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Introduction

In 1792, just as in 1789, the Revolution exploded. The shock, stronger this time, threatened to sweep everything away, including the sacrosanct notion of property. 'Watch out ahead!' went a popular song. The time-honoured institution of royalty was driven out from the Tuileries – the new Bastille. The defenders of the monarchy left the sinking ship and went into winter quarters in prison, in the provinces or in exile. From the 'dark depths' dear to Michelet there rose a people moved not by misery but by disappointment, a people that vehemently claimed its due and, to achieve victory, was willing to die. Another bourgeoisie, called forth by the insurrection, climbed up the rungs of the Republic; until 9 Thermidor, the ordinary Frenchman was on the stage. This was the Jacobin period; it lasted barely two years.

When seen 'from above', through debates in the Assembly and in political 'clubs', through decrees and official correspondence, the history of Jacobinism appears to follow a straight path, unaffected by any deviations or by the quirks of fate. The conventional history of the period is replete with political rivalry, factions and *journées*. It puts excessive emphasis on these factors, focuses too often on orators and leaders, and grants too much space to ideas, as if the written word were a sufficient mainspring for action, and as if the ignorant were better left ignored. Thanks to that history, some legends have retained their emotional sway, in particular the tales of 'blood-drinkers' and 'heroes in rags'.

Later, because of the social character of the Jacobin revolution, historians 'socialized' it by transferring onto that smouldering past a set of present-day problems that distort the perspective. Whereas the Marxists appropriated this dramatic period as their own, others subjected it to systematic belittlement and demystification. Does it deserve such honour and such ingratitude? An objective explanation, the only one we are aiming at, must concern itself with the forces unleashed by Jacobinism and with their interrelationships.

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To set out these factors socio-economic analysis, focusing on the food crises (*crises de subsistances*) that punctuated the revolutionary movement, has produced charts and tables whose mathematical rigour pales in the face of biological imperatives. The application of electronics has made the economy reveal its cycles more readily, and society its structures and hierarchies. But the analysis has often gone astray in a pseudo-scientific gibberish that repels those who love the past.

Narrative had to be revived; man – who, by his massive and constraining presence, was the collective artisan of history – had to be put back in his environment. Is he not possessed of flesh and blood, of mind and heart? How can one overlook his behaviour, his attitudes, and their explicit or hidden motives? Georges Lefebvre, my mentor and friend, quietly invited us to follow this new approach. Soboul, Cobb, Rudé and a few others heeded his call. Their valiant efforts have revealed the abundance of primary sources and the usefulness of treating them methodically. Pierre Goubert has stressed the urgent need to listen to the Revolution thinking, to watch it live, in order to appreciate 'collective attitudes, the force of ancestral brutalities and grudges and the power of hopes thwarted for too long, and a whole unconscious – several, rather – repressed for centuries.'[1]

The First Republic, a continuous and ever-threatened creation, lends itself to this broader research. Are we prepared for it? Is there not a risk of over-interpreting recollections, giving too much credit to second-hand accounts, applying a Parisian pattern to the French countryside, and attributing 'terrorist' opinions to every patriot? Until there are enough local monographs comparing social, mental and economic aspects to allow us to 'nationalize' the issues of sociological analysis, any attempt at summary will be premature. I shall therefore confine myself to an interim report based on little-known research carried out by many hands spontaneously for over twenty years, whose results I have assembled without premeditation. Even as they stand, these results can encourage other attempts, guard against fallacies, and corroborate certain findings.

Semantic confusion is the first barrier to a comprehensive explanation. During these troubled years, the meaning of words changed. The 'people' differentiated itself from the 'mass' and the 'crowd', which

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[1] P. Goubert, *L'Ancien Régime*, Paris, 1969, 'Collection U', vol. 1, chapter 11, p. 257. [Quoted from the English translation by Steve Cox, *The Ancien Régime: French Society 1600–1750*, New York, 1973. Trans.]

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were quick to coalesce and fast to break up. At first identified with the nation – the community of citizens – the 'people' shrank at the same rate as the nation by casting out the elements that oppressed it. As a catchword of the Jacobin ideology, it took on the same ambiguity as the word 'homeland' (*patrie*). Contemporaries who were aware of this tried to define the 'people'. At times the 'people' encompassed 'the immense class of the poor...which provides the homeland with men and our borders with defenders, which feeds society by its labours, uplifts it by its talents, adorns and honours it by its virtues'; at times it was restricted to the 'toiling and indigent class'. The absence of wealth and property conferred a presumption of civic virtue (*civisme*). The patriot people was the worker people, and the homeland merged with the Revolution.[2]

The terms describing political attitudes underwent a parallel change. 'Jacobin', 'patriot', 'revolutionary' and *sans-culotte*, all of which had several meanings at first, became more precisely defined in the minds of militants, while provincial *sociétés populaires* adopted all these tags at once. They also called themselves *montagnards* in order to prove their allegiance to the Convention, home of the 'Mountain' that inspired their loyalty. This profusion of terms was in fact deplored. 'We have no right wing, no left wing, no mountain, no valley, nor any of those denominations that would be as ridiculous as they are insignificant were they not dangerous,' declared the inhabitants of Aurillac in April 1793; 'Here, all patriots are united in defence of their liberty.' Actually, the labels *girondin* and *hébertiste* caught on only after the *girondins* and the *hébertistes* had been denounced at their trial; these terms were used sparingly, as was *enragé*, to which *maratiste* was preferred.

