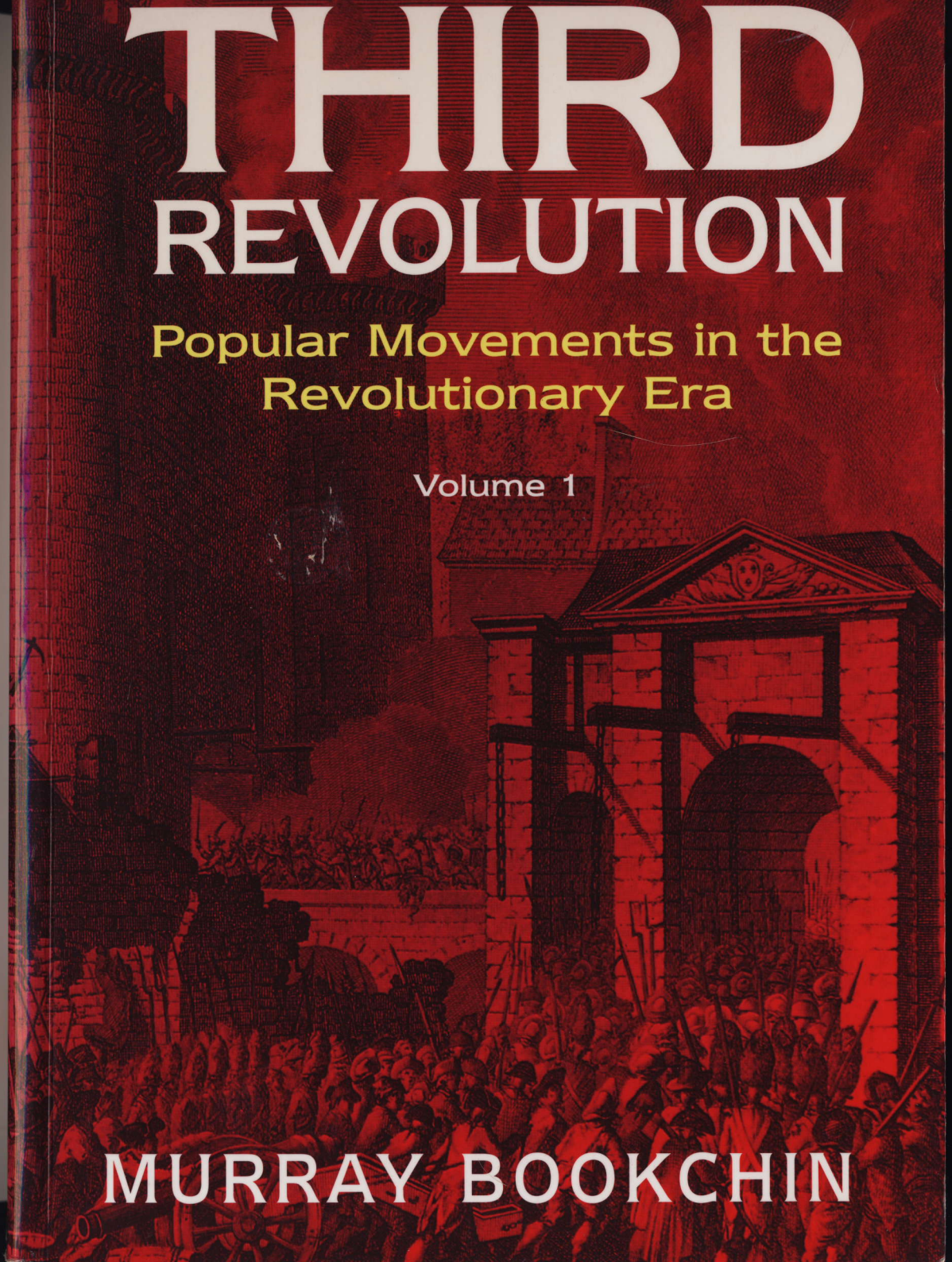
THE THIRD REVOLUTION

Popular Movements in the Revolutionary Era

Volume 1



MURRAY BOOKCHIN

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POPULAR MOVEMENTS IN THE REVOLUTIONARY ERA

VOLUME 1

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Murray Bookchin

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For my granddaughter Katya

Preface

This book has been written because of a deepening concern I have felt over the past two decades: the ebbing of the revolutionary tradition. The era of the great revolutionary movements, from that of the English Revolution of the 1640s to that of the Spanish Revolution of 1936–39, is waning today from the consciousness of even radical young people, let alone the reasonably educated. Insofar as these revolutions are remembered at all, they are dismissed as irrelevant failures or as the incubators of authoritarian states and their rulers such as Oliver Cromwell, Maximilien Robespierre, and Joseph Stalin.

Yet while the names of the tyrants that the revolutions are said to have produced live on as historical villains, the names of the people who tried to rescue their liberatory potentialities are nearly lost, and so too are the exhilarating ideas they propounded. All but forgotten, in fact, are the little-known popular spokespersons who articulated great visions of freedom and often coordinated great insurrectionary uprisings in towns and the countryside, like Thomas Münzer, Richard Overton, Daniel Shays, Jean Varlet, Jean Varlin, Louise Michel, and Nestor Makhno. Each of these individuals, among many others, earnestly tried to propel the great revolutions of past centuries toward a full realization of their emancipatory goals. Yet they and their endeavors are usually forgotten, often completely so, except among people who have a specialized knowledge of the revolutions in which they participated.

That the revolutionary era of the past four centuries continually widened the radical horizon of freedom is equally unknown to the present generation. Few people today are aware of the radical programs, achievements, and gains, as well as the errors that were made, especially at the popular base of revolutionary movements. Ordinary people—peasants, workers, artisans, radical intellectuals—made great attempts to take full control of society, establish fairly egalitarian forms of social organization, and defend important human rights as well as expound lofty goals of freedom. That such an era, with all its problems and ideals, may become lost to memory has been too chilling for me to contemplate.

It is this social and historical amnesia that has impelled me to write an account of the revolutionary era—to set down people, events, social factors, and political programs of popular revolutionary movements that began with the peasant wars before the modern era and reached remarkable fruition for a brief time in the Spanish Civil War of 1936–39. Each of these revolutions was built ideologically on the historical memory of the revolutions that had preceded it. Americans were deeply conscious of the English Civil War of the 1640s and 1650s; the French were profoundly affected by the American Revolution, whose radicalism is usually woefully understated in the historical literature today; and the revolutions that followed were immensely influenced by the events of the French Revolution.

My principal orientation in this work has been toward the popular or "mass" movements and the so-called "grassroots" institutional structures and organizational frameworks of the groups that propelled the great revolutions forward. For each revolution, I have tried to provide the social, economic, cultural, and political background that gave rise to and sustained its radical movement.

I have avoided viewing the intentions of these movements as reflecting the emergence and consolidation of industrial capitalism; rather, I have taken the demands of various revolutionary tendencies at their word. I believe that the great mass of people who made the revolutions described in this work genuinely believed in the notions of liberty, equality, fraternity, and the pursuit of happiness that they articulated—not necessarily in free trade, a ruthless egotism, or class collaboration, contrary to the retrospective interpretations that have been given to their liberatory slogans.

Each revolution, moreover, advanced moral, political, and social alternatives to capitalism—although they lacked any clear idea of what capitalism would become and often even cleared the way for modern capitalism. The popular revolutionaries did present alternatives to the self-seeking, competitive, and acquisitive society that prevails today. The reasons that they failed should be a matter of the greatest interest to us, now that capitalism is often taken as a given in ordinary discourse or seen as the "end of history," the outcome of humanity's long and bitter struggle for the good society.

Hence I do not work with the teleological conviction that what *now* exists *had* to come into existence; rather, it was one of many *other* possibilities that were latent in the revolutionary potentialities that existed generations, indeed centuries, ago. Any prejudgments of the past in the light of the present represent the abdication of a moral interpretation of history—the abjuring of an emancipatory "should be" that critically opposes the prevalent "what is." If a largely retrospective or even fatalistic perspective were to guide us, we would have to consider the high ideals that emerged in past revolutions as merely an ideological patina for uncontrollable economic forces that determined human behavior irrespective of human wishes and desires.

In fact, if cultural factors were merely reflexes of economic ones, capitalism would have emerged at almost any time in the past, as far back as antiquity. Capitalists in sizable numbers lived in ancient Greece and Rome as well as many parts of medieval Europe, and they were no less acquisitive or enterprising in their pursuit of wealth than our own bourgeoisie. But what prevented them from taking a commanding position in social life—assuming that they tried to do so—was precisely a host of cultural factors that favored the ownership of land over capital, denigrated material accumulation, and strongly emphasized social status in the form of noble titles rather than the ownership of fungible property.

The title of this book—*The Third Revolution*—has been chosen largely to show that capitalism as we know it today was not predestined to gain the supremacy it presently has; rather, that popular revolutionary movements offered, and fought for, more rational and democratic social alternatives to the present society and to so-called "bourgeois revolutions," to use the label that has so often been given to the English, American, and French Revolutions. I have thus examined the classical revolutions internally, from within their own inner dynamics, rather than externally, from the standpoint of where we are today.

My emphasis on popular insurgencies places unavoidable limits on the extent to which I can describe these sweeping historical movements as a whole. Readers who want more detailed accounts of specific revolutions may consult the sources in my notes and the bibliographical essay at the end of this book. Fortunately, nearly every work I cite in the essay contains references to the abundant, increasingly specialized works that now exist in many languages. I have tried to use sources in the English language as much as possible to meet the needs of the general readership to which this book is addressed, and I have provided reference notes mainly for the quotations that appear in the narrative.

Let me make it clear from the outset that this book does not attempt to be a work of academic scholarship. Rather it has been written to chart out a memorable legacy for the reader unlikely to be concerned with esoteric sources or minor details. It is admittedly an account of the popular movements that propelled the great revolutions forward to their most radical and democratic extremes—and it is an interpretation of events as they might have been seen by a radical participant in them.

I do not regard such an approach by a twentieth-century lifelong student of the great revolutions as presumptuous. When circumstances afforded popular revolutionaries sufficient freedom of expression, they were often very eloquent in presenting their own interpretations of what they were doing and made their goals quite clear in pamphlets, speeches, manifestos, and actions. What I have done is to cite them, their ideas, and their actions with the attention they

deserve, and free them from the historical dungeons to which many of them have been confined by conventional, often middle-class, and partisan historians.

I make no claim to be impartial in my own views—as though "impartiality" were possible in discussions of great revolutions—and I admit quite frankly that I would have stood side by side with Jean Varlet in the *sans-culottes*' uprising of 1793 and with Jean Varlin during the embattled days of the Paris Commune of 1871.

This volume—the first of two, ranging from the peasant wars of the sixteenth century to the French Revolution—was read as the basis of a course on the revolutionary tradition to my students in Vermont in 1988–89. The extensive text that I prepared was supplemented by extemporaneous elaborations and discussions. I wish to thank my colleague and companion, Janet Biehl, for editing the text and giving it more of a book format for the general reader, filling in background material, and writing most of Chapter 13 on the basis of discussions between us and her own research. Both the style and content of the book remain entirely my own responsibility. I wish also to thank my editor, Steve Cook, of Cassell, for his encouragement and support for this book.

Volume Two of *The Third Revolution* will take the reader through the nineteenth century, focusing on the French uprisings of 1830, 1848, the Paris Commune of 1871, and into the twentieth century, focusing on revolutions in Russia, Germany, and Spain. So acutely aware are we, these days, of the shortcomings of these revolutions—the elitism of the political factions and parties in France and Russia, for instance, and the extent to which the needs of women, native peoples, and persecuted minorities of all kinds were not fully encompassed by revolutionary movements—that we tend to overlook how sweeping the popular revolutionary movements in Europe and America were in so many respects.

The fact that I have not addressed in any great detail certain shortcomings of the great democratic revolutions, such as the limited role that women were permitted to play in them and the oppression that African-Americans suffered even as the American Revolution honored their "natural rights" in the breach, does not mean that I am oblivious to the rights and interests of women, homosexuals, and ethnic minorities. But any introductory account of the revolutionary era must necessarily be highly selective in its choice of events and facts. Fortunately, there are now many books available that deal in considerable detail with issues of gender and ethnicity in these revolutions and that adequately fill out my own gaps.

Murray Bookchin
Burlington, Vermont
June 14, 1993

INTRODUCTION Revolution from Below

The title of this book, *The Third Revolution*, is taken from what may seem an extraordinary historical coincidence. The demand for a "third revolution" was actually raised in two great revolutions: the French Revolution in the closing decade of the eighteenth century, and 120 years later in the Russian Revolution during the opening decades of the twentieth.

The revolutionary *sans-culottes* of Paris in 1793 raised the cry to replace the supposedly radical National Convention with a popular democracy—the Parisian sections—that they themselves had established during a series of insurrections, often against the wishes of the Convention's Jacobin leaders who professed to speak in their name. In another place and another time, in 1921 in Russia, the revolutionary workers of Petrograd and the famous "red sailors" of Kronstadt, the capital's nearby naval base, raised the identical cry. They, too, sought to overthrow an authoritarian, though seemingly radical regime—in their case, one led by Bolsheviks—with democratically elected councils or "soviets."

In surveying the events of these two periods, it struck me as fascinating—and more than a mere coincidence—that this very same demand, word for word, was raised in both Paris and Petrograd toward the end of two historically crucial revolutions that were separated by such a great span of time.

The two peoples who raised the demand profoundly differed in their cultural and social conditions. Neither the Petrograd workers nor the Kronstadt sailors were schooled, as far as I can discern, in revolutionary history—certainly not in the details of 1793—and they could not have known much about the Parisian *sans-culottes*. Yet they directed the identical cry against a seemingly revolutionary regime that they had helped bring to power and by which they now felt betrayed.

What was it about the dynamics of these two great revolutions that caused such a demand to be raised twice? What brought these revolutionary populaces into open, even bloody, opposition to the leaders, organizations, and regimes that claimed to be radical to one degree or another?

In both cases a "first revolution" had been directed against a patently obsolete monarchy—the Bourbons in France and the Romanovs in Russia—because of the gross incompetence of the royal regime. A shapeless but earnest coalition of liberals, radicals, and even dissatisfied members of the courtly ruling class had taken over the reins of government in this "first revolution," replacing the monarchy with a new and moderate but irresolute representative government. Accordingly, in both cases, a "second revolution" had followed the first one, in which a radical government that had the support of the most insurgent people proceeded to overthrow the moderate one. But once in power, the radical government, too, became discredited to a point where the revolutionary populace demanded still a "third revolution" to reclaim the power they had lost.

A number of writers on revolution, perhaps most popularly Crane Brinton in *The Anatomy of Revolution*, have advanced a "stages" theory of revolutions that accounts very well for the first two revolutions. According to Brinton's approach, the English, French, and Russian Revolutions all underwent a series of fairly distinct steps that followed a rough schematic pattern, somewhat as follows:

Initially, the people are drawn into a more or less unified revolt against a monarchy, which leads to the establishment of a moderate regime—or what I (and they) in retrospect call the first revolution. After its initial success, the revolution moves in an increasingly radical direction, followed or accompanied by a civil war that awakens broad sectors of the lower classes, in which extremists engage in a struggle with their formerly moderate allies, thereby leading to the second revolution. In time, however, conflicts within the revolutionary camp are resolved by a military regime, which itself is supplanted by a restoration of the old regime. According to Brinton's approach—and that of Marx, I should add—this counterrevolution is never entirely successful. The revolution, viewed as a whole, wins in the sense that its social conquests cannot be removed by the restored old regime and are thus institutionalized as a permanent historical advance, despite the nominal defeat of the revolution and its military sequelae.

Besides Brinton, theorists influenced by the "human ecology" ideas of the Chicago School of urban sociology have also advanced such a highly idealized pattern. So, too, have Marxist historians. Leon Trotsky contended to the end of his life that Stalin's rule over the former Soviet Union constituted a "Thermidor" comparable to the counterrevolutionary rule of the Directory—the moderates who overthrew Robespierre and the Jacobins—in France.

In fact, the "stages" theory is not completely bereft of truth. Stages there surely were in the major revolutions, successful and unsuccessful alike. The extraordinary similarity, at least in the sequence of events, between the English, French, and Russian Revolutions raises fascinating questions, some of which bear on the nature of revolution itself.

To what extent did political factors outweigh economic ones? To what extent were the outcomes different from what revolutionary leaders had intended—and if greatly so, why? What emancipatory directions *could* the revolutions have followed, had certain specific events not altered their courses profoundly? In what ways and with what goals did the popular movements—more specifically, ordinary people themselves—affect these revolutions?

The fact is that the stages theory describes only the first and second revolutions. Remarkably, the insurgent people who called for a third revolution seem to have dropped out of the historical schema worked out by Brinton, Trotsky, and others. Yet they were an abiding presence throughout the revolutionary era, and, more than any of the revolutionary figures and parties that loom over most historical accounts of the great revolutions, they were the authentic radicals in the events in which they participated.

For the insurrectionary people, almost alone, were seeking to reclaim and expand highly democratic institutions that had been established during earlier phases of the revolutionary cycle and whose power had been subsequently reduced or usurped by the parties and factions that professed to speak in their name. The French *sans-culottes* sought to extend the authority of their neighborhood popular assemblies or "sections" at the expense of the increasingly powerful, centralized, essentially Jacobin-controlled state apparatus. The Russian workers and sailors wanted to democratize and reinvigorate their grassroots councils or "soviets" as a substitute for the increasingly authoritarian Bolshevik-controlled state apparatus. In demanding a third revolution, they in effect articulated a popular desire for the establishment of a radical democracy, a demand that reached the point of outright insurgency. Ultimately, their uprisings were quelled when the self-styled revolutionary organizations of the second revolution turned against the popular movement and suppressed it with military force.

The failure of insurrectionary people to achieve a popular democracy has nonetheless profoundly affected the events of our own time. Indeed, seldom has the past been so integrally part of the present, for we live under the shadow of the failure of the French and Russian Revolutions to this very day, all recent claims to the contrary notwithstanding. Whether directly, as in the case of the Russian Revolution, or indirectly, as in the case of the French, they profoundly shaped the course of the twentieth century and of the century that is soon to follow—and we cannot afford to face the future without learning what they have to teach us.

It was not only in the French and Russian Revolutions that the demand for a third revolution arose: radical popular tendencies have emerged repeatedly in revolutionary movements of the past, essentially voicing the same demands as the French and Russian insurgents, albeit in different words and different ways.

Nor have they been simple popular explosions that lacked direction, purpose, or leadership.

Revolutionary "mobs" or crowds seemed to erupt like elemental forces in major revolutions, yet they were hardly as formless or "chaotic" as many historical accounts and reminiscences would lead us to believe. Episodic crowd eruptions or "riots" should not be confused with the more lasting and underlying popular movements that slowly crystallized from small groups in neighborhoods, towns, and villages into increasingly larger ones during revolutionary periods. Before huge crowds surged around the Bastille on July 14, 1789, in Paris, or confronted tsarist troops in the avenues of Petrograd on February 23 and 24, 1917, the people had already established vital political networks in the slums and working-class neighborhoods of both cities.

Such networks existed not only in urban but in village milieus. In the countryside, village life itself often fostered among its members, for all their internal status differences, highly intimate ties and a deep sense of collective mutual responsibility. Radical historians in particular tend to overstate the extent to which the European peasantry was dispersed and atomized and therefore incapable of joint action. They echo too closely Marx's disparagement of the peasant world in general as mean-spirited, based on his perception of the egoism of the French peasantry of his own time. If all peasant societies resembled that of nineteenth-century France, it would be difficult to explain the peasant movements that fought so zealously and with such self-sacrifice in the Mexican Revolution of 1912, not to speak of the Vietnamese War against the Japanese, French, and American colonialists. The great *jacqueries* of Europe and Russia would remain mysteries to us if we did not understand that they were rooted in the strong and collectivist village ties of precapitalist agrarian communities.

From the largely medieval peasant wars of the sixteenth-century Reformation to the modern uprisings of industrial workers and peasants, oppressed peoples have created their own popular forms of community association—potentially, the popular infrastructure of a new society—to replace the oppressive states that ruled over them. Generally these popular associations shared the same goal: the *de facto* political empowerment of the people. In time, during the course of the revolutions, these associations took the institutional form of local assemblies, much like town meetings, or representative councils of mandated recallable deputies.

These networks were generally impervious not only to police surveillance but to subsequent historical investigation. With few exceptions and only in recent times have historians tried to look beyond the formal revolutionary institutions, such as revolutionary parliamentary bodies, and organizations, such as political parties, to discern how ordinary people, and particularly the anonymous militants among them, engaged in their own self-organization.

It is these subterranean popular movements, their various forms of organization such as committee networks and assemblies, and their often little-known or neglected leaders that I explore in the pages that follow. My own success in this endeavor is necessarily limited, since this hidden area of activity is hardly replete with documentation and objective reminiscences.

Nonetheless, on the basis of what I have been able to gather, I have found that the process of popular self-organization often broadly follows a definite pattern. In the poorer neighborhoods—and in the countryside, in the villages of underprivileged peasants—people initially gather in local taverns, cafés, squares, and marketplaces; in industrial areas they gather in factory "hangouts," in union halls, or in *casas del pueblo* (literally, "houses of the people," or neighborhood centers). There they have access to newspapers, lectures, classes, and the like. Ultimately, these loose gatherings give rise to a distinctive neighborhood political *culture*, with educational, debating, even choral and literary groups. Such little-noticed and poorly explored cultures then undergo a process of structuration, influenced by an articulate, militant grassroots leadership, so that an organized popular movement begins to emerge. This occurs quite often without the help of any political parties. There is a very real sense, in fact, in which all the great revolutions of the past were *civic* or *municipal* revolutions at their base, whether it was a village, town, neighborhood, or city where the complex process of community structuration took place. Hence what often appears to the police, to higher authorities, and even to sympathetic journalists and historians as a "mob" in a period of social upheaval is frequently a remarkably articulated, communally definable, and well-led popular upsurge.

These communal processes of structuration not only nourish revolutions, but also explain why large masses of people persistently engage in recurring battles with well-armed troops. These popular political cultures and their networks sustain the revolutionary people and its leaders during periods of temporary defeat, which are often followed by vigorous and even more decisive upsurges. In February 1917, when ever-larger crowds from the working-class Vyborg district of Petrograd invaded the center of the city, they were able repeatedly to defy the clubs and pistols of police, the sabers of dragoons, and the gunfire of infantry regiments, until finally even the military garrison itself mutinied and helped to pull down the tsarist monarchy. In a very real sense, then, movements of oppressed strata and classes were clearly civic movements, rooted in the communal life of villages, towns, cities, and neighborhoods, not only landed estates, small shops, and factories—a fact that has not received the recognition it deserves from historians of the great revolutions.

Initially, no political party led these people, least of all the principal parties of the Russian Left: the Mensheviks, the Bolsheviks, and the Social Revolutionaries. In fact, shortly before the Petrograd workers began their uprising, tsarist police arrested the city committees of the revolutionary parties—perhaps fortunately,

since their rather dogmatic ideologies, and their inhibiting notions of the "stages" through which they believed a revolution should go, could very well have impeded the insurrectionary upsurge that overthrew the monarchy.

But this upsurge was neither formless nor impulsive. The victory of the Petrograd people is testimony to the hidden structures that they had already created within their neighborhoods and factories, and to the little-known leaders—the class-conscious insurgents—who, as orators and catalysts, provided indispensable guidance to their neighbors and co-workers in fomenting the revolution. Thus, after temporary setbacks, the people consciously reconvened their forces and, in large part because of their local leaders, continued to attack the official institutions until they had completely demolished them. Like the Russian workers in 1917, the Parisian *sans-culottes* too were suppressed for a time, then rose up again until they succeeded in pushing the revolution in a more radical direction.

This first phase of a revolution, in which the people and their leaders initially confront the established authorities, may also be called its popular phase. Not only do the authorities of the old regimes seek to control this phase, but they seek to suppress the popular movement—and if they fail, parties, liberal or radical in complexion, try to move to the head of the popular movement. Nor do these parties hesitate to use the very slogans raised by the people and their leaders to gain control over it, as did Danton and Robespierre during the French Revolution and Lenin and Trotsky during the Russian Revolution.

Revolutions are profoundly educational processes, indeed veritable cauldrons in which all kinds of conflicting ideas and tendencies are sifted out in the minds of a revolutionary people. No sooner is the old regime overthrown than a veritable storm of pamphlets, manifestos, and resolutions appears, together with public meetings, demonstrations, clubs, and societies—in short, a war of written words and oratory from which we can begin to identify the conflicting factions and their goals within the revolutionary movement.

Individuals who enter into a revolutionary process are by no means the same after the revolution as they were before it began. Those who encounter a modicum of success in revolutionary times learn more within a span of a few weeks or months than they might have learned over their lifetime in non-revolutionary times. Conventional ideas fall away with extraordinary rapidity; values and prejudices that were centuries in the making disappear almost overnight. Strikingly innovative ideas are quickly adopted, tested, and, where necessary, discarded. Even newer ideas, often flagrantly radical in character, are adopted with an élan that frightens ruling elites—however radical the latter may profess to be—and they soon become deeply rooted in the popular consciousness. Authorities hallowed by age-old tradition are suddenly divested of their prestige, legitimacy, and power to govern, while the revolutionary people

compels its own often unnerved and hesitant leaders to adapt themselves to radical changes in popular mood.

So tumultuous socially and psychologically are revolutions in general that they constitute a standing challenge to ideologues, including sociobiologists who assert that human behavior is fixed and human nature predetermined. Revolutionary changes reveal a remarkable flexibility in "human nature," yet few psychologists have elected to study the social and psychological tumult of revolution as well as the institutional changes it so often produces. This much must be said with fervent emphasis: *to continue to judge the behavior of a people during and after a revolution by the same standards one judged them by beforehand is completely myopic.*

I wish to argue that the capacity of a revolution to produce far-reaching ideological and moral changes in a people stems primarily from the opportunity it affords ordinary, indeed oppressed, people to exercise popular self-management—to enter directly, rapidly, and exhilaratingly into control over most aspects of their social and personal lives. To the extent that an insurrectionary people takes over the reins of power from the formerly hallowed elites who oppressed them and begins to restructure society along radically populist lines, individuals grow aware of latent powers within themselves that nourish their previously suppressed creativity, sense of self-worth, and solidarity. They learn that society is neither immutable nor sanctified, as inflexible custom had previously taught them; rather, it is malleable and subject, within certain limits, to change according to human will and desire.

At some point every revolutionary people must confront the issue of how to render permanent the changes it has made and the innovations it has introduced—that is, how to *institutionalize* people's own participation in the management of social affairs in such a way that not even the revolutionary regime itself can exclude them. During the French Revolution the *sans-culottes* and their leaders solidified their sections and attempted to turn them into permanent institutions for a direct democracy throughout France. The Russian working class and peasantry, too, had to face the question of the sovereignty of their soviet or council form of social organization. In both cases, the popular movements found that political parties alternately appealed to and opposed their popular social aspirations, often obstructing the flow of events toward radical democratic ends.

What role, it is fair to ask, do revolutionary political parties play in this development? Normally, parties are not simply organizational structures that seek to mobilize popular support. Nor are they, given their structure and the mentality of their leadership, alternatives to the nation-state. Quite to the contrary: parties are *products* of the nation-state itself, whether they profess to be revolutionary, liberal, or reactionary. The principal difference that distinguishes one party from another is the *kind* of nation-state it wishes to establish.

In Europe the nation-state began to replace feudalistic sovereignties as recently as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The nation-states that emerged in England, France, and later Russia were the products of vigorous centralizing monarchs who, particularly in the cases of France and Russia, succeeded in establishing huge bureaucracies to manage their specific territories and empires. In contrast to the relative chaos of the feudal world, the more successful nation-states created strong, stable centralized bureaucracies that ruling classes elsewhere in Europe tried to emulate.

The political party, in turn, emulated the nation-state, even when it opposed its more tyrannical operations. Emerging after an initial historical lag, political parties paralleled the nation-state organizationally and politically; in time they became more or less inseparable from it. They were and are today consciously structured to resemble nation-states, like nation-states-in-waiting that seek to take power, whether by peaceful means, as a loyal opposition, or by force of arms, as a revolutionary organization. Like monarchies and republics, parties become centralized entities in varying degrees, with bureaucratic or quasi-bureaucratic infrastructures where authority characteristically flows from the center to the base.

Not only are parties organized like nation-states, but they are usually national in scale, knit together by systems of command and obedience, with their center far removed from control by their base. The tautness of their infrastructures, to be sure, varies considerably from loose systems of command in republican nation-states to stringent ones in highly authoritarian states. But they remain centralized nonetheless. In this respect, many revolutionary parties in the past came to resemble the very state structures they professed to oppose. Designed to take power—or, in Leninist language, to "seize power"—they knowingly or unknowingly became small nation-states themselves, both in their mentality and in their functioning, irrespective of their size and degree of popular support.

It should not be surprising, then, that revolutionary political parties—however idealistic their leadership and members, normally looked askance at the popular structures that the masses and their leaders created, especially in revolutionary situations when "the seizure of power" was on the agenda of the day. This raised the historical question: what kind of "power" would replace the existing structures that were to be "seized"? Often submerged in the initial sweep of the popular revolution, parties emerged in its aftermath with the distinct goal of using the mass movement to gain power for themselves and the interests they represented, not of demolishing the state and its bureaucratic machinery.

Ultimately, these parties came into head-on collision with the popular institutions that the revolutionary people and their leaders had established, such as their town and neighborhood assemblies or factory councils, giving rise to

the cry for a third revolution. Histories that emphasize the rivalries between liberal, radical, and revolutionary parties for control of the state all too easily overlook the clash between professedly revolutionary parties and the new, often directly democratic institutions created by an insurgent people.

Even more confusing for historians: as the people became increasingly radical with the unfolding of a revolution, the leaders of the more revolutionary parties needed to gain their support, particularly in interparty conflicts. This necessity temporarily compelled them to adopt the popular movement's democratic aims. But this nod in the direction of democracy was just that—a gesture—and usually did not last. In France, when the highly centralistic Jacobins were locked in a bitter struggle with the moderate Girondins and required popular support to dislodge their opponents from leading governmental positions, they adopted a highly revolutionary and democratic rhetoric that seemed to have no other purpose than to gain mass support. Similarly, the essentially authoritarian Bolsheviks sounded virtually like anarchists in their conflicts with the bourgeois-oriented Mensheviks, the Social Revolutionaries, and their liberal rivals.

Once established in power, however, Jacobins and Bolsheviks alike did everything they could to neutralize the power of the sections and the soviets, respectively, accelerating the transformation of France and Russia into increasingly authoritarian nation-states. The parties and the people came into armed conflict, and wherever the people were vanquished the revolutionary process came to an end, despite the social and economic changes the revolution may have produced.

We shall follow this drama in all the classical revolutions of the modern era and examine the institutional forms that the people and their leaders created, the roles that the parties played in suppressing them, and the ideas that evolved among both the people and the parties—and finally the material and political conditions that could have led to the success of the popular movement in a third revolution.

Given this perspective, the major revolutions of the modern era are not reducible exclusively to conflicts between clearly definable economic classes. Broadly speaking, they always encompassed conflicts between the exploited and their exploiters, the rich and the poor, the well-to-do and the materially denied. But knowingly or not, these revolutions were *also* conflicts between opposing visions of political life. Workers, peasants, and radical intellectuals tended to favor the groupings they had formed in their own communities, often pitting their decentralized institutions of popular rule and face-to-face democracy in sharp opposition to statist forms of rule based on nationhood, top-down control, centralism, and bureaucracy. When the *sans-culottes* and the Petrograd working-class leaders called for a third revolution, they were concerned not only with bettering their economic position but, to take their own declarations and

demands at their word, with expanding their revolutionary institutions as the principal means of conducting a democratic public life. Revolution in their eyes meant the institutionalization of direct action: namely, engaging in self-administration as a *normal* form of politics. The organization of the revolution as a permanent condition of life, through popular assemblies, shop committees, soviets, and popular societies, constituted direct action in its most *advanced* form—ultimately far more significant than other, more sporadic types of direct action, be they the temporary occupation of factories or the raising of theatrical but militarily useless barricades. In revolution, direct action meant a special form of *political* action: the institutionalization of self-management and the creation of an organized form of participatory democracy.

What often impeded the success of the popular movement was its failure to form a vanguard organization in the best sense of the term: that is to say, an accountable, recallable, confederal leadership group that explicitly challenged all statist organizations *as such.** The failure, in France and Russia, of such an organization to emerge and mount a serious challenge to the Jacobin and Bolshevik states profoundly shaped the history of the past two centuries and will possibly continue to shape events, however indirectly, for generations to come. The popular leaders were often too irresolute, too disorganized, and too uninformed to deal effectively with the highly maneuverable centralized parties, radical or otherwise, that they confronted.

Another factor that impeded the success of the revolutionary people was the material limits that circumscribed the lives of people in their movements. It should be emphasized quite frankly that for most of human history ordinary people have lacked sufficient means and free time to engage fully in the management of social affairs. As long as they are obliged to devote most of their time to acquiring the means of everyday subsistence, political life will usually fall into the hands of the privileged few. This compelling fact has been clearly recognized since Aristotle's day in ancient Athens, where a low level of technology, slavery, patriarchy, and warfare profoundly affected the life and future of the *polis.*

The question of whether the scope of the democracy demanded by a revolutionary movement must be pared to meet the material limits of the time in

*The term *vanguard* has fallen into such disrepute these days, mainly because of the connotations given to it by the Bolsheviks and their followers, that it is easily forgotten how common it was in *all* radical movements, including anarchist and libertarian ones, during the first half of the twentieth century. *Vanguard* was the title of the principal anarchist journal in the United States in the 1930s and was used throughout Europe, particularly in Spain, as the title of anarchosyndicalist journals until the Second World War. *Vanguard* simply denoted an organization that had a more advanced degree of class consciousness than radicals could expect to find among less socially concerned workers, peasants, and middle-class people.

which it arises has understandably occupied serious radical theorists for generations. In the eighteenth and to a much greater extent the nineteenth century, revolutionary parties tended to emphasize the importance of meeting the material needs of the people rather than the attainment of democratic ends. When the Jacobins tried to restrict the meetings of the Parisian sections, ostensibly to allow people to get enough sleep to go to work the next day, Robespierre justified this policy at the revolutionary Convention by asking, "Who were the people, in fact, who could sacrifice their time to go to meetings? . . . Artisans and honest working people cannot spend all their time at meetings [*assemblées*]."[1] However shrewd his reply, the question was not at all meaningless. Nor is it meaningless even today.

Nevertheless, the fervor of the popular movement in revolutionary situations often overrode economic considerations, at least for a time. The truth of Robespierre's assessment is difficult for historians today to establish. Section meetings that addressed very important issues generally attracted huge crowds, especially during periods of heightened radical fervor and activity. Otherwise they tended to be very small, probably in large part because of the long working hours that prevailed at the time.

Nor were the *sans-culotte* leaders who pushed the revolution in a democratic direction certain that the rest of France was behind them. In fact, the radical demands of the Parisian revolutionaries increasingly alienated the peasantry in the countryside and the more well-to-do sectors of French society. So, too, did the Bolsheviks in revolutionary Petrograd have cause to doubt that Russia was behind them, although they gained a considerable edge over their political opponents by their willingness to address peasant land hunger and the war weariness of the soldiers. In the end, however, only the prospect of a materially comfortable life with minimal toil for the people at large could ultimately have laid the lasting basis for a free, democratic, and rational society.

Owing to the limited extent to which movements in the classical revolutions addressed radical economic issues, they were not in fact majoritarian revolutions. The heady changes that initiated most of the great revolutions initially resulted from a spirit of rejection rather than affirmation. However eager the popular movement was to establish democracy, its ideas of precisely how society would function economically were very ambiguous. That highly disparate elements in society could unite around the abolition of an arbitrary monarchy in France or tsarist despotism in Russia should not be surprising. But as soon as other issues were raised—such as the redistribution of land, challenges to wealth and profiteering, and the material needs of the underprivileged—the revolutionary process began to diverge in many directions. Needless to emphasize, as increasingly radical demands, particularly with respect to property, began to command public attention, various privileged layers of society turned against the revolutionary process.

As this juncture was reached, the revolutionary nation-state and its parties conflicted increasingly with the communal structures of the people. Such junctures have a long historical pedigree, in which the propertyless are pitted against the propertied, the poor against the wealthy, and popular democracy against bureaucratic control. This drama was played out in the peasant war in Germany during Luther's time, in the English and American revolutions, and during the Great French Revolution, the Paris Commune of 1871, the Russian Revolution of 1917–21, and the Spanish Revolution of 1936–39. All of these revolutions in their later stages (except the short-lived Paris Commune of 1871) were pushed forward by volatile if uncertain minorities, both those within the popular movement itself and seemingly revolutionary advocates of increased state power such as Oliver Cromwell, Alexander Hamilton, Maximilien Robespierre, and V. I. Lenin.

There are, to be sure, notable exceptions to this development. The Kronstadt sailors who rose up in 1921 against the increasing authoritarianism of the Bolsheviks probably spoke for most of the people in Russia when they established a revolutionary "commune" at their naval base in the Gulf of Finland. But by then, the Russian people had become exhausted and paralyzed politically by three years of bloody civil war, famine, and widespread disillusionment.

In what sense can the great revolutions of the past be seen as "bourgeois democratic" revolutions? Karl Marx's approach on this score has gained such widespread acceptance among radical and even liberal historians that it may seem heretical to take exception to his view that largely economic—and notably bourgeois—interests were the guiding factors. Historians generally tend to describe the English, American, and French Revolutions as "bourgeois-democratic," as if they were the work of the capitalist class. As I have already indicated in my preface, I plan to take the popular participants of the great revolutions at their word rather than retrospectively dealing with them from a present-day perspective.

I shall have occasion to examine the extent to which the classical revolutions can be regarded as bourgeois when I deal with each revolution individually. In general, Marx's view tends to render the historical revolutionary process highly fatalistic, obliging us to assume that in all the great movements for freedom over the past four centuries, there was never an alternative to the ultimate triumph of capitalism—in my view, an unacceptable case of historical teleology. We would be obliged to assume that the German peasants who revolted in the 1520s were "reactionaries" because they were trying to retain their archaic village life; that the Roundhead yeomanry who formed Cromwell's New Model Army were historically "doomed" as a social stratum by industrial inventions and forms of production that had yet to be developed; that the radical Minutemen farmers in the American colonies inevitably had to disappear like their English yeoman

cousins; that the *sans-culottes* who established the first French republic were *déclassé* riffraff or mere "consumers," as more than one historian has called them—and so on, up to fairly recent times.

In the Marxist and liberal view of these revolutions, it was the bankers, merchants, manufacturers, and other entrepreneurs—the predatory men who were amassing enormous wealth in the eighteenth century—who formed the class vanguard of the great revolutions, presumably in spite of themselves. Let us agree, from the outset, that the bourgeoisie *benefited* from most of these revolutions. Certainly, the bourgeoisie wanted "free" trade, "free" workers, and the "free" play of egotism, which can easily be mutated into a cry for *"liberté, egalité, fraternité."* But if it is true that capitalism is globally supreme today, no class in history has been more craven, cowardly, and fearful of social change (especially change involving the "dark people," as they called the underprivileged) than the entrepreneurs who peopled the commercial centers of Europe and America during the eighteenth century. As a class, the bourgeoisie has *never* been politically revolutionary, let alone insurgent. Indeed, until recent times it was understandably the object of disdain by nobles, intellectuals, and clerics. It was long imbued with a sense of social inferiority and political ineffectuality—and deservedly so.

If not the bourgeoisie, what social strata carried through these revolutions? Societies undergoing institutional and economic transition are by definition unstable, not only politically and economically but also culturally, psychologically, and intellectually. From the sixteenth century onward, Europeans lived in a state of chronic change and upheaval in all these respects—especially peasants, independent farmers, artisans, laborers, and, later, factory workers. From the English Revolution of the 1640s to the Spanish Revolution of the mid-1930s, what stands out very strikingly in revolutionary upsurges is that they occurred during periods of sweeping social transition from agrarian to industrial culture. Men and women from small villages suddenly found themselves living in urban and later large industrial communities, far removed from the natural rhythms, extended families, communal support systems, and time-honored traditions of rural life.

But even when an emerging capitalist economy began to assail their values, people still felt themselves part of a traditional community. As they moved into cities, villagers brought with them their old communal networks and attitudes based on the intimacies of village life, while among city-dwelling artisans the traditional networks of the medieval guilds had not yet disappeared completely. The chronic riots and small-scale insurrections that exploded repeatedly throughout the seventeenth century were more redolent of the limited peasant *jacqueries* of the late Middle Ages—albeit now carried by new migrants from the countryside into towns, neighborhoods, and cities—than of the great revolutions into which these uprisings eventually flowed. Even before the great

revolutions, in effect, there existed a *spirit* of rebellion, a *culture* of radical political life, and an ongoing process of *exercising* direct action that eventually led to sweeping revolutionary change. Insurrectionary tocsins, or alarm bells, sounded repeatedly over several generations of restless slum-dwellers before they gave rise to great social upheavals such as the French Revolution.

Most of the working people of the revolutionary era were peasant in origin or were removed by only one generation from village society. Caught in an increasingly atomized and synthetic world, ruthlessly exploited and lacking the basic means of life, these people were confronted daily by stark cultural contrasts. Culturally dislocated and psychologically at odds with industrial forms of life, they were highly susceptible to rebellion—and ultimately revolution. Capitalism, in effect, *had not fully penetrated into their lives or undermined their sense of independence.* It was this kind of "proletariat," a class with one foot in the countryside and another in the city, that turned to revolution, if only to recover a sense of social rootedness, coherence, and meaning that was increasingly denied to them in the dismal shops and congested neighborhoods of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The workers who found themselves caught up in the transition between a basically rural economy, an urban economy, and later a growing industrial one were imbued with exceptional qualities. Those following the traditional time-honored crafts, such as printers, blacksmiths, jewelers, wheelwrights, and independent farmers, were often expressive individuals with strongly etched personalities. They were filled with a deep sense of their own competence and self-worth. Daily readings of the Bible in the traditional family gave artisans and yeomen farmers a remarkable degree of literacy. The letters of a yeoman farmer such as the American abolitionist John Brown reveal how eloquent and knowledgeable the artisan-farmer and the artisan generally in precapitalist societies could be.

The Parisians who raised barricades in the series of revolutions up to the Commune of 1871—what has loosely been called the "Parisian proletariat"—were primarily craft workers who, however urbanized, still retained these personal qualities. Indeed, it was precisely this kind of working class and the leaders it produced that made the French capital the center of European revolutions for the greater part of a century. If the Parisian artisan had one foot in a traditional, largely small-town past and the other in a highly urban future, the Russian worker on the eve of 1917 had one foot in the peasant village and the other in an industrial present. A very large number of the Petrograd workers were newly arrived from the countryside and even retained land allotments, to which they could return and become peasants again if the need arose. Indeed, they did return to their villages in large numbers during the near-famine conditions of the Russian Civil War between 1918 and 1921. Not fully captive to industrial routines and possessed of strong agrarian support systems upon

which they could rely in periods of crisis, they were militant in ways that hereditary proletarians fully immersed in modern bourgeois society are less likely to be. In neither Paris nor Petrograd did workers take capitalist society for granted as a "natural" or predetermined social order; indeed, the sharp contrasts between precapitalist and capitalist cultures exacerbated deep-seated class and social differences to a point where explosive hatred of the emerging industrial society reached revolutionary proportions.

Revolution is created not by a nondescript body of people called "the masses," however much I am obliged to use this term. Certainly, the fuel that stoked fires into blazes was a minority of militants who came from suppressed strata and, very significantly, a radical intelligentsia. A time-honored stratum that dates back to the peripatetic Greek philosophers, the intelligentsia were organizers of various dissident groups and circles, social critics, sowers of doubt, publicists, and occasionally powerful theorists. They furnished the revolutions with invaluable theoretical insights, a sense of direction, a critical thrust, and considerable creativity. By an "intelligentsia"—a Russian word, let it be noted—I am speaking not of what we call "intellectuals" today who are well ensconced in universities, but a footloose network of writers, artists, poets, and professionals of all sorts, even actors (who formed an exceptionally close and visible community in cities such as Paris during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). Their absorption in recent years into the modern university system, with its many emoluments, has been one of the most costly blows to the development of present-day revolutionary movements.

Revolution also needs a visible target, a social enemy, whose behavior in some sense provokes popular action. Most revolutions, in fact, begin as defensive actions against attempts by ruling elites to suppress an emerging popular movement. Parisians attacked the Bastille on July 14, 1789, because they believed the king was collecting troops near Paris to seize the capital and suppress social unrest. In the October Revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks initially dispossessed the liberal Kerensky regime in Petrograd because the government fatuously closed their press, although, as was evident to everyone in the Russian capital, they had already been carefully planning an insurrection against the provisional government.

There is no doubt that the various ruling elites whom the popular revolutions overthrew and replaced were highly visible to the populace. But they were visible in a very special way. As the people moved toward revolution, often after a series of aborted local uprisings, the ruling elites made it very clear that their regimes were in a deep-seated crisis. It was not only the populace that lost confidence in the existing order; their own masters exhibited a visible failure of nerve. While the incipient revolutionary forces became more and more united, the ruling elites became more and more divided. That the established order was breaking down became apparent to all, both above and below, and only the most

inflexible elements of the old society opposed the transparent need for change. Indeed, in France, many elements of the nobility patronized the great Enlighteners who created the intellectual and moral atmosphere of the French Revolution, while in turn-of-the-century Russia, individual nobles and merchants often gave large sums of money to revolutionary organizations.

It was the extent to which the elites *resisted* change that often determined how far-reaching a revolution would be, how radical the popular movement would become, and how long it would last. Since certain ruling strata who favored the status quo put up intense, often unthinking, resistance to even minimal reforms, many of the great revolutions went on for years, if one includes not only the insurrections or *journées* ("days"), as they were called in the French Revolution, but the civil wars that followed them. Indeed, it is questionable whether the French Revolution really ended with the overthrow of Jacobin rule in 1794. Many of the same social forces existed and clashed with each other persistently in repeated insurrections up to 1871, so that we can speak of a uniquely French revolutionary era that existed for nearly a century. The English Revolution spanned a period of at least four years and continued for nearly two decades if we include Cromwell's Protectorate. The American Revolution lasted almost three decades if we date the revolutionary period as starting with the beginnings of dissent in the early 1760s and ending with the adoption of the Constitution by the states in 1789. Even if we choose to date the start of the Russian Revolution at 1917 rather than the aborted revolution of 1905, the revolution continued for four years before it was suppressed with the crushing of the Kronstadt commune of 1921. All of these revolutions, if they were not crushed at the outset, were marked by an internal logic of events that slowly worked its way through precarious periods of uncertainty, partial victories for the masses, and eventually defeats of the popular movements to one degree or another. Although each of these developments was different in many specifics, most of them were astonishingly similar in their general outlines.

It is very much my task, if possible, to account for this similarity in the general outlines of certain major revolutions, even as I examine remarkable forms of freedom that the specific popular movements created throughout the revolutions. As I have already suggested, after the fall of the Jacobins in 1794 the French Revolution became the "model" on which other revolutions based their visions of social change. The sequence of events of the Russian Revolution closely resembles that of the French, albeit in a telescoped form. That leaders of all Russian revolutionary tendencies, from Marxists like Lenin to anarchists like Peter Kropotkin, were steeped in the history of the French Revolution, however, does not in itself explain these similarities; nor does the existence of economic commonalities like the peasant majorities in both countries, the highly radicalized urban populations, and the emergence of resolute, centralized vanguard parties.

My point in saying this is that both revolutions were guided not only by similar economic conditions, but also by a compelling political goal—namely, a popular desire for freedom. These revolutions contained an eminently *moral*, not only economic, dimension. As well as being motivated by the very real economic interests, such as land hunger, that played so decisive a role in both revolutions, the French and Russian peasantries were possessed by a passionate, almost millenarian, desire for a new, just, and free way of life. The marvel, and the tragedy, of the classical revolutions during the 1640s in England and the 1930s in Spain is that they were fueled by a deep-seated desire for popular sovereignty which the revolutionary leaders and their nation-state type of organizations systematically undermined.

I have omitted from this book any account of the "Third World" revolutions that have occurred since the Second World War. Although space limitations alone would necessarily restrict me to revolutions in Europe (and North America) the "Third World" revolutions have been and still are different in significant respects from the European revolutions. For one thing, the European revolutions, even the American, emerged from already formed nation-states, often absolutist monarchies; the "Third World" revolutions are attempts to form nation-states, to gain a sense of national identity after long periods of colonial rule. Moreover, the European revolutions, despite their indispensable agrarian upswells, were primarily centered in cities, such as London, Boston, Paris, Petrograd, and Barcelona. The "Third World" revolutions, by contrast, have been fought out primarily in the countryside (although China in the 1920s forms an interesting exception).

The European revolutions, in fact, spoke for oppressed humanity as a whole, and the breadth of their goals has been unequaled by revolutions in other parts of the world. They not only raised major political issues such as republicanism and democracy, but had very powerful international and ideological effects upon the development of European civilization for over three centuries. Indeed, they were important ideological, cultural, and economic turning points in world history generally. Their great declarations, charters, and manifestos appealed to *all* of humanity in support of universal human rights and freedom, often transcending national considerations.

The "Third World" revolutions, by contrast, understandably tended to be deeply self-oriented, and their ideological impact upon the world has been very limited. A thrust toward democracy and popular demands for local rights at the expense of the nation-state are not conspicuous features of these upsurges. They are largely national struggles against imperialism in which colonized peoples seek to define their identity and achieve national independence. Despite the popularity of Maoist doctrines in the 1960s, the Chinese Communist revolution was an insurrectionary variant of Leninism, and after Mao's death it began to lose its hold even in China itself. Neither Castro's revolution in Cuba nor the

Sandinistas' in Nicaragua produced major ideological changes in the world, despite the impact their uprisings had on Latin America. Indeed, their eclipse by movements like the Shining Path in Peru and their increasing clientage to Euro-American powers reveal that their impact on social development generally is more limited than 1960s radicals in the West could have anticipated in their day.

The possible charge that I am "Eurocentric" leaves me singularly untroubled. The fact is that the authentic center of the revolutionary era was the European continent, including Russia, and the United States (whose revolution belongs very much in the European tradition). To the extent that revolutions in the "Third World" had certain universal features and sought or professed to establish a radically new social dispensation for humanity as a whole, they emulated the great European revolutions discussed in this book. Their nationalistic and anti-imperialistic aspects may be understandable in the context in which they occurred; but these revolutions should not be mystified, nor should their justifiable claims to freedom from imperialism be viewed as comparable to the universal appeals to humanity that marked the great revolutions that occurred in Europe.

Significantly, each of the classical revolutions followed the others toward a more radically sophisticated historical level in which an almost utopian internationalist outlook and a broader definition of freedom superseded any earlier nationalistic or "patriotic" claims. Indeed, the Spanish Revolution of 1936–39 challenged even domestic hierarchies as well as classes, often assuming an explicitly libertarian form. By contrast, either the "Third World" revolutions devolved into established nation-states oriented toward industrialization, or their ideologies lingered on mainly as echoes of the older European revolutions. The revolutions that helped form new nation-states in India, China, Southeast Asia, Africa, and Central America have little of the internationalist character that marked the French and Russian revolutions. Even the American Revolution saw itself as a utopian beacon to an oppressed world, despite attempts by many radical historians to reduce it to a mere "war for independence."

It is my hope that this book will revive the flagging interest in the great revolutions that so profoundly shaped modern history and encourage the reader to examine the dynamics of the classical Western revolutions from the standpoint of movements from below: the institutional forms that revolutionary peoples and their leaders developed to manage society and their interaction with the revolutionary parties that professed to lead the people or certain oppressed strata. I wish to explore the problems that this interaction produced, the lessons we can learn, and the various theories that cluster around the nature and trajectory of the great revolutions themselves. Theory will closely intermingle with narrative, and generalizations with specific facts.

I would like not only to evoke the era of the great revolutions in an admittedly interpretive way—their limits and possibilities—but to convey the *ésprit révolutionnaire* that existed not only during the high points of the revolutions themselves but throughout the revolutionary era, even in periods of relative quiescence. I will ask what it *means* to be a revolutionary, not merely a "radical" or a "progressive," to use words very much in vogue today. In view of the fact that, in 1989, the bicentennial of the Great French Revolution was celebrated more as a patriotic exercise than as an evocation of the great world-inspiring revolution it was, this task seems particularly necessary today. I wish to lift, as best I can, the chauvinistic clouds that obscure the hopes that the great revolutions produced in the hearts of all enlightened human beings, and the ideologies that have influenced them over the greater part of two centuries.

At this time of writing an eerie counter-Enlightenment is percolating through Western culture, one that celebrates egocentricity at the expense of social commitment, mysticism at the expense of naturalism, intuitionism at the expense of rationalism, atavism at the expense of civilization, a passive-receptive mentality at the expense of a militant, activist one, and an enervating religiosity at the expense of a critical secularity. As capitalism expands to global proportions, a media-orchestrated barbarism is pushing the modern human spirit back into an absurd caricature of medievalism—almost centuries removed in spirit and outlook from the revolutionary era that gave birth to modern ideals of freedom. Whether this marks a definitive end of the revolutionary era and the Enlightenment that nourished it, I do not know. What I do know is that I, for one, do not want to be part of a historical period that lacks a revolutionary spirit to give meaning to life. This book is intended to evoke that spirit and, if possible, to make it relevant to our time.

NOTE

1. See Robespierre's speech in the *Gazette Nationale* or *Le Moniteur Universel*, no. 262 (September 19, 1793), in *Réimpression de l'ancien 'Moniteur'*, vol. 17 (Paris: Henri Plon, 1858–63), p. 683.

PART I

PEASANT REVOLTS

CHAPTER 1 Late Medieval Uprisings

The view that history can be summed up as "the history of class struggle," most famously expressed by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, has become increasingly problematical among historians and social theoriests over the past half-century. Although antagonistic class interests undoubtedly played a role of enormous importance in the social conflicts discussed in this book, in many of these struggles different hierarchical strata staked out claims to traditional rights and duties that were cultural, religious, and political as well as economic in nature. Often, in fact, it was not only classes in the economistic sense that were embattled with each other but also various culturally privileged and underprivileged status groups. The tendency of historians, liberal no less than Marxian, to reduce all social conflicts to class conflicts has placed a heavy veil over our understanding of conflicts involving hierarchies that were structured more around status than around material wealth and property ownership. Historically, in fact, the emergence of hierarchies long preceded that of classes, and persisting oppressions by privileged genders, ethnic groups, nationalities, and bureaucracies might well continue to exist in society even if economic classes were abolished.

That is not to ignore the fact that major social conflicts in history had a patently class-oriented dimension. Accounts of major class struggles appear in the hieroglyphic records of ancient Egypt, the cuneiform records of Mesopotamia, and the pictographic records of Asia and even Indian America long before Europeans invaded the continent. In some ancient Egyptian records upper-class scribes bluntly portrayed revolts in their midst as mere looting expeditions of the rich by the poor, in which ordinary people ransacked warehouses to redistribute grain and plundered manors of their wealth. To be sure, civil conflicts as described in ancient Greek and Roman accounts clearly had a component of class conflict, such as the Solonic "revolution" of the sixth century BCE, and the efforts of the Gracchi brothers in republican Rome not only to eliminate the oligarchic powers of the Senate but to remove the debt burden that weighed heavily on the shoulders of the Latin yeomanry.

But the role of class conflict in these eruptions must be carefully qualified and nuanced. Many ancient conflicts were essentially popular explosions that aimed to regain rights that were being lost and that properly belonged to an era that was no more, notably the era of tribalism, or what the Marxist literature calls "primitive communism." In Mesopotamia and Egypt, popular uprisings seem to have essentially demanded the restoration of tribal egalitarianism—a demand that went well beyond mere resentment of economic exploitation by ruling classes. And if the Gracchi brothers of republican Rome gained their popular support largely because they demanded an equitable distribution of land on behalf of nonaristocratic strata, they also tried to transform their city-state into a Hellenic-type democracy.

With the possible exception of the democratic *poleis* (cities) of ancient Greece, which even ancient writers (not only modern historians) disdained as "mobocracies," these explosions failed to create a democratic polity for humanity. Not even the Athenians of antiquity regarded their democracy as a universal ideal that would capture the hearts of so-called "barbarians." It was only Greeks as an *ethnos* or "race," in the view of thinkers like Aristotle, who were suited for living in a *polis* (much less in a democracy), not non-Hellenic peoples. Few if any Athenian democrats would have differed with him on this score. The Gracchi brothers, in their attempt to establish the sovereignty of the plebeian assembly over the Senate, were concerned only with the fate of republican Rome, not with society generally. Their essentially local conflict had no impact beyond the environs of Rome and its satellite communities on the Italian peninsula. More universal demands for freedom—that is, for freedom of humanity as a whole—were to come later, over the course of centuries of social transition and changes in popular consciousness.

FEUDAL SOCIETY

The late medieval and early modern periods, too—as well as the conflicts that occurred within them—should be understood in noneconomic as well as economic terms, and their aims were often very limited in space and time. The great nomadic invasions from the east and the north greatly unsettled life on the continent, virtually reducing many of its communities to armed fortresses and defensive enclaves, after which lifeways based on hierarchical as well as class structures froze into static pyramidal forms that remained basically unaltered for centuries. Social life was organized around fairly self-sufficient manors in which local lords, endowed with many social as well as economic privileges, held the land as vassals of still higher lords, to whom they owed not only material support but personal fealty and military service.

Initially, the burden of the material obligations was borne by serfs, who were neither slaves nor strictly freemen but families grouped in villages that were tied to the land in an elaborate system of rights as well as duties. In addition to giving over a sizable part of their crop to their local lord, they were required to perform a host of personal as well as labor services, provide gifts to the manor house on special occasions, and when necessary, bear arms. In return, they could claim their lord's protection from invaders, robber bands, and military marauders (the "knights errant" and mercenaries who abounded everywhere). They could also expect a modest amount of care during times of infirmity and old age.

Time-honored custom had created a basically corporate and parochial society in Europe, one based on a clear-cut hierarchy of rank and of reciprocal rights and duties. The serf, boxed into his own locality, could feel relatively secure in receiving protection and a modicum of care from the local lord; the local lord, in turn, staked out his own claims on the serf for food and various services to the community as well as the manor.

Each community was a world unto itself. It had its own common land on which serfs and peasants pastured cattle, gathered wood for fire and shelter, and found herbs for condiments and medicinal purposes. Draught animals, plows, and many farm implements were commonly shared, not privately owned, and the cultivation of land was usually a communal affair that fostered not only cooperation but collective self-discipline. Essentials such as coarse cloth, simple metal artifacts, building materials, and agricultural implements were ordinarily made entirely on the manorial estate, its villages, and its towns. This self-enclosed world had very little need for money; barter in one form or another was the rule in many parts of Europe. Serf, peasant, artisan, and local merchant were enmeshed with one another in a carefully knit, highly localized world at the base of feudal society. And as in antiquity, social conflicts rarely extended beyond isolated localities until well into medieval times.

From the fourteenth century onward, however, commerce greatly revived in Europe with the growth of town life, the clearing of forests, and the end of the great nomadic invasions. Caravans from Italian cities laden with spices, fine cloth, artistically wrought weapons, armor, and the like were passing along the earthen roads of the continent protected from robbers not only by armed guards but by their very numbers. Their wares were not destined for consumption by the overwhelming majority of the population—the ordinary people at the base of feudal society. Materially well-endowed lords took their pickings from the caravans, often paying for luxury goods with what limited coinage was available—especially money they had gained from tolls imposed on the merchants who crossed their manorial borders. Some nobles, the "robber barons" of the era, gained further wealth through surreptitious raids on the caravans themselves. These raids, to be sure, were not without risk: robbers invited reprisals for their interference with long-distance trade, not only from

nearby lords who benefited from the trade and wanted to foster it but especially from the emerging national monarchs, the growth of whose royal juridical authority over the nobility (the "king's peace") provided them with revenue in the form of taxes.

Still, the development of long-distance trade did not appreciably alter life at the base of feudal society. If local lords, peasants, or even serfs had the means, they usually purchased the commodities they could not make on their manors, or make well, from local towns, whose artisans, organized in tightly knit guilds, crafted items that met most of their needs. The guilds, in turn, carefully policed the workmanship, output, and training of their members, including master craftsmen, their apprentices, and journeymen. In time, the guilds were to differentiate themselves into well-to-do ones and poorer ones, and sharply distinguish masters from journeymen, who were increasingly excluded from guild membership and reduced to ordinary workmen. But on the whole, extremes in wealth were comparatively uncommon in the early Middle Ages: material needs were comparatively few, and trade itself was fairly simple. For a time at least, a basically harmonious relationship existed between town and country, albeit one that should not be overly romanticized, if only because the towns were obliged, often by force of arms, to assert their autonomy over their rapacious territorial lords.

AN EGALITARIAN LEGACY

In addition to a growing continental trade, another phenomenon slowly eroded the parochialism that marked the medieval landscape, namely the Catholic Church. The rise of Christianity had been an unparalleled ideological revolution for Europe. Over the centuries, the papacy and its hierarchy came to function as Europe's most important unifying and universalizing agent. After the demise of the Roman Empire, the Vatican became a pivotal center that prevented Europe's collapse into an agglomeration of quasi-tribal societies that a fatalistic Islamic world from the south and Asian barbarian nomads from the east could easily have overrun.

In the absence of the Church as a source of ideological and institutional coherence, the unique history of the European continent and its potential for a visionary dynamism might well have been suffocated by invaders who had little to offer it beyond the social stagnation that prevailed in the Asian world. Militant Christianity, with its emphasis on individual self-worth and its belief in human free will, played a major role in preventing Europe from becoming a historic backwater and in keeping alive the classical heritage of the ancient Western tradition.

But the Church was also a source of discord, as was Christian doctrine itself. Much as armies commonly reflect the conflicting social forces that exist in civil society, the Church came to reflect in exaggerated form the conflicts that emerged when feudal society began to wane in the late Middle Ages. Just as serfs and peasants began to stand at odds with barons, and barons with princes and monarchs, so poverty-stricken parish priests stood sharply at odds with their overfed bishops; monks with the well-to-do clergy; and national churches with the papacy, which filled its coffers with wealth drained from its various bishoprics throughout the continent. In the thirteenth century, England alone had paid the Vatican a thousand pounds of silver annually, a quantity that exceeded the British monarchy's tax collections fivefold.

Ironically, despite the close integration of the higher clergy with the landed aristocracy, the egalitarian ideals of Christianity set a social whirlwind into furious motion by the high Middle Ages. The idea that all people are equal in the eyes of God, at least when they enter the heavenly world, raised major ideological problems for the privileged strata in the earthly world, where Christian visions began to take a highly radical and heretical turn. Errant preachers such as the English Lollards proclaimed a fiery message of social equality, validating peasant discontent with biblical precept. Perhaps the most fecund source of these egalitarian precepts, apart from the Bible, was the writings of Joachim di Fiore. This monk's historical interpretation of the Trinity envisioned the Holy Spirit as a utopia in which the poor would eventually be freed of their material and mortal burdens. Joachimite ideas, some fairly tame but others implicitly revolutionary, abounded throughout Europe during the high and late Middle Ages and provided in their more fiery interpretations an ideological underpinning for growing discontent among peasants, serfs, and urban plebeians. By the fourteenth century, movements or extensive networks of conventicles began openly to demand a radical redistribution of wealth, often involving its outright expropriation in the name of Christian egalitarianism and communal living as described in the Acts of the Apostles in Christian Scripture. Many of these conventicles directly challenged the higher clergy for their violations of basic Christian precept, their clearly visible appetite for wealth and high living, and their oppressive hierarchical structure as a whole.

The Brethren of the Free Spirit, a widespread radical network of heretical Christian dissenters, not only abandoned themselves to a free-living, often lascivious lifestyle within their own groups, but regarded themselves as beyond the reach of the Church, the state, and even conventional Christian precepts of morality. In so doing, they advanced an ideal of communism as well as freedom, a striking advance beyond the radical movements of the ancient world and early Middle Ages, staking out a claim to privileged status based on their own special knowledge or *gnosis*—a *gnosis* that they felt endowed them with the right to act with no constraints upon their personal wishes and desires. Although the

Brethren, like the adherents of many other heresies, viewed their communities as members of the "elect," their exclusivity did not keep their ideas from infecting masses of artisans, peasants, and even serfs, who tended to adopt the egalitarian aspect of their beliefs for themselves.

The fourteenth century thus saw popular attacks on the privileges of the Church that often exploded into outright insurrections, which were difficult to suppress. The Black Death, by reducing the availability of labor, gave rise to chronic peasant uprisings for better material rewards. These began to converge against local lords and bishops in England, Bohemia, Germany, and France in major civil wars that swept over entire regions, eventually reaching a scope that was virtually unprecedented in any previous period of history.

By the same token, the Vatican's role as an inspirational force began to wane significantly. Schisms within the papacy gave rise to two and even three rival popes, profoundly lowering the prestige of the Church in the eyes of its communicants, while the corruption of endowed bishops and monastic orders earned the established clergy the outright contempt of all classes in Europe, particularly the oppressed strata of the population.

As early as the twelfth century, the Waldenses (so named after the devout merchant Peter Waldo of Lyon), a sect that spread in influence among the artisans of southern France and northern Italy, militantly challenged the Church's departure from the gospel. The Waldenses' agitation eventually became a redemptive popular movement that threw itself into direct conflict with the papacy. Concurrently, the Albigensian movement, with its enlightened views and practices which challenged key precepts of Church doctrine, was suppressed by a long and brutal crusade that ended in widespread destruction in southern France—a chapter in the history of the South that aborted its development for centuries. Like darkening clouds before a storm, these movements, although invariably defeated, heralded major bloody conflicts that were to explode throughout Europe and the British Isles.

Nor can we ignore the academic critics of the Catholic Church, the scholarly precursors of the Reformation, who propounded messages that earned them widespread support not only from their militant acolytes but even from the temporal powers, which were slowly entering into conflict with the papacy. Although Pierre Abelard's rationalism and his call for intellectual freedom were relatively restrained, he left behind a disturbing body of condemnatory criticism that the Church tried cannily to assimilate, so that he managed to survive, dying in bed with adoring acolytes at his door. Similarly, John Wyclif challenged such basic notions of Catholic doctrine as transubstantiation from his enclave in Oxford University and abjured the Church to yield to the temporal powers. Although he too died in bed, his doctrines and his emphasis on scriptural authority fed into the views of the emerging Lollard radicals in England and their dreams of a nation-state free of noble burdens and authority.

Arnold of Brescia, who also challenged the clergy's privileges, shared a less happy fate. Advocating as early as the twelfth century an apostolic Christianity and a simple life free of worldly authority, Arnold, who had studied under Abelard, extended his views into an outright physical confrontation with the papacy and personally participated in plebeian revolts in Rome against papal rule. Unlike in the cases of Abelard and Wyclif, Arnold's activism cost him his life when he was burned at the stake as a heretic in 1155. Jan Hus, who brought Wyclif's message to Bohemia, was also burned at the stake in 1415, as much for his commitment to Bohemian nationalism as his challenge to ecclesiastical precepts, and Wyclif's Lollard followers, of whom John Ball was one, were hunted down by the authorities and often murdered ruthlessly. Abelard, Wyclif, and even Hus were academicians; they might even have been personally shocked by the radicals who reinterpretated their teachings. But John Ball and later the Bohemian Taborites, who regarded Hus as a heroic martyr, were insurrectionaries who challenged not only ecclesiastical authority but feudalism—indeed, in some cases, the entire system of social hierarchy and private property. And in their own way and time, they spoke for the third revolution that the Reformation had churned up, breaking not only with official Catholicism but with their more reticent predecessors, some of whom were protected by the self-seeking temporal powers of their day.

