Twelve Who Ruled
The Year of the Terror in the French Revolution

By R. R. Palmer

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ANYONE who had business with the government of the Reign of Terror directed his steps to the Tuileries, an old palace of the kings of France on the right bank of the Seine between the Louvre and the Tuileries Gardens, in which then as now children played and chestnut trees blossomed in April. Entering the courtyard on the opposite side of the building from the garden, the visitor saw signs of a government not very sure of itself, for two cannon and a file of soldiers guarded the door. Passing these sentries and climbing what had lately been called the Queen’s Staircase, he came into a series of communicating chambers crowded with all manner of people, busy little functionaries of one kind and another, clerks carrying papers to be signed by the great men within, army officers, politicians and contractors waiting for interviews, errand boys, porters, secretaries and factotums, and couriers with the mud of distant provinces still spattered on their boots. If the visitor’s business was urgent, or if he was a person of exceptional consequence, he eventually reached the last in the series of chambers, a room which Louis XVI had used as a private office, and which in a few years was to serve Napoleon Bonaparte for the same purpose.

Here if left for a moment alone the caller might reflect on past and present. Outside the window he saw the garden or public park, knowing that beyond the trees, half a mile away, it opened upon the superb Place Louis XV, the finest square in Europe, a triumph of city planning in the last days of the monarchy. He would remind himself to call it the Place de la Révolution—appropriately enough, for at the center of the new square (which we call the Place de la Concorde), in full view of the new Champs-Elysées and the new Madeleine, stood a new invention of late monarchical times, now symbolizing a new order—the guillotine.

Turning from the window he saw more traces of the last Louis, whom this same guillotine had put to death a few months before. The clock bore the inscription, “clockmaker to the King.” The rich carpet, the polished mirrors, the glistening chandeliers still kept

THE TWELVE

"Stranger set of Cloud-Compellers the Earth never saw."—CARLYLE: THE FRENCH REVOLUTION


Jean-Nicolas Billaud-Varenne, b. 1756, also a lawyer and son of a lawyer, a writer and agitator, impatient, clamorous.

Lazare Carnot, b. 1753, army officer, engineer, mathematician, stern patriot, "Organizer of Victory."

Jean-Marie Collot d’Herbois, b. 1750, actor and playwright, self-made, crude, excitable.

Georges Couthon, b. 1756, lawyer, humanitarian, family man, a paralytic unable to walk.

Marie-Jean Hérauld de Séchelles, b. 1759, nobleman and aristocrat, lawyer, wit, poseur.

Robert Lindet, b. 1743, steady, sensible, middle aged.

Prieur of the Côte d’Or (Claude-Antoine Prieur-Duvernois), b. 1763, army officer and engineer, a young man of promise.

Prieur of the Marne (Pierre-Louis Prieur), b. 1756, lawyer.

Maximilien Robespierre, b. 1758, lawyer and son of a lawyer, introspective, self-righteous, idealistic.

André Jeanbon Saint-André, b. 1749, Protestant minister, one time ship’s captain, diligent, masterful.

Louis-Antoine Saint-Just, b. 1767, "Angel of Death," youngest of the Twelve, law graduate, imperious, incisive.
alive the elegance of royalty. But the main object in the room was severely utilitarian, a large oval table covered with green cloth, matching the green paper on the walls. Inkwells and piles of papers littered the table, marking the places for a number of men to work. It was the council table of the Committee of Public Safety, one of whose members would soon appear to receive the visitor, of whom therefore we can now take leave.

The Committee of Public Safety governed France during the Terror, the chaotic France of the year-old First Republic. Twelve men made up the Committee, always the same twelve from September 1793 to the following July 27, or g Thermidor of the Year Two in revolutionary parlance. The twelve never once sat at the green table at the same time. One presently ceased to sit at all, for he was put to death by the others. Some were habitually away, stationed in Brittany or Alsace or Flanders. But their presence was felt; their dispatches came in regularly, along with the vast streams of correspondence with which those remaining in Paris had to deal. Of those who sat in the green room, though they had no chairman and recognized no one of themselves as chief, the best known outside its walls was Robespierre.

The Committee transacted its affairs at all hours, but its real sessions took place secretly, behind closed doors, at night. No one knows exactly what happened at these conclaves. Anyone interested today can read, in large clear print, thousands of documents emanating from the Committee, ordinances, proclamations, letters of command, advice and instruction. No one can say what passed over the green table before the decisions were reached. No evidence for these matters exists except a few contemporary inuendos made for political purposes, a few indiscretions, a great many rumors, and a few recollections written down years later by two or three of the survivors. But the debates were undoubtedly lively, and the Twelve had many secrets. They fought and disputed with each other, sometimes differing widely in policy, their nerves on edge from sheer fatigue, their minds inflamed by revolutionary passions. As individuals they were almost all autocratic, jealous and short-tempered. But they managed until near the end to act as a single body, keeping their private differences to themselves.

They ruled a country convulsed in its fifth year of revolution. The National Convention claimed sovereign authority, but in half of France its authority was denied. The west and south fell apart in civil war. The plans made in the earlier and supposedly wiser phase of the Revolution had broken down. Local and outlying authorities could not be controlled and were now centers of independent agitation. Initiative had fallen into the hands of political clubs and revolutionary committees. Paris was in turmoil. Street orators and demagogues, secret agents both of the government and of its enemies, radicals and counter-revolutionaries of every description roamed the streets. Deserters from the army, disguised priests and strange foreigners jostled with half-crazed patriots and self-appointed saviors of the nation. On the frontiers the armies of England, Holland, Spain, Prussia and Austria were thrusting themselves into France. The ports were practically closed by the British navy. Beyond the battlelines lay a Europe unanimously hostile, stirred up by French émigrés, by conservatives of all nationalities almost hysterical with fear, by the pope and the Catholic hierarchy, and by Catherine the Great of Russia, an old woman near death who urged on the Allies while declining to join them.

Anarchy within, invasion from without. A country cracking from outside pressure, disintegrating from internal strain. Revolution at its height. War. Inflation. Hunger. Fear. Hate. Sabotage. Fantastic hopes. Boundless idealism. And the horrible knowledge, for the men in power, that if they failed they would die as criminals, murderers of their king. And the dread that all the gains of the Revolution would be lost. And the faith that if they won they would bring Liberty, Equality and Fraternity into the world.

This was the situation in which the twelve men who came to the green room acted. Who were the twelve?

