissioners corresponded directly with the Minister of the Interior, supervised the work of the various local government bureaus, and issued orders to the municipal commissioners: they foreshadow Napoleon's Prefects. Furthermore, the Constitution of Year III allowed the Directory some important powers, on the basis of which it could issue decrees: it handled diplomacy and concluded treaties, even secret ones; it controlled the armed forces and chose the commanding generals; as guardian of the Republic's internal security, it could issue warrants for arrest and judicial appearance. These powers may seem

insignificant in comparison with the "coercive force" wielded by the regime of Year II, and they were still a far cry from the degree of centralization attained under the Consulate. But this was a marked advance over the total decentralization embodied in the Constitution of 1791.

In practice, the evolution toward continuity, centralization, and authoritarian rule seems to have proceeded by fits and starts and in violation of the Constitution, but the trend was nonetheless clear. After Fructidor, Year V (September 1797), the special courts reappeared under the guise of military commissions, while centralization was reinforced by the quashing of elections and the dismissal of officials so that, in many Departments, the government was able to change the administrative personnel as it saw fit; furthermore, the government received the right to purge the courts. The coup of Floréal, Year VI (11 May 1798) led to a further strengthening of the executive, which not only packed the Councils with its nominees, but also received the right to fill vacancies among the Justices of the Peace and in the criminal courts until Year VIII. Benefiting from increasing stability and enhanced authority in the twenty months following its success of 18 Fructidor, Year V (4 September 1797), the Directory laid the foundations of the financial reorganization completed under the Consulate, along lines that had already suggested themselves. A separate administration to handle all direct taxes was set up by the law of 22 Brumaire, Year VI (12 November 1797), indirect taxation was resumed, and the Treasury was subordinated

to the executive. Though the parliamentary "revolt" of 30 Prairial, Year VII (18 June 1799) seemed to give the legislature power over the Directory, and although it allowed for changes in government personnel in accordance with the legislature's wishes, in fact the executive was neither weakened nor subdued.

Everything, however, still hung in the balance. After Austria made peace at Campo Formio in October 1797, only England remained at war against France. The preservation of peace on the continent demanded cautious diplomacy, but instead the Directory launched into a policy of expansion that destroyed any chance of stabilizing the external situation and undermined any attempt at domestic reform. Toward the end of 1798 the Second Coalition formed against France, and war broke out again in the spring of 1799, while at home the counterrevolution burst out afresh. Although the revolutionary uprising of 30 Prairial, Year VII (18 June 1799) and the successful military campaign in the summer of 1799 restored the situation, another election was due in the spring of Year VIII (1800); and whether this would produce a victory for the Royalists or for the Jacobins, in either case the stability of the regime would be jeopardized. The problem was resolved by the coup d'état of 18 Brumaire.

According to a placard that appeared in Paris, and whose contents were noted in the *Monitor* for 24 Brumaire (14 November 1799), "France desires great and lasting things. Instability has been her ruin, and now she cries out for order. . . . She needs a unified central power to execute the laws." By conferring full

executive powers on the First Consul, the Constitution of Year VIII put an end to the ambiguity of the Directorial era with its covert indications of incipient dictatorship. Viewed in this light, the Consulate again appears as the final step in a necessary evolution. The powers granted to the Directory by the Constitution of Year III had been consolidated and expanded under the pressure of circumstances, either by the executive itself or by the legislature, always under the guise of temporary measures, but with such frequency that their use became normal. Wider powers for the executive, nomination of judges and administrators, reliance on the police—none of these were innovations brought in by the Consulate. The constitutions that the Directory imposed on the sister republics in Holland, Switzerland, or Italy had already moved in the direction of greater executive power. The Constitution of Year VIII completed the subordination of the legislature, which the Directory had striven in vain to achieve. By concentrating power in the hands of the First Consul, a single, stable directing will, the new Constitution opened the way for the reorganization of the administration by the great laws of Year VIII, and for the consolidation of society that the Directory had proclaimed to be its purpose as early as 14 Brumaire, Year IV (5 November 1795): "To restore social order in the place of the chaos that is inseparable from revolutions."