THE ENGLISH PEASANT REVOLT

Perhaps the earliest major explosion to be produced by the ferment that marked the late Middle Ages was the English Peasant Revolt of 1381, led by Wat Tyler and John Ball, a revolt that challenged not only the injustices of the time but privilege as such and the hierarchical core of feudal society.

The fourteenth century in England saw the emergence of a free yeomanry demanding the dissolution of feudal bonds and noble prerogatives, the right to tender service in rent, use of the forests, and higher returns for their work. Radical Lollard preachers, particularly Ball, who were roaming the English countryside, openly directed their appeal to this stratum, inveighing against privilege and expressly voicing egalitarian, even communistic, views. "Matters cannot go well in England until all things shall be held in common," Ball cried out; "when there shall be neither vassals nor lords, when the lords shall be no more masters than ourselves. . . . Are we not all descended from the same parents, Adam and Eve?"[1] More pointedly, radical clerics popularized the jingle: "When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?" Such talk found ready ears among masses who were eager to believe that social inequality was contradicted by Scripture and that a new social dispensation was in the offing. Typically, driven by their need for cheap labor because of the plague, the English nobility, with the usual myopia of arrogant feudal lords, turned this unrest into an open rebellion by trying to restore serfdom—much of which had already been abolished in England.

Eventually, in May 1381, the villages north of London rose up in revolt. Peasants and yeomen from East Anglia, arming themselves with axes and longbows and soon followed by militant peasants in Kent, elected Wat Tyler (a roof tiler as his name suggests) to be their commander and captured Canterbury, liberating Ball from imprisonment in the cathedral city. The Essex and Kentish rebels then converged in great numbers on London, pillaging manors and emptying prisons along the way. Unfortunately, they formed no organized army, so that a self-assured, disdainful London mounted no defense against them. In fact, its leading nobles were occupied with conflicts elsewhere, leaving the city's artisanal townspeople free to sympathize with the rebels. On June 12, some twenty thousand peasants assembled outside the city walls, and demanded negotiations with the king—fourteen-year-old Richard II—whom they naively viewed as their protector against the feudal lords. Apparently with a view toward getting the rebels to quietly disperse, Richard appeared among them astride his horse and flippantly granted all their demands. As was to occur repeatedly in future peasant insurrections, many of the rebels were satisfied and departed, while those who remained gratefully voiced their allegiance to the king.

Meanwhile, Wat Tyler, perhaps the most resolute of the peasant leaders, captured the Tower of London on June 14 and destroyed the Savoy, the residence of the hated Duke of Lancaster, calling upon his followers to take over the city. As Tyler seems to have realized, the king's promises were worthless. Once again, the king's nobles offered further negotiations, but Tyler persisted in his demand that all rank and status be abolished and social equality established for everyone, apart from the king. Although the young king pleasantly agreed, his aides mortally wounded Tyler in a scuffle. Upon seeing Tyler's head on a lance and Ball's corpse hanging from a gallows, the peasants and yeomen fled homeward, only to be butchered by the nobles and their supporters—a scenario, as we will see, that was to be repeated again and again as nobles were able to defeat trusting peasant rebels through fraud and finally through callous murder.

THE TABORITE REVOLT

The teachings of religious mystics went far beyond reform of the Church and sometimes stepped outside the boundaries even of Christianity itself, advancing visions whose origins lay in the pre-Christian radical movements that had been suppressed in the early days of the Church. Catholicism had transformed the

dream of Christ's return to earth into a distant vision, often centered on a remote Day of Judgment that would fell the wicked, and reward the virtuous with immortality. On the margins of the Church, mystical visionaries competed with seers of supernatural signs and portents, and both voiced calls for miraculous changes that would culminate in a universal brotherhood of love. These dreamers were not free of major divisions among themselves. Some advanced visions that were more messianic than activistic, bringing a pacifist, often sectarian and parochial, element into their images of the millennium. Still others, by contrast, saw the millennium as a bloody purge of the wicked—and it was precisely this embattled strain that found its sharpest expression in the Taborite movement.

The Taborite commune of 1420 in Bohemia essentially began as part of a quasi-national and religious war that Jan Hus's followers had waged against German and papal sovereignty for some two decades. Violent and extremely millenarian Anabaptists, the Taborites—so named after their city of Tabor (itself named after the mountain where Christ's transfiguration supposedly occurred)—were explicitly communistic in outlook. Their community completely abolished private property. They were a movement less of peasants than of small artisans and dispossessed urban plebeians, their communistic attitudes toward property and their essentially libertarian views toward authority were intertwined with the religious conviction that they were a chosen "elect," like the Brethren of the Free Spirit, who asserted their right freely to indulge their senses and desires. The Second Coming, they maintained, would lead to the abolition of all laws and all social differences of class and caste, and confer immortality and material abundance on all believers.

To gain more popular support against the military forces that the emperor, nobles, clergy, and moderate dissenters were amassing against them, the Taborites appealed to the peasantry for aid, declaring that Christ, disguised as a brigand, would soon appear in their midst and preside over the destruction of the existing evil world. These appeals met with very little response. For better or worse, the very isolation of the Taborite "warrior communists" assured their ultimate defeat. "If socialism in one country is doomed to become deformed and crippled, communism in one city is impossible for any length of time," Kenneth Rexroth acerbically observes in his account of the movement.

> Sooner or later the garrison society will weaken, but the outside world does not. It is always there waiting, strongest perhaps in times of peace. Tabor was never able to balance its popular communism of consumption with an organized and planned communism of production, nor the exchange of goods between city communes and peasant communes.[2]

In time, the Taborites were defeated in a series of battles with the Emperor Sigismund. The mystical and religious fervor that permeated the movement's outlook brought neither a Second Coming nor a new social dispensation. In the end, the rational calculations of Sigismund and, more importantly, the power of cold steel in the hands of well-organized armies triumphed over the millenarians, who were poorly armed, poorly commanded, and sharply divided between moderates and radicals, despite their shared mystical zeal.

Typically, the ruling classes were merciless in suppressing popular uprisings. Given the times, the monarchs, princes, and nobles of the era literally butchered the rebels, dismembering the captives they left alive and brutally torturing their leaders. Later peasant wars, too, normally ended in bloody slaughters, often preceded by truces in which the nobles rallied their forces before mercilessly turning upon and massacring the rebels.

Those on the pacifist wing of the chiliastic movement, it is worth noting, fared no better at the hands of the ruling classes. Indeed, not only did their passivity expose them to violent onslaughts by nobles and Catholics, it rendered them psychologically vulnerable to strong, demagogic leaders who often turned their "communes" into personal fiefdoms, regaled by chosen "elders" who ossified them along authoritarian lines. Custom, in effect, played as much of a debilitating role as did physical coercion, and the "elders" proved to be no less exacting in dealing with their congregations than the conventional clergy.

THE FRENCH *JACQUERIE* AND ÉTIENNE MARCEL

By far the most remarkable event of the era was Étienne Marcel's revolt in the 1350s, a Parisian uprising that swept in other French towns against the growing power of the monarchy. As provost of the merchants, Marcel was the equivalent of the mayor of the capital, and by all rights he can well be regarded as the popular leader of what would become the "Third Estate": the ordinary people who lacked noble or ecclesiastical status. Indeed, his principal goal was to strengthen the authority of the Estates General at the expense of the monarchy. More immediately, he tried to diminish the tax burden that the king had placed on the middle classes, much as the French Estates General were to do five centuries later, and, like most modern French revolutionaries, Marcel was ultimately driven by the logic of events to challenge the whole structure of oligarchical power in France. As Perez Zagorin observes, he "wanted to build an alliance of towns" against the monarchy and "also established some slight ties with the *Jacquerie*, the big peasant revolt that had broken out at the same time in the Ile-de-France and the surrounding region."[3] Over several stages, Marcel's insurrection in Paris nearly combined with a well-organized peasant war ably

led by one Guillaume Cale. Had the revolt been successful, its consequences would have anticipated those of the French Revolution of a later era.

By 1358, Cale, a peasant of Picard origin, had united a diffuse agrarian uprising into a coherent and able fighting force that threatened the very structure of French feudal society. Hardly a naive country bumpkin or "Jacques," as nobles and arrogant town dwellers disdainfully called the French peasant, Cale was in fact a highly astute and experienced military leader as well as an able political strategist. Not only did he turn a loose and scattered peasant rebellion into a well-organized peasant war, but, with rare political insight, he tried to ally it with plebeian and middle-class elements in the towns. Together, he reckoned, they could form an effective common front against the nobility and their urban patrician supporters. For a time, this exceptional strategy met with surprising success. Radical townsmen took over towns like Senlis and Beauvais, opening their gates to the approaching well-organized peasant battalions under Cale's command; indeed, even a major city like Amiens rallied to Cale's forces, imposing death sentences on its nobles *in absentia.*

A crucial turning point of the revolt was reached when Marcel linked his Parisian supporters (clad in red and blue, the colors of the capital city) with Cale's peasant armies. Even more provocatively, the Parisian provost openly offered to his "Jacques" allies the estates of his royalist opponents, notably the properties of the king's councilors near the city. To the panic of the nobility and the urban patricians, the peasants lost no time in looting the estates. The revolt of the towns now lost its fairly moderate middle-class character and assumed an increasingly radical plebeian one that pitted Marcel not only against the monarchy and its noble supporters but against the well-to-do Parisian burghers.

The uprising's success depended heavily on the ability of Cale and his peasant armies to defeat the monarchy at the city of Meaux. Peasant prospects for successfully seizing the city seemed unusually propitious, but precisely at this strategic moment, poor strategy on the part of individual peasant commanders, combined with the nobility's cavalry, threw the invading peasants into a headlong retreat. The nobility, encouraged by their victory, proceeded to rally their forces in earnest, throwing back the peasants, who fled toward Paris, where they hoped to stand their ground outside the city walls with the aid of the radical Parisians.

But Cale and Marcel's hopes for joining forces came to naught when the peasant leader, lured into negotiations with his enemies with promises for his personal safety, was imprisoned and brutally executed. What followed was essentially an anticipation of the English Peasant War. The leaderless peasants were easily scattered, hunted down, and massacred by the thousands, while in Paris, well-to-do royalist burghers killed Marcel and slaughtered his supporters. Once the gates of the capital were opened to the king, the shrewdly forgiving monarch was free to lay the basis for royal despotism in the centuries that followed.

By no means is it clear that the defeat of Cale and Marcel was historically inevitable. Indeed, the history of France, perhaps even that of Western Europe, might well have taken a very different institutional turn—a turn toward urban and peasant confederations rather than centralized nation-states, even toward a vibrant village life rather than an egoistic peasantry—had Cale's peasant army captured Meaux and routed the local nobility. The peasant armies could have easily taken the city had they attacked it from a different vantage point or else fallen back directly upon Paris instead of trying to hold their ground at some distance from the capital's walls. Had they deployed their forces more effectively and resolutely, Marcel and Cale might very well have joined forces and established a plebeian confederation, possibly in an alliance with other French towns.

The French *Jacquerie* and Marcel's urban uprising more than amply demonstrate that there are turning points in history in which constellations of events based on able leadership and political decisiveness might very well alter the long-range course of events. A more rational social dispensation far in advance of the one that actually followed upon their defeat might very well have emerged had the two men prevailed over the forces that opposed them, as seemed very likely for a time. The historian who is concerned only with what *did* occur at a given moment and not with what *could have* occurred, given the potentialities that exist at any given period, abdicates all ethical judgment and interpretative insights. History, as a rational dispensation of liberatory potentialities, is reduced to a random chronicle of events that have neither direction nor meaning, or even an instructive function—or, to put this thought more colloquially, the possibility of "learning from events."

A MIXED ECONOMY

Nor is it certain, still less inevitable, that the international links forged by commercial capital in Europe and the world during the late Middle Ages had to radically alter the village and even urban life along capitalistic lines. That commercial and so-called "manufacturing" towns emerged, based on long-distance trade and, by medieval standards, advanced methods of production, is hardly arguable, but the word *manufacturing* must be applied very advisedly to this complex period. Apart from mining, which employed complex gearing systems made of wood, most work was done by hand and, in this literal sense, remained within the orbit of traditional "manufacture" or handwork. Throughout most of the late medieval period, work rarely involved the use of the sophisticated machines we associate with industrial manufacturing.

Even the towns that were conspicuous "manufacturing" centers employed a technology that was surprisingly simple. Spinning, weaving, and dyeing were still

performed with tools and hand-operated "machines" whose character was more ancient than modern, as were the technologies involved in the forging of metals and the building of homes. The famous arsenal of Venice, which employed several thousand workers, consisted mainly of a series of small enclaves in which artisans used traditional tools and methods to make arms. Much of this work, in fact, was done at home. Florence's late medieval textile "industry" was structured around small shops that used traditional techniques and skills, in which it was not so much the technologies that had undergone change as it was the organization of labor and the tempo at which artisans were expected to work. In towns and cities where guilds and local rules did not impede their efforts, many of these laborers went on to establish businesses for themselves and become "masters" who hired a number of proto-proletarian workers of their own.

Rationalized or industrial production was generally organized to support long-distance trade, which had grown considerably by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Italian, Flemish, Provençal, and northern German merchants now carried "manufactured" wares from towns and seaports into central Europe as well as the East, exchanging domestic goods for more exotic ones. Their profits were commonly enormous. Moreover, they demanded coinage in exchange for the exotic goods they sold, so that their customers were limited to moneyed nobles, wealthy clerics, and other rich merchants. In reality, a very small part of European society was involved in this capitalistic nexus. Only well-to-do people, the possessors of currency, could buy the silks, furs, fine woolens, delicately wrought artifacts, and expensive spices that caravans and ships carried into the heartland of Europe. Notably lacking was sufficient money and an open market unrestricted by guilds, local tariffs, customs, and feudal forms of mutual vassalage that alone could foster an authentic development of capitalism on the continent.

From the fourteenth century onward, in fact, we encounter a highly mixed economy whose foci in some cases were capitalistic, in others, largely feudal, and in still others, peasant and artisanal. The widespread existence of capitalistic elements who reinvested their profits primarily into industry rather than ownership of land and acquisition of titles is largely the product of historical hindsight rather than factual reality. That capitalism eventually emerged—not only as an economy but also as a *society*—and colonized every aspect of life was not the result of any "inexorable laws" of social development; indeed, well into the eighteenth century, this mixed economy was the rule rather than the exception, even after feudal obligations had given way to status based on wealth rather than ancestry. As late as the early nineteenth century, in an era that was increasingly invaded by factories, mills, railroads, and heavy machinery, a thinker such as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon could still work out the bulk of his social theories and political views primarily in artisanal terms, indeed, from a small-town perspective, while in the early 1840s the size of London, which by

present-day standards would be regarded as modest, awed Friedrich Engels when he first visited the city.

Any description of prerevolutionary Europe must thus take into account the fortunes of this highly mixed economy and society if it is to give a satisfactory account of the popular movements of the era. Peasants, even serfs, tended to resist attempts to subvert the time-honored customs of rights and duties that gave them access to village common lands; tenants, in turn, viewed their rented plots essentially as hereditary endowments, not as tracts of real estate that could be taken away from them at will. At the same time, their landlords—noble as well as bourgeois—were beginning to discard their sense of obligation to the food cultivators whom their families had inherited over countless generations together with their estates. In the course of doing so, they reduced serfs to mere renters whom, in time, they could displace with sheep or with gang labor, guided by the needs of the international market for wool and food staples.

As the monarchy, in turn, expanded its authority to national proportions, it exacted taxes that often violated traditional exemptions, heavily burdening the farmer, artisan, merchant, and emerging capitalist alike. The growing bureaucracies that monarchies were obliged to support created the need for public financing and a royal debt. With the sophistication of weapons and fortifications, wars became more costly, the need for revenues grew, and conflicts became increasingly oriented toward commercial hegemony as well as the acquisition of territory. Not only did peasants rise up against the upper strata of society as they passed these growing exactions on to them, but nobles too rose up against monarchs who increasingly encroached upon their authority.

In the towns, guilds began to close their doors to everyone but the sons of craft masters, creating an excluded and chronically restless plebeian stratum. These privileged guilds, in turn, were challenged not only by the excluded workers but by weaker, less provident guilds, whose powers were steadily waning before the authority of the higher guilds. Chronic conflicts now arose between peasants and nobles, nobles and merchants, merchants and artisans, rich masters and poor journeymen, commercial cities, the various estates of a kingdom, and the monarchy, giving rise to centuries of tumult in Europe that left the continent insecure and deeply uncertain about its future.

FLEMISH TOWN REVOLTS

By the early fourteenth century, in fact, the Flemish textile communes of Ghent, Brabant, and Hainault became battlegrounds between a large body of dispossessed plebeians and an entrenched, usually closed elite of privileged craft guild masters. The guilds in turn were themselves divided between "lesser" and

"greater," collectively generating riots as an ongoing feature of social life throughout the area. After many conflicts, victory came to the plebeian elements in Ghent in 1336, when the lesser guilds, led by the weaver Jacob van Artevelde, unseated the patrician guildsmen of the city and established a magistracy composed of the weavers, fullers, and lesser guildsmen, largely excluding the well-to-do stratum of the city.

The commercial interests of the textile towns were intimately tied to the fortunes of England, which supplied them with much-needed wool, rather than to those of France, whose monarchy ruled them through its representative, the Count of Flanders. The common hostility these lowland communes shared toward French rule cut across class lines, with the result that their resistance to the French often led to tentative alliances between plebeian workers and rich and poor guilds in an uneasy common front against an external enemy.

The Flemish towns seemed to tilt toward civic autonomy, albeit not without protection from local nobles in the countryside, and toward a growing sense of intercity commonality, despite the economic competition between them. Facing a conflict with France, Ghent chose Philip Artevelde, the son of Jacob, who had been killed in a fracas, as the chief captain of the city. He was placed in command of the joint forces of Ghent and other Flemish towns against an invasion by the Count of Flanders. In 1382 the massed Flemish citizen militia faced the highly trained knights and troops of the count. In the face of the count's cavalry charges, the militiamen, linked together arm-in-arm, were crushed under the weight of their own bodies. The body of Philip was found on the field, trodden over by the flight of his own men. With his death, "Flanders was to give up the dream of government by a league of independent towns," observes Ephraim Emerton, "and submit to the ever more and more centralized rule of power territorial lords, whose model was naturally the aggressive monarchy of France"[4]—again foreclosing the possibility of a Swiss-like confederal political structure as distinguished from a nation-state.

It is worth emphasizing that the resistance of the Flemish burghers—or "bourgeois"—to French monarchical centralization was almost entirely an urban struggle; we find little, if any, evidence of significant peasant support. It is also worth emphasizing that these burghers were not committed to the rule of nation-states, despite the proclivity of many historians to portray medieval cities as early supporters of nationalism. Quite to the contrary, the Flemish burghers were deeply devoted to their communes, and on general regional matters, when the need arose, they were often able to work with their neighbors in leagues. Proud and independent men, fairly literate artisans who lived with their weapons by their sides so as to be able to meet any military emergency that faced their communes, they were a special human type who would play leading roles as militant revolutionaries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, often under the misleading latter-day rubric of "proletarians."

NOTES

1. John Ball quoted in Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), p. 374.

2. Kenneth Rexroth, *Communalism: From Its Origins to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), p. 91.

3. Perez Zagorin, *Rebels and Rulers: 1500–1600*; vol. 1, *Society, States, and Early Modern Revolution: Agrarian and Urban Rebellions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 232.

4. Ephraim Emerton, *The Beginnings of Modern Europe* (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1917), p. 217.

CHAPTER 2 The German Peasant Wars

One of the great culminating points in the premodern uprisings of oppressed peoples has been broadly described as the "German Peasant War", a sweeping conflict that exploded in central Europe early in the sixteenth century.

The war stemmed in part from economic problems that arose within the patchwork of principalities known as the Holy Roman Empire. As the empire began to fall apart, feudal domination intensified enormously, even as serfdom was declining elsewhere in Europe, and many of the ruling princes, lay and ecclesiastical, attempted to aggrandize themselves in their sovereign principalities at the expense of the peasantry. Whether owing to growing economic needs or in pursuit of greater power (the two are not mutually exclusive), lords and princes began to impose heavier and heavier burdens on the peasants by seizing their traditional common lands, increasing virtually all feudal exactions, and trying to restore serfdom among those who were already relatively free. The petty burdens that the upper classes placed on the lower can be judged by the sixty-two Articles of the Stühlingen peasants, whose grievances and actions sparked the rebellion of 1525 in the Southwest. By adopting Roman law over German, the nobility were able to curtail freedoms that the peasants had enjoyed for centuries, and exact heavy penalties for infractions that would have been considered minor under traditional common or Germanic practices. Tempted by the new wares that growing European commerce made available to those who could afford them, temporal and ecclesiastical lords demanded more from the peasantry than they had in earlier times—and quite often, the fairly well-to-do peasants chafed more under these demands than the more downtrodden, who had been conditioned for generations to accept fatalistically their lot in life.

Serfdom, for its part, had become more brutal since the high Middle Ages. The medieval serf at least had a body of rights he could claim as well as duties he had to perform, and his lot was often softened by many generations of compromises between lord and underling. The common law of his quasi-tribal society and the religious precepts of the Church had served as countervailing

forces to arbitrary manorial rule. With the decline of feudalism and the degeneration of the Church, however, serfdom began to approximate outright slavery, and arbitrary temporal power began to invade the most guarded realm of the peasant's life. Now he was not only compelled to give more, indeed most, of his working time to the lord and pay increasing taxes, rents, and tithes, but he could be arbitrarily imprisoned, tortured, and in some cases even killed at the lord's behest. To worsen their lot, the many peasants who were serfs or faced the prospect of enserfment suffered the loss of the common meadows on which they had pastured their domestic animals and the common woodlands from which they had gathered fuel and timber since time immemorial.

Overall, two very distinct ways of life confronted each other, and almost inevitably were destined to explode into open conflict. On the one side, there was the peasant economy, which was structured around subsistence farming with all its attendant uncertainties that obliged the food cultivator, as Tom Scott and Bob Scribner observe,

> to rely on a wide range of activities other than mere arable farming in order to make ends meet. The creation of game reserves from common land and denial of access to forests cut the peasants off from what they regarded as a natural resource which they could justly exploit to supplement their purely agrarian incomes. Access to commons and waste land for grazing or the use of the forest to fatten swine or cattle on beechmast were considered vital for the maintenance of livestock, freeing as much land as possible for cultivation, just as grass and hay were indispensable for fodder.

On the other side, the distinctly rapacious nobility were enamored of the fine goods carried over the Alps by Italian merchants, and fired by ambitions to increase their land holdings. These nobles sought to extract what they could from the peasantry's labor, with no regard for their ancestral responsibilities to the lower classes. They sought to plunder "this subsistence economy in many ways," observe Scott and Scribner,

> especially through their desire to maximize their own incomes and to take advantage of every opportunity offered by an expanding market. Forests were a rich natural resource which could be exploited by the sale or lease of timber or charcoaling rights, while staves and bark could be sold rather than allowed to the peasants as a traditional right. Traditional fishing waters could be leased or exploited for the lord's own use, while common land could be enclosed and converted to arable. We may perceive in some areas virtually a conflict of two economic systems, a peasant subsistence economy with necessary links to local markets and that of feudal landlords aware of the entire range of market possibilities offered by economic conjuncture.[1]

In these circumstances, little more than a mere episode was required to turn peasant unrest into a general insurrection of revolutionary proportions.

THE *BUNDSCHUH*

There was no lack of unrest among the peasantry. The immediate precursor of the German Peasant War was a largely subterranean peasant movement known as the *Bundschuh*, whose name and symbol came from the peasant's laced boot, in contrast to the nobleman's fine *Stiefel*. Arising in German-speaking Alsace, the *Bundschuh* was probably sparked by a rise in the cost of living, but over time the peasants' basic demands were widened to include ecclesiastical reforms such as reductions in clerical income, a limitation on the number of priests in a community, and an end to clerical courts. Its slogan "Nothing but God's Justice" or "God's Word," referring to biblical precepts as a guide to the interactions between lord and underling, voiced the peasants' desire for a radically new social order, one based on traditional common law rather than Roman contract law, and one that recognized the authority only of the emperor and the pope, not of lords and clergy. Regrettably, anti-Semitism was ubiquitous; Jews, who were obliged to be moneylenders because of clerical restrictions on their activities, were seen as exacting usurers. While some *Bundschuh* programs demanded a fixed interest rate of 5 percent, other members demanded the extermination of the Jews. When the *Bundschuh* called for the abolition of taxes, including tithes, and, remarkably, claimed the sole right to levy taxes for itself, the movement began to establish itself as an incipient dual power in opposition to existing princely authority. When it called for the election of pastors by congregations, its program began to resemble that of the radical English Puritans who, a century and a half later, would shake the foundations of established regal authority (which claimed to head the Anglican Church) with their demands for the election of ministers in England and on the North American continent.

What is remarkable about the *Bundschuh* is the high degree of organization it created between 1493 and 1517, and the tenacity of its membership, so unlike what is commonly imputed to peasant movements. Strictly speaking, the *Bundschuh* was a conspiracy: illegal, it had to be kept highly secret, and its members were bonded by oaths, ceremonies, and commitments to punish any treachery. Even Friedrich Engels expressed his admiration for the movement,

> which overcame the obstacles to a more centralised organisation in spite of the fact that they were scattered over the countryside, and . . . after numberless dispersions, defeats, executions of leaders, they renewed their conspiracies over and over again, until an opportunity came for a mass upheaval.[2]

In 1493, certain *Bundschuh* leaders daringly planned to take over the city of Schletstadt and its nearby monasteries during Easter week, expropriate the wealth of the city's rich, and proceed to do the same in the rest of Alsace. The plan somehow became known to the authorities, and many of the leaders were arrested and tortured. Still others were driven out of the area with their hands or fingers brutally amputated. Yet despite the failure of the Alsace movement, the *Bundschuh* did not disappear; it lingered on in the hidden life of the peasantry and resurfaced continually for the next thirty years in various parts of southern Germany. By the early 1500s, its members in Speyer had broadened its program considerably to include the abolition of serfdom, the confiscation of monastic and Church-owned estates and their redivision among the people, and a Germany united under the shaky imperial crown.

As in Alsace, a plan for a major insurrection to take over the town of Bruchsal was aborted, this time betrayed by a priest to whom one of the members had naively confessed the plan. The alerted authorities, acting under a harsh decree of the Emperor Maximilian, extinguished what resistance they encountered. But the majority of the *Bundschuh* members were never discovered by the authorities, and the movement continued to exist in different forms and under different names. In Swabia, in the Duchy of Württemberg, it changed its name from *Bundschuh* to Poor Conrad, a name borrowed from that of an innocuous Catholic peasant fraternity. In the upper Rhine region, Joss Fritz, a former soldier and veteran of the Alsace conspiracy succeeded in uniting the peasants with knights, dissident clerics, and urban plebeians in a complex conspiracy, which spread back to Alsace and into Baden and Württemberg. Although a plot to take the town of Freiburg was betrayed and repressed once again, most of the movement members escaped. Shortly thereafter, a congress of Poor Conrad in the Duchy of Württemberg led to an uprising in 1514, which received widespread support owing to the famine conditions in the area. Together, peasants and town plebeians succeeded in taking three Swabian towns; indeed, they even managed to get their representatives seated in the Württemberg diet, which convened at Stuttgart. But the treacherous Duke Ulrich ordered the representatives of the middle classes to meet in an alternative diet in Tübingen without the peasants. The diet dutifully passed a law against the uprising, and the duke gathered troops to disperse the peasant militia. Although stern, the duke's treatment of the "rebels" was not particularly brutal; but he completely ignored the peasant demands and strengthened the laws against all peasant gatherings in the duchy. Although the main leaders of Poor Conrad again escaped, attempts to revive the *Bundschuh* in the Black Forest region were effectively suppressed by the authorities. Joss Fritz, who had lived a nearly charmed life through three abortive insurrections, fled to Switzerland, where he apparently died.

Well before the climactic years of the peasant war in Germany, a mass rebellion exploded in Switzerland, Hungary, and Slovenia between 1513 and

1515. In Hungary, a relatively benign monarch had initiated agrarian reforms that the feudal lords bitterly resented, and as soon as they regained their authority over the Crown, the reforms were flagrantly annulled. Thereupon, Gyorgy Dósza, a knight who had earned a distinguished reputation as a military commander and had organized a popular, mainly peasant militia to fight Turkish invaders, proceeded in 1514 to throw these well-disciplined forces against the nobility, opening a full-scale peasant war. Dósza proclaimed a republic, abolishing the monarchy and the privileges of the nobility, and once again, as with Étienne Marcel in Paris two centuries earlier, Hungary stood at a decisive social juncture in which history seemed to hold its breath.

In fact, this peasant uprising even gained the wavering support of the urban middle class. But when the peasants burned manors and castles, the ever-fearful bourgeoisie became alarmed and, fearing too militant a peasant revolt, deserted the peasant cause and threw their support over to the nobles, on whose behalf John Zapólyai, the future king of Hungary, had raised a substantial army. Notwithstanding the persistent belief that all peasant insurrections are chaotic, moblike affairs, Dósza's well-disciplined, superbly organized, and highly committed army fought valiantly and stubbornly, but Zapólyai's combined force of urban burghers and rural nobles ruthlessly crushed it at Temesvar. With this military victory, the Hungarian nobility assembled in a diet and proclaimed serfdom as a permanent condition, essentially freezing the history of their country for centuries to come.

THE REFORMATION

In the German-speaking areas of the Holy Roman Empire, many ideological factors—the Reformation and its radical offspring—came into play that seemed to challenge the authority of the ruling elites and that gave a strong cultural edge to the peasants' economic demands.

The Reformation was greatly fueled by the complex interplay of political and social forces that emerged in the closing years of the Middle Ages. By the sixteenth century, a broad intellectual and popular movement, supported by the emerging European monarchs, stood opposed to a thoroughly corrupt and decadent Church. In England, Henry VIII had severed his country's ties with Rome completely, while France and Spain, for their part, had gained the right to appoint their own bishops, a right that initially belonged to the Vatican. Under these conditions the Church seemed like a useless, self-perpetuating artifact that froze vast landholdings from wider social accessibility, accumulated an incalculably large treasure that the rising national economies of Europe sorely needed, and supported a swollen hierarchy of ecclesiastical and bureaucratic parasites

who made no productive contribution to the material well-being of society. At the same time, abbots and bishops, many of whom were also princely landowners, tried to exact increasing revenues from the peasants as zealously as the lay princes.

Thus, it was not only the emerging bourgeoisie who opposed the Church, whose system of charities blocked off what could have been a reserve labor force for capitalists to exploit; rather, reformation had become a pressing need for almost all strata of society: manorial lords as well as peasants, monarchs as well as nobles, urban patricians as well as plebeians, indeed everyone except the desperately poor who lived on Church handouts. Even feudal lords viewed the Church as an immense drain on their resources and dreamed of expropriating monastic lands and ecclesiastical wealth.

Reformation was in the air—but what kind of reformation would it be? The various demands for reform were vaguely divided along conflicting class lines until the Great Peasant War sorted them into clearly definable positions. The reformers essentially differed according to whether changes would serve nationalism against Catholic universalism, the temporal powers against the ecclesiastical ones, the wealthy against the poor, the princes against the peasants—or the peasants against the oppressive nobility generally.

LUTHER AND THE SWABIAN LEAGUE

In 1517, while the ever-active Joss Fritz was engaging in the last episode of his rebellious life in the Black Forest region, Martin Luther posted his famous ninety-five theses on the castle church door of Wittenberg, challenging papal hierarchy and moving Christian precept away from a faith structured around the Catholic Church to a faith based on personal belief. As a doctrine, Lutheranism was markedly subjective; it emphasized the inner light of faith over the outer reality of deeds and rituals. Although Luther's criticisms of indulgences, of papal authority over temporal German rulers, and of the widespread corruption in Rome were not strikingly innovative—they had, in fact, already been voiced by many clerics throughout the Holy Roman Empire and elsewhere—his attack came at a very strategic time, when virtually all strata of German society were alienated from Rome for a host of material, spiritual, and political reasons.

With support from the princes, urban classes, and peasants, Luther's aims evolved from mere reform of the existing Church into outright rebellion against it, indeed toward the establishment of a national church that was akin in many respects to the Church of England that his contemporary, Henry VIII, had created. In his 1520 *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, Luther struck a blow for a total break with Rome, demanding the creation of a uniquely

German clergy with its own bishops. Such writings whetted the appetite of German nobles of all levels for Church-owned lands. At the same time Luther's tenor had certain remarkably democratic features, such as an appeal to faith rather than obedience to ecclesiastical hierarchies, and his language was redolent of an apostolic Christianity that resonated deeply with peasant and plebeian aspirations for communal autonomy. Pamphlet after pamphlet written by Luther and his supporters fed the aspirations for a better life of peasants and serfs, who were chafing under increasingly severe feudal exactions, the growth of princely power, and exploitation by wealthy monastic orders and bishops.

Nor was the peasantry the only social group to feel itself threatened by the appetites of the ruling princes and the Church; the lesser nobility in the Holy Roman Empire also suffered a major erosion of its power at the expense of the dynastic territorial princes who ruled the major principalities of Germany. As the authority of the princes increased, the authority of the nobility diminished, producing unrest among the barons and knights. Given the opportunity, the lesser nobles correspondingly sought to create a "democracy of nobles"—of the lesser nobility—that would reunite the empire largely under their control, and thereby enhance their own power over the agrarian economy. These aspirations profoundly affected the status of free peasants, whom the nobles planned to enserf, as well as serfs, whose burdens would be increased, and the rural poor generally, who would suffer the loss of common lands that traditionally belonged to peasant villages.

Perhaps more so than any other stratum, the nobles wanted a German Church that would end the power of the landed monasteries and clerical princes, the secularization of clerical states and estates, and ultimately the elimination of princely power. In 1522, Ulrich von Hutten tried to use an old league of Rhenish, Swabian, and Franconian nobles—the Swabian League—to promote these aims by force of arms. Hutten amassed a noble army that could be directed not only against the Church but also against the territorial princes, and with Franz von Sickingen as its military commander, the League's forces attempted to stage a coup against the clerical states, particularly the elector-archbishop of Trier.

The attempt failed. By itself, the nobility were not strong enough to prevail militarily against the princes. Not only were the princes too powerful, but neither the peasants nor the townspeople were willing to make common cause with the lesser nobles in a plan to increase their power; indeed, the peasants sought to abolish all the privileges of the nobility, higher or lower. Instead of calling for the abolition of serfdom to gain peasant support, Hutten merely declaimed against Rome as the source of all the ills of the time. The forces of the Swabian League were defeated at Trier, where Sickingen was killed. Hutten, who fled, died shortly after. Thereafter the nobility's power was definitively broken, and the nobles were forced to submit to the princes, under whose protection

and leadership the lesser nobles were to remain for centuries. Indeed, by the mid-1520s, as the empire fragmented, the princes were clearly ascendant. Even the urban patricians became largely dependent upon them, as did Luther, who wedded himself to this realignment of the German upper classes. Accordingly, the Lutheran Church lost whatever social and political independence of the ruling classes it had had, and the democratic tenor in Luther's own writings waned ominously, the writings becoming more oligarchical and committed to the authority of the temporal rulers.

Although it is tempting to see Luther's emphasis on "inwardness" and his own sharply etched personality as expressions of "bourgeois individuality," he was hardly the bearer of ideological trappings for an emerging individualistic German bourgeoisie against a corporate feudal society. In fact, quite the opposite is true. In contrast to the Calvinist aspect of the Reformation, Lutheranism did little to favor bourgeois interests in Europe; indeed, for Germany, it marked a decided setback. The Reformation in Germany largely provided an ideological patina for landlordism, not for commerce, and for the princes, not for the burgher class, which supported it more out of fear of the peasants' war and the peasants' plebeian allies in the towns of central Europe than out of any profound religious convictions of their own.

In fact, Luther, by allying himself with the agrarian princely and urban patrician elements in German-speaking areas, rather than the burghers, furthered the fragmentation of the empire into many kingdoms, princelings, dukedoms, and imperial cities, which, far from fostering a bourgeois development, essentially obstructed it. Lutheran "inwardness" essentially became a gospel of quietism and obedience that was anything but compatible with the aggressive egotism characteristic of the bourgeois spirit, and its political effects were to favor Germany's dismemberment in opposition to any attempts to unify the empire or produce a nation-state.

In favoring submission to temporal power, Lutheran Protestantism conformed completely with the interests of the German princes and later with the Scandinavian monarchs, who were to eagerly adopt it to strengthen their own sovereignty. Although the Lutheran Church made far more doctrinal and liturgical changes than did the Anglican Church established by Henry VIII (which largely subordinated Roman Catholic doctrine to the monarchy), Lutheran clerics eventually were reduced to mere bureaucratic supports of German princes and Scandinavian kings. As D. Riazanov observes, "Lutheranism became the religion of the economically backward countries. It spread in northern and western Germany, Denmark and Sweden, where the princes, bishops and the landlords became the protectors of the Lutheran Church."[3]

The transformation that was taking place in Lutheranism notwithstanding, the peasants still identified with the early apostolic tone of Luther, whose appeals to faith and the Bible seemed to legitimate their demands for a more

egalitarian society. In reality, they were following in the wake of the radical Reformation clerics who voiced the quasi-mystical millenarianism that they erroneously associated with Luther's name and teachings. Chafing under feudal exactions, the peasants saw the Reformation, particularly as voiced by mystical clerics such as Balthasar Hubmaier and Thomas Münzer, as a return to the old egalitarian ideas advanced in Acts and in preachings directly ascribed to Jesus. It was in this highly charged ideological as well as economic and social environment that from the early 1500s the various local rebellions and general unrest collected into the climactic struggles that came to be known as the Peasant War, particularly in the fateful years of 1524 and 1525.

THE SCOPE OF THE PEASANT WAR

The Peasant War "proper" (as it has been called by some historians) of 1524 and 1525 was not an easily delineable conflict. It began in different places much earlier than 1524 and extended well beyond 1525—reaching into Alsace and the Palatinate—and it can be said to mark the culmination of chronic uprisings and unrest that date back centuries before the 1500s. No one region fought the upper classes exclusively on its own; various troops tried to aid each other when they could, and as one was suppressed it provided recruits to peasant troops that were still in the field elsewhere. Aside from the chronic struggles in the late Middle Ages between peasants, urban plebeians, and their overlords, the war has a distinctive place in any chronicle of European revolutionary movements over the past five centuries.

But we can single out three distinct but interrelated conflicts, each of which differed regionally and temporally over a span of a year—which is not to deny the war's long prelude and extended sequelae. The first of the wars centered in southwestern Germany, notably the Black Forest and Upper Swabia, directly adjacent to northern Switzerland and overlapping northeastern Austria. This conflict began in the late spring and early summer of 1524 and lasted well into the first half of 1525. In this area, as Scott and Scribner observe, the "balance sheet of the rebellion . . . was rather untidy," because, its many innovations notwithstanding, "it was lacking in political stamina or determination, and too easily drew back from realizing the implications of the political forms it had created."[4]

The second of the wars broke out in Württemburg and Franconia, in south-central Germany, and got under way in mid-April 1525. In this region, urban communities played a major role, and the rebels were more radical in their goals and resolute in their sense of purpose. But this war did not last long. After a series of easy victories, it continued into the early summer, but began to decline

rapidly when peasant troops failed to take the Marienberg fortress after a two-week siege in late May and early June.

The third of the wars had its locus in east-central Germany, most famously in Thuringia (where Thomas Münzer created his celebrated Eternal League of God at Mühlhausen), reaching Hesse and extending into Saxony to the east, indeed as far as Bohemia. In this region the war began around the same time as the Württemberg–Franconian conflict and was essentially suppressed before the end of May 1525.

What initially ignited the first of the sweeping insurrections of peasants against lords seems almost a trivial provocation. On June 23, 1524, the Countess of Lupfen-Stühlingen in Hegau, in southwestern Württemberg, ordered her peasants to collect snails and strawberries for a banquet. In itself, the order was not unusual; but she issued it at a time of the year when the peasants were hastening to gather their hay. The Lake Constance area, in which Hegau was located, had already been highly radicalized, and her arrogant demand infuriated the peasants, who assembled together and drew up a list of sixty-two grievances that protested excessive taxes, forced labor, the seizure of common lands, the loss of traditional legal principles, and the arbitrary rule of the nobility. A thousand Stühlingen tenants, bearing such arms as they could get, elected an extraordinarily gifted leader, the professional soldier or *Landsknecht* Hans Müller, as their captain, who organized them into a highly disciplined and effective force.

In August, this force marched southwest to Waldshut, a town on the Rhine about forty miles from Zurich. A well-chosen urban base for an insurrection, Waldshut had already been stirred up by radical reformers who had all but won over the citizenry against the temporal and clerical powers. The Rhenish town's patricians were Lutherans, but its pastor was a radical Zwinglian and its plebeians had been influenced by the fiery preachings of Andreas Bodenstein of Carlstadt and by the incendiary cleric Thomas Münzer, who was later to figure so prominently in the peasant uprising in Thuringia. The townspeople were sympathetic to the peasant forces and formed an alliance with them—in fact, even nearby Zurich gave them active assistance, including volunteers. At this time Waldshut was itself in revolt against its Austrian rulers, demanding the status of a free city, but the Austrians were much too occupied with imperial affairs in Italy to give any serious attention to a local revolt. As a result, Müller's peasant forces succeeded in fully occupying Waldshut in October 1524, making it one of the centers of the peasant uprisings in southwest Germany.

The remnants of the Swabian League formed the sole military body in southern Germany on which the princes and nobility could rely, but with only 1,700 troops it lacked sufficient strength to overcome Müller's peasant forces, which numbered 3,500 by October 1524. Accordingly, the nobles, as they had so often had done in the past and would continue to do in the future, offered truce

negotiations to stall the peasants, while enlarging and arming their own forces. By conceding for a time to many of the peasants' demands, they forestalled the possibility of a decisive peasant victory, which was clearly in the offing had the rebels attacked. The uprising in these early stages was still relatively peaceful. Old habits of servility held the peasants in tow: armed though they were, they behaved more like petitioners than the formidable insurrectionaries they could have been.

Nonetheless, the revolt subsequently swept through the rest of the Hegau region, much of the German–Swiss frontier area, and eastward into the Allgäu region (in what is now southwestern Bavaria). Earlier German peasant revolts had always been fragmentary and limited, largely confined to reclaiming traditional rights for their particular area, which often were quite different from those of a nearby region. What gave the Peasant War a new cohesion was the peasants' shared belief that they were supported by divine law against grasping bishops and abbots everywhere, and by their dream of a godly, egalitarian society. From the Black Forest region, the war raced toward the northeast like a huge tide, reaching Upper Swabia by the spring of 1525.

THE ARTICLES OF MEMMINGEN

In March 1525 representatives of the peasant bands in the southwest assembled in a general parliament at Memmingen, the principal town in Upper Swabia, to formulate a common program. The document they produced, "The Twelve Articles of the Peasants," was permeated with Christian piety and sought to refute the idea, held by the horrified elites, that the peasants were teaching

> that no one should obey but all should everywhere rise in revolt and rush together to reform or perhaps destroy altogether the authorities, both ecclesiastic and lay. . . . The articles below shall answer these godless and criminal fault-finders, and serve in the first place to remove the reproach from the word of God, and in the second place to give a Christian excuse for the disobedience or even the revolt of the entire Peasantry.[5]

But in the first of the twelve articles, the peasants claimed for themselves the right to "choose and appoint a pastor" and "the right to depose him should he conduct himself improperly." This chosen pastor was to teach the peasants "the Gospel pure and simple, without any addition, doctrine or ordinance of man." The demand was by no means a frivolous one. The right of a community to choose its pastor in a world where only the elite claimed this initiative was in itself a subversion of the established order of things: in fact, by implication, it

not only challenged the professional clergy by strengthening the powers of the village commune, but threatened the civil hierarchy itself.

The second article duly acknowledged that Scripture obliged the peasants to pay a "just tithe" in grain to Church authorities, but this tithe, the peasants insisted, was now to be collected by an *elected* provost—"whomsoever the community may appoint"—thereby challenging a fundamental power of the nobles to choose village clerics. The proceeds were to be used to provide the chosen pastor and his family with "a decent and sufficient maintenance", and nothing more. Beyond the amount needed for this maintenance, all funds collected from the tithe were to be distributed among the poor and used to "avoid laying any land tax on the poor." The peasants refused to pay any additional "unseemly tithe that is of man's invention," whether it be "ecclesiastical or lay"—another gauntlet that was thrown down to existing temporal and spiritual powers alike.

The third Memmingen article defined all obligations in purely personal terms and bluntly called for an end to serfdom, declaring:

> It has been the custom hitherto for men to hold us as their own property, which is pitiable enough, considering that Christ has delivered and redeemed us all, without exception, by the shedding of His precious blood, the lowly as well as the great. Accordingly, it is consistent with Scripture that we should be free and wish to be so. Not that we would wish to be absolutely free and under no authority. God does not teach us that we should lead a disorderly life in the lusts of the flesh, but that we should love the Lord our God and our neighbour. We would gladly observe all this as God has commanded us in the celebration of the communion. He has not commanded us not to obey the authorities, but rather that we should be humble, not only towards those in authority, but towards everyone. We are thus ready to yield obedience according to God's law to our elected and regular authorities in all proper things becoming to a Christian. We, therefore, take it for granted that you will release us from serfdom as true Christians, unless it should be shown us from the Gospel that we are serfs.

By radically invoking Scripture—"the Word of God"—against temporal authority this remarkable article was enormously provocative. Not only did it implicitly call the entire social order into dispute, it staked out a new claim for freedom of the individual, invoking Christian humility "toward everyone"—not merely toward one's social superiors.

In the fourth through seventh articles the peasants went on to claim the right to hunt game, fish, gather wood, and possess their land, and the right to communal lands "without restriction," which were to be administered "in a brotherly and Christian manner." These demands were crucial; not only was their fulfillment economically necessary to sustain the village way of life but

they presupposed a democratic right of all strata, particularly the peasants, to enjoy full access to the bounty of the natural world. They demanded freedom from the "excessive services" that were increasingly imposed upon them, and they asserted that the nobility "should no longer try to force more services or other dues from the peasant without payment, but permit the peasant to enjoy his holding in peace and quiet." The eighth article called for rents to be fixed according to the capacity of the peasants to pay—a remarkable demand at any time, in which need rather than gain dictated economic behavior—and the ninth, that justice be rendered according to traditional common law rather than individualistic Roman law. The tenth article reiterated the demand for the return of common lands to the village communities:

> we are aggrieved by the appropriation by individuals of meadows and fields which at one time belonged to a community. These we will take again into our own hands. It may, however, happen that the land was rightfully purchased. When, however, the land has unfortunately been purchased in this way, some brotherly arrangement should be made according to circumstances.

The eleventh article demanded the abolition of the inheritance taxes that burdened widows and orphans of deceased peasants—a particularly offensive levy by the nobles that often stripped peasant families of all their belongings—while the final one avowed that Scripture was the sole criterion by which the legitimacy of the claims in the document was to be judged.

The Twelve Articles of Memmingen thus essentially placed themselves under the protection of Christian precept, "the Word of God" or holy writ, indeed God himself. "The Word of God" became a major peasant slogan, challenging all temporal authority with that of Scripture. The peasants, in effect, were appealing to a power that they regarded as higher than that of their lords and princes—hence the revolutionary content of the phrase. Social life was to be lived according to tenets established by the Bible, not by ecclesiastical or lay authorities. Men were to hold power by election, not by birth, and deal with others according to law, not arbitrary judgment. Most of the personal and institutional intermediaries between God and man, even between society and community, were to be abolished, and people were to be regarded as neighbors, not as lord and lowly, or noble and serf. The authors of the articles thus viewed society essentially as a Christian fraternity, not as a social order based on rank and privilege. In closing the Articles, the peasants warned that they would expand the articles if it became necessary: "if more complaints are discovered which are based upon truth and the Scriptures and relate to offenses against God and our neighbour," they were "determined to reserve the right to present these also."

More articles in varying number emerged throughout the Peasant War, some even going beyond those adopted at Memmingen, including radical visions that

struck at the very heart of hierarchical society. In Upper Swabia in February 1525, when tenants gathered at Sonthofen, they demanded the abolition of all feudal lords—a revolutionary demand that spread with the revolt. The "Twelve Articles" of the Alsace peasants called for the election not only of pastors but of all public officials, and completely repudiated the authority of the princes. In the Tyrol, a peasant parliament at Merano demanded that all authorities be chosen by the communities they administered. The peasants cited equality as a vital right and repeated a maxim of the English peasants a century and a half earlier, asking by what right the first noble had held the ordinary people in thrall.

Other articles raised during the war embodied ideals not only of social but of economic equality—equality that would be achieved by raising the condition of the peasant rather than diminishing that of the upper classes. A demand was raised that no one should possess more than two thousand crowns in wealth: a fairly sizable competence, to be sure, but an explicit restriction that flouted what the nobles regarded as a major right of any property owner. Utopistic visions called for the abolition of all capitalistic enterprises and for republican forms of government in which peasants and nobles would conjointly manage civil affairs, and demanded that the production of luxuries be suppressed in favor of goods that were meant to satisfy basic human needs.

The Peasant War, in effect, was as antibourgeois as it was antiaristocratic. Proposals were advanced during the course of the conflict not only to abolish tolls, dues, indirect taxes, and serfdom, but even to limit to some ten thousand crowns the amount of capital that merchants could make.[6] That such radical, indeed visionary, demands could have been made at peasant congresses and meetings—not only by radical clerics but by peasant leaders themselves—attests to the unusual nature of the insurgencies that swept over central Europe early in the sixteenth century.

ALLIES AND ENEMIES OF THE PEASANTS

To characterize the Peasant War exclusively as an agrarian movement would be a grave error, although the peasantry clearly provided the principal force and inspiration behind the upheaval. The peasant insurgents gained support from clerics, bureaucrats, officials of all kinds, knights, burghers, and even nobles, each stratum occupied with achieving the realization of its own particular interests. In nearly all the cities and towns that were in one way or another swept into the movement, the Peasant War produced a general social ferment, inducing riots in cities such as Strasbourg and popular attacks on the elite councils of Mainz, Cologne, and Ratisbon, and on clerical rulers in Bamberg and Speyer. Despite the peasants' initially peaceable and Christian approach, the

nobility, clerics, and many well-to-do burghers were hardly soothed by the rebels' call for brotherliness but often panicked and took flight when the peasants assembled and marched upon their castles, convents and towns.

The decline of feudalism, moreover, had created a sizable plebeian element of relatively unskilled people who lived at the mercy of the patricians and local bourgeois. These urban plebeians, far from fearing the peasants, often saw themselves as their natural allies and gave the rebels their earnest support. Although beggars were easily bought off by the established authorities with food and drink, they too organized into bands or "kingdoms" and played a very helpful role as they roamed the roads, forming a communication system for the peasants. The middling burghers, for their part, who were often ensnared in battles with urban patricians, dealt with the peasants opportunistically, often supporting them in order to intimidate the patricians, a support which the burghers easily withdrew, betraying the peasants after they achieved their own ends—or when they feared plebeian uprisings in their own towns.

Generally, however, the peasant demands resonated with the poorer classes in the towns and cities, the unskilled workers and poor artisans. Indeed, as the Peasant War swept across Germany, the peasantry brought many smoldering urban grievances to the surface and virtually turned their movement into a national revolution. Throughout southwestern and central Germany, towns and cities tended to divide into two groupings in response to the upheaval: those that spoke for the poor, or the "commune," and the ruling councils and well-to-do. In any given town, sympathy for the peasant cause depended upon which held the upper hand. The merchant class was generally weakest in the smaller towns and strongest in the larger ones, and it was in these small towns peripheral to the centers of the emerging bourgeoisie that "communes" were organized, either as citizens' assemblies or as crowds, exhibiting great sympathy for the peasant cause. Aid came to the peasants from Heilbronn, Würzburg, and Rothenburg, while in Frankfurt the "commune" took over the elite council and swore a covenant of allegiance to support the peasants. The Frankfurt movement drew up articles affirming their traditional rights, which the city's council accepted and which cities as far to the north as Münster and Osnabrück used as a model for their own "social contract."

Despite its seemingly fragmentary character, the Peasant War did not lack well-organized political institutions. "A parliamentary constitution was developed in larger territories by estates of peasants, burghers, and miners," observes Peter Blickle.

> While retaining the institutional framework . . . territorial estates were replaced by countrysides (*Landschaften*), which in 1525 meant both the representative assembly and all the rebels in each territory. Autonomous village, mining, market and urban communes chose representatives by election for the provincial diet, which in turn appointed a representative government (committee), which carried out the business of government with the territorial lord.[7]

More traditionally, the villagers made their decision by forming "a ring" or holding "a commune" that congregated under an oak tree,

> in a churchyard, sometimes in a field, or even at an ancient site for the administration of justice (*Malstatt*), and was usually summoned by ringing the storm-bells to indicate that a communal assembly had been called. In theory the village commune was an assembly of equals engaged in nonhierarchical political activity, signifying that all its members were mutually dependent on the support and assistance of their fellow villagers. Demands for the restoration of village autonomy and the protection of communal rights and privileges reflected this fundamental peasant political consciousness, which supplied the lifeblood of the peasant rebellion.[8]

The Peasant War was actually a "revolution of the common man," Blickle argues. "Godly law and the Gospel [were] carried from the towns into the countryside by the preachers," he avers, although religion cannot be separated from the economic tinder that fed the conflagration that swept over the revolutionary areas.

> The limited coincidence of interests between peasants and burghers, in the shape of similar agrarian problems (farming towns), tax burdens (military levy, pallium), or encroachments on communal autonomy by territorial lords (there was an identity of interests with the miners), was strengthened by a common yearning for a more just, more Christian world.[9]

Religious zealotry gave a deep ideological dimension to class antagonisms in combating the long-hated privileged rulers and their ideologues. In central Germany alone, an estimated forty monasteries and castles were destroyed, and many cities, whether out of complicity or fear, opened their gates to the peasant armies. "The Word of God" became a rallying cry for various heterogeneous elements—professional soldiers, artisans, and plebeians—who rose with the peasants, in part as a religious expression of the rebels' cause. Some sympathetic well-to-do burgher elements found the various Protestant tendencies useful as banners under which to unite peasants and plebeians who shared their hatred of the high clerics and nobles—at least, before betraying them. So effective was radical Protestantism as a banner that some canny leaders of the princes' cause, such as the knight Götz von Sickingen, a veteran of the earlier nobles' revolt, did not hesitate to use it as a means to draw erstwhile allies of the peasants to the princes' side.

Some princes used the war for opportunistic ends as well. The same Duke of Württemberg whom the Poor Conrad movement had fought so bitterly several years before adopted the name "Utz the Peasant" and tried to enlist peasants in order to regain control of his duchy. Knights who had been displaced by wealthy landed nobles and were now footloose were only too eager to join conflicts that held out the promise of real estate and a manorial way of life. Forming their own leagues or freebooting companies, they roamed the countryside seeking their fortunes and freely looting both sides alike for whatever wealth they could acquire. Although the knights were notoriously unreliable, as individuals and in groups they fitfully allied with the peasants, taught them the arts of war, and left behind a memory of social chivalry that German poets were to romanticize centuries later.

THE PEASANT TROOPS

Faced with the rising peasant tide, the Swabian League, now led by Truchsess Georg von Waldburg, continued its policy of delay. It still lacked sufficient troops to suppress the peasants. In one great delaying tactic, the "Twelve Articles" were actually submitted for arbitration to a commission that included Luther, his acolyte Philip Melancthon, and a representative of the princes and the emperor. Even though none of the commission's members were peasants, basic interests were clearly at war between the nobles and peasants, and no appeals to brotherly love could possibly reconcile them.

Between February, when negotiations began, and the end of April 1525, the revolt spread until it ignited nearly all of southwestern Germany, notably the Black Forest and Upper Swabia. If only because of the perfidy and arrogance of the nobility, violence was inevitable between the peasantry and their rulers. Indeed, once the peasants decided to abandon the peaceful approach they initially had adopted, they organized themselves into formidable armies (*bunden*) or "troops," as they have been called, that were more than "mobs" of farmers poorly armed with scythes and bludgeons; in quite a few cases, they were equipped with firearms, cannon, and even some cavalry. Although these military forces were usually aided by professional military men, the *Landsknechten*, they were highly democratic in character, as was often the case with the militias of the era. Officers were elected by their units, and military plans were often made by the armed community, perhaps as "rings," as a whole.

The course of the social revolution over such a wide expanse, the mobilizing of peasant troops at various centers, their crisscrossing and merging over large territories, their victories, and finally their defeats—all is too complex a story to tell briefly. Nearly two-thirds of present-day Germany was directly involved in

this sweeping conflict at some time or another, and its effects were felt as far north as Gdansk, on the Baltic, and may have reverberated into the Slavic East. At least a dozen individual peasant troops gained prominence as the conflict unfolded—which should not diminish the importance of the many other troops that operated on a smaller scale in their localities. The revolution's impact—its mistakes as well as its possibilities—can best be understood by singling out the activities of the major troops when the revolt was at its height.

As previously indicated, the earliest was the Hegau Troop, which had occupied Waldshut in October 1524 under the command of the *Landsknecht* Hans Müller, after the Stühlingen affair. In February, a peasant insurrection in Upper Swabia produced the Baltringen Troop, which raised a revolutionary red flag and reached ten to twelve thousand men, making it one of the largest of the peasant forces in the field. During the same month, the Upper Allgäu Troop of about seven thousand was formed at Schusser, and at Bermatingen, near Lake Constance, Eitel Hans formed the Lake Troop. Early in March, a Lower Allgäu Troop of some seven thousand peasants established a camp near Wurzach. The Lake, Allgäu, and Baltringer Troops together formed a Christian Union, whose common basis was the Twelve Articles, spreading the revolt across most of southern Germany. The Leipheim Troop was formed in the Danube area, so that at the beginning of March roughly six peasant armies were operating in Swabia, consisting of thirty to forty thousand armed insurgents—an overwhelming force by comparison with the much fewer numbers commanded by the ruthless Truchsess.

Individually, the peasant armies rarely exceeded seven thousand men, and they were often on the move, generally fighting independently of one another as they crisscrossed southern Germany. Altogether, they created an impressive record of destroying monasteries and castles. In major battles, the troops often came to each other's assistance, and from time to time they held peasant congresses or convocations, usually at Heilbronn, on the Neckar River. Like Waldshut, Heilbronn became the political center for the peasant armies in Swabia and later Franconia.

In area after area and town after town, the war expanded. It swept northward to the upper reaches of Coburg in mid-April, reaching Saxony by the end of the month, and broadened out in the southeast to sweep into the Tyrol, Attergau, and parts of Austria by the beginning of May. In Salzburg the archbishop holed himself up in his castle in fear of his parishioners, and at Innsbruck, the Archduke Ferdinand refused to leave the city lest he be attacked by the peasants and their sympathizers in the city's environs. Freiburg, too, capitulated to the peasants when the city opened its gates to them on May 24 1525.

Many clerics played a major role in the Peasant Wars, but not even a cursory summary of them can ignore the figure of Thomas Münzer, who looms large in nearly all histories of the conflict, especially in Thuringia. An iconoclastic antagonist of Luther who sought to overthrow the social order and establish a

godly society in its stead, Münzer acquired an honored place in Marxist iconography owing particularly to the tribute that Friedrich Engels paid him as an Anabaptist advocate of communism—a view, in fact, that may have been extracted from him by torture. Perhaps far more influential in Thuringia, however, was the radical pastor of Mühlhausen, Heinrich Pfeiffer, who together with Münzer dislodged the Mühlhausen town council in early 1525, replacing it with an "eternal council" that was to be a harbinger of the imminent coming of Christ and the earthly Kingdom of God. In May, the landgrave, Philip of Hesse, after a brief attack on Mühlhausen, offered to negotiate with the city and again used the time when peasants were considering his peace offer to redeploy his artillery effectively, slaughtering the hapless peasants in droves. Rather than die in battle, Münzer tried to escape in disguise but was caught; at their hearing Pfeiffer remained stalwart, but Münzer recanted his millenarian beliefs and took Catholic communion, which did not prevent both men from being beheaded.

At around the same time Martin Luther replied to the Twelve Articles of Memmingen in *An Admonition to Peace: A Reply to the Twelve Articles of the Peasants of Swabia*, which urged the peasants to be peaceful. A few weeks later, however, after the peasants' "sedition" against the princes became "clear" to him—which was all the more irritating to him because they were "seditious" in the name of ideals that had an affinity with his own—Luther issued his infamous tirade *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants*, savagely denouncing their movement and aligning himself with the princes.

MILITARY EVENTS

Had the peasant armies in southwestern Germany attacked the Swabian League at the outset of the war, they would certainly have inflicted a devastating defeat on the princes and nobles and thrashed Truchsess Georg, the infamous hangman of the Peasant War. But the overly trusting and charitable Baltringen, Allgäu, and Lake Troops concluded an armistice with the Truchsess, who continued all the while to gather new forces to throw against the peasants. The nobility, for their part, with arrogant disregard for the peasants' concerns, were temperamentally incapable of achieving even a semblance of the Christian brotherhood that the peasant articles so earnestly voiced.

Irrespective of the truce arrangements, the revolt spread into Franconia and to the border of Thuringia, where the peasants formed a seventh major force, the Bildhausen Troop, which demanded that the Empire be restructured to be run by a peasants' parliament. Additionally, various peasant columns collected at Schoenthal to form an eighth major peasant army, the Gay Troop, a well-equipped force of some eight thousand men with cannons and three thousand

guns. It was from this force that the Franconian knight Florian Geyer gathered his Black Host, a highly trained, well-disciplined, and select troop recruited mainly from peasant infantries and one that acted more resolutely and bravely than most of the other detachments. Although from a strictly military viewpoint Geyer was one of the most astute of the peasant leaders, he was also a well-educated man who had joined with the peasants out of a genuine belief in the rightness of their cause. Honorable and courageous, devoted to the movement, this remarkable man would die with his weapons in hand.

Still another ninth Franconian army, the Gay Bright Troop, was formed under the command of the knight Götz von Berlichingen, while in Limpurg, the tenth, the Gaildorf or Common Gay Troop, a violent and very unreliable force, ultimately disbanded after alienating much of the population. The Wunnenstein Troop, commanded by Matern Feuerbacher, formed an eleventh major peasant army. Feuerbacher, an innkeeper, was noted for the moderateness of his political views, but he gained considerable respect for his military and organizational abilities. The twelfth troop, the Gay Christian Troop, was formed at Stuttgart. Additionally, many local groups were formed throughout southern Germany and often joined the larger troops or withdrew from them as occasion arose.

Despite the often extreme demands advanced by various peasant articles and radical clerics, the military aims of the peasants were very diffuse. They lacked a competent, accountable leadership, making do primarily with radical clerics and disaffected knights as military strategists. To have achieved even their more modest demands, they would have had to crush the Swabian League and its supporters completely. Indeed, they would have had to behave with a harshness comparable to that which the League inflicted upon them during and after their defeat. But in the absence of any coordinating, much less governing, power, each of the peasant armies often functioned very much on its own, with a degree of decentralization and often a wavering morale that imparted a decisive advantage to the gathering forces of the Swabian League.

In early April 1525, when the Leipheim Troop, under the leadership of the radical cleric Jacob Wehe, attacked the city of Leipheim, the Truchsess went into action. He crushed the troop and beheaded Wehe—a harbinger of defeats that the peasant armies were to suffer in May and June. On April 15, the Truchsess came face to face with a formidable peasant force, the Lake Constance army, before Weingarten, which could easily have routed him and decisively crushed the Swabian League; but he prudently negotiated a peace treaty with his plainly superior opponents, after which the rebels disbanded. This crucial, indeed decisive failure by the peasants would lead to their ultimate defeat. Still another major failure by the peasants occurred at Böblingen in May, when Feuerbacher ably deployed his united peasants and his cannon in a way that left the Truchsess confused and incapable of action. But once again the peasants were seduced into a truce, while the Truchsess shrewdly redeployed his forces to his own

advantage. On May 12, while the truce was still in effect, the League suddenly attacked the peasants, who were guilelessly at their ease, and completely shattered them, ruthlessly hunting down and slaughtering those who were fleeing from his cavalry.

Not only did the Weingarten treaty and Böblingen defeat eliminate the entire Württemberg insurrection, it demoralized all the insurgent forces, throwing them on the defensive and instilling new vigor in the nobility. The Swabian League's cavalry, which was rightly regarded after its victories as a terrifying killing machine, was absolutely merciless in its treatment of wounded and captive peasants. The well-to-do citizens of Heilbronn surrendered the city to the Truchsess, while Geyer's Black Host was decimated in a vain attack on Frauenberg, the nearly invincible castle of the Duke of Franconia, who was also the Bishop of Würzburg and had become the primary target of the insurgents' offensive in that area. As summer drew near, the élan of the peasant armies gave way to demoralization. The Gay Bright Troop, during negotiations with the Truchsess, gradually melted away, and its treacherous commander, Götz von Berlichingen (later immortalized in Goethe's eponymous drama), seeing that the fortunes of the peasant cause had taken a turn for the worse, went over to the Swabian League, claiming to have always been a captive of the peasants. In a maneuver at Krautheim, the Truchsess enveloped eight thousand peasants who were equipped with thirty-two cannon and bloodily "dispersed" them—more properly, slaughtered them. In June 1525 at the village of Sulzdorf, League forces moved against Florian Geyer, who had combined the remaining six hundred men of his Black Host with other peasant forces. The Truchsess easily defeated this small peasant army. After an unrelenting five-day pursuit by the League's cavalry, Geyer and his few men were cornered and perished in battle.

The remaining peasant armies were defeated one after another. Rottenburg fell to a patrician counterrevolution, as did Strasbourg and Frankfurt. In the Palatinate, a massacre of the peasants at Pfeddersheim on May 23 and the capture of Weißenburg on July 7 left only two peasant armies intact in southern Germany: the Hegau–Black Forest and Allgäu Troops. The Peasant War now turned on itself. The Lake Troop, which had earlier come to terms with its nobility with the Treaty of Weingarten, was now brought into service against its own brethren in the Hegau Troop. The same Hans Müller who had played so important a role at the outset of the war now encouraged the Hegau Troop to disperse. Müller himself had joined the nobles and later ended his days in Switzerland. Engagements now were marked by further treasonable defections, and by agreements to honor peasant demands that were followed by betrayals of truces. On December 6, after several engagements, agreements, and betrayals, the last insurgent Black Forest troops and their allies surrendered the last peasant stronghold, Waldshut, to the nobles.

The failure of the peasant troops to attack the Truchsess at Weingarten cost them an extraordinary number of lives in the months that followed, both in Franconia and in Thuringia. For every noble's life that was lost, ten to fifty peasants were killed, a terrible ratio that the ruling classes were only too eager to inflict on the peasantry but that the long-servile peasantry were not prepared to claim from the nobility. After each defeat not only were the peasants brutally hunted down, but their villages were razed, their livestock slaughtered, their women and children driven homeless into the open, and their leaders brutally tortured. The number of rebels killed during the conflict in Swabia and Franconia reached such appalling proportions that the nobility ultimately had to desist lest they lose their workforce.

The outcome of the conflict over the long run was disastrous. Political life of southern and central Germany was set back for centuries, not only because of the ruthless determination of the ruling classes but also in no small measure as a result of the peasants' own naiveté and Christian humility. The princes achieved the absolute power they sought, while none of the peasants' demands were met. To be sure, the peasant war continued in Germany for a century in the form of limited and sporadic uprisings, but the Thirty Years War of 1618–48 reduced the country to ruins and wiped out an estimated one-third of its population, ending all hope of a new social dispensation for generations.