They were on the whole not very unusual people—only twelve rather typical men of the old régime, brought into prominence by an upheaval which no one could control. Glowering at each other across the green table, they must sometimes have pondered on the circumstances that had brought them together. Their position was a curious one. No human wisdom could have foretold it. They had been strangers to each other not long before, scattered through France, with small prospect of any political career and with no political experience, each apparently destined for the humdrum
life of his own occupation, all of them loyal to the "good king Louis" whose headless body now rotted in its grave.

Aristocratic Europe was appalled to see France governed by "nobodies." Who then, or what, were they in the peaceful years that preceded their great adventure?

At Arras, near the Straits of Dover, shortly before the Revolution lived a lawyer about thirty years old, named Maximilien Robespierre. He was a competent lawyer, a man of integrity, respected. He won most of his cases, partly because he preferred to defend victims of obvious injustice. He was a great believer in progress and the march of reason, which he vindicated by winning the case of a client who had been sued for putting up an ungodly instrument as a lightning rod. Robespierre had been to Paris, where for many years he enjoyed a scholarship at the University, receiving the best education that the country had to give. Like many others, he was dissatisfied with conditions, though he himself had not been deprived of opportunity.

Robespierre's home life had been upset since his middle childhood, but he was well brought up by two aunts, and able to go away to school. He turned out to be a very serious and rather lonely man. His expression, his sister tells us, was often smiling, but he was hardly capable of a hearty laugh. He scarcely touched wine; he was unmarried, chaste, and a trifle puritanical. Constant rumination made him extremely absent-minded. His failure to recognize people in the street gained him the reputation of being proud. In company, his attention would wander if the conversation turned to small talk. He was preoccupied with an inner vision, the thought of ills which it seemed to him could easily be corrected, the picture of a world in which there should be no cruelty or discrimination. He was humane to the point of disapproving capital punishment; his sympathies were always with the underdog; he believed in equality seriously and profoundly.

Robespierre had the fault of a self-righteous and introverted man. Disagreement with himself he regarded simply as error, and in the face of it he would either withdraw into his own thoughts, or cast doubt on the motives behind the other man's opinion. He was quick to charge others with the selfish interests of which he felt himself to be free. A concerted action in which he did not share seemed to him to be an intrigue. He had the virtues and the faults of an inquisitor. A lover of mankind, he could not enter with sympathy into the minds of his own neighbors.

At Arras there was a literary society, where the members, besides reading each other orations and odes, often discussed public questions. Their discussions were likely to be bookish and abstract, for few of them, under the bureaucratic monarchy, had ever had any experience in affairs. These societies were numerous in France. They gave future revolutionists practice in expounding their sentiments and ideal ends, but none in parliamentary methods. Robespierre was an active member at Arras. In the club rooms he met an army officer, a captain of engineers stationed in the locality. The acquaintance was only casual at the time, but the two were to be colleagues, years later, on the Committee of Public Safety.

This man was Lazare Carnot, one day to be called the "organizer of victory." He came from Burgundy, but had been living for years in one army post after another. He was not unlike Robespierre. He, too, was austere in manner, rather chilly except to his own friends, inattentive in company, absorbed in his own problems. His private world was a mathematical one, in which he was just short of being a genius. He was the author of abstruse books. The famous Lagrange once admitted that Carnot had anticipated one of his discoveries. The captain, however, was not a mere thinking machine. He could unbend on occasion. His verses were a delight to the local literati. Kind-hearted, he once made use of Robespierre's professional services in a case of the sort that they both enjoyed. A poor woman servant of Carnot's had fallen heir to an unexpected legacy; and Robespierre, acting for Carnot, saw the case through the courts.

Carnot in these years was no politician. In normal times he might have left a name simply as a scholar, as his two sons did when the hurricane was over. But in the 1780's there were a number of matters which even the most unpolitical army officer could not ignore.

The army was almost monopolized by persons of noble blood. Hardly any of the officers were commoners, except in the engineers where technical knowledge was indispensable. And the tendency was toward more discrimination.
The lives of these twelve give a glimpse into the old prerevolutionary France. It is a very partial glimpse. Little appears of the Church, hardly anything of the nobility—for Hérald de Séchelles, a Paris lawyer and boulevardier, was not typical of the thousands of noble families. There is above all not an inkling of the peasantry, who constituted four-fifths of the population. Saint-Just's grandfather had indeed been a farmer, but his father had settled in town, and he himself wished to be a man of letters.

Not one of the twelve had ever labored with his hands. Not one of them, except Collot d'Hébois, had ever experienced any economic insecurity. Not one of them in 1789 lived in fear of poverty, for even Collot had worked to the top of the actor's profession. Hérald was wealthy; Barère well off; Lindet, Carnot and Prieur of the Côte-d'Or had fortunes approaching 50,000 livres before the Revolution. Robespierre in 1781 possessed, jointly with his sister, a small capital of 3,000 livres. The purchasing power of a livre (so far as any comparison is possible) roughly resembled that of a dollar in 1940. Investment was chiefly in land, and generally brought an income of five per cent.

All except Hérald were of the middle class. None, however, except Saint-André for a short while, had ever engaged in trade. They had no personal knowledge of industry. They had no experience with wage-earning people, except in hiring a few clerks or domestic servants or occasional craftsmen. What could they know of the proletariat of Paris, the silk weavers of Lyons, or the iron workers of Le Creusot? Paris then had over 600,000 inhabitants, Lyons over 100,000; but except for Collot, who was born in Paris, and Hérald, who lived there, these future rulers of France were all provincials, used to small town life.

All except Collot had received a good deal of formal schooling. Even Collot had acquired enough learning to become a writer. The others had been exposed to rhetoric and philosophy in the schools, and had in addition graduated from professional studies. Eight of them were lawyers by education. Two were engineers. Saint-André had studied theology at Lausanne. They were certainly not ignorant men.

They were not suffering from want, or from political oppression. They were not deprived of the elements of a comfortable and satisfying life. They were probably better off, most of them, than their fathers had been. They were not maddened by the drive of material need, as many of the peasants and city workers were. Why, then, did they become radical revolutionists?

To answer this question would require more knowledge both of psychology and of the causes of the French Revolution than anyone can be certain of having.

The group was relatively young. Only Robert Lindet was over forty when the Revolution began. Four of them were under thirty. All of them might feel that they still had a career to make. Yet Carnot and C.-A. Prieur were shut out from promotion. Saint-André as a Protestant would remain a mere spectator of events. Collot had had bad luck. Billand had succeeded at nothing. And eight of them were lawyers! Lawyers were often leaders in their communities, men of opinions, convincing talkers, likely to see
the seamy side of the government, eager to enter public affairs themselves, perhaps even concerned about the improvement of justice.