From the Directory to the Consulate, therefore, the continuity is evident, in spite of apparent differences exaggerated by legend. The continuing war and the persistent threat of counterrevolution necessitated the

concentration of power, if the bourgeois revolution was to be consolidated: the Consular dictatorship took over this mission from the republic of notables, and accomplished it. But although they planned to strengthen the executive and restore the unity of governmental action, the bourgeois of Brumaire did not intend to do away with political liberties, so long as these operated to their advantage. Events were soon to prove that they had miscalculated.

Conclusion:

The French Revolution and the History of the Contemporary World

I. THE RESULTS OF THE REVOLUTION

After ten years of revolutionary changes and vicissitudes, the structure of French society had undergone a momentous transformation. The aristocracy of the Old Regime had been stripped of its privileges and social preponderance; feudal society had been destroyed. By wiping out every vestige of feudalism, by freeing the peasants from seigneurial dues and ecclesiastical tithes —and also to some degree from the constraints imposed by their communities—by abolishing privileged corporations and their monopolies, and by unifying the national market, the French Revolution marked a decisive stage in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The vanguard of revolution was not the commercial bourgeoisie; since it remained wedded to its mercantile, intermediary role, it tended to come to terms with the old social system and, from 1789 to 1793, it generally favored compromise. The real force behind the

Revolution was the mass of direct petty producers, whose surplus labor or production had been appropriated by the feudal aristocracy through the juridical system or through the state mechanisms of enforcement under the Old Regime. It was the revolt of these petty producers, craftsmen or peasants, that dealt the gravest blows against the old order of society.

The defeat of feudalism did not mean that new forms of social relations appeared at once. The movement toward capitalism is not a simple process in which the component elements of capitalism develop within the framework of the old society, until the moment when they are strong enough to burst it asunder. A long time was still needed before capitalism clearly asserted itself in France; during the revolutionary period it developed slowly, the scale of business enterprises remained small, and mercantile capital was still the dominant element. But the collapse of the system of feudal landed property and of the corporative regulated economy freed the small and middling direct producers, while also accelerating the growth of class differentiation in the rural communities and among the artisans of the cities, and sharpening the polarization between capital and wage labor. In this way the autonomy of the capitalist mode of production was finally assured, in both agriculture and industry, and an irreversible step was taken in the direction of the bourgeois system of relations in production and exchange. This constituted the essence of revolutionary change.[1]

1. See M. Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (London, 1946).

While the economy of petty and middling production became more clearly differentiated, and the separation between peasants and urban craftsmen increased, the center of gravity of the bourgeoisie began to shift. Businessmen and entrepreneurs assumed the dominant role hitherto occupied by inherited wealth. Speculation, the equipping and victualing of the armed forces, and the exploitation of conquered territories provided them with new chances for greater profits. Economic liberty opened the way for the concentration of business enterprises. Soon these men, with their willingness to take risks and their spirit of initiative, forsook speculation and invested their capital in production, contributing in this way to the rise of industrial capitalism.

As the Revolution overthrew the old social and economic order, it also destroyed the state structure of the Old Regime, sweeping away the vestiges of separatism, abolishing local privileges and provincial autonomies. It thus made possible the establishment of a modern state under the Directory and Empire, corresponding to the needs and interests of the bourgeoisie.

Bearing these considerations in mind, we can see that the French Revolution was far more than a myth, as has been sometimes supposed.[2] True, "feudalism" in the medieval sense no longer existed in 1789; but to contemporaries, whether bourgeois or peasants, this abstract term expressed a concrete reality very familiar to them through feudal dues and seigneurial authority

2. A. Cobban, *The Myth of the French Revolution* (London, 1955); *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, England, 1964).