In assessing why the Peasant War failed, at least militarily, Scott and Scribner pithily observe that while there

> were disparities in military experience and equipment [which favored the nobles], these were often compensated for [by the peasants] by shrewd tactics. Political failure, miscalculation, loss of nerve, and divided or inadequate leadership complicated the military equation, so that it cannot be claimed that the peasants were defeated simply because of their military inadequacy. The mischief of historical accident played more than a passing role, in that the conditions for success never ripened simultaneously throughout the various areas of revolt, or did not do so in ways that impelled any lasting domino effect, so vital for success. Just as the Franconian rebellion began to pick up impetus, the Upper Swabian rebellion ran out of steam and only revived after the challenge of the central German and Franconian movements was decisively blunted.[10]

In any case, the defeat of the peasants and the steady erosion of their democratic village communes foreclosed the possibility of a populist confederal German nation. It was not until the nineteenth century that the German states, duchies, and cities were to be unified into a single nation—and then mainly by Prussian militarists and the Hohenzollern dynasty, who created the authoritarian tradition that the German people were to inherit into the century that followed.

NOTES

1. *The German Peasants' War: A History in Documents*, edited, translated, and with an introduction by Tom Scott and Bob Scribner (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1991), pp. 8–9.

2. Friedrich Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, trans. Moissaye J. Olgin. Marxist Library: Works of Marxism–Leninism, vol. 33 (New York: International Publishers, 1926), p. 79.

3. D. Riazanov, "explanatory notes" to Friedrich Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany* (New York: International Publishers, 1926), p. 182, note 13. Since Riazanov was a victim of Stalin's purges in the 1930s, his name was removed from subsequent editions of Engels's history.

4. Scott and Scribner, *The German Peasants' War*, p. 28.

5. The Twelve Articles have been reprinted in many works on the Peasant War, including Engels, *Peasant War*, pp. 157–63. An insightful interpretation may be found in Peter Blickle, *The Revolution of 1525: The German Peasants' War from a New Perspective*, trans. Thomas A. Brady, Jr., and H. C. Erik Midelfort (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 25–67.

6. "The local demand for the abolition of seigneurial rights gave place to universal ideas of liberty, fraternity, equality; and it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the German peasants in 1525 anticipated most of the French ideas of 1789." A.W. Ward, G.W. Prothero, and Stanley Leathes, eds., *The Cambridge Modern History*, "planned by Lord Acton"; vol. 2, *The Reformation* (New York and London: Macmillan, 1904), p. 184.

7. Peter Blickle, "The 'Peasant War' as the Revolution of the Common Man—Theses," in Bob Scribner and Gerhard Benecke, eds., *The German Peasant War of 1525: New Viewpoints* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), p. 21.

8. Scott and Scribner, *The German Peasants' War*, p. 14.

9. Blickle, "The Peasant War," p. 21.

10. Scott and Scribner, *The German Peasants' War*, p. 64.

PART II

THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION

CHAPTER 3

The Rise of Commerce: The Dutch Revolt and Tudor England

Despite the enormous damage that the Reformation wars and the Thirty Years War inflicted on the German-speaking regions of Europe, the social and economic decline of these areas should not be attributed exclusively to military conflict. From the mid-sixteenth century onward, Europe's historical development shifted by degrees away from the inland areas of the continent and the Mediterranean to the Atlantic coast and the northern cities of the continent, particularly to the emerging nation-states of the Netherlands and England. A booming commerce arose, in great part owing to the discovery of the New World and new trade routes along the Atlantic to the Indies. Portugal became a major maritime power for a time, as did Spain, whose cities flourished during the rule of Charles V and Philip II.

In the British Isles the forces that were to prepare a fertile soil for the emergence of capitalism were already at work in the seventeenth century. Yet this capitalist development was by no means inevitable. In terms of sheer wealth and resources, England was no more ripe than Spain, or even France, to move rapidly in a bourgeois direction. Indeed, it might have seemed at first that economic, political, and cultural hegemony in creating European capitalism would fall to Spain. The treasure that the Spaniards looted from their American possessions far and away exceeded that of the British, yet it was not until the twentieth century that capitalism truly gained ascendancy on the Iberian peninsula. The Spanish monarchs frittered away their enormous wealth in wars waged by ambitious kings on the European continent. Their efforts to gain control of the dying Holy Roman Empire and their duels with France eventually impoverished this earliest of European nation-states. Thriving Spanish cities and towns were permitted to languish, and internal as well as external

commerce faded away, leaving Spain a historic backwater for centuries. The wastage of material resources in dynastic conflicts seemed almost to doom seventeenth-century France to a similar fate, save for the efforts of Cardinal Richelieu—perhaps the greatest clerical nation-state builder of the era—to transform the country into the major continental power of Europe.

THE DUTCH REVOLT

Among the northern European countries, it was the Netherlands that displaced these earlier powers, where commerce brought Dutch cities enormous material prosperity and fostered a rich cultural development. Commanding the mouth of the Rhine, the Dutch were strategically placed to control the Rhenish trade in the heartland of Germany, and, especially after chronic warfare had weakened the Germans, they began to absorb a great deal of Europe's commerce, preempting the earlier Baltic trade in which the German Hanseatic League of cities had played so important a part. Indeed, the Dutch and, shortly afterward, the English were to be the major beneficiaries of the Age of Exploration that Portuguese and Spanish mariners had pioneered.

The involvement of Dutch merchants in the expanding commerce of the late Middle Ages fostered in the Netherlands a strong sense of nationhood and republican unity, as did the resentment that this relatively free people felt toward Spanish interference in their lifeways and religious beliefs. So considerable was the influence of commerce in Dutch life that it is easy to forget that the northern lowlands of the present-day Netherlands—as distinct from Flemish and French-speaking areas of present-day Belgium—were uninhabitable marshy areas that were slowly reclaimed from the sea. Over the centuries a peasantry with spades and windmills managed to open intractable parts of their coastline to agriculture and village settlements supported by modest fishing fleets. More a yeomanry than a servile peasantry, the northern Netherlanders of Holland were notable for their ingrained sense of enterprise, personal independence, and basically heterodox lifeways. As their provinces took form, they retained much of the egalitarian law of their Germanic ancestors and their traditional system of local freedoms. When the dukes of Burgundy united the provinces of both north and south—Flanders and Brabant as well as Holland and Zeeland—under their own Estates General, the dukes, who summoned those bodies, normally permitted them to retain their original rights and traditions.

Ideologically, the Dutch largely reworked and benefited from a new form of Protestantism, notably Calvinism, that Luther had inadvertently stirred up abroad. In its origins in Geneva, Calvinism had seemed like a quietistic doctrine comparable to Lutheranism, sharing Luther's belief in salvation by faith alone,

and personally John Calvin, a noble Frenchman turned theologian, was no less an advocate of obedience to authority than Luther. "The Lord has not only testified that the status of magistrate or civic officer was approved by him and was pleasing to him," Calvin instructed,

> but also he has moreover greatly recommended it to us, having honored its dignity with very honorable titles. For the Lord affirms (Prov. 8:15–16) that the fact that kings rule, that counselors order just things, and that the great of the earth are judges, is a work of his wisdom. And elsewhere (Ps. 82:6–7), he calls them gods, because they do his work. In another place also (Deut. 1:17; II Chron. 19:5–7) they are said to exercise judgment for God, and not for man. And Saint Paul (Rom. 12:8) calls the higher offices gifts of God.[1]

But Calvin, far more than Luther, insistently regarded the Church as a higher authority than the state and placed a greater premium on ecclesiastical over secular authority generally. God's will was absolutely and ultimately sovereign over earthly affairs, he enjoined. "Hence princes and magistrates must think of Him whom they serve in their office," he asserted, "and do nothing unworthy of ministers and lieutenants of God."[2] Indeed,

> from obedience to superiors we must always except one thing: that it does not draw us away from obedience to Him to whose edicts the commands of all kings must yield. The Lord, therefore, is the king of kings, and, once He has opened his sacred mouth, he must be listened to by all and above all. Only after that, we are subject to men who are constituted over us, but not otherwise than in him. If men command us to do something against him, we must do nothing, nor keep any account of such an order. On the contrary, let rather this sentence take place: that it is necessary to obey God rather than men (Acts 4:19).[3]

Such remarks conferred considerable power on the clergy over the magistrates, kingly or otherwise. After 1541, when the community of Geneva finally accepted Calvin as its spiritual leader, he essentially replaced its unstable political regime with an austere theocracy, subordinating the city to the church, which ruled it with a stern rigor that regulated conduct in all areas of life. Minor infractions of Calvinist notions of appropriate behavior were treated as criminal offenses, and major heresies were punished as capital crimes, often not without torture. Calvin burned the Unitarian Michael Servetus at the stake in 1553, belying later pretensions of much radical Protestantism to a consistently libertarian outlook. Nevertheless, as Calvinism drifted through Europe, it steadily moderated its practices and credo, especially in the Netherlands and England.

Such moderation was all the more necessary because Europe remained largely Catholic, a fact with which Protestants were obliged to reconcile themselves,

doctrinally as well as politically. Unlike Lutheranism, Calvinism accepted and even encouraged trade and production, ultimately (but not immediately) becoming an ideological factor in the emergence of capitalism. In fact, by no means was it simply a "bourgeois" religion. Its devotees included nobles as well as merchants and artisans and many of the poorer people of Europe. The acceptance of Calvinism depended as much on the prevailing political conditions in a given locale as on the economic. In France, where the Crown had brought the Catholic clergy into its own service, it feared the Calvinist Huguenots as an aristocratic threat to the nation-state, since many nobles adhered to that faith. Although French kings tolerated the Huguenots initially, they finally and ruthlessly persecuted them in the Wars of Religion (1562–98) and the bloody Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572.

In the Netherlands, Calvin's teachings became an ideological basis for the earliest attempt in northern Europe to achieve a republican, fairly open, and pluralistic society. In 1566, when Philip II, the king of Spain, attempted to bring the notorious Spanish Inquisition into the Lowlands to root out Protestant and other heretical doctrines, Calvinism became identified with a growing nationalist sentiment that permeated Dutch people of nearly all classes and provinces against their militantly Catholic Spanish rulers. A league of some two hundred nobles tried to keep the Inquisition out of the country, but the zealous Philip arrogantly rejected their petition—a high-handed act that incited a popular revolt on the part of wage-earners and poor journeymen, not only against Spanish rule but against Catholicism as a whole. Flanders and Brabant initiated the struggle for independence in 1562, and under William the Silent, the prince of Orange, the conflict assumed widespread and chronic proportions. Northern "sea beggars" or pirates, booty hunters, and patriots raided the Spanish-held coastal towns, followed in turn by ruthless Spanish attacks on Dutch communities.

In time, the revolt opened a cleavage between the nobility of the region and the lower classes. The nobles, fearing social unrest among their underlings, were often ready to come to terms with Philip, and the struggle might have easily turned into a class war, redolent of the artisanal uprisings of the early Flemish "proletariat" centuries earlier. Instead, it became a sweeping national war that reunited virtually all social strata against the Spaniards, owing in great part to Spanish arrogance and stupidity, particularly when the Duke of Alba—the Spanish equivalent of Truchsess Georg von Waldburg—was unleashed upon the Lowlands. Alba was utterly unconcerned with class distinctions. Not only did he butcher thousands of people of the lower classes, but he freely confiscated noble estates and imposed heavy taxes on the well-to-do, whose support he might have easily gained with a lenient policy. By 1576, after William the Silent successfully drove out the Spanish garrisons, all seventeen of the Lowland provinces had united in a common league to struggle resolutely to expel the Spaniards from their territory.

Following a more conciliatory policy after the removal of Alba, the Prince of Parma, who became governor-general of the Netherlands in 1578, managed to divide the union by winning over the support of the largely Catholic southern provinces. The Spanish governor Alessandro Farnese eventually reconquered the southern provinces, which remained Spanish possessions, and the Protestants among them were gradually reconverted to Catholicism. In 1581 the seven Protestant northern provinces—Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Gelderland, Overijssel, Friesland, and Groningen—established a permanent union of their own: the United Provinces of the Netherlands, or the Dutch Republic, which declared its definitive independence from Spain. The conflict continued well beyond the lifetime of its initiators and original participants; indeed, not until 1609 was the Dutch Republic legitimated by a twelve-year truce. The conflict revived during the Thirty Years War (1618–48), upon whose conclusion the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 finally recognized the independence of the United Provinces.

The Dutch revolt has not found its proper place in the history of European revolutions. As a revolt against Spanish rule, it was one of the earliest revolutions to raise the image of the "nation" as a motive force for rebellion, a word that in the seventeenth century denoted a *people*, not merely a sovereign territorial entity. Patriotism, in turn, meant devotion to one's free "nation," rather than nationalistic chauvinism as we know it today. But the revolt had further implications as an effort to create a new kind of society. In the United Provinces the "nation" did not become a pretext for royal absolutism; quite to the contrary, it served to weaken statist elements of the kind that the great monarchies of Europe were then forging. Nor did Dutch patriotism serve to subvert local and provincial freedoms. Rather, it became the basis for a confederal republic, one that conjoined provincial customs and local autonomy with national unification. Indeed, the Dutch Estates General were composed of seven delegates from each of the seven provinces that constituted the republic, which was actually more of a confederal cantonal system than a centralized republican one.

Headed by the highly prestigious but unpretentious princes of Orange, the society of the United Provinces did not fully shed all its feudal traits, such as the authority that guild masters held over journeymen; nor did the higher social status that aristocrats enjoyed over merchants disappear. Large differences in wealth surely existed, yet moderate and humane Calvinists regarded extravagant displays of wealth and the extremes of exploitation as virtually sacrilegious. Distinctions in social strata were as much a matter of personal and family prestige as real economic power, perhaps even more so.

Still, the civilized Dutch burgher republic was unabashedly commercial. Like the figures painted by Vermeer and Rembrandt, commoners were concerned with trade, tidiness, domesticity, artisanship, and the rewards of banking. A

Dutch commercial empire began to emerge even before the 1609 truce, with the formation of the Dutch East India Company seven years earlier; and if the formerly prosperous port of Antwerp languished under Spanish rule, Amsterdam and other Dutch ports—given control over the Scheldt River by the Treaty of Westphalia—became supreme in Dutch trade, bringing the burghers immense prosperity.

Which is not to say that the Dutch revolt was a "bourgeois revolution"; indeed, quite to the contrary. The revolt was led by the noble House of Orange, and Holland's prosperity rested primarily on the ownership of land. At the same time, "bourgeois" urban centers of the Lowlands either did not participate in the struggle, hesitated to do so, or remained loyal to Spain. Amsterdam, the most "bourgeois" of the Dutch cities, initially refused to join the uprising, while Antwerp, the most important northern European banking city, retained its allegiance to the Spanish crown in the long run, owing to the fear of the popular unrest that had been aroused in the northern provinces. Nor did religious allegiances strictly follow class lines. The most prosperous areas, and in many respects the most "bourgeois" of the Spanish Netherlands, adhered to Catholicism, which remained the preferred religion of the upper classes and burgher patricians, while Calvinism appealed in great part to the lower classes.

Nor were United Provinces the only republic on the continent: the Swiss, Venetians, and Genoese enjoyed a similar political form. But the Dutch were probably the most tolerant and egalitarian of all of them, with the possible exception of certain rural Swiss cantons. Inasmuch as a third of the Dutch were still Catholic, domestic harmony required a more tolerant form of Calvinism than the kind that had existed under Calvin himself. The Dutch Reformed Church never became as intolerant of dissenters, including Catholics, as other Protestant churches, such as the English Anglicans and Presbyterians, despite the fact that the Reformed Church essentially became the Dutch state religion. A decent humanism flourished in the republic, together with a strong burgher sense of duty, responsibility, and moral probity, a signal feature of the Netherlands to this very day. The republic became a refuge for oppressed peoples of all kinds, including Portuguese and Spanish Jews, Huguenots, and sectaries, who enjoyed considerable freedom as long as they did not involve themselves too deeply in the country's internal affairs.

Finally, the Dutch revolt and the republic that followed from it profoundly affected the Puritan movement on the English side of the Channel, strengthening its militancy and giving it a strong political flavor. Queen Elizabeth's support for Dutch independence, although guided mainly by *realpolitik*, greatly consolidated British Protestantism and associated the Tudor monarchy with the Protestant interest in Europe. The moderate, stable, and tolerant Calvinism in the United Provinces, in effect, became a breeding ground for more radical Puritan tendencies that surfaced in the English Revolution. It was in Amsterdam

and the Hague that many refugee English Puritans learned republican ideas—ideas that they later brought back home. The freedoms that the Dutch enjoyed, in effect, reinforced desires to expand similar freedoms in England.

TUDOR ENGLAND

Like the Dutch, the English ruling classes benefited in varying degrees from the commercial advances of the Atlantic trade of the sixteenth century. But even more than the Dutch, the English aristocracy was notable for its social and structural weakness. Between 1455 and 1485, the Wars of the Roses had all but exterminated the island's traditional nobility. Unlike other baronial wars of the time, in which rivals fought to acquire each other's estates by holding their respective owners for ransom, the Wars of the Roses, in which the houses of York and Lancaster desperately fought each other to acquire the throne, carried the conflict nearly to the point of their mutual physical extermination. The object of conquest was thus control of the emerging nation-state itself, not of a particular landed estate. After the Yorkists temporarily succeeded in winning the throne for Edward IV in 1442, bloody internecine conflicts flared up between the victors. The conflicts continued after Edward's death in 1483, this time between the future Richard III and the nobles, especially after he murdered Edward's two young sons, only to be killed in battle in the closing period of the war.

By the time Henry Tudor came to power in 1485, uniting the houses of York and Lancaster with an interdynastic marriage, the aristocracy had been largely exterminated, leaving no powerful nobility that could seriously challenge royal authority. Indeed, great territorial lords like those of seventeenth-century France, who chased the young Louis XIV out of Paris and wrought havoc on the monarchy, were largely unknown in England after the Wars of the Roses. Just as Louis, fully schooled in the dangers of an ambitious nobility, managed with Cardinal Mazarin's help to forge one of the most centralized states in Europe, so Henry VII and his ministers tried to enlarge and concentrate all power in the monarch's hands. As the Spanish ambassador to the court of Henry VII ironically observed in 1498, the king "would like to govern England in the French fashion but he cannot."

This judgment was very astute. All of Henry's efforts notwithstanding, English society was far from stable or centralized. The English monarchy, in effect, was strikingly unlike the absolutist regimes that were emerging on the European continent; indeed, if anything, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England under the Tudors was perhaps the most socially mobile and least absolutist of any monarchical nation-state in Europe.

Henry VII, as the founder of the Tudor dynasty, depended for his support on the lower gentry and independent squires, who had essentially been bystanders in the interdynastic wars, and on the county governments that they ran, as well as the realm's free farmers or yeomen. Indeed, a new nobility had been created out of the well-to-do middle classes, whose appetite for the profits of trade far exceeded their desire for the spoils of battle. The king was also obliged to rely for support on a large variety of merchants, artisans, and socially indefinable commoners who had been disgorged by the declining feudal system. As Lawrence Stone observes,

> the Crown [became] heavily dependent upon Parliament for political and financial support. The classes represented in the House of Commons were willing enough to give the King their support in his religious and political policies, but only so long as they were left to rule over the countryside and the towns. The Crown was thus in no position to proceed to the next stage in the creation of a strong monarchy, the replacement of the local gentry by paid officials of its own.[4]

Indeed, unlike continental monarchs, English monarchs did not erect a local government made up of bureaucracies of professional salaried officials dependent upon the crown. Instead, they had to rely on the prominent families in counties and corporate towns to administer local justice, enforce laws, collect parliamentary levies, and muster the militia, among other functions. Thus, as Stone observes,

> There was a tacit agreement to divide responsibility, and the main burden of local administration had to be left in the hands of unpaid gentry and urban worthies, whose loyalty and efficiency was dependent on a careful regard being had for their interests, privileges, and prejudices. So far from being progressively weakened, local particularism grew step by step with the growth of the central government.[5]

While the monarchy failed to gain absolute control over the countryside, the House of Commons really began, in effect, to hold the nation together. Not that Parliament was particularly active during the Tudor era, but the Tudor monarchs—in particular Henry VII, Henry VIII, and Elizabeth—prudently respected its powers and carefully courted its members. Parliament, in turn, obligingly voted the taxes, when it was summoned into session, needed to support the monarchy. Moreover, the Tudors were shrewd enough to deal cautiously with the citizens of London, the largest and wealthiest of England's cities and certainly one of its most volatile.

Geography, too, favored both the English monarchy and English localism. With its island location, England was set apart from the devastating conflicts that swept over the Continent. In Tudor times, English interference in European affairs was centered primarily on deflecting the attention of the island's potential enemies to Continental affairs. The defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 secured England safety from further invasions, so that the monarchy was now accepted at home as a stabilizing force as well as a guardian of English international interests. Whether because of the country's geographic insularity or the gentry's opposition to a strong royal power or both, the Tudor monarchs built neither a standing army nor a costly and far-reaching bureaucracy. The territorial defense of the realm was undertaken by local militias or "trained bands," while the practical affairs of the realm were handled by the local gentry, whose general interests were expressed in the House of Commons.

By no means, however, were the kings and queens of England willing to accept the monarchy as a passive arbiter in domestic affairs, and their prudence notwithstanding, the most pronounced problems of the Tudor era stemmed from the throne's insidious efforts to increase its own power at the expense of the squires. Indeed, *all* the Tudor monarchs tried to be absolute rulers, albeit with limited success. Henry VII left his son, Henry VIII, a considerable financial patrimony, which he rapidly dissipated as much to strengthen his political power as for personal reasons. Although Henry's tastes were of legendary extravagance, the king, mindful of possible conflicts between nobles and his royal power, also tried to reduce what remained of the warrior nobility to a courtier stratum dependent on the monarchy. To some extent, Henry VIII anticipated Louis XIV's later policy of collecting the French aristocracy at Versailles, placing English nobles under royal supervision, and virtually divesting them of threatening ambitions. His own ambitions were clear when he declared to the Irish that his "absolute power [was] above the law"; nor did his daughter Elizabeth have less despotic aspirations during the first half of her reign.

In contrast to what happened on the Continent, the power of the English Parliament and the squirearchy for which it spoke held Henry VIII's aspirations to absolute power carefully in check, forcing all the Tudor monarchs to reach compromises between their own ambitions and the palpable limits placed on their powers by Parliament. The Crown had to conceal its ambitions with largely conciliatory measures and a royal deference to the rights of "freeborn Englishmen." Parliament, in turn, never surrendered its prerogatives to the king, and each Tudor monarch was obliged to come to terms with the Crown's dependence on the gentry and the House of Commons. "Country" and "Court," to use the language of the seventeenth century, thus lived in an uneasy, if symbiotic, relationship with each other. The "Country" formed a parallel power to the "Court," and a potentially rebellious Parliament could place very serious impediments in the way of an overbearing monarchy—hence the astuteness of the Spanish ambassador's observations on the limits of the English crown.

ENGLISH PROTESTANTISM

Whether by design or circumstance, the Protestant Reformation in England was initiated largely from the top down, by the monarchy rather than by clerical divines. By 1534 Henry VIII had broken with the Vatican and converted the English Church, Catholic in all respects, into a symbol of national unity and a supine creature of the monarchy. English bishops and prelates, entirely under royal sovereignty, replaced Catholic clerics, and religious doctrine was turned into an ideological prop for the central government. The closing of the monasteries and the expropriation of their vast wealth that followed from Henry's measures bolstered his shaky financial position for a time and greatly expanded his authority over many aspects of English life that had hitherto been claimed by Catholic ecclesiastics.

Yet Henry himself was not fully committed to Reformation ideas; nor did he abandon Catholic rituals. The king replaced the pope with himself as head of the new Anglican Church, ended celibacy, abolished monasteries, and expropriated the Church's vast material resources. But English Protestants who publicly challenged Catholic doctrines such as the Trinity and transubstantiation were put to death with the same impartiality as Catholics who asserted the authority of the papacy over the monarchy. Henry's failure to complete the Reformation was itself a potential source of conflict between the monarchy and Parliament, for as long as the Anglican Church was basically a Catholic church tailored to English royal needs, Henry could never gain the full allegiance of his truly Protestant subjects, who were growing rapidly in number. Nor could they, in turn, seriously challenge his rule by abetting the return of Catholicism. Thus, as in the political realm, an uneasy balance of forces prevented either outright Reformation or outright rebellion in the religious realm.

Yet even in its tepid Anglican form, English Protestantism fostered a belief in individuality and its "inner light" over ecclesiastical institutions. Englishmen who were influenced by Calvinism saw themselves less as mere subjects of the Crown and more as members of a godly elite—an "elect" of "visible saints" in an ungodly world. Nor did Anglicanism reduce the individual to a mere member of a corporate estate, as Catholicism did to commoners in France and Spain. Indeed, in counterposition to the despotic proclivities of the monarchy, English commoners became increasingly self-conscious individuals, strident in expressing their views and confident of their own personal judgments. Subdued guilds gave way to raucous merchant adventurers, and placid peasants to an unruly

"mobility" that was quick-tempered and ready to interfere in political and religious issues. The House of Commons, despite its medieval origins in a corporate society, was reinforced by an independent gentry, merchant class, and artisanry and began to regard itself as the authentic voice of the "people"—an ambiguous word at the time—rather than a lowly estate in a feudal hierarchy.

After Henry VIII's death in 1547, a Council of Regency supervised English affairs on behalf of Henry's young son, Edward VI. With Henry gone, the Council further loosened English society by increasingly supplanting Henry's Anglican reformation with a more militant Protestantism—one that continued to plunder the remaining wealth of the Church and widen its distance from Catholicism. Whether this new dispensation was the product of greed or ideology is irrelevant; indeed, both motives were probably involved. But Edward did not live into manhood, and when his half-sister Mary ascended to the throne, religious policy shifted to a flagrantly pro-Catholic extreme. The new queen married Philip of Spain, the monarch of a land that many English people viewed as their country's most dangerous rival. Quite reasonably, they saw the zealous Spanish king as the standard-bearer of a Catholic orthodoxy bent on an inquisitorial counterreformation: under Mary's rule, the Mass, which Edward's regents had discarded, was restored; relations with the Vatican were reestablished; and a furious attack, including numerous executions, was visited upon dissenting Protestants whose views were more radical than Henry's reformation. "Bloody" Mary's attempts to restore Catholicism, followed by a disastrous and costly war with France, completely alienated the English people, and when she died in 1558 England's fortunes and morale had reached their lowest ebb. Fragmented by religious conflicts and burdened by an immense debt, the country was on the edge of civil war.

Anglicans regarded the ascent of the new Protestant queen, Elizabeth, the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, as a God-given deliverance—and she largely lived up to their expectations. Although no less imperious than her father, she made earnest attempts to compromise with all the opposing factions and interests that could have undermined the country. Relations with the Vatican were severed completely, and Catholic priests were peremptorily expelled from the country, which did not prevent her from driving radical Protestants or Puritans underground, especially their millenarian conventicles. Basically oriented toward social reforms, Elizabeth and her able advisers stabilized the currency, improved working conditions for the lower classes, and softened long-standing antagonisms between hostile social strata in the realm. The defeat of the Spanish Armada ensured English naval and commercial supremacy, while her rule gave every encouragement to trade, manufactures, and agricultural improvements. The state took over the care of the poor, many of whom were victims of the land enclosures that had been going on for more than a century. Elizabeth came to terms with the gentry to which earlier Tudor

kings had to accommodate themselves, and her shrewd policy of compromise with Parliament, the nobility, the gentry, and the merchant class established a period of internal peace. Needless to emphasize, her reign was a time of exceptional literary and cultural achievement: the "Elizabethan Age," particularly famed for its drama and poetry.

SOCIAL CONDITIONS

The harmony created by Elizabeth's compromises, however, was in some respects illusory. Commercial life was growing at a disorienting pace. More than any country in Europe, England was undergoing a rapid transition from a feudal to a commercial society. In addition to its growing maritime commerce, the country was by far the world's greatest coal producer, and to feed a rapidly growing population (which doubled between 1500 and 1660), agricultural output increased enormously through the draining of marshy areas and deforestation.

The improvements that were being made in agriculture, particularly the shift from food cultivation to sheep runs, were to affect profoundly the future of English society. The common lands that the peasantry had traditionally shared for centuries were ruthlessly enclosed in order to create sheep pasture for the growing wool trade. Aside from the large pool of labor produced by the enclosures, the entire landscape of rural life began to change along lines that stood very much at odds with the country's feudal past. Beginning in the fourteenth century, the English had exported raw wool to the Lowlands across the North Sea, where it was refined and woven into the finest cloth in northern Europe. By the mid–sixteenth century, when Flemish Protestant weavers sought refuge on the island from religious wars, England had grown to ascendancy in the European cloth trade, rivalled only by the Dutch in the production of cloth. By fostering the enclosure of common lands and eliminating many tenant farms, textile production created a nationwide economy rather than one structured around small, isolated regions. As Lawrence Stone has observed, trade in cloth

> was a powerful unifying force in society since its prosperity affected the landed classes, who owned the sheep which produced the wool, the poor labourers and their wives and children who spun it, the artisans who wove it, the clothiers who handled it, and the merchants who exported it.[6]

Isolated regions of England were thus brought into a wide-ranging skein of economic interactions that often served to make it a nation as much as did its religious and political institutions.

It is easy to exaggerate the burgeoning English commercialism. Seventeenth-century England was neither an industrial society nor a capitalist one in the sense that we speak of capitalism today. "England in the seventeenth century remained what it and the rest of Europe had always been," observes Stone,

> an undeveloped society. On the other hand there can be no doubt that it was permeated with small-scale industry and commerce, more market-oriented, and richer than it had ever been before, and more so than any other contemporary society, with the probable exception of the United Provinces.[7]

Stone's judgment here is sound. The country was still precapitalist, neither fully agrarian nor fully bourgeois; indeed, its Industrial Revolution still lay far ahead, despite the fact that sheep-farming was making agricultural capitalism a relatively widespread phenomenon, unequaled anywhere in the world. But as late as 1688, only a half million out of the five million English people were engaged in trade and craft production, and of these, about half were involved in commercial transactions.

In general, a quasi-feudal sense of obligation to underlings was still more common than the predatory bourgeois mentality that was to be ushered in a century and a half later. During the sixteenth century, to be sure, capitalism was taking a considerable toll on English laborers, and new technologies, while not very revolutionary, were creating serious unemployment. But the monarchy still felt a tradition-hallowed sense of obligation to the lower classes. Typically, as late as the reign of Charles I, the king prohibited the use of a new sawmill that threatened to reduce the jobs of woodworkers, and placed restraints on land enclosures. He even limited rising prices as well as wages to soften the economic dislocations that created hardships for the poor. To what extent such actions were the result of genuine concern for the lower classes or attempts to curry favor with them at the expense of the commercial classes is hard to judge. Later, of course, when capitalism was fully established in England, the neglect that the poor and the proletariat suffered was to be appalling. But the congested, polluted, and disease-ridden England of the Industrial Revolution was not to emerge for some two centuries.

At the time of Elizabeth's death in 1603, the total population of the country, including Wales, numbered only four and a half million. Apart from London, very few towns exceeded ten thousand inhabitants and most had two thousand or fewer; in fact, England's second-largest city, Bristol, a lively commercial center, numbered only 48,000 people. The larger towns of England were small merchant and artisan centers, few of whose workers were members of guilds any longer. Indeed, the guild system had almost completely died out in most of the country apart from London, and artisanal production, at least, was largely unencumbered by guild restrictions.

But certain feudal traditions still existed in the countryside. Well over four million people were still working in agriculture or agriculture-related tasks, and the majority lived in villages as copyholders, whose families held lifetime feudal claims to their parcels of land. Still, new economic developments were subverting traditional agrarian lifeways. More and more cottagers became involved in the production of cloth, generally for "factors," as their employers or contractors were called, who supplied them with wool and rented them hand-operated machines. Still others were servile tenants who could easily be dispossessed from the land to make way for sheep runs, while a minority of the rural population were independent yeomen, who proudly owned their own farms.

Serfdom had long disappeared from the realm, unlike on the Continent, where it was still dying out in Western Europe and was retained or firmly restored in the east. Still, as late as the end of the seventeenth century, by far the majority of England's growing five and a half million people lived in villages and hamlets, followed by less than a million in large and small towns, and approximately a half million in London. Numerous paupers lingered in English towns and villages, subsisting on pitifully small food allotments or drifting aimlessly from the countryside to London, where they increased the capital's unruly multitudes.

Normally obedient when the nobles and gentry dealt with them paternalistically, husbandmen could become almost insurrectionary when their overlords threatened to dispossess them of their smallholdings. Adding fuel to their volatility in times of uncertainty, growing sectarian religious differences increasingly fragmented England; indeed, the most materially dependent tenant might break away from the most caring landlord if the tenant was a radical Puritan and the landlord a conservative Presbyterian. With the onset of the revolutionary period, which can be dated back to the death of Elizabeth in 1603, these varied differences sharpened into social turmoil and, in the early 1640s, exploded into open revolution.

Surprisingly, even the aristocracy, the ruling elite of England, was still small in the 1630s. It consisted of only 122 peers and 26 bishops, to which can be added some 300 eldest sons of peers and newly created baronets. The nobility had suffered losses in prestige and wealth over the years and no longer enjoyed their high status as energetic warriors of medieval times. Their status in the social hierarchy was further eroded when the financially burdened Stuart monarchs who succeeded Elizabeth, the last of the Tudors, sold titles (especially the newly created status of baronet) to raise cash for the spendthrift throne. Unlike the lesser gentry, the titled nobility gravitated toward the lively court life in London and became absentee landlords, retaining little or no contact with their rural clients.

The real structural base of England rested on the local gentry, who may have numbered 1,800 knights and 9,000 squires at the most, while a lesser gentry of 14,000 gentlemen, that is to say, landed property owners (who enjoyed a status somewhat higher than yeomen), as well as well-to-do merchants, professionals,

academics, and officers of the crown. Taken as a whole, it was these men who held England together, filling the county offices of the realm as sheriffs, justices of the peace, and commanders of the militia. From among the poorer gentry—men who barely qualified as "gentlemen"—the county recruited its constables, overseers of the poor, churchwardens, and parish clerics. Thus, the aristocratic elite, including its "gentlemen," and the country gentry accounted for one out of every twenty-five people. Moreover, together with freeholders who could claim to earn twenty-five shillings a year—not a trivial sum in those days—the elite and the gentry constituted the principal qualified voters in parliamentary elections, leaving a large part of the population disenfranchised.

The men who actually held seats in the House of Commons were the merchants, gentry, academics, and lawyers of the country. The House spoke for the materially well-to-do and prestigious part of the population, clearly not for the majority of the people. Given the property restrictions of the time, perhaps one in ten Englishmen was qualified to vote, and of these voters, a much smaller number were likely to run for the House of Commons. Of the House's five hundred members, about three-quarters were from the gentry and only a quarter from the merchant and professional strata.

Like all leaders in later revolutions, when the Commons finally confronted the king in armed conflict Parliament spoke in the name of the "people" to legitimate its claims. But who were the "people" in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England? The mixed economy and society made a clear answer to this question difficult to formulate, and as new economic developments created new disparities of wealth, these ongoing changes would lead to major divisions within the "Country" forces themselves—and ultimately to movements toward a third revolution. But before these movements arose, the "people"—in the sense of the majority of the House of Commons—had waged an earnest campaign to restrain new monarchical claims to absolute authority over that aborning entity, the nation-state.

NOTES

1. John Calvin, "Instruction in Faith" (1537), trans. Paul T. Fuhrmann, in *Great Voices of the Reformation: An Anthology*, ed. Harry Emerson Fosdick (New York: Modern Library, 1952), p. 237.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, p. 238.
4. Lawrence Stone, *The Causes of the English Revolution: 1529–1642* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 63–4.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 68–9.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

CHAPTER 4 "Country" versus "Court"

The seventeenth century was an era of nation-state building *par excellence*, marked by efforts by emerging absolutist monarchs to centralize power. In France, Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin, the principal ministers of Louis XIII and XIV respectively, seemed to lead the development along strictly monarchical lines, excluding the nobles and their particularistic claims to sovereignty over their regions. In England, the effort to centralize monarchical power intensified with the Stuart successors of Elizabeth. At her death in 1603, Elizabeth left no direct heir. Since the Tudor line had branched off earlier into Scottish royalty, including the Stuarts, a Stuart dynasty now replaced the Tudors, and the English throne fell to James VI of Scotland. Upon his ascension as James I of England, Scotland and England were now united by a shared monarchy.

But this shared monarchy did not produce a truly unified realm. Indeed, in many respects, England and Scotland were utterly different from each other. For one thing, they differed in religion: If England's reformation had been a top-down and incomplete affair, Scotland's had been more deeply rooted in the urban populace—and more extreme in its convictions. John Knox, a Scottish prelate who had repudiated Catholicism and had personally known John Calvin as a mentor in Geneva in the early 1550s, steadily won many Scots over to a militant political version of Calvinism in subsequent decades. Organizationally, Knox's Calvinism replaced the Anglican system of bishops with committees of elders or presbyters—hence its name, Presbyterianism—and in the minds of Presbyterians, these committees and their ministers resembled the early Christian Church as it had existed before the Bishop of Rome, the pope, gained supremacy over the ecclesiastical monarchy created by Catholicism. As could be expected in an era when politics was normally cast in religious terms, Presbyterianism's antihierarchical ecclesiastical sentiments posed a challenge to secular absolutism itself. Knox did not mince words in declaring that it was the duty of the righteous to overthrow "ungodly" monarchs, and, armed by this faith, he stridently entered directly into affairs of state.

Moreover, Presbyterianism ultimately came to be identified with Scottish nationalism. When Mary of Guise, a devout Catholic and a Francophile, ascended the Scottish throne as regent in 1554, she was accompanied by sizable French military contingents that clearly seemed to threaten Scottish independence, evoking widespread opposition to her rule in much of Scotland that led to an open conflict between an anti-French and anti-Catholic party on one side and a pro-French and pro-Catholic party on the other. After Mary of Guise tried to move against the Protestants in England, the troubled anti-Catholic party summoned Knox back from Geneva to be their leader, and the Scottish Estates, under his firm guidance, voted to abolish the authority of the pope and ban Catholic practices in Scotland.

Upon Mary's death in 1560, her equally devout Catholic daughter Mary, known as Mary Queen of Scots, was obliged, after a series of scandals, which Protestants eagerly exploited, to abdicate and flee Scotland in 1567 and seek protection from her English cousin, Elizabeth. Presbyterianism became the state religion of Scotland, and the Scottish Kirk (as the Presbyterian Church in Scotland was called) exercised even greater influence over the country, for a time, than the Estates and the monarchy—both of which normally spoke in the interests of the country's privileged strata. The Kirk thus became the most powerful institution in Scotland.

STUART CENTRALIZATION

This turbulent history greatly influenced the political outlook of James, the son of Mary Queen of Scots. On his ascendancy to the English throne, his half-Scottish and half-French parentage aroused considerable unease among his new subjects, who dreaded another attempt to force a return to Catholicism. In the socially mobile and relatively pluralistic society of England, moderate Puritans had quietly co-existed with the official Anglican Church. Despite James's Protestant avowals, his French background cast doubts in the minds of many English about his commitment to Protestantism. And, in fact, James had actually hated the Protestant Scottish Kirk, which, together with the Scottish Estates, he regarded as forces that countervailed his own royal authority. Nor were popular doubts about his commitment to the Protestant faith diluted by his vacillatory treatment of Catholics, whom he alternately tolerated and restricted, until in 1605 a Catholic attempt to blow up Parliament, and himself with it, led him to take a firmer anti-Catholic stand domestically. But whatever support his anti-Catholic measures reaped him from his English subjects was more than outweighed by his numerous flirtations with Catholic Spain, England's bitter, indeed hereditary, enemy at the time.

In contrast to Elizabeth's tolerance, James's harsh treatment of the democratically oriented Puritans served to further cast serious suspicions on his religious policies. More egalitarian than the Presbyterians in Church matters, the Puritan movement found growing support among the literate and the parliamentary strata of the country. Persecution by Tudor and Stuart monarchs alike had driven the growing radical Puritan tendency underground, where it took the form of small, hidden congregations whose members were imbued with a zealous, millenarian commitment to the power of individual faith. The "saints," as Calvin's elect were called—those who, according to Calvin's doctrines, were predestined to be saved—placed their allegiance to God, their individual conscience, and especially the Bible, above the claims of any secular authority; indeed, it seemed self-evident that the Bible had clearly laid out the framework for the kind of society in which God willed people to live—which was far removed from the social structure that prevailed in England. In 1604, after affording the moderate Puritans an opportunity to preach their doctrines before the throne at Hampton Court, James came out flatly against them. "No bishops, no king" became a guiding maxim of Stuart absolutism, and the persecution of their conventicles was reinforced.

That James's temperament was authoritarian did not substantially distinguish him from his more popular Tudor predecessors; but his rule stood in marked contrast to that of Elizabeth, who knew her people and their traditions better than a monarch who had been raised in Scotland. England was a culturally unknown territory to James, and its localist traditions were totally at odds with his clumsy penchant for absolutism. The Scottish-born king had no understanding of the gentry's prerogatives as administrators of their counties and shires, or the extent to which most government in England was local.

Not only was England unknown territory to James culturally, it was extravagantly rich by comparison with the sparse resources of Scotland. Despite standard accounts of the Reformation as a "bourgeois" phenomenon, Calvinist Scotland, in fact, was not economically advanced, and it certainly lacked a burgeoning commercial class. Quite to the contrary: it was undeveloped even by seventeenth-century standards, burdened by archaic clans and their chieftains, and a quasi-feudal social order whose institutions seemed to give the king a larger measure of power than in England. Far more than in Scotland, James felt completely orphaned in his new, more secular and prosperous realm, which seemed increasingly to resent his pretensions.

And these pretensions were socially very unsettling. A devout believer in the divine right of kings, James seemed to view England as his own personal patrimony, asserting a doctrine of the divine right of kings to the Parliament and the country's growing middle classes. England, in effect, was an estate he felt he could milk without restraint. Nor did James understand Parliament's right to levy taxes and approve all money bills. In a period of rising prices, the modest

annual revenue of £400,000 that had satisfied Elizabeth seemed not only inadequate but unseemly to a king who looked with envy to the high-living French court and the vastly wealthy Spanish monarchy for his models of royal authority. Adopting a policy that was to widen significantly the chasm between "Court" and "Country," James began to seek funds that would make him and his successors financially, even militarily, independent of parliamentary controls, with results that were to have dire political consequences.

After failing to gain sufficient funds from the sale of monopolies, titles, and the like, James was finally obliged to summon his first Parliament to increase taxes. Faced with a king committed to absolutism, the House of Commons expressly obstructed the king's requests; at most, he was voted only a portion of the money he asked for, and no less humiliating, the House of Commons proceeded freely, and critically, to debate his foreign and domestic policies, thereby trespassing upon what James believed was his exclusive royal executive prerogative to deal with affairs of state. "As to dispute what God may do is blasphemy," he sternly declared, ". . . so it is sedition in subjects to dispute what a king may do in the height of his power. . . . I will not be content that my power be disputed upon." To this provocative avowal, Parliament, with equal aplomb, replied that it had the right "to debate freely all matters which properly concern the subject and his right or state."[1]

Outraged, James peremptorily dissolved Parliament in 1611; nor did he summon it into session again for a decade. During this interregnum, the king functioned increasingly as a despot, reinforcing the popular suspicions that he was an absolutist in secular affairs and pro-Catholic in religion. He imposed forced loans on his well-to-do subjects and levied new customs duties on the mercantile interests; he sold off titles, creating the rank of baronet in 1611 for no purpose but to be placed on the market for purchase. Monopolies over key commodities were sold that comprised a sizable part of English goods and maritime commerce, with the result that the two Parliaments James was finally obliged to call—one in 1621, the other in 1624—were again adamantly unwilling to vote the Crown more than a part of the taxes he demanded. The Parliament of 1621, in fact, rubbed James's nose in the dust by impeaching his own lord chancellor, Sir Francis Bacon, for financial irregularities, thereby flinging down a challenge to the monarchy's "divine" claim to control and administer all policy in the realm.

Engendering popular unrest still further, James produced widespread consternation among his subjects by visibly allowing the Spanish ambassador to influence his views and by trying to negotiate a marriage agreement between his son Charles and a Spanish princess. The uneasy English people had not forgotten the Armada, nor were they ignorant of the horrors which the Spanish Inquisition had visited upon persecuted Protestants on the Continent. Despite James's rather belated shift to an anti-Spanish policy that was more in line with

what Parliament favored, the Commons spitefully granted him less than half the taxes he demanded—even for a war against Spain. The shabby failure of an English naval expedition against Cádiz in October 1625, led by the king's favorite, George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham, followed by a costly conflict with the French presumably to help the besieged Huguenots of La Rochelle, served to arouse rather than allay the anger of the entire country. Fears that England would slip into Continental-style absolutism, that it would tolerate Catholics, that its finances would be depleted by extravagances, and that Spain would gain hegemony over its commerce all fed a growing, potentially explosive antagonism between "Country" and "Court."

It was probably only by his timely death in March 1625 that James escaped the outbreak of a revolution. This was not to be the fortune of his son Charles, who not only shared his father's idea of absolute royal prerogative but became even more embroiled with Parliament than his father. Because he had married a French Catholic princess, Charles's succession to the throne produced widespread popular misgivings, and his first Parliament, which convened in June 1625, viewed with deep suspicion his requests for money for governmental expenses and the war with Spain. Despite Charles's pledges to uphold the Protestant cause at home and abroad, the funds Parliament voted were wholly inadequate for his purposes. In a decision that he saw as even more degrading and unprecedented, Parliament limited the term for which the king could levy customs duties (called tonnage and poundage) to a single year—a right that previous Parliaments had routinely given to every new monarch for the entire term of his or her reign. The House of Lords, in fact, simply let the allocation of this levy lapse, leaving Charles hanging in the air financially. King and Parliament sharply collided when Charles simply began to levy customs duties without any parliamentary consent whatever. When Parliament reconvened at Oxford in August, "Country" and "Court" were entering into a collision course over claims by both parties to manage foreign and religious policy, which led the king to prorogue the House abruptly on August 12, 1625.

Less than a year after this grim beginning, and in the wake of serious foreign policy blunders as well as growing quarrels over religious policy, Charles was finally forced by lack of funds to convene his second Parliament, which met in early February 1626 at Westminster. The king blatantly attempted to exclude the House of Commons' principal spokesmen, such as Edward Coke and Robert Phelips—efforts that served only to infuriate rather than deter the Commons. Parliament's leaders, Sir John Eliot and Sir Dudley Digges, entered into an open collision with the Court, mobilizing a powerful opposition to the hated Duke of Buckingham and formally impeaching him at the bar of the House of Lords on May 8. Charles responded by imprisoning Eliot and Digges, both of whom however were soon released, whereupon the king dissolved the second Parliament on June 15, leaving a dark cloud hanging over the country.

Charles now took those major steps toward personal rule and arbitrary action that would be his complete undoing. He systematically levied forced loans on the country, billeted soldiers in private homes, and collected tonnage and poundage in the flagrant absence of parliamentary sanction. The Crown's patrimony was sold off by disposing of royal lands, forests, and other properties; monopolies and titles were placed on the royal auction block, enriching the few and enhancing their status; and the mercantile interests of the country were subjected to continual interference in a period of rising prices and commercial competition with the Dutch.

By the time Charles was obliged to convene his third Parliament in March 1628, "Country" and "Court" were completely at loggerheads. With extraordinary effrontery, the king demanded that a staggering million and a quarter pounds be added to his ordinary requirements, as well as to prosecute wars with Spain and France, which the House of Commons (by now immensely overshadowing the House of Lords in both wealth and popularity) denied him. To the parliamentarians, not only were Charles's wars abject failures and not only had he abused fiscal rights that properly belonged to them, but he was increasingly using the Star Chamber—a body established by Henry VII, composed of the king's counselors and judges—to control unruly nobles; to secretly and arbitrarily jail his opponents. This last abuse seemed particularly odious to "free Englishmen," who viewed every arbitrary act as an egregious violation of the country's basic liberties.

Nor did Charles's approach to religious issues do anything but increase the antipathy toward him. Under William Laud, who was made the archbishop of Canterbury in 1633, the Anglican Church became a servile ideological prop in support of absolutism. Anglican practices and beliefs veered ever closer to the rituals, structures, and creeds of Roman Catholicism, which were notably useful in enforcing royal authority. Laud, drawing upon the Arminian doctrines, tried to move the High Church in a Catholic direction, indeed, to distance the Church from Puritanism, whose popularity had become widespread among the middling and lower classes. Even the milder Presbyterianism that was filtering from Scotland into England stood sharply at odds with this new pro-Catholic trend, making Archbishop Laud one of the most detested figures in England.

No longer did any doubt exist that Laud's efforts were intended to strengthen the Crown's powers by supporting the divine right of kings and enlarging the king's authority in the Anglican Church. High churchmen even preached that it was a sin to question the king's authority. Anglicanism, in effect, was becoming strictly a Court religion, in which king and bishops significantly upheld each other's claims to divine right. Although the wealthy, the titled nobility, the courtier stratum, and their dependents supported Laud and his High Church episcopacy, the great mass of squires, craftsmen, merchants, and yeomen began to rally in growing numbers around his opponents in the Commons and among

the more committed, indeed critical, Protestant preachers, who abounded through the land.

Led by Sir John Eliot, a monarchist who nevertheless felt that Charles was impinging on traditional English rights, and by the great legal expert of the day, Sir Edward Coke, Parliament presented the king with a comprehensive Petition of Right on June 7, 1628, demanding that he respond to it favorably. The document bluntly declared

> that no man hereafter be compelled to make or yield any gift, loan, benevolence, tax, or such-like charge, without common consent by act of Parliament; and that none be called to make answer, or to take such oath, or to give attendance, or to be confined, or otherwise molested or disquieted concerning the same, or for refusal thereof; and that no freeman, in any such manner as is before mentioned, be imprisoned or detained; and that your Majesty will be pleased to remove the said soldiers and mariners, and that your people may not be so burdened in time to come; and that the foresaid commissions for proceeding by martial law be revoked and annulled; and that hereafter no commissions of like nature may issue forth to any person or persons whatsoever to be executed as aforesaid, lest by colour of them any of your Majesty's subjects be destroyed or put to death, contrary to the laws and franchises of the land.[2]

The Petition did not deny the king his established domestic and foreign prerogatives; nor did it challenge his status as the executive head of the realm or his traditional relationship with Parliament. But it was far-reaching in its demands to make England into a constitutional monarchy. Accordingly, the Petition made *all* levies—apart from the sale of royal properties—illegal without parliamentary consent, including the means for developing a centralized bureaucracy and a standing army that the king could have used against his domestic opponents. It made illegal the arbitrary use of power, such as that exercised by the Star Chamber, and it denied the right of the High Church hierarchy to use commissions or courts to persecute the Puritans and sectaries who were springing up like mushrooms after a rainfall throughout the realm. The document, in effect, amounted to a Bill of Rights, completely rejecting the absolutism that so many kings abroad were attempting to achieve.

Charles still held as fervently as ever to his father's view in 1610 that

> monarchy is the supremest thing upon earth; for kings are not only God's lieutenants upon earth and sit upon God's throne, but even by God himself they are called gods. . . . I will not be content that my power be disputed upon.[3]

But he ultimately assented to the Petition, mainly as the result of a parliamentary bribe: the Commons promised him £350,000 in subsidies that he

desperately needed, should he sign the document. No sooner had Charles accepted the Petition, however, than he proceeded to violate it by collecting customs duties unilaterally. When the Commons demanded that the impeached Buckingham be removed from his position as a royal adviser, Charles angrily prorogued Parliament. When the next Parliament convened in January 1629, it again restricted to a year the king's right to tonnage and poundage, which Charles arrogantly rejected as a restriction of his divine authority.

In fact, the last session of the Commons ended in tumult. To prevent the speaker (an appointee of the king) from closing down the House, its members forcibly held him in his chair and rushed through several resolutions that designated anyone who attempted to introduce "popery" or levy a tax unauthorized by Parliament as an enemy of England, subject to capital charges. The House was then dissolved, but its members were prepared to bring the fight directly to the people. So acrimonious were the sentiments that pitted the Commons against the Crown that armed conflict between "Court" and "Country" seemed unavoidable.

CHARLES'S PERSONAL RULE

This grim prospect did not temper Charles's behavior or his absolutist policies. Quite to the contrary: the king simply did not summon another Parliament for eleven years. During this period, he turned to direct, personal, and arbitrary rule by continuing to collect tonnage and poundage in flat defiance of the Petition and Parliament's last legislation; raising tax rates without sanction; reviving and increasing feudal dues; selling trade monopolies indiscriminately; and marketing titles like so many commodities. The king flatly challenged the parallel system of local government that Elizabeth had more or less respected by appointing royal sheriffs to collect taxes in the counties, thereby undermining the authority of the local gentry itself. Archbishop Laud tried to prevent the traditional mustering of local militias in village churchyards, calling it a sacrilege, while Charles attempted to recruit and maintain a centralized standing army—or what he gallingly called a "perfect militia." Requirements that the people quarter soldiers generated intense local resentment and a feeling that those in charge of the new army intended to undermine established English liberties. Finally, the king angered the City of London by delaying the repayment of loans, with the result that the monarchy began to lose its credit with the capital's banking houses.

Acting largely under the king's pressure, courts behaved more and more arbitrarily in their proceedings and decisions, engendering fears among all who were outside the king's circle of personal confidants that they were threatened by

the loss of their liberties. In a series of highly sensational cases, critics of the king were punished with such ferocity that it aroused a nationwide furor. John Eliot was thrown into the Tower for his opposition to the king during the last Parliament and adamantly refused to make the apologies to Charles that would have easily resulted in his release. He died in prison after being deliberately mistreated by jailers. Like the lesser courts and commissions, the Star Chamber was active in imprisoning, torturing, and humiliating pamphleteers who challenged the king's excesses. Religious dissenters, known critics of Charles, and those who refused to pay what they regarded as illegal taxes and levies were singled out for harsh royal retribution. Some twenty thousand Puritans are believed to have fled the country during this period to escape persecution, most of them resettling in New England.

Perhaps the most detested evidence of monarchical arrogance was the issue of ship money, which came to a head in the mid-1630s. English kings had traditionally imposed this levy exclusively on coastal communities for the construction of ships to protect them from pirates and hostile invaders. Charles, by extending the payment of ship money to the inland counties as well, broke with a time-honored precedent. Had the king succeeded in collecting this tax without parliamentary consent, he would have emerged victorious in a basic constitutional issue and could have dispensed with the limits Parliament placed on his increasingly arbitrary powers. But it did not go uncontested. The legality of the levy was put to the test when a well-to-do Puritan from Buckinghamshire, John Hampden, openly refused to pay it. At his celebrated trial of 1637–38, Hampden's attorneys argued that the levy had been imposed without parliamentary consent and thereby violated the Petition of Right. Under strong pressure from the king, however, the judges denied the validity of Hampden's claim by seven to five, and the chief justice went so far as to void any parliamentary act that claimed to bind the king's behavior to the wishes of his subjects, specifically Parliament.

Public resentment against this verdict, and against the king, boiled over. For Englishmen, the decision called into question not only Charles's motives but the very legitimacy of the monarchy, the courts, indeed, even of the state itself. One writer viewed the verdict as "an utter oppression of the subjects' liberty. . . . What shall freemen differ from the ancient bondsmen and villeins of England if their estates be subject to arbitrary taxes?"[4] Large sectors of the propertied classes were now mobilized against the king, including the City of London, which took the radical step of completely denying credit to the Crown.

To the majority of parliamentarians like Eliot, the king was introducing measures in flat contravention not only of Parliament but of English common law and tradition. Generally, the parliamentarians viewed themselves as guardians of custom and "ancient Saxon liberties"—the pre-Norman heritage of English freedom (even though much of seventeenth-century English common law had

actually been introduced by the Normans). But the image of "Norman" legal importations suited the popular sentiment that oppressive laws had been inflicted on them by invaders, who transgressed ancient "Saxon" liberties and defiled the traditional "rights of Englishmen." The challenge to the king, in effect, was cast in terms of restoring liberties that had been violated by an alien monarchy, indeed one that lacked any knowledge of its subjects' traditional freedoms.

The Puritans, for their part, viewed themselves as the upholders of biblical precept, of older Christian practices that the "popish" religion had adulterated. The word *Puritan* was used ecumenically to refer to anyone who wished to "purify" the Church in the name of an "authentic" form of Christianity that was free of clerical hierarchies, morally committed to a way of life consistent with biblical precept, and guided not only by faith and an inner light but by a political dispensation consistent with Christian virtue. English Protestantism had advanced well beyond Luther's subjective emphasis and had moved directly into spheres of overt social action. Before the outbreak of the Civil War, these concepts were sufficiently vague, to be sure, to be accepted by the gentry, yeomanry, middling merchants, artisans, and even many nobles. Initially, in fact, a Puritan could be a Presbyterian, who preferred the presbyter structure in religious organization, or a Congregationalist, who strongly advocated grassroots control of ministers by congregations. But all of these strains were strongly committed to social reform, and the more authoritarian and democratic tendencies were to enter into sharp conflict with each other as well as with the king.

THE LONG PARLIAMENT

After eleven years of personal rule, Charles was finally obliged to convene Parliament. The immediate cause of his action seemed like a side issue: his attempt to place the Scottish Kirk under Anglican control. Charles's rule in Scotland had been only nominal: the local Scottish nobility was very strong, and the Kirk was still the most powerful institution in the land. The king's fatuous attempt to force the Anglican Book of Prayer on the Kirk and its militant Presbyterian following misfired, provoking a storm of opposition throughout the land to the north. In 1638 large numbers of Scots adopted a National Covenant to resist the king's efforts, pledging to disregard all Charles's changes until they were approved by free assemblies and parliaments.

With the foolhardiness that characterized so much of his reign, Charles thereupon proceeded to invade Scotland with English troops that were, if anything, more sympathetic to the Scots than to himself, and with domestic support that was as secure as that of the hostile and short-lived Parliament he had summoned to fund the invasion. This Short Parliament, as it came to be known, refused to give the king financial aid and was abruptly dissolved after three weeks. The Scots, in turn, responded to Charles's aborted invasion by occupying the northern English counties of Northumberland and Durham and demanding a large financial indemnity before they would leave. At length, in 1640, Charles was obliged to call the famous Long Parliament into session—a Parliament that would preside over a decade of civil war and his own execution nine years later.

The Commons, most of whose members were now fervently united in their aversion to the king's personal rule, economic misadventures, and religious absolutism, asserted its own authority by rapidly enacting a series of radical measures that essentially reduced the king to a constitutional monarch. Henceforth, the House declared, Parliament was to be summoned into session every three years, regardless of the will of the king, who would be deprived of any right to dissolve it without its own consent. Ship money, tonnage and poundage—indeed, *all* levies and taxes imposed without parliamentary consent—were declared illegal, thereby reducing the Crown to complete financial dependence on the Commons. The Star Chamber and ecclesiastical courts were abolished, and those who had been imprisoned by these bodies were freed.

Parliament's darkest suspicions of the king and his ministers—particularly of Archbishop Laud and the royal adviser, the Earl of Strafford—were aroused when Strafford tried to form an army in Ireland, presumably to aid the king against the Scots. Many parliamentarians viewed this measure as an attempt by the king and Strafford to raise an army against the Commons. Their fears were hardly allayed by rumors that the king had gone to Scotland to win military support for disbanding the House. The Long Parliament responded to this challenge by impeaching both Laud and Strafford, despite anguished efforts by Charles to save their lives. Strafford was executed in 1641 and Laud in 1645 by order of Parliament—acts that Charles properly viewed as overt challenges to his authority.

An Irish rebellion in 1641 finally caused the conflict between king and Parliament to reach explosive proportions. Parliament, flatly refusing to equip the king with an army, took direct command of England's military forces, notably the local "trained bands" or militias. On behalf of the House, John Pym prepared a Grand Remonstrance to justify parliamentary mistrust of the king and his intentions, chronicling Charles's ill-doings throughout his reign and essentially demanding parliamentary approval of all his ministers, Church reforms, and military actions. The king, of course, flatly rejected the document, whereupon Parliament issued nineteen demands that were plainly revolutionary in character. These demands included not only religious reforms so sweeping that they would have extirpated Catholicism from England, but also gave the Commons the right to appoint all royal ministers and judges, indeed even to

undertake the education of the king's children.

On August 22, 1642, the king raised his standard at Nottingham, declaring open war upon Parliament, while Parliament did the same at London. Two opposing armies, the Cavaliers, as the royalists were to be called, and the Roundheads, as the parliamentary and Puritan troops were disdainfully called because of their short-cropped hair, now faced each other, plunging England into the first of the modern revolutions.

THE ALIGNMENT OF FORCES

It is commonly claimed in hindsight that the English Revolution was caused by a basically bourgeois mentality, bourgeois institutions, and bourgeois lifeways, making it, in effect, a "bourgeois revolution." More precisely, the Revolution must have been "bourgeois," it is argued, since the bourgeoisie—landed as well as commercial and industrial—ultimately benefited from its occurrence. England, after all, was the country in which capitalism later made its most important historic breakthrough into world history; that is to say, it was in England that capitalism finally triumphed in a manner that was to affect, indeed to *define*, the future of Western civilization to an unprecedented extent. That the triumph of capitalism—particularly, in later years, of industrial capitalism—over feudalism played a world-transforming role unequaled by the role it had previously played in northern Italy, Flanders, and central Europe is hardly arguable; indeed in the nineteenth century, England became the model of economic analysis, not only for Karl Marx but for most social thinkers of his age. It is not surprising, then, that many able historians trace the emergence of this world-transforming development back to the English Revolution itself, thereby imparting to it a pride of place in fostering capitalism that is even greater than that of any of the revolutions that followed.

Yet at the very least this interpretation is arguable. Firstly, to analyze the Revolution strictly or even primarily along class lines—let alone to find a "revolutionary bourgeoisie" anywhere in the mid–seventeenth century—stands at odds with many established facts. By no means did the English aristocracy monolithically support Charles. To be sure, the very highest nobility—that is to say, the court aristocracy and peers of the land who directly benefited from Stuart-endowed privileges—generally favored the king's cause. But even families of the same social class among the aristocracy, landed gentry, and commercial strata divided and opposed each other. Indeed, far from being merchants, the great leaders of the parliamentary forces were landed gentry. John Hampden, John Pym, Sir John Eliot, and even Cromwell himself lived on estates as country gentlemen between sessions of Parliament and dabbled in trade rather than

engaged in it. Eliot, as we saw, died in prison rather than surrender his principles and accede to Charles's demands for compromise. One might well have expected the Earl of Essex to fight under the king's standard; James I, after all, had restored his estates to him after his father led a Catholic rebellion against Elizabeth's religious policies. But as we will see in the next chapter, Essex resolutely supported Pym's policy against Charles's absolutism and was actually the first commander of Parliament's armies. Similarly, the 2nd Earl of Manchester, who commanded the parliamentary armies in East Anglia, including Cromwell's cavalry, struck a strategic blow against Charles's forces in July 1644 with the capture of York and defeated the seemingly invincible royalist forces commanded by Prince Rupert.

If landed gentry and noblemen played a major role in the parliamentary struggle against the king, the bourgeoisie—if we can use this word loosely to refer to people involved in commerce, industry, and finance—played a surprisingly minor role. By no means were the parliamentary Roundheads made up of members of the bourgeoisie. Moneylenders, to be sure, gave less and less support to Charles I and threw their financial support to the parliamentary forces. But the king's arbitrary exactions, his expensive court, and his fiscal irresponsibility made him a very bad investment. Yet some of England's commercial cities rallied to the king's standard; indeed, at the beginning of the civil war, the lord mayor and aldermen of London sided with Charles out of concern for their oligarchic municipal and commercial interests.

Although the ports, the manufacturing towns, the South and the East, and most of the middle class generally rallied to the Parliamentary cause, other bourgeois sectors of the country actually regarded the monarchy as a tradition-honored institution and opposed its overthrow. If the Revolution was primarily bourgeois or if there was a truly "revolutionary bourgeoisie" in seventeenth-century England, it was either scarce or inordinately myopic. Indeed, one could more easily argue that the bourgeoisie were militantly counterrevolutionary during certain decisive turning points in the trajectory of classical revolutions that have been designated as "bourgeois" in our own time.

NOTES

1. James I, 1610, in Christopher Hill and Edmund Dell, eds., *The Good Old Cause: Documents of the English Revolution of 1640–1660: Its Causes, Course, and Consequences*, 2nd ed., rev. (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1949; New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1969), p. 119.
2. "The Petition of Right," June 7, 1628, in Hill and Dell, *Good Old Cause*, pp. 148–9.
3. James I, 1610, in Hill and Dell, *Good Old Cause*, pp. 118–19.
4. Quoted in Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution, 1603–1714* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1961; New York: W.W. Norton, 1966), p. 55.

CHAPTER 5 The Levellers and the New Model Army

Despite its premodern, often religious vernacular, the English Revolution had a remarkably modern and secular character. In retrospect, the religious factions that prosecuted its internal conflicts actually had very practical and worldly social goals. Their theological rhetoric tends, if anything, to conceal the extent to which the English Revolution opened the era of the great, basically secular democratic revolutions that were to follow in its wake.

For one thing, the English Revolution had a notably plebeian dimension. It was fought out not only in the halls of Parliament and on various battlefields but also in the streets of London as well as other cities and villages. The House of Commons spoke in the name of "the people," not of God, to legitimate its claims, declaring that "the people" or at least their "representatives" had sovereignty superior to that of the king. In the free discussion of the 1640s, questions were raised about how representative Parliament actually was of "the people" as a whole. Sir Robert Filmer, a defender of the king, relished the opportunity to point out that the parliamentary electorate, far from comprising the people of England, consisted of perhaps one out of every ten Englishmen—and these were the upper ten in social rank. Like Filmer, radical democrats criticized the narrowness of the parliamentary electorate and tried to extend the franchise to include most of the male population. One such pamphleteer claimed that in the scriptural injunction "Touche not mine anointed" it was the common people who were anointed. Still another pamphleteer warned as early as 1642 that this "dangerous tenet hath been buzzed into the ears of the people as if they only were anointed, none but they."[1]

Another modern aspect of the "Great Rebellion," as many British historians call the English Revolution, was the extent to which it was an ideologically self-conscious upheaval, bringing the entire establishment—social as well as institutional—into question. To judge from the documents we have, it was an

immensely literate and polemical revolution: presses worked overtime to produce a host of pamphlets and newspapers. Easy as it may be today to take a popular literature for granted, it should be realized that newspapers did not even exist until England moved toward revolution. Whereas in earlier times dissenters had relied primarily on sermons from pulpits to radical congregations to disseminate their message, now incendiary parliamentary speeches, proclamations, and remonstrances were committed to print and distributed widely throughout the country.

The written word was brought into close unison with the spoken word. Parliamentary proceedings became highly visible public arenas, not unlike the Elizabethan stage, where oratory was directed not only to legislators and the court but to the nation as a whole. In this sense, the Revolution was an eminently popular event, at least to anyone who chose to participate in it. Finally, what raised the Civil War of the 1640s from a "Great Rebellion" to a modern social revolution was the emergence of socially challenging radical groups that directed themselves not only against the most sacrosanct institutions of traditional England but against seemingly popular leaders who replaced the established government, nearly culminating in a third revolution by the most radical sectors of the revolutionary movement.

THE FIRST CIVIL WAR

The English Civil War can roughly be divided into two distinct periods, the first lasting from 1642 to 1646, and the second from 1648 to 1649. The first was initially marked by considerable social, political, and religious unanimity among the parliamentary forces. During this time, Parliament did not throw down its gauntlet against Charles, whose person remained inviolable, still less against the monarchy as such; rather, it professed to be fighting for "Country" *and* "Court," not "Country" *against* "Court." The House of Commons saw itself as defending the traditional constitution against royal "innovations" and fought to constrain the king rather than eliminate his office. Charles was seen, at least for public purposes, as a benign but ill-advised ruler who was transgressing ancient liberties at the behest of an unscrupulous courtly and clerical camarilla.