On the other hand, during the Year II, the *montagnard* was still linked to the Jacobin and the *sans-culotte*. Whereas the first referred more specifically to members of the Convention, the 'true Jacobin' was also a 'sincere *montagnard*' and, in the countryside, the 'good' and 'pure' *sans-culotte* gradually established himself. This designation, derived from the urban workers' custom of wearing their trousers buttoned onto their coats, retained a popular and social connotation. After the summer of 1793, the petty bourgeois Jacobin distinguished himself from 'genuine *sans-culottes*, that is, men who have no other resources to live on than their manual labour', nor 'any other property than the wages for services rendered to their fellow citizens'. Thus the

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[2] See A. Geffroy, 'Le Peuple selon Saint-Just', in *Actes du Colloque Saint-Just*, Paris, 1966, p. 231.

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Convention was *montagnard*, the people *sans-culotte* and the nation patriotic.

The collective mentality similarly confused patriotism with Jacobinism, thus bringing about, in practice, a fusion of the two concepts. The national consciousness, sharpened by the war and the aristocratic plot, momentarily – and ostensibly – obliterated social cleavages. The bourgeoisie, the town-dwelling *sans-culotterie* and the peasantry set aside their differences in a composite society that transcended their traditional behaviour. By attending his *section*, his club and his 'watch-committee' (*comité de surveillance*), the citizen got away from his family and professional environment to look after the higher interests of the homeland. He became a soldier, imposed duties on himself, and freely accepted the constraints they entailed. These constraints in turn influenced traditional behaviour and spread the notion of a natural order of things that did not involve the responsibility of those who carried out orders.

Henceforth, several attitudes towards the Revolution were possible: unconditional support, passive or active resistance, or indifference. Only the first was tolerable. Descriptions of attitudes became tantamount to verdicts: they condemned citizens or cleared them; they implied praise or scorn. Aristocrat, *feuillant*, federalist, fanatic, 'starver' (*affameur*) – these epithets were used as indictments. After September 1793, *muscadin* was added to the list. It applied to young men of means, to those declared unfit for military service, to the idle, to pleasure-seekers who wandered about town and haunted sleazy taverns. Finally, a distinction was drawn between true patriots and false patriots, who concealed themselves behind their exaggerated rhetoric.

For the revolutionary spirit was engendered by a unanimity of feelings, and national solidarity manifested itself through work. The *conventionnel* Simond recognized only three classes of citizens: 'those who clothe man by their handiwork, those who feed him by agriculture, and those who defend him by warfare'. Yet the artisans, peasants and soldiers who were all worthy elements of Jacobin society did not adopt a common outlook. Despite the 'supreme law' of public safety, each category persisted in its attitudes, which had been shaped before the Revolution by professional working conditions and the quest for food, regardless of subsequent changes in social environment. One should always remember to what extent mental structures are conservative, and to what extent man is a 'creature of habit'.

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This limited and homogeneous group thus provides more solid grounds for analysis than the notion of an embryonic class. The bourgeoisie and the peasantry, under the cloak of a broad agreement, concealed too many antagonistic interests and internal conflicts. Consensus, when there was one, took the shape of slogans and hard-hitting catch-phrases, not a coherent programme of demands; it was sustained by a common aggressiveness against designated enemies. This tension, which culminated in civil and foreign war, sublimated patriotism and civic feeling, and so made it possible, to a great extent, to channel the blind interplay of social forces. However, their flow could not be halted. After 10 August 1792, the Revolution therefore continued on its logical course, which naturally had to make room for the aspirations of the *sans-culottes*.

At the same time, the Revolution locked Jacobinism into a dilemma: the choice between a republic and democracy. At first, for most patriots, one was unthinkable without the other; then it was noticed that the two terms were not synonymous. The Republic designated the State, its framework and its laws, while democracy stood for a social process. This semantic equivocation soon ceased, revealing two pathways towards equality: equal rights or equal enjoyment of property. The Republic made do with Jacobin ideology, while the democratic movement got out of hand, then stumbled. Despite its fundamental contradiction, the Republic remained just as the *montagnards* had wanted it, and its enemies blamed all their misfortunes on the *jacobinerie* ('Jacobin-making factory').