All twelve were intellectuals. They were steeped in the philosophy of the eighteenth century, a body of ideas so pervasive that even a Protestant minister and an actor-playwright could hardly escape it. They were acutely aware of change. Business had been expanding for a century; new inventions were appearing on every side. Thinkers set forth elaborate theories of progress. Change seemed to be easy; the most ingrained customs were to be re-fashioned by the enlightened reason. Society was artificial; it needed only to be made more natural. It was confused, a mere hand-me-down from the past; it should be given a new and purposeful "constitution." Never had there been an age with such faith in social planning.

Thousands of people in France, educated, materially well off, conscious of their powers, were irritated at the paternalism of government, resentful at the bars of law and etiquette that stood in their way. The middle classes detested the privileges of the nobles. Liberty and equality had been freely talked of for years. The country surged already with a sense of being a nation. Barère and Robespierre were both French. Why then should they not practise the same uniform national law, in the shadow of the Pyrenees and by the Straits of Dover? Saint-André was as loyal as the Archbishop of Paris. Why then should the Protestants be treated with suspicion? Carnot knew more than the Count de Rochambeau. Why should the Rochambeaus reap all the glory? Lindet and Hérault were both lawyers. Then why should Hérault get the better job, and Lindet have to defer to him as a noble? Hérault himself did not know. Many of the aristocracy had lost faith in the social system.

At the same time, thanks to the philosophy of the eighteenth century, large elements of the educated classes were estranged from the Catholic church. Billand's *Last Blow Against Prejudice* was only one of many books of its kind. The church had lost the intellectual and moral leadership that it had once enjoyed. Many people thought that it was too powerful as an organized force in politics. It was widely supposed to possess more landed wealth than it actually did. It was thought of as a public corporation which had ceased to perform its functions efficiently, and which an enlightened government might reorganize and direct. Philosophy was a catchword of the day, and those who took a philosophical view, besides thinking that the state should be supreme, were very dubious of revelation, impatient of the claims of any established clergy, scornful of solemn religious processions, pompous vestments, the consecration of wafers and the clanging of bells. They preferred a more natural religion, some pure and simple form of belief which would make people socially conscious, teach them their civic duties, and still preserve the "consoling doctrines" of the existence of God and of survival in a somewhat hazy afterlife.

These religious ideas were to bring the revolutionary intelle-gentsia into conflict with the majority of the people of France, the peasants and others who still respected their priests.

Intellectuals were not only out of sympathy with the world in which they lived; many of them were attached emotionally to a world of their imagination. They looked to America, and saw thirteen small republics of simple manners and exemplary virtues. They remembered their ancient history, or moral episodes which they took to be history, and they saw more idealized republics, the polished citizenry of Athens, the stern patriots of Sparta, the incorruptible heroes of early Rome. They did not expect to duplicate any such society in France. They did not even have much practical belief in a republic. But their conception of statesmanship was patterned on their dream. Their ideal statesman was no tactician, no compromiser, no skilful organizer who could keep various factions and pressure groups together. He was a man of elevated character, who knew himself to be in the right, a towering monument in a world of calumny and misunderstanding, a man who would have no dealings with the partisans of error, and who, like Brutus, would sacrifice his own children that a principle might prevail.

Nor were the ideas to be gleaned from Rousseau more suited to encourage conciliation. In the philosophy of the *Social Contract* the "people" or "nation" is a moral abstraction. It is by nature good; its will is law. It is a solid indivisible thing. That the people might differ among themselves was a thought that Rousseau passed over rather hurriedly. Believers in the *Social Contract* thus viewed political circumstances in a highly simplified way.
All struggles were between the people and something not the people, between the nation and something antinational and alien. On the one hand was the public interest, self-evident, beyond questioning by an upright man; on the other hand were private interests, selfish, sinister and illegitimate. The followers of Rousseau were in no doubt which side they were on. It is not surprising that they would not only not compromise with conservative interests, but would not even tolerate free discussion among themselves, or have any confidence, when they disagreed, in each others' motives. Robespierre in the first weeks of the Revolution was already, in his own words, "unmasking the enemies of the country."

But all the ideas, hopes and ambitions that we may impute to our twelve men, and to others like them, would perhaps never in themselves have been enough to make them revolutionists. None of our twelve was consciously revolutionary before 1789. There was no such thing as a professional revolutionist before the nineteenth century—before the French Revolution set the example. The old régime drifted to its Niagara without knowing it. Its most restless spirits reconstructed society mentally, but they had no planned and organized movement to destroy the existing order. People expected change. But they expected the fortress of the old order to collapse before the horn of reason.

The breakdown of the government and the attendant confusion allowed these optimists to take a hand at revolution. Groaning under its load of debt (acquired largely in the fight for American independence), creaking in every part of its outmoded machinery of taxation, unable to borrow from the bankers, the monarchy of the Bourbons simply failed. So a general election was held; the old Estates-General met for the first time in one hundred and seventy-five years. Among the delegates to Versailles were three of the Twelve: Robespierre, Barère, and Prieur of the Marne.

Events moved rapidly. A constitutional monarchy was instituted. It would not work—because it set up somewhat impractical institutions, because France went to war, because prices soared, because neither the king, nor the royalists, nor the churchmen nor the working classes were satisfied with their new position. On August 10, 1792, a tremendous uprising occurred in Paris. The government yielded, wrote its own death warrant, and summoned a convention to draw up another constitution. It was called a convention from the precedent of constitutional conventions in the United States.

The elections were held in the next few weeks. Our twelve men, who by this time if not active in Paris were at least prominent local politicians, were all chosen as deputies, along with more than seven hundred others.

The great Convention met on September 20, 1792. Two days later Collot d'Herbois moved the abolition of royalty. The Convention so ordered. Billand-Varenne proposed and the Convention decreed that September 22, 1792, should be the first day of the French Republic, which was affirmed to be One and Indivisible in defiance of all powers that might tear it to pieces. With the execution of Louis XVI in the following January the men of the Convention made their irrevocable commitment, challenging the monarchies of Europe, horrifying public opinion in France itself, consciously appealing from the world in which they formed a revolutionary minority to the world of the future which they hoped to create. We are of that world. We are the posterity on whose judgment they relied. Whether or not we can give them a perfectly fair judgment, we can at least try to give them understanding.
The Age of the Democratic Revolution

A POLITICAL HISTORY OF
EUROPE AND AMERICA, 1760-1800

Vol. II: THE STRUGGLE

BY R. R. PALMER

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The theory of revolutionary government is as new as the revolution that has produced it. It cannot be found in the books of political writers, by whom this revolution was not foreseen. . . .