The most important military leadership during this early period came from wealthy landowners, as indeed it had to, for, following still-existing medieval custom, it was the peers of the realm who were accorded the highest commands in the army and sat on the parliamentary Council of War. Accordingly, the leadership of the parliamentary forces was conferred on Robert Devereaux, the 3rd Earl of Essex, and Edward Montagu, the 2nd Earl of Manchester. These aristocratic commanders, far from seeking to remove Charles from his throne,

sought merely to rectify the king's relations with Parliament. Essex in particular had an abiding aversion to facing the king on the battlefield. Nothing seems to have embarrassed him more than when on October 23, 1642, during the Battle of Edgehill—the first major engagement in the Civil War—the earl found himself commanding a parliamentary force against royalist troops directly under Charles's leadership. It was only through the king's own duplicity and wiliness that he eventually alienated even these moderate parliamentarians and lost their loyalty.

The opening conflicts between "Court" and "Country" were marked by debilitating archaisms that stalemated the civil war inordinately and perhaps inevitably. Thus, the aristocratic commanders relied primarily on the feudal institutions—militias and county administration—that tradition bestowed upon them to conduct a war. But traditional means proved woefully inadequate for achieving victory. Heredity rather than merit did not provide a particularly sound criterion for choosing commanders, and the struggle seemed to lumber along until new, innovative commanders and more committed troops were recruited from lower strata of the social hierarchy to make up the parliamentary army. After 1644, the gentry, the yeomanry, and the so-called "masterless men," or common laborers, poor tenant farmers, and artisans became involved in the conflict, providing Parliament with more zealous—and socially troubling—forces. Despite the proclivities of these men for radical democratic views, Parliament was compelled to turn to them for aid not only because they opposed the king but, in the best of cases, because of their outstanding courage in battle and the high level of their morale.

In religious affairs, too, the solidarity among Parliament's supporters was initially extensive but very superficial. Conservative parliamentarians had little quarrel with the Anglican Church, notwithstanding the objections of moderates to Archbishop Laud's introduction of "popish" features. In 1643, by denying Anglican bishops the right to govern ecclesiastical affairs, the moderate majority in Parliament struck a direct blow at the divine right of kings, which the Anglican Church had tried to validate. But as Anglican clerics increasingly sided with the king against Parliament, moderate and even conservative parliamentarians found it necessary to shift their religious affiliation from the Anglican Church to the once-radical Presbyterianism of Knox and the Scots. This shift had a strategic benefit as well: it enlarged the popular base of the parliamentarians beyond the borders of England by gaining them Scottish support. Even Essex drifted toward Presbyterianism, together with a substantial number of the parliamentarians who formed the majority in the House of Commons.

Although the shift to Presbyterianism allowed Parliament to adapt itself to the increasingly radical turn that the Revolution was beginning to take, it also opened a cleavage between the religious moderates and conservatives, on the one hand, and the religious radicals on the other. These radicals were the sterner

Puritans, the Independents, who steadily increased their influence among those who opposed the king. As Congregationalists, the Independents did not look to bishops for religious guidance, nor did they look to presbyters to stand between their congregations and God. Rather, they dispensed with religious hierarchies entirely and formed their own congregations of people with like-minded beliefs, choosing their own preachers and ministers. Most of them sought spiritual guidance entirely from Scripture, while some, essentially pantheists, even denied the authority of the Bible altogether—and the existence of a traditional deity.

Nor was the radicalism of these Independents limited to religious affairs alone. Just as they demanded religious freedom, so too did they demand political freedom. Many, in fact, adopted views that were expressly republican, insisting that the Commons, not the king, was sovereign. And indeed, under the impact and exigencies of civil war, all English political structures were changing rapidly. As the traditional state was partially destroyed, new political institutions were created to replace them. In some towns and villages, revolutionary committees were created, whose members, as one unhappy squire of the Isle of Wight lamented, included people of lower social rank rather than the traditional gentry: "We had a thing here called a Committee which overruled Deputy-Lieutenants and also Justices of the Peace, and of this we had brave men." This committee, he observed with disdain, included a peddler, an apothecary, a baker, two farmers, and a poor man. "These ruled the whole Island, and did whatsoever they thought good in their own eyes."[2] But this extreme situation was far from typical; in fact, most of the new committees were dominated by the gentry and were ultimately brought under the centralized control of Parliament.

The English Revolution was also modern because of its social trajectory: the king's duplicity and his repeated attempts to impose absolutist rule on England and Scotland thrust the conflict in an increasingly radical direction. More and more, the majority of the Parliament found it impossible to accept the kind of constitutional monarchy that a moderate Puritan like Pym would have wanted and that peers such as Essex and Manchester would have accepted. During the summer campaign of 1645, when the parliamentary army captured York and defeated the royalist cavalry led by Charles's dashing nephew Prince Rupert, many radicals were already calling for the elimination of the monarchy, not merely for restraining it. Their frustration became intense when their Presbyterian generals proved unwilling to defeat the king decisively in battle. At Newbury in October 1644, the parliamentary commanders Manchester and Sir William Waller deliberately delayed the offensive as long as they could. After it finally began, the enthusiastic parliamentary forces roundly defeated the Cavaliers, only to find that their generals permitted the royalist forces to withdraw, largely intact, from the field of battle with all their equipment. There could be little doubt that Manchester and Waller had no intention of decisively defeating the king and his Cavaliers.

In fact, generals who came from noble families seemed to be more fearful of their increasingly radical officers and troops than of their royalist opponents, and the parliamentary soldiers responded in kind to their aristocratic commanders. Essex avowedly despised the lower classes with all the haughtiness of a peer. In December 1644 he denigrated popular demonstrations in London streets with the remark: "Is this the liberty which we claim to vindicate by shedding our blood? Our posterity will say that to deliver them from the yoke of the King we have subjected them to that of the common people."[3] What was at issue was not merely differences in social pedigree that divided the parliamentary forces; diverging political aims were also emerging among parliamentary moderates, conservatives, and radicals that essentially divided the army against itself and its officers.

In time, the real leadership of the Roundheads fell to a man from the lower squirearchy, Oliver Cromwell, an outspoken militant who was an iconoclastic Puritan and the ablest of the Independent cavalry officers. Cromwell had risen to the fore of the Independents partly by virtue of his extraordinary military ability and partly by boldly denouncing the conservative generals before the House of Commons. In response to these denunciations, Essex, Manchester, and other Presbyterian leaders made a scandalous attempt to impeach him for sedition, but Cromwell's capacities as a commander had already made him so indispensable to the war that he eluded removal from the army. He had organized his "Ironsides" cavalry regiment (the name was Prince Rupert's sobriquet for Cromwell himself) at Cambridge in 1643. At Marston Moor in July 1644, after other parliamentary forces had been routed, Cromwell led a cavalry charge in which his military abilities and the zeal and discipline of his horsemen defeated the royalists and in fact saved the army from ignominious defeat. The subsequent failure of Manchester and Waller to crush the royalist army at Newbury brought Cromwell and his cavalry into open opposition to Manchester and his irresolute supporters in Parliament. "If we beat the King ninety-nine times, he would be King still and his posterity, and we subjects still," Manchester is reported to have told Cromwell reproachfully, to which Cromwell rejoined, "My lord, if this be so, why did we take up arms at first?"[4]

THE NEW MODEL ARMY

The increasingly plebeian rank and file of the parliamentary forces and their growing mistrust of peers generally fed their scorn for the parliamentary generals whose dilatory tactics and reverses seemed irremediable, giving rise to a radical republican movement that began to form out of the socially mixed parliamentary troops. To the radicals, it was apparent that the old system of military organization had to be scrapped and the army thoroughly reorganized. The Independents introduced a Self-Denying Ordinance into Parliament, which, when passed in April 1645, forbade any member of either House to hold a military command. Inasmuch as peers could not resign from the House of Lords, it forced all parliamentarians to surrender their army positions. No longer would tradition dictate that peers had to command the armed forces; indeed, military rank now had to be based on merit, not on birth, which led to the resignation of Essex and Manchester from the army command.

Nor was Parliament to be trusted to decisively defeat the king. Instead of forming a new parliamentary army, the Presbyterians in Parliament dithered and hoped that their moderate coreligionists in Scotland would take over the war in the absence of the old generals—a prospect that was tenuous at best. Thus, ultimately, they were obliged to authorize the creation of a New Model Army, naming Sir Thomas Fairfax as commander in chief and Cromwell as lieutenant-general in charge of the cavalry. Cromwell proceeded to organize and train his expanded force along the same lines that he had organized his "Ironsides" regiment, obliging it to adhere to the discipline of a loyal and completely zealous crusading force. Preaching and hymn-singing were routine, and complete freedom of discussion reigned in the ranks, forging a deep sense of purpose and commitment and a high level of political consciousness among the troops. The New Model Army was to become a military force that not only won the revolution but was never defeated in battle.

Its yeoman cavalry turned a looming defeat into a decisive rout of the Cavaliers at Naseby on June 14, 1645, a battle that clearly rendered Charles's cause hopeless. By May 5 of the following year, after a series of royalist defeats, the New Model Army had finally vanquished the king's forces. The First Civil War ended when the king's base at Oxford surrendered in June 1646 and Charles gave himself up to the Scots, who turned him over to parliamentary commissioners in 1647.

Although the real power of the country passed into the hands of the House of Commons, sharp divisions opened between its Presbyterian majority and Cromwell's zealous troops. As conservatives in the Commons began in increasing numbers to drift back to the royalist cause, the Independents radically redefined the entire political perspective of the antiroyalist cause. While Presbyterian political aims focused increasingly on bringing the revolution to an end by negotiating with the king and restoring him to power, radical Puritans began to form an opposition to Presbyterian rule in the Parliament, demanding what were ultimately to be republican goals and an expanded, more popular electorate.

In fact, the only major obstacle to a Presbyterian compromise with Charles was the Army itself. The New Model can truly be regarded as one of the most democratic armies in history. Its ideology was distinctly republican in character

at a time when republicanism was seen as outrageously radical in a country saddled with a hierarchy of peers and squires. Once the king had surrendered, Parliament sought quite overtly to eliminate this gnawing obstacle to constitutional monarchy by disbanding the Army, leaving only a small remainder with which it hoped to reconquer Ireland—an enterprise, moreover, that would be under the command of new, reliable officers rather than Cromwell.

To the fury of the Presbyterian-dominated Parliament, however, the Army command and most of the troops simply refused to disband. Most of the politically astute New Model troops did not regard a mere end to the war as the victory for which they had fought. The social and political turmoil of the conflict had unleashed high hopes for a transformation of the social order, arousing millennial aspirations and yearnings for a new social dispensation of justice and freedom, which a restoration of Charles would hardly have produced. Nor was it clear that the existing Parliament was preferable to the king: the House of Commons began to imprison people arbitrarily without trial and to refuse to receive popular petitions, while its members were patently using their positions to enrich themselves at public expense—abuses that produced widespread dismay among the radicals. By 1646, the popularity of the so-called Levellers, or radical democrats, was growing steadily in the ranks of the New Model, impelling it to advance increasingly radical demands, notably the complete elimination of the monarchy and the election of a new and more popular Parliament.

THE LEVELLERS

Of all the various independent groups that opposed the moderate and conservative leaders in Parliament, the Levellers were historically the most serious, well-organized, and resolute. It was their movement, both in London and in the Army, that posed the most important revolutionary threat to the ruling strata of the country.

The Levellers emerged just at the moment of Parliament's victory over the Cavaliers, a time that seemed to call out for radically new political ideas. They were Independents in both a political and religious sense. As a democratic movement, they originally stood for the sovereignty of the Commons, but as its abuses became clear—it had arbitrarily imprisoned one of their foremost leaders, John Lilburne—they began to shift their emphasis to the sovereignty of the people, often against the moderate House of Commons. Congregationalism taught them democratic principles, while a certain messianism convinced the most religious among them that they were the instruments of God. The term *Leveller* was not one of their own choosing; it was applied to them by

Commissary-General Henry Ireton in the fall of 1647 as a term of opprobrium for the democratic faction of the Parliamentary cause, particularly with a view toward discrediting them in the New Model Army, which was exercising an ever-increasing political influence on the Revolution. Although some Levellers resented the name, it had acquired an honorable pedigree in English history: in 1607 in Leicestershire and Warwickshire, rebellious tenants and copyholders who were trying to recover their common lands from the gentry had used the word to express their desire not for social equality but to "level" the fences and hedges that were then being raised to enclose land. In the English revolution, the name became popular after the spring of 1648, and in time many radical Independents adopted the Leveller name for their own movement. In fact, Gerrard Winstanley's communistic Digger movement used the name *True Leveller* to distinguish itself from the larger movement of radical Independents.

Considering the brutality of the times, the Levellers had a broad sense of social right and decency; indeed, they were exceptionally humane people. Even when English blood was more than overheated with desires for revenge against Irish rebels, who had massacred immigrants from Scotland and England in their struggle for national freedom, the Levellers seem to have stood alone in their sympathy for Irish struggles against tyranny. They emphasized that English folk needed to focus their attention against their own domestic tyrants rather than Ireland's just attempts to free itself of English rule. Moreover, their movement was very expansive in its attitude toward the oppressed of all kinds. Levellers, observes H. N. Brailsford, "encouraged women to play their part in politics side by side with their husbands and brothers, because they believed in the equality of all 'made in the image of God'"[5]—a view virtually unprecedented in seventeenth-century Europe.

In the eyes of the Levellers, society was basically divided between the wealthy and the poor, the powerful and the dispossessed. "O you Members of Parliament and rich men in the City," John Lilburne wrote in January 1648, a time of great economic hardship,

> that are at ease and drink wine in bowls and stretch yourselves upon beds of down, you that grind our faces and flay off our skins, will no man amongst you regard, will no man behold our faces black with sorrow and famine? . . . What, then, are your ruffling silks and velvets and your glittering gold and silver laces? Are they not the sweat of our brows and the wants of our backs and bellies? . . . What else but your ambition and faction continue our distractions and oppressions? Is not all the controversy whose slaves the poor shall be?[6]

Yet the Levellers were neither socialists nor extreme social radicals. They affirmed with all sincerity that they upheld and would defend the right of property, and indeed, the final version of their program, called *An Agreement of*

the People (issued from the Tower of London on May 1, 1649), explicitly repudiated any intentions to "level mens Estates, destroy Property, or make all things Common."[7] The ownership of property, in their view, played a fundamentally important social role. Property, Levellers believed, conferred social responsibility, independence, and a basic decency of behavior, even promoting aid for less fortunate individuals in dire material straits. A merchant who owned his own property and employed men or women under decent conditions did not earn their opprobrium—although radical Levellers like William Walwyn did not hesitate to denounce the taking of interest. What irked them far more than a modest measure of wealth were the exploitative prerogatives that royal monopolies conferred, the rising prices that burdened consumers, and the economic regulations that monopolies imposed on basic goods at the expense of the poorer classes.

What the Levellers normally meant by property was the modest competence of the common man, who had to be defended against the rich, the nobility, and the economic monopolists. Such small artisans and yeomen were viewed as the basic sinews of the social and political order, in contrast to the rich and exploitative strata, who held massive accumulations of wealth and reduced thousands of people to servants or beggars dependent on alms. Accordingly, the Leveller pamphleteer Richard Overton demanded that "all orders, sorts, and societies of the natives of this land" be able to

> freely and fully enjoy a joint and mutually neighborhood, cohabitation, and humane subsistence, one as well as another, doing unto all men as we would be done unto; it being against the radical law of nature and reason, that any man should be deprived of an humane subsistence.[8]

Despite their considerable influence in English cities, especially London, the Levellers' influence in the countryside should not be overlooked. Although the Levellers did not call for a drastic land redistribution, they bluntly challenged quasi-feudal "badges of slavery," such as the "oaths of fealty, homage, fines" that the nobility and squirearchy (which they identified with the Normans) imposed on the freeholders and tenants of the English countryside. Hence they insisted

> that a certain valuable rate be set, at which *all possessors of lands so holden may purchase themselves freeholders*, and in case any shall not be willing or able, that there be a *prefixed period of time after which all services, fines, customs, etc. shall be changed into and become a certain rent*, that so persons disaffected to the freedom and welfare of the nation may not have the advantage upon the people to draw them into a war against themselves upon any occasion by virtue of an awe upon them in such dependent tenures.[9]

Modest and reasonable as these demands to eliminate "base tenures" may seem today, they "would have changed the face of England" had they been instituted, observes Brailsford.

> A fixed tribute is compatible with mental, social and political independence and with a hopeful spirit of enterprise. The peasant's improvements would have been his own. The insecurity and the fear of rackrent [i.e., the highest possible rent that can be squeezed from a property] and exploitation, which bent him into a posture of cautious servility, would have vanished. The Levellers, in short, *would have peopled the English countryside with an enfranchised peasantry, so securely planted on the soil that it would have dared to stand erect.* This, needless to say, was not a communistic policy: it was in its inspiration individualistic, though something of the traditional communism of the open fields would have survived through several generations. But it would have broken the power of the great landed families which ruled England through the next two centuries, by adding immeasurably to the capacity of the villages for resistance. It would have made rural England what rural France became after the Revolution, a land of small peasant owners.[10]

Brailsford regards this trend as atavistic—but was it? An "enfranchised peasantry" might well have placed major limits on the extent and viciousness of English capitalism—limits that might have profoundly shifted England's economic development along humane and socially progressive lines. The Levellers, in effect, were not only trying to democratize England politically; their program represents a realistic and populist alternative to the brutal capitalist development that the British people would face a century and a half later.

Variously Puritan, Presbyterian, or Anglican in religion, Leveller supporters were generally "the middle sort of people," noted Lilburne; yet Lilburne, who regarded himself as a "gentleman," may have snobbishly overemphasized the middle-class nature of the movement. To all appearances, the Levellers seem to have attracted the so-called "leather apron" strata of the population, such as cobblers, weavers, printers, and miners, and among agrarian strata, the poorer tenant farmers and insecure copyholders. (It was these strata that also formed the rank and file of the New Model infantry, as distinguished from the officers, who were commonly recruited from the gentry and yeomanry.) The movement gained some support from individual well-to-do tradesmen and professionals, although the latter for the most part drifted toward the Presbyterians and moderate Independents. But the larger number of Leveller supporters were those who earned less than the forty pounds per year required to gain the legal right to vote.

Hence a central plank in the various versions of the Levellers' political program, *An Agreement of the People*, was the extension of the franchise to all

Englishmen, regardless of wealth or income. The several versions of the *Agreement* that the Levellers wrote over the course of the English Revolution shared basic political demands for the overthrow of both the monarchy and the House of Lords and the sovereignty of a single House of Commons, whose members were to be reelected every year by a broad electoral constituency of all males of twenty-one years of age and over, "not being servants, or receiving alms, or having served the late King in arms or voluntary Contribution." These exclusions from the suffrage may seem harsh to us today, but they were premised on the not unwarranted belief that servants and beggars would use the franchise on the behest of their masters or almsgivers, creating large blocs of votes for the wealthy.[11] The sovereign House of Commons, in turn, was expected to be wholly accountable to the people of England: annual elections and various constitutional guarantees would ensure that Commons would not become tyrannical or arrogant. Along with these tenets, the Leveller demand for absolute religious toleration as an ultimate desideratum of a free society should also be cited—no minor point in a time of considerable religious intolerance.

Individual Levellers often issued pamphlets that were far more radical than the more formal Leveller documents or manifestos. Although John Lilburne had no sympathy for Digger-like tendencies within the Leveller movement that favored communalization of the common lands, his *Earnest Petition* of January 1648 advanced a notion that at the time would have led to a radically decentralized form of democracy: the election from below—rather than appointment from above, in Westminster—of "sheriffs, justices of the peace, committeemen, grand jury men, and all ministers of justice whatsoever, in their respective counties," for terms of only one year: in essence, the decentralization and self-government of every parish and county of England, and the end of the hereditary authority of landowning gentry in the rural localities.[12]

William Walwyn, a close associate of Lilburne, came closest to advocating a vague form of communism by denouncing inequities in the distribution of the means of life as the source of all ills. This remarkable man, in effect, advanced what we would call a communistic social dispensation so benign in its intention that government would have been unnecessary. He is reported to have said in conversation that the social situation in England would never be well until all things were held in common. "But will that ever be?" his interlocutor objected. "We must endeavor it," Walwyn replied. "But that would destroy government," it was protested. "There would be no need of government," Walwyn is said to have retorted, "for there would be no thieves or criminals."[13] Some years later, in April 1649, writing in his defense as a prisoner in the Tower of London, he denied that he had ever called for an end to government or for a communistic society. Yet he did not fail to note that

> the community among the primitive Christians was voluntary, not coactive; they brought their goods and laid them at the apostles' feet. They were not enjoined to bring them; it was the effect of their charity and heavenly mindedness . . . a voluntary act occasioned by the abundant measure of faith that was in those Christians and apostles . . . and not the injunction of any constitution.[14]

Unlike the senior Army officers and other strict Independent Puritans, who would end their political speeches with calls for the severe punishment of swearing, drunkenness, and wenching, the Levellers were not given to sanctimonious prudishness. Quite to the contrary: it was their custom, whenever

> Leveller soldiers had suffered under the brutal punishments of the military code to carry them off in a coach for a feast at the Whalebone or the Windmill. They had their own standards of decency and good manners . . . for they did not admire grossness. But there was nothing in their temperaments of that Puritan sourness which never tired of condemning the pleasant sins of others.[15]

In a period when a ponderous religious mien and a suitably self-righteous biblical quotation commonly served to mask hypocrisy, Leveller tolerance gave rise to a remarkable degree of secularity. In this respect the Levellers contrasted markedly with Cromwell, a master of pious hypocrisies, whose continual references to Scripture and smug religious philistinism concealed a policy of treachery to his men as well as to his professed religious ideals.

THE LEVELLERS IN THE ARMY

By the time the Army moved as a revolutionary force to the forefront of English radical politics, many officers and most of the troops had essentially been plebeianized and were under Leveller influence. The Army saw itself as the savior of the English people, as embodying their will, and as the guardian of their liberties. It was responsible for defending the people against all abuses, whether by king or Parliament. The Levellers, for their part, saw the Army as an institution that could "teach peasants to understand liberty,"[16] and in ever-greater numbers, New Model soldiers were becoming receptive to their propaganda. To understand the course of the Revolution, we must look more closely at this revolutionary army, the New Model Army itself, which was so crucial in bringing about the radical phases of the Revolution.

Within the Army, whose total authorized force consisted of 22,000 men, a crucial distinction must be drawn between the cavalry and infantry regiments. A sizable part of the infantry or "foot" consisted of conscripts, but the New Model

cavalry was made up of volunteers, many of whom were supporters of the more democratic aims of Army radicals. These small farmers, often freeholders, and artisans were more politically aware than the infantry. Marked by an independence of mind and means, they brought their own horses and weapons into battle, and (in contrast to the infantry, which was largely illiterate), the majority of the cavalry troopers could read and included among their numbers men of some education.

The initial devotion of the soldiers to their commanders—notably Sir Thomas Fairfax and Oliver Cromwell—was almost reverential. In their eyes, these officers, together with figures such as Cromwell's son-in-law, Henry Ireton, and popular commanders like Colonel Thomas Rainborough, provided the Army with an excellent and trustworthy military leadership. As to their social background, as C. H. Firth has noted, most of the general officers of the New Model Army were

> commoners of good family. . . . A large number of the inferior officers belonged to the minor landed gentry, and came from families whose pedigrees and arms were registered in the visitations of the heralds. A good many were drawn from the trading classes in London and elsewhere, but did not generally rise to command regiments till much later in the war. And throughout the whole period the cavalry officers, like the troopers they commanded, were drawn from a higher social class than the infantry officers.[17]

An extraordinary phenomenon by any historical standard, the New Model was the most ideological force in the country. Cromwell carefully selected his own cavalrymen—of all faiths except Catholics and Anglicans—for their religious zeal and independence. Here religious education went hand in hand with military training. As already noted, the cavalry rode into battle singing hymns, and its soldiers formed congregations for Puritan preachers whom the earlier parliamentary army would have cashiered for their subversive messages. Over the course of its existence, the New Model was continually worked upon by Puritan divines who exhorted it to battle as a matter of sacred duty and in response to a godly calling. Within the cavalry's ranks, radical Anabaptists fought side by side with moderate Independents, and Presbyterians were tolerated with none of the discrimination they might have been expected to encounter from antihierarchical Puritans.

The ferment in the cavalry was not only religious but intensely political. "In the political movements of 1647 and subsequent years," Firth observes, "it was always the troopers of the cavalry who took the lead."[18] After 1647, the New Model cavalry, for all practical purposes, formed the political vanguard of the Revolution, and it was the section of the Army that was most open to Leveller propaganda, indeed to that of radicals generally.

During the first two years of the New Model Army's life, to be sure, the Army played little role in the political events that were coming to a head in the English Revolution; but following its victory over the Cavaliers at Naseby and the Scots' surrender of the king to parliamentary commissioners in 1647, the Army encamped itself some forty miles from London, at Saffron Walden, where the soldiers read Leveller propaganda and listened to the preaching of the Independents from the city. Two days after Naseby, a visitor to the Army complained that

> a great part of the mischief was caused by distribution of the pamphlets of Overton and Lilburne, against the King and the Ministry and for Liberty of Conscience; and the soldiers in their quarters had such books to read when then had none to contradict them.[19]

It was precisely at this time that the Presbyterian Parliament was obdurately trying to dissolve the increasingly politicized Army, even while it negotiated with the very king whom the Army had defeated, a patent act of treachery that only strengthened the resolve of the New Model not to disband. No less infuriatingly, Parliament had failed to give the soldiers the back pay they were owed over some ten months; indeed, for nearly a year, the soldiers had fought and subsisted without pay, while the Presbyterian Parliament refused to vote it the subsidies it needed, heaping scorn on the Army's actions and its growing radical ideas.

Finally the anger of the Army boiled over into a head-on revolt against the House of Commons. In the spring of 1647 a council of officers was chosen by the troops to receive the parliamentary proposal that the Army be disbanded. This council, a sizable body in its own right, included even the lowest military ranks, such as subalterns. In fact, the unnerved Parliamentary commissioners who visited the Army's Saffron Walden headquarters in April 1647 attested that no fewer than two hundred officers met them and almost the same number a month later. These meetings, which were meant to subdue the Army, ended with a resolute refusal by the New Model to disband.

Moreover, differences between Army moderates and radicals began to emerge, leading many rank-and-file soldiers to conclude that their senior officers were not adequately working on their behalf. The "Grandees," as the commanders were called, seemed overly eager to preserve good relations with Parliament. Creating a new precedent in revolutionary history, the ordinary soldiers and troopers met among themselves to choose representatives of their own, the "Agitators" as they were called—a name that was synonymous with "agents" and had none of its pejorative present-day overtones—to voice their increasingly firm demands. Late in April 1647, Agitators representing eight cavalry regiments formed a council, whose existence they justified in a letter to their generals and

to Parliament, expressing both professional (back pay) and political (Leveller) demands. The following month, the infantry followed suit and chose its own council of representatives. C. H. Firth tells us that "the committee of troopers [cavalry] met at St Edmundsbury, and the foot [infantry], who chose two out of every company, sent them to confer with the troopers, and every foot soldier gave fourpence apiece towards defraying the charges of that meeting."[20] The infantry in turn wrote a protest letter of their own that expressed their personal grievances and also raised disquieting Leveller demands. Finally, cavalry and infantry together elected a smaller body that would represent the rank and file of both military divisions. This was dangerous stuff indeed, not only to Parliament but to the leadership of the Army. A soldiers' council movement had been initiated, which the Levellers in the ranks were only too eager to expand among the New Model soldiers.

The soldiers' letters and petitions were duly ignored by Parliament, which demanded that the "Grandees" put an end to the councils, and provocatively instituted proceedings against officers who had taken part in these meetings. As if to provoke a confrontation, it disbanded a number of the more restive regiments, whereupon the soldiers, faced by parliamentary obstructions, called for a rendezvous of the entire army for June 4, 1647 at Newmarket to deal with its demands. These events occurred precisely at a time when the Presbyterian Parliament seemed on the point of reaching a compromise with the king—indeed, even to use the king as a weapon against the Army. On June 2–4, on the instruction of the Agitators, a squad of cavalry troopers led by a Leveller soldier, Cornet Joyce, nervily kidnapped the king from his house arrest in Northamptonshire, removing him from parliamentary custody, and brought him to Newmarket, where the rendezvous was taking place. The king was now in the hands of the Army—an Army that was now turning against Parliament as well as the monarchy.

On June 5, the rendezvous accepted by acclamation a document called the *Solemn Engagement of the Army*, in which it announced that the New Model would not "willingly disband or divide, or suffer itself to be disbanded or divided" until such time as the council was convinced that Parliament would meet the Army's demands.[21] More significantly, the *Solemn Engagement* set up a General Council of the Army that, unlike the previous Council of War, was no mere military body of strategizing generals but a body of representatives from all military ranks that would make political decisions on behalf of the soldiers. Two representatives of the rank and file of each regiment and two of the junior or commissioned officers from each regiment were added to the old Council of War, together with its senior officers, the "Grandees." The rank and file were expected to

> choose out of the several troops and companies several men, and those out of the whole number . . . two or more for each regiment, to act [on the council] in the name and behalf of the whole soldiery of the respective troops and companies.[22]

Also called Agitators, these rank-and-file representatives were to have equal votes with the "Grandees," regardless of the rank they represented. With this expansion of the council, the General Council of the Army had now become a revolutionary soldiers' council, perhaps the first to emerge in a modern revolution.

Moreover, councils were now formed throughout the New Model, until they constituted a far-flung network, in great part the result of the work of a militant Leveller known as Private Edward Sexby. Indeed, owing to Sexby's organizing talents, the New Model established councils, "very like the soldiers' soviets which the revolutionaries formed in the Russian army in 1917," observes Jasper Ridley in his account of Puritan leaders. On the higher military level, in turn, New Model soldiers elected Regimental Committees, "and each Regimental Committee elected two delegates to the Army Council of Agitators," for whom Sexby, in turn, became the "leading spokesman." Nor were these soldiers' councils confined to the regiments stationed near London: they were formed not only in the South but also in the North, Sexby having succeeded in networking them throughout most of the New Model Army's structure.[23]

To all appearances, the Army's political intention was to overturn Parliament's nonpayment of salary and to resist parliamentary attempts to disband the Army. But the expanded General Council now became a highly political body in its own right whose goal was to formulate policies for the Army—a network that had, in effect, become a dual power in the land, basically in tension with the Court, Parliament, and the "Grandees" as well.

NOTES

1. Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution: 1603–1714* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1966), p. 173.
2. Sir John Oglander, quoted in Christopher Hill, *The English Revolution 1640: An Essay* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1940), pp. 46–7.
3. Quoted in Jasper Ridley, *The Roundheads* (London: Constable & Co., 1976), p. 43.
4. Quoted in Antonia Fraser, *Cromwell: The Lord Protector* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973; originally published in Great Britain as *Cromwell: Our Chief of Men* by Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1973), p. 138.
5. H. N. Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, ed. Christopher Hill (Nottingham: Spokesman University Press, 1976), p. 316.
6. Quoted in Brailsford, *Levellers*, p. 324.
7. Article 30, "An Agreement of the Free People of England" (May 1, 1649), in G. E. Aylmer,

8. Richard Overton, "An Appeal," July 17, 1647, in Don M. Wolfe, ed., *Leveller Manifestoes of the Puritan Revolution* (1944; New York: Humanities Press, 1967), p. 182; I have modernized the spelling and punctuation.

9. Article 16 of "A New Engagement or Manifesto", quoted in Brailsford, *Levellers*, p. 440 (emphasis added).

10. Brailsford, *Levellers*, pp. 441–2 (emphasis added).

11. "Agreement of the [Free] People of England, May 1, 1649," in Aylmer, *Levellers of the English Revolution*, pp. 160–8.

12. Lilburne quoted in Brailsford, *Levellers*, p. 321.

13. Quoted in G.P. Gooch, *English Democratic Ideas in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), p. 179. So disliked was Walwyn by the Cromwellians that at the end of the Second Civil War, when the "Grandees" were trying to regain the Leveller support that they had lost earlier, the Levellers were obliged to remove him from their negotiating committee.

14. "A Manifestation," attributed to Walwyn and signed by John Lilburne, William Walwyn, Thomas Prince, and Richard Overton, dated April 14, 1649, in Wolfe, *Leveller Manifestoes*, pp. 390–1.

15. Brailsford, *Levellers*, p. 314.

16. Rev. Hugh Peter, 1646, quoted in Hill, *The English Revolution*, p. 48.

17. C.H. Firth, *Cromwell's Army: A History of the English Soldier during the Civil Wars, the Commonwealth and the Protectorate, being the Ford Lectures delivered in the University of Oxford 1900–1901* (London: Methuen & Co., 1962), pp. 46–7.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

19. Quoted in Gooch, *Democratic Ideas*, p. 120.

20. Firth, *Cromwell's Army*, p. 349.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 349–50.

22. "Engagement of the Army," June 5, 1647, quoted in Firth, *Cromwell's Army*, pp. 349–50.

23. Ridley, *Roundheads*, p. 94.

CHAPTER 6 The Putney Debates

Had it not been for the "Grandees" on the Army's General Council, the New Model Army might well have made a successful third revolution of its own in England. After two fruitless months of negotiations in the summer of 1647 between the Army and Parliament, the Agitators expressly called upon the Army to march on the capital and occupy it. Over the strong objections of Cromwell and Ireton, this powerful, well-disciplined, and socially conscious military body that no force of arms could defeat began moving toward the capital, bringing England to the edge of a radical political democracy and perhaps even an agrarian and artisanal social democracy. On June 14, in an extraordinary appeal to Parliament and indirectly to the people—again, perhaps, the first of its kind in modern revolutions—the Army issued its *Declaration of the Army*, in which the soldiers justified their involvement in politics and declared that the New Model was very different from the conventional armies of the day. In this moving, indeed thrilling, document, unprecedented by a military force thus far, the soldiers solemnly declared:

> We were not a mere mercenary army, hired to serve any arbitrary power of a state, but called forth and conjured by the several declarations of Parliament, to the defence of our own and the people's just rights and liberties. And so we took up arms in judgment and conscience to those ends, and have so continued them and are resolved . . . to assert and vindicate the just power and rights of this kingdom in Parliament, for those common ends premised, against all arbitrary power, violence and oppression, and against all particular parties or interests whatsoever.[1]

The *Declaration* did not merely define the Army's view of its own role in the Civil War but asserted its claim to be the guardian of the people's "just rights and liberties" against tyranny. These liberties, it declared, were based on "principles of Right and Freedom," and "the just Principles and the Law of Nature and

Nations, being that law upon which we have assisted" the people of England.[2] It demanded that the Long Parliament be terminated and replaced with an elected body, based on a franchise that was more representative of the people's wishes. This was clearly Leveller thought and language.

In the meantime, Parliament, controlled by its majority of Presbyterians, did an about-face once the king had been defeated: it began to deal with him differently and tried to restore the authority he had enjoyed before the Civil War. But the Army's march toward London threw Parliament and the well-to-do middle classes into utter consternation. The City placed its militia under Presbyterian control and tried to mobilize it, but to no avail: by early August, all parliamentary resistance simply collapsed, and the New Model occupied London, forcing eleven Presbyterian members from the House. After installing the king in Hampton Court (he was still being held under military guard, essentially as a hostage), the Army basically took over complete control of the country. As Denzil Holles, a Presbyterian parliamentarian who fiercely opposed the New Model, lamented, "The Army now did all, the Parliament was but a Cypher, only cry'd Amen to what the Councils of War had determined. They make themselves an absolute Third Estate."[3] A third revolution, in effect, had begun, led by radical Independents and Levellers.

CROMWELL AND "THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY"

The Army now controlled the country—but who controlled the Army? And what future did its leaders have in mind for England? To these questions, there was as yet no unified answer, even within the Army itself.

What seems to be clear is that, even before the march on London, Cromwell and the "Grandees" on the Council of War patently feared the Leveller and Agitator movement in the rank and file far more than they feared the royalists and the Presbyterians. At most, they had to put up with the Levellers owing to the considerable support that they enjoyed among the soldiers, particularly the cavalry, and, far from leading the radical political developments in the Army, Cromwell and Ireton prudently but uneasily followed them. Whenever Cromwell appeared to support the Levellers, his principal goal seems to have been to contain an outright Army revolt, but as a member of the General Council of the Army he shrewdly worked to restrict the soldiers' demands for a redress of professional grievances and to abort the social, economic, and political program into which the Levellers had so successfully educated the rank and file. Indeed, feeling the Army slipping from his fingers, Cromwell proceeded to pack the General Council with conservative soldiers from all ranks—in some cases, even with privates who could be used to countervail the more sophisticated Agitators.

At the same time, he also used upper-class fears of the Levellers as a bargaining chip in dealing with the king and the then-Presbyterian Parliament. In August 1647, just before the Army marched on London, the "Grandees," firmly entrenched in their official Council of War, drew up *Heads of the Proposals of the Army*, a set of propositions for a new political order for England. Prepared by Commissary-General Henry Ireton, who wrote most of the "Grandee" documents, this hazy document was meant to be used as the basis for the Army's negotiations with the parliamentary commissioners. Unlike the Leveller-based programs, particularly their versions of *An Agreement of the People*, the *Heads of the Proposals* was favorable to the king: not only did it preserve the House of Lords, it essentially restored Charles to a condition of safety and honor, without limiting his ability to exercise his personal rights, and even gave him the right to veto parliamentary legislation. To blunt Leveller criticism, it modestly expanded the franchise. During the drafting of the document, in fact, Ireton had secretly met with an agent of the king, modifying several articles in the hope of placating Charles and gaining his support. Indeed, the army leaders are suspected of having been negotiating with royal agents with a view toward acquiring earldoms for themselves if the king and Parliament could work out any of their differences. So frequent were these meetings that Cromwell was obliged to ask a royal agent to visit him less often, "the suspicions of him being so great that he was afraid to lie down in his own quarters."[4]

At length, when the *Heads of the Proposals* appeared, whatever remaining political support the rank-and-file soldiers had for Cromwell and Fairfax evaporated rapidly. Most of the soldiers had still not been paid by the hostile Parliament, and a number of them faced criminal prosecution by the courts for acts that they had been compelled to commit in combat. As reports of secret meetings between the Army leaders and the king circulated among the soldiers, rumors abounded that Cromwell would restore to the king all his rights, and many soldiers began visibly to lose faith with the general officers under whom they served, giving rise to the prospect of an open split between the "Grandees" and the ranks.

By the autumn of 1647, even as the army occupied the capital, rank-and-file opinion turned against Cromwell and the "Grandees." To add fuel to the Army's anger, Parliament banned all meetings in September between the officers and men—although meetings between the officers and the king were still permitted. The Agitators and many officers of lower rank now openly accused the generals of usurping authority over the General Council of the Army. As C. H. Firth puts it, the "democratic party" within the Army opposed not only Cromwell's negotiations with the king but the influence that the "Grandees" and superior officers exercised in the Army's deliberations generally.[5] "When Cromwell and Ireton, and their faction of self-interested officers, thought they had got the soldiery fast by the brain," as a Leveller pamphlet later summed up the events,

as to dote sufficiently upon their transaction and conduct of business, they then decline the Agitators, decline the Engagement, slight their Declarations and Promises to the people and the Army, rendering the Agitators but as ciphers amongst them . . . by degrees, step after step they cast out the interest of the soldiery from amongst them, destroyed the Engagement, and broke the faith of the Army.[6]

By October 1647, the discontent of the more radical New Model soldiers was virtually uncontrollable. In Yorkshire, as Jasper Ridley tells us, the local Council of Agitators "arrested their Commander-in-Chief, the Presbyterian General Poyntz, accusing him of treason in seeking to provoke a new civil war between Parliament and the Army. They sent Poyntz as a prisoner to Fairfax's headquarters at Uxbridge." Fairfax, the nominal head of the New Model, was "shocked at this act of indiscipline" and "released Poyntz at once."[7] Further, five cavalry regiments decided that the Agitators who had been representing them were either incapable of fulfilling their task or else had willingly betrayed it, and they proceeded to elect even more radical representatives, now known by the name of New Agents.

Aided by the democratic leaders from outside the Army, the ten Agents of the cavalry regiments published a manifesto titled *The Case of the Army Truly Stated*, a document that bluntly stated that "all power is originally and essentially in the whole body of the people of this nation." It demanded that the nation establish a "law paramount"—that is, a fundamental law—that Parliament be elected every two years "by all the freeborn at the age of 21 years and upwards . . . excepting those that have or shall deprive themselves of that their freedom" by fighting for the royalist cause. This demand, giving even recipients of wages and alms the franchise, was, in its day, an extraordinary step that symbolized the growing radicalization of the ranks.

The documents of this period, in fact, reveal a remarkable advance over earlier, more restrictive suffrages and demands. The first *Agreement of the People*, issued in late October, virtually amounted to a draft Leveller constitution for England. What makes this document remarkable is that it addressed itself to the *people* of England rather than to Parliament and called for the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords, establishing the Commons as supreme power in the state. Lest any doubt exist that Parliament gained its authority from the people, the *Agreement* declared: "Parliaments are to receive the extent of their power and trust from those that betrust them; and therefore the people are to declare what their power and trust is, which is the intent of this Agreement."[8] Moreover, the document emphasized that

> If any shall enquire why we [i.e., the Army] should desire to join in an agreement with the people to declare these to be our native Rights, and not rather petition to the Parliament for them: the reason is evident. No Act of Parliament is or can be unalterable, and so cannot be sufficient security to save you [the people] or us harmless, from what another Parliament may determine, if it should be corrupted.

Although the *Agreement* vested authority in the Commons, certain rights—such as freedom of religion, freedom from impressment, and equality before the law—were regarded as the "native rights" of all Englishmen that no Parliament could diminish or take away.[9] Not only did the *Agreement* demand manhood suffrage, equal electoral divisions, and biennial Parliaments, it significantly demanded that enclosed common lands should be restored to the poor, and that monopolies and sinecures should be abolished, a demand of paramount economic importance for the destiny of the country and its lower classes. The Levellers in the Army thereupon presented the *Agreement* to the General Council of the Army on October 28, 1647, recommending that it be accepted by the Council and placed before the country as a whole.[10]

Thus, two essentially irreconcilable factions within the Army, each with its own basic document about the future of England and ways of determining it, stood in open confrontation with each other—a confrontation whose outcome was to decide the future of the Revolution and of the realm.

THE PUTNEY DEBATES

The form this confrontation took was the justly famous Putney Debates between the Army radicals—among whom Leveller influence and political interest in a more democratic England had now reached their peak—and the largely conservative "Grandees."

The debates occurred between October 28 and November 11, 1647, in St. Mary's Church at the Army's headquarters in Putney, a short distance from London. Formally, they consisted of a series of meetings by the General Army Council on whether the New Model Army would place before the House of Commons the *Heads of the Proposals* prepared by Ireton or the *Agreement of the People* prepared by the Levellers as the basis for future government in England. We are fortunate that a member of Fairfax's secretariat, William Clarke, kept a nearly verbatim account of the key debates, which brings to life the often heated exchange of views that exploded between the Levellers and their "Grandee" opponents.

The debates were chaired by Cromwell and attended by a sizable complement of officers of all ranks as well as ordinary soldiers and a few civilians. Ironically, Fairfax, the nominal commander of the New Model, was absent. Instead,

Cromwell's son-in-law and close political associate, Commissary-General Henry Ireton, emerged as the principal spokesman for the "Grandees," although as chairman, Cromwell himself was anything but neutral; his repeated interventions on behalf of Ireton and his reprovals of the Levellers occasionally reached menacing proportions. The Lieutenant-General even threatened to resign his command if the Council adopted the *Agreement*, which set the debaters on edge and unnerved many of its observers. His was an intimidating voice rather than a compromising one.

The Levellers, in turn—which is to say, a large portion of the Army—were represented by the Agitator Private Edward Sexby and by two London Levellers, John Wildman and Maximilian Petty, among others, whose presence turned the debates into a relatively popular forum. Perhaps their most effective debater was Colonel Thomas Rainborough, an extraordinary man whose clear, pointed arguments provide us with one of the most outstanding articulations of radical opinion in mid-seventeenth-century England, and whose almost aphoristic observations were to reappear in radical British tracts long after the Revolution had passed into history. Rainborough, perhaps the only figure who could have replaced Cromwell in the leadership of the Army, would have been indispensable to the Leveller cause in the coming years, but in one of the tragedies of the Revolution, he died in a skirmish with Royalists in 1648.

The Putney Debates are all the more remarkable for having placed some of the most paramount social issues of the time in their proper context and place. They covered not only the full range of topics on democratic rights and social relations in seventeenth-century England but inferentially even the redistribution of property, if the logic of an unrestricted franchise were followed to its logical end. Nor did the "Grandee" debaters fail to point out that the views of the Levellers would lead precisely to this end.

The major topic that came to the foreground at Putney was the franchise: would all Englishmen be free to vote in parliamentary elections? Underlying this discussion were issues that concerned the consequences of so sweeping a franchise, notably its impact on wealth and the basic structure of government. The Levellers, as radical republicans, plainly wanted to bring the monarchy and the peerage to an end, just as surely as the "Grandees" hoped to retain a political and social hierarchy in the realm.

Ireton and the "Grandees" stood firmly with the social status quo, apart from small modifications offered by their *Heads of the Proposals*, such as more equal electoral districts. They plainly viewed the Leveller attack upon civil laws versus the "laws of nature" (or natural rights) as a political challenge to the entire social order. From the very outset of the debates, Ireton emphatically affirmed,

> I do not seek, or would not seek, nor will join with them that do seek, the destruction either of Parliament or King. Neither will I consent with those, or concur with them, who will not attempt all the ways that are possible to preserve both, and to make good use, and the best use that can be made, of both for the kingdom."[11]

This was the voice, of course, of a constitutional royalist who was closely attuned to aristocratic as well as economically privileged social interests.

By contrast, the Levellers at Putney upheld their *Agreement*'s assertion that the House of Commons was the sole national authority, answerable to the people, and called for the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. They expressly opposed blind obedience to unjust civil law. "I confess to me this principle [of obedience] is very dangerous," declared John Wildman, one of the civilian Levellers. ". . . It is contrary to what the army first declared" in the June 14 declaration: "that they stood upon such principles of right and freedom, and the laws of nature and nations, whereby men were to preserve themselves though the persons to whom authority belonged should fail in it."[12]

At issue here was the nature of the basis of the franchise. Was it a right based on natural law, as the Levellers argued? Or was it a privilege, depending upon property ownership, as the "Grandees" argued, in which case some people could justly be deprived of the right to vote? For the Levellers, all Englishmen possessed this right by virtue of their birth. Thus Rainborough called for the widest possible adult manhood suffrage, regardless of property ownership, arguing

> that every man born in England cannot, ought not, neither by the law of God nor the law of nature, be exempted from those who are to make laws, for him to live under, and for him, for aught I know, to lose his life under.[13]

Sexby, in turn, affirmed, "I am resolved to give my birthright to none."[14] If the franchise was to be denied to those who had taken up arms to fight for Parliament, Sexby continued, they should have been informed beforehand, for otherwise what had they fought for?

In his response Ireton argued that the basis for any social order is property, a social institution as distinguished from a natural right: "If you will resort only to the law of Nature, by the law of Nature you have no more right to this land, or anything else, than I have," he declared firmly. "I have as much right to take hold of anything that is for my sustenance, [to] take hold of anything that I have a desire to for my satisfaction, as you."[15] The natural political rights for which the Levellers argued, he maintained, would inevitably lead to the end of property. "No person," Ireton emphasized,

> has a right to an interest or share in the disposing or determining of the affairs of the kingdom, and in choosing those that shall determine what laws we shall be

ruled by here, no person has a right to this, that has not a permanent fixed interest [i.e. property] in this kingdom; and those persons together are properly the represented of this kingdom and consequently are to make up the representers of this kingdom, who taken together do comprehend whatsoever is of real or permanent interest in the kingdom.[16]

In short, it was property that counted in sorting out "the rights of the English," not natural right or virtue or personal excellence; neither the franchise nor property was a birthright of Englishmen. To constitute society according to a "law of nature" rather than a "social contract" that allows heirs to stake out their unchallengeable claim to property would be to jeopardize the very existence of the civil interest that property confers. Or as Ireton put it:

> If we shall go to take away this fundamental part of the civil constitution, we shall plainly go to take away all property and interest that any man has, either in land by inheritance, or in estate by possession, or anything else.[17]

Indeed, as he later declared:

> All the main thing I speak for is because I would have an eye to property. I hope we do not come to contend for victory, but let every man consider with himself that he do not go that way to take away all property. For here is the case of the most fundamental part of the constitution of the kingdom, which if you take away, you take away all by that.[18]

And challenging the natural law position of the Levellers, Ireton went on to say:

> Is it by the right of nature [that the Levellers found social life]? If you will hold forth that as your ground, then I think you must deny all property too, and this is my reason. For thus: by that same right of nature, whatever it be that you pretend, by which you can say, "one man has an equal right with another to the choosing of him that shall govern him"—by the same right of nature, he has an equal right to any goods he sees: meat, drink, clothes, to take and use them for his sustenance. He has a freedom to the land, [to take] the ground, to exercise it, till it; he has the [same] freedom to anything that anyone accounts himself to have any property in.[19]

This view on the "state of nature" and the "rights" it confers is redolent of very traditional arguments not only for private property and parliamentarism but for oligarchy and monarchy.

The most dramatic counterposition of Leveller and "Grandee" positions occurred during the second day of the debates. Rainborough, by affirming that

all Englishmen had the right to actively decide their own political fate irrespective of their station in life, voiced a statement that has echoed over generations as one of the great declarations of radical democracy:

> the poorest he that is in England has a life to live as the greatest he; and therefore truly, Sir, I think it's clear that every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that government; and I do think that the poorest man in England is not at all bound in a strict sense to that government that he has not had a voice to put himself under; . . . I should doubt whether he was an Englishman or no, that should doubt of these things.[20]

These words, apparently spoken in some heat, were not to be translated into political fact until three centuries or so later; nor did "the poorest he" find his clearest voice against the "greatest" until the emergence of modern socialism.

Although the Levellers repeatedly declared that they had no intention of "levelling men's estates," they were nonetheless intent on ending every form of legal or political privilege. The "Grandee" debaters were equally emphatic in their assertion that this view implicitly challenged the legitimacy of private property. Indeed, the views of the more extreme Levellers implied a relatively equitable distribution of wealth, with a reasonable material competence for artisans and land-hungry farmers, and possibly even a communitarian kind of society in the distribution of goods and resources.

Cromwell himself accused the Levellers of advancing a politics of Swiss-like cantonalism—or confederalism, as we might call it—charging Rainborough, Sexby, Wildman, and the Agitators with views leading to anarchy. "No man says that you have a mind to anarchy," he sternly declared,

> but *the consequence of this rule tends to anarchy,* must end in anarchy; for where is there any bound or limit set, if you take away this [limit], that men that have no interest but the interest of breathing [shall have no voices in elections]? [21]

The word *anarchy* was patently pejorative and in no way reflected the actual views of the Levellers. Rainborough and Petty, in fact, strongly denied the charge. But Rainborough qualified his reply and struck an egalitarian note nonetheless by asking "how it comes about that there is such a property" of some men, not of others.[22] Indeed, he continued, in stronger language,

> So one on the other side said, that if otherwise, then rich men shall be chosen [there would be no property]. Then I say the one part shall make hewers of wood and drawers of water of the other five, and so the greatest part of the nation be enslaved. Truly I think we are still where we were; and I do not hear any argument given but only that it is the present law of the kingdom.[23]

Given its time, this statement was nothing less than extraordinary. It implied the need for economic as well as political democracy. Rainborough essentially tore off the political veil that Presbyterian and Independent alike had placed over the material conditions that continued unchanged even after the people had taken up arms against the arbitrary power of the king. Nothing had improved for them, and, as Rainborough concluded, "They have now nothing to say for themselves."[24]

The various statements of Rainborough, Sexby, Wildman, and other Levellers were to be evoked time and again in the centuries that followed. At Putney, these men created a radical tradition without ever knowing that they had done so.

On November 4, having heard both sides, the Council of the Army finally voted to accept a resolution affirming the basic positions of the *Heads of the Proposals*. The monarchy and the House of Lords would be preserved. The only positive accomplishment that the Levellers won was a franchise that was broadened to include all freeborn males who had served in the war or contributed materially to it, regardless of property qualification, "if they be not servants or beggars." The Agitators were clearly disappointed by this last limitation, declaring that in the adopted proposals "the King's corrupt interest was so intermixed that in a short time, if he should so come in, he would be in a capacity to destroy . . . the people."[25]

Cromwell and Ireton remained steadfastly opposed to the broad franchise demands of the Agitators and their Leveller supporters. He and the other "Grandees" saw to it that the Agitators were dispatched back to their regiments, and once they were gone a committee of fairly conservative officers took advantage of their absence to close the debates. This move not only ended the Agitators' public forum but essentially dissolved them as a group.

THE RENDEZVOUS

Before the Putney Debates began, it had been agreed that the Army would hold a general rendezvous of all the regiments in the Southeast to adopt the Leveller *Agreement*, but the "Grandee" committee parceled this general rendezvous into three separate meetings, cannily fracturing the Army and isolating its more militant regiments. At a single rendezvous, the united Army might very well have adopted the Leveller program, and indeed, the Agitators had hopes that the resolution could be overturned in a general gathering of the soldiers.

The authority of the "Grandees" in the Army was soon put to a dramatic and decisive test. During the first of the three rendezvous, some eight regiments met at Corkbush Field, near Ware. Two of the more militant regiments, the cavalry of Major-General Thomas Harrison and the infantry of Colonel Robert Lilburne (a brother of John Lilburne who strongly sympathized with the Leveller cause and

commanded "the most mutinous regiment in the army"[26]), bitterly resented the outcome of the debates. Although these two regiments were not among those that were supposed to attend the Ware rendezvous, they suddenly appeared, flagrantly wearing copies of the *Agreement of the People* in their hats together with the motto "England's Freedom and Soldiers' Rights," and wearing green sprigs, the color of the Leveller party. Colonel Rainborough also came unscheduled, without his regiment, as did John Lilburne, who had just been released from prison. Clearly, Cromwell now faced a near-mutiny against his authority.

Fairfax's officers managed to cow Harrison's men by tearing the *Agreement* from their hats and arresting nine of the most militant soldiers, three of whom were tried on the spot by a military court-martial and sentenced to death. The three men were then told to throw dice for their lives. The loser, Private Richard Arnold, was shot to death before his regiment— "for promoting and assisting the work of the soldiery in reference to the Solemn Engagement of the Army," as a later Leveller pamphlet angrily and ironically put it.[27] The Levellers and their supporters would not forget this execution, for blood had finally been drawn between Leveller and "Grandee." Indeed, as the Leveller "Hunting of the Foxes" pamphlet argued, the ultimate failure of the Army rank and file to fulfill Leveller political goals was the work of these "foxes of the deepest kind."[28]

What may very well have postponed an Army mutiny was the news, which reached Ware four days before the rendezvous, that Charles had escaped from Hampton Court and taken refuge on the Isle of Wight, raising the likelihood of a second civil war. Cromwell, who had been negotiating with Charles well in advance of the Putney Debates, seems to have planted the notion in the king's head that Levellers were trying to "assassinate" him, which may have prompted the king, who was loosely guarded, to take flight. In any case, Cromwell knew that Charles had been negotiating with the Scots and with royalists in England to restart the Civil War, and the Lieutenant-General may have even tried to restore the monarchy in the hope of acquiring an earldom for his services. He could hardly have been unaware that the king would try, sooner or later, to escape from Hampton Court, since it was Cromwell's cousin, Robert Hammond, who, conveniently enough, was holding him under guard.

The "escape's" timing—precisely when the "Grandees" were dueling with the Levellers—could not have occurred at a better time for the Lieutenant-General: it served to unite the Army with its general officers against the king and his supporters, and it forestalled any plans for a mutiny. It required no effort by the "Grandees" to persuade the soldiers that a divided army would mean a royalist victory, and the men of the New Model had always prided themselves on their strong sense of military discipline. Events now forced them to place their loyalty to their militant and victorious Army above their Leveller aspirations. The Second Civil War that now loomed over them completely overshadowed the sharp political divisions that the Putney Debates had opened within the Army.

NOTES

1. "Army's Declaration," June 14, 1647, in Christopher Hill and Edmund Dell, eds., *The Good Old Cause: Documents of the English Revolution of 1640–1660: Its Causes, Course and Consequences*, 2nd ed., rev. (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1949; New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1969), pp. 348–9.
2. Quoted in *The Clarke Papers*, ed. C.H. Firth, vol. 1 (London: The Camden Society, 1891–1901), p. 260n.
3. Holles quoted in Antonia Fraser, *Cromwell: The Lord Protector* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973; originally published in Great Britain as *Cromwell: Our Chief of Men* by Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1973), p. 208.
4. Cromwell quoted in G.P. Gooch, *English Democratic Ideas in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), p. 127.
5. C.H. Firth, *Cromwell's Army: A History of the English Soldier during the Civil Wars, the Commonwealth and the Protectorate, being the Ford Lectures delivered in the University of Oxford 1900–1902* (London: Methuen & Co., 1962), p. 352.
6. "The Hunting of the Foxes, from Newmarket to Triploe Heaths to Whitehall, by Five Small Beagles (Late of the Army), or the Grandee-Deceivers Unmasked (That You May Know Them)," dated March 1, 1649, in Don M. Wolfe, ed., *Leveller Manifestoes of the Puritan Revolution* (originally published 1944; New York: Humanities Press, 1967), pp. 362–3.
7. Jasper Ridley, *The Roundheads* (London: Constable & Co., 1976), p. 94.
8. "An Agreement of the People (October 28, 1647)", in A.L. Morton, ed., *Freedom in Arms: A Selection of Leveller Writings* (New York: International Publishers, 1975; London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), p. 144.
9. See Firth, *Cromwell's Army*, p. 354.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 354.
11. *Clarke Papers*, vol. 1, p. 233.
12. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 260.
13. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 305.
14. Quoted in Christopher Hill and Edmund Dell, eds., *The Good Old Cause: Documents of the English Revolution*, p. 356.
15. *Clarke Papers*, vol. 1, p. 263.
16. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 301–2.
17. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 303.
18. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 306.
19. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 307.
20. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 300–1.
21. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 309 (emphasis added).
22. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 311.
23. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 320.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 441.
26. H.N. Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, ed. Christopher Hill (Nottingham: Spokesman University Press, 1976), p. 296.
27. "Hunting of the Foxes," *Leveller Manifestoes*, p. 363.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 359.

CHAPTER 7 Regicide and Defeat

Although Charles was still the nominal head of the Church of England, he opportunistically agreed to accept the Presbyterian faith in exchange for Scottish support and was once again able to lead a military force into battle against the New Model Army. The persistent treachery of this "man of blood," as he was called by the Puritans, had put an end to all patience on the part of the New Model Army—and early in 1648, the Second Civil War erupted in England.

Unlike the first, it lasted for only a few months. Yet despite its brevity, the Second Civil War often demanded more military prowess and even greater ruthlessness from Cromwell's forces than the first. The New Model Army was now obliged to defeat an invading Scottish army that was substantially larger than itself. Indeed, much of England expected that this time the royalists would prevail. Yet within a matter of months, the zeal of the New Model troops and the exceptional abilities of Cromwell and his commanders gave their Army its ultimate victory over the renewed royalist onslaught. At Preston in August 1648, Cromwell decisively defeated a force of Scots and Cavaliers twice the size of his own, and after mop-up operations against royalist holdouts during the rest of the summer, the New Model finally put an end to the renewed hopes of the monarchical cause.

The definitive victory of the revolutionary Army did not have the full support of the English people, nor did it gain the sympathy of the squirearchy and the merchant class, which had rallied to the House of Commons in the opening years of the revolution. By 1648, the radicals had frightened off most of the well-to-do classes and their dependents, sharply polarizing much of the country. As a whole, the English people—nobles, gentry, and plebeians—were not anti-royalist; they were merely outraged by the particularly noxious behavior of Charles. But the radicalism of the Army engendered fears of social instability that unsettled all the greater and lesser privileged strata of the country. When Army Agitators and the civilian Levellers who worked closely with them prepared *Agreements of the People* and demanded a democratic Army, the

middle classes and landed gentry united in opposition to the radicals, bringing their tenants and many dependents along with them.

In some areas of England the rural tenant population, in fact, took up arms against the revolutionary Roundheads, often on behalf of their own landlord. South Wales, Kent, and Essex in particular became sites of widespread royalist insurrections that Cromwell was obliged to subdue by military force. In these restive regions, the peasantry passively adopted the loyalties of their local lords, most of whom supported the king.

THE LEVELLERS AND THE SECOND CIVIL WAR

The setbacks that the Levellers encountered in the Army—the defeat of their *Agreement*, the murder at Ware, and the restored unity between the soldiers and their general officers in the Second Civil War against the king—shifted the focus of their political efforts to civilians, especially to London, where they probably became the earliest democratically organized political party in the modern era.[1] They recruited members from signatories to various manifestos and petitions and drew their finances from regular dues, which were collected in direct proportion to a member's income. These funds were used to print pamphlets and newsletters, and probably even to send organizers to various parts of the country to spread Leveller views and form new groups associated with those in the capital. No such organization had existed before, and given the times it had a significant impact on a Revolution that might have easily run adrift in many different and diffuse directions in its absence.

The London Leveller organization, the one on which we have the most detailed information, was clearly structured on a civic basis around ward groups in the city, which met regularly in local taverns sympathetic to the Leveller cause. Each ward group, in turn, sent representatives to a parish committee that embraced several wards, and, on a still higher level, elected "commissioners" or "agents" (the word was borrowed from the name that radicals used in the New Model Army) who constituted the Executive Committee of the Greater London area. This citywide executive made decisions of a tactical nature for the capital as a whole. Some three Executive Committee meetings were held every week, rotating from one tavern and ward to another. Depending upon the size of a given community, a similar form of organization existed outside London and its suburbs. Indeed, the structure, which doubtless varied from place to place, encompassed the "many thousands" that Leveller accounts loosely claim for the movement outside of London. Actually, it is likely that wherever parliamentary troops were stationed in any sizable numbers, they helped to create some kind of Leveller organization in their locality, a phenomenon of a kind we shall encounter in some of the revolutions of a later time.

Leveller forms of organization, far from inhibiting democracy within the movement, actually gave it a nearly libertarian form, partly by rotating office and meeting places. In the taverns where the Leveller movement found its local home, political life was very much part of the neighborhood in which a group was located, knit together by personal friendships and local agitation. The Leveller weekly, *The Monitor*, was widely read in London, both by civilians and soldiers, and Levellers generally "debated their grievance over a tankard of ale or a glass of sack and enjoyed all three," observes Brailsford, which helped loosen many tongues and make for lively arguments. Indeed, far from being limited to the New Model Army, the Levellers were in every sense a community movement with deep-seated, local roots among the ordinary people.

Nor did Leveller activity within the Army come to an end after Ware. While the Second Civil War was still in progress, the Levellers were deeply involved in nurturing radical sentiments in the Army, to which even the "Grandees" were obliged to yield. On the first day of the decisive Battle of Preston (August 17, 1648), a pamphlet apparently written by Henry Marten, one of the most radical of the Levellers, furiously attacked the "rich and mighty" in the name of the "plain men of England." All the troubles that beset the country, Marten's pamphlet argued, had been caused by "a confederacy amongst the rich and mighty to impoverish and so enslave all the plain and mean people throughout the land." Addressing this privileged and wealthy stratum of society, he made the accusation that

> by corruption in government, by unjust and unequal laws, by fraud, cosenage, tyranny and oppression [men of property have gotten] most of the land of this distressed and enslaved nation into your ravenous claws. Ye have by monopolies, usurers and combinations engrossed all the wealth, monies and houses into your possessions; yea and enclosed our commons in most counties.[2]

Such attacks on the wealthy—and on wealth as such—occurred throughout the Second Civil War, reaching deeply into the Army, which still had the force to back up such demands.

The summer and autumn of 1648 were to mark a high point in Leveller influence—within the Army, among the lower classes of London, and in far-flung districts of the countryside. Ironically, even the Presbyterian Commons and the so-called "silken Independents," as the more well-to-do and conservative elements of the Independent movement were called, tried to court the Levellers in the hope of using them against Cromwell. In late August 1648, the Commons went so far as to release "Honest John" Lilburne from another of his

prison terms in the Tower and even vote him £3,000 in recompense for his suffering at the hands of the Star Chamber in the 1630s.

But far from forming a faction against Cromwell, Lilburne, upon his release, immediately established contact with the Lieutenant-General in order to forge a common front against the king and the danger of a restoration of royal rule. The Leveller leader proposed that the parliamentary Independents, the Army, and the Levellers all send representatives to a meeting to draw up a final *Agreement of the People.* Lilburne, whose personal loyalty to Cromwell reached guileless, even obsessive, levels, naively closed his message with the pledge, "Yours to the last drop of my heart's blood." And in fact this pledge laid the foundation for an alliance between the Levellers and the Cromwellian Independents, one that both parties needed at the time, despite the basic antagonisms that still existed between them. The Presbyterian Parliament once again began to move provocatively toward disbanding the Army, or at least removing its commander, while, on the other side, Cromwell's own troops, many of whom were under Leveller influence, were forcing him to act decisively against the Presbyterians and especially against the king.

Although Cromwell was consistently contemptuous of the Levellers, he was necessarily obliged to come to a temporary compromise with them. In a series of conferences "Grandee" and Leveller representatives wrangled as always over drafts of their respective visions of England's future, often coming to verbal blows until it seemed that any reconciliation was impossible. In November, Fairfax called a meeting of the Army General Council that actually consisted only of the officers; the Agitators or Agents were not summoned. It issued the draft of a *Remonstrance* drawn up by Ireton that tried to offer the Levellers conciliatory positions on questions of religious toleration and the future of the king. But the Levellers, (Agitators or Agents), and rank and file troops were not taken in. They firmly demanded that the council issue a more strident *Remonstrance,* one that clearly advocated that the "man of blood" (Charles) be brought to justice and that the peerage be completely abolished. Like it or not, Cromwell desperately needed the Levellers at this point, and Ireton rewrote the tepid passages on the king, openly calling for his execution. Moreover, the document urged, any future king would have to be an elected one and would have to accept an *Agreement of the People*—a term that by now was becoming synonymous with a constitution or a fundamental law—according to which an elected Parliament would exercise power in the name of the people's wishes.

The Levellers, in fact, demanded substantially more. Unlike Ireton's *Remonstrance,* they wanted neither oligarchical parliamentarians nor Army officers to frame this fundamental law. Rather, they demanded that the great majority of Englishmen should elect what we would now call a constitutional convention to draw up an *Agreement*—that is, to state explicitly the power of the people's deputies and to draft and ratify a constitution.

THE RUMP PARLIAMENT

As usual, the Presbyterian Parliament remained ambivalent about the king. It wanted his return to power to ensure that Presbyterianism would be England's state religion, and it regarded the monarch as the only bulwark against a republic—or possibly, to its horror, even a democracy. Its commitment to the second war against the king had been as equivocal as its behavior during the first conflict. If anything, the Presbyterian Parliament was often overtly hostile to the New Model Army. "The Presbyterians, the majority in the House of Commons, had never wished for too decisive a victory for either side," observes Christopher Hill in his biography of Cromwell.

> They still hoped the King would save them from the "heretical democracy"—freedom of discussion and organization for the lower classes—which the Army advocated. In May, 1648, they had passed a savage act against heresy and blasphemy. They resumed the weary negotiations with the King while Cromwell pursued the defeated royalists into Scotland at the beginning of October.[3]

Indeed, such behavior by the middle class and liberal political center was not unique to the English Revolution, as we shall see; it was to recur in every major revolution in the centuries that followed.