Could the Republic have been anything other than bourgeois? Only those who possessed either knowledge or the means of production, or both, were in a position to lead the Republic, to breathe an infectious energy into it, to achieve a compromise with the masses. The requirements of national defence and of the revolutionary struggle put immense powers in the hands of the *montagnard* bourgeoisie, which used these powers against its former supporters. But, although the men of 1793 were of the same generation as those of 1789, the four intervening years had made them wiser. Some did not hesitate to overcome their fears, while others were blinded by the fear of being overcome. This gradual hardening of attitudes inevitably led to Thermidor.

The fact is that patriotic fervour was tempered in civilian and military societies that made no distinction between service to the nation and service to the State, and fostered personal ambitions within

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conformist frameworks. The Year II, therefore, cannot be regarded as an 'unfortunate' and useless 'deviation'.[3] The bourgeoisie and property-owners, after a brief moment of disarray, remained in control. Although they may have seemed to go astray in 'popular side-tracks', the authorities in fact followed the only course laid down by a mass consensus that allowed them to govern efficiently. It would be disregarding the facts to deny a tragic grandeur to the Jacobin Republic; just as it would be going against the evidence to underrate the spirit of sacrifice of those who put their trust in it. The Republic was, whatever one may say, and in spite of Germinal, 'the ascending phase of the struggle for liberty'.

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[*] The number in bold type refers to the bibliography on pp. 234–47.

[3] See François Furet and Denis Richet, *La Révolution française*, vol. 1 (**12**) and Claude Mazauric's critique of that work in 'Réflexions sur une nouvelle conception de la Révolution française', *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française* [hereafter referred to as *AHRF*. Trans.], 1967. The reader should also consult F. Furet's reply to his critics in 'Le Catéchisme révolutionnaire', *Annales ESC*, March–April 1971 [available in English in F. Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. by Elborg Forster, Cambridge, 1981. Trans.].

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Forces and attitudes

The fall of the French monarchy unleashed opposing forces that have never been studied jointly. They seem to follow parallel tracks that overlap only on occasion and by chance. Because of this highly artificial separation, it is difficult to appreciate the influence of the opposition on the stiffening of revolutionary attitudes. The revolutionary movement provoked resistances each of which blocked it in turn. Whenever the Revolution was threatened by a new peril, it expelled its untrustworthy elements. Every crisis was met by a collective reaction of self-defence that required greater precautions and severity. Thus the reaction, its ranks increased by scares and successive purges, grew with every aggravation of economic constraints and social protest. Time, which worked in its favour, provided new recruits who were a far cry from the aristocratic counter-revolution.

The counter-revolution has long been the object of excessive admiration or superficial attention. 'Left-wing' French historians have scoffed at it. In Mathiez's work, its role is marginal and confined to political explanations, particularly with regard to the 'foreign plot'. At a very late stage, Mathiez encouraged research on emigration and international finance. He was rightly wary of diplomatic documents, as, incidentally, was Georges Lefebvre. But Lefebvre took a different view, and stressed the social aspects of disaffection. He suggested adopting the attitude of the revolutionaries, who regarded all those who were not with them as being necessarily against them. Thus he was able to grasp the true dimensions of the problem, and he regretted the difficulty of obtaining proper statistics about it. The opening of the Coalition archives, investigations into private papers, and the cataloguing of the O^3 series at the Archives Nationales (Maison du Roi) gave him new hope. But researchers followed narrow paths, studying the networks and secret agents whose mysteries some investigators are still trying to solve.

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On the other hand, British and American historians who were involved in the study of ideas produced solid analyses of theoreticians and doctrines. They nevertheless persisted in looking at anti-Jacobinism 'from the outside'. Finally, and more recently, some young sociologists, breaking with tradition, have bravely set about examining the structures of the passive and armed resistance of the Vendée, and the behaviour of its troops.

These are the directions increasingly being followed in historical research. One can already perceive the frailty of certain commitments to the Revolution and the existence of a stable mass of peasantry indifferent to any attempt at innovation, as we shall see in more detail later. Not only does there seem to be a huge gap between the attitudes of the Parisian militant and those of the peasant of the west, but geographical conditions and patronage relationships in each community fostered diametrically opposed political choices. As for the army, its popular recruitment encouraged the intermingling of opinions. It is no longer regarded, therefore, as a backward institution and a frozen society; it is now seen as a factor of social development and national unity.

Finally, the analysis of attitudes points to the continuity of the Terror. Punitive reaction, which was anarchic in 1792, then legalized in 1793, was part of the revolutionary movement and the counter-revolutionary outlook. It stemmed from identical motives and similar collective impulses. In both camps it manifested itself with the same violence: the individual was fighting for survival, the social group for its material and moral interests. The Parisian uprising can thus be explained by an intuition that led the people to forestall royalist schemes.