The aim of constitutional government is to preserve the commonwealth; of revolutionary government, to found it. . . .

Under the constitutional regime it is almost enough to protect the individual against the abuse of public authority. Under the revolutionary regime the public authority must defend itself against factions that attack it.

Revolutionary government owes good citizens the whole protection of the nation. To enemies of the people it owes nothing but death.—Maximilien Robespierre, December 1793

Everything now depended on what happened in France. The revolution in Poland had been stopped. Belgian democrats had again scurried out of their country, where the Statists came to terms with the Austrians. The Dutch émigrés had their expectations suddenly dashed, and the Dutch patriots at home, sadly disappointed, were reduced to passively awaiting a change in the fortunes of war which would bring in the French as liberators. In Ireland, Wolfe Tone privately remarked in March 1793 that ten thousand French troops in Ireland would effect Irish deliverance from Great Britain. In Britain the radical feeling was less subversive, but reformist and radical groups, of various descriptions, were dismayed and outraged by the war in which the British government was now engaged. In every country where the government was at war with the French Republic in 1793—in Britain and Ireland, in the United Provinces and in Belgium restored to the Emperor, in the Austrian Monarchy, the small German states and the Prussian kingdom, in the Italian kingdom of Sardinia (the one exception may be Spain)—there were groups of people, more than individual dreamers, whose sympathies lay in varying degree with the declared enemy.

Feeling ran high in neutral countries. In the United States the emerging Republicans repeatedly said, in the large language of the day, that the cause of the French Republic was the cause of the human race. There were even Federalists, like Noah Webster, who could not bring themselves to desire victory for the Coalition. On the other side of Europe, in Russia, where Catherine II and the upper classes were now hysterically fearful of France, they were afraid also of malcontents among their own people, especially among the "low-born intellectualia," or persons who did not belong to the nobility but had acquired some knowledge of the world. "I venture to predict," said a worried
SURVIVAL OF THE REVOLUTION IN FRANCE

writer of 1793, "that the agitation in France will have many unhappy consequences for these wondrous lands"—i.e., Russia.1

Wherever the French Revolution had been heard of there were men who wished it not to fail. Their concern was not only for France but for the future of some kind of democratization in their own countries.

For those, on the other hand, who hoped to see the whole Revolution undone, these same first months of 1793 saw a revival of the exciting expectations of a year before. In the execution of Louis XVI they saw a sign of desperation, the act of a handful of cornered regicides who had turned all decent men against them. To the outside world no one could seem more revolutionary than Dumouriez. Yet Dumouriez had repudiated the Revolution, declaring that it had collapsed into anarchy. The Republic seemed a sinking ship, crazed, in addition, by mutiny in its own crew.

The king's death was received with mixed feelings. Catherine II became ill. Pope Pius VI was genuinely concerned. He declared after much thought, as his personal opinion, that Louis XVI had died a martyr to the Catholic faith, for whom canonization proceedings might some day be in order. For a precedent he looked back, not to Charles I of England, where the analogy was clear enough to more secular minds in all camps, but to the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots, who had been considered a true martyr by Benedict XIV. The French Convention, according to Pius VI, was no better than the dreadful Elizabeth of England. Both, in his view, had been swayed by bad books and "factious, Calvinistical men."2

A week after Louis' death his brother, the Count of Provence, took the title of Regent and issued a proclamation, declaring his intention to restore the "ancient constitution" of France. No European power recognized him. The powers at war with France did not wish it to have a government that they need respect. Nor were leading French émigrés and noblemen in a mood to subordinate themselves to the monarchy. When a rumor spread after the king's death of a plot to assassinate his two brothers, the Prince of Condé, a leading émigré (and himself a Bourbon) put it off with a joke: "Be assured, Princes without armies,

1 For Wolfe Tone see his Life (Washington, 1826), 1, 108; for Noah Webster, pp. 3-4 above; for the Russians, M. M. Shtrange, Roskhoy Obiskhodov i Frantsuzskaya Revolyutsiya (Russian Society and the French Revolution, 1789-1794) (Moscow, 1956), 146. I am indebted to Dr. W. L. Blackwell for summarizing this Russian book.

2 A. Theiner, Documents inédits relatifs aux affaires religieuses de la France, extraits des archives secrètes du Vatican (Paris, 1879), 1, 177-91.

Bourbons not surrounded by a nobility, are such nonentities as hardly to be worth the honors of assassination."3

Beyond an Allied military victory, and restoration of the French throne, what the aristocratic French émigrés and conservative churchmen hoped for, and what the revolutionary element in France with good reason feared, was restoration of the nobility and the church. It would not be a mere restoration of their persons, but restoration of social bodies with something of the old powers and privileges, and the old forms of wealth and income.

The Pope asked Maury to draft memoranda on the steps to be taken, now that the Revolution seemed to be nearing its end. The memoranda do not show what the Pope would have actually done, but they do show what the most conservative of the French clergy wanted in 1793, and the pressures to which the Pope would be subjected by his own most loyal supporters. Here is what Maury advised; the Pope should excommunicate all French constitutional clergy and depose recalcitrant bishops. A restored king should crush the Gallicanism of the restored Parlements. Toleration of Protestants should be withdrawn, and Jansenism and Freemasonry extirpated. Bad books should be censored, education supervised by bishops, and school-teaching turned over to priests. All remarriages of so-called divorced persons should be declared void. Religious orders should be re-established, with vows permitted at age sixteen. And all their former property should be returned to ecclesiastical owners, subject, however (it was Maury's one concession), to taxation by the restored king.4

In a few places the probable consequences of Counter-Revolution became concretely evident at the time. After defeating Dumouriez at Neerwinden, the Austrians crossed the border and occupied the regions about Valenciennes and Lille. They remained there about a year, and what happened is significant in suggesting what might have happened in the rest of France if the armed forces of the Coalition had obtained a clear victory. The occupying administration set up by the Austrians was not reactionary in principle. It tried to be moderate with the local people involved in the Revolution, those who had accepted office under the new municipalities, or purchased land formerly belonging to church bodies or to émigrés. But under the Austrian administration, local malcontents emerged from obscurity, and French churchmen,

3 E. Daudet, Cadets 1789-1793 (Paris, 1890), 197.
4 "Memoire de Maury ... sur les determinations du Pape envers l'Eglise de France" (Rome, June 23, 1793), in Theiner, 1, 381-420.
nobles, and émigrés swarmed into the occupied area, despite Austrian efforts to keep them out. Where the Austrians, for example, at Valenciennes, authorized only six persons to reside as actual returned émigrés from the locality, the Valenciennes municipality, now in the hands of French counter-revolutionaries, authorized over two hundred. The Austrians, naturally enough, gradually and under pressure came to favor their own supporters. Tithes and seigneurial dues were declared collectible, former landowners re-established themselves, and towns- men and villagers who had accepted office under the Revolution, since 1789, were branded as enemies to society.6