For its part, the Army had exhausted every possibility of coming to terms with the Presbyterian Parliament and the Crown, and after its victory over Charles's forces, Brailsford observes, "the Army felt entitled to impose its will—God's will—on the defeated majority."[4] The Revolution seemed to enter an entirely new, more radical phase of its development. On December 6, 1648, trudging back to London after its victories in the north, the New Model Army again occupied the capital, and Colonel Thomas Pride, backed by troops and acting in accordance with the whole range of opinion within the Army from Cromwell to the radicals, surrounded and invaded the Commons. But Pride was a "Grandee." He did not dissolve the existing Parliament and replace it, as the Levellers demanded, by a popular convention that would choose a new House; rather, he created a one-party Parliament from the remaining 250-member Long Parliament, driving out its royalist and Presbyterian members. The few who still occupied their seats—only sixty-eight, principally Independents, whom Pride considered the "honest" or godly members—became the short-lived Rump Parliament, which subserviently followed the demands of the Army officers. A day after Pride's Purge, as it was called, Cromwell himself entered London, piously disclaiming any advance knowledge of the coup, which is hardly credible, but dutifully declaring his support for it.

The Rump Parliament, guided by its Cromwellian Independents, proceeded

to construct a republican state, the "Commonwealth", and half-heartedly co-opted many of the demands that had long been raised by the Levellers. By January 1649, the House passed three major resolutions to the effect that all state power ostensibly had its source in the people, specifically designating the House of Commons alone as their representatives. Enactments of the Commons alone had the force of law, requiring consent neither from the king nor from the House of Lords. Theoretically at least, England was now a republic, and after the monarchy was formally abolished on January 30 and the House of Lords on February 7, it seemed to become one in reality.

But in fact, no new elections were held. The Rump remained the sole legislative body of the nation in lieu of a more representative one prescribed by its own resolutions. Voting, when it occurred, was still based on a limited franchise, and state power was shared by the Rump, by a very powerful Council of State chaired by the Lieutenant-General, and by a High Court of Justice, or revolutionary tribunal. Moreover, the source of the Rump's power clearly was not the people but the Army; more precisely, its general officers. Although this Parliament was to form the country's supreme legislature for five years, the "Grandees" formed the *de facto* institutional basis for state power. Indeed, by its arbitrary proclamations the Rump approximated a collective tyranny, which troubled even Cromwell, a latent royalist sympathizer, who had never quite abandoned the idea of a settlement "with somewhat of monarchical powers in it." As time was to show, he may very well have aspired to precisely that status for himself.[5]

To Lilburne's lasting credit, the Leveller denounced Pride's Purge as the arbitrary foisting of a one-party rubber-stamp legislature on the country; indeed, the Rump essentially diluted and neutralized the Leveller vision of a popular convention. Instead of calling a constitutional convention to create an *Agreement of the People*, as the Levellers demanded, the Rump created a sixteen-man committee to draw up an *Agreement*, a term that had been coopted and its meaning cheapened by the "Grandees." After the committee members—who included both "Grandees" such as Ireton and even Levellers such as Lilburne—hammered out some generalities concerning their areas of political agreement, the committee fell apart over the issue of religious toleration: the Levellers insisted on complete religious freedom, including freedom for Catholics, Jews, and atheists, while the officers adamantly opposed it, maintaining that only selected "saints" should govern and hence that dissent should not be tolerated.

It is entirely possible that this quarrel was staged to drive the Levellers out of the committee. In any case, after a vehement quarrel, Lilburne withdrew in outrage at the committee officers and, with all the rhetorical powers at his command, warned of the dangers of outright military rule. On January 20, the remaining committee members submitted their own version of the *Agreement*, drafted largely by the "Grandees," to the Rump—which simply let it drift into

oblivion, producing a constitutional stasis that the committee's officers did not find in the least objectionable. Any Leveller agitation for a fundamental law thus was dissipated by the sheer inertia of the Rump and the "Grandees"; nor was it to be picked up for more than a century, notably in England's North American colonies. Finally, on January 27, the Rump condemned the king to death, fulfilling another aim for which the Levellers had long pressed. But the Levellers, again true to their principles, had always intended that this task should be undertaken by a truly representative House of Commons, not the illegitimate Rump, and Lilburne denounced the trial of Charles—whom he detested no less than the most radical of Independents—as an illegal and arbitrary act.

Charles's execution three days after his trial marked the first time in the modern era—perhaps ever—that a *popular* movement had committed regicide, a privilege that was formerly reserved only for members of the upper classes. By this behavior, the English Revolution thus attained a degree of radicality unprecedented in revolutionary movements in the past. Not even the English Peasant Revolt of the late fourteenth century had threatened the life of the monarch or challenged the sovereignty of the throne. In fact, for a brief period after the regicide, the English Revolution veered sharply to the left, relying partly on a measure of increasingly critical Leveller support, but above all on the growing radicalism of the New Model.

Yet needless to say, all did not sit well with the increasingly distrustful radicals. Sporadic outbreaks, even virtual mutinies, against the rule of the "Grandees" broke out in a number of radical Army contingents, which the regime quickly put down. Soldiers and officers who openly challenged the authority of the "Grandees" were arrested, and the Rump even tried to suppress dissenting opinions throughout the country. But dissent was ubiquitous. By April 1649, harsh Leveller attacks on the new regime and on Cromwell in particular appeared in print, notably John Lilburne's *The Second Part of England's New Chains Discovered*, in which the Leveller leader called for a restoration of the General Council of the Army with the inclusion of Agitators and the formation of a new Parliament elected on the basis of the Leveller *Agreement of the People.* Richard Overton's scathing *Hunting of the Foxes* blamed the officers' obstruction, opportunism, and hypocrisy for the Army's failure to impose a constitutional settlement along Leveller lines at a time when it could easily have done so.[6]

The new regime no longer regarded these pamphlets as dissent but as outright sedition, and four prominent Levellers—Lilburne, Walwyn, Overton, and Thomas Prince—were peremptorily arrested on charges of treason and thrown into the Tower. While he was awaiting trial, Lilburne, from behind closed doors outside the Council of State, overheard Cromwell tell the Council's president: "I tell you, sir, you have no other way to deal with these men but to break them in pieces" or

> they will break you; yea, and bring all the guilt of the blood and treasure shed and spent in this kingdom upon your heads and shoulders; and frustrate and make void all that work, that with so many years industry, toil and pains, you have done.[7]

Popular clamor for the Levellers' release brought thousands of Londoners in demonstrations before the court where they were being tried, just as, a little over a year earlier, huge Leveller street demonstrations had followed the coffin of Colonel Rainborough to its interment. Cowed by these mass actions, the "Grandees," in the end, had no choice but to acquit "Honest John" and the other Levellers, but the situation in the capital and elsewhere remained as heated as ever.

THE DEFEAT OF THE LEVELLERS

The execution of Charles sparked royalists in parts of Ireland and Scotland to proclaim the late king's son, also named Charles, as his successor, and, incongruously, the young Charles was obliged to raise his royalist armies in Catholic Ireland as well as Presbyterian Scotland, against Anglican and Puritan England, where English supporters of the king had nearly all been subdued. In the course of crushing this uprising, the Commonwealth took the opportunity to rid itself of troublesome radical military regiments as well by dispatching them to Ireland, thereby diminishing the impact they might have had on the domestic political situation—an obvious ploy that only heightened rank-and-file unrest in the Army.

In May 1649, this unrest finally came to a head. In Salisbury, Colonel Scroop's cavalry regiment, which was scheduled to go to Ireland, called a new Council of the Army for the ostensible purpose of discussing arrears in pay. In fact, the council was actually convened to coordinate the resistance of regiments who were being sent to Ireland without their consent. The same crisis that had led to the confrontation at Ware was now being replayed, this time possibly with greater success. Over a twelve-day period Scroop's and five other disgruntled regiments elected Agitators to represent them, and at the same time, troopers and civilian Levellers at Oxfordshire gathered into supportive formations of their own. Had these scattered dissenters acted entirely on their own, none of them would have posed a serious threat to the authority of Cromwell and the "Grandees." But if the various mutinous regiments could assemble together from their separate locations into a single military force, the regime had every reason to regard them as a major revolutionary challenge. And this was precisely the plan that the Levellers had in mind. On the evening of May 14, some twelve

cavalry troops, largely under Leveller influence, gathered at the village of Burford, near Oxford, waiting for sympathetic forces from other parts of the country to join them. But they did not come in time. Cromwell, apprised of the Leveller troop movements, furiously raced some forty miles to the Burford encampment, reaching it at midnight and taking the mutineers completely by surprise. He easily crushed the fragmented revolt in a nearly bloodless victory. Although three men were shot for their role in the mutiny, the remainder were either cashiered from the Army or pardoned.

The defeat of the troops at Burford essentially marked the end of the radicals' influence in the Revolution, although they were to participate in or initiate aborted insurrections for years to come. In another manifesto, issued by the Levellers in September 1649, *The Remonstrance of Many Thousands of the Free People of England*, which Brailsford "ranks among all their utterances as the most reckless and the most revolutionary," they hurled

> a declaration of war . . . at "all those tyrants and usurpers now sitting at Westminster." "Our burdens," it declares, "become so insupportable, that we are . . . compelled to make use of that means nature teacheth us for our own preservation." It calls for disobedience to all acts and orders of these usurpers, especially for a refusal to pay all taxes, assessments and tithes.

The manifesto openly threatened to avenge the Levellers who had been shot at Ware, Burford, and elsewhere; to gain debentures for the soldiers; to confiscate the wealth and estates that Members of Parliament had obtained as a result of the revolution; to enact the 1648 *Agreement of the People*; and most strikingly, to guarantee "every free commoner" the means of life. This last guarantee was an explicit threat to all the propertied classes of England. "For the attainment of all these ends," the manifesto concluded, "we have drawn our swords and are resolved not to put them up again till we have obtained the things before specified, not doubting of the aid and assistance of all honest and well-meaning men."[8] Approximately 100,000 people signed this challenging manifesto, nearly ten times the number who normally signed earlier Leveller petitions, and panic swept the ever-uneasy propertied classes. But no swords were drawn. The "Grandees" thoroughly purged the regiments on which the Levellers relied most, while other troops were by now thoroughly exhausted and largely demoralized. Nor is it likely that many civilians had the means or the stomach to do battle against an Army that had earned, and still retained, their deepest respect.

Thereafter, the Leveller movement fell apart, or dissolved into often pitiful conspiracies against Cromwell. The Burford defeat had produced a social vacuum, followed by defeats that left the radicals in despair. Individual Levellers each followed separate and surprisingly odd destinies. Sexby, the former soldier, came to detest Cromwell so much that he even joined with royalists in

conspiracies against him and his regime. Many Leveller officers who had not been cashiered by the "Grandees" rose in the ranks to become professional soldiers, while still others retired to private life. A few, like Lilburne, became Quakers, turning to nonviolence as a credo. The third revolution, which had seemed so close to success at Ware and at Burford, came to its tragic end in England. The new historical course on which the country embarked favored more enclosures of common fields, the dispossession of the peasantry and even the yeomanry from their land, and eventually the rise of industrial capitalism.

NOTES

1. On Leveller organization, see A.L. Morton, ed., *Freedom in Arms: A Selection of Leveller Writings* (New York: International Publishers, 1975; London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), chap. 17.
2. Quoted in H.N. Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, ed. Christopher Hill (Nottingham: Spokesman University Press, 1976), p. 340. Marten, it is worth noting, belonged to the very class he attacked in the pamphlet. His father was a rich lawyer who owned a large landed estate and, like his son, sat in the Commons.
3. Christopher Hill, *God's Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 100.
4. Brailsford, *Levellers*, p. 337.
5. Hill, *God's Englishman*, pp. 107–8.
6. "The Hunting of the Foxes," March 1, 1649, in Don M. Wolfe, *Leveller Manifestoes of the Puritan Revolution* (originally published 1944; New York: Humanities Press, 1967), pp. 359–83.
7. "Lilburne before the Council of State, April 1649," in *The Good Old Cause: Documents of the English Revolution of 1640–1660: Its Causes, Course and Consequences*, ed. Christopher Hill and Edmund Dell, 2nd ed. (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1969), p. 403.
8. "The Remonstrance of Many Thousands of the Free People of England", quoted in Brailsford, *Levellers*, pp. 573–4.

CHAPTER 8 Millenarian Sects and Cromwellian Governments

The waning influence and defeat of the Levellers did not bring the English Revolution to a complete end—but they did lead to a period that combined parody with pathos, absurdity with tragedy. Once the "Grandees" had firmly established themselves in power, they found themselves in a political cul-de-sac, much as the Jacobins would a century and a half later. Many goals that the parliamentary forces had long sought were fulfilled: the king was executed, and the monarchy and House of Lords were no more. Having accomplished these ends and created a Commonwealth, the "Grandees," who were unwilling to fulfill more radical ones, could advance no further socially. In the lack of new causes to fight for and ideals to uphold, the sense of rectitude that had impelled the revolutionary fervor of Puritanism and given it a social motivation was drastically diminished, and the officers, who were entrenched in positions of power, seemed to hold their offices for no other purpose than their private aggrandizement. To compensate for this spiritual emptiness, the "Grandees" turned inward, toward mysticism. Indeed, even on the eve of Pride's Purge, at a time when the Levellers were becoming increasingly secular, Cromwell's aides began to invoke variously images of a "New Jerusalem," of the "Fifth Monarchy" predicted in the Book of Daniel, and of the coming rule of a returning Christ.

Mysticism, in fact, had been a feature of the English radical milieu since the early 1640s. Mingling with the Independents and often straying well beyond their antiauthoritarian structures, a wide assortment of millenarian revolutionaries formed conventicles during the Revolution that in some cases were expressly pantheistic, if not outright atheistic. These sects, largely rooted in the wilder fenlands or "dark corners" of the North and West, seemed to echo the mystical anarchism of medieval sects such as the Brethren of the Free Spirit. Quakers, who would hardly be recognizable to the pious Brahmins who speak in their name today, mingled with revolutionary Anabaptists like Familists, who

strongly believed that a heaven on earth was imminent and roamed through the countryside spreading the good news. In the 1640s "there was a period of glorious flux and intellectual excitement," observes Christopher Hill in his radical, perhaps most libertarian book on the English Revolution; indeed, for a time it seemed that,

> as Gerrard Winstanley [the Digger leader] put it, "the old world is running up like parchment in the fire." Literally anything seemed possible; not only were the values of the old hierarchical society called into question but also the new values, the protestant ethic itself. Only gradually was control re-established during the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell, leading to a restoration of the rule of the gentry, and then of King and bishops in 1660.[1]

Nevertheless, most of these movements—if such they can actually be called—went unnoticed or exercised influence only in the most remote areas of the land.

THE FIFTH MONARCHY MEN

Perhaps the most prominent of these sects was an overheated millenarian tendency, the Fifth Monarchy Men, who lived in momentary expectation of a Second Coming of Christ and a communistic dispensation of the world's goods. Their name was taken from the Fifth Monarchy envisioned in the Book of Daniel, in which "the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the kingdom of the Saints of the most High" (vii:27). According to the dispensation advanced by Fifth Monarchy Men, the "saints," in effect, would gain the divine mantle that kings had previously worn and live in blissful happiness in a world free of sin and want.

The strength of the movement lay more in its demands for religious reform and its simple sense of humanity for the poor than in its fervent expectation of miraculous intervention into human affairs, which thus made its ideas acceptable to a wide range of people across social class. Indeed, a belief in a Fifth Monarchy that would be installed with the coming of Christ, for all its apocalyptic overtones, did not necessarily constitute an overt challenge to property, and the movement failed to spell out a concrete program for economic change. Hence, it remained a pious tendency that sought generally but harmlessly to see oppressions removed and grievances resolved.

Even fairly extreme Fifth Monarchy Men, such as they were, gave no support to the Levellers' *Agreements of the People*, since what this era needed, they believed, was not a republic but, rather vaguely, a dictatorship of "saints." The very notion of "saints" which the Fifth Monarchy Men promoted was patently

elitist, in stark contrast to the Levellers' egalitarian ideas and demands for a popular franchise; thus Fifth Monarchism was not without its appeal to the saintly "Grandees" themselves, who were bitterly hostile to the very real—and dangerous—secular demands of the Levellers. "The Saints of the Most High . . . are a people distinct from the world," a Fifth Monarchy tract observed,

> . . . and are by themselves a Common-Wealth and Free State; and there 'tis to be desired from good and sound grounds, that they would exercise that Royal Authority which God has given unto them, and invested them with, as they are saints by calling.[2]

Even one of the most distinguished Fifth Monarchy Men, Major-General Thomas Harrison, a New Model soldier who had been converted to millenarianism during the Revolution, had a rather wayward career. During the Putney Debates, Harrison had sided with Rainborough and resolutely sought to bring the king to justice; afterward he formed a close relationship with Cromwell against his former associates and was one of the architects of a later parliament of "saints" known to history as Barebone's Parliament.

Their elitism, as it turned out, locked many Fifth Monarchy Men into naive conspiracies, failed uprisings, and individual acts of defiance that more closely resemble the hapless terrorists of Russia or the Blanquists of France than the mass movement that the Levellers tried to establish. In contrast to Leveller secularism, the mystical message of an elect group destined to redeem the world in spite of itself offered no serious threat to the rule of the "Grandees," and when the time came to do without it, it was easily suppressed.

THE RANTERS

The turn toward mysticism that followed the waning of the Leveller movement found its most absurd and noisiest, if not its strongest, expression in the Ranter movement: a collection of small groups that were neither coordinated nor knit together in any palpable way but oddly gained a sizable and ineffectual urban following, particularly among the London poor, who could only dream of a forthcoming miracle that would "levell" the wealthy "to lay the Mountain low." That their number grew rapidly after the Leveller troops at Burford were subdued suggests that they were largely a product of the despair that followed that defeat rather than an advance in the fortunes of the Revolution. Their name came from their alleged tendency to talk, shout and gesticulate—in short, to rant—unintelligibly in public. Whether such behavior really characterized the Ranters is arguable, since Presbyterians, royalists, and Independents alike tended

to caricature sectaries of all kinds, if only to erode their influence with ridicule when they could not destroy them outright.

What Ranter groups seem to have shared was a rejection of all literal interpretations of Scripture as well as a rejection, based on moral law, of deference to any kind of authority, be it secular or divine. God, these basically pantheistic radicals declared, existed everywhere and was embodied in all things. One Ranter pamphlet reads:

> I see that God is in all Creatures, Man and Beast, Fish and Fowle, and every green thing, from the highest Cedar to the Ivey on the wall; and that God is the life and being of them all, and that God doth really dwell, and if you will personally; if he may admit so low an expression in them all, and hath his Being no where else out of the Creatures.[3]

This outlook led the Ranters to very radical social conclusions: "a deep concern for the poor, a denunciation of the rich and a primitive biblical communism," observes A.L. Morton in his comprehensive account of their activities, "that is more menacing and urban than that of Winstanley and the Diggers." Indeed, their antiauthoritarian rejection of Scripture and deferent behavior, as well as their flagrant disrespect for religious institutions and the state, has led some historians to characterize them as "anarchists."

Possibly—but if the Ranters were anarchists, they were mystical anarchists, and their mysticism tended to completely paralyze their capacity to change the real world. As Morton points out, for the Ranters it was "God himself [who] was the great Leveller, who was to come shortly 'to Levell with a witnesse, to Levell the Hills with the Valleyes, to lay the Mountaines low.'"[4] Alas, divine intervention was not an auspicious program for action. The Levellers had tried to set things right by the sword, and the Diggers, more feebly, by the spade, as we shall see, but the Ranters could offer nothing more than another millennium. Indeed, there is much to show that their outlook drifted toward an ineffectual quietism. A Ranter pamphleteer of the late 1640s articulated a distinctly quietistic approach in a work that addressed "King, Monarchy and Parliament" with the following denunciation:

> You are afraid to lay down your Swords, lest you should lose your Liberties; but the Lord will recompense this seven-fold into your bosme, he is coming to make you suffer a blessed Freedom, a glorious Liberty, a sufficient recompense for the loss of all outward glories. . . . When you are become children of the new birth, you shall be able to play upon the hole of the Aspe, and to dwell with the Cockatrice in his den, oppression and tyranny shall be destroyed before you.[5]

The very religiosity of this injunction almost seems sanctimonious at a time when England was still in turmoil and Levellers were hoping for an insurrection that would overthrow Cromwellian rule.

How many small groups and individual converts there were among the Ranters is very unclear. Iconoclastic and devout as they no doubt were, the more outstanding Ranter "leaders," whatever that term meant, were basically commanders without an army, and any notion that they constituted a serious threat to established authority was more useful to royalists, who wanted to panic the public in order to suppress more serious competitors in the conflict with the Commonwealth, than to more knowing authorities who had no difficulty in silencing them with harassment, arrests, and ridicule.

THE DIGGERS

The Diggers advanced explicitly communistic ideas that they hoped to apply to the common lands still available in England, and sought a radical dispensation of property in the interests of the landless. Denoting themselves as the "True Levellers," the Diggers went almost completely unnoticed during the English Revolution itself; their fame in our own time is the product more of radical research into the era than of their actual impact on it. We know from legal documents that on Sunday, April 1, 1649, a small group of landless men—perhaps no more than a dozen—and their families gathered with spades at St. George's Hill, a common just outside London, and began to dig up the very unpromising soil there in order to cultivate food. This action was perhaps more symbolic than materially rewarding. Their encampment grew to about forty or fifty, and with it grew their boldness, which soon began to distress the local parson and the gentry in the area. These radicals with spades were led by William Everard, a former New Model soldier who had been cashiered out of the service because of his radicalism, and by Gerrard Winstanley, a linen tradesman in London whose small business had been ruined by the Civil War.

The appearance of Gerrard Winstanley marks a genuine high point in the Digger movement. Although he had never been educated beyond ordinary grammar school, Winstanley was a superb pamphleteer, and within little more than a year, he was flooding London and other receptive areas of England with his works, detailing his communistic aims and his pantheistic beliefs. The earth, in Winstanley's view, was a "common treasury" that should be shared by all and worked communally. His social program was simple and basically rural: "The earth with all her fruits of Corn, Cattle, and such like, was made to be a common Store-House of Livelihood to all mankind friend and foe, without exception."[6]

This economic program, as Christopher Hill observes, represented a possible alternative course of development for England:

> Collective colonization of the waste by the poor [which amounted to about a third of the land in England] could have had the advantages of large-scale cultivation, planned development, use of fertilizers, etc. It could have fed the expanding English population without disrupting the traditional way of life to anything like the extent that in fact happened. The Diggers sowed their land with carrots, parsnips and beans—crops of the sort that were to transform English agriculture in the seventeenth century by making it possible to keep cattle alive throughout the winter in order to fertilize the land. . . . Winstanley had got a solution to his own paradox: "the bondage the poor complain of, that they are kept poor by their brethren in a land where there is so much plenty for everyone, if covetousness and pride did not rule as king in one brother over another."[7]

By conviction, Winstanley was more of a pantheist than a Puritan or Independent, for "to know the secrets of nature is to know the works of God," he wrote, denying the existence of a heaven or hell as a "strange conceit."[8] "Reason," in his eyes, is the "great creator," and anarchy—at least, the absence of rule—was the earliest and most benign form of social life, for "not one word was spoken in the beginning that one branch of mankind should rule over another."[9] Not only did the Diggers squat on common land that manorial lords coveted when they tried to break up Digger settlements (both the one at St. George's Hill and a later one at Cobham), but when Diggers took to cutting timber, they committed an affront to the gentry and yeomanry that was almost comparable to stealing horses. This action was done very publicly, in order to assert the right of ordinary folk to common lands and, perhaps more disquietingly, to a way of life in which land was shared by all in common.

Moreover, the Diggers sent out their own missionaries to the countryside, with the result that Digger colonies appeared in Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Middlesex, Bedfordshire, and on a common in Kent, among other places. At their colony in Wellingborough (in Northamptonshire) they met with a good deal of sympathy from local farmers who provided them with seed and some assistance. Agriculturally, 1650 was a very difficult year in England; the sharp rise of food prices over the previous three years, together with burdensome taxes, had reduced many rural dwellers to virtual beggary. Warehouses containing corn were looted, and hunger spread into the towns and cities of the realm.

Local attempts to suppress the Diggers, however, soon brought in the Army. The Digger leaders met with Fairfax, who treated them courteously and apparently regarded them as harmless. Although the ever-prudent Cromwell seems to have shown some concern over their activities, in the end the Army did

nothing to stop them, and they were left to the less kindly mercies of the surrounding inhabitants. Ironically, it was not the manorial lords who finally destroyed the Digger experiments but the yeomanry, who kept a sharp eye on the common lands for their own ends and generally despised the Digger colonies as an affront to their parochial interests. What the Army did not try to do with troops, the locals successfully did with raids on Digger encampments and harassment—and within a year after the Diggers first spaded St. George's Hill, most of the colonies were dispersed.

As a pacifist who eschewed violence as a matter of principle, Gerrard Winstanley would have had little in common with the leaders of the great peasant revolts of earlier centuries in England, France, and the German states. He sought to win the hearts of his opponents by his example and powers of persuasion, playing no role in the Leveller revolts. Nor was he associated with the somewhat militant politics of the Fifth Monarchy Men. Indeed, it is likely that he felt distant from the mass movements that had brought down the monarchy, although he opposed the Cromwellian dictatorship. The "True Magistracy"—the vision he advanced for the future—was not a direct democracy but at least a representative one, and his surprisingly centralistic politics called for a social order based more on punitive measures than on love.

BAREBONE'S PARLIAMENT AND THE PROTECTORATE

The uprising of the Irish and the Scots had provided Cromwell with sufficient excuse to invoke the danger of a perpetual external threat to the Revolution, as did Robespierre and Stalin in later times. Thus, after the Army subdued these uprisings, the "Grandees" dissolved the Rump Parliament in April 1653 and created still another, even less representative, body to rule the country. Cromwell and his Council now decided to gather a picked assembly, or Nominated Parliament, of the more colorful religious radicals from among the independent congregations to usher in the reign of the "saints."

With the help of the Fifth Monarchy Man Thomas Harrison, devout Congregational ministers prepared a list of potential nominees, leaving it to Cromwell's own commanders to choose 140 "godly men" to be members of the new Parliament, which presumably would issue laws and devise a constitution for the country based on Puritan principles. The royalist and anti-Cromwellian wags in London took to mocking the assembly as "Barebone's Parliament," named after Praise-God Barbon, a leather merchant and Fifth Monarchy Man who, in fact, played a rather insignificant role in the Parliament's proceedings.

The convocation of the Parliament marked the zenith of Fifth Monarchy influence. About half or more of the new parliamentarians seem to have been

either Fifth Monarchy Men or influenced by Fifth Monarchy ideas. Cromwell opened the sessions of the Barebone's Parliament with an ecstatic speech, declaring, "I confess I never looked to see such a day as this—it may be nor you neither—when Jesus Christ should be so owned as he is at this day . . . by your call." The speech resounded with the cry: "Truly you are called by God to rule with him and for him."[10] The saintly body remained in existence for five months, while Cromwell, needless to say, conducted state affairs in the background.

Barebone's Parliament has entered into historical accounts as more of a wrangling, semihysterical congregation than a legislative body, but it also had a pragmatic side that has largely been ignored by some historians. Despite sharp divisions around religious policy, it tried to reform and remove some of the feudal archaisms from the legal system, provide relief for creditors and poor prisoners, humanize the penal system (including limiting the use of the death penalty to major crimes), and provide assistance for victims of land enclosures and oppressive landlords. It even turned marriage into a civil ceremony and made earnest attempts to foster literacy among the ordinary populace.

To what extent Cromwell's professed piety sincerely guided his actions is hard to judge. Much to the disgust of the Levellers, he routinely invoked God, especially in difficult moments, when the cold pragmatics of power required him to abjure his ostensible egalitarianism. "You shall scarce speak to Cromwell about anything," Overton's pamphlet sarcastically noted, "but he will lay his hand on his breast, elevate his eyes and call God to record; he will weep, howl and repent, even while he doth smite you under the first rib." "Oh Cromwell!" cried the pamphleteer, "Whither art thou aspiring?"[11]

As it turned out, Cromwell was aspiring less for sainthood than for power. Barebone's Parliament sufficiently frightened the well-to-do strata with whom Cromwell had curried favor throughout the stormy 1640s to open the way to direct military rule, and he abruptly disbanded the Parliament in December 1653. The radicals were forced out of the House and the remaining conservatives obligingly called upon him to take over the state completely. A new Instrument of Government proclaimed Cromwell "Lord Protector" of a military dictatorship, the Protectorate—a euphemism for complete military rule over the country and the enforcement of a Puritan moral code that was none the less weakening.

A Council of State (more precisely, the major-generals of the Army and the Lord Protector) took over the real governing of the country and, as if to remove any pretense of representative government, the Lord Protector and the Council all but placed the country under martial law in the summer of 1655. England was divided into twelve military districts, each ruled by a major-general and a corps of largely professional troops. Many of the more humane achievements of Barebone's Parliament were simply eliminated, and censorship was not only reinstated but gradually tightened to a point where virtually all free political expression in the land came to an end.

The Lord Protector now began to turn on his own erstwhile comrades. Old revolutionaries who had aided Cromwell during his halcyon years, such as Thomas Harrison, a dyed-in-the-wool millenarian, and the scholarly Independent Sir Henry Vane, were imprisoned, and the radicals were unrelentingly driven from any positions of power or fled into exile. "The Protectorate meant the victory of conservatism in church and state," Hill observes in his biography of Cromwell.

> A member of the old family of the Howards, who had been reactionaries even in the days of the monarchy, was made colonel of the regiment of Nathaniel Rich, dismissed for his radical views. The whole army was under constant process of transformation from the ideologically committed force of the 1640s to the formidable professional army of the later 1650s. . . . Gone were the exuberant days of free discussion: opposition pamphlets could appear only illegally.[12]

The triumph of reaction is perhaps best seen in Cromwell's address to the first of the specious Parliaments that he summoned to give his rule a veneer of legitimacy. Addressing this assemblage of wealthy members, gentry, and magistrates, the Lord Protector sharply attacked the Levellers—his erstwhile rank and file in the Army—and assured the "natural rulers" of the realm:

> a nobleman, a gentleman, a yeoman: that is a good interest of the nation and a great one. The magistracy of the nation, was it not almost trampled underfoot, under despite and contempt by men of Levelling principles? . . . Did not the Levelling principle tend to reducing all to an equality? . . . What was the design but to make the tenant as liberal a fortune as the landlord?[13]

Whatever defiance existed came from Fifth Monarchy preachers who became the nuclei in London around which congregations hostile to the Protectorate were formed. A plot by Fifth Monarchy Men and discontented Army officers to assassinate Cromwell in January 1657 seems to have been intended as a prelude to a more concerted attempt to rise in insurrection. But their efforts were quickly headed off. Before they could even take any violent action, Thomas Venner, the leader of the plot, and his supporters were rounded up and brought before Cromwell and the Council of State. That they and their followers were treated with extraordinary leniency by Cromwell and eventually released is perhaps evidence of their ineffectuality; in any case the Lord Protector, who was being groomed as an uncrowned king, apparently viewed the sect as harmless. The movement continued to foment plots, conspiracies, and aborted plans for uprisings, directly up to the Restoration, but to no avail. The same is true of the Ranters. In the early 1650s, a parliamentary committee was established to investigate the activities of the Ranters and their spokesmen were imprisoned, but

the charges against them had less to do with sedition than with religious heresy, and they were slowly driven underground until they too all but faded away.

As early as 1652, Gerrard Winstanley was thoroughly disenchanted with the results of the Revolution and with the popular disregard of the Digger experiments. Among the memorable lines in his famous *Law of Freedom* are the very moving poetic passages that express his bitter disillusionment:

> Truth appears in Light, Falsehood rules in Power;
> To see these things to be, is cause of grief each hour.
> Knowledge, why didst thou come, to wound, and not to cure?
> I sent not for thee, thou didst me inlure.
> Where knowledge does increase, there sorrows multiply,
> To see the great deceit in which the World doth lie . . .
> O death where are thou? wilt thou not tidings send?
> I fear thee not, thou are my loving friend.
> Come take this body, and scatter it in the Four,
> That I might dwell in One, and rest in peace once more.[14]

Thereafter Winstanley faded into oblivion. Like the once combative John Lilburne, he ended his life quietly as a Quaker.

DENOUEMENT

To those who would view the Protectorate as a regime guided by capitalistic interests, the evidence is essentially disappointing. Throughout its existence during the 1650s, the regime followed commercial policies that often indicate a surprising subordination of strictly bourgeois interests to ideological precepts. The Protectorate did not encourage *laissez-faire* ideas any more than the Stuarts had; indeed, it was a mercantilist theory of controlled trade that prevailed over any *laissez-faire* notions. Government interference in economic affairs was very common. As Lawrence Stone observes,

> old views about the just price, the wickedness of usury, and society's obligation to provide for the poor persisted throughout the century. At every period of harvest failure, the government of Charles I, the Rump Parliament, or the Restoration monarchy, resorted to the usual measures of control of prices, prohibition of hoarding, ban on exports, attempts to bully employers to put more people to work, and pressure on the local authorities to increase poor relief from local taxation. Maximum interest rates remained limited by law and the limit was in fact reduced. Poor relief for the old, the sick, the orphaned, and involuntarily unemployed continued throughout the century, regardless of the regime, and tended to increase rather than decrease in quantity as time went on.[15]

Admittedly, Cromwell's conflicts with the Dutch, which culminated in an English victory in 1652, were primarily commercial in nature, conflicts that Lawrence Stone has called a "watershed in English history." But during the Protectorate, Stone continues, it is notable that Cromwell's foreign policy

> was far more ambiguous. He hated fighting fellow Protestants and soon put an end to the war with Holland. His support for England's huge navy and his use of it to obtain bridgeheads around the coast of Europe and to launch an onslaught on the Spanish colonial empire in the Caribbean were motivated only marginally by commercial considerations. He was primarily concerned to make England feared in Europe, to deter foreign powers from supporting the Stuarts, to strike a blow against the power of Spain, and to transfer the mineral wealth of Latin America from that popeish country to Protestant England.

Cromwell's policy did not "meet with much approval from England's merchant community," Stone adds, "who saw their lucrative Mediterranean and Spanish trade cut off with no compensating gain, since the attempt was a dismal failure."[16]

A portrait of Cromwell that dates from shortly before his death depicts him clothed in monarchical ermine, which suggests that he may have been intent on creating a new royal dynasty. Evidently only the memory of his radical past restrained him from proclaiming himself king. Not surprisingly, his third son, Richard, took over the Protectorate after his death in 1658, only to founder in conflicts that erupted between the military and Parliament, and the scion seems gladly to have resigned his office in May 1659.

Finally, in February 1660, royalist troops led by General George Monck entered London, dissolved the remaining Parliament, and reestablished the Presbyterian Long Parliament, which Pride had purged a decade earlier. The Long Parliament officially dissolved itself after reestablishing Presbyterianism as the virtual state religion, and the new Commons that followed upon the Long Parliament's dissolution was overwhelmingly royalist—a political orientation that probably reflected widespread support for England's "natural rulers" after the military interregnum and the Protectorate. Charles II, the son of the late monarch, was proclaimed king and during his reign tried to steer a course between Puritans, Anglicans, and Presbyterians, while his Parliaments were firmly intent on retaining the powers they had accrued during the Revolution.

Under the restored monarchy, the Fifth Monarchy Men Thomas Harrison and John Carew were hanged as regicides. Thomas Venner and some fifty other Fifth Monarchy Men managed virtually to convulse London in a series of guerrilla

attacks and battles until all of them were eliminated. When Venner was captured, he behaved with unusual heroism at his trial and execution in January 1661, and executions of accused Fifth Monarchy Men continued for years thereafter, although the government's fears of serious uprisings by this rather formless sect were patently unfounded.

The generally lax rule of Charles II was followed by the high-handed reign of his brother, James II, who still laid claim to divine right and openly adhered to Catholicism, creating widespread disaffection in the country. In time, peers, lawmakers, and the well-to-do classes of the realm invited William of Orange to "invade" England, and he and his wife, Mary, who was next in line in the succession to the English throne after James's newborn son, landed with a Protestant "armada" of some fifty warships and five hundred transports at Torbay, an inlet on the Devonshire coast. With virtually no support from his own army, James II was permitted to "escape" to France in December 1688. What English historians were to hail as the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688–89, as distinguished from the "Great Rebellion" of the 1640s, established a domesticated Protestant monarchy that was now answerable to Parliament and the laws of the land.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE REVOLUTION

Certainly the immediate result of the English Revolution was less than a capitalist transformation. English society and its basic politics remained primarily agrarian in character; and although trade became very important in the century that followed, this does not alter the fact that England was ruled by a landed hierarchy—not by men whose main interests were industrial and commercial. Nor did the strengthening of Parliament in itself confer political power on the commercial classes as a result of the Civil War; rather, it was returned legally to the "Country" at the expense of the "Court"—that is to say, to landed classes. In the eighteenth century most of Parliament's members were still rural-based gentry who, while admittedly engaging in a great deal of commerce and the production of goods for the market, were by no means necessarily involved in the wool trade and indeed were more agrarian in their outlook and lifeways than urban and bourgeois. These essentially agrarian strata recovered the institutional power they had enjoyed earlier, but in a setting that allowed for greater political and personal freedom. They may have ultimately created a more favorable climate for capitalism, but they were not the initiators of a capitalistic dispensation. Indeed, a major achievement of the English Revolution may well have been a restructuring of the English nation-state from an emergent absolutist regime to a largely oligarchical one.

What made the "century of revolution," as Christopher Hill has called it, so important for England and later for the Western world, is largely political: it vastly diminished arbitrary power as such.[17] For hundreds of years, monarchs ruled with little restraint, draining the wealth of their realms for dynastic or ideological purposes, despoiling their subjects, and confiscating their property. By the eighteenth century, Spain had been ruined by the arbitrary exactions of its Habsburg rulers, while France was brought to near ruin by the demands of its last Bourbon rulers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. With the diminution of royal power, new social forces and tendencies beyond individual control began to play a more ascendant role than they could when monarchies—strong or weak—could inhibit new historical developments.

The English Revolution enormously strengthened the power of a politically innovative Parliament at the expense of a smothering, reactionary monarchy. Where James I had succeeded to the English throne by hereditary right, an Act of Parliament was required to give George I the throne in 1714. Where the Tudors had summoned Parliament at their own discretion, by 1714 Parliament was more or less in permanent session and not only controlled finance and formulated economic policy but had a major voice in formulating foreign policy. Moreover, in England, the "century of revolution" created an orderly, collectively ruled, relatively more decentralized and tolerant political state that gave rise to a constitutional regime. Unlike under feudalism, individuality became more important than corporate relationships, and personal liberty, which was closely associated with the sanctity of private property, began to count for more than arbitrary behavior in dealing with persons and their wealth. It was now widely accepted that England was to be ruled by law rather than custom, and it was Parliament, the collective representative of the propertied classes, that made those laws, not the "Court." All of these changes created a vital setting for what existed of a capitalistic economy, but they did not necessarily bring it to the island.

England had been awash with countless sects, "gathered churches," and movements too numerous to mention, but with the defeat of the Levellers and the rise of a military regime, the focus of revolution shifted elsewhere.

NOTES

1. Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), p. 12. Religious sectaries, anarchistic mystics, and communistic pantheists add spice to this account of the English Revolution, but it should be noted that *The World Turned Upside Down* was written at a time when libertarian movements and ideas were very much in vogue in America and Western Europe.
2. Quoted in P.G. Rogers, *The Fifth Monarchy Men* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 304.

3. Jacob Bauthumley, "The Light and Dark Side of God," quoted in Norman Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 304.

4. Quoted in A.L. Morton, *The World of the Ranters: Religious Radicalism in the English Revolution* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970), p. 71. It is worth noting that the Ranters' numbers included even atheists, for whom "the sacred BIBLE was but a meer Romance, and contradictory to itself; only invented by the Witts of Former Ages, to keep the People in subjection."

5. J. Salmon, "A Rout, A Rout," quoted in Morton, *World of the Ranters*, p. 85.

6. Gerrard Winstanley, "A Declaration from the Poor Oppressed People of England," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Andrew Hopton (London: Aporia Press, 1989), pp. 26–7.

7. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, pp. 104–5.

8. In Christopher Hill and Edmund Dell, eds., *The Good Old Cause: Documents of the English Revolution of 1640–1660: Its Causes, Course, and Consequences*, 2nd ed., rev. (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1949; New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1969), p. 385.

9. Hill and Dell, *Good Old Cause*, pp. 385, 395. See also Winstanley, *Selected Writings*.

10. Quoted and discussed in Christopher Hill, *God's Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 139.

11. "The Hunting of Foxes," in Don M. Wolfe, ed., *Leveller Manifestoes of the Puritan Revolution* (1944; New York: Humanities Press, 1967), p. 370.

12. Hill, *God's Englishman*, p. 149.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

14. Gerrard Winstanley, *The Law of Freedom in a Platform, or True Magistracy Restored*, ed. Robert Kenny (New York: Schocken Books, 1941), p. 147.

15. Lawrence Stone, "The Results of the English Revolution," in *Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776*, ed. J.G.A. Pocock (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 45–6.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 45–6, 48.

17. Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution: 1603–1714* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1961; New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1966), pp. 1–2.

PART III

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

CHAPTER 9 "A Kind of Revolution"

The men and women who rallied to the Leveller cause in the late 1640s faded away with the rise of Cromwell's interregnum. But their political ideal of "an agreement of the people acceptable to the general will," as H.N. Brailsford observes, did not disappear. "It crossed the Atlantic . . . and bore ripe fruit. Defeated in Europe, the English Revolution found its triumph and its culmination in America."[1]

Until recently, there has been a tendency among historians to deprecate the migration of radical ideals to colonial America and the radicalism of the American Revolution generally. Its revolutionary character has been slighted by historians who treat it as a mere war for independence, a conservative movement to preserve existing political institutions, or a purely economic conflict between competing colonial interests and the "mother country." Even so populist a historian as Howard Zinn has dismissed the American Revolution as a "kind of revolution" and demeaned it for its presumed tameness and upper-class bias,[2] while other historians portray it as a gentlemanly ballet between bewigged Anglo-Americans.

It is one thing to look at the Revolution in the terms of the varying fortunes of the late-twentieth-century American Left, and quite another to examine it within the context of its own time, more than two centuries ago. As an eighteenth-century phenomenon, the American Revolution continued an earlier political tradition based, like the English Revolution, on "the rights of Englishmen," but it built this tradition into a force that would gain monumental importance, no less for Europe and even colonized countries than for the United States. In its own time, this Anglo-American tradition was to become distinctly revolutionary, in a sense that would have been congenial to figures such as Lilburne, Rainborough, and Overton.

In arguing the case that the American colonies underwent a revolution in the 1770s and 1780s and not merely a war for independence, R.R. Palmer explores the question according to two quantitative and objective criteria: "how many

refugees were there from the American Revolution, and how much property did they lose, in comparison with the French Revolution?" By the first criterion, he observes that whereas there were "24 émigrés per thousand of population in the American Revolution," there were "only 5 émigrés per thousand of population in the French Revolution." As for the second criterion, the French revolutionary government's confiscation of the property of French *émigrés* is well known, but judged by indemnities that the British made American loyalists for their property losses in the American Revolution, the American revolutionary government did not confiscate any less than the French Revolution in proportion to population.[3] In short, the American Revolution produced an even greater *émigré* population than the French, and comparable expropriations of property.

Perhaps more significant than these statistics is Palmer's quite sound observation that the American and French Revolutions were guided by identical principles: "certain ideas of the age of Enlightenment, found on both sides of the Atlantic—ideas of constitutionalism, individual liberty, or legal equality—were more fully incorporated and less disputed in America than in Europe."[4] These principles, he observes, were

> much more deeply rooted in America, and . . . contrary or competing principles, monarchist or aristocratic or feudal or ecclesiastical, though not absent from America, were, in comparison to Europe, very weak. Assertion of the same principles therefore provoked less conflict in America than in France. [The American Revolution] was, in truth, less revolutionary. The American Revolution was, indeed, a movement to conserve what already existed. It was hardly, however, a "conservative" movement, and it can give limited comfort to the theorists of conservatism, for it was the weakness of conservative forces in eighteenth-century America, not their strength, that made the American Revolution as moderate as it was. . . . America was different from Europe, but it was not unique.[5]

The less inflammatory character of the American Revolution can be attributed to the fact that American colonists had already been revolutionizing their society from the inception of colonization some two centuries earlier. By the time hostilities broke out, they had come to regard their liberties as part of their patrimony. On the eve of the Revolution, many Americans had significantly less to fight about internally than revolutionaries in France, whose feudal past burdened them with an entrenched aristocracy, a fairly centralized monarchy, and a powerful clergy.

The fact that American colonists generally accepted that one-fifth of the population were chattel slaves; that they waged genocidal wars against Indian peoples; and that colonial families were patriarchal may seem to belie Palmer's thesis and my own. But it is easy to forget that Americans were no different from Europeans in these respects. None of the imperialist European countries were

gentle guardians of subject peoples, as witness the treatment of the Irish by the English; nor did any of them accord women political, legal, and economic equality. As for slavery, Napoleon—generally regarded as the crowned defender of French revolutionary ideals from the late 1790s to 1814—restored slavery to the French colonies after the French Revolution had abolished it. In Europe itself, slave labor would have made no economic sense given the continent's high population density—in contrast to America, where labor was chronically scarce for centuries. The Americans, particularly the plantation owners who depended so heavily on field hands to cultivate tobacco and later cotton as their most important cash crop, were chronically short of labor and used white indentured servants—people who gained passage across the ocean to America in exchange for five to seven years of work once they arrived—as well as blacks, for servile tasks throughout the colonial period. These facts do not in any way justify slavery, but they explain the reasons why it emerged in the specific context of colonial society.

The English people in general acutely remembered that they had had to force their monarchs to respect their rights—rights that Frederick II of Prussia, Louis XVI of France, or Catherine II of Russia would have abrogated without a second thought. In this respect, as Palmer suggests, *all* the revolutions of the democratic era were in some sense conservative, for the revolutionaries asserted popular rights that they regarded as hallowed by tradition, against invasive or domineering innovations that would limit them. An appreciable radical literature of the English Revolution asserted that popular rights were Saxon rights, as we have already seen, which the Norman conquerors had presumably abridged following William's invasion of the island in 1066. However specious such claims were and however distorted the history they invoked, revolutions have often been initiated as defensive actions. What Americans were trying to "conserve" in reaction to British interference was a spectrum of English liberties, many of which, in fact, were by no means conservative in the usual meaning of the term.

After the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688–89, in which the last Stuart monarch was replaced with the more domesticated, Parliament-controlled monarchs, American colonists, even more than their English cousins, elaborated the "rights of Englishmen" into fairly autonomous institutions, ranging from oligarchical colonial legislatures typified by the House of Burgesses in Virginia to direct-democratic town meetings in New England—assemblies that were quite capable, when necessary, of defying royal colonial governors and raising barriers to the exercise of arbitrary powers not only by the Crown but also by the British Parliament. Indeed, on the eve of the Revolution, many colonists, echoing the English Roundheads of the 1640s, considered that the Crown and its ministers were usurping the sovereignty of their institutions.

But as the American Revolution unfolded, Americans did not merely "conserve" local institutional forms of "Englishmen's rights"; rather, the very momentum of popular boycotts, riots, acts of defiance of the royal authorities in their land; the establishment of grassroots institutions to mobilize people against the royal and parliamentary invasion of their "liberties"; and finally the actual facts of armed insurrection that spread through the colonies—all produced a very radical institutional upheaval. Out of this upheaval emerged new political ideals and values and popular insurrectionary institutions that had an inestimable impact on Euro-American history, and which were to reappear, often with no change of name, as we shall see, in the French Revolution itself. Although the ideas of the age of Enlightenment "were more fully incorporated and less disputed in America than in Europe," as Palmer observes,

> [t]here was enough of a common civilization to make America very pointedly significant to Europeans. For a century after the American Revolution, as is well known, partisans of the revolutionary or liberal movements in Europe looked upon the United States generally with approval, and European conservatives viewed it with hostility or downright contempt.[6]

The American Revolution, in effect, marked the culmination of revolutionary tendencies that had been a significant part of the Atlantic seaboard's colonization as far back as the 1630s—and it is to these tendencies that we must first turn our attention.

THE ORIGINS OF REBELLION

Perhaps the most important single factor that shaped the trajectory of the Revolution was the availability of vast expanses of land for settlement and the existence of a strong and highly independent yeomanry. In this respect, the situation of the American colonists was quite different from that of European revolutionaries. England's yeoman population was losing out to land enclosures, a process that would ultimately create an urban proletariat, while later, in France, it was not until after the Revolution began that redistribution of former church lands would create a large peasant stratum.

By contrast, the American colonies nestled at the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains, beyond which lay a vast expanse of arable land. This immense area rendered unnecessary the demand for radical land redistribution, such as occurred in France. Although the growth of the yeoman population was achieved at the expense of rich Indian cultures, it produced quite unique political conditions. In New England, the abundance of arable land made possible a self-conscious yeomanry that saw no reason why its self-sufficient lifeways should be inhibited by any exogenous elements, such as merchants,

speculators, or, later, industrial entrepreneurs. Despite the immense landholdings that eastern speculators and southern plantation owners acquired, the western frontier provided a major reservoir that absorbed millions of landless immigrants for more than a century after the Revolution came to an end.

Paradoxically, the frontier also served as a force to dampen social unrest by absorbing many discontented elements. When more aggressive, militant, and socially unruly individuals found their aims stymied by large landowners and wealthy merchants, they drifted westward rather than remain behind and provide leadership to popular movements against privileged elites. On the frontier, moreover, these militant elements could create their own rough-and-ready egalitarian communities, and when further immigrants rolled in, they could move still further on to recreate democratic lifeways in the West—or at times remain where they were and become elites in their own right. The vastness of the continent, the richness of its soil, its uncharted wilderness, and the absence of a highly stratified society made possible the formulation of an egalitarian "social contract" that kept the democratic ideals of the English Levellers very much alive.

English colonization of the New World did not begin in earnest until the opening decades of the seventeenth century, when the Virginia Company, chartered in 1606, established a permanent community at Jamestown. This settlement was more of a business enterprise than an idealistic undertaking. By 1630, tobacco shipments from the new colony had soared from a mere token £2,000 of cured leaves to about £1.5 million, anchoring the southern colonies in a plantation way of life. In the coastal areas of Virginia and the Carolinas, the white landed gentry, who tended to be Anglican, even developed aristocratic pretensions, and their affinity for hierarchy was second nature. This oligarchy lived in hostile coexistence with its own white indentured servants and a growing number of African slaves.

Pushed inland into the demanding foothills of the Appalachians—the Piedmont—an impoverished white population of Scotch-Irish settlers formed insulated communities of their own that were more likely to be Presbyterian than Anglican and that shared the hardships of frontier life: its poverty, insecurity, and continued Indian raids. These yeoman farmers had little patience with the social distinctions that coastal elites so fervently cultivated. The common people, complained William Byrd, "are rarely guilty of flattering or making any court to their governors, but treat them with all the excess of freedom and familiarity."[7]

These backcountry settlers typify another feature that contributed to the Revolution. In many parts of the colonies, a militia system had developed that made for a mentality and character structure among American farmers that had long since ebbed among the lower classes in England, where the once volatile "train bands" of the 1620s and 1630s had been replaced by a stable professional standing army. At a time when England was instructing its lower and middle

classes in the arts of servility, the demanding living conditions in America were instructing its population in the arts of self-assurance. Survival in a harsh land required not only strong community ties but keen marksmanship. Three wars in which American militia, along with British regulars, fought the French at outposts on the frontier, and numerous wars against Indians who resisted white encroachments on their lands produced in the colonies a well-trained popular military force and a skilled officer cadre that, by the eve of the Revolution, knew the art of warfare as well as, if not better than, their British counterparts.

This is not to say that there were no class conflicts in colonial America; indeed, quite to the contrary: opposing class interests within the colonies gave rise to considerable domestic skirmishing between different strata of the population. Local armed uprisings were common enough, partly because ordinary colonists were irascible in temperament, and partly because their familiarity with arms gave them the ability forcefully to assert their demands. These hardy people were as accustomed to taking direct action in defense of their rights as they were forward in their demeanor. When a seventeenth-century royal governor of Virginia, William Berkeley, voiced his upper-class concerns—"How miserable that man is that Governes a people wher six parts of seavan at least are Poore Endebted Discontented and Armed"[8]—his complaint reflected not only serious economic inequities but fears that an armed people would try to resolve those inequities in their own combative way.

The sharpest colonial hatreds were initially domestic: the rough Piedmont lived in enduring hatred of the sophisticated and aristocratic coastal plain. In Virginia, Nat Bacon led a revolt of 1676 that was conducted largely by frontiersmen who demanded not only protection against Indian raids but the easing of inequitable taxation of the poor and the lifting of controls over the beaver trade that favored the well-to-do. The revolt reached even more menacing proportions when it was joined by armed indentured servants and black slaves. Other civil conflicts broke out between the highly privileged planter clique that controlled the provincial assemblies and the backcountry settlers, who felt overtaxed by their social betters and denied their democratic rights.

The failure of Bacon's rebellion inflamed the ingrained hatred toward the quasi-aristocratic Anglican tobacco planters that festered among the rude Presbyterian frontiersmen. On the eve of the Revolution, associations of frontier settlers known as Regulators—a term that would be used for armed backcountry rebels throughout the century—came into conflict with the semi-aristocratic legislators from the Atlantic seaboard. Such revolts would likely have become chronic throughout the colonial period had planters not imported ever more black slaves to provide the labor upon which the southern economy was built. Indeed, one reason planters accelerated the importation of black slaves was to avoid still another revolt like Bacon's, which, had created a panic among elite strata in southern society.

In New England and the middle Atlantic colonies, settlers on the edge of the wilderness developed strong antagonisms toward city merchants and well-to-do artisans. By the eighteenth century, in the coastal cities the poor and bitterly oppressed were a visible part of the population. Homeless children, indeed entire families, lived precarious lives in the streets; young people were impressed into service in trading ships, whalers, and fishing vessels; most indentured servants were little more than slaves for the period of their servitude, and many of them did not survive their often harsh treatment. At the same time, merchants in the northern provinces, planters in the southern, and lawyers almost everywhere stood at the summit of colonial society and filled the various provincial legislatures. The contrast between street beggars misshapen by poor nutrition and neglect, on the one hand, and merchants and landed proprietors who rode in ornate carriages with black drivers and liverymen, on the other, was evident to any honest visitor to the colonies.

Within the working population, sharp antagonisms divided unskilled laborers—many of whom earned a miserable day-to-day livelihood on the wharves of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston—from master-artisans, who enjoyed a substantially higher standard of living. These master-artisans, in turn, ruthlessly exploited apprentices and especially journeymen, who were increasingly denied the opportunity to advance their guild status. Taken together, these economic strata—as well as indentured servants and slaves—tended to share a common hatred of the merchants, who formed the wealthiest class in the colonies as a whole.

Moreover, the colonies themselves were very much at odds with one another. New York and New Hampshire conflicted over claims to the so-called Hampshire Grants, which were later to become the separate and extremely radical state of Vermont; Virginia and Pennsylvania clashed over claims to the unsettled lands of the Ohio Valley; and the southern colonies competed for lands in the Alleghenies and westward—lands vital to the tobacco plantation economy because of the enormous toll that the crop takes on soil fertility. Although differences between the colonies over religious issues diminished with the passing of time, varying religious and cultural traditions also pitted settlements against each other. Finally, frictions between colonial assemblies and their royal governors, and between municipal organs of government and colony-wide institutions, became nearly continuous.

NEW ENGLAND TOWN MEETINGS

The slave plantation economy of the south and the semifeudal patroon system of the Dutch in the Hudson Valley stood in marked contrast to the lifeways that

prevailed in New England—the region that became the popular center for the Revolution *par excellence*. In 1629, the Massachusetts Bay Company, a branch of the Virginia Company, initiated the major settlement of New England, literally rescuing the devout Puritan colony at Plymouth from ruin after its founding in 1620. The Company steadily populated the region with yeoman farmers, merchants, fishermen, and artisans, and new colonies were soon founded in Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire, partly because of religious differences with Puritan Massachusetts and partly because of the need for land. But socially the New England colonies were surprisingly alike: they were based on independent farmsteads organized into a village society, on the one hand, and a coastal merchant class oriented toward internal and foreign trade, on the other.

Whether consciously or not, the Congregationalist world of the Puritans was marked by democratic values similar to those that had surfaced during the English Revolution. Democracy was explicitly loathsome to Congregational divines: they believed rather in rule by the elect, whose authority was God-given and authorized by Scripture. Indeed, democracy was "the meanest and worst of all forms of government," wrote John Winthrop.[9] Yet even as the Congregationalists denied that they pursued democratic ideas, Puritan religious precepts stood in flat opposition to ecclesiastical hierarchy—which, they believed, was contradicted by the Bible—and thus, if only inadvertently, their religious order gave rise to remarkably democratic institutions. Rather than forming a unitary church presided over by bishops and presbyters, each Puritan congregation created its own church, by means of a compact or covenant among individual men and women who agreed to abide by Scripture, look after each other's souls, and elect their own minister, thereby fulfilling an old demand that had been raised in the German Peasant War of 1524–25.

Not only were the New England congregations self-constituted and, as such, virtually all-powerful in religious matters, but they themselves and no one else wrote the individual covenants that bound them together. Almost unavoidably, the towns they formed became extensions of their religious congregations and, over time, answerable only to themselves, not to any higher governmental authority. Formed on thirty-six-square-mile parcels of land patented by the Massachusetts assembly, they governed themselves in town meetings, which were the secular counterpart of the covenanted religious community. Thus, where the congregation elected its minister, the town in turn elected its moderator and selectmen; both met in the meetinghouse in the center of town. By 1641, the Massachusetts Body of Liberties recognized their legal existence and acknowledged their considerable autonomy in managing their own local affairs.

During the early years of settlement, to be sure, Massachusetts townspeople permitted these local powers to devolve on the selectmen, who formed an ongoing oligarchy, reelected for one-year terms year after year. By 1720,

however, the town meetings had ceased to act as rubber stamps for the decisions of their selectmen on day-to-day affairs, even on matters as fundamental as altering bylaws. The towns now met more frequently—indeed, whenever they deemed it necessary—and easily turned unsuitable selectmen out of office, electing their moderators and engaging in ever more contentious debates. By 1705, when Cotton Mather was attempting to unify and centralize authority in the congregational churches, John Wise, the head of the church at Ipswich, could rebut him and, remarkably for the time, extol *democracy* as "a form of government which the light of *nature* [not God—M.B.] does highly value, and often directs us to as most agreeable to the just and natural prerogatives of human beings."[10]

Perhaps more important than ideology was the reality of democratic lifeways in New England and in the backcountry of the other colonies. The demands of colonization fostered a highly egalitarian outlook on the ever-changing frontier. When New England was the frontier in the 1630s, town meetings were created, as we noted, largely as an extension of a town's Congregational church to civil affairs, and the franchise expanded steadily with new settlers. In time, compared with the southern colonies, where perhaps one out of ten white males was an eligible voter and only the most select members of society gained entry to the provincial assemblies, four out of five New Englanders had the right to vote, and commoners often sat alongside wealthy merchants and lawyers in colonial legislatures. Although, before 1691, church membership in Massachusetts was a prerequisite for voting, over time voting qualifications were steadily reduced and the franchise extended from church members to householders of even fairly limited means. Once the religious qualification was eliminated, the only remaining qualification for participation in a town meeting was that a man was required to have an income of 50 shillings. But after a while it was not difficult for male inhabitants with very little property or low incomes to meet this requirement, with the result that most male inhabitants of a town were enfranchised.[11]

The town meetinghouse finally became a community's genuine popular center, and as an institution it acquired fairly considerable powers. Town meetings could levy taxes, distribute land, settle property disputes, admit new residents, organize and control the militia, construct roads, and voice and debate political opinions on all issues in times of social unrest. Moreover, the towns enjoyed considerable autonomy in managing their own affairs. "The only links connecting the town with the larger world in the colonial capital," observes Richard Lingeman, "were the deputy it sent to the legislature and the county officials—the sheriff and the circuit judges—who were appointed by the governor."[12] Authority was based upon the direct face-to-face democracy of the community, and delegation or representation was strictly mandated by the town meeting itself. When the Massachusetts towns dispatched legislators to the colonial assembly or General Court in Boston, their mandate limited them to being mere agents of the town, and they could vote on any given issue only as they had been instructed by their town meetings. So assiduous were the Massachusetts towns in assuring that their delegates behaved according to their mandates that they often sent along a second member whose sole role was to see how each deputy voted in the assembly. Finally they insisted that assembly proceedings be published so that all citizens could scrutinize the behavior of their deputies.

NEWER COLONIAL SETTLEMENTS

The establishment of the mid–Atlantic seaboard and newer colonies may be summarized rather quickly. New York, initially settled by the Dutch for commercial reasons, was based on a patroon system whereby large landowners along the Hudson and Delaware Rivers were allowed to exercise nearly feudal rights over their large estates, such as the right to appoint local officials and the authority to set up local courts. In 1664 New Netherlands was taken over by the English, who did not dismantle the Dutch system; thus, a quasi-feudal society extended up the Hudson Valley and remained in place well into the Revolution, although, incongruously, the colony's famous port city of New York—formerly New Amsterdam—soon rivaled Boston as a center of business activity.

Maryland was settled almost exclusively for economic purposes, and its well-to-do founders, like the Dutch patroons in the Hudson Valley, established a semifeudal dominion structured around a class of manorial landlords with bond servants, tenants, and slaves interspersed with small but fairly independent farmers. Pennsylvania, initially chartered by William Penn as a haven for English Quakers, became the center for an extraordinary variety of religious immigrants, such as German Lutherans, Welsh Baptists, Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, and later Catholics and Jews. Philadelphia, in turn, became one of the most culturally vibrant of American cities, even though an oligarchy of Quaker merchants presided over its political life. New Jersey and the Carolinas were peopled by small farmers and manorial landlords respectively, and only slowly established a distinctive cultural identity—in the case of New Jersey, a highly varied and ambiguous one.

Georgia was initially settled as a haven for the indigent and debtors by the English philanthropist James Oglethorpe, who actually prohibited slavery and opened the doors of the colony to religious sectarians of every variety as well as Jews. (Catholic settlers, to be sure, were prohibited.) But the colony's extraordinary diversity, high-minded goals, and religious tolerance could not withstand the pressure of economic forces. By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, coastal Georgia had been parceled into plantations worked

by African slaves, and its philanthropic goals were sacrificed to the intensive cultivation of tobacco for material gain. Like the Carolina Piedmont, its highlands became a turbulent backwater of largely indigent—and indignant—white farmers, from which angry Regulators surfaced who engaged in ongoing social conflicts with the wealthy landlords.

Initially, the thirteen colonies were of three political types: corporate, Crown and proprietary. The New England colonies were corporate, which meant that they enjoyed considerable local autonomy, possessing their own charters and largely self-governing assemblies. Although Massachusetts governors were appointed by the Crown after 1692, Rhode Island and Connecticut elected their own governors and executive councils. By contrast, Crown colonies such as the Carolinas, Georgia, New Jersey, and New York were obliged to accept governors and councils chosen by the Crown. The proprietary colonies—most notably, Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania—were founded by proprietary lords, such as the Penn family, who enjoyed feudalistic powers granted by the king. Ostensibly managed by chartered companies, these companies' authority declined rapidly, and in time the proprietary colonies simply became Crown possessions. Hence, apart from those of Rhode Island and Connecticut, all colonial governors were eventually either appointed or approved by the king, whose powers over the colonies were nominally sweeping. The Crown could appoint or reject all civil authorities, veto legislation enacted by the colonial assemblies, and prorogue them at will.

The colonial legislatures, for their part, normally consisted of fairly well-to-do individuals: planters, merchants, and freeholders, many of whom were also lawyers or had legal training. In periods of social stability, tensions between the Crown and the colonies were low; as Palmer notes, only 5 percent of the laws passed by colonial assemblies were actually vetoed by London.[13] But potentially, at least, these legislatures formed a rival power to the executive: they could, if they chose, make a governor's life utterly miserable and, if necessary, all but annul his authority. "These little parliaments enjoyed powers which were nowhere strictly defined in laws, charters, and decrees," observe Charles and Mary Beard in their magisterial history of the United States.

> From small and obscure beginnings they grew in dignity until they took on some of the pomp and circumstance long associated with the House of Commons. In the course of time they claimed as their own and exercised in fact the right of laying taxes, raising troops, incurring debts, issuing currency, fixing the salaries of royal officers, and appointing agents to represent them in their dealings with the government at London; and, going beyond such functions, they covered by legislation of their own wide domains of civil and criminal law—subject always to terms of charters, acts of Parliament, and the prerogatives of the Crown.[14]

The colonial assemblies, to be sure, often defended the interests of domestic elites against those of the lower classes. Yet: "Endowed with such impressive authority," the Beards continue,

> these assemblies naturally drew to themselves all the local interests which were struggling to realize their demands in law and ordinance. They were the laboratories in which were formulated all the grievances of the colonists against the government in England. They were training schools where lawyers could employ their talents in political declamation, outwitting royal officers by clever legal devices. In short, in the representative assemblies were brought to a focus the designs and passions of those rising economic groups which gave strength to America and threw her into opposition to the governing classes of the mother country. Serving as the points of contact with royal officers and the English Crown, they received the first impact of battle when laws were vetoed and instructions were handed out by the king's governors or agents of the proprietors.[15]

Palmer, in fact, regards these assemblies as "the most democratically recruited of all such constituted bodies in the Western World." In New England, the great majority of the people were enfranchised, while half or more enjoyed the right to vote in New Jersey and about half or less in Virginia.[16] Indeed:

> The elected assemblies enjoyed what in Europe would be thought a dangerously popular mandate. By 1760, decades of rivalry for power between the assemblies and the governors had been resolved, in most of the colonies, in favor of the assemblies. The idea of government by consent was for Americans a mere statement of fact, not a bold doctrine to be flung in the teeth of government, as in Europe. Contrariwise, the growing assertiveness of the assemblies made many in England, and some in America, on the eve of the Revolution, believe that the time had come to stop this drift toward democracy—or, as they would say, restore the balance of the constitution. In sum, an old sense of liberty in America was the obstacle on which the first British empire met its doom.[17]

Yet the radicalism of the American Revolution is hardly exhausted by an account of the colonial legislatures. Too often overlooked by Palmer, the Beards, and a great many historians of the American Revolution were the local popular institutions that sprang up at the grassroots to conduct the revolution—institutions that ultimately formed a radical-democratic dual power at the grassroots level to oppose not only British rule in America and Tory sympathizers but wealthy elites at home.

A REBELLIOUS PEOPLE

The Crown's subjects, it must be emphasized, were not a vanquished people. They were feisty English Anglicans and Congregationalists for the most part, as well as Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, many of whom still marched into battle with kilts and bagpipes. They included Dutch burghers, whose ancestors had fought Spanish oppression; Lutheran and Anabaptist Germans, whose radical traditions dated back to the Peasant War; and an array of fiercely independent backwoodsmen, who had been schooled in Indian wars and skirmishes with French adventurers. Collectively, colonial Americans were a highly adventurous, largely plebeian people, however much their elites aspired to the staid aristocratic ways of London and Paris.