The Republic, born of the 10 August rising and timidly assigned the 'birthday' of 21 September 1792, was consecrated by Valmy. Although it prided itself on a popular victory over both foreign invaders and anti-Jacobinism, its legal status was almost fraudulent. The fallen monarchy served as its catalyst; the Republic was the monarchy's antithesis and hence ceased to be an abstraction. But it remained devoid of institutional and social content. While the people intended to make full use of their rights, the Rousseauian concept of national representation survived. The Paris Commune, an insurrectionary institution, set itself up against the discredited Assembly.[1] There was the danger that this

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[1] The Commune, in the name of the people, had sent Huguenin to the Legislative Assembly as early as 11 August to serve notice of its dismissal.

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could lead to a dual structure of power, creating anarchy and civil war, all the more so as this 'second revolution' did not meet with unanimous approval in the country.

In fact, property-owners were worried about the unrest that was spreading from Paris to the large towns and to rural France, which was thought to be indifferent and passive. Socially defined parties were preparing for a clash. One camp comprised those who wanted to end the Revolution with the gains of 1789. These were the law-abiding citizens, the *honnêtes gens*, pusillanimous by temperament and attached to the Constitutional order. They included both rich and poor, and their fear of adventure led them to prefer their present situation, however uninspiring, to an uncertain future. The other camp consisted of those who had higher hopes and dreamt of a better society, those who wanted to drag the Revolution out of its quagmire for their own sake but also for the sake of their children and all people – their fellow men.

THE DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

The Jacobin ideal partook of that wider world which had supported the uprising that had in turn confirmed Jacobinism's popular following. Opinion was split both on the issue of 10 August and on Jacobinism. These two issues were the dividing lines between supporters and opponents, and acquired their full significance in the coming conflicts between a democracy that was finding its way and a recalcitrant society encased in an obsolete framework. The aftermath of the August events was dominated by atavistic 'fears' and a collective mentality influenced by war and invasion. However brief, this period deserves examination. It foreshadows the 'prophetic Year II', in which all its traits expressed themselves to the extreme, spawning the same violence, the same resistance and, in some respects, the same audacity. The terrorist mentality and the revolutionary dictatorship asserted themselves by the Year I of the Republic, which was also the Year I of equality.

Insurrection, sovereignty, legality

'The State must be saved by whatever means, and nothing is unconstitutional except what can lead it to ruin.' Thus Robespierre, on 29 July 1792, settled in advance the question of legality in favour of the insurrection. Its legality was that of the Revolution and liberty. The rising was dictated by circumstances alone, not by the will of an

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individual or party. 'Must one keep referring to the penal code in order to assess the salutary precautions required by public safety in times of crisis brought about by the impotence of laws?' Robespierre was already distinguishing between regimes that were the product of 'wars and upheavals' and those suited to 'peace and concord'.

Most people defended their point of view by referring to the same principle: popular sovereignty, that is, 'the nation's rightful power to determine its own destiny'. The nation possesses 'all the rights that each man has to himself, and the general will governs society in the same way as individual will governs each single individual'. The nation was now vested with all the powers that the Constitution had separated; it was inalienable and non-transferable. Hence 'the people's delegates (*mandataires*) occupy the same position with respect to the sovereign as a private individual's proxies with respect to their principal, and the servant with respect to the head of a family'. The people could thus invoke this subservience to rise against their unfaithful officials, cast aside the old order and establish a new one, which, even if not yet codified, was no less formal. As its supreme recourse, the people confirmed the nation in its absolute prerogatives, which were vested in every fraction of the sovereign authority. So long as the nation remained in arms, its role was to guide the people's thoughts and actions. Everything emanated from the people and everything came back to the people.

This notion of revolutionary right, in its simplicity and rigour, contained a latent strength. It prompted Parisian *sectionnaires* and provincial *fédérés* to storm the Tuileries; it convinced the *sans-culottes* of their own existence and supremacy. From that moment on, they acquired self-awareness. Their concept of sovereignty moved them to exercise it without intermediaries, and justice represented one of its functions. Experience had made them vigilant. 'The sovereign must be at his post, leading his armies, going about his duties; he must be everywhere.' Given the deficiencies of the State, and 'in the absence of protective laws, [the sovereign people] must look after itself'. It set out to place ministers and civil servants – that is, its delegates – under permanent watch, and to dismiss those who infringed the 14 August oath to Liberty and Equality. In late August, a Versaillais, Frotié, went so far as to suggest appointing a tribune in each *département* to counter abuses by public officials and offset their influence. 'Think of your own interest, O humble class in the towns and in the countryside. The time has come for your happiness or slavery.'