—a reality which they finally destroyed. Nor is it valid to object that since the various Revolutionary Assemblies were composed essentially of public officials and men from the liberal professions, rather than businessmen, financiers, and manufacturers—capitalists, in a word—therefore the French Revolution had no significance for the emergence of the capitalist system. In the first place, capitalists formed a small but very active minority in the Assemblies, as well as constituting important pressure groups like the Deputies for Trade, or the Massiac Club which championed colonial interests. But the essential point is that the old socio-economic system was destroyed, and that the Revolution proclaimed without reserve the principle of free enterprise and profit, thus clearing the way for capitalism. The history of the nineteenth century would show that this was much more than a myth.

II. THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND BOURGEOIS REVOLUTIONS

While it constituted an essential stage in the general transition from feudalism to capitalism, in comparison with similar movements the French Revolution still retained certain specific features arising out of the particular nature of French society at the end of the Old Regime.

This specificity has been denied. For some historians, the French Revolution was no more than "one aspect of a Western, or more precisely Atlantic, revolution, beginning in the British colonies in America shortly after

1763, and continuing through the revolutions in Switzerland, the Low Countries, and Ireland, before reaching France between 1787 and 1789. From France the revolution spread back to the Low Countries again, before reaching the Rhineland, Switzerland, and Italy."[3] It is certainly important not to underestimate the significance of the Atlantic for the economic development of the West, and for the exploitation of its colonies. But this is not what these authors mean. Nor are they seeking to show how the French Revolution is just one episode in the general historical development which, through the sixteenth-century revolution in the Low Countries, and then through the English and American revolutions, brought the bourgeoisie to power. Nor does the French Revolution mark the geographical end point of this transformation, as ambiguous terms like "Atlantic" or "Western" would seem to imply. In the nineteenth century, wherever a capitalist economy developed, it was accompanied by the rise of the bourgeoisie, for the bourgeois revolution was a universal phenomenon. Moreover, placing the French Revolution on the same level as "the revolutions in Switzerland, the Low Countries, and Ireland" absurdly minimizes the depth and scale of events in France, and the abruptness of the changes that they

3. This is the view put forward most notably by J. Godechot and R. R. Palmer: see the former's *France and the Atlantic Revolution of the Eighteenth Century* (trans. H. H. Rowen, New York, 1965); and the latter's "The World Revolution of the West," in *Political Science Quarterly* (1954), and *The Age of the Democratic Revolutions* (2 vols., Princeton, 1959, 1964).

represented. This conception robs the French Revolution of all its specific economic, social, and national characteristics and ignores a half century of historiography on the Revolution, from Jean Jaurès to Georges Lefebvre.

De Tocqueville had already posed this problem when he asked "why similar principles and political theories only led to a change of government in the United States, yet in France they produced the complete overthrow of the social order." To phrase the question in these terms is to transcend the superficial considerations of political and constitutional history, and to attempt to explain social and economic realities in their specific national context. The comparison that can then be made between conditions and types of change in the Low Countries, England, and the United States will reveal how far the French Revolution marked a shift in direction, thus restoring its irreducible individuality.

The "respectable" English revolution of 1688 brought about a social and political compromise under which power was shared between the bourgeoisie and the landed aristocracy (and this recalls the revolution in France of July 1830). But such a compromise was only possible because the first English revolution of the mid-seventeenth century had overthrown an absolute monarchy and established a representative—though not democratic—government in its place, and at the same time had ended the exclusive domination of a persecuting state church and cleared the way for the development of capitalism. As one recent English historian, Christopher Hill, sums it up: "The English revolution

brought the middle ages to a close." The last traces of feudalism were swept away, feudal tenures were abolished, and the landowning class was secured in absolute possession of its estates. The confiscation and sale of lands belonging to the church, the crown and the royalists broke up traditional feudal relations in the countryside and hastened the accumulation of capital. The guilds lost all their economic importance; commercial, financial, and industrial monopolies were abolished. "The Old Regime had to be destroyed," concludes Christopher Hill, "in order that England could experience the freer form of economic development necessary for maximizing the nation's wealth and carrying it to a dominant position in the world, and in order that the control of policy, including foreign policy, should pass into the hands of those who carried weight in the nation."