It testifies to the fairly egalitarian atmosphere in most colonial settlements that neither Patrick Henry in Virginia nor Sam Adams in Massachusetts was a man of means or affected aristocratic airs. Adams spent much of his time among the boisterous artisans and wharfsmen of Boston who provided the muscle for the chronic riots in the city, while Henry deliberately affected crude rustic manners, often speaking in the accent of a backcountryman rather than using the polished expressions of an urban dweller. He dressed carelessly, wearing cheap clothing that affronted his well-to-do peers; in fact, most upper-class British visitors found that a "most disgusting equality" prevailed in the colonies, and what differences in material means there were did not always produce differences in social status.[18]

Nor were those who affected aristocratic airs necessarily of a deferential cast of mind. Andrew Burnaby, an English clergyman who traveled through Virginia in 1759, thought the young bloods of the province "haughty and jealous of their liberties, impatient of restraint and [they] can scarcely bear the thought of being controuled by any superior power."[119] Such qualities were not conducive to the servility that most British aristocrats would have preferred in their American cousins. The colonial elites were made up of highly educated men: Virginia aristocrats gained a "sound education in the ancient classics and political theory" at the College of William and Mary, as did many of the revolutionary leaders of New England at Harvard College. "Running a plantation, serving on the [Governor's] council or in the house of burgesses," according to Samuel Eliot Morison, "and reading Cicero, Polybius, and Locke gave Virginians excellent training in statesmanship."[20] Nor were well-to-do colonials the only beneficiaries of an education. As early as 1692, every Massachusetts town was required to provide a free grammar school for each child in the community.

The cities, cottages, and assemblies of the colonies had, in effect, produced a remarkably literate public, nurtured on regular readings of Scriptures and law books, as well as the classics. It should be noted that the first edition of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* reached as many as 100,000 adult readers, a very substantial literate public. To a large proportion of the population, the duties that were ordained by Deuteronomy, even the tenets advanced in Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*, were probably as familiar as royal fiats. The assemblies of this people—be they town meetings or provincial legislatures—had trained them in the arts of polemic, legal discourse, and rational explanations for self-government. The town meetings in New England and colonial assemblies generally taught many American colonials how to govern themselves, especially locally, to an extent that would have astonished most continental Europeans of their day.

Finally, the conflict between England and America emerged at a time when the Enlightenment was cresting in Europe and encompassing the New World. The utopian Puritan vision of "a city on the hill," a "New Jerusalem" in the American wilderness, to be sure, was never lost by the colonials, irrespective of their religious and regional differences, but the Enlightenment had secularized this vision, particularly for home-grown intellectuals like the unassuming Benjamin Franklin. Franklin, it should be noted, had a European reputation as a savant: his scientific works, writings, and technical innovations won him international acclaim for his remarkable combination of intellectual and artisanal virtues. When he met with Voltaire in Paris and the two men embraced each other publicly, they produced a great ovation from the Parisians that should have signaled to England's arrogant rulers that they were not dealing with the American country dolts depicted in their snide cartoons. Least of all were they dealing with men and women who were willing to live in abject servility to the dull-witted king who had been installed on the British throne. A society, remarkably egalitarian for its time in outlook, if not in all of its institutions, had arisen that no longer deferred to petty hierarchical distinctions. Unknown to Parliament, the Crown, and even the royal governors of the colonies, British America had spawned a new kind of individual who was neither a rural naif nor a craven subject but an active citizen. What some two centuries of colonization had begun, British mercantilism and royal arrogance largely completed in the crucible of a revolution.

NOTES

1. H.N. Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, ed. Christopher Hill (Nottingham: Spokesman University Press, 1976), p. 376.
2. Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980).
3. R.R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolutions: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800: The Challenge* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 188.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

7. Quoted in Elisha P. Douglass, *Rebels and Democrats* (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times Books, 1955), p. 73.

8. William Berkeley to Thomas Ludwell (July 1676), Henry Coventry Papers at estate of the Marquis of Bath (microfilm, Library of Congress), no. 77, fo. 145.

9. John Winthrop, "Defense of the Negative Vote," June 4, 1643, quoted in Ola Elizabeth Winslow, *Meetinghouse Hill 1630–1783* (1952; New York: W.W. Norton, 1972), p. 36.

10. John Wise, "Vindication of the Government of New England Churches" (1717), in Perry Miller, ed., *The American Puritans* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956), p. 135, emphasis added.

11. Needless to say, women and children had very limited rights in Massachusetts, as was true of the colonies generally. Indeed, rights such as the franchise and economic independence for women did not appear in the Western world until the French Revolution, and even then they were rescinded shortly thereafter, not to be reinstituted until the present century.

12. Richard Lingeman, *Small Town America: A Narrative History, 1620–The Present* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1980), p. 50.

13. Palmer, *Democratic Revolutions*, p. 190.

14. Charles Beard and Mary Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization*, revised and enlarged ed., vol. 1 (originally published 1927; New York: Macmillan, 1949), p. 111.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 111–12.

16. Palmer, *Democratic Revolutions*, p. 190.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

18. Quoted in Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Oxford History of the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 172.

19. Quoted in Morison, *Oxford History*, p. 174.

20. Morison, *Oxford History*, pp. 174–5.

CHAPTER 10 Colonial Resistance

There is little to show that the mother country was very motherly toward her American colonies. From the 1650s onward, British economic policy was overwhelmingly mercantilist in character, aimed at the accrual of a favorable balance of trade, in which raw materials flowed into England at the expense not only of commercial rivals but of the colonies themselves. In the mercantilist world, wealth and a sound commercial policy required the accumulation of bullion. Hence, the Crown sought not so much to expand as to *control* the market in order to acquire gold and silver, a policy that it often implemented by outright parasitism and commercial piracy.

Britain's policy toward its American colonies, basically guided by the mercantilist ideas of the day, aimed not to foster their industrial development but to pillage them of their resources. One of the most succinct statements of this policy was made by Sir Francis Bernard, an eighteenth-century governor of Massachusetts: "The two great objects of Great Britain in regard to the American trade," Bernard observed,

> must be [first] to oblige her American subjects to take from Great Britain only, all the manufactures and European goods which she can supply them with: [and second,] To regulate the foreign trade of the Americans so that the profits thereof may finally center in Great Britain, or be applied to the improvement of her empire. Whenever these two purposes militate against each other, that which is most advantageous to Great Britain ought to be preferred.[1]

Indeed, from the early days of settlement, although southern agriculture flourished, British mercantile policies directed this slave-worked wealth into tobacco, rice, and indigo, exclusively for English markets and coffers. Credit supplied by English merchants to the plantation owners came with such crippling interest rates that many planters and their families were held in thrall to London merchants for generations. In addition to high interest rates, planters

had to pay import duties at English ports, costs of transportation, commission rates to English salesmen, warehouse, inspection, insurance fees, and the like. To counter the soil exhaustion produced by the cultivation of tobacco, planters continually needed new land—a need that the Crown frustrated when it spitefully barred settlement west of the Alleghenies in 1763.

According to the mercantile system, the colonists who reaped and exported these raw materials were not to manufacture anything that would compete with British industry. Rather, Americans were to be consumers exclusively of English manufactures. Yet colonial manufactures developed nonetheless, posing no trivial problem for British entrepreneurs. An estimated seventy ships a year were constructed in New England shipyards, followed by forty-five in New York and Pennsylvania and forty in the southern colonies, making an annual total of more than 150. Inland from the port cities, the colonies supported a growing number of small lumber mills, family-made and later community-made textiles, earthenwares, leather goods, and iron forges that yielded much-needed hardware, nails, kettles, hoes, spades, and guns. These artisanal manufactures directly competed with British imports. By the 1750s, furious protests from English ironmongers, leather-workers, woodcutters, and a variety of other tradesmen were flooding Parliament. The colonials, in turn, were faced with mounting debts, partly for want of coinage to pay for the manufactures they were obliged to purchase from Britain.

Mercantilist policy, to be sure, had partly motivated the land grants that the Stuart kings gave to corporate enterprises such as the Virginia Company and the Massachusetts Bay Company, but active legislation to ensure Britain's commercial monopoly over all its colonies did not really get under way until the mid–seventeenth century—that is, during Cromwell's Protectorate. In 1651, the East India and Levant Trading companies managed to persuade the government to compel the colonies to transport their produce to England exclusively in English ships manned by English crews, to use only English ships in their coastal traffic—the primary means of intercolonial transport—and to export raw materials such as salted fish, timber, and whale products to Britain alone. To this legislation—the first of the notorious Navigation Acts—more and more articles were added between 1660 and 1696, including sugar, tobacco, wool, rice, furs, lumber, iron, copper—indeed, virtually all exportable products from the New World. Barred from shipping goods to non-British ports, American ships were obliged to go first to British ports for their produce to be reshipped to markets elsewhere.

Other legislation required colonials to purchase manufactured goods exclusively from England. Persistent attempts were made to limit or arrest colonial manufacturing, metallurgy, and even household weaving, lest they compete with similar English commodities. A Pennsylvania law to foster commercial shoemaking, a New York act to develop sailcloth production, and a

Massachusetts ordinance for promoting linen production—all were disallowed by the mother country. Other regulations had the effect of limiting intercolonial trade along the Atlantic seaboard. The Crown went so far as to inhibit Virginia's attempts to establish new towns, lest they become industrial rivals of English manufacturers.

It is difficult to say how the sparsely populated American colonies would have reacted if the Navigation Acts had been strictly enforced—but they were not. For a century a succession of wars with Britain's commercial rivals—the Dutch, Spanish, and French, in different coalitions with each other—kept the Crown too occupied to enforce its commercial restrictions on the colonies. American merchants, for their part, realized that if they were to prosper, they had to bypass these regulations by all means possible, otherwise they would be rendered completely subservient to British commerce.

As it turned out, American infractions of the Navigation Acts were chronic. American ships traded freely with Europe, Africa, the Indies, and other areas, blatantly ignoring the Acts; in fact, by the 1760s, smuggling had become a way of life for many coastal colonials. The population everywhere avidly protected its smugglers and even smuggled goods for political as well as economic reasons. Indeed, smugglers were among the most respectable businessmen in the colonies: after 1736, Thomas Hancock, the father of the rebellious John Hancock, made a fortune as a smuggler—and earned considerable respect for his activities. The illegal commercial prowess of the northern colonies was especially notorious. A merchant would purchase sugar and molasses from the West Indies—and molasses from the French possessions in the Indies was considerably cheaper than that of the British possessions, which mercantilism constrained the Yankee traders to buy.

Little wonder, then, that in 1763, 97 percent of the molasses imported into Massachusetts was smuggled. Once in New England, this molasses was processed into rum, which was then shipped to Africa, where it was used to buy slaves. These slaves were brought across the Atlantic to the Indies and the South, where they were forced to produce the sugar that was sent north to New England. This three-way pattern of trade generated large fortunes for Boston merchant families; indeed, so great was the appetite of Yankee traders for commercial intercourse that they even supplied naval stores to England's enemy, France.

The French, in turn, had replaced the Spanish as the hereditary enemies of the British, and their colony, Quebec, was an obstacle to English hegemony in North America. During the French and Indian War, which broke out in 1756, and in which Britain and France fought for domination of North America, American militiamen joined British troops, some with greater zeal than others, to defeat the French, who had induced Indians to harass the frontier colonists. Britain finally cowed France on the Plains of Abraham outside of Quebec City in 1759,

neutralizing France as a colonial power in North America, and the 1763 Peace of Paris now left the British alone, face-to-face with their colonial subjects along the Atlantic seaboard. American colonists now had no other major European adversary to confront but England, which soon became the greatest impediment to the exercise of their liberties and to their trade.

In fact, the seven-year-long war had provided Americans with considerable profits; to the British, however, it had been very costly. Parliament, which regarded the conflict as a benign and self-sacrificing struggle waged to protect American settlements from French and Indian attacks, felt that it was time for the Americans to provide at least some recompense to the Crown. The Navigation Acts, which had been all but dormant since their passage during the preceding century, were now enforced, and with increasing vigor. The Americans, in turn, were little disposed to comply with them. They remembered all too well the numerous wars they had fought against the Indians in which Britain had provided them with no assistance, and they chafed at the disparaging attitudes that the British regulars had held toward the rough American militiamen who fought with them against the French.

This dissension was complicated by the ascent of a stubborn, strong-willed, and, as it turned out, mentally unsound monarch, George III, who became the most politically intrusive of the Hanoverian kings of Britain. Although the Glorious Revolution of 1688 had assured supremacy to Parliament in the all-important matters of policy and finance, it had not clearly defined the full range of the monarch's authority. English kings could still appoint and dismiss ministers, use patronage to corrupt Parliament, and play an active role in colonial policy. The difficulties in adjusting the authority of the monarch to the power of Parliament were further complicated by the fact that the Earl of Bute, the new king's tutor, mentor, and a privy councillor, believed in the supremacy of the monarchy over Parliament—a view his young royal student thoroughly imbibed. Britain's economic need to cover its war debts by taxing the colonies was thus reinforced by the monarchy's political need to create a more authoritarian regime at home and abroad. Where once Britain had administered its empire with laxity—indeed, with benign neglect—the Crown now took determined measures to expand and centralize all colonial administration under monarchical rule.

The new stridency in Britain's policy toward its empire occurred precisely at a time when the French were driven from North America, as has been noted, and the need for the mother country to aid the colonies had all but disappeared. The colonies, in fact, had developed into thirteen *de facto* independent nations, each with a potential for economic and demographic growth that seemed enormous. More forward-thinking American colonists knew that they had to achieve home rule juridically, even though they had already achieved it in almost all other respects *de facto*, and, without saying as much, they seemed to be convinced that

the logic of colonial development ultimately led to outright independence from Britain. Yet the policies followed by British Tories, conservative Whigs, and certainly by George III and his Court cabal tried to expand not only the economic but also political sovereignty of England over the colonies. The growing arrogance of the Court and the Tory parliamentarians was heading into direct collision with greater colonial self-assertiveness and self-confidence—two radically opposing trends that, if it continued, could lead only to a war for independence.

RESISTANCE TO TAXATION

When the British undertook to rigorously enforce the Navigation Acts, the task of enforcement fell to the new Tory prime minister, George Grenville, who, anticipating popular resistance to his policies, stationed an intimidating force of ten thousand British regulars in colonial ports. Adding to this extremely provocative step, Grenville in 1755 allowed duty collectors and soldiers to use warrants called "writs of assistance" that enabled them freely to search ships, wharves, warehouses, retail outlets, and even homes for smuggled goods. The highly arbitrary way in which the searches were conducted, often on the merest suspicion of smuggling and sometimes even maliciously to harass unfriendly colonials, produced a far-reaching impact on the already restive Americans. Nothing seemed more outrageous than the freedom that the troops acquired to break into and search any kind of domicile. Riots broke out; soldiers were pelted with rocks; known British sympathizers were insulted; and those who favored the Crown's policies were targets of unremitting anger. To most Americans, the writs were seen as outrageous affronts to traditional popular claims of the "rights of Englishmen."

In response, the Grenville ministry adopted only faint conciliatory half-measures, which served only to reveal its weakness without allaying public anger. It lowered duties on coffee, various wines, and other items, while enforcing the collection of existing duties all the more rigorously and clumsily. When some colonial assemblies tried to issue paper money for local trade, owing largely to the lack of metallic currency for domestic use—a problem that, as has been noted, stemmed from the need of Americans to pay their debts in coin to their English counterparts—the ministry flatly prohibited such measures, a prohibition that could serve no purpose other than to assert the authority of the British pound, and with it the power of the Crown to regulate colonial economic life.

Matters were worsened further when, in 1763, the Grenville ministry drew a boundary line along the watershed of the Allegheny Mountains, proclaiming all

lands to the west closed to colonial settlement. Ostensibly, this proclamation was intended to remove any causes for Indian uprisings, which the ministry, lacking funds, complained it could not suppress—and, more provocatively, to retain the wilderness as a source of fur pelts. Few of the colonists, however, doubted that the ministry was trying to emphasize the serious consequences that would befall the Americans if they failed to pay duties to the Crown. The Proclamation Line, as it was called, was made to be ignored; to observe it would have proved fatal to the tobacco planters, who needed fertile soil to keep the southern economy alive, and landless or land-poor settlers saw it as an intolerable obstacle to the carving out of farms beyond the mountains. The main effect of these policies was to turn illegal behavior into a general way of life in the colonies and to increase the disrespect for the Crown and its representatives that people felt throughout America.

The monarchy and its supporters, to be sure, could still count on the traditional loyalties that colonists felt for the mother country and on disunities that existed between the colonies themselves. But nothing could have raised colonial anger or fostered a conscious drive for home rule more effectively than the Grenville ministry's measures, its endless nuisance duties, its attempts to challenge the freedom of colonial legislatures to promote local interests, and its prohibition of western settlement.

At length, on March 22, 1765, the Grenville ministry finally imposed a fiscal measure that definitively brought more colonists in common opposition to its policies, namely, the notorious Stamp Act. Colonists were now obliged to affix stamps on a whole array of documents necessary for daily life—not only on wills, deeds, contracts, licenses, and the like, but also on pamphlets, calendars, newspapers, and even dice and playing cards. Without such stamps, which were sold by government-appointed individuals, legal documents were no longer valid, indeed illegal. Although such stamp taxes were common enough in Europe, Americans, like their Puritan ancestors in England a century earlier, were unaccustomed to the levy and viewed it as an outrage. Not only was the stamp tax a costly nuisance, it was the first direct tax—as distinguished from a tariff—that the colonists had been obliged to pay to a government in which they had absolutely no parliamentary representation.

The amount of revenue that the Grenville ministry expected to receive from the tax was, in fact, quite small—roughly £60,000 per annum—hence, more than money was at stake on both sides of the issue. To Britain, the tax symbolized its right to exercise complete ministerial and parliamentary control over the colonies. The Americans regarded the tax as a direct challenge to the right of their own colonial legislatures to control the purse. The cry "No taxation without representation" was similar, in principle, to the opposition that John Pym and other Parliamentary leaders had voiced generations earlier to Charles I's arbitrary imposition of ship money and other levies without the consent of the House of Commons. Americans saw the tax, in effect, more as a political challenge to the rights of a free people than as a major economic burden. Their hostility focused more on the political logic of the stamp tax than on the economic costs it entailed.

Opposition to the Stamp Act united colonists across all social lines: southern planters who were heavily indebted to British creditors; northern colonists who were harassed by trade restrictions; artisans who chafed under the limitations on manufactures; and backwoodsmen who resented any settlement restrictions. Many colonists formed local clubs (most famously, the Sons of Liberty—as well as Daughters of Liberty in New Jersey) to force a revocation of the Stamp Act, and although the Sons' membership came largely from the middle and upper classes, it broadened considerably as the movement spread. From Connecticut, where the Sons of Liberty had originated, the clubs spread to Boston, where the volatile Sam Adams was a key spokesman against British authority, and further, as far south as Charleston, where the club met in the building of the Fireman's Association. In Baltimore the Sons were distinctly plebeian, emerging out of the Ancient and Honorable Mechanical Company, and in Philadelphia they were recruited from the Heart-and-Hand Fire Company. More and more, the Sons became a movement of artisans and laborers, or "mechanics," as well as tradesmen, professionals, planters, and yeomen.

Whenever an attempt was made to implement the Act, the Sons organized large and repeated demonstrations in the streets of towns and cities, many of which ended in seeming riots. Yet as Jesse Lemisch points out, the riots showed that:

> the mob had begun to think and reason. . . .Their "riots" were really extremely orderly and expressed a clear purpose. Again and again, when the mob's leaders lost control, the mob went on to attack the logical political enemy, not to plunder. They were led but not manipulated.[2]

The enormity of the popular American reaction against the Stamp Act—in crowd actions, popular meetings, and fiery denunciations—may well have astonished the ministry and its supporters. Stamp tax collectors were tarred and feathered, and places that sold the stamps were burned to the ground. In Boston, Governor Thomas Hutchinson's mansion was completely sacked. When the colonial militia were called out to suppress the riots, they flagrantly refused to obey the orders of the authorities. Crowds rioted against attempts not only to impose the measure but even to acknowledge its legitimacy, and they did so with a fury that finally caused the Grenville ministry to repeal the Act.

Once again, the ministry had overstepped its capacity to curb the colonies; but the repeal of the Stamp Act, far from allaying colonial resistance, served only to churn up popular sentiment against British authority on an unprecedented scale.

With incredible fatuity, Parliament fed this resistance to its authority even more by passing the Declaratory Act, which affirmed the House's absolute right to inflict any legislation it pleased upon the colonies "in all cases whatsoever." With this ominous clause, Parliament transformed a formerly loosely held empire into a tight unitary state, transforming itself into a tyrannical central government over the colonists. Parliament now felt free to billet troops in the homes of ordinary colonial citizens, demand recompense for damages that resulted from riots against the stamp tax, and centralize its authority to collect duties in a powerful Board of Commissioners. When the New York Assembly attempted to resist the billeting order, it was summarily dismissed by the home government.

The notorious Townshend Act of 1767 that followed placed a new series of tariffs on a wide variety of goods that the colonists were obliged to purchase from Britain, including lead, glass, paper, paint, and tea. The Act created a furor. Its passage led not only to the usual riots and acts of defiance on the part of colonial legislatures but significantly to the formation of a wide-ranging network of committees to enforce a general colonial boycott against English goods. In February 1768, Sam Adams, on behalf of the Massachusetts Assembly, drafted a Circular Letter to other colonial legislatures that called for the mobilization of intercolonial united resistance to the duties, bluntly asserting that colonies ruled by Crown-appointed governors were not free. When Governor Hutchinson ordered that the Circular Letter be withdrawn, the Assembly flatly refused and was immediately suspended. Moreover, as Hutchinson angrily wrote to London, "every town [in Massachusetts] is a body corporate but without any form of government an absolute democracy which exists hardly anywhere else all being upon a level. . . . The town of Boston is an absolute democracy."[3]

In fact, Hutchinson's remarks were not far from the truth. Parliament and the Court had opened the sluice gates of democratic sentiment in the colonies to an extent that had not been seen since the English Revolution more than a century earlier. As still further evidence of the home country's weakness, the ministry, faced with sweeping colonial resistance and an extraordinarily well-organized boycott, repealed the Townshend tariffs on all the listed items except tea. When, in the face of continued disorder, the government threatened to send troops to Boston, the Boston Town Meeting flatly declared on September 13, 1768, that to maintain a standing army among them "without their consent in person or by representatives of their own free election would be an infringement of their natural, constitutional, and charter rights; and the employing of such an army for the enforcing of laws made without the consent of the people, in person or by their representatives, would be a grievance."[4]

Inasmuch as the Assembly was still suspended, the more radical Boston Town Meeting, guided by Sam Adams and his colleagues, called on the other Massachusetts towns to send delegates to a new convention for the following

week, a call which most of the towns eagerly answered. Almost under the very eyes of the British army, the delegates assembled at the usual meeting place of the suspended Assembly for what necessarily turned out to be a short meeting, but not without declaring their firm opposition to a standing army, after which it quickly adjourned. Nor should the brevity of the convention be allowed to belie its significance: it showed that the towns alone could meet in an extraconstitutional assembly, even when the regular Assembly was dissolved, thereby claiming the right to exercise sovereign power over themselves and for the public interest.

To reinforce troops already billeted in American homes, two British regiments were nonetheless sent to Boston. Adams shrewedly advised Bostonians not to provoke the soldiers; the time was not right, he warned, for a direct confrontation between ordinary citizens and regulars. This request was honored in sullen quietude. But it was a situation that could not last. In March 1770, after a year and a half of tension, the latent conflict came to a sudden head when British troops opened fire on a crowd after some children threw snowballs at them. Five citizens were killed and six wounded. Following the Boston Massacre, as the shooting was called, Adams addressed a huge town meeting and, speaking for the city, demanded that the troops be immediately withdrawn. The British responded again half-heartedly by redeploying one of the two regiments to an island in the harbor. When Adams demanded, "Both regiments, or none!" the administration gave in under the overwhelming pressure of the townspeople.

Thereafter, each year on the anniversary of the Boston Massacre, the town meeting was given a lecture, for the purpose of public education, on basic liberties. The oration was essentially the same each year. Reasoning from first principles, the speaker would explain that society was formed for the defense of basic rights, guiding his listeners from an unruly "state of nature" into the voluntary compact of civil society. Public education of this kind became a crucial feature of the Revolution, reflecting the extraordinarily high goals and regard for fundamental social principles that guided the revolutionary generation of that remarkable era.

The Boston Massacre was followed by a misleading lull. For the next two years, acts of resistance flared up only intermittently. But in 1772, true to his reputation for fatuity, the king stirred up the colonists again by deciding that the salaries of all colonial judges would be paid by the Crown rather than the assembly, depriving the colonial judiciary any independence from the king, in violation of a tradition that dated back to 1701 in England. Once again, in November, Sam Adams revived the dormant Boston Committee of Correspondence to inform other Massachusetts town meetings about this latest outrage, which defied another constitutional principle that the colonists had taken for granted: the independence of their judges and courts from the king. The Boston Committee, which was accountable to the Boston Town Meeting,

invited the other towns to prepare statements that listed their political rights as they saw them, as well as violations of those rights, and to form their own Committees of Correspondence, made up of all adult inhabitants, to educate each other and to maintain a state of general alertness.

Within two months, some eighty Massachusetts towns formed such committees, each of which, in varying degrees, began to discuss, articulate, and formulate their political principles in written statements. This activity proved to be an immense political education for the ordinary people of the colony. All over the province, heated discussions broke out, in which townspeople in their meetings inveighed against the king's officers and their abuses of power, against standing armies, and against the centralized and absolute authority of Parliament. Even more than the grievances (*cahiers*) that preceded the convocations of the Estates General in France nearly two decades later, the statements that towns sent to Boston asserted that sovereignty lay with the people organized in towns, not in Parliament or even in the General Court of Massachusetts. In early 1773 the replies—filled with generous principles and expressions of courageous determination—were read aloud to the Boston Committee of Correspondence in Faneuil Hall.

More and more, ordinary people of the city began in increasing numbers to participate in the Boston Town Meeting. "The meetings of that town," Governor Hutchinson complained in May 1772, are

> constituted of the lowest class of the people under the influence of a few of a higher class but of intemperate and furious dispositions and desperate fortunes. Men of property and of the best character have deserted these meetings where they are sure of being affronted. By the constitution forty pounds sterl.—which they say may be in cloaths household furniture or any sort of property is a qualification and even into that there is scarce ever any inquiry and anything with the appearance of a man is admitted without scrutiny.[5]

The following year, Hutchinson replied to the declarations of popular sovereignty that the towns had sent to Boston by declaring:

> No line . . . can be drawn between the supreme authority of Parliament and the total independence of the colonies: it is impossible there should be two independent Legislatures in one and the same state; for . . . two Legislative bodies will make two governments as distinct as the kingdoms of England and Scotland before the Union.[6]

As had been the case in England more than a century earlier, the governor was describing the existence of a dual power, which he correctly observed was an impossible situation that had to be ultimately resolved—one way or the other.

Thereafter, the network of standing Committees of Correspondence that Adams had created in Boston and in the Massachusetts towns became a model for revolutionary organization throughout the colonies. In mid-March 1773 radicals in the Virginia House of Burgesses, led by Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and Richard Henry Lee, established a Committee of Correspondence to maintain contact with Massachusetts, thereby increasing intercolonial solidarity. Initially, these committees were created to coordinate activities throughout the colonies and to educate the citizenry, but over time they began to correspond with each other in order to define their common problems and formulate common strategies, especially economic boycotts and political goals. These local committees became the earliest means by which radical leaders aroused their communities to resistance, and their growing role in building local and intercolonial solidarity as well as translating abstract new political concepts into daily practice was crucial, for such extraconstitutional local bodies were to become the embryos of a later, more grassroots network for revolutionary organization and action.

Although all of the Townshend duties had long been revoked except for the tax on tea, in 1773 Parliament, as part of a bailout of the largest tea company in Britain, agreed to allow the British East India Company to sell tea in the colonies at greatly reduced prices, well below the price that the Dutch demanded. Far from celebrating the opportunity for Americans to purchase inexpensive tea, the Boston Committee of Correspondence responded with outrage to Parliament's new Tea Act, viewing it as a blatant attempt to break the colonial boycott. In November, the Committee called a "Meeting of the People" at the Old South Meeting House, to which about eight thousand fervent Bostonians responded. There the assembly unanimously voted that the tea should be returned to England, and it charged the Committee with the task of assuring that no tea would be unloaded in Boston's harbor.

This "Meeting of the People" was not a town meeting. The Boston Town Meeting was a legally constituted body that was required to exercise a restraining authority over those of its members who broke the law. By contrast, the "Meeting of the People" was a palpably extralegal body, bound solely by its own sovereign decisions, which gave it greater freedom than the town meeting to resist British laws and actions. From this point onward, the Boston Committee of Correspondence ceased to be accountable even to the Boston Town Meeting; it was now an extralegal committee of a kind that, under various names, as we shall see, was to spring up all over the colonies. And indeed, it was citizens from this body—as well as the Town Meeting—who, disguised as Indians, boarded ships in Boston harbor, dumping £75,000 worth of tea into the ocean in the Boston Tea Party.

London responded immediately and furiously to the Boston Tea Party by passing the so-called Intolerable Acts of 1774, which blockaded the port of

Boston by armed British gunboats and radically altered the Massachusetts charter so that the upper council of the General Court was now to be appointed by the king rather than elected by the people. Most notably, town meetings throughout the province of Massachusetts were drastically limited to only one meeting in each town per year, to elect town officials. In this unprecedented denial of local autonomy, no further town meetings could be called without the explicit approval of the governor. Long afterward, Americans remembered the prohibition of the Massachusetts town meetings as the most damaging act, short of armed coercion, that the Crown could possibly have inflicted on a free people.

General Gage, commander of the king's forces in America, in turn, was appointed Governor of Massachusetts, essentially placing the province under military rule. Parliament thereupon passed the provocative Quebec Act, which established a government for Quebec that was highly authoritarian, lacking both juries and assemblies. This Act was all the more troubling coming when it did, because, to many Americans, it seemed to presage the form of administration that the colonists feared Britain would ultimately impose upon the American colonies as a whole.

COLONIAL REBELLION

The Intolerable Acts precipitated the simmering rebellion into an outright revolution. Daily riots exploded throughout the towns and cities of British America, as men began openly to collect arms and train for defensive action against the British. Committees of Correspondence were activated throughout the colonies, and the Massachusetts town meetings, hotbeds of revolution, defiantly continued to meet, totally ignoring the new restriction on their activities. Towns soon had not only Committees of Correspondence but Committees of Inspection and Committees of Safety, of which we shall have a good deal to say later. On the eve of the revolution, observes Harry Cushing,

> the governor's authority now embraced little more than Boston; the royal treasurer soon failed to receive payments of recognition from the towns; by the towns had been brought about the end of the royal legislature; at their instance the royal courts had been abolished; and it is significant that in this general collapse the town system, and that alone, had maintained an existence and an activity that were practically continuous. By this element the government of the King had been destroyed; by it the reconstruction was to be effected.[7]

According to Samuel Eliot Morison, the towns had become

> in fact the several sovereigns of Massachusetts Bay. Their relation to the General Court closely approximated that of the states to the Congress of the Confederation, with the important difference that there were not thirteen but almost three hundred of them.[8]

By the summer of 1774, in the absence of a provincial assembly the towns in each county of Massachusetts joined together to form an extralegal county convention to coordinate and direct provincial political activity. Initiated by the towns of Berkshire County in July, the western towns were particularly enthusiastic. Functioning essentially as confederations of municipalities, the conventions were themselves managed like town meetings, with elected moderators, reporting committees, and open votes, thereby constituting a far-flung direct democracy.

By autumn, town meetings all over Massachusetts began to drill their militias and form them into a military force of some consequence and create militias where none had existed. "Whereas a great part of the inhabitants of this town may soon be called forth, to assist in defending the Charter and the Constitution of the Province, as well as the rights and liberties of all America," the Marblehead Town Meeting resolved, " . . . it is necessary that they should be properly disciplined and instructed in the art of war." These militias, whose officers and rank and file often overlapped with the old Sons of Liberty, elected their officers and operated according to the same democratic principles for which they were prepared to fight. Indeed, they became the backbone of the revolutionary war. A special militia of farmers called Minutemen was specifically organized to respond immediately to any British military action against their communities—and the name they adopted resurfaced throughout the colonies long after hostilities with the British had begun.

These acts of virtual insurrection, needless to say, were provoked by the British when they had originally decided to set an example for all the colonies by cracking down on Massachusetts. By this divide-and-conquer strategy, British authorities naively expected that the other colonies would turn against the New England province in order to preserve good relations with the Crown. It was a gross yet typical miscalculation. One colonial assembly after another, totally ignoring British bans on convening and protesting the Intolerable Acts, publicly voiced their outrage against the Crown's measures, while large quantities of food and supplies flooded blockaded Boston overland from other colonies to express their solidarity with the beleaguered New England port.

By early 1774, the assemblies of all but one of the colonies had established a Committee of Correspondence, "the earliest and most common revolutionary organization," over the opposition of the royal governors. "The members of the lower houses of the legislatures," notes Margaret Burnham Macmillan, "seem to have been motivated by a desire to create an official mouthpiece for the opinions

of the colony such as they felt the governor was for the views of the English government."[9] In the summer and fall, many provincial governors tried to shut down their provincial assemblies, fearful that their members were inflaming public opinion against Britain's suppression of colonial rights. When the governors refused to call the assemblies back into session, many Committees of Correspondence provocatively took it upon themselves to convoke them. Thus, when the governors of New Hampshire and North Carolina dissolved their provincial assemblies, the Committees of Correspondence in those provinces simply summoned them back into session, essentially displacing the governors as the executives of the colonies. In South Carolina, the lieutenant governor had planned to prorogue the provincial assembly at ten o'clock on August 3, 1774, but the assembly convened at eight o'clock—"because of the heat"—and carried out its business quickly since its members were all in agreement with each other. By the time the governor prorogued it at ten, it was too late; its legally binding decisions had already been made.[10]

As the grassroots power, legal and extralegal, began to grow, attempts by British authorities and colonial governors to dissolve the assemblies had less and less effect. Not only were Committees of Correspondence insisting that the provincial assemblies reconvene, but they began to supplant their legislative role and took over many of the executive and judicial activities of the provincial government.

In Massachusetts, Gage refused for months to call the General Court into session. At length, in October, the first provincial congress—an extralegal, revolutionary legislature—was organized in Massachusetts, to which the county conventions ceded their leadership of the revolution. This was the first of such outright revolutionary provincial congresses or conventions to be formed throughout the colonies. The regular provincial congresses now began to assume legislative and executive duties that hitherto had belonged entirely to the domain of the royal governors. Like the county conventions that had preceded them, the provincial congresses freely enacted revolutionary legislation, organized new militias or reconstituted older ones into revolutionary forces which elected their own officers, and began to take action against the loyalist Tories. As the Massachusetts Provincial Congress was to recognize, the ultimate source of power lay in the towns and town meetings.

It is important to emphasize the dynamics of the municipalities' revolutionary development: the enormous impetus they gave to the uprising, their role in restructuring the old colonial assemblies into the new, more democratic ones, and the coordinating role of popular local committees. In addition, the colonies exhibited an extraordinary capacity to network, confederate, and empower various institutions on all social levels, many of which had been in existence for generations. Often, the revolutionaries changed very few of the local bodies that had been created during the early days of the colonies; they shrewdly

restructured them, expanding local powers at the expense of the provincial institutions and those of the provincial institutions at the expense of the Crown and British Parliament.

THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

By now, the time had come to assemble a Continental Congress to coordinate the efforts of specific provincial and local struggles, although the source of the original call is not known precisely. According to many accounts, after the Virginia House of Burgesses was dissolved for supporting Boston, the members reassembled at the Raleigh Tavern in Williamsburg to issue a call for a general or continental assembly of representatives from all of the colonies. Carl Becker cites the New York Whigs—mainly conservative merchants—as another source. The Whigs, who valued their trade with Britain, appear to have believed that they could evade the need to respond to Boston's appeal for a congress to boycott all British goods; indeed, they presumably intended to pre-empt the appeal by convening a Continental Congress that they could dominate, reducing its action to a humble petition for redress by the Crown.

In any case, the First Continental Congress that met in Philadelphia on September 5, 1774, was no mere conservative oligarchy; it was composed of delegates from the provincial assemblies and, in the six colonies where assemblies no longer existed, from local Committees of Correspondence and other extralegal bodies that had been defiantly elected by ordinary citizens. "Wherever such a revolutionary group selected the delegates," Macmillan observes, "they chose them from among the more radical Whigs," or patriots.[11] As a result of this selection process, for the first time in many colonies the backcountry yeoman received their rightful proportion of delegates.

To the radicals of Massachusetts and Virginia, the prospect of being assembled in one place was a source of unrestrained rejoicing: Richard Henry Lee of Virginia exulted that the colonies' political salvation lay with Massachusetts, and Paul Revere, who received a hero's welcome, arrived bearing the resolves passed by the Suffolk County Convention, which called for an end to all intercourse with Britain. The radicals immediately banded together to press for the Continental Congress to adopt a similar, binding resolution. No doubt because of the equal representation that brought many backcountry farmers to the Congress, the radicals prevailed—to the utter consternation of the conservative Whigs.

To enforce nonintercourse, the Congress bound the separate colonies together into a Continental Association to boycott British goods, ending all importations from the mother country almost immediately and, if Britain failed to comply

with colonial demands, completely prohibiting the exporting of American goods to Britain. Although the radicals carefully avoided pronouncing the word *independence*—except, perhaps, to deny that they sought it—this Continental Congress and the one that met the following year passed a variety of resolutions that essentially amounted to a *de facto* break with Britain. They created a new government for each colony, mobilized a continental army, formed an intercolonial confederation, and opened American ports to trade with the entire world.

For the New England townsmen, the Continental Congress had still another, indeed broader meaning. Clearly, self-government had been bred into their bones and sinews, and when it was usurped, they knew they would rebel. For much of the colonial period, the towns themselves had been fairly insular, preoccupied mainly with their own purely local affairs; now events on a larger, indeed international, scale swept them up and thrust far-reaching responsibilities upon them. Nor was the Crown unmindful of what the Congress meant for British authority in the colonies. To the news that a Continental Congress was convoked, the king responded: "The die is now cast. The colonies must either submit or triumph." Parliament, keeping apace with the statement, declared Massachusetts to be in a state of rebellion and proceeded to arrange for the transportation of more troops to America.

The events that followed are part of the American national tradition. On the night of April 18, 1775, General Gage, now Governor of Massachusetts, convinced that he could quell the rebellion in one bold action, dispatched eight hundred troops to Concord, eighteen miles north of Boston, with orders to seize the military stores that the colonials had collected in the town, and then proceed to Lexington to arrest two important Massachusetts leaders, Sam Adams and John Hancock. Warned by advance riders that the British troops were on the move, Minutemen began sporadically to engage them along their entire route. Finally, after suffering losses of more than a third of their complement in pitched battles at Lexington and Concord, the British were forced to retreat toward Boston. American losses numbered only about ninety. It was a humiliating defeat for a highly disciplined contingent of professional troops against presumably raw, untrained farmers. Whether they were conscious of their actions or not, the American colonies had initiated a revolution whose values, organizational forms, ideals, and even vocabulary would be echoed in democratic revolutions around the world.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Charles Beard and Mary Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization*, revised and enlarged ed., vol. 1 (originally published 1927; New York: Macmillan, 1949), pp. 115–16.
2. Jesse Lemisch, "The American Revolution Seen from the Bottom Up," in *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History*, ed. Barton J. Bernstein (New York: Pantheon, 1968), p. 20.
3. Quoted in Robert E. Brown, *Middle-Class Democracy and the Revolution in Massachusetts, 1691–1780* (New York: Harper & Row, 1955), p. 58.
4. Quoted in Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 113.
5. May 29, 1772; quoted in Brown, *Middle-Class Democracy*, p. 60.
6. "Speech of the Governor to the Two Houses, January 6, 1773," in Alden Bradford, ed., *Speeches of the Governors of Massachusetts 1765–1775* (Boston, 1818), pp. 336–42, at p. 340.
7. Harry Cushing, "Political Activity of Massachusetts Towns during the Revolution," American Historical Association, *Annual Report* (1895), pp. 108–9.
8. Samuel Eliot Morison, "The Struggle over the Adoption of the Constitution of Massachusetts, 1780," Massachusetts Historical Society, *Proceedings*, vol. 50 (1916–17), p. 360.
9. Margaret Burnham Macmillan, *The War Governors in the American Revolution* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1965), p. 15.
10. See *ibid.*, p. 20.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

CHAPTER 11 Revolutionary Ideology

When the American colonists rebelled against rule by the British, there was as yet very little of a conscious revolutionary tradition with which they could identify and to which they could appeal. The radical aspects of the 1640s in England were little known to the people at large. What the revolutionary intellectuals were acutely aware of, however, was an ongoing decline of liberty throughout the world. Nearly everywhere, they believed, people had known only tyranny. Only a few societies had ever been able to enjoy liberty for any length of time, notably, ancient Athens, the Roman Republic, the Swiss Confederacy, the Dutch Republic, the Venetian Republic, Sweden, Denmark, pre-Norman England, and post–1688 England. In these societies, virtuous and sturdy citizens had lived the cherished simple and patriotic lives devoted to justice and individual liberty that Americans identified with freedom.*

But, as the American revolutionaries noted, most of these societies had subsequently lost their liberties. While ambitious and opportunistic men from without or within sought to expand their own power, the governing structure became tyrannical, and the republican virtues that had upheld the system had given way to corruption, cynicism, and venality. Thus, Athens had fallen to Sparta and later to Alexander's Macedonian empire; the Roman Republic—whose history fascinated America political theorists, as it did the French—had degenerated into a tyrannical and blatantly corrupt empire; the Swedish people, once free, were now subjected to monarchical tyranny; Denmark's parliamentary freedoms had been destroyed in the previous century, as the

*In using the term *liberty* interchangeably with *freedom*, I am conforming to the usage of two centuries ago. Following the natural rights doctrines of the time, which endowed each individual with inborn autonomy, the revolutionaries of the eighteenth century tended to conflate personal liberty with social freedom—a distinction that was not to be clarified until the next century by socialists, for whom the individual divested of a social context was an abstraction.

result of a corrupt nobility and a standing army; and Venice, formerly a republic, was now ruled by a cabal of despots. Only those free societies whose members had maintained their virtue and exercised continual vigilance had been able to resist this tendency toward tyranny and retain their liberties: most notably, the Swiss and the Dutch.

The other major exception to worldwide tyranny, in the eyes of early American thinkers, was Great Britain. Centuries ago, to be sure, the liberty-loving Saxons had been subjugated by the Normans under William the Conqueror, and more recently, to be sure, the Stuart kings had almost succeeded in destroying English liberties. But as a result of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which had established parliamentary sovereignty, liberty still existed in Britain, it was believed; nor was this history lost on English Whig intellectuals of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, who extolled the liberties that the English system still preserved. Men of independent property enjoyed freedoms unparalleled elsewhere on earth, and the key to preserving them, so the Whig writers maintained, was Britain's unique constitution—unwritten and organic—embodied in the traditions of its monarchy and Parliament. Both institutions existed in equilibrium as a result of what were later called "checks and balances" that prevented the encroachment by one branch of government on another, which John Locke grounded in natural rights and a social contract. The American intellectuals believed that as Englishmen (and they were mainly men) they shared in this unique legacy, and accordingly—at least before the prerevolutionary decade—they viewed the English system as a paragon of lasting personal freedom.

But in the 1720s a number of oppositional intellectuals in England realized that this system, so extolled by earlier Whig intellectuals like Locke, was a sham. The equilibrium of court and Parliament within the English system had gone awry. The king and his ministers were becoming all too powerful and were threatening to usurp the privileges of Parliament. The Crown's ministers had corrupted members of Parliament through patronage and favors; standing armies had been established by the king and remained under his control, rather than Parliament's; and the steady usurpation of power by the monarchy threatened to disrupt the institutional balance that had allowed England's system to preserve individual liberties.

The coffeehouse radicals and the opposition politicians who made these criticisms in 1720s England called themselves the Independent or True Whigs, as opposed to the false Whigs who had betrayed the Glorious Revolution. They revived the "Country" critique of the "Court" that had existed in the decades before the English Revolution, and their primary polemicists, pamphleteers John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, invoked the ideals of the Glorious Revolution and the writings of Locke, Harrington, and others against the present corruption of English politics and society. Writing with verve and color in *The Independent Whig* and *Cato's Letters*, these polemicists inveighed against

the manipulative and corrupting encroachments of Walpole's ministry, emphasizing the dangers that a powerful government posed. Again, they popularized ideas of natural right, the social contract, and England's constitution, as these had been expounded by Locke, Sidney, Neville, and especially the republican James Harrington, but this time, in the service of opposition to the status quo rather than to its celebration.

The polemicists of the 1720s did more than merely uphold the aims of the Glorious Revolution; their writings were often overtly libertarian. They maintained that government as such was intrinsically hostile to human liberty, existing only because people whose needs it served allowed it to; if it trespassed beyond its proper limits and became tyrannical, it not only could be but should be overthrown. Whether knowingly or not, their program revived the spirit of the more radical Leveller manifestos by insisting that government was necessarily accountable to the sovereign people if it was not to slip into tyranny. The pamphleteers even raised old Leveller demands for adult manhood suffrage, the binding of representatives to their constituencies, freedom of the press, and complete religious tolerance.

Surprisingly, these ideas had relatively little political impact in the England to which they were addressed, but in the American colonies their influence was enormous. The colonists thought that the trend of the British Empire was no longer toward the preservation of freedom in America but rather toward the centralization of all British territories under the authority of a Parliament controlled by the Crown. Like the English opposition writers of the 1720s, they held that the royal government was not preserving but denying them the "rights of Englishmen." Accordingly, when Britain tried to impose taxes and tariffs on Americans, legitimating them in a seemingly representative body, Parliament, but one in which Americans had no representation, such actions were equivalent to denying the Americans their own liberty-preserving political institutions, such as the town meetings of New England and the colonial legislatures south of the Hudson alike. The Americans were outraged that the ranks of the royal administration, particularly customs commissions, were being expanded, creating the possibility for more of the British-style patronage and corruption against which Trenchard and Gordon had inveighed. And, in fact, some of the colonial governors, especially Hutchinson of Massachusetts, seemed intent on developing a large patronage machine that was being filled with people who, as Benjamin Franklin explained, were

> generally strangers to the provinces they are sent to govern, have no estate, natural connection, or relation there to give them an affection for the country . . . they come only to make money as fast as they can; are sometimes men of vicious characters and broken fortunes, sent by a minister merely to get them out of the way.[1]

Like the English True Whigs, Americans regarded the royal power as self-aggrandizing, seeking to expand itself at their expense. "The crown will take advantage of every opportunity of extending its prerogative in opposition to the privileges of the people," wrote James Wilson of Pennsylvania, which destroyed their virtue since "it is the interest of those who have pensions or offices at will from the crown to concur in all its measures."[2] The attempt by Parliament in 1772 to appoint colonial judges, a practice that had been disallowed in England since 1701, was a step that Americans saw as particularly aggrandizing and a tyrannical subversion of the English constitution on their side of the ocean. Clearly, the powerful in Britain were conspiring to overthrow liberty-preserving institutions in America; indeed, it was feared, priests would be imposed upon America and the separate colonial legislatures would be eliminated. This is precisely the way in which many Americans viewed the Quebec Act: as a regression to "popery" and absolutism.

Accordingly, the English libertarian tracts, especially *Cato's Letters*, were republished over and over as pamphlets and in colonial newspapers for what seemed like a public of insatiable readers. To Americans, according to Bernard Bailyn, "the writings of Trenchard and Gordon ranked with the treatises of Locke as the most authoritative statement of the nature of political liberty and above Locke as an exposition of the social sources of the threats it faced."[3] These writings seemed almost tailored to the way the colonists conceived of their lives and their destinies. Americans, if only in theory, assumed that theirs was a land based on independent farmsteads, relatively representative legislatures, and a polity made up of free, virtuous yeoman farmers who conformed to radical Whig ideas of a free polity. Indeed, a good deal of Enlightenment thought supported the notion that America was in effect purer and freer than England, the apotheosis of "the rights of Englishmen," and more generally an enclave of virtue and liberty. Both Voltaire and Diderot viewed America as the distillation of all that was good in England, and many Americans were only too glad to oblige them in this image. John Adams voiced the same attitude in 1765 when he maintained:

> The liberties of mankind and the glory of human nature is in [Americans'] keeping. America was designed by Providence for the theater on which man was to make his true figures, on which science, virtue, liberty, happiness, and glory were to exist in peace.[4]

The American revolutionary intellectuals thus viewed their battle as a struggle for liberty as such, and their colonies as the crucial holdout against the worldwide demise of freedom. It was no small matter that Thomas Paine, in his electrifying pamphlet *Common Sense*, assigned a quasi-millenarian goal to the American Revolution:

> O ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose, not only the tyranny, but the tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Asia and Africa long expelled her—Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O! receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind.[5]

In this perception, all that stood between liberty and tyranny was vigilance, as the cases of the virtuous Swiss and Dutch seemed to demonstrate.

In fact, the American analysis of the institutional sources of their liberty was based on a fallacy. The colonists had depended much less on the existing English constitution for the preservation of their liberties than on the "benign neglect" of the colonies by the royal administration over past generations. Before 1760, the Crown and Parliament had scarcely exercised their powers over the colonies, with the result that the colonists had become accustomed to a system in which they essentially governed themselves. In the absence of strict administration from London, the town meetings and the colonial assemblies exercised real power in most important areas of colonial life. Thus, Parliament's legal powers to approve or reject bills passed by colonial legislatures and decisions by colonial courts, to make appointments, to regulate trade, and the like, were less integral to daily life, even when they had been exercised before 1760.

> It had in fact been local, common law courts that administered justice in the colonies; . . . And it had in fact been local bodies—towns and counties in the first instance, ultimately the provincial Assemblies—that laid down the rules for daily life; rules concerning the production and distribution of wealth, personal conduct, the worship of God—most of the ways in which people deal with the world, animate and inanimate about them. And these same bodies had been the ones accustomed to tax. Moneys had of course been collected by the home authorities; but they had been fees, dues, and rents—charges, for the most part, incidental to the regulation of overseas trade—not taxes. The power of taxing, from the earliest years of settlement, had been exercised by the representative Assemblies of the various colonies, and exercised without competition—indeed with encouragement—from England. The condition of British America by the end of the Seven Years' War was therefore anomalous: extreme decentralization of authority within an empire presumably ruled by a single, absolute, undivided sovereign.[6]

Under such circumstances, the English constitution was scarcely relevant to American liberties, and when they began their revolt against Britain the Americans found that the social and political order that they were constructing exhibited relatively little resemblance to the much-apotheosized Glorious Revolution. Whether knowingly or not, they were reviving the demands that the

Levellers had made in their very first *Agreement of the People*: sovereignty of the people, if only by developing and enlarging the scope of institutions they had established under the neglect of the British authorities across the Atlantic.

PAINE'S *COMMON SENSE*

Nevertheless, at the time when hostilities broke out between the colonies and Britain, many patriots remained devout monarchists who thought they were merely trying to rectify abuses of power on the part of a flawed king and his ministers—even as George III was declaring them "rebels" and obliging them to fight their English cousins in red coats. The armed conflict went beyond mere skirmishes at the Battle of Bunker Hill (actually of Breed's Hill) on the outskirts of Boston on June 17, 1775—the first organized encounter of British regulars with New England militiamen on a large scale. The British victory was a pyrrhic one: more than a thousand dead and 2,200 wounded fell against entrenched Americans, who lost only 441 out of an estimated 3,200. In selecting George Washington to command the 15,000 militia who formed the united colonial forces, the Continental Congress showed unerring judgment: the wooden image that Americans commonly hold today of this gallant man does him little justice. Washington commanded a force of his own during the French and Indian War, during which time he exhibited exceptional qualities as a military strategist. He was a man of immense personal courage in combat situations and a devoted leader of his troops. In the early period of the war the Continental Army—that is, the army in which Americans enlisted as regulars—and local militias tried to outwit rather than recklessly confront the relatively sluggish but well-trained, well-equipped, and sizable army of British regulars. Once the colonial forces were routed in the New York City area—which remained in British hands until the end of the war—Washington's tactics alternated between retreats designed to preserve his small army from total destruction and limited surprise attacks that threw the British commander, General William Howe, off balance.

After these months of armed conflict, with bloody bodies left on battlefields, increasing numbers of American colonists began to abandon any allegiance to the monarchy. Many who had continued to favor America's association with Britain lived in the vain hope that the mother country would maintain a basic respect and affection for its colonies—a hope that was finally shattered by the news that the Crown had hired 20,000 Hessian mercenaries to fight against its own colonial subjects. So devastating to loyalist arguments was the deployment of foreign mercenaries that even many committed monarchists were outraged, and for many loyal colonists the bond between ruler and subject was revealed as a sham.

In January 1776, Tom Paine's stirring pamphlet *Common Sense* clearly formulated the still inchoate but increasingly hostile sentiments of the colonials into a flat rejection of the notion that the English constitution, with its king and Parliament, could conform to American conceptions of liberty. Contrary to more than a century of English Whig thought, Paine argued, the balance of king and Parliament constituted an outright threat to colonial freedom. Not only did Americans lack any representation in Parliament, but they could not feasibly obtain such representation in a body that met thousands of miles away. To restore a balance in their relations with Britain was chimerical, Paine argued; bluntly, Americans had to sever their ties with England and independently follow their own destiny.

Contrary to the commonly held view that *Common Sense* merely inspired the patriot party to demand independence, Paine's pamphlet was actually a spirited argument for republicanism as such. "The nearer any government approaches to a republic the less business there is for a king," he militantly declared.[7] And it was not the king alone but the English system as such that was fatally flawed—"the so much boasted constitution of England," as Paine called it—which consists merely of two tyrannies, "monarchical tyranny in the person of the King . . . [and] aristocratical tyranny in the persons of the peers," a system that merely relies on the oligarchical House of Commons to create the illusion of true representation. The idea "that the constitution is a union of three powers reciprocally checking each other," Paine wrote, "is farcical."[8]

Tyranny was endemic to kings, argued Paine; they naturally tended to expand their own power. Grasping and tenacious, restless and insatiable, monarchical power invariably corrupted virtue and destroyed liberty. Like the Leveller Thomas Rainborough, who had invoked the natural rights of the individual in the Putney Debates almost a century and a half earlier, Paine too invoked natural rights in formulating his case against monarchy: "the exalting one man so greatly above the rest cannot be justified on the equal rights of nature." Further: "For all men being originally equals, no *one* by birth could have a right to set up his own family in perpetual preference to all others."[9] Paine left no argument for monarchy unanswered, no claim to scriptural authority unrefuted. "For monarchy in every instance is the popery of government," he warned, associating kingship with the widely regarded enemy of liberty, the Catholic Church.[10]

Fortunately, Paine's argument continued, a king is unnecessary to political systems; indeed, monarchy "is a political superfluity." Nor is a balance of forces or "checks and balances" necessary to preserve liberties. In fact, he continued, the source of the liberty-preserving elements of the English constitution has been misidentified: the liberties of England, such as they are, are all "wholly owing to the constitution of the people, and not to the constitution of the government."[11] There is no reason for Americans to try to recapitulate the English system in America, since "it is the republican and not the monarchical part of the constitution which Englishmen glory in, viz. the liberty of choosing a house of commons from out of their own body."[12] Americans should cast off the ancient traditions of England's corrupt system and create a new political order based not on English tradition but on natural rights, which alone are the true bases of human liberty. As the radical English Whigs had previously done and as French revolutionaries would do only a few years later, he invoked "republican virtue" as the moral basis of the new system. "It is easy to see," he wrote, "that when republican virtue fails, slavery ensues."[13]

Independent America, Paine argued, should adopt the republic as their form of government—a body of representatives without either a king or an aristocracy. Falling back on the long experience of the colonies with written colonial charters, which had often protected them from British interference, Paine called upon the thirteen new states to adopt constitutions that institutionalized unicameral assemblies—a single house of parliament—whose members would be elected annually, based on a relatively equal suffrage, and presided over by an elected president. For the colonies as a whole, Paine raised the cry for a "Continental Charter, or Charter of the United Colonies" that would "secur[e] freedom and property to all men." He offered his own plan for a republican constitution, again with a large unicameral assembly, whose members ("at least 390") were to be elected annually by a broad suffrage. The presiding officer, the president, Paine argued, should be chosen by lot and rotation by the Congress from among the delegates of the states.

Not all patriots, to be sure, agreed with Paine's call for the unicameral legislature nor with his rejection of the "checks and balances" of the English constitution. Paine's conception of republican government, complained John Adams, "was so democratical, without any restraint or even an attempt at any equilibrium or counterpoise, that it must produce confusion and every evil work."[14] Popular assemblies, Adams felt, were too changeable, too subject to hasty judgments, and too amenable to demagoguery to lend stability to a political and social order. Adams, in his own *Thoughts on Government*, which appeared only a few months after *Common Sense* and apparently in response to it, presented a model of republican government that recapitulated the equilibrium of the English constitution, albeit without the king and the aristocracy: there would be two houses in the legislature, Adams prescribed, and an executive that could veto bills passed by the legislature, as well as an independent judiciary.

Although American constitutionalists were to eventually accept Adams's views in his *Thoughts on Government*, it was Paine's pamphlet that fired the mood of the revolutionaries. With blistering polemical ardor and taut rationality, *Common Sense* electrified the patriot movement, and more than any single work at the time it led to the writing of the Declaration of Independence.

Following its publication, General Washington ceased toasting the king's health at the nightly mess of his officers. As he noted in a letter of January 31, 1776, "the sound doctrine and unanswerable reasoning contained in the pamphlet *Common Sense*," among other arguments, "will not leave members at a loss to decide upon the propriety of a separation."[15] Within a week or two, the Virginia aristocrat and military commander had been converted from a royalist to a republican, and he ordered his officers to read the pamphlet to their troops.

The debate over the proper form of government, especially as articulated by Paine and Adams, reached a peak of intensity once the American provinces no longer considered themselves subjects of the king, and it became their task to write constitutions for themselves as independent states. "Up and down the still sparsely settled coast of British North America," writes Bailyn,

> groups of men—intellectuals and farmers, scholars and merchants, the learned and the ignorant—gathered for the purpose of constructing enlightened governments. . . . Everywhere there were discussions of the ideal nature of government; everywhere principles of politics were examined, institutions weighed, and practices considered. And these debates . . . were direct continuations of the discussions that had preceded Independence.[16]

Indeed, in 1776 alone, eight states drafted and adopted constitutions establishing their independence from the Crown.

On June 12, 1776, the famous Virginia Bill of Rights appeared, clarifying what Americans were fighting for. Written by George Mason, the Virginia bill stated the cherished liberties of citizens that had always been won by countless struggles throughout English history, but unlike later bills of rights of which it was to be the progenitor, the Virginia bill was also presented as a "basis and foundation of government." "All power is vested in, and consequently derived from, the people," the bill declared in sweeping prose; "magistrates are their trustees and servants, and at all times amenable to them." Its articles asserted the right to "alter" and "abolish" government "in such a manner as shall be judged most conducive to the public weal," with "frequent certain and regular elections" (which at this time meant annual ones). It upheld suffrage for "all men having sufficient evidence of permanent common interest with, and attachment to the community" (a property qualification), and proclaimed the judicial right of all accused persons to confront their accusers in open courts in the course of a "speedy trial by an impartial jury of [their] own vicinage," prohibiting excessive bail, "cruel and unusual punishment," and general warrants such as writs of assistance. Finally, the bill affirmed freedom of the press as "one of the great bulwarks of liberty," and it favored a militia as against a standing army that "in times of peace should be avoided as dangerous to liberty." This sweeping document eliminated all restraints on religious liberty and endowed all men with "the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience."[17] It may be well to note that most of these rights and freedoms would have been considered treasonable in the rest of the world at that time.

INDEPENDENCE

The rapid advance from a conciliatory attitude toward the king to one of open hostility and disavowal is remarkable, reflecting the fact that revolutions telescope events that ordinarily take generations, even centuries, into a single year or less. By the early months of 1776, patriot sentiment throughout the colonies was so inflamed that John Adams, at the Continental Congress at Philadelphia, could write: "By every Post and every day, Independence rolls in on us like a torrent."[18] Not that the colonies were undivided; in Rhode Island the backcountry was the driving force toward independence, for example, but Newport and Narragansett Counties in the wealthy southern part of the state remained loyal, while the agrarian north, which was in control of the provincial government, openly declared the colony's independence.

Moreover, many delegates to the Continental Congress were hesitant about supporting separation from the mother country. In the spring of 1776, the defenders of proprietary interests in Pennsylvania and delegates from many southern colonies were shocked by Paine's demands, and at the Congress itself they maintained a particular wariness of the New Englanders, with their town meeting "mob rule" democracy and their apparent desire to extend it to the other colonies. The delegates from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New York—colonies where wealthy conservative interests were still in power—had been specifically instructed to vote against independence if it was raised. Nor would delegates from these colonies vote for independence until the radicals at home turned to outright revolutionary actions and established popular governmental institutions.

Still, Paine's words profoundly influenced the committee that the Second Continental Congress appointed in mid-June 1776 to prepare the Declaration of Independence. The committee included Sam Adams of Massachusetts, Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania, Roger Sherman of Connecticut, Robert Livingston of New York and, of course, Thomas Jefferson, who was asked by his co-members to draft the Declaration with which his name is famously associated. The document was a sweeping statement of the basic concepts of liberty that had been percolating through the colonies from the inception of their struggle:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government.

Many of the "self-evident truths" of which Jefferson wrote had their immediate roots in the treatises of John Locke: notably, that men as individuals (and women no less, we would interject today) have inalienable natural rights that cannot be abridged; that these rights stem from the very natural order of things; and that government exists by the consent of the governed and has no authority except what the people grant to it. Many of these ideas have clear predecessors in the writings of the Levellers, although at the time of the English Revolution they were hardly seen as "self-evident." If not by design, the authors repeatedly express views, even statements, in the Declaration that parallel early Leveller assertions going back to the 1640s. "By natural birth," Richard Overton had asserted, "all men are equally and alike born to like propriety, liberty, and freedom."[19] Similarly, "by nature," John Lilburne had written, they are "all equal and alike in power, dignity, authority, and majesty."[20] And again: "We are resolved upon our natural rights and freedoms," Overton wrote.[21] "The only and sole legislative law-making power is originally inherent in the people," Lilburne affirmed, "and derivatively in their commissions chosen by themselves by common consent and no other."[22] "So ought the whole nation to be free therein even to alter and change the public form," William Walwyn asserted, "as may best stand with the safety and freedom of the people."[23]

By contrast, it is worth adding, the constitution that John Locke himself had prepared for his patron's newly acquired colony of Carolina in the late seventeenth century was a curious regression to feudal privilege and hierarchy. Yet Locke's theoretical ideas bear implications that are far in advance of previous thinking on social contract and natural law ideas. Although the notion of equal natural rights had been long in the making, Locke's *Second Treatise* turned it into a rational idea by emphasizing that men by their own labor refashion nature, in a sense, when they invest their labor to meet their own needs and aims. That is to say, their labor recreates nature as a domain of individual rights. Nature, in effect, is not merely an original condition of human equality; it is a realm permeated by property rights, formulated by human activity, and recreated by work and intelligence.

By Locke's time, radical statesmen had indissolubly wedded property to natural law; human labor, they argued, had conferred "natural rights" upon the individual that were beyond the reach of the state, still less of arbitrary rulers.

The fact that nearly all the great declarations promulgated by republican revolutions in the eighteenth century wedded property to natural rights or at least swept property rights into their list of inalienable rights—including their right to the liberty of their own bodies—was not necessarily due to self-interest or class interest, important as these interests were to men of property. Rather, by virtue of the fact that property was acquired through labor in reworking nature, Locke in effect shifted the priority Hobbes had given to the state over the individual to individual property as a major source of natural rights, thereby diminishing its authority over the people.

Property, in turn, conferred major liberties on the citizen. It gave him the material independence to act as a free agent, beholden to no one and nothing other than his own reason and conscience. Unlike the dependent serf of the feudal system, who had owed produce and service to his lord in exchange for military protection and the use of the lord's land, the independent citizen in the republic owned his own land, provided for his family with it, and bore arms to defend his own land and his community. And unlike servants and others who had no property and hence could be manipulated by their masters, the propertied man could be guided by his own rational judgments, free of external coercion or fears of material want. He was not a client but a citizen, or at least potentially so. Nor was he a "drifter," a member of the "mobility" or "mob," but rather a well-rooted member of a given community who had a social stake in its welfare. He had lasting friends, neighbors, material interests, and responsibilities, and hence he could be counted upon to be concerned with the community's best interests as well as his own.

Bourgeois as these notions seem to us today, they date back to ancient times and can be found in the works of Aristotle. Doubtless, had John Locke himself attended the Putney Debates, he would have sided with Henry Ireton when Cromwell's son-in-law insisted that property was the prerequisite for political rights. But Locke's ideas could be used, by implication at least, by Thomas Rainborough, who defended universal suffrage on the basis of natural rights and was willing to extend citizenship even to the poorest Englishman who was not a servant. Ireton had argued to considerable effect that a social order based on natural rights would not only give everyone the vote but could be used by the propertyless to claim a right to property. Locke had yet to write the *Second Treatise* when the Putney Debates were under way, and Rainborough had no effective rebuttal to Ireton's argument. Yet Locke's theories wresting private property from nature through one's labor could have been used by Rainborough to counter Ireton, assuming that he was prepared to assert the "right" of all men to own property—an issue that was to emerge two decades later among the radical Jacobins, at least by implication, in the famous Ventôse laws of 1794.

Unknown in the 1640s, the nonbourgeois aspects of Locke's theories were very much in the air a century and a half later. To yeoman farmers of limited

means, their world of property was a world of familial husbandry; American farmers, in fact, tended to cultivate only as much land as they needed to meet their immediate needs. One might farm more land if one lived close to the larger artisanal and commercial towns along the Atlantic seaboard and riverways, where a growing market economy tended to seduce the farmer into commercial agriculture. But the closer yeoman farmers came to the frontier, the less this condition prevailed, as we shall see in our discussion of the Shaysites. Here the view of property as a natural right, carved out of the wilderness by virtue of one's own physical labor, seemed only too obvious, and a Lockean argument could be used as effectively against the merchants of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston, to whom the farmers were indebted, as it could against the king. Nor did the small proprietors of America ever quite lose sight of the view that attempts to seize their farmsteads and possessions for unpaid debts were a violation of their "natural rights," and from the 1770s until as late as the 1930s they took up arms to keep merchants and bankers from dispossessing them from land that they or their ancestors had wrested from "nature" by virtue of their own labor. The notion that property was sacred was thus highly elastic: it could be used as effectively by precapitalist strata to hold on to their property as it could by capitalist strata to expand their holdings.

The signers of the Declaration of Independence—which was no less a summons to the American people to take up arms against the monarchy than a claim to independence—were mainly lawyers, although quite a few had thriving businesses and perhaps fewer had thriving plantations of their own. The well-to-do merchant class, the nearest thing the Americans had to an authentic bourgeoisie, constituted only a minority of the signers, and the extent to which they were representative of their class is questionable, despite efforts to characterize the Revolution as "bourgeois." In a sense the signers reflected the interests of a broad middle class, as yet undefined, and even of a "bourgeoisie" in the sense of burgesses who were not strictly capitalistic. They belonged to a world that was still mixed economically, in which "property" included a man's life, social status, liberties, and personal esteem as well as his material holdings. Should one add to this list one's responsibility to the community, the description is more Hellenic than capitalistic and in some respects more public than privatistic.