Somewhat similarly, when the British occupied Corsica in 1794, and remained for two years, setting up an Anglo-Corsican kingdom, the attempts of the British viceroy at moderation were repeatedly frustrated; and Corsica, which had belonged to France for twenty-five years, exhibited what might have happened in France if the Counter-Revolution had succeeded at this time. 6

Rebellion broke out in western France, beginning in the Vendée, in March 1793. Led by disaffected seigneurs, in touch with the émigrés and the British government, it appealed to peasant grievances against the Revolutionary church policy and military conscription. It spread most rapidly in rural areas, since the towns, even the small ones, characteristically remained as isolated and besieged pockets adhering to the new order. The leaders of the rebellion attempted to set up a civil authority over such territories as they were able to control. This authority restored the church tithe, re-established the royal courts as before 1789, and declared all sales of former church and émigré property null and void.7

The issue, for France and the world in 1793, was not whether one band of Jacobins should chase out another, but whether Revolution or Counter-Revolution should prevail.

Gouvernement révolutionnaire

It was true that France at the moment suffered from anarchy, and that what it needed was government. "Anarchy" is hardly too strong a word. Ministers and ministries remained in existence, but decisions lay with committees of the Convention, which consisted of 750 men from the middle classes assembled under chaotic conditions, and enjoying neither confidence in each other, nor the prestige of an acknowledged authority, nor habits of obedience on the part of the population. Organs of local government, as set up in 1790 and 1791, had not had time to consolidate. Tax reforms of the early years of the Revolution had also been caught unfinished by the war and the upheaval of 1792. Taxes, like much else, existed mainly in principle. There were no regular revenues, so that the Convention depended on paper money. Army reforms, begun early in the Revolution, had also been far from complete; the country went to war with its armies commanded largely by officers of the Old Regime; and as the revolutionary spirit mounted into 1793, the officers increasingly lost respect for the civilians in Paris who claimed to govern. Dumouriez was only the most spectacular case.

Impotence in what would normally be considered the government was matched by an intense political liveliness among the "governed." It was a question whether the country could be governed at all, except by dictatorship, whether a revolutionary dictatorship such as soon developed, or the dictatorship of a restored king, such as the moderate Mounier, writing in exile, had recommended in 1792. The French people in 1793 were too highly politicized, too spontaneously active, too disillusioned with persons in public office (not without reason), to accept orders from any political heights. When they said the people were sovereign, they meant it literally, and they meant themselves. Middle class citizens, associated in the Paris Jacobin club and in similar clubs in the provinces, and acting on their own initiative, tried somehow to keep going, coordinate, and dominate the shattered apparatus of state, from the National Convention down to the village communes. Citizens of more modest station were aroused in the popular revolutionism described in Chapter 11 above. They met in lesser clubs, like the Paris Cordeliers, or in the face-to-face groups of immediate neighbors, as in the section assemblies of Paris and other large cities. They too, at the local level, helped to carry on the business of government.

The people were not only sovereign but debout, "on their feet," to use the expression of the time. Popular leaders called for a levée en masse, or general "rising." The term levée en masse has become frozen to signify the universal military service of the Revolution, a conscription conducted by government and designed to expel foreign invaders.

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It is true that the military levée en masse would not have been very effective if it had not been converted into an organized raising and equipping of troops by a government. But in its origin the term meant much more. A “mass rising,” in 1793, could be a general rising of the people for any purpose, with or without the assistance of official persons who did not command much public confidence. It could be a swarming of citizen soldiers to defy the regular armies of Prussia and Austria. It could be a rising of the sections of Paris against the Convention or some of its members. It could be an armed insurrection or an unarmed demonstration in the streets. It could be the wandering of a band of sans-culottes from one part of France to another, self-organized as an armée révolutionnaire, in pursuit of aristocrats or in search of food. There was something inherently anarchic in the whole idea.

Out of this anarchy there arose, however, by gradual stages, the gouvernement révolutionnaire, confirmed by the Convention in a famous decree of October 10, 1793, declaring “the government of France revolutionary until the peace.” It began with an at first little noticed provision, when on April 6, the day after Dumouriez’ final defection, the Convention authorized a special Committee of Public Safety, which in six months became the keystone of the gouvernement révolutionnaire. It was this government, which lasted until the death of Robespierre, and which Napoleon once called the only serious government in France in the decade after 1789, that turned the tide of foreign invasion, carried on the Terror, protected the country from both anarchy and counter-revolution, and initiated the military offensive which was to revolutionize Holland and Italy and shake the established order of Europe.

For the purposes of this book, it is of especial interest to trace the relations of this Revolutionary Government with popular revolutionism and with international revolutionism. Pressures generated by both these movements helped to bring the Revolutionary Government into being. Once established, it sought to subordinate both movements to itself.
in the Paris sections against the convention. Not yet in power himself, he was more sympathetic to “direct democracy” than he would be later.

He also called for the addition of two groups of new articles to the Declaration of Rights. The first group, composed of five articles, referred to the right of property, and touched on the ideology of popular revolution. The second group, in four articles, referred to international fraternization, and touched on the matter of international revolutionism.

Robespierre, like the popular democrats, favored a degree of economic equality which he never specified, but which fell short of the equality of incomes that Babeuf demanded three years later. “Equality of wealth is a chimera,” he said, “necessary neither to private happiness nor to the public welfare.” But “the world hardly needed a revolution to learn that extreme disproportion of wealth is the source of many evils.” He proposed, therefore, to lay it down as a principle that property right was a creation of law, not of nature apart from law, and that, like liberty, it was inseparable from considerations of ethics, and found its limits where it touched on the rights of others. He also proposed a progressive income tax. Brissot objected, and praise for Robespierre on this score has come more from posterity than from his contemporaries. Since there was no discussion of actual rates, it is hard to estimate the social significance of Robespierre’s idea of a progressive tax. He himself soon changed his mind, coming to believe that in a democratic society it was better for men of small means to carry a proportionate share of the costs, lest the well-to-do, by supplying the money, make themselves too indispensable to the state. That he was something of a social as well as a political democrat there can be no doubt.