The English revolution was, however, far less radical than the French: as Jaurès observed in his *Socialist History,* the English revolution was always "narrowly bourgeois and conservative," as opposed to the French which was "bourgeois in a wider sense, and democratic." The English revolution may have produced its Levellers, but it did not give the peasants any control over the land; and in fact the English peasantry was to disappear in the following century. The reasons for the conservative nature of the English revolution are to be sought in the rural nature of English capitalism at the time, which divided the gentry as a class, many of whom prior to 1640 were actively engaged in sheep farming, the cloth industry, or mining. Again, although the English revolution produced, with the

Levellers, the first political theory based on the concept of human rights which, via Locke, was handed on to the revolutionaries in America and France, nonetheless it never proclaimed the universality and equality of these rights, as the French Revolution was to do with such force and resonance.

Like its predecessor, but to a lesser degree, the American revolution was characterized by a spirit of empiricism. Despite its appeal to natural law and its solemn Declaration of Independence, it did not accord complete recognition to the principles of liberty and equality: the blacks remained slaves, and even though equality of rights was established among the white population, the social hierarchy founded on wealth was left untouched. The form of government in America was certainly "democratic," but it still worked to the advantage of the notables and the rich.

The English and American revolutions were nevertheless enormously influential and long retained their prestige, for the conservative political compromise that they enshrined was reassuring to any propertied class more concerned with liberty than with equality.

The French Revolution was another matter altogether. It was the most dramatic of all the bourgeois revolutions: the tension of its class conflicts eclipsed all earlier revolutionary struggles, owing to the aristocracy's stubborn refusal to compromise in defense of its feudal rights and the equally strong determination of the masses to have done with them. The nobles' counter-revolution forced the revolutionary bourgeoisie to proceed tenaciously to the total destruction of the old order. This it could only do by allying with the urban

and rural masses, whose demands had to be met: feudalism was overthrown, democracy was established. The political instrument that brought about this transformation was the Jacobin dictatorship of the lower and middling bourgeoisie, backed by the masses, whose social ideal was a democracy of independent petty producers, working and exchanging their products freely. In this way the French Revolution acquired a unique place in modern and contemporary history: the revolution of the peasants and the urban masses undergirded the bourgeois revolution and provided the power that pushed it forward.

These special characteristics explain the far-reaching significance of the French Revolution and its value as a model for the contemporary world. It is true, however, that the armies of the Republic and then of Napoleon, more than the sheer power of ideas, overthrew the Old Regime in the countries that they occupied. The French conquest led to the abolition of serfdom, freed the peasants from seigneurial exactions and church tithes, and placed entailed lands back on the market, thus clearing the ground for the growth of capitalism. More important still, it was the advance of capitalism, by nature aggressive and expansive, that transmitted the new ideas and the bourgeois social order through the world, causing the same changes everywhere.

The diversity of national economic structures and their unequal rates of development naturally produced wide differences and infinite variations in the formation of modern capitalist societies. In some crucial cases, when the movement toward capitalist methods of

production was imposed from above, the evolutionary process of transformation was halted in mid-course and the older system of production was preserved rather than destroyed. The history of the nineteenth century offers several striking examples of this phenomenon, and by comparison with them the radical character of the French Revolution appears all the more clearly.

The national unification movements in nineteenth-century Europe can be regarded in many ways as bourgeois revolutions. However important nationalist sentiment may have been in the Italian Risorgimento or in the forging of German unity, national energy could not have succeeded in building a modern society and a unified state unless the internal economic development of the state had been moving in the same direction. All the problems and confusion involved in the historical analysis of these movements derives from the basic fact that they are—unlike the French Revolution—both social and nationalist in origin.