Rooted in natural law, the Declaration of Independence stands apart from most revolutionary declarations of the eighteenth century in its demand that the "unalienable rights" include life, liberty, and the "pursuit of happiness," rather than property, as the French Declaration of Human Rights would announce thirteen years later. Nearly all the proclamatory literature of the era used "life, liberty, and property" as a definition of rights and freedom. Jefferson, who drafted the document, was hardly indifferent to the rights of property, to be sure; indeed, he upheld it as a source of meaning to natural law doctrines, and it is he who is most clearly identified in the early history of the United States with

the political demands and interests of the independent farmer-proprietor. Whatever Jefferson himself may have meant by the word *happiness*, his use of it added a utopian, indeed transcendental dimension to ideas of rights and freedom. It conveyed the vision that the revolution was an ethical and humanistic movement, not merely a material one or a "tax revolt" or commercial adventure by merchants and planters who wished to have greater freedom of trade.

But the Declaration is not without a major contradiction: although it speaks almost lyrically of humanity's natural rights, it takes no note whatever that one in five people in America were black slaves, let alone Indians who were treated as aliens in their own land, and women who were the legal equivalent of juveniles. Particularly in the light of the many American denunciations of British rule as "slavery," Jefferson was acutely aware of the paradox created by the existence of chattel slavery in the colonies. Among the grievances he listed against the king in the original draft of the Declaration was the charge that "he has waged a cruel war against human nature itself . . . in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating them and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere" and kept an "open market where MEN could be bought and sold." This clause in the Declaration was deleted, however, to satisfy objections from delegates from southern states and Yankee slave-traders from New England.

What makes the Declaration extraordinary is the fact that it was a proclamation directed to the entire world. To cite its opening lines, "a decent respect to the opinions of mankind" obliges the American revolutionaries to "declare the causes that impel them to separation." The Declaration explicitly addresses itself to humanity and to public "opinion"; the Americans who signed this remarkable document were patently declaring their cause to the world, a precedent that all later major revolutions would follow, with its implied appeal to solidarity among all people and with its implied application of inalienable natural rights not only to the English and Americans but to everyone whom its words could reach. Like the Enlightenment itself, it was a clearly universalistic declaration that appealed to people as a whole who are free or live in trammels of political repression, avowing that the American Revolution was oriented toward the world and concerned with the existence of oppression as such.

The Revolution proved that a free people could create remarkably effective institutions at the very base of their society, institutions that were ultimately far more effective than the bureaucracy of the English monarchy. The Declaration brought this reality to the foreground such as no public document had done before. Where the Levellers had the New Model Army and an easily fragmented political network as an institutional base, the Americans had a *society* and a *body politic*. George III had essentially lost the colonies once British troops were no longer needed to protect them from the French and Indians in 1760. The Declaration took this fact for granted when it cited many of his royal prerogatives as violations of colonial sovereignty: it described his monarchical

right to veto laws and suspend legislatures as the abuses of an invading tyrant, not as the exercise of legitimate royal authority by eighteenth-century standards. It is no wonder, then, that a democratic spirit inspired many ordinary patriots after the Declaration of Independence was signed. Thereafter, revolutionaries used not only *Tory* and *loyalist* as epithets for their opponents, but with increasing frequency *royalist.*

NOTES

1. Franklin quoted in Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1967), p. 102.
2. Wilson quoted *ibid.*, p. 103.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
4. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 20.
5. Thomas Paine, *Common Sense and the Crisis* (New York: Doubleday & Co, 1960), p. 42.
6. Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, p. 204.
7. Paine, *Common Sense*, p. 26.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 22.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Quoted in Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, p. 289.
15. Washington's letter to Joseph Reed, quoted in Samuel Eliot Morison, *Oxford History of the American People* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 220.
16. Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, p. 231.
17. "Virginia Bill of Rights," June 12, 1776, in Samuel Eliot Morison, ed., *Sources and Documents Illustrating the American Revolution 1764–1788 and the Formation of the Federal Constitution*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1929), pp. 149–51.
18. Quoted in Morison, *Oxford History*, p. 221.
19. Richard Overton, *Defence against All Arbitrary Usurpations*, September 9, 1646, in Don M. Wolfe, ed., *Leveller Manifestoes of the Puritan Revolution* (1944; New York: Humanities Press, 1967), p. 11. In this and the remaining Leveller quotes in this passage, I have modernized the spelling and punctuation. On the parallels between these passages and the opening paragraph of the Declaration of the Independence, I am indebted to Charles Beard's introduction to Wolfe's collection.
20. John Lilburne, *The Freeman's Freedom Vindicated*, June 19, 1646, in Wolfe, *Leveller Manifestoes*, p. 8.
21. Richard Overton, *Alarum to the House of Lords*, July 31, 1646, in Wolfe, *Leveller Manifestoes*, p. 11.
22. John Lilburne, *The Charters of London and London's Liberty in Chains*, December 18, 1646, in Wolfe, *Leveller Manifestoes*, p. 14.
23. William Walwyn, *England's Lamentable Slavery*, October 11, 1645, in Wolfe, *Leveller Manifestoes*, p. 7.

CHAPTER 12 The Committees of Safety and the Militias

The American Revolution was to innovate very remarkable revolutionary institutions, many of which were to resurface in popular uprisings throughout the world. Perhaps one of the most remarkable of these innovations was the network of revolutionary committees that emerged at every level of society, which were to constitute the authentic engine of the Revolution—later to be emulated in the French Revolution and in other comparable upheavals well into the twentieth century. When the First Continental Congress met in Philadelphia in September 1774 to create a Continental Association designed to end all intercourse with Britain, it also set up a specific mechanism to implement its goals. Article 11 of the resolution passed by the Congress on October 20 recommended "that a committee be chosen in every county, city, and town, by those who are qualified to vote for representatives in the legislature, whose business shall be to observe the conduct of all persons touching this association"—that is, to enforce the boycott of British goods.[1] These committees were to examine every shipment of imports that arrived from Britain after December 1, 1774, and to supervise the disposition of confiscated goods.

In accordance with this resolution—and very much on their own initiative as well—ordinary citizens began to constitute grassroots, county, and provincial committees throughout the colonies. Although the Continental Congress expected that the various colonies would instruct the Committees of Correspondence to enforce the Continental Association, these committees were already so overburdened with responsibilities that smaller auxiliary bodies were formed to perform special duties, which generally went under the name of Committees of Safety. By July 1775 the Continental Congress called upon every colony to establish a Committee of Safety, presumably to take on the overflow of work that nonimportation committees were unable to handle, thereby legitimating their existence as special revolutionary bodies.

Committees of Safety were not entirely unprecedented historically, but nowhere else did they emerge on a scale even remotely comparable to that created in America in the late 1770s. During the English Revolution of the 1640s and 1650s, the House of Commons had established bodies with that name to deal with crucial situations that required swift action by a small number of elected parliamentary representatives. But the British committees of safety were primarily parliamentary bodies; they rarely had local roots.

By contrast, the Committees of Safety in the American colonies were generally far-flung popular bodies whose insurrectionary pedigree reached back to the Glorious Revolution of 1688, when William and Mary replaced James II, a revolution that aroused widespread hopes for greater liberties not only in England but the colonies as well. In both Boston and New York City the citizenry had risen in insurrections to unseat Court-approved executives of James by men of their own choosing. In New York, many citizens harbored long-term resentments against their heavy tax burdens, the high-handed behavior of Lieutenant Governor Francis Nicholson, and the arrogance of a small, privileged oligarchy composed of established families such as the Van Cortlandts and Philipses that exercised firm control over the colony. In the spring of 1689, Nicholson, who was slow to inform the people of the change of royal power that had occurred in England, aroused widespread popular suspicion, which, together with fears of a possible French invasion of the city, led to a broad uprising. Nicholson was obliged to flee from his own province, and in June the city's affairs had been placed in the hands of an elected Committee of Safety composed of sixteen members, led by the commander of the rebel militia, Jacob Leisler, a German merchant immigrant. Driving the ruling merchant– landowner elite from office, Leisler had replaced them with a wider social spectrum of officeholders and remained at the Committee's head for some eight months until he assumed the title of lieutenant governor of the entire province, replacing the Committee with a conventional executive council. In March of the next year, Leisler was arrested, tried, and hanged, and the entrenched oligarchy whose rule he had temporarily disrupted was restored to power in the province.

But Leisler's Committee of Safety had established a precedent that was not easily forgotten. Even before the recommendation of the Continental Congress in October 1774, Committees of Safety had spontaneously sprung up in almost every patriot province, county, city, and town, each elected by the people of the area to enforce the Continental Association. In some areas, the Committees appeared under a variety of names, such as Committees of Supply and Committees of Observation and Inspection, which zealously saw to it that the Continental Association boycott was honored. As Governor Dunmore of Virginia complained:

> A Committee has been chosen in every County whose business it is to carry the Association of the Congress into execution, which Committee assumes an authority to inspect the books, invoices, and all other secrets of the trade and correspondence of Merchants; to watch the conduct of every inhabitant without distinction, and to send for all such as come under their suspicion into their presence; to interrogate them respecting all matters which, to their pleasure, they think fit objects of their inquiry; and to stigmatize, as they term it, such as they find transgressing what they are now hardy enough to call the Laws of Congress, which stigmatizing is no other than inviting the vengeance of an outrageous and lawless mob to be exercised upon the unhappy victims.[2]

Although Dunmore's description specifically cites committees that were established to implement nonimportation of British goods, the distinctions between mere boycott and open revolution became increasingly murky.

The Continental Congress provided little guidance on how the committees were to gain the personal adherence of their fellow citizens to boycott British goods or gain pledges to consume only what America could produce itself. "The Continental Congress laid down the program on general lines," observes A.C. Flick, "but let each colony devise its own ways and means."[3] The first method of the committees was relatively genteel: they simply published the name of any individual who violated the Continental Association in the local press. To ferret out more surreptitious violators of the boycott, in some places copies of the Continental Association document were circulated for signature by the people, and those who refused found their names listed in the press as well.

In time, during recess periods between meetings of a legislative body—be it a town meeting, a county convention, or a provincial congress—the local Committee of Safety often became a temporary executive authority to meet the growing and varied needs of the revolutionary cause. As Margaret Burnham Macmillan observes, the loyalist royal governors in 1774 and 1775 were "compelled to admit that entire new revolutionary governments, parallel and coexistent with the old authority, had been established in their respective provinces."[4] In December 1774, Virginia governor Dunmore warned in alarm: "Every County . . . is now arming a Company . . . for the Avowed purpose of protecting their committees, and to be employed against government, if occasion require."[5] Between June and October 1775, most of the royal governors took refuge on offshore British warships or in British military fortifications. There were, to be sure, exceptions. The governor of New Jersey, for example, remained in office, although the revolutionaries placed his house under guard, intercepted his mail, and finally arrested him in June 1776. The governor of Connecticut, on the other hand, remained in office throughout the war, prudently working together with the committees, and even became governor of the new state of Connecticut after the Revolution. On the other hand, the

governor of Maryland, who was very popular with the elite strata of the colony, was forced out of office when more vigilant revolutionaries discovered that he had been in correspondence with Britain and with the loyalist governor of Virginia.

In time, the Committees began to meet continually, even during the sessions of the various bodies whose duties they had only temporarily taken over, often assuming executive powers when they were not granted them outright. As such, they became a revolutionary executive during the period from the end of the rule of royal governors to the adoption of new state constitutions for patriot governments. Indeed, once actual military operations began, their tasks expanded enormously, well beyond the enforcement of the Continental Association. They became the active forces *par excellence* in overseeing the authority of the Revolution, coordinating military efforts where necessary, issuing enlistment orders, setting quotas for the number of militia each town was expected to provide, and mobilizing troops for existing militias and the new Continental Army. It was the committees that often procured arms for the militias, equipped them with supplies, and cared for the dependents of absent troops. In many cases, the committees functioned as the collective commander-in-chief of the militias, and commonly maintained close surveillance of known or suspected loyalists, even rounding them up for questioning and imprisonment. They fixed prices, confiscated loyalist property, and when necessary conducted military operations, appointing officers when they were not elected by their men. Where no institutionalized patriot judiciary existed, the committees generally functioned as revolutionary courts.

It was these bodies, as Richard Alan Ryerson points out, that gave grassroots institutional embodiment to the democratic ideals espoused by revolutionary intellectuals. If "the American Revolution was a seminal event in world history," Ryerson writes, it was "not because it proclaimed the right of revolution, but because it developed the ideological, governmental, and popular means to bring about a revolution." Indeed, it took that democratic ideology "out of the realm of theory and rhetoric and into the domain of reality and action."[6]

With the exception of Rhode Island, every colony had a Provincial Committee (or Provincial Council) of Safety at one time or another during the course of the Revolution, working with coexisting county and local Committees of Safety that often outlasted a provincial committee's dissolution by new state institutions. The Committee of Safety in New Hampshire, among the longest-lived in the colonies, was not disbanded until June 1784, three years after British troops began to debark from the former colonies, while the Connecticut committee lasted until 1783. Some committees had very limited authority, as in Massachusetts, while others had virtually dictatorial powers.

The structure established in North Carolina almost ideally exemplifies the structure that existed to one degree or another in nearly all of the colonies.

Established in September 1775, the province's carefully graded structure of committees consisted of a reliable and patriotic Provincial Council of Safety, whose thirteen members were elected by the Provincial Congress together with two members from each of the province's electoral districts. County committees formed the next tier of the structure, followed by Committees of Safety that met quarterly in major towns of each elected district. Not only did the committees direct the local militia, but they functioned as appeals courts for Tory defendants whom the all-important local committees had convicted of offenses against the patriot cause. The town Committees of Safety were elected annually by the local freeholders. Ranging in number from seven to fifteen members, they established their own operating regulations and were free to arrest and confine all suspected Tories. The local militias, which they organized and commanded, often served as the real force in the communities and counties. The militias, it should be added, elected most or all of their officers, and they played a decisive role in winning a given town or region to the revolutionary cause.

By no means were all the Provincial-level Congresses and Committees of Safety eager to carry out the responsibilities that had been thrust upon them. A number of them conspicuously lagged behind the local, district, and county committees, which were usually notable for their revolutionary zeal and initiative. Although the local committees were given a broad latitude in carrying out their responsibilities, they eagerly took many matters into their own hands. Thus in New Hampshire it was the local committees that typically undertook the job of rooting out Tories, confiscating their land, mobilizing and equipping militia forces, and caring for the dependents of militiamen on active duty. In New Jersey, the main function of the Committee of Safety and Inspection seemed to consist almost entirely of dealing with Tories. The province had become a battleground for bitter conflicts between Tories and patriots, exploding in widespread bitter guerrilla warfare, especially in areas where the fronts between British and Continental armies were still ill-defined.

At the provincial level of some provinces, however, uncertainty about the outcome of the conflict and fear of reprisals after a possible British victory undoubtedly caused many moderate patriots to be wary of undertaking overt anti-British activity. Not only were they glad to leave the responsibilities of supporting the Revolution to the local Committees of Safety, but in Maryland, to cite an extreme example, the provincial committee was composed almost completely of the more "respectable," prudent and hesitant supporters of the Revolution. So conservative was this committee, in fact, that it tended to deal with patently Tory officials with remarkable deference. There, Continental Army officers such as the militant General Charles Lee had to turn to the radical Baltimore committee, composed largely of workmen, to challenge the provincial committee and circumvent the governor's barely disguised support for the British.

On the other hand, patriots in the New York City area were often in the minority and were obliged to depend mainly on committees at the provincial level to countervail the strong loyalist sentiment in Westchester, Queens, and Kings Counties and on Staten Island. In these counties, patriots actually lost control of the local Committees of Safety to virtual loyalists, who carried out none of their obligatory functions. So moderate was the provincial revolutionary government of New York that General Washington, John Hancock, and General Lee had to urge it to take stronger measures against Tories to keep the city from falling to the British. When the city finally did fall in the autumn of 1776, the local committees were disbanded and the city became the major gathering place for Tories from throughout the provinces.

Thus, throughout the provinces the local committees often acted on their own, beyond the strict control of the provincial committees. In general, "the central government [of a province] had no means of enforcing authority over [the county committees]," observes Agnes Hunt, a historian of moderate political views. "These county committees . . . were tenacious of their local supremacy and stood as a complete barrier against any attempt at centralization which must precede any practical exercise of independence in a central executive."[7] The Committees of Safety, in effect, emerged as a dual power on *every* level of sovereignty, county and local as well as provincial, even paralleling various provincial congresses as well as the Continental Congress itself.

Like the French revolutionaries a decade later, the patriots' civilian authorities in the American Revolution were continually suspicious of possible coups by the military—and, as it turned out, their suspicions were often quite warranted. Thus, some Committees of Safety openly resisted any attempt by the Continental Army to dictate orders to them. "Committee of safety members usually were civilians well imbued with the prevalent distrust of unchecked military authority," Macmillan notes.[8] In Massachusetts the Provincial Committee was accountable only to the Provincial Congress and assiduously upheld the supremacy of the civil authority over that of the military. When General Ward of the Continental Army ordered a Massachusetts committee to place its military stores at the discretion of the army's officers, the committeemen complied but solemnly took the pains to assert the authority of civilian institutions over that of the military, warning, "It is of vast importance that no *orders* are issued by the *military* or *obeyed* by the *civil* powers, but only such as are *directed by the honorable representative body of the people, from whom all military and civil power originates.*"[9]

Essentially, all the institutions for a revolutionary democracy were very much in place in areas controlled by the revolutionaries. The New England town meeting was extended to many communities along the Atlantic seaboard and even to inland frontier settlements. Outside New England, as one patriot later recounted, resistance leaders envied the New England town meetings and their

ability to unite "the whole body of the people in the measures taken to oppose the Stamp Act induced other Provinces to imitate their example." Even sizable cities developed popular assemblies of one kind or another that were markedly democratic. Thus, Charleston's patriotic local artisans consciously imported the New England town meeting to their city, an act that was all the easier because the city was unincorporated on the eve of the Revolution and lacked municipal bodies that patriots might use to press their resistance to British rule. In time, the town meeting gradually became the municipal government of the southern city. Initially, in 1768, "mechanics and many other inhabitants of this town" gathered to urge that South Carolina join the other provinces in the nonimportation agreement; by September 1769, merchants and planters began to attend the boycott committee, so that the meeting soon became a "general meeting of inhabitants . . . to consider of other matters for the general good" besides nonimportation. The same "general meeting of the inhabitants of and near Charlestown" then convened in late 1773 in order that the "sense of the community might be collected" on its response to the passage of the Tea Act, followed again in March 1774 by another meeting on the closing of the port of Boston. Finally, this "general meeting" called upon the various parishes of South Carolina to choose delegates to a General Convention, which thereupon formed a committee in which as many as half of its members were mechanics. Typically, Christopher Gadsden, the leading South Carolina Whig, distrusted the Charleston town meeting as a disorderly mob and even defamed it in 1778, when he speculated that the people's "running upon every fancy to the meetings of liberty tree" was a "disease amongst us far more dangerous than . . . the whole present herd of contemptible tories." The Charleston town meeting continued to be the municipal government of the city for a total of fifteen years, until the city was incorporated by the state legislature in August 1783.[10]

Nor were the newly formed revolutionary militias immune to the democratic fervor that swept over the colonies. In Baltimore, to cite a remarkable example, democratic practices had so completely imbued the local revolutionary militia that its troops actually assumed the lead in democratizing the city's lagging institutions. "At a time when Baltimore had no elective offices," observes Charles G. Steffen, "privates were suddenly choosing their own officers." With the strong democratic spirit that existed among the citizen-soldiers, Maryland's provincial convention of 1775 abrogated its previous policy of appointing local militia officers and "permitted companies to elect officers below the battalion level," Steffen notes. The temper of the militias suggests that the assembly gave this "permission" only reluctantly; in any case, popular impulses to democratize the militia swept over the entire province. "Across Maryland the new militia law sparked a revolution within the units, as soldiers debated openly the merits of their prospective commanders." The "mechanics" or artisans and other urban workers who made up much of the militia chose officers to lead them who were

"fellow mechanics, not . . . merchants, lawyers, or physicians; only a decade of experience in the Mechanical Company, Sons of Liberty, and Mechanical Fire Company could have prompted such independent action."[11] As a result of the popular initiative unleashed by the Revolution and the revolutionary storm that erupted following the beginning of hostilities, many local militias soon came to be as democratic as that of Baltimore. Similarly, captured American seamen who were taken prisoner formed their own prisoners' organizations: "Separated from their captains and governing themselves for the first time, on their own they organized into disciplined groups with bylaws: in microcosm the prisoners went through the whole process of setting up a constitution."[12]

MILITIAS AND LOYALISTS

Every stratum in the American provinces was affected by this storm: the merchants and artisans who could or would not sell their goods to the British; the farming families bereft of manpower or subject to requisitions by both sides of the conflict; the black slaves who overheard talk of equality and inalienable human rights; and the wealthy landowners, merchants, speculators, financiers, as well as privileged artisans—not to speak of the thousands of bureaucrats and officials in the king's service who lived in deadly fear of the "levelling" language of the revolutionaries. Indeed, as Richard Alan Ryerson points out, the colonies were politically divided, industrially feeble, and militarily unprepared. The only strong element of their capacity to resist Great Britain was their will. Extraordinary self-sacrifice *would* make them powerful, visible sacrifice *would* unify them. When thousands of patriots publicly cast their timid self-interest aside, they reinforced the courage of all.[13] Indeed, it was mainly through the zeal of the ordinary citizenry that the war could possibly be won.

And it was a war that was fought within every city and in many towns and villages. If we accept John Adams's estimate, one-third of all Americans were patriots, and another third were loyalists, while the remaining third were "neutral." In fact, it would have been very difficult to be neutral during these demanding times: the revolutionary committee system that reached into the very marrow of colonial society—the sheer depth of the revolution, penetrating into every aspect of everyday life from New England to the Carolinas—left little room for indifference. Almost everywhere, patriots viewed loyalist sympathizers with intense suspicion, even if they did not commit overt acts in support of the British. C.H. Van Tyne, a historian sympathetic to opponents of the Revolution, recounts in considerable detail the patriots' growing, active suspicion toward loyalists. "Exclusion from public favor was the first step in the political purification," he notes. "This social ostracism was at first informal. After the first

violent agitation and discussion there was a breaking of old bonds. Loyalists were sent to coventry by their townsmen. Old friends did not speak as they met; neighbors ignored neighbors; Whig and Tory drifted further apart, because neither modified the views of the other by friendly argument."[14] Lists of loyalist sympathizers were published, their businesses boycotted, and their homes often burned to the ground. Their presses were smashed by irate patriot crowds, while other loyalists were refused any services by tradesmen and mechanics. In Massachusetts in 1775 alone, two hundred conservatives, including the Hutchinsons, left America altogether.

Nor was it easy to hide one's views—neutral or otherwise—from public surveillance. Loyalists had initially been identified by their refusal to sign on to the Continental Association, but patriot committeemen soon found that it was far too easy for someone to conceal his or her loyalty to the Crown by simply signing their name. To make identification more certain, loyalists or neutrals were identified by their failure to volunteer for militia associations or muster with the patriot militia. Other activities that soon came to constitute punishable acts in support of the Crown included writing or speaking against the American cause; harboring or associating with known Tories; being "in arms against the liberties of America"—meaning, arming oneself or others in support of the British; recruiting soldiers to fight for the British; drinking to the health of the king; even rejecting Continental currency.

Betraying the American cause soon became a punishable crime. According to resolves that the Continental Congress passed in August 1775, suspects arrested for antipatriotic crimes could be tried by a local Committee of Safety, and their property temporarily placed in the custody of "some discreet person" whom the Committee could appoint. By January 1776, even so moderate a patriot as General Washington described the loyalists as "abominable pests of society," demanding that "vigorous measures, and such as at other times would appear extraordinary, are now become absolutely necessary."[15] In March the Congress recommended that all arms found in the possession of nonassociators, persons "disaffected to the cause of America," and those who refused to take an oath of loyalty to the patriot cause be confiscated and placed in the temporary custody of a county committee. When General Washington complained to the Congress in June 1776 about the activities of loyalists in New York, the province was ordered to create better means "for detecting, restraining, and punishing disaffected and dangerous persons in that colony."[16]

As the conflict intensified in scope and bitterness, punishment of loyalists increased in severity, ranging from denunciation to fines, and worse. A loyalist in Baltimore was required to pay five hundred pounds to the revolutionary government, as well as nine shillings daily to each of the soldiers assigned to "guard" him under house arrest. In time, Tories were tarred and feathered, or tried and imprisoned. Weapons that had been confiscated only temporarily were

kept for permanent use on behalf of the patriot cause. Indeed, revolutionary committees became increasingly ruthless in their treatment of their loyalist opponents, turning themselves into revolutionary tribunals, sentencing loyalist spies to death and filling prisons with supporters of the Crown. Some loyalists were exiled to other states; North Carolina's Committee of Secrecy, War and Intelligence recommended that loyalists captured in the Battle of Moore's Creek be sent to Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania, since "their pernicious influence . . . might and probably would prove fatal."[17] Some revolutionaries held convicted Tories as prisoners of war in what Van Tyne calls "reconcentration camps."[18] Finally, temporary confiscations of real and personal property became permanent possessions of the patriot cause and were sold off to support the revolutionary army. Indeed, sweeping confiscations of personal wealth, livestock, crops, and land that followed gave the American Revolution that "levelling" quality that conventional historians tend to ignore.

After the mid–1770s, patriots seethed with so much hatred toward the loyalists that even seemingly authentic neutrals, whom both sides, in fact, tended to view as closet opponents, began to suffer retribution. Very likely, many "neutrals" drifted from one side to the other, changing their allegiances with the fortunes of the contending forces. Beyond New York City and Long Island, the virtual capital of the British Army in America, the areas controlled by the patriot and British forces shifted back and forth incessantly and were marked by ever-sharpening conflicts and destruction.

But even if British regulars had taken and held all the urban centers and larger towns of the colonies, it is highly unlikely that they could have been able to conquer the rural areas in which the majority of Americans lived and worked. For the redcoats to go too far inland was to risk decimation and defeat at the hands of armed yeomen, who easily changed from farmers into guerrillas. In January 1777, Washington's rout of a substantial British force at Princeton demonstrated that the British were incapable of holding the northern rural areas for any extended period of time, and were limited primarily to capturing and occupying colonial cities. It is not accidental that after General Howe captured Philadelphia on September 26, 1777, he made no attempt to pursue Washington into the countryside, where the battered Continental Army took refuge at Valley Forge, some twenty miles to the northwest. Although Howe might have all but wiped out the patriot forces in a conventional battle, he prudently chose to settle back with his army in the safety of urban surroundings. "The British could not win," observes Jesse Lemisch, "precisely because the Americans were fighting a popular war"—and one that the redcoats could not hope to win in the countryside, as the Battle of Saratoga was to prove.[19]

The victory of the Americans over Major General John Burgoyne at Saratoga in October 1777 was not only the turning point of the war, but graphically

testifies to the populist nature of the conflict. Burgoyne's ill-starred Saratoga campaign in the summer of 1777 was undertaken to cut New York off from New England, an enterprise that would have divided the northern colonies along the Hudson River. But "Gentleman Johnny" was hardly the man to lead an army of 4,000 British regulars, 3,000 Hessians, 1,000 Canadian militia, and highly unreliable Indian allies through the dense wilderness that separated Fort Ticonderoga at the southern tip of Lake Champlain from Fort Edward on the Hudson. Overloaded with baggage, with the families of his officers, and with supplies that were more suitable for conventional warfare in open country than a conflict in a heavily forested region, the army was slowed to a snail's pace, eventually to no more than one mile a day. This highly encumbered force contrasted markedly with the lightly equipped yeoman militia it opposed, which enjoyed enormous maneuverability and close proximity to a home base, and was thoroughly familiar with the terrain.

Part officer, part light-minded courtier, "Gentleman Johnny" took nearly a month to reach Fort Edward, which the Americans by then had already abandoned. Lacking sufficient food for his men, Burgoyne made two expeditions into the countryside, which aroused all the patriot forces in the area. The first expedition went up the St. Lawrence River to Oswego and then into Mohawk country, where it encountered such strong patriot resistance that it retreated back into Canada, completely abandoning the main force under Burgoyne's command. The second expedition moved into the Hampshire Grants (later Vermont) and was wiped out by the Green Mountain Boys under the command of General John Stark. So completely had Burgoyne's march stirred up the countryside that zealous farmers and militia—almost twice as numerous as Burgoyne's own forces, which were now reduced to a mere thousand as a result of the two failed expeditions—surrounded him at Saratoga and forced him to surrender on October 17. Most of the men who brought this well-armed, largely European military force to a standstill and then to defeat were not professional soldiers but armed farmers organized into militia units under elected officers, who fought more as an armed people than a professional army. The defeat served to reinforce British fears that rural America was not secure battleground on which to deploy a largely uninspired conventional military force, however easily it could capture cities and towns along the Atlantic coast.

With this victory the Revolution sharpened in intensity, and patriot and loyalist fought each other with increasingly vicious measures. The conflict was fought by fair means or foul, in nearly all the colonies and at all levels of social life. Aside from more traditional forms of military engagement, guerrilla warfare sprang up everywhere, a "partisan warfare," as Charles Royster calls it,[20] with all its attendant bitterness and cruelties. Once the British troops entered the countryside, they came under attack from revolutionary farmers, using

tactics of "mobility, withdrawal, and unexpected counterattack: they fled only when they could not win and turned and fought only when they had a good chance of victory."[21] Snipers often decimated small detachments of British regulars and wiped out their patrols. Patriot guerrillas used roadblocks to impede the movement of British supplies, destroyed bridges that the redcoats needed in order to move in the wild countryside, conducted sudden raids from behind stone fences, and waged demoralizing small-scale engagements, until it was difficult, often impossible, for the British regulars and Hessian mercenaries to operate in the rural areas.

Loyalists, too, took up arms in support of their own cause. Southern backwoodsmen who smoldered with resentment toward the patriot tobacco planters, together with adventurers of all sorts who found the conflict an invitation to pillage and profiteer, incongruously joined royalist elites to form a "loyalist party" and, once the conflict had crossed a river of blood, established a military and guerrilla force in their own right. It is estimated that in New York, the loyalist base for most of the war, some 42,000 American loyalists created a Tory militia that often fought with British regulars. Together with small or large forces elsewhere in the colonies, they carried on a furious, continual assault against the patriot forces. The region between Newburgh, New York, and Manhattan became a blood-soaked guerrilla battleground in which the Tories massacred whole families and burned their homes to the ground. In New York generally, yeoman farmers played less of a role in the Revolution than elsewhere because much of the province's agriculture was dominated by landed families, unlike in New England, with its fiercely independent towns and villages. Inasmuch as the British never altered the old Dutch patroon system after their capture of New Amsterdam, many of the big landholders became Tories.

By contrast, a furious struggle ravaged the Mohawk River valley of the province, where newly settled yeomen farmers—many of whom, in fact, were uncommitted to either side—were harassed by Tory guerrillas, such as Sir John Johnson's Loyal Greens and John Butler's Tory Rangers, who behaved with exceptional brutality toward all settlers in the area.[22] In early 1776, General Schuyler, leading a force of Tryon County militia, captured the arms of the thousand-man loyalist force in the region, naively releasing Johnson on parole—who then continued with his guerrilla activities, fleeing to Canada only after he learned that Schuyler was again in pursuit of his forces.

Even more brutal than the Tory raids in the North were those which were led by Benedict Arnold in the South. Arnold had defected to the British and came to be hated as much by his countrymen for his cruelty as for his betrayal of the patriot cause. During the southern campaign commanded by General Charles Cornwallis, loyalists took full vengeance not only on the patriot forces but on civilians whom they suspected of being patriot sympathizers. These raids were often carried to the point of near extermination of patriot frontier settlements.

So much had the Revolution cut across ethnic as well as social lines that Loyalists readily allied themselves with aggrieved Indians and white ruffians, who spared neither women nor children in their attacks on outlying settlements.

The American Revolution, in effect, was a harsh civil and social war. Landlord, merchant, yeoman, tenant, artisan, ropemaker, or freight carrier—all who signed its documents and fought as guerrillas or spies—were fair game for one side or the other. For every Burgoyne or Cornwallis who led well-organized British troops with flags flying and drums beating, there were others who served the king as guerrillas with extreme brutality. By the same token, the patriots often terrorized the loyalists in their midst into silence, forced them to flee abroad, divested them of their wealth, and occasionally executed them as spies. But if the revolution was a bitter fight for "home rule," as Carl Becker put it in 1909, it was also a fight for "who shall rule at home."[23]

NOTES

1. "The Association," October 20, 1774, in *Sources and Documents: American Revolution, 1764–1768*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 124.
2. Earl of Dunmore to Earl of Dartmouth, December 24, 1774, in *American Archives: Containing a Documentary History of the English Colonies in America*, 4th ser., vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: M. St. Clair Clarke and Peter Force, 1833), p. 1062.
3. Alexander Clarence Flick, *Loyalism in New York during the American Revolution* (originally published *c.* 1900; reprinted by New York: Arno Press and New York Times, 1969), p. 65.
4. Margaret Burnham Macmillan, *The War Governors in the American Revolution* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1965), p. 23.
5. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 24.
6. Richard Alan Ryerson, *The Revolution Is Now Begun: The Radical Committees of Philadelphia, 1765–1776* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), pp. 5, 256.
7. Agnes Hunt, *The Provincial Committees of Safety of the American Revolution* (originally published in 1904; reprinted by New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1968), p. 153.
8. Macmillan, *War Governors*, p. 35.
9. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 35. Original emphases.
10. All quotations in this paragraph are from Pauline Maier, "The Charleston Mob and the Evolution of Popular Politics in Revolutionary South Carolina, 1765–1784," *Perspectives in American History*, vol. 4 (1970), pp. 173–96.
11. Charles G. Steffen, *The Mechanics of Baltimore: Workers and Politics in the Age of Revolution, 1763–1812* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), p. 62.
12. Jesse Lemisch, "The American Revolution Seen from the Bottom Up," in *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History*, ed. Barton J. Bernstein (New York: Pantheon, 1968), p. 27. See also Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., vol. 25, no. 3 (July 1968), p. 401; and "Listening to the 'Inarticulate': William Widger's Dream and the Loyalties of American Revolutionary Seamen in British Prisons," *Journal of Social History* (Fall 1969), pp. 1–29.

13. Ryerson, *Revolution*, p. 147.

14. Claude Halstead Van Tyne, *The Loyalists in the American Revolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1902), pp. 213–14.

15. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 211.

16. The Congress's resolves of August 1775 and March 1776 and its order to New York are quoted in Flick, *Loyalism in New York*, pp. 62–3, 65.

17. Quoted in Van Tyne, *Loyalists*, p. 219.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

19. Lemisch, "American Revolution Seen from the Bottom Up," p. 27.

20. See Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775–1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), pp. 11–12, 26–7. See also the same author's *Light-Horse Harry Lee and the Legacy of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1981), chapter 1.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

22. John Ford's 1939 motion picture *Drums along the Mohawk* conveys with considerable accuracy the brutality of the Tory guerrillas and the fear they inspired.

23. Carl L. Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760–1776.* PhD dist. (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1909).

CHAPTER 13 Internal Revolutions

As avidly as people from all strata of American society united to fight the British for independence, many were also fighting to alter their society at home—to eliminate political privilege and create a polity that lived up to the ideals of liberty and popular sovereignty enunciated in the Declaration of Independence. Backwoods yeomen, commonly abetted by the poor stratum of "mechanics" in the large towns and cities, pitted themselves against plantation aristocrats, Hudson valley patroons, merchants large and small, land speculators, shippers, landlords of all sorts, well-to-do artisans, and an emerging financial stratum that profiteered from the war and from the deflation of the currency. If broad republican ideals were "self-evident" to Whigs and patriots generally, they were by no means in agreement about what *kind* of republic would replace the royal administration. Indeed, patriots such as Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, Gouverneur Morris, James Duane, John Dickenson, and Robert Morris could easily have become loyalists, so abhorrent were the "mob" and "democracy" in their eyes.

In some provinces more than others, serious clashes emerged within the patriot party itself—between radical patriots and conservative Whigs. The radicals asked a crucial question: Would the thirteen new independent republics retain politically powerful elites that might well become bastions of privilege, corruption, and even tyranny in their own right? Or would these republics be based on majority rule by the broadest possible male citizenry? The conservatives, on the other hand, asked: Would the new independent republics contain governmental "checks and balances" to prevent the "mob" from gaining power—and keep an unchecked majority from forming a tyranny in its own right? Would the independent republics protect large landholdings and mercantile wealth against "the people," who might try to undermine privilege?

NEW YORK: RADICAL PATRIOTS AND CONSERVATIVE WHIGS

These differences long predated the outbreak of hostilities at Lexington and Concord in April 1775. New York, as we have seen, had a history of clashes between the privileged and the powerless during the colonial period, and in the prerevolutionary decade the lines of internal tension were redrawn in even sharper terms during the struggle over the Stamp Act. To be sure, the stamp tax generated wide opposition in all social strata, among merchants as well as artisans in the cities, and among landholders as well as yeomen farmers in the countryside. In fact, it was merchants who had originally formed the Sons of Liberty in New York to oppose the Act, and merchants and landowners had even encouraged popular demonstrations to exhibit colonial solidarity in opposition to the hated measure. But when demonstrations became riots, in which artisans and mechanics threw bricks at British forts where the stamps were stored and hung the lieutenant-governor in effigy, the upper classes became deeply alarmed. "This sort of thing brought men of property to a realization of the consequences of stirring up the mob," Carl Becker observed.

> A little rioting was well enough, so long as it was directed to the one end of bringing the English government to terms. But when the destruction of property began to be relished for its own sake by those who had no property, and the cry of Liberty came loudest from those who were without political privilege, it was time to call a halt. These men might not cease their shouting when purely British restrictions were removed. The ruling classes were in fact beginning to see that "liberty and no taxation" was an argument that might be used against themselves as well as against the home government. The doctrine of self-government, which for so many years they had used to justify resistance to colonial governors, was a two-edged sword that cut into the foundations of class privilege within the colony as well as into the foundations of royal authority without. Dimly at first, but with growing clearness, the privileged classes were beginning to realize the most difficult problem which the Revolution was to present to them: the problem of maintaining their privileges against royal encroachment from above without losing them by popular encroachments from below. It was this dilemma which gave life and character to the conservative faction.[1]

When the wealthier New York opponents of the Stamp Act felt that resistance had eluded their control and become too radical, opposition to British imperial policy divided sharply into radical and conservative factions. Thereafter, the wealthy and established merchants, the lawyers, and the Anglican clergy in the province began to resist the king's actions by cautious, moderate, and strictly

legal means, forming their own separate party in order to do so. In 1770 they unilaterally abandoned the resistance policy of nonimportation of goods that the colonists had agreed upon as a means of resisting the Townshend Act, thereby essentially ending the boycott in the province.

In rural areas of New York, where the patroon system flourished, the large landholders were no less frightened by the specter of popular rule than were the merchants in the city. And their fears were more than justified. The tenant farmers who worked their ever-larger baronial estates had long suffered under patroon rule and their resentments ran high. The rents the tenants were required to pay for their leaseholds were excessive, indeed, in some cases, they were obliged to pay quasi-feudal dues. When they sought recompense in court, justice was often meted out by a judge appointed by the landlord. Although many tenant farmers could meet the forty-shilling qualification for voting, they were reluctant to exercise this right in their own interests because voting occurred in public in the province—and people who dared to vote had to do so *viva voce*. Thus, a vote that was cast against the pleasure of the landholder upon whom the voter was precariously dependent could cost him his leasehold or worse.

In 1766, the year after the Stamp Act riots, tenant farmers in Westchester and Dutchess Counties finally refused to pay rents until landlords converted their tentative leaseholds into permanent freeholds. The landlords responded by evicting the tenants, who then took up arms, driving out local officials and smashing up the Poughkeepsie jail. In the hope that the Sons of Liberty in New York would rally to their support, they then threatened to march on the city and burn down Pierre Van Cortlandt's home. But the merchant-dominated organization, instead of acknowledging the commonality between its own demands for liberty and those of the oppressed rural poor, joined the landholders in urging royal troops to suppress the insurrection being waged by the rural "levellers." Long after the royal troops obligingly put down the revolt, the tenant farmers harbored a deep bitterness against the city's wealthy Sons of Liberty. In turn, the landholders either joined the fairly conservative Whigs in the city—among them the Van Cortlandts, Livingstons, De Lanceys, and Philipses—or else they became outright Tories and supported the British cause.

Meanwhile, in the city itself the younger lawyers and merchants, led by Isaac Sears and Alexander McDougall, were forming their own popular movement, and their radical agitation caused consternation among the urban elites. After the Boston Tea Party and the closing of the Port of Boston, the arrogantly conservative Whig, Gouverneur Morris, wrote in a letter on May 20,

> These sheep, simple as they are, cannot be gulled as heretofore. In short, there is no ruling them, and now, to leave the metaphor, the heads of the mobility grow dangerous to the gentry, and how to keep them down is the question. While they

> correspond with the other colonies, call and dismiss popular assemblies, make resolves to bind the consciences of the rest of mankind, bully poor printers, and exert with full force all their other tribunitial powers, it is impossible to curb them.

Morris went on to disgorge his contempt for the popular movement:

> The mob begin to think and to reason. Poor reptiles! It is with them a vernal morning; they are struggling to cast off their winter's slough, they bask in the sunshine, and ere noon they will bite, depend upon it. The gentry begin to fear this. . . . I see, and I see it with fear and trembling, that if the disputes with Great Britain continue, we shall be under the worst of all possible dominions; we shall be under the domination of a riotous mob.[2]

And yet Morris favored independence from Britain. Apparently, conservative Whigs such as he realized that they would have to join the resistance if they hoped to dominate and control its trajectory. They set about to capture the organization by running fifty-one of their own nominees for a Committee of Correspondence, of whom many were elected; but when the time came for the committee to oversee the election of delegates to the Continental Congress, a Committee of Merchants tried to skew the results in its own favor. It was prevented from doing so only by an alert Committee of Mechanics, composed largely of artisans and journeymen, which acted as a watchdog on the activities of elite committees. When other provinces tried to organize a nonimportation boycott following the blockade of Boston, the New York elites were able to delay their participation until the Continental Congress definitively adopted a nonimportation policy in the fall of 1774.

In January 1776 the New York Committee of Mechanics enthusiastically welcomed the publication of Paine's *Common Sense* and demanded that the province's delegates to the Continental Congress be elected at large and instructed to vote for independence. A few months later, in May, while the Provincial Congress was establishing the procedure for a new state government, the Mechanics became alarmed by a provision that accepted whatever constitution the new Congress prepared without ratification by the people of New York. Calling for sovereignty of "the people at large," the Mechanics insisted that "inhabitants at large exercise the right which God has given them, in common with all men, to judge whether it be consistent with their interest to accept, or reject, a Constitution framed for that State of which they are members." This, they argued, is "the birthright of every man."[3] The Mechanics, in effect, demanded a popular ratification of the state constitution, but by this time the conservatives had gained control of the Provincial Congress and dominated the revolutionary government. The Mechanics' demands were haughtily rebuffed,

and it may well be that "only the timely invasion of Long Island by the British saved the aristocrats from a political crisis of an explosive character."[4] A genuine class conflict existed in New York, which the Revolution stoked up into a virtual class war.

THE CAROLINAS: BACKCOUNTRY LOYALISM

Unlike the tenant farmers in rural New York, yeomen farmers in North Carolina easily obtained their own freeholds, but their economic independence was not accompanied by political freedom. Although two-thirds of the population lived in the backcountry on the eve of the Revolution, small farmers were drastically underrepresented in the Assembly, which the numerically smaller coastal elites completely controlled. Nor was there any tradition in the South of voters instructing their representatives on how to vote, as was the case in New England. Local government, too, in North Carolina was egregiously unrepresentative. Not only were there no town meetings in the province, but the tidewater aristocracy had constructed a system in which all political authority at the local level rested with officials in the county courts, such as magistrates, clerks, registers of deeds, sheriffs, and constables, with the result that people who had differences to resolve were obliged to travel to distant courts to transact their business, especially in North Carolina, where most county authorities were appointed by the governor.

The county authorities routinely overcharged ordinary people for their services and formed what amounted to a scandalous extortion ring. Justices of the peace demanded exorbitant fees for the dizzying array of services they concocted, while the sheriffs embezzled part of the tax revenues they collected, sometimes charging more than the required legal amount. When a farmer was finally charged with greater fees than he could afford to pay, his land was expropriated and sold off for a pittance to friends of the courthouse gang. In one hypothetical case that epitomized the farmers' plight,

> a man . . . has had execution levied on him by a merchant for a five pound debt secured by a judgment note. Personal effects to the amount of the judgment are seized, but the poor man's troubles are not over. For entering the judgment on the court docket and issuing the execution—"the work of one long minute"—the justice of the peace demands forty-one shillings and five pence. Unable to pay the fee, the unfortunate debtor is confronted with the alternative of a distraint or twenty-seven days work on the justice's plantation. But even after he has worked out his debt to the justice, the poor man's account is not settled. "Stay, neighbor . . . you must not go home. You are not half done yet. There is the damned

lawyer's mouth to stop. . . . You empowered him to confess that you owed five pounds, and you must pay him thirty shillings for that or else go to work nineteen days for that pickpocket . . . ; and when that is done you must work as many days for the sheriff for his trouble [in levying execution and selling the debtor's goods], and then you can go home to see your living wrecked and tore to pieces to satisfy your merchant."[5]

The Regulator revolt of 1768–70 erupted largely in retaliation against this overt extortion ring. In 1768 the sheriff of Orange County in North Carolina announced that rather than go around the county to collect taxes, he would go to only five places in the county, to which the farmers were obliged, often at considerable distances, to travel to pay him. Those who failed to make the journey would be penalized. This announcement, coupled with the news that the Assembly had just allotted £15,000 to build a new gubernatorial palace, was the last straw. Farmers mobilized and formed "associations"—a militia term—to "regulate" or reform the system, flatly refusing to pay any more taxes until the courthouse gangs provided an open public accounting of county finances—a demand that the magistrates duly declined.

Having endured all they could take, Regulators in 1770 invaded the county seat of Orange County, removed the justices, and simply tried cases on the docket themselves, whereupon the Assembly passed a riot act, forbidding gatherings of ten or more persons. If those taking part in a gathering of ten or more refused to disperse when ordered, they could be shot outright. When the Regulators protested, the governor organized a military force whose officers came from the gentry but whose unruly rank-and-file refused to follow, agreeing to do so only upon the offer of a bounty. They inflicted a humiliating defeat on the Regulators at the town of Alamance, due mainly to the lack of competent leadership among the latter.

Whereas some of the tidewater gentry who had fought at Alamance went on to become major Whig leaders in the province, many backcountry farmers, in turn, became intensely pro-British. Others who would have favored the patriot cause raised demands for democratic reform, such as the transfer of county courts to eighteen "selectmen" elected by white manhood suffrage; still others demanded an unrestricted suffrage for all freemen and the popular election of clerks and sheriffs. None of these demands, however, came to anything; if, in later years, the state constitution ultimately incorporated some Regulator demands, it failed to inaugurate responsible local government. The old courthouse cabals remained intact, and justices of the peace in North Carolina were still appointed by the governor.

In Virginia, the seaboard planters and the yeomen in the interior waged a continual struggle over the social order that would emerge from the Revolution, while in South Carolina, as the Beards observe,

slave-owners of the lowlands and merchants of the towns engaged in almost daily contests with mechanics from the shops and farmers from the back country. . . . So threatening in fact was the menace—a group of "levellers" bent on overthrowing the aristocracy of "wealth and talents"—that the notables of the state had to exercise considerable skill in saving their privileges and prestige. Across the border in Georgia the social battle between conservatives and radicals was carried to such a pitch that in a moment of bitter rivalry the patriot party could boast of two legislatures and two executives.[6]

BACKCOUNTRY PATRIOTS

No less intransigent were backcountry farmers in Maryland and Pennsylvania, where radicals found that the wealthy elites who constituted the Whig resistance moved too slowly against the British, delaying or even impeding the struggle for independence. Rather than siding with the British, as in North Carolina, the backcountry farmers used the opportunity presented by the Revolution to break with the established system of political privilege and, arms in hand, acquire long-sought rights.

Before the rupture with Britain, Maryland's colonial assembly had consisted of large landowners and slaveholding tobacco planters, whose base was in the capital, Annapolis, and generally in Ann Arundel County. But more and more of the settlers moving into northwestern Maryland were Scottish Presbyterian yeomen farmers, differing from the established Episcopalian gentry in both ethnicity and religion. Urban support for these farmers came from the city of Baltimore, filled with its restless population of mechanics, whom the Maryland Assembly disdainfully refused to grant a city charter that would have given it even a modicum of self-government. From 1729 to 1786, Baltimore was governed by commissioners who were picked by the Assembly. Not a single local official was elected.

With the advent of the Revolution, Baltimoreans seized the opportunity to strike a blow against the Assembly. During the Stamp Act crisis, members of the Mechanical Company formed the core of the Sons of Liberty in Baltimore. As we have seen, the strongest impetus for local democratization came from the militia: specifically, the Baltimore Mechanical Volunteer Company, whose privates were electing their officers in 1775. The militia was also the most important institution in politicizing the mechanics. When citizens of Baltimore subsequently chose Committees of Inspection and Observation to enforce the Continental Association, they created an embryonic municipal government and for the first time provided the townspeople with a taste of home rule.

But in Annapolis, the Whig leaders who controlled the provincial revolutionary government were conservatives—indeed, some even wanted a reconciliation with Britain—and, led by wealthy planters and lawyers such as Charles Carroll of Carrollton, they differed little in social status and wealth from the royal administration. These conservative Whigs made up the Baltimore and Annapolis Committees of Correspondence and the provincial Council of Safety, who called the provincial conventions and dominated their sessions. As a result, a furious patriot General Lee was obliged to turn to the radical Baltimore committee—made up mainly of artisans—to challenge the Provincial Committee and oppose the governor's barely disguised support for the British.

Nor did the backcountry farmers of Maryland become loyalists. Although they had been grossly underrepresented in the colonial assembly and their resentments might well have inclined them toward the British, many of their local committees issued resolves in favor of independence. Not only were these farmers strong patriots, but they had little patience with the machinations of Whigs in the Provincial Convention, where debates were often kept secret from the public. The most decisive factor that seems to have rallied the Baltimore mechanics and backwoods farmers against these oligarchs, however, was the fact that the Maryland Whigs seemed to favor a reconciliation with Britain. The Frederick County committee for the mechanics and farmers bluntly declared that the Provincial Convention was "incompetent to the exigencies of the province and dangerous to our liberties."[7] Not until June 28, 1776, under strong pressure from Baltimore radicals and backcountry patriots, did the convention instruct Maryland's delegates to the Continental Congress to vote for independence.

As to the new convention that was to be held on August 1 in order to draft a state constitution, the backcountry militia declared that whether they met the property qualification or not, they had the right to vote for delegates since they had "armed in defense of the country." Although this principle guided the Frederick County voters in electing their delegates, the convention refused to seat them. It finally adopted a constitution that was based on the typically conservative "checks and balances" model that preserved the political privileges of the elites. But in 1777, the Baltimore radicals formed the extralegal countervailing Baltimore Whig Club to express their dissatisfaction with the conservatism of the new state government and vigorously pressed it to harry Tories from the land.

PENNSYLVANIA DEMOCRACY

Undoubtedly the most radical and, for a time, the most successful internal revolution in the American provinces occurred in Pennsylvania, where backwoods yeomen fought furiously not only to achieve independence from Britain but to take political power from the Quaker and other oligarchs in Philadelphia. While the conflict between America and Britain overshadowed internal conflicts in many of the other colonies, in Pennsylvania internal conflicts ultimately even superseded the conflict for independence in importance. The Revolution radically transformed Pennsylvanians from parochial and docile freemen who bowed to their cultural and social betters into cosmopolitan, contentious citizens. More than any other province, Pennsylvania was torn by a genuine class war.

On paper, Pennsylvania's charter of 1701, granted by William Penn, had provided the colony with a relatively democratic government: annual elections, an upper house of only limited powers, and an assembly with a wide range of legislative powers. In the backcountry, moreover, western Pennsylvanians had far less to complain about than had the inhabitants of the Carolinas. Pennsylvania's yeoman farmers had, if not town meetings, at least relatively responsive local government: the citizens elected their own sheriffs, the justices of the peace as well as the members of county boards who levied their local taxes. Nor was the voting franchise narrow; rather, in the west the suffrage was so broad and land so abundant that nearly every farmer of whatever ethnicity had the requisite freehold to qualify for the vote.

Yet in practice, Pennsylvania at the provincial level was as oligarchical as North Carolina. As late as 1774, Quaker merchants and lawyers essentially ruled the colony by means of two devices. One was a suffrage based on a high property qualification for residents of the city of Philadelphia. Unlike the suffrage in the west, this restriction excluded most lower-class inhabitants of the city, so that only about one-third of the white males could vote. Second, the Philadelphia elite saw to it that the western inhabitants were grossly underrepresented in the colonial assembly. Although the Quakers made up only one-tenth of the colony's population, they controlled more than a third of the assembly representation. In 1770 the original eastern counties of Philadelphia, Bucks, and Chester and the city of Philadelphia sent a combined twenty-four representatives to the Assembly, while the five western counties sent only ten. The ever more numerous westerners continually petitioned the Assembly to gain representation proportionate to their numbers, but the Quakers consistently denied their petitions lest reapportionment cost them their political control. At times when, under pressure of circumstances, they could no longer avoid admitting representation to a newly created county, the oligarchy would draw its borders much larger than the densely populated eastern counties, and allot it only a few representatives. Inasmuch as representation was based on a county, irrespective of its area or demographic numbers, western delegates increased only slightly in number, even though their potential constituents grew rapidly over time. Another source of western discontent was the fact that the Quaker Assembly refused to aid the westerners in their backcountry wars with the Indians. The

pacifism of the Quakers enraged the frontiersmen, who, as in western North Carolina, were also ethnically and religiously different from the coastal elites—primarily Scotch-Irish Presbyterians and German religious dissidents rather than English.

Initially, the early years of the revolutionary period were very tranquil in Pennsylvania. The British imperial policies that outraged other provinces had left the local, presumably pacifist, Quaker elite remarkably unruffled. Indeed, the Pennsylvania legislature was the only major assembly in British North America that engaged in no sharp controversy with the ministry during the years between the passage of the Stamp Act in 1765 and the Intolerable Acts in 1774. The Pennsylvania elite may have considered these breaches to be affairs of the royal colonies; after all, Pennsylvania remained a proprietary colony, technically a possession of the Penn family and not of the Crown. Although Philadelphians formed an effective committee during the Stamp Act crisis, to resist the Act, and held a number of demonstrations, citizen protests were mild compared with the furor that the Act aroused in New York and New England. Led most notably by the merchant Charles Thomson, Pennsylvanians participated in the Townshend Act boycott in March 1769, electing a Committee to enforce it.

In 1770, Thomson, called by John Adams the "Sam Adams of Pennsylvania," formed a faction on the committee that was committed to earnestly resisting imperial policy. This faction both helped and was helped by a growing articulate and united mechanic class in Philadelphia. In September 1770, however, the Pennsylvania merchant Whigs, like their fellow importers in New York, unilaterally abandoned the nonimportation boycott of the Townshend duties. The mechanics' spokesmen denounced the merchant Whigs for this betrayal; since the boycott affected the public welfare, they argued, all "tradesmen [merchants and artisans], farmers, and other freemen" should have participated in any decision on making such a change.[8] This act of betrayal destroyed the merchants' reputation among the politically active community of the province, which ceased to look to them for leadership.

Clearly a new, more radical set of leaders and institutions was needed. In particular, Thomson mobilized a new resistance movement in the city's neighborhoods, and by November 1773 the patriot faction formed a Committee of Twenty-four to resist the passage of the Tea Act, whose members included the core patriot spokesmen at this time: Charles Thomson, Thomas Mifflin, and Joseph Reed. Although the members of this committee were less affluent than any established Pennsylvania committee, they increasingly defined the resistance movement more in ideological rather than economic terms. In 1774, townspeople militantly refused to allow the East India Company's tea to be unloaded in the City of Brotherly Love; partly as a result of the committee's efforts, a large number of Philadelphians had moved from a resigned acceptance

of all British authority to opposition to the imperial policies. In time, most of the leading wealthy families of the city, including merchants, lawyers, and liberal members of the Quaker oligarchy, came to favor the Whig cause, but the Whigs were still sharply divided over how far to carry resistance to British imperial policy. While conservative Whigs favored a cautious and legal approach, the radicals favored bold and extralegal action, with the result that between 1774 and 1777, the conservative and radical factions began to openly struggle with each other for control of the resistance movement.

Meanwhile, between May 1774 and July 1776, the new committees that sprang up in the city not only reflected this struggle but gave the citizenry dramatic experience in self-government. As Richard Alan Ryerson points out, this movement

> quietly worked a revolution in Pennsylvania politics. In these twenty-six months more than 180 Philadelphians served on civilian committees; another hundred sat on the city militia's Committee of Privates. In rural Pennsylvania, another thousand persons were committeemen on civilian boards alone. Perhaps 90 percent of these individuals had never before held public office. The committees revolutionized Pennsylvania politics not only by what they planned, said, and did, but by what they were.[9]

In May 1774, word of the closing of the port of Boston spread to Philadelphia. When Paul Revere rode into Philadelphia bearing an appeal from the Boston Committee of Correspondence for the city's support, he was greeted enthusiastically not only by the radical Whigs but by the committees, who agreed to support the city. On June 1, the day the port was to be shut down, radical committeemen tried to mobilize the whole community, and, as a public show of support for Boston, Thomson called a "solemn pause" in which all regular business was suspended so that citizens could "ponder" the imperial crisis. Thomson, in effect, had called a general strike. Typically, the Quakers refused to participate, but most Philadelphians closed their shops, and church bells rang out for the entire day.

In anticipation of the upcoming Continental Congress, which was to meet in Philadelphia, the Committee of Nineteen demanded that Governor Thomas Penn call the Pennsylvania Assembly into session so that it could choose delegates for the Congress, but the stubborn Penn refused, whereupon the committee called a public assembly on June 18 that elected a larger Committee of Correspondence that was empowered, in the Assembly's stead, to call a provincial convention to elect the delegates. This committee sent out a letter to all the counties in Pennsylvania, urging them to form committees of their own. The members, they advised, should be chosen by citizens in every district and township in the county. These county committees, in turn, were asked to send

delegates to the provincial convention, which would then choose delegates to the Continental Congress.

Thus, between June and July, with the help of Philadelphia radicals, a comprehensive committee system was created that essentially coordinated the resistance effort throughout the province. Pennsylvanians formed local committees and assembled delegates at the provincial convention with such eagerness that one can only conclude that their distrust of the Assembly's ability to handle the crisis must have been enormous. The men they elected to the Provincial Convention met on July 15, 1774, passed resolves against all the abuses of British imperial policy, voted to join the Continental Association, and chose delegates to the Congress.

In the meantime, realizing that the situation might well slip out of his and the Assembly's control, Governor Penn decided to call the Assembly into session after all. Dominated by conservative Whigs, the Assembly met at the same time as the radicals' Provincial Convention; indeed, Pennsylvania was the only colony where rival assemblies met simultaneously. The official Assembly's aim was to keep resistance activities legal: it ignored the Provincial Convention's extralegal resolves and activities and chose its own delegates to the Continental Congress. Led by Joseph Galloway, these delegates were distinctly conservative in outlook, and were given no instructions to vote for independence. Provocatively, Galloway declared that the competing extralegal Provincial Convention had no power whatever and would only set up "anarchy above order." This statement infuriated the yeomen farmers, who raised an outcry for the complete transformation of the province's political structure. The Provincial Convention, they argued, was legitimate even though it was extraconstitutional, and, far from being anarchic, its meetings were conducted with scrupulous attention to procedure, since the delegates believed fervently in the importance of expressing the popular will in proper form. Nor were the radicals averse to hearing opposing views; on the contrary, they were committed to debate and sought to involve everyone in the general discussions.

Significantly, when the first Continental Congress met in Philadelphia in September 1774, the delegates assembled in Carpenters' Hall, a popular committee meeting place, instead of the State House, the venue of the conservatives. After the Congress voted in favor of the Continental Association and recommended the formation of committees to enforce it, Philadelphia elected a radical Committee of Observation and Inspection that had little difficulty in enforcing nonintercourse with Britain, since the boycott was already very popular in Philadelphia. During the next few years, whenever the Philadelphia Committee faced elections, the members that the citizenry returned were ever more zealous, ever younger, ever more radical and ever more of mechanic-class origins. In time, the revolutionary committees became the real government of the colony.

After the Battle of Lexington and Concord in April 1775, when militias were mobilized in all the American provinces, all counties of Pennsylvania formed voluntary militia units, called Associations, under the auspices of each local committee. Although they acted with no legal foundation, the Association militias drilled intensively and grew rapidly, so that by May 10 there were more than thirty companies in Philadelphia alone, aside from the backcountry, which mustered its own companies with equal zeal. Wherever the committee movement opened the way for political activity by the mechanics, the militia movement brought in still poorer artisans, journeymen, apprentices, day-laborers, and even servants. Such privates were not to the taste of the Assembly Whigs, who disdained them as "in general damn'd riff raff—dirty, mutinous, disaffected."[10]

From the start, the radicalism of the Pennsylvania militiamen assumed a highly militant form; indeed, no longer a "mob," they were now organizing politically as well as militarily. Deeply committed to the preservation of their communities and their liberties, they opposed all those who resisted their rights in Pennsylvania at least as much as they opposed British imperial policy. Like the Maryland radicals, "the political procedures of the individual companies fostered a spirit of democracy," as Elisha Douglass observes. Political debates among the Associators—as the Pennsylvania militiamen were called—was intense: the uneducated soldiers learned from the radical intellectuals they met in the ranks, and privates elected the junior officers and even some of the senior officers who were to command them. "The associations served as a kind of school for democratic processes"[11]—much like the New Model Army during the English Revolution. Their commitment to egalitarianism even extended to uniforms; although the officers were demanding that they wear expensive and distinctive uniforms, the ordinary militiamen in a May 1775 broadside declared that all soldiers should wear cheap hunting shirts, which would "level all distinctions" within the ranks.[12]

Proud of their own patriotic virtue and service to their community, these men felt strongly that service in the militia should be universal. Every able-bodied man, they argued, should associate as a matter of civic virtue. Increasingly, they despised those who refused to associate as opportunistic and self-interested, seeking only to profit from the war that others were fighting. Indeed, a man's worth was to be judged, they contended, not by his birth or wealth but by the intensity of his commitment to the Revolution. If a man could not serve, for whatever reason, he should at least make some significant financial payment to underwrite those who did.

A source of particular resentment for the Associators was the pacifism of the Quakers and the privileges this ideology conferred upon them, an ideology for which the conservative Whig Assembly exhibited an inordinate degree of solicitude. Indeed, the Quakers were exempt not only from serving in the

militias but from paying any taxes to support them. The Associators viewed this exemption as a dodge by which the Quakers used their religious scruples to avoid aiding the patriot cause, a hostility that was exacerbated by the fact that Quaker oligarchs owned some of the largest and wealthiest estates in the province. Thus the Associators strongly felt that the Quakers should at least be taxed—preferably in proportion to the property they owned—to pay the soldiers who were protecting their community and to support their families while they were away from their fields. Time and again, the Philadelphia Committee demanded that the Assembly guarantee pay for the Associators, which the Assembly repeatedly rebuffed—again feeding the resentments of the backcountry farmers.

Ill-feeling toward the Assembly's failures grew, as it had to. Perhaps more than in any other province, the conservatives of Pennsylvania were intractable about making concessions to those who would challenge their rule. Accordingly, the Philadelphia Committee called another Provincial Convention, which met in early 1775, to protest the tepid way in which the Assembly was conducting the opposition to Britain. During the summer of 1775, a large network of institutions, often with overlapping memberships—the local Committees of Observation and new Committees of Militia Officers, even Committees of Militia Privates, so redolent of the Leveller agitators a century and a half earlier in Britain—began to function as the real power in the colony.

The Committee of Privates was particularly militant in demanding sacrifices from the Quakers. Its members refused even to serve as Minutemen as long as the Quakers were exempted from both service and special taxation, a decision the officers endorsed, declaring that it was "unreasonable" to expect privates "to remain in the field, while a great number of men equally able to bear arms are suffered to remain at home."[13] Further, the officers noted that people

> sincerely and religiously scrupulous are but few in comparison to those who upon this occasion, as well as others, make conscience a convenience;—that a very considerable share of the property of the province is in the hands of people professing to be of tender conscience in military matters; that the associators think it extremely hard that they should risk their lives and injure their fortunes in defense of those who will not be of the least assistance in this great struggle.[14]

When the conservative Assembly met again in September, the privates demanded that it tax non-Associators in lieu of military service. At length the Assembly gave in, but even in making this concession it humiliated the Associators: the levy, some fifty shillings, was not only woefully inadequate but seemed to place a pitifully low price on privates who were endangering their lives in the patriot cause. Gallingly, it even stipulated that the pay for the soldiers in the training period was to be drawn from poor relief rather than from a special fund—another flagrant insult, inasmuch as the privates hardly saw remuneration as charity and demanded full support for their entire term of military service.

In particular, the Assembly insulted the Philadelphia Associators by continuing to deny them the right to vote. The Associators considered it a self-evident truth that every armed man who was defending the province should have the franchise, regardless of how much property he owned (indeed, even if he received alms or was a servant or tenant), and regardless of age. Despite a resolve by the Committee of Privates to this effect on February 23, 1776, the Assembly not only denied its request but even had the effrontery to choose officers for the Associations. As the Committee of Privates declared to the Assembly, those who "expose their lives in defense of a country, should be admitted to the enjoyment of all the rights and privileges of a citizen of that country which they have defended and protected."[15] The Associators thereupon openly repudiated the authority of the Assembly altogether, setting the stage for an open conflict between the two clashing authorities.

During the period between the Intolerable Acts of 1774 and the Declaration of Independence in 1776, most of the other colonies were already at war with Britain and had already shed their colonial governments and royal governors, which meant almost inescapably that they were committed to independence. The conservative Pennsylvania colonial government, which had been established under British rule, still held office even as revolutionary passions boiled over among the citizenry. Not only did the colonial Assembly refuse to pay soldiers adequately but it still refused to extend the franchise to them and, as we have seen, refused to instruct Pennsylvania's delegates to vote for independence in the Continental Congress. Independence now became a crucial issue in the province because it meant an end to the existing colonial government as well as the establishment of a republic. In short, arguments for independence in Pennsylvania were actually direct assaults on the legitimacy of the Assembly and established government by the supporters of committee power. The only way to secure the liberties of the people, the committeemen concluded, was for the people to run their own affairs. No longer in revolt merely against British rule, they were calling for a new political and social order in the colony itself.

The Assembly patently feared political and social revolution more than anything else, and its fears were only heightened after Paine's *Common Sense* appeared in January 1776. One of the Pennsylvania Whig leaders, John Dickinson, who had formerly worked with the more radical elements, now lauded the power of the king and Parliament as "indispensable to protect the colonies from disunion and civil war." Without the monarchy, "the democratic power" might "prostrate all barriers, and involve the state in ruin."[16] Besides, the Whigs argued, there was no need for a revolutionary government; after all, they controlled the Assembly. When the Assembly met in May, however, it once again

refused to instruct the delegates to vote for independence. The radicals now decided to remove the conservatives from power by force, seize sovereignty in the state, and establish an independent revolutionary government.

The Continental Congress meeting in Philadelphia, meanwhile, was eminently willing to help them. The Congress had looked upon the Pennsylvania Assembly's obstinacy with increasing impatience; clearly, if Pennsylvania were ever to cast its vote for independence, its delegates would have to be under the instructions of a different provincial government. It was with this situation in mind that, on May 10, 1776, John Adams proposed a resolution that those provinces that had not yet adopted governments "sufficient to the exigencies of their affairs" should be encouraged to adopt such government "as shall, in the opinion of the representatives of the people, best conduce to the happiness and safety of their constituents in particular and America in general."[17] No government that still held power under the authority of Britain could be considered satisfactory any longer; new governments should be formed that derived their power from the people. For all practical purposes, the Congress's advice amounted to a general recommendation that the provinces still under the old system of colonial government undertake a revolution, and, since all the other provinces had by then shed their old governments, the recommendation was clearly directed at Pennsylvania.