He appealed also to the force of world revolution, which he now blamed the Girondists for ignoring. He scorned the argument that to stir up the peoples might aggravate the trouble with kings. “I confess that this inconvenience does not frighten me.” The kings were already combined against France and against liberty everywhere. “All men of all countries are brothers.” They should lend mutual aid as if they were citizens of a single state. The oppressor of one nation is the enemy of all. “Kings, aristocrats and tyrants, of every description, are slaves in revolt against the sovereign of the earth, which is the human race, and against the legislator of the world, which is nature.” “Verbiage pretending to profundity,” said Brissot, who had done as
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much as anyone to introduce such language into French politics since 1789.

In time of war and defeat, against the Brissotins in the Convention, and against the cosmopolitan forces of Counter-Revolution, Robespierre was willing to ally himself with two spirits that have never since been quite conjured away: those of mass upheaval and world revolution.

The Paris sections exploded in May. The Convention enacted controls on the retail price of bread. Agitation continued, sponsored by Jacobins of the Mountain. On May 31 a rising of sectionnaires captured the city government, and on June 2 eighty thousand armed sansculottes besieged the Convention, demanding the arrest of twenty-two of its members. Defenseless and divided, the Convention yielded. Brissot and his friends were arrested (or fled, like Condorcet), to be disposed of by the Revolutionary Tribunal. The same kind of popular rising which by overthrowing the monarchy in 1792 had brought the Convention into being now threatened the Convention itself in 1793. It remained to be seen whether the Jacobins of the Mountain could avoid the fate of those of the “Gironde.”

A constitution was thrown together in a few days. Full of elaborately democratic provisions, it came to be known as the Constitution of the Year I—that is, the first year of the Republic. The primary assemblies, throughout the country, ratified it with a vote reported as 1,801,918 to 11,610, out of some seven million adult men over 21. (Neither the French constitution of 1789-1791, nor the American federal constitution of 1787, had even been offered for direct popular ratification at all.) The Convention, given the facts of war and revolution, made no move to put the constitution into effect, seeming rather to envisage its own indefinite continuation. It appears that the mass of sans-culottes and sectionnaires accepted this decision, seeing in the Convention, now purged of its Girondist leadership, a necessary center and symbol of government in time of emergency. Immediately, however, voices were heard demanding the introduction of constitutional government. They came from journalists and militants, like Hébert, who were not members of the Convention and who really meant, not constitutionality, but the dissolution of the Convention and overthrow of Robespierre. Robespierre coined the term “ultra-revolutionary” to describe these men. In the logic of revolution, as he understood it, ultra-revolution came to be an insidious form of counter-revolution. Was he merely setting himself up as a norm? Was he simply identifying his own purposes with “the Revolution”? Was he only resisting the fate he had meted out to Brissot? It does not seem so. To purge the Convention was one thing; to dissolve it, another. The logic of revolution is not altogether weird or subjective, and demands for dissolution of the Convention in 1793, as voiced on the Left, would produce exactly what the most unregenerate conservatives throughout Europe most desired. It can be considered as certain that France could not be governed in 1793 by liberal or democratic constitutional means. To disband the Convention could only perpetuate anarchy. In that case a monarchist restoration, even if it masked a clerico-aristocratic dictatorship, would be welcomed.

That Robespierre could now detect “ultras” was a sign that he was turning from insurrectionism to gouvernement révolutionnaire, and that he himself had a hand in this incipient government. In July the Convention elected him to its Committee of Public Safety. But matters had never been worse for the Convention than in this summer of 1793. Marat was assassinated in his bath. He was the second member of the Convention to be assassinated since January. The great provincial cities, Lyon, Marseille, Bordeaux, where the expulsion of the Girondists angered the urban bourgeoisie, denounced the anarchy in Paris and defied the authority of the Convention. This “federalist” rebellion was of course a sign of anarchy in itself, and was abetted by the secret maneuvers of true counter-revolutionaries and foreign agents. At the end of August the royalists at Toulon threw the city open to the British and surrendered the fleet. Edmund Burke demanded that the Allies, now that they had a foothold in southern France, recognize a royal government and make clear their common cause with the émigrés—the true people of France, as he called them (estimating their number at 70,000), the revolutionaries being “robbers” who had driven them from the house.12 The powers did not take his advice. They wished a free hand in what seemed an imminent victory.

In Paris the sans-culottes again invaded the Convention on September 4. The Revolutionary Government was the outcome. It rested on a compromise between the popular democrats of the sections and the middle-class Jacobins of the Mountain in the Convention. The Convention saved itself from further purging or dissolution, but only by accepting the demands of the populace, in which hysteria, suspicion, fear, revenge, resolution, and patriotic defiance were mixed together.

12 “Policy of the Allies,” (1793) in Burke, Writings and Speeches, 12 vols. (Boston, 1901), iv, 446.
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The Convention authorized a levée en masse to enlarge the army. It consented reluctantly to a semi-military armée révolutionnaire to patrol the country. It enacted the General Maximum, a system of nation-wide price controls on a wide range of consumers’ goods. It promised to rid the army of unreliable officers. It passed a draconian Law of Suspects, and enlarged the Revolutionary Tribunal. The Terror began in earnest, as the Brissotins, Marie Antoinette, and various unsuccessful generals went to the guillotine. A Republican Calendar was adopted, marking the end of the Christian Era, and the beginning of the movement known as Dechristianization. In this, as in some other measures, it was only a small minority that called for such extreme action. But it was dangerous and impossible at such a time, opening the way to suspicion and denunciation, for anyone to question the demands of the most intransigently patriotic.

On the other hand, the government began to govern. The Committee of Public Safety received larger powers. Its membership settled at twelve, who remained the same twelve individuals from September 1793 to July 1794. They included Robespierre, Saint-Just, Couthon, Barrère, and Lazare Carnot. The Committee of General Security obtained wide powers of political police, and gradually subordinated the local and largely spontaneous “surveillance committees” to itself. The government was declared “revolutionary until the peace.” That is, the question of constitutionality was suspended for the duration. Members of the Convention, despatched to the provinces, to insurgent areas, and to the armies, reported directly to the Committee of Public Safety. This network of représentants en mission coordinated and enforced national policy, and worked to assure some measure of uniform loyalty to the Revolution. In December the ruling Committee received powers of appointment and removal of local office-holders throughout the country. A Subsistence Commission, building on the price-controls, and working under the ruling Committee, developed an elaborate system of requisitions, priorities, and currency regulations. The value of the assignat was held steady. The armies were supplied, while Carnot supervised their mobilization and training. By the end of 1793 the Vendéan rebellion was neutralized, the federalist rebellions suppressed, and the British ejected from Toulon. By the spring of 1794 an army of almost a million men faced the foreign enemy. It was the

first mass or “democratic” army, or at least the first above the level of casual militia, possessed of a modern kind of national consciousness, with its morale heightened by political attitudes in the common soldiers, its higher ranks filled with men promoted from the ranks on grounds of “merit,” and prepared to act, by its training, equipment, and discipline, in a great war among the old military powers of Europe. Eight marshals of Napoleon’s empire, in addition to Bonaparte himself, were promoted to the rank of general officer at this time.

By the spring of 1794 the French armies resumed the offensive. In June they won the battle of Fleurus, and the Austrians abandoned Belgium. In the Dutch cities the potential revolutionaries took hope again. The Poles, with Kosciuszko, again attempted revolution. Its outcome was uncertain. But in France it was clear, by mid-1794, that the Republic had survived.

It survived at a certain cost, or on certain terms. Much happened in France during the climactic Year Two of the republican calendar. Within the larger framework of the general eighteenth century revolution, and indeed of the subsequent history of modern times, it is illuminating to see two of these developments in some detail. First, the Revolutionary Government reacted strongly against popular and international revolution, exhibiting what, in the jargon, might be called “bourgeois” and “nationalist” inclinations. Second, in the extreme emotional stimulation, the Revolution, as understood by Robespierre, became the means to call a new world into being, and turned into something like a religion.

The purpose of the Revolutionary Government was not merely to defend the state but to found it, not only to win a war but to introduce a new and better society. That was what made it a revolutionary and not merely an emergency regime. In its vivid sense of a new world coming, its “eschatology,” the Revolution became a kind of religion. The substance of things hoped for, or new world as now desired, was one in which human dignity would rest on a foundation of fellow citizenship, freedom, and equality of status and respect. The picture had been drawn eloquently by Rousseau. It occupied the minds of many. Consider these statements by two “founders”:

“A constitution founded on these principles introduces knowledge among the people, and inspires them with a conscious dignity becoming free men; a general emulation takes place, which causes good humor, sociability and good manners to be general. That elevation of sentiment inspired by such a government makes the common people brave and enterprising. That ambition which is inspired by it makes them sober, industrious and frugal. You will find among them some elegance, perhaps, but more solidity; a little pleasure, but a great deal of business; some politeness, but more civility. If you compare such a country with the regions of domination, whether monarchical or aristocratical, you will fancy yourself in Arcadia or Elysium.”

The other said:

“We want an order of things . . . in which the arts are an adornment to the liberty that ennobles them, and commerce the source of wealth for the public and not of monstrous opulence for a few families. . . . In our country we desire morality instead of selfishness, honesty and not mere ‘honor,’ principle and not mere custom, duty and not mere propriety, the sway of reason rather than the tyranny of fashion, a scorn for vice and not a contempt for the unfortunate . . . good men instead of good company, merit in place of intrigue, talent in place of mere cleverness, truth and not show, the charm of happiness and not the boredom of pleasure . . . in short the virtues and miracles of a republic and not the vices and absurdities of a monarchy.”

The first was written by John Adams in 1776, the second by Maximilien Robespierre in 1794. The pictures in their minds were much alike. Both thought that a properly drafted constitution (producing

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of twentieth-century standards, but such a well-publicized holocaust (there was no secrecy because there was no shame) had been unknown in western Europe since the wars of religion, and broke upon men of the humane eighteenth century with peculiar horror.

To Robespierre, a humane man himself, such violence was intolerable unless it had a strong ethical justification. It is sometimes argued that Robespierre, and others like him, ended up by killing people because they began with a visionary idea of an impossible future world—that fanaticism leads to murder. The opposite may be at least as true of real human psychology: that fanaticism itself is bred by events, or that Robespierre and others, caught up in events, and having accepted a series of decisions each more ruthless than the last, dwelt at length on the better world they hoped to create—if only to transform their own doubts or guilt feelings into a state of mind with which they could live. It is hard to explain otherwise the intensity of the feelings, since the idea of a moral republic, as a flat thing itself, was common enough to many people who did not become so excited. The French Revolution, by 1794, had in fact been so vast, so soul-shaking, so ferocious, and so pitilessly demanding of sacrifice, that it would seem to have been totally unsuccessful unless it was followed by an incomparably better world.

For moral as well as for practical reasons, for Robespierre, the Terror was unacceptable without Virtue. "If the mainspring of popular government in time of peace is virtue, the mainspring of popular government in time of revolution is both virtue and terror: virtue, without which terror is evil; terror, without which virtue is helpless. Terror is nothing but justice, prompt, severe and inflexible; it is therefore an emanation of virtue." It was also the "principle of democracy applied to the pressing needs of the country." 332

It was the equation of Virtue and Terror that many persons then and since have found especially nauseous, and which does indeed distinguish the Terror of the French Revolution from other general liquidations in history. There seemed something insufferably hypocritical about it. To which a good Jacobin would reply that much hypocrisy has been expended on less defensible causes.

And what was this Virtue—the "virtue" which without terror was helpless? In part it meant only common honesty, the avoidance, for example, of the corruption and thieving in which a few members of the

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Convention were implicated when the East India Company was dissolved. In part it meant a kind of austerity, a willingness to go without coffee or new shoes when such items were in short supply, and a belief that the sacrifices imposed by public emergency should be equally shared. It meant also patriotism or good citizenship, a subordination of private to public good, a willingness to do one's part, whether by serving in the army or by scraping saltpeter in caves. It required a suspension of factiousness and complaining, at least for "the duration." It forbade profiteering and dabbling in the black market. And it included all those qualities that were believed to be permanently necessary to a wholesome commonwealth in the future. The good citizen, in the good republic, would put behind him the false values of the immediate past, care nothing for social rank, detest everything ornamental, frivolous or rococo, live contentedly at his business and in his family, spurn riches as a snare, be free from consuming ambition, guard his civic and political freedom, accept other men as his equals and delight in a classless society.