Antonio Gramsci, in one of his notes written in prison, suggested the need to examine the question of "the absence of Jacobinism in the Risorgimento."[4] Starting from a definition of Jacobinism as an alliance between a revolutionary bourgeoisie and the peasant masses, Gramsci went on to stress that, because of this, the bourgeois revolution of the Risorgimento had not been as radical as the French Revolution, in which the

4. Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), Marxist thinker and one of the founders of the Italian Communist party; imprisoned by Mussolini from 1926. See *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (trans. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith, New York, 1971).

Jacobins had played a decisive part. In effect, he was returning to the question of the different social and economic character of the two revolutions. Insofar as the Risorgimento "failed"—in Gramsci's phrase—to achieve a popular and particularly a peasant revolution, it failed to conform to the classical type of bourgeois revolution, of which the French Revolution was the archetype. The key to understanding why the Italian bourgeoisie refused the real revolutionary path of alliance with the peasantry during the struggle for unification, and subsequently came to a compromise with a feudal aristocracy, is to be sought in the settlement reached half a century earlier in the agrarian question. In the later eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, especially under the French occupation, but in different ways from region to region, a series of reforming measures abolished the seigneurial system; but despite this, the great aristocratic landowners still dominated Italian society. So while in France the Revolution broke up the old structures of peasant life finally and conclusively, in Italy the peasants remained fixed in their former condition of agricultural laborers tied to the soil, or sharecroppers: they remained dependent. Whereas in France the revolutionary bourgeoisie had ultimately supported the peasants in their fight against feudalism and had maintained their alliance until complete victory, in Italy the capitalist bourgeoisie and the landowning nobility drew together in a close-knit group. After unification, the Italian peasantry remained under the control of an oligarchy of big landlords and rich bourgeois, in a system of large landed estates of an

aristocratic type. There could be no possibility that the moderate liberals who achieved the unification—and particularly Cavour, whose very name symbolizes the alliance of bourgeois and landlords—would follow the path mapped out by the French Revolution: a peasant uprising would have threatened their political hegemony.

This was to be of vital significance in the development of Italian capitalism. In Italy, as distinct from France, a large group of independent smallholders did not emerge, producing for the market; rents were still collected in kind, and production remained subordinated to the market and to commercial profit. In this way the Italian passage to capitalism defined itself as a compromise adjustment in which industrial capital remained subordinate to commercial capital, ending as an oligarchic form of capitalism with monopolistic tendencies.

German unification was accomplished by a rather similar process, but with local variations. Outside Europe, the Meiji revolution in Japan formed the starting point for the development of a capitalist society, following the pattern set by the French Revolution. From its beginning in 1867, the Meiji revolution led after a decade of upheavals to the destruction of the feudal and seigneurial Old Regime and to the modernization of the state. External forces alone would never have caused the modernization of Japanese society, had its internal development not been moving in the same direction; in other words, the capitalist system of production was already in gestation within the feudal

economy of Japan. The unique nature of the Meiji revolution derives particularly from this congruence between internal development and external pressures. To show how this historical process operated it would be necessary first to analyze the feudal system of the Tokugawa and the structural crisis from which it had been suffering since the eighteenth century. On the eve of the revolution, opposition to the regime was mounting rapidly, both from the peasants—especially the middle peasantry—and from the small and middling manufacturers, who were hostile to the monopolistic system maintained by the great merchants and financiers, backed by the lords and the large peasant landowners *(jinushi)* who did not farm their own land and who levied their rents in kind. The "opening" of the country under pressure from the United States and Europe accelerated this development, but before social and economic conditions inside Japan had matured sufficiently for the achievement of a bourgeois revolution.