Adams's resolution was passed on May 15, and a general meeting of Philadelphia inhabitants on May 18 used it to legitimate the abolition of the Assembly. The existing Assembly, it resolved, had no right to form a new state government, since any government it formed would be a means "of subjecting us and our posterity to greater grievances than any we have hitherto experienced."[18] Two days later, the Philadelphia Committee—now directed by Tom Paine, James Cannon, and David Rittenhouse—called for a Constitutional Convention for Pennsylvania to be held the following month to carry out the resolve of May 15 and, in a demand cheered by the four or five thousand people who attended the meeting, to form a new government for the province.

The Assembly's days were quickly running out. For its June 10 meeting it could not even attract a quorum of members, and on June 14 those members who were present quickly instructed the delegates to vote for independence. The Provincial Conference of Committees met on June 18 and declared the end of the Assembly. Moreover, the conference directed that all adult associators and legal voters who repudiated loyalty to Britain be eligible to vote for delegates to the Constitutional Convention, whose purpose was to establish a new government, "on the authority of the people only." No unrepentant Tory who had attacked this takeover of power by the committees could vote, and the people were urged to mandate their delegates with instructions on how to vote at the Convention.

When the Constitutional Convention met on July 15, 1776, the more conservative Whigs did not show up, thereby abandoning the political stage to

their radical opponents. The delegates in attendance were mainly farmers and artisans who had been active Associators, led chiefly by Paine, Rittenhouse, Cannon, and Thomas Young, and the constitution they established was the most democratic that any American state had created up to that time (to be surpassed only by the one that Young subsequently wrote for Vermont after he left Pennsylvania), closely resembling the model that Paine had recommended in *Common Sense*.

According to its preamble, government was to hold power "without partiality for or prejudice against any particular class, sect or denomination of men whatever."[19] There was to be only a single legislative chamber in the government, rather than two, elected annually by citizens, whose franchise would not be limited by any property qualification. Every tax-paying freeman over the age of twenty-one could both vote and hold office. The doors of the meeting place of the assembly hall were to be open to all citizens at all times, and bills passed by the new assembly would not take effect until they had been published and then approved by the next elected assembly—that is, until the people had expressed their will through what approximated a referendum. In addition to the assembly there would be a Supreme Executive Council that had only coordinating and administrative duties, chaired by a president who was merely a first among equals. All officers were to be "servants. . . at all times accountable" to the people. The constitution also provided for the continuation of democratic local government: justices of the peace, sheriffs, coroners, commissioners, and tax assessors were to still be locally elected.

Its popularity was immense; as Lemisch points out, "The people cherished their copies as they did the Bible, and they would later take up arms against its domestic opponents."[20] Although the radical constitution went into effect, the struggle over its legitimacy consumed state politics. It was as bitterly opposed by the conservative Whig leaders as it was supported by the people, and ultimately the powerful elites in Pennsylvania succeeded in replacing the 1776 constitution with a conventional "checks and balances" constitution in 1790.

Meanwhile, Pennsylvania finally fully entered the Revolution, throwing all of its resources into defeating the British. In March 1777 insurgent radicals terminated the moderate Committee of Safety, which had been handling military affairs all this time, and established a revolutionary Committee of Safety in its place. This Council took over the militia and quartered its troops in the homes of non-Associators. It arrested suspected Tories and subjected them not only to imprisonment but even to capital punishment, confiscating arms, supplies, and landed estates from its known opponents. Between mid-October and early December 1777, the revolutionary "dictatorship" of the Committee of Safety conducted what Agnes Hunt calls a "reign of terror," which came to an end only on the order of Pennsylvania's Supreme Executive Council.[21]

EFFECTS OF THE INTERNAL REVOLUTION

Actually there was no reign of terror in the American Revolution in any way comparable to the unrestrained bloodletting in France a decade and a half later. But the grassroots nature of the American Revolution, its chronic fury, and the deep-seated structural changes it introduced made it at least as far-reaching in its effects as the French. As a result of the Revolution—whose effects were both internal and external—all the colonies saw a large-scale confiscation of loyalist property, including vast western territories held by loyalist land speculators. As loyalists either fled the American provinces or were forced to leave, the committees seized and put up for sale the lands they left behind. In New York, the patroon system was largely demolished: land holdings like the three-hundred-square-mile Philipse estate, as well as those of the De Lanceys, the Van Cortlandts, and the Coldens, were confiscated and put up for sale.

Nor did the provincial and state committees and governments simply resell confiscated lands to wealthy bourgeois, such as occurred to a great extent in the sale of the Church lands during the French Revolution. By and large, in what amounted to a virtual land redistribution, the broken-up estates were sold in small parcels to ordinary farmers and agricultural workers. To sell tracts of land in excess of 500 acres was viewed with opprobrium. Characteristically, the enormous De Lancey estate in southern New York was parceled out among 275 independent buyers, while the Roger Morris estate in Putnam County was acquired in modest plots by about 250 purchasers. As C.H. Van Tyne observed of the loyalist movement in New York, the revolutionaries in their land policy were "thus leveling, equalizing, and making more democratic the whole social structure" of at least the northern colonies and those of the mid–Atlantic seaboard.[22]

Nor was it simply the quasi-feudal estates of the New York patroons that were broken up. A sizable part of the lands of the American landed aristocracy as well as lesser gentry were disposed of in this fashion. The largest estate confiscated in all colonies was that of the Penn family, which at 21.5 million acres was worth a million pounds. Under the Divesting Act of 1779, Pennsylvania's Assembly took control of these vast holdings of the proprietor's family. Virginia confiscated the six-million-acre Fairfax estate. In Massachusetts, a law was passed confiscating the property of everyone who had fought against the colonies; the aristocratic William Pepperel lost his lands, which stretched for thirty miles along the coast of Maine (then part of Massachusetts). In New Hampshire twenty-eight Tory estates were confiscated, including the property of the royal governor, Wentworth, while in New Jersey five hundred Tory estates were taken over and sold in smaller packages to other citizens. In North Carolina, confiscated land was sold in two-hundred-acre plots. The Crown domains also fell into the hands of state legislatures, most notably the forests of New Hampshire.

This intensive political education in human rights and liberties could not help but call attention to the plight of those who, in America itself, had none. The Quaker oligarchy in Philadelphia fought slavery as resolutely as they opposed the patriots, owing largely to their pacifism; indeed, the first antislavery society in the world was formed at a meeting of Quakers in Philadelphia on April 14, 1775. This society as well as subsequent ones gained direct or indirect support from such prominent figures as Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, Abigail Adams, Tom Paine, and a multitude of small religious sects. In 1780 Pennsylvania passed a law instituting the gradual abolition of slavery; as its preamble stated, "When we consider our deliverance from the abhorrent condition to which Great Britain has tried to reduce us, we are called on to manifest the sincerity of our profession of freedom, and to give substantial proof of gratitude, by extending a portion of our freedom to others, who although of a different color, are the work of the same almighty God."

In 1785, the Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves was formed in New York and a similar society in 1788 in Delaware, which had already abolished the slave trade in 1775. Connecticut and Rhode Island outlawed the slave trade in 1774, while Vermont, even before Pennsylvania and other colonies, forbade the existence of involuntary servitude in any form whatever from its inception as a short-lived republic in its constitution of 1777. In 1780 the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled that the state's constitution had abolished slavery within its borders when it said "all men are born free and equal." Even in Virginia, a law easing manumission in 1782 led to the freeing of more than 10,000 slaves in eight years.

But in most southern states the very opposite pattern prevailed. North Carolina made the manumission of slaves more difficult than before the Revolution. South Carolina gave slaves as bounties to induce white residents to enlist in the Continental Army, turning them into a form of human currency to pay soldiers from the South. If Americans, tragically, did not abolish slavery in the South until some ninety years later, they legally eliminated all remaining feudal privileges that had been carried over from the Old World to the New.

To be sure, more state constitutions instituted by the Revolution followed the guidelines prescribed by John Adams in his relatively conservative *Thoughts on Government* than those of Tom Paine in *Common Sense*. Thus, most of the new states had two legislatures, and property qualifications for voting and holding office disfranchised many people until decades later, when the qualifications were dropped completely. To this extent, the conservative Whigs prevailed in the internal revolution. "The Whig leaders of 1776," observes Douglass, "could congratulate themselves after the struggle that their revolution, like that of 1688, was glorious as much for what it left untouched as for what it had altered."[23] As in the English Revolution, the radical tendencies were ultimately defeated.

Yet the mobilization for the Revolution brought active and direct participation in political life to thousands. Not only did republicans stand in opposition to royalists, but democrats stood in opposition to republicans, if not in name then in practice. Indeed, the revolution both preserved and built a democracy *within* the American Republic. This democracy took the form of committees that oversaw a wide variety of crucial tasks; of town meetings, which swept from New England to the other provinces and which the ruling strata dismembered only in part after the war. It took the form of a democratic and popular militia. And people abroad avidly watched the Revolution unfold, later borrowing its radical vocabulary as well as its insurrectionary institutions. "What an engine!" John Adams wrote of the committees. "France imitated it and produced a revolution. . . . And all Europe was inclined to imitate it for the same revolutionary purposes."[24]

NOTES

1. Carl L. Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760–1776.* PhD dist. (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1909), pp. 31–2.
2. Gouverneur Morris to Thomas Penn, May 20, 1774, in Richard B. Morris, ed., *The American Revolution, 1763–1783: A Bicentennial Collection* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 142–3.
3. Quoted in Staughton Lynd, "The Mechanics in New York Politics, 1774–1788," *Labor History*, vol. 5, no. 3 (Fall 1964), p. 231.
4. Roger Champagne, quoted *ibid.*, p. 232.
5. George Sims, *Address to the People of Granville County*, summarized by Elisha P. Douglass, *Rebels and Democrats*, (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times Books, 1955), pp. 78–9.
6. Charles Beard and Mary Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization*, revised and enlarged ed. vol. 1 (1927; New York: Macmillan, 1949), pp. 267–8.
7. Quoted in Bernard C. Steiner, *Western Maryland in the Revolution* (Baltimore, 1902), Johns Hopkins Studies in History and Political Science, vol. 20, p. 19.
8. Richard Alan Ryerson, *The Revolution Is Now Begun: The Radical Committees of Philadelphia, 1765–1776* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), pp. 32–3.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
10. Quoted in Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 63.
11. Douglass, *Rebels and Democrats*, p. 252.
12. "To the Associators of the City of Philadelphia," May 18, 1775, reproduced in Foner, *Tom Paine*, p. 67.
13. Quoted in Foner, *Tom Paine*, p. 66.
14. Quoted in Douglass, *Rebels and Democrats*, p. 250.
15. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 251.
16. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 253.
17. Quoted in Merrill Jensen, *The Articles of Confederation* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1940), p. 98.

18. Quoted in Jensen, *Articles*, p. 100.
19. The Constitution of Pennsylvania (September 28, 1776), in Samuel Eliot Morison, ed., *Sources and Documents Illustrating the American Revolution, 1764–1788, and the Formation of the Federal Constitution*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 162–75.
20. Jesse Lemisch, "The American Revolution Seen from the Bottom Up," in *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History*, ed. Barton J. Bernstein (New York: Pantheon, 1968), p. 12.
21. Agnes Hunt, *The Provincial Committees of Safety of the American Revolution* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1968), p. 96.
22. Claude Halstead Van Tyne, *The Loyalists in the American Revolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1902), p. 280.
23. Douglass, *Rebels and Democrats*, p. 8.
24. John Adams to Dr. J. Morse, December 22, 1815, in Charles F. Adams, ed., *Works of John Adams*, vol. 10 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1856), p. 197.

CHAPTER 14 Shays's Rebellion and the Constitution of 1789

Even after independence was achieved, prominent Whigs and radical patriots continued their battle over what kind of republic the states should establish. Most of the moderate Whigs favored a strong, unitary, centralized republic after the war was over. To the camp of John Adams, James Wilson, and Gouverneur Morris were now added Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, as well as many lesser figures. Some of these men, to be sure, were more centralistic in their views: Hamilton and Morris, in fact, would not have been averse to a constitutional monarchy, whereas Adams and Madison merely wanted an oligarchical republic in which mainly men of "wealth and talents" would hold power—in short, a republic that contained checks against "mob rule." Many patriots, on the other hand, favored a quasi-confederal republic: Richard Henry Lee, John Rutledge, Christopher Gadsden, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and Samuel Adams sought to devolve real power on to the state governments or, more precisely, the state legislatures.

None of these parties, however, favored building the new republic upon the institutional machinery of the Revolution, notably the town meetings, popular assemblies, conventions, and the far-flung committee system. Still less did they wish to establish a "revolution in permanence," with higher levels of authority whose powers diminished as their scope widened and were fully accountable to the local communities, in which real power reposed. Few even held the word *democracy* in high esteem, although it was to enter into common use as time passed by. The committee system disbanded as quickly as possible once the state governments were in place, sometimes even before hostilities came to an end. In Pennsylvania, the rule of the backwoods farmers who had unseated the Quaker establishment came to an end when the radical Constitution of 1776 was replaced with a bicameral and gubernatorial structure that restored the privileges of the Philadelphia elite in 1790. At the same time, state governments

made resolute and largely successful efforts to replace the town meetings and popular assemblies with a system of mayors and city councils. Any man, wrote Gadsden, "whatever station his country may have put him in during the war," should fall "cheerfully into the ranks again," "sacrificing all . . . resentments and private feelings, to the good of the State," whose legislatures and governors were to be "untrammeled" by citizens.[1] Charleston was duly incorporated in 1783, followed by New Haven and towns in New Jersey and Virginia, many of which had established town-meeting forms of political management. The tide of civic incorporation, however, was halted in much of New England, where Sam Adams and his supporters adamantly rescued the Boston Town Meeting from what they regarded as the encroachment of tyranny. The conflict over municipal self-government was essentially a duel between the wealthy and the relatively poor: in nearly all cases the commercial and patrician strata of the population furiously opposed civic democracy, while less fortunate artisans, laborers, radical intellectuals, and farmers firmly supported it.

In Massachusetts, despite the persistence of the town meetings, the new state constitution—framed primarily by John Adams, now a conservative lawyer, and James Bowdoin, a hard-fisted businessman—raised property qualifications for voting by 50 percent and required sizable estates for holding senatorial, representative, and gubernatorial offices. This constitution, like so many others, clearly reflected the interests of the merchants, lawyers, and well-to-do. As Samuel Eliot Morison observes, "The [Massachusetts] Constitution of 1780 was a lawyers' and merchants' constitution, directed toward something like quarter-deck efficiency in government, and the protection of property against democratic pirates."[2] On this score, Massachusetts suffered setbacks after the Revolution that were not to be undone for years to come.

ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION

At the national level, however, it was the confederalists who seemed to prevail over the centralists in the 1780s. Owing to their years of struggle against the arbitrary power of the Crown, Americans had become acutely mistrustful of any central authority, which they still identified with a single executive. The Articles of Confederation, drawn up in the heat of the revolutionary conflict and ratified in 1781 as the constitutional document for interstate cooperation, created only a loose alliance between the states, giving rise, in effect, to thirteen new and independent republics.

In this sense, the Articles created a decentralized national polity, albeit by no means a democracy based on local bodies and entities. The second article declared quite bluntly, "Each state retains its sovereignty, freedom and

independence, and every power, jurisdiction, and right, which is not by this Confederation expressly delegated to the United States in Congress assembled." Its confederation congress had not only legislative power but executive power as well, and its delegates were "annually appointed in such manner as the legislature of each state shall direct . . . with a power reserved to each state to recall its delegates, or any of them, at any time within the year, and to send others in their stead for the remainder of the year" (Article 5). Each state, regardless of size, had at least two members, and "no person shall be capable of being a delegate for more than three years in any term of six years" (Article 5). The government's "executive," which met only between sessions of the Congress, consisted not of an individual president but of a Committee of the States, in which each state had one vote, irrespective of its size or population (Article 9).

The Confederation "central government" was dependent upon the state legislatures for almost every resource and authority. In this respect, the new United States was not a typical nation-state. Expressly forbidden to maintain a professional army, Congress relied entirely upon the states to provide it with military forces as need arose, "for the common defence or general welfare." It could not call for a mobilization of the militia and naval forces "unless nine states assent to the same." Nor could the Congress levy taxes or collect customs duties unless every state agreed to it in a unanimous vote, and therefore it was entirely beholden to the state legislatures for financial resources. If a state was delinquent in fulfilling a congressional request for revenue or military forces—as every state was, in fact—Congress could not punish it. Nor could it borrow funds. Although it could issue currency, the national government had no control over currency and banking in general since the states could also issue currency, as seven of them actually did. It had no power to conclude commercial treaties or intervene in any domestic affairs of a state, even in the face of an impending civil war; "nor shall a question of any other point . . . be determined, unless by the votes of a majority of the United States in Congress assembled."[3] Once the conflict with Britain was won, the states were less inclined to grant requests that the Congress made and were increasingly indifferent to the alliance as such, regarding themselves as sovereign republics. While the Congress had responsibility for paying off the enormous debt that the former colonies had incurred during their struggle, the states were prepared to allocate it only very meager resources.

However adamantly the Articles of Confederation preserved state powers against central authority, however, this system was not decentralized to the point where power rested in towns and counties. Since the Articles devolved legal power upon the state legislatures, political authority was defined more by the state constitutions than by the Articles themselves. In the southern states and even in Massachusetts, their constitutions were expressly oligarchical, and the legislature usually elected the governor (who could not veto legislative acts) and

exercised complete control over the courts, whose rulings were essentially subordinated to the legislature. Although the governor could appoint judges, he essentially remained under the legislature's control.

Still, oligarchical tendencies often intertwined with republican ones. Countervailing the power of state legislatures was the considerable power enjoyed by the citizenry. Elections were annual affairs, and voters consisted mainly of independent yeomen farmers, most of whom enjoyed a widely extended franchise. In Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and New Hampshire property as a qualification for voting, sacrosanct during colonial times, was replaced by the mere fact of tax payments. Typically, the New England states had a very broadly based electorate; as early as 1777, Vermont placed no property or tax qualifications on the male franchise, and it was followed shortly afterward by Pennsylvania and Rhode Island, which made it possible for such relatively broad electorates to change legislatures very easily if they so chose.

Although "farmers by no means voted against the American aristocracy, for many of them were equally conservative on many issues," as Merrill Jensen observes, still, "where agrarian interests were involved in such matters as local self-government, paper money, and debt collection policies, they could and did outvote the minority"—that is, the merchants, financiers, and tradesmen in the large cities.

> And in such cases, there was no central government to which a hard-pressed minority could appeal for help; the governors had no veto; the courts were weak. Thus the American Revolution made possible the democratization of American society by the destruction of the coercive authority of Great Britain and the establishment of actual local self-government within the separate states under the Articles of Confederation.[4]

NEWBURGH

The conservative Whigs found the polity created by the Articles of Confederation wholly unacceptable, and the old unabated fears of "mob rule" among the commercial classes and their spokesmen resurfaced with particular acuteness after the war. Once the fighting essentially came to an end in 1781, elitist reactionaries such as Alexander Hamilton and Gouverneur Morris were resolved to undo the newly achieved republic by establishing a monarchy or, failing that, by placing the states under military rule.

To this end, they tried to exploit widespread disaffection in the army. Despite the Continental Army's definitive victory at Yorktown in 1781, the soldiers had received little or nothing in the way of pay for four or even six years. Washington

pleaded with the Confederation Congress for money to pay his troops their wages and to give them the pensions that they had been promised during the fighting. But no funds were forthcoming. Unpaid, penurious, and uncertain of their future, the neglected soldiers felt unappreciated by the people whose liberty they had sacrificed so much to defend.

After Yorktown the aggrieved army, together with a militant group of officers, had collected around army headquarters at Newburgh, New York. Instead of returning home to Mount Vernon, Washington remained with his troops and tried to ease their semimutinous state of mind. Although he dispatched a committee of officers to Philadelphia to express the soldiers' disillusionment to Congress and again demand that it fulfill its financial commitments to them, the bankrupt Congress could do nothing. Indeed, just after the committee arrived, a bill that would have allowed it to collect its own taxes was defeated when two states voted against it.

While they were in Philadelphia, the officers on the committee conferred with the financiers Gouverneur and Robert Morris, who were interested in getting Congress to make good on the debt certificates that they held. After exploring their common ground, the officers and financiers agreed that the army should not disband until it had been paid, and if it were not paid, the officers should use the military to establish a strong central government, which could meet its demands—and, needless to emphasize, those of the government's creditors. For the army officers, the success of this plan depended upon the cooperation of General Washington, who the conspirators eagerly hoped would agree to lead the army, like a prototypical Bonaparte, disband the Congress and the state legislatures, and perhaps even become a constitutional monarch.

The task of gaining Washington's support for this counterrevolution fell to Alexander Hamilton. In mid-February 1783, Hamilton, following a carrot-and-stick policy, sent a carefully composed letter to Washington at Newburgh warning him that the Congress could not pay the soldiers, and that when this became clear the following June, the army would take up arms "to procure justice to itself."[5] It would do this with or without Washington, Hamilton warned, but he shrewdly added the prediction that without Washington, "the difficulty will be to keep a complaining and suffering army within the bounds of moderation." The far preferable alternative, he urged Washington, would be for the general to lead his troops in taking control over the country himself and establish a system of taxation that "can do justice to the creditors of the United States."[6] Monarchy was the system of government that was most known to history and most common in the world today, Hamilton argued; in accepting the offer to become king, Washington would merely be adhering to the norm of the times.

One of Washington's own confidential correspondents, Joseph Jones, confirmed for him that danger was indeed very real in the army. The general's

reputation with the men he commanded, Jones warned, was being systematically undermined by "dangerous combinations in the army," so that should Washington refuse to go along with the *coup* plan, "the weight of your opposition will prove no obstacle to their ambitious designs" and it could be carried out without him. When Washington investigated the situation himself, he found that Jones was correct; the mood of the soldiers was more rebellious than he had supposed.[7]

To his lasting credit, Washington in March rejected Hamilton's proposal in the firmest possible terms and refused to lead an enterprise that would be "productive of civil commotions and end in blood." "I shall pursue the same steady course of conduct which has governed me hitherto," he wrote; "fully convinced that the sensible and discerning part of the army cannot be unacquainted (although I never took pains to inform them) of the services I have rendered it on more occasions than one."[8]

Once the conspirators realized that they would have to bypass Washington, the "dangerous combinations within the army" of which Jones warned grew rapidly in numbers and decisiveness. Unsigned literature circulated throughout Newburgh deprecating the general himself and calling for a mass meeting of the officers to discuss the upcoming military coup. Frustrated by his own inability to help his soldiers gain the pay they were owed, Washington nonetheless felt that he had "to arrest on the spot the foot that stood wavering on a tremendous precipice." To head off the upcoming mass meeting, he announced a meeting of his own at Newburgh, for March 15, 1783. "This was probably the most important single gathering ever held in the United States," writes Washington's biographer, James Thomas Flexner[9]—a decision by the general that probably rescued the Revolution from defeat and the former colonies from domestic monarchical rule.

Although Washington hinted to his officers that he would not attend the meeting he had called, his sudden appearance onstage took the rebellious officers in attendance aback. He told his angry men that the country in which they were being asked to establish a tyranny was that of "our wives, our children, our farms and other property," and he implored them not to "deluge our rising empire in blood." But their faces remained stonily impassive. He then took out a letter from a congressman that he wanted to read, but he could not see it well enough and so had to put on his spectacles. His men had never seen him wear them before. "I have not only grown gray but almost blind in the service of my country," he quietly explained. His momentary helplessness completely won over the hearts of his men, who gathered around him and wept with contrition over the frailty of their commander. The conspiracy simply dissolved. "The moderation and virtue of a single character," Thomas Jefferson later wrote, "probably prevented this Revolution from being closed, as most others have been, by a subversion of that liberty it was intended to establish."[10]

SHAYS'S REBELLION

The aborted coup still left the decentralized Confederation Congress and the Articles of Confederation in place, and the republic's wealthy creditors loathed it all the more once the prospect of changing the confederal government seemed to be postponed indefinitely. All the difficulties that the republic faced were portrayed by these men as stemming from the Articles, and later nationalist or so-called "federalist" historians of the Revolution were to paint the Confederation era in the darkest colors. In fact, the 1780s was a period of marked if uneven recovery from wartime dislocations. Trade between the American port cities and Europe began to revive soon after the end of hostilities, and with the Peace Treaty of September 1783—in which His Britannic Majesty recognized his former colonies as "free, sovereign and independent"—American ships were far freer to trade than they had been under the imperial system. The southern economy, too, recovered rapidly: its tobacco, indigo, and raw materials were direly needed by the British, and a brisk trade developed between the two former enemies.

The population in and around Boston in particular was basically oriented toward a market economy, fueled by growing opportunities for profit and expansion. During the Confederation, Boston was no more an industrial town than other American towns and cities, although English methods of mass manufacture were beginning to penetrate the United States; but unlike in much of rural America, money rather than barter was the principal means of exchange, and increasingly one's needs were supplied by purchasing goods that others had produced with their labor rather than by homemade goods. The city's population consisted largely of merchants, artisans, speculators, and a host of professionals; it was clearly a commercial town whose authentic concern was business and economic growth.

By contrast, the backcountry agrarian culture was radically different from that of the seaboard towns. The farmers who had settled in central and western Massachusetts had developed a modest subsistence agriculture that allowed them to be almost wholly self-sufficient and required little, if any, currency. The yeoman who remarked that he could acquire "a good living on the produce of [his farm]" for himself and his entire family was not unusual. "Nothing to wear, eat or drink was purchased, as my farm provided all."[11] Such yeomen, to be sure, usually produced small crop surpluses for the market, which they took to shopkeepers in Deerfield and Northampton to exchange for glass, gunpowder, iron, medical supplies, and the like, but these transactions generally took the form of barter rather than monetary exchanges, in which foodstuffs and homespun cloth were traded off for items crafted by nearby artisans or in distant cities.

In this respect, the household budget of a yeoman family in Whately, Massachusetts, described by David P. Szatmary, was nearly autarchical:

> In 1784, twenty-nine-year-old farmer Paul Smith had three dependents and owned fifty-six acres of land, an ox, two cows, and six swine. To feed himself and his family for a full year, he needed roughly 60 bushels of flour, 500 pounds of pork, 200 pounds of beef, flax for making clothes, and small amounts of peas, turnips, potatoes, fruit, and carrots to round out his family's diet. In addition, he needed grain for seed to be planted the following year, another 16 bushels of corn to feed the cows, some grain to pay the cost of milling grain into flour, and about 5 tons of hay for the ox and the cows.[12]

Moreover, Smith lived outside the market economy:

> [He] utilized only enough land to meet these immediate needs. Although he had the chance to grow more surplus crops for market, given his fifty-six acres of land, the labor of himself and his wife, and the close proximity of Whately to the Connecticut River, he generally used only the land and labor necessary for short-range requirements.[13]

Such eighteenth-century New England yeomen, who farmed mainly to maintain themselves and their families in reasonable comfort, lacked any orientation toward commerce or innovation and followed very traditional customs they had inherited from their fathers. Cultivating only enough to meet his family's simple needs and enjoying freedom from servitude to others, the backcountry yeoman lived in a premarket culture that fostered a strong sense of individuality, moral probity, and a sturdy willingness to defend his independence from outside commercial interlopers. This condition of near-autarchy, however, was not individualistic; rather it made for strong community interdependence. "Although priding themselves on their autonomy," Szatmary observes,

> yeomen lived in a community-directed culture. During planting and harvesting, family and friends eased their backbreaking work. The independent status of yeomen, then, resulted in neither self-sufficiency nor a basically competitive society but led, rather, to cooperative, community-oriented interchanges.[14]

In fact, the independence that the New England yeomanry enjoyed was itself a function of the cooperative social base from which it emerged. To barter home-grown goods and objects, to share tools and implements, to engage in common labor during harvesting time in a system of mutual aid, indeed, to help newcomers in barn-raising, corn-husking, log-rolling, and the like, was the indispensable cement that bound scattered farmsteads into a united community.

For better or worse, however, this culture could not resist the impact of the outside world. In the early 1780s, the market economy began to penetrate inland to central and western Massachusetts, slowly locking the yeoman culture in what Szatmary calls a "chain of debt collections." The "chain" started abroad, when major English shippers to America demanded payment of the loans they had previously extended to Boston merchants. These shippers refused to accept anything but specie—that is, gold or silver coin—in payment, since paper currency had become virtually worthless. But specie was relatively rare among war-stricken Yankee merchants, making it extremely difficult for them to pay off debts. By demanding coinage in payment for their goods, English shippers placed an enormous burden on American merchants, who passed it on to traders along the Connecticut River, compelling them to demand specie on the loans they had made to retail shopkeepers in Deerfield and Northampton.[15]

Standing at the end of this "chain of debt collections," the yeomanry were now cajoled by local shopkeepers not only to purchase more goods than they had in the past but to make all their payments and meet all their debts in money rather than barter. Since the farmers lacked money, the shopkeepers granted them short-term credit for their purchases. In time, many farmers became significantly indebted and could not pay off what they owed, least of all in specie, which was what everyone along the "chain of debt collections" demanded—and significantly lacked.

By the late 1780s, this "chain" began seriously to jeopardize the traditional, basically independent way of life of the yeomen, who faced the loss of their farms to merchants and speculators in debt collections. With their creditors pressing them for specie, merchants and shopkeepers flooded the courts with suits demanding the repayment of their loans to farmers. Many farmers were dispossessed of their landholdings, cattle, implements, homes, and even furniture, valuables they had usually crafted with their own hands; and if the dispossessed goods of a yeoman were inadequate to pay his debts, he was likely to be imprisoned. Between August 1784 and August 1786, the docket of the Massachusetts Court of Common Pleas contained nearly three thousand debt cases from Hampshire County alone, over two and a half times more than in 1770–72. At least 31 percent of the county's male citizens over sixteen years old were swept up into this wave of prosecutions, and comparable percentages can be cited for Essex, Bristol, and Berkshire counties. Nor was Massachusetts alone in the wave of prosecutions: over a fifth of Connecticut taxpayers were hauled into court for indebtedness in 1786, and such cases were also numerous in New Hampshire and Vermont.

As if to deepen the yeomanry's outrage, the Massachusetts General Court had biased the state's tax collection system toward the commercial classes of the seaboard towns, imposing the lion's share of the tax burden on land rather than on salable stock. Needless to say, taxes, like debt payments, were generally

demanded in specie. The yeomanry, many of whom were veterans who had been discharged from the army with paper currency, if they were paid at all, were placed in an intolerable position: not only were they required to pay off impossible debts, but they were also being asked to carry the major tax burden of their respective states.

Precisely because many of the farmers were veterans of the Revolution, they were hardly willing to sit by and allow city entrepreneurs to deprive them of their cherished lifeways. A spontaneous movement of resistance broke out among the yeomanry in which they began to replicate their behavior in opposition to the Intolerable Acts of March–June 1774—much to the consternation of the erstwhile Whigs, who had encouraged these very actions a decade earlier against the British. Calls now went out in town meetings throughout Massachusetts, Vermont, and New Hampshire for county conventions, which were chillingly redolent of the assemblies that had led to the Revolution a decade earlier. Initially, the assemblies' demands were by no means revolutionary. In Massachusetts, they merely asked that the state issue paper money and, to provide debt relief, recognize goods as a legitimate form of debt payment. Nearly a third of all the towns in the state sent petitions to the General Court with such demands, while comparable actions were taken in Vermont and New Hampshire.

The urban commercial elites adamantly resisted these peaceful petitions; indeed, they arrogantly viewed them as appeals from an archaic rural world that lacked a full appreciation of the sanctity of contract and metallic wealth. Despite its legality, paper money was viewed by the puritanical urban elites as immoral by contrast with metallic specie, and they gallingly blamed the presumably improvident farmers for incurring the very debts they had actually been induced to accumulate by all the merchants along "the chain of debt" from Boston to the frontier. At the same time, financial speculators quickly bought up depreciating Continentals, as the new American currency was called, from debt-pressed veterans at scandalously low prices, which in later times they redeemed at their par value, much to the outrage of the soldiers who had sold them for a mere pittance.

Heavily influenced by the coastal elites, the state legislators also turned a deaf ear to the yeomanry's demands. In fact, state capitals such as Boston, Hartford, and Exeter, where most of the legislatures met, also doubled as major commercial centers; hence merchants and lawyers in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire were always physically present and well positioned to influence state policy directly. Not surprisingly, state legislators tended to favor specie by persistently refusing to issue paper currency; indeed, only Rhode Island exhibited any sensitivity to the yeomanry's needs by validating the use of nonmetallic money.

The continuing debt prosecutions and the indifference of state legislators to the plight of the farmers pushed the peaceful movement to violent rebellion. In

the late summer of 1786, many Massachusetts yeoman farmers formed militias that systematically closed down courts throughout most of the state's inland areas. By calling themselves Regulators, these armed farmers were invoking the menacing prerevolutionary agrarian uprising of the Carolina backwoodsmen. To history, however, they came to be known as Shaysites after Daniel Shays, a revolutionary war veteran who was actually only one of several coequal members of a "Committee of the People" for Hampshire County.

In Vermont, Connecticut, and New Hampshire, the Shaysite movement mainly took the form of undisciplined crowd actions, which were easily subdued by local militias composed of well-to-do people who assisted local police officials. But in Massachusetts, the rising took a serious, potentially revolutionary form. Not only were many of the Shaysites in the state veterans of the Revolution, but some had even served as officers and knew how to plan and lead a sustained campaign. Daniel Shays himself had served as a captain, as had his fellow leaders Luke Day, Agrippa Wells, and Adam Wheeler, among others. The Massachusetts Shaysites, in effect, were not undisciplined, ill-trained crowds but rather disciplined, single-minded, and well-trained soldiers with able military leaders.

Their militias, moreover, were organized along typically libertarian lines, structured around county committees ("Committees of the People"), each of which assumed military leadership of the armed forces in every county and remained its highest military unit. Whether wisely or not, this structure obviated the need for a supreme command over the entire movement. Local militia committee leaders served more as chairpersons than as officers, and the agreement of the men was indispensable for every major decision and action. As Richard M. Brown has observed in his discussion of American agrarian rebellions, "the protagonist of the back country rebellion rose from the people but, unlike John Adams of the patriot movement, for example, did not rise above them."[16] They drilled together on greens in front of taverns or in open spaces in the countryside, adopting an evergreen sprig as an insignia on their three-cornered hats—perhaps with no knowledge that the English Levellers of the previous century had used the same symbol.

The Shaysites now formed their militias into well-organized platoons. Shrewdly selecting their targets and carefully coordinating their plans, they marched in regular order to courthouses and systematically closed them down. Their popularity was much too wide and their maneuvers too well planned to make it easy for local authorities to suppress them. In Worcester, the county militia refused to oppose them, while in Berkshire, Hampshire, Bristol, and Middlesex counties, many militiamen deserted to the rebels.

The commercial strata on the seaboard and in the inland market towns responded to these developments with virtual hysteria, raising cries of "anarchy" and actually voicing appeals to replace the Commonwealth with a monarchy.

The legislature, not without the aid of Samuel Adams, shamefully passed a riot act to prohibit any gathering that the authorities might view with suspicion, and even suspended habeas corpus, despite its sanctity in English common law. All of these attempts foundered. It was not until the wealthy strata of the state collected sizable contributions from their own kind to recruit what was little more than a mercenary army, made up partly of their personal servants, that the state could begin to offer serious resistance to the insurgents.

Far from intimidating the Shaysites, however, this mobilization by the upper classes served primarily to radicalize them. From what had started as a debt rebellion, Shaysites now began to escalate their goals to broader and more threatening dimensions. Presumably with the purpose of taking complete control of the state government, various Shaysite detachments united into an army numbering several thousand men and laid plans in January 1787 to capture the Confederation arsenal in Springfield, which would have provided them with 7,000 military muskets, 1,300 barrels of powder, and, very significantly, artillery with a good supply of shot and shell. Had the armory been taken, they would have become a formidable insurrectionary force, probably capable of capturing Boston. Armed with their old muskets and even wooden clubs, the Shaysites, between January 21 and 24, formed three separate companies along three approaches to Springfield. According to their carefully laid plans, the Berkshire County rebels were expected to attack the arsenal from the north on January 25, in conjunction with the Worcester and Middlesex companies from the northeast, and the Hampshire company from the west.

On the day of the planned attack, Luke Day from the Hampshire company decided on his own initiative to send an ultimatum to General William Shepard's government forces, who were defending the arsenal, giving them twenty-four hours to lay down their arms. Day also sent a message to the two other companies, apprising them that he had postponed the date of the attack by one day to allow time for a reply from the arsenal. But this message was intercepted by Shepard's men, and it never reached the other Shaysite companies, which proceeded with the attack on the twenty-fifth as originally planned. Lacking the support of the Hampshire company, the assault entirely miscarried: Columns of yeomen prematurely attacked the government forces, which raked artillery fire directly into their ranks. In the absence of artillery and sufficient forces, the attacking Shaysites were compelled to withdraw to outlying towns, leaving behind twenty-four dead and wounded. Eli Parsons, a Shaysite, later declared that Day's intercepted message "occasioned [the Shaysites'] failure—they must have carried it, if their measures had been properly concerted."[17]

Conventional histories of the insurrection create an egregiously misleading impression that the Shaysites were dispatched by a whiff of grapeshot. Armed only with old muskets, clubs, and lacking aid from Luke Day's column, they had

no choice but to retreat; nor did the movement evaporate after the Springfield fiasco. In fact, skirmishes and minor battles continued throughout Massachusetts until the Shaysites were finally quelled by General Benjamin Lincoln, who commanded a well-armed force of three thousand men from Boston, supported by artillery. During February, Lincoln surprised the Shaysites at their Petersham camp and dispersed them with his massively superior forces and equipment. Many Shaysites were subsequently rounded up and tried; others fled, finding refuge in Vermont, as did Daniel Shays himself, or in New York, and ultimately drifting westward into the Ohio Valley. The majority of Shaysites, however, seem to have remained behind in Massachusetts as the economy improved and gradually accepted the new social dispensation that followed the Revolution.

If the definition of a revolutionary requires that the person hold views antithetical to property as such, then in that sense the Shaysites were not revolutionaries. They were property owners themselves and never questioned its legitimacy. But to the New England yeomanry, property, as we have seen, meant something very different from what it did to the emerging bourgeoisie. They regarded it as a means of life that formed the basis for personal independence and individual freedom, not a means for profiteering, acquiring riches, or gaining power. Their notions of property were imbued by a sense of strong moral responsibilities for the land, the community, and communal lifeways and came closer to a form of simple usufruct than production for gain. Although the commercial men of the New England cities and market towns shared the yeomanry's views of property as sacred, they were engaged in making profit and created a highly monetized market and an expanding economy that conferred power and status as well as security on an exploitative elite. The yeomen, for their part, had literally carved their small properties out of the forest. Hence, as in the German Peasant War, two cultures collided that were guided by radically dissimilar values and economic imperatives: the one to seek enrichment and power, the other to retain modest, traditional, and communal lifeways.

We will never know with certainty what the Shaysites would have done had they seized the Springfield arsenal. But Shays himself told the *Massachusetts Sentinel* in January 1787 that after taking the arsenal, they planned to "march directly to Boston, plunder it, and then . . . *to destroy the nest of devils, who by their influence, make the [General] Court enact what they please*, burn it and lay the town of Boston in ashes." The Shaysite farmers would then have it "in their power to overthrow the present constitution" and eliminate the present government, which was controlled by commercial interests.[18] Whether Shays actually made these patently incendiary remarks is difficult to establish. The political system that the Shaysites intended to establish in place of the old regime seems to have been a yeoman democracy, which already existed in varying degrees through their own network of town meetings and county

conventions. Had they won, Massachusetts, conceivably, could have become a confederal democracy, not unlike early Switzerland, and yeomen throughout New England could have tried to emulate them. In any case, together with the revolutionary events in Pennsylvania during the war, Shays's rebellion was as close as America came to an insurrectionary third revolution.

THE CONSTITUTION OF 1789

The men who suppressed Shays's rebellion were surprisingly lenient in their treatment of the rebels. They made no effort to follow up their victory with a counterrevolutionary bloodletting; indeed, the few Shaysites who were sentenced to death were ultimately pardoned. But if the "men of wealth and talents" drew no blood, they profited immensely from the yeoman rebellion. The Shaysite uprising was portrayed as dramatic evidence that the decentralized Articles of Confederation were unworkable, indeed chaotic, and that they had to be replaced by a new Constitution, one that provided for an effective, centralized nation-state. To frighten wavering supporters of the Articles, General Henry Knox, the Secretary of War and a rabid centralist, bluntly denounced the Shaysites as "levellers," awakening fears that the British ruling elite had felt in the previous century. To Knox, the "state [confederal] system" was "the accursed thing which will prevent our being a nation . . . the vile state governments are sources of pollution which will contaminate America for ages." What was needed, Knox claimed, was a strong central government with checks and balances. The worthy general himself was prepared to enforce the commands of such a government "by a body of armed men to be kept for the purpose": that is, by a standing army. Rising to oratorical heights, Knox enjoined such a government, which had yet to be established, to "smite" the state governments "in the name of God and the people."[19] Edmund Randolph agreed that "the chief danger [in the present situation] arises from the democratic parts of our [state] constitutions. It is a maxim which I hold incontrovertible that the powers of government exercised by the people swallows up the other branches. None of the constitutions have provided sufficient checks against the democracy." A senate was necessary as a bulwark against "evils" that stem from "the turbulence and follies of democracy."[20]

The state constitutions that Knox and Randolph denounced so vigorously were, in fact, the only refuge for small farmers who were faced with crushing debts. Under the pressure of yeoman protests and near revolts, many state legislatures finally did pass laws delaying or suspending the collection of taxes and debts, and more than half of the thirteen states issued paper money, making it possible for impoverished farmers to resolve their financial difficulties. A few

states compelled creditors to accept paper instead of specie as an authentic means of exchange. If any single feature of the Articles of Confederation seems to have infuriated James Madison—the "Father of the Constitution"—it was precisely the fact that these measures were taken by the state legislatures. He viewed them as serious transgressions of property rights by improvident agrarians, and regarded creditors as an oppressed minority whose rights it was the government's responsibility to protect. "Government," Madison wrote, "is instituted to protect property of every sort," a concern that was clearly focused on the interests of the well-to-do strata in the new country. "This being the end of government, that alone is a just government which impartially secures to every man whatever is his own."[21]

Despite the differences that existed between them, merchants and plantation owners required no arguments to convince them that the Articles of Confederation had to be supplanted by an entirely new instrument of government. The wealthy and well-educated elite of the new nation thereupon proceeded to adopt a strategy that they learned from the radical patriots during the Revolution: they convoked an extralegal convention to create a new, basically nationalistic, constitution. If "the people" could call conventions in the name of preserving their liberties, the wealthy felt free to call them in the name of protecting their property. In September 1786, an assembly in Annapolis sent out a call for such a convention, presumably to revise the Articles of Confederation. Six months later the Confederation Congress, under strong pressure, agreed to the convention for "the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation" and "to devise such further provisions as shall appear to them necessary to render the constitution of the federal government adequate to the exigencies of the union."[22]

The convention's mandate, it should be emphasized, was very limited, but the Constitutional Convention, which met from May 25 to September 17, 1787, in Philadelphia, blatantly and illegally exceeded it. In fact, the Convention carried out a political revolution—and unlike the assemblies of the people during the Revolution, which were open to all citizens, it was held in extraordinary, indeed conspiratorial, secrecy. The windows on the ground floor of the Pennsylvania Statehouse, where the Convention assembled, were kept shut even during the sweltering summer days to prevent ordinary people from overhearing the debates within, while troops patrolled the grounds outside. The secretary of the Convention recorded little more than the various motions and the votes each one received. Fortunately for later historians, Madison took copious notes of the proceedings, but they were not published until the last of the delegates present—namely, Madison himself—had died. Thus, the process by which the present-day Federal Constitution was drawn up largely remained unknown to the much-revered "people," in whose name it professed to speak, until well into the nineteenth century, by which time the Constitution had sedimented itself

into everyday American statecraft and tradition. Given this procedure and all the maneuvering surrounding the Convention, it is not lurid to consider it a conspiracy by a self-interested elite against the people and the governing institutions of the Confederation. The presence of Washington at the gathering gave the Convention a legitimacy it probably could not have attained on its own. Rhode Island refused to send any delegates, while Patrick Henry declined to attend it with the remark, "I smell a rat."

James Madison's political philosophy draws a clear distinction between democratic and representative government. In his famous *Federalist* No. 10, Madison defines "a pure democracy" as "a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person. . . . A common passion or interest will, in almost every case, be felt by a majority of the whole; a communication and concert results from the form of government itself"[23]—concepts that could almost have come from the writings of Rousseau. The practicability of democracy, Madison observes, is a function of size and scale: it was possible only in small communities of intimates, not in large cities, still less in a nation-state. Rooting his views of politics in the fixities of human nature, he asks: "What is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary." Inasmuch as this was not the case, he continued: "In framing a government . . . you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions."[24] A separation of powers is necessary as a check on tyranny by playing each branch of government—the legislative, executive, and judicial—against the other, thereby limiting the powers of any single branch.

Most of the delegates at the convention agreed on the need for a centralized national government whose authority enjoyed preeminence over the states. For some, this meant that the states would have to defer to the central government but would retain real powers that the national institutions did not claim for themselves; for others, including Madison himself, it meant that the states would all but disappear except as administrative units, somewhat like the departments later established in revolutionary France. The majority of the delegates, however, favored a national government not only based on a clear separation of powers but allowing considerable authority to state legislatures. How the powers of the national government were to be structured, allocated, and given authority was the subject of intense debate, but most of the delegates favored a bicameral legislature in which an upper chamber presumably would consist of wise, moderating, and conservative elements over a more popular and irascible lower one.

Madison and his allies were unsuccessful in producing the highly centralized system they wanted. The document preserved considerable states' rights, which was to produce an ongoing tumult over construing their powers for more than two centuries afterward. Indeed, in failing to clearly specify the powers of the states, the men who sat at Philadelphia throughout the summer of 1787 created a new form of government that was neither a highly centralized nation-state of the kind that suffocates French political life to this day, nor a Swiss-style cantonal confederacy, but rather a hybridized system in which the federal government remained surprisingly weak throughout the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth. Only the New Deal era and the Second World War massively bureaucratized the national government and increased its scope over public life.

The government that the Federal Constitution established was nonetheless much more centralized than the Articles, appropriating powers that had formerly been cherished, however briefly, by the states. Indeed, some of the delegates never accepted Madison's centralistic approach. Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts maintained that the respective powers of the President and Congress were too sweeping to avoid a "tyranny," while George Mason eloquently warned that a constitution formed in secret from the public, with a powerful executive, might expand into a bureaucratic despotism and, lacking any bill of rights, undermine the domestic goals of the Revolution.

The ratification struggle that followed the extralegal convention was fought furiously over precisely these issues. The conventioneers had decided upon a ratification procedure that deliberately avoided submitting the new Constitution to the state legislatures, which almost certainly would have rejected it. Instead, taking another page from the book of the Revolution, the conventioneers decided to bypass the legislatures and go directly to the sovereign "people." If the legislatures were adamantly opposed to ratification, the "people" might still be persuaded to accept the new Constitution. In each state, it was decided, the people would elect a ratifying convention to consider the document. Aware that most Americans might still remain highly skeptical of a central government after their experience with the British Crown, supporters of the Constitution cynically coopted the label *federalist* to denote their cause, rather than *nationalist*, which would more accurately have expressed their authentic goals. Thus was an illegal act, the closed and far-ranging Convention, compounded by a demagogic act of misrepresentation. The Convention prudently instituted the requirement that the support of no more than nine states out of the thirteen was needed to ratify the constitution.

Opponents of ratification were stamped with the unenviable and uninspiring sobriquet of *antifederalists*. Madison's arguments for a national government and Mason's in opposition demarcated the broad outlines of the "debate" over the Constitution, if such it can properly be called, given the level of manipulative

"federalist" pamphleteering that went on. Opinion ranged from extreme antifederalists whose views verged on "Switzering anarchy" (as a Cromwellian might have put it more than a century earlier) to extreme nationalists who seemed to favor a constitutional monarchy rather than a republic. The "federalists" shrewdly availed themselves of radical slogans and measures to gain popular support, such as Tom Paine's maxim, "That government is best which governs least." When antifederalists expressed concern that the Constitution nowhere guaranteed the basic liberties of each individual, the "federalists" assured them that these guarantees were implied in the Constitution, but the antifederalists were not taken in by this ruse, and the "federalists" were obliged to accept the need for a bill of rights that explicitly stated the liberties that Americans were to enjoy.

Elite and well-to-do sectors of the population mobilized in great force to support an instrument that clearly benefited them at the expense of the backcountry agrarians and urban poor. A powerful central government would be able to establish a sound, well-regulated currency, make international treaties that favored commerce, establish a transportation system that penetrated into the interior of the continent with its potentially inexhaustible riches in furs, forest goods, and cultivable land, and mobilize troops not only to deal with domestic unrest but to wage expansionist territorial wars.

But the economic considerations should not be overemphasized. The ratification debate, as a whole, seemed to be guided primarily by political concerns. Admittedly, many of the "federalists" were men of substance—merchants, well-to-do artisans, patroonlike lords, and slave-owning planters—but furiously as the "federalist" and antifederalist debate was waged among the elite strata of the country, it stirred surprisingly little passion among the so-called lower classes. An economic upswing in the late 1780s had quieted the rebellious agrarians who formerly united as Shaysites and Regulators but now benefited from the country's relatively stable currency and Europe's need for grain. Indeed, the debate crossed many class lines. Some of the most adamant antifederalists were actually men of wealth and position such as George Mason, James Winthrop, Christopher Gadsden, Patrick Henry, the Lees of Virginia, and, for a time, John Hancock, whereas Sam Adams was obliged to end his opposition to the Constitution since his constituents among the Boston shipwrights supported it.

The ratifying conventions held in the smaller states quickly accepted the document. It granted them parity of representation (two senators for each state, irrespective of its size) with the larger states in the Senate, which was the most they could have hoped for. Indeed, it was the largest states that posed the most serious obstacles. Massachusetts was so sharply divided on ratification that only the most cunning maneuvering, the most insistent pressure tactics, and major concessions to the antifederalists gave the "federalists" a nineteen-vote majority

out of the 355 representatives at the state convention. Virginia and New York's decisions hung in the balance for months. Despite the strong nationalist sentiment among the delegates that Virginia had sent to the Convention in Philadelphia, Virginians were largely antifederalist. It required much heated debate and maneuvering before the state ratified the Constitution, and then by only a ten-vote margin out of 169. A huge barrage of articles and pamphlets favoring the Constitution was unleashed in order to garner New York's vote, spearheaded by the *Federalist Papers* (written mainly by Hamilton and Madison with a few essays by John Jay). Nevertheless the "federalists" won the state by only three votes out of fifty-seven. Rhode Island, having refused to send delegates to the Philadelphia Convention, also refused to call a ratifying convention. The Constitution went into effect without its assent, and only in 1790 did Rhode Island finally ratify the document and rejoin the Union.

The Constitution and the Bill of Rights essentially allowed the states and, by indirection, the small localities enough leeway to retain "democratic" features of federalism within a loosely centralized union, as Tocqueville observed in the 1830s. Over time, as new states entered the union, the right to vote was further broadened and a large variety of human rights were granted that did not fall within the purview of the federal government. States could decide whether they would be free or slave, whether they would restrict or expand the franchise, grant the vote to women or not, have bicameral or unicameral legislatures, tax or not tax their inhabitants—indeed, as we see today, allow for abortion, capital punishment, or gambling, harbor or extradite fugitives from all but federal crimes, legally "rebel" or not, and a host of other lesser but personally relevant and politically important rights, including varying degrees of easy access to the levers of government itself. Despite the bourgeois, commercial, and later imperialistic society that emerged in the following decades, the American Revolution had produced a remarkably multilayered governmental system: within the centralized republic existed instrumentalities for creating a fairly decentralized democracy. Whether this structure can continue to exist and its democratic features be expanded at the expense of the centralized nation-state remains the most uncertain and undecided legacy of the Revolution to this very day.

NOTES

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4. Merrill Jensen, *The New Nation* (New York: Vintage Books, 1950), p. 128.
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11. "Diary of George Richard Minot, June 9, 1787, quoted and discussed in David P. Szatmary, *Shays' Rebellion* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), p. 1.
12. Szatmary, *Shays' Rebellion*, p. 2.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.
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16. Richard M. Brown, "Back Country Rebellion and the Homestead Ethic," in Richard M. Brown and Don Fehrenbachar, eds., *Tradition, Conflict and Modernization: Perspectives on the American Revolution* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), pp. 86–7, 91.
17. Quoted in Szatmary, *Shays' Rebellion*, p. 102.
18. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 100. Original emphasis.
19. Quoted in Merrill Jensen, *The Making of the American Constitution* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1964), pp. 36–7.
20. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 40.
21. Quoted in Christopher Collier and James Lincoln Collier, *Decision in Philadelphia: The Constitutional Convention of 1789* (New York: Ballantine, 1986), p. 65.
22. Quoted, for example, in Charles A. Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1913), pp. 62–3.
23. *Federalist* no. 10, in James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers* (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 81.
24. *Federalist* no. 51, in *Federalist Papers*, p. 322.

PART IV

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

CHAPTER 15 The Ancien Régime

If the American Revolution has been too often seen as merely a genteel disagreement over colonial independence, the French Revolution of 1789–95 has been widely seen as the classical revolution *par excellence.* This interpretation became so deeply ingrained in revolutionary social thought during the nineteenth century that it immensely influenced the behavior of revolutionary leaders thereafter, so that the French Revolution became a kind of template for revolutionary movements in the century and a half that followed. Revolutionary leaders of all kinds expected the course of events to duplicate those of the French Revolution, and they drew upon its history for an understanding of the "stages" their revolutions would follow. By studying the Jacobins, their assumed prototypes, they learned what social strata they could expect to trust or mistrust, and what alliances they could expect to make and break. They formulated strategies, analyzed the relationship of forces that existed in revolutionary situations, and diagnosed the outcome of revolutionary crises generally along lines that modeled the French Revolution.

Such interpretations of the French Revolution were often based on mythology and were even obfuscatory, as Marx saw in the 1840s. In his caustic opening to *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,* he mocked the 1848 revolutionaries' proclivities for drawing parallels with the events of 1789–95: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce. Caussidière for Danton, Louis Blanc for Robespierre, the *Montagne* of 1848 to 1851 for the *Montagne* of 1793 to 1795, the Nephew for the Uncle. And the same caricature occurs in the circumstances attending the second edition of the eighteenth Brumaire"[1] (18 Brumaire being the date in the French Revolutionary calendar on which Napoleon Bonaparte took power).

Nevertheless, the image of the French Revolution exercised an immensely powerful influence on the Russian Revolution of 1917–21. Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, Left Social Revolutionaries, and even many anarchists preconceived

their revolution and formulated their strategies largely in terms of the French. To Marxian revolutionaries, every revolution—French and Russian alike—unfolded in stages, according to "inner laws" of development, as Trotsky was to write in the preface to his *The History of the Russian Revolution.* "The masses go into a revolution not with a prepared plan of social reconstruction," he observed,

> but with a sharp feeling that they cannot endure the old régime. Only the guiding layers of a class have a political program, and even this still requires the test of events, and the approval of the masses. The fundamental political process of the revolution thus consists in the gradual comprehension by a class of the problems arising from the social crisis—the active orientation of the masses by a method of successive approximations. The different stages of a revolutionary process, certified by a change of parties in which the more extreme always supersedes the less, express the growing pressure to the left of the masses—so long as the swing of the movement does not run into objective obstacles.[2]

Prudently, Trotsky noted that "such, at least, is the general outline of the old revolution."

In fact, not only Trotsky but Lenin and revolutionaries of the 1930s regarded this stages theory of revolution almost fatalistically as a historical law. They saw the overthrow of tsarism as parallel to the creation of the National Assembly in France, while Trotsky himself viewed the rise of the short-lived Stalin–Zinoviev–Kamenev "troika" in 1924 as a replication of the Directory and Thermidor of the French Revolution. Disastrously, he regarded Stalin merely as a Bonapartist rather than as the brutal totalitarian that he turned out to be, and the mild Nikolai Bukharin as a spokesman for a capitalist restoration. That he totally failed to see his situation accurately stems in no small part from his proclivity and that of other revolutionaries for a century and a half to view all major revolutions in terms of the French Revolution.

A BOURGEOIS REVOLUTION?

In particular, most Marxist interpretations were notable for their attempts to deny any importance to the ideological content of the French Revolution and see it almost exclusively as a clash of economic interests—between an emerging, indeed vibrant, highly self-conscious bourgeoisie and a declining, indeed moribund feudal system. The revolution was seen as a paradigmatic "bourgeois revolution" in which the rising middle classes supposedly came to such a high stage of historical development that they consciously, even courageously and insightfully, overthrew the restrictions of feudal society that were impeding the

advance of their commerce and manufactures. Thus, according to Jean Jaurès, the French socialist leader: "The bourgeoisie is not merely a force of prudence and economy; it is a bold and conquering force that has already in part revolutionized the system of production and exchange and is about to revolutionize the political system."[3] Albert Soboul went so far as to call the French Revolution "the definitive model of all bourgeois revolutions. . . . *Everyone* knows that the bourgeoisie led the Revolution."[4]

Indeed, it is not only Marxists who interpret the Revolution in this manner: orthodox interpretations in the twentieth century have seen French revolutionary developments in terms of naked bourgeois class interest and the ascent of capitalism in France, and there can be no doubt, in retrospect, that the French bourgeoisie in later years were the principal beneficiaries of the Revolution, the class that gained most from its outcome. But by no means is it clear that the French Revolution itself was "bourgeois" if by a "bourgeois" we mean a modern "industrial capitalist." The two words, it should be emphasized, are not synonymous. Before the advent of industrial capitalism, the "bourgeoisie" consisted of urban dwellers or burghers, including many artisans, merchants who transported and sold goods to faraway places, and a great variety of professionals. Some burghers had humble material status, while others enjoyed considerable wealth. Generally, deep-seated cultural attitudes inherited from antiquity attributed an inferior status to men who profited from trade or worked at menial tasks, so that the more successful commercial strata of the past tended to invest their wealth in landed property and live as *rentiers* or idle gentry. Almost consistently, their ideals remained those of titled nobility, owners of rural estates and landed property, with whose families they tried to intermarry; indeed, French financiers and tradesmen aspired to land ownership and titles well into the nineteenth century; that is to say, long after they presumably "led" or "made" the great Revolution.

Moreover, although industrial capitalism ultimately benefited from the diminution of privilege during the French Revolution, so too did other strata in French society, notably that distinctly noncapitalist class, the peasantry. No less than the emerging industrial entrepreneurs of the late eighteenth century, the small food cultivators of the countryside were among the beneficiaries of the sweeping demolition of feudal or quasi-feudal manorial holdings and privileges. It took France well into the nineteenth century to shift from a putting-out or cottage system of manufacturing to a factory system, long after the mechanized production of cotton goods was burgeoning in England. In England, agriculture, more than any other branch of the economy, took giant strides toward capitalistic and rationalized forms of production during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but in France rural society remained largely peasant and domestic in nature throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. According to available economic indices, France lagged behind

England in nearly every sphere of the economy, except for the crafting and production of luxury items.

To attribute determining economic factors to a complex cultural system and assume that they form the base of the culture's "superstructure"—that is, the most decisive factors in explaining social developments—is to reduce human social activity and creativity to a simplistic interplay of mechanistic actions and reactions. Indeed, the kind of image that people living in a certain time and place have of their society has an importance that should not be minimized; especially in periods of revolutionary change, what people think about their aspirations and goals profoundly affects the very economic forces that supposedly uniquely motivate them. Marx's famous remark to the contrary notwithstanding, we would be wise to judge a man by "what he thinks of himself,"[5] for his view profoundly affects his behavior, and, by the same token, we would be wise to judge "a period of transformation by its own consciousness"—for thought and consciousness, whether of a man or of a period, profoundly shape what people do and how societies develop. The critical consciousness that the French Enlightenment created fed directly into the Revolution itself, while the egalitarian beliefs generated during the Revolution actually did much to inhibit the emergence of modern capitalism in France. When *émigrés* returned to France after the execution of the Robespierrists, they found a nation substantially different from the one they had left upon the collapse of the ancien régime, one that not only looked different but thought very differently—and critically—about rank, privilege, authority, religion, and personal values.

THE EVOLUTION OF 1789 FRANCE

On the eve of the Revolution, France was a chaotic, often dizzying collage of administrative and religious jurisdictions, traditions inherited from centuries past, enormous disparities in privilege, and cultural archaisms. During the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church divided France into eighteen archepiscopal provinces and 135 dioceses, many of which reflected divisions dating back to the Roman Empire. What was then France consisted of disparate feudal baronies and duchies, many of which were not strictly Gallic in origin and nearly all of which were heir to unique customs, systems of privilege, and cultural differences. So fractured was feudal society into small sovereignties that for a long time the king exercised virtually no control over the country. Slowly, over the centuries, French kings pieced the country together through incessant wars, dynastic marriage alliances, and diplomacy. As they added new territories to the domain, they often did little to alter the institutions that came with

acquired lands; rather, they modified or adapted them to the growing kingdom, so that provincial centers remained culturally distinct, with autonomous feudal municipalities, and laws and customs very much as they had been for centuries.

In the seventeenth century, Richelieu and Mazarin, two strong-willed cardinals committed to unifying and centralizing France under a powerful Crown, patched together an absolute monarchy for their sovereigns, Louis XIII and XIV respectively. Upon the old provinces, Richelieu superimposed a new set of administrative units known as *généralités*, appointing royal officials called intendants whose main function was to supervise the behavior of the provincial aristocracy. Finally, between 1648 and 1653, the conflict between the monarchy and aristocracy came to a head when the nobility, irate over the restrictions imposed by the cardinals, directly challenged the growing royal authority in an armed uprising, the Fronde, which ended in abject failure and humiliation for the nobility. Thereafter, the young Louis XIV shrewdly established his court at Versailles, some fifteen miles away from Paris, largely to collect and keep an eye on his once-unruly nobles, seducing them with the pleasures of a languidly idle life, straitjacketing them with an elaborate aristocratic etiquette, and training their children to become effete and obedient courtiers. To induce them to remain at Versailles, he endowed the nobles who were "presented" to court with benefits, pensions, and sinecures that turned them into harmless and dependent parasites.

Above all, to avoid future Frondes, Louis XIV removed the nobles as much as he could from the substantive tasks of officeholding and policymaking, responsibilities that the monarch gave to an increasing number of servile commoners, opening a gap between the traditional nobility of the sword (*noblesse de l'épée*) and the new, largely bureaucratic nobility of the robe (*noblesse de la robe*). The latter, many of whom had purchased their titles, depended heavily upon the king's favor and goodwill, while the sale of titles, in turn, became a sizable source of income for the Crown. Taken together, the king managed to increase its revenues, gain a trustworthy bureaucracy, and divide the elite classes themselves, playing the nobility of the sword against the nobility of the robe. Despite the growing chagrin that the old nobles felt toward their new counterparts, the king continued to allow commoners to buy up key positions as intendants and members of the courts of appeal, or *parlements*, as well as the royal bureaucracy. In the end, they formed much of the administration of the country. Increasingly, nobles of the robe, whose positions were held for life and were hereditary, became politically more powerful as a stratum than the nobility of the sword.

The monarchs who followed the Louis XIV were made of stuff less stern. The languid Louis XV and Louis XVI lacked Louis XIV's capacity to keep the nobility cowed, so that the traditional nobles, always mindful of their former powers, began to encroach on the monarchy's powers. If Louis XIV mistrusted his

nobility, shrewdly trying to render them dependent upon him, his successors lived in the very bosom of their courtiers. If the sardonic Louis XV was an indolent caricature of his assertive predecessor, Louis XVI was a vaporous shadow of both: dull, awkward, and utterly indecisive, behaving much as though the crown had been thrust upon him unawares. Nor were these attributes lost upon his courtiers, who soon concluded that he was a dull buffoon, a view shared by his own wife, the frivolous Austrian princess Marie Antoinette.

Deeply discontented by their powerlessness, the nobles of the 1780s now sought to reclaim at least some of their lost power and steadily began to filter back into governmental positions. In 1781 they succeeded in getting an ordinance instituted that required all commissioned officers in the military to prove that their families had been in the nobility for four generations. By 1789 all the bishops in France hailed from noble families and nobles occupied all but one of Louis XVI's ministerial posts, as well as choice positions in the military and the Church. With the increasing return of the old aristocracy to political influence, ambitious nobles ultimately reclaimed a considerable degree of the independence that Louis XIV had successfully quashed.

At the same time, the nobles of the robe, although well entrenched in key institutions such as the *parlements*, were increasingly blocked from influencing governmental policy. As Norman Hampson observes,

> The exclusiveness of the aristocracy now deprived the newly ennobled of some of the most important practical advantages that their status had formerly conferred and consequently created a sharp division of interest between the old *noblesse* and the upper middle class and *anoblis* [ennobled] which accentuated the divergence between social hierarchy and the economic structure of the country.[6]

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS

Nevertheless, in the 1780s the French monarchy was still highly centralized. Royal authority was preeminent in determining economic, religious, and foreign policy for the more than twenty-five million people living in some 277,000 square miles over whom Louis XVI ruled. But despite the efforts of the two earlier cardinals to centralize the state in the Crown's hands, France still remained a patchwork of different sovereignties steeped in administrative chaos. In contrast to the American colonies, which were structured around governors, legislatures, and English law, the disparate feudal baronies and duchies that made up France still laid claim to special customs, traditions, and privileges. The intendants had never been able to break down local privilege in places such as Brittany, where the local provincial assemblies remained powerful enough to

thwart reforms from Paris. Avignon, the seat of a French pope during the great schism centuries earlier, was still owned by the pope in Rome, while Alsace contained pockets that were nominally under the rule of German princes and the city-state of Mulhouse.

Provincial legal systems varied enormously. Some areas followed Roman legal codes, while others adhered to customary law. In northern France, where customary law was prevalent, provinces, principalities, and cities were governed according to sixty-five general customs and three hundred local ones, with the result that important differences existed with respect to marriage, inheritance, and the ownership of property. The thirteen *parlements*, or high courts of appeal, were ancient institutions that had jurisdiction in various *bailliages*, *sénéchausées*, and other districts of such diverse size that the jurisdiction of the *parlement* of Paris alone—the most powerful of all—covered a full third of the kingdom, while that of Pau in the south was minuscule by comparison.

From one province or region to another, one could hear German, Italian, Breton, Basque, Provençal, and even English spoken, not to mention an extraordinary variety of French dialects that would have been virtually incomprehensible to a Parisian. Systems of weights and measures differed considerably from place to place. Taxation varied widely, with the heaviest tax burden generally falling on the northern provinces. In the kingdom at large, in some places the principal and most oppressive direct tax, the *taille*, could be levied on personal income, while in others it was levied on land ownership. Nobles and clergy were exempt from this onerous tax, which was imposed overwhelmingly on the peasantry, while the notorious salt tax, the *gabelle*, varied from area to area according to a scale of six different rates. Internal customs barriers crisscrossed the entire kingdom with bewildering frequency based on unpredictable rates. Customs duties could be collected at town gates, river crossings, and provincial boundaries, so that goods shipped from the Franche-Comté down the Saône and Rhône rivers to the Mediterranean might incur thirty-six distinct public and private imposts along the way.

On the eve of the Revolution, France was overwhelmingly an agricultural country, although, contrary