Robespierre was not so simple as to suppose these qualities easy or "natural." Like everyone else in his day, he believed religion to be necessary to society. For the kind of society he had in mind the authorities of the Christian churches had ceased to offer much support. It was commonly believed, on all sides, that religions had been "invented." Moses and Numa Pompilius had been notably successful in this respect. In founding a religion they had each also founded a polity and a people. The Revolutionary Government would therefore invent a religion of its own. Prompted by Robespierre, the Convention decreed, on May 7, 1794, that "the French people recognizes the Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul." 333

Thus originated the famous Worship of the Supreme Being, best known for the mammoth celebration held in Paris on June 8. Though arising from the same sources as the Worship of Reason of the preceding winter, it differed from the latter, in Robespierre's mind, in being less aggressively anti-Christian. It was his hope that all good citizens, whatever private religious views they might entertain, could publicly unite in religious services so comprehensive, so tolerant, so

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332 See, besides the decree, Robespierre's speech in its support, "Sur les rapports des idées religieuses et morales avec les principes républicains et sur les fêtes nationales," May 7, 1794, in Vellay, Discours, 347-75. The decree itself appears on 375-78. For the idea of "inventing" a religion, and for the whole present discussion, see M. Reinhard, Religion, Revolution et Contre-Révolution, Centre de Documentation Universitaire, Paris, 1960. The question of religion and revolution is also taken up in Chapter 21 below.
lacking in dogmatism, so irreleil and so useful. As the "decadary cult," celebrating republican or civic religion on each décadal, or "Sunday" of the republican calendar, the observances originating in the worship of the Supreme Being lingered on for several years. Contrary to Robespierre's hope, they never enjoyed any mass following, and by attracting mainly the anti-Christians remained as a divisive force in the republic.

There was a genuine religious feeling in the new cult, but it was a religion that was overwhelmingly ethical. There was a sense of man's place in the universe, but a much stronger sense of his proper role and attitudes in society. As Robespierre explained it (not unlike Burke), the individual reason could be frail and misleading. It was too involved with self-centered emotions. "Human authority can always be attacked by human pride." The inadequacy of human authority is therefore "supplemented by the religious sense, by which the soul is impressed with the idea of a sanction given to moral principles by a power superior to man."26 The value and even the truth of religion were seen in the moral principles and public conduct which religion instilled. This being the end of the eighteenth century, the publicists of the opposition did not argue very differently. For Joseph de Maistre, as for Edmund Burke, the importance of religion lay in the inculcation of moral principles, that is, in a doctrine of attitudes and duties towards one's fellow man, and one's own place in society. The clash was less between religion and irreligion than between the cults, respectively, of an idealized aristocratic and an idealized democratic world.

The Year II reached a culmination on 20 Prairial, or June 8, 1794. It was the day of the Festival of the Supreme Being. Robespierre, just elected for the two-week term as president of the Convention, officiated as a kind of priest of the Republic as tens or hundreds of thousands watched. The victories at the front, the coming of summer, the recollection of a terrible danger that had been survived, gave a joyousness to the occasion. For Robespierre, very likely, it was the climax of his own life and the day of foundation of a new world. Even Mallet du Pan, a realistic observer, when he read the reports in the Paris papers, believed that Robespierre had successfully healed the wounds of the past years and might consolidate the new state.

Events proved otherwise. The Law of 22 Prairial gave freer rein to the Revolutionary Tribunal. Most of those executed in Paris died in June and July of 1794. The Terror had got out of control, or at least it bore less relation to outer realities, and was carried on by the relentless will of a few individual men. Everything was now centralized in the government, even the definition of religion and virtue. Virtue itself came to mean harmlessness to the government. As Robespierre himself had said, human authority was attacked by human pride. Never had he been so inquisitorial, so implacably suspicious, as in these last few weeks.

If he had no longer objective grounds to fear for the Republic, he had good reason to be fearful for himself. By his preaching of virtue, and hieratic performance on June 8, he made enemies among his own colleagues. Old Voltaireans sneered at the new Rousseau. So strict a state could have no lasting appeal for the mass of actual Frenchmen—or of actual human beings. Some were guilty of offenses, of superstition in the provinces, or political or money-making intrigues, for which it was evident that Robespierre questioned their virtue, and contemplated their demise. He had sent Danton to death, and some of his associates, to hold some kind of middle ground after the death of the Hébertists. But in attacking the Dantons he had attacked the Convention itself. He had violated the body which he himself had always held up as the only symbol of legitimate power.

The restoration of public authority, the achievements of the Revolutionary Government, the tremendous year which had assured the survival of the Revolution, and which seemed to promise the foundation of a moral and democratic republic, thus ended up in an unedifying spectacle, in which the issue was to see which handful of men would get rid of the other first. By a palace revolution, a mere conspiracy in the Convention, Robespierre was outlawed on 9 Thermidor of the second year of the Republic, and died the next day.

The Meaning of Thermidor

Thermidor has become a byword for the reaction in which revolution ends. Many older histories of the French Revolution terminate here. For a long time Robespierre was taken to represent the most advanced point of the Revolution. He was not exactly ne plus ultra, but the "ultras" beyond him did not reflect the "true" movement. With his death came a "bourgeois" reaction, or at least a long, sordid, and uninspiring period until the appearance, or "advent," of Bonaparte. In more recent times, as the world has changed, it has been increasingly

26 Vellay, Discours, 361.
seen that Robespierre was by no means the furthest Left among authentic voices of the Revolution. There was a whole movement of popular excitement among the common people, largely autonomous and spontaneous, without which the Revolution could never have succeeded, or taken the course that it took. The popular movement was indeed crushed after Thermidor. But even before Thermidor it had been crushed, or at least mortally weakened. Popular revolutionism reached its height late in 1793. It was checked, disciplined, and calmed down by the Revolutionary Government itself, following the lead of Robespierre.

The French Revolution was by no means ended at Thermidor. The Revolution survived, but at a certain cost and on certain conditions. One of these was the supremacy of middle-class attitudes. Only the bourgeoisie, outside the aristocracy, was capable at the time of carrying on public business. A revolution, to be successful, was bound to be "bourgeois." This did not mean merely a triumph for a pre-existing bourgeoisie, for indeed many of the old-fashioned bourgeoisie were severely mauled. It meant that a wide variety of people, from government personnel to schoolteachers and landowning farmers, came to share in the advantages of a "bourgeois" society. It carried with it, however, the estrangement, not only of aristocrats, but of the economically most depressed classes and their spokesmen. It prepared the way for an accentuated class conflict after 1830, when the middle and the lower classes, looking back, glorified the Revolution for very different reasons.

The survival of the Revolution in 1794 was purchased also at great cost to the republican idealism for which Robespierre had stood. The Republic after 1794—if not as "cynical" as conservatives, radicals, and high-minded altruists have agreed in alleging—was above all else a government among governments.

If a certain idealism was lost, a powerful image had been created, the vision of a Revolution militant and victorious, of Liberty and Equality marching irresistibly forward. "The Convention," as Alexis de Tocqueville once said in the 1850's, "which did so much harm to contemporaries by its fury, has done everlasting harm by its examples. It created the politics of the impossible, turned madness into a theory, and blind audacity into a cult." The Convention was not really so mad or so blind. If it was the Convention that accepted and conducted

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