The abolition of the seigneurial system took the form of a compromise. Feudal rights were suppressed in return for compensation, contrary to what had occurred in France, so that the cost had to be borne by the peasants, who were required to pay a new land tax in cash *(chiso)*. Peasant landowners *(hon-byakusho)* were liberated from their ties of feudal dependence but remained subject to the new taxes, which represented as heavy a burden as the old seigneurial exactions. Furthermore, they had no chance to acquire land, as the French peasants had had through the sale of

national lands. In the Japanese countryside there were no well-off farmers or peasants of the kulak type. For most peasants, either day laborers *(mizunomi)* or small tenant farmers *(kosaku)*, emancipation proved to be illusory; agrarian reforms made the big farmers *(jinushi)* landowners in their own right and liable to the land tax which had to be paid in cash, so that the small farmers who tilled the soil *(kosaku)*, far from being enfranchised in their turn, were still obliged to pay an annual rent in kind to the *jinushi*. The traditional ties of dependence were thus maintained and the surplus produced by the *kosaku* was still taken from them, but now under the aegis of the state and with the backing of its mechanisms of constraint.

The peasant proprietors and "enfranchised" farmers of the post-Meiji period cannot therefore be compared to the free, independent peasant proprietors who appeared in Western Europe as a result of the decay of the feudal system of landownership. In Japan there were no yeomen, as in England, and no middling peasantry, as in France. The Japanese peasantry was still dominated by an oligarchy of the privileged upper bourgeoisie and the semifeudal *jinushi* landowners: the emergent capitalist society preserved the essential element in the feudal relation of production. It therefore becomes clear why, aided by the opening of the country under foreign pressure, the Meiji revolution ended in the formation of an absolutist, oligarchic monarchy. It thus differs completely from the French Revolution, which overthrew the absolutist state and allowed the emergence of a bourgeois, democratic society. Despite the development

of modern capitalism in Japan, vestiges of the feudal system remained until the land reform of 1945 *(nōchi kaikaku)*, which aimed precisely at enfranchising "the peasants oppressed for centuries by feudal exactions." As K. Takahashi has observed, "the Meiji revolution and its agrarian reforms failed to accomplish the historical task of the bourgeois revolution, which was to destroy the social and economic relationships of feudalism."

The French Revolution, therefore, assumes a unique place in the history of the contemporary world. As the classic bourgeois revolution, abolishing feudalism and the seigneurial system, it forms the point of departure for capitalist society and liberal democracy in the history of France. As a revolution of the peasants and the masses, and therefore uncompromisingly antifeudal, it twice transcended its bourgeois limits: first during Year II, an experiment which, though necessarily doomed to fail, long retained its power as a prophetic example; then with the Conspiracy of the Equals, an episode that marks the birth of present-day revolutionary thought and action. These essential characteristics probably explain the vain efforts that have been made to deny the true historical nature and the specific social and national character of the French Revolution, for it is a fertile and dangerous precedent. Hence also the shudder that the French Revolution sent through the world, and the continued reverberation that it arouses in men's minds even today. The very memory of it is revolutionary, and stirs us still.

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History

ALBERT SOBOUL has held the Chair of the History of the French Revolution at the Sorbonne since 1967, and is probably the leading Marxist scholar working in that field today. The book translated here should be regarded more as a synopsis of Professor Soboul's interpretation of the Revolution than as a detailed account of the course of events: it is an essay in analysis rather than a narrative. In it the author argues that the French Revolution can only be understood in terms of class struggle, and that any attempt to diminish the significance of class conflict as its motive force obscures the meaning of the events of the Revolution and renders them ultimately incomprehensible.

The course of the Revolution and its final outcome, which was clear by the time Napoleon seized power in 1799, were the products of a complex class struggle enacted simultaneously on many levels, leading finally to the triumph of the bourgeoisie, the defeat of the aristocracy, and the fragmentation and collapse of the popular forces, who as the allies of the bourgeoisie had played a vital part in securing its victory.

Professor Soboul shows that although the Revolution was caused initially by specific factors peculiar to the structure of French society at the end of the Old Regime, it came to constitute the definitive type of the bourgeois revolution and opened the way for the ascendancy of industrial capitalism in the next century, not merely in France, but in the rest of Europe and the world at large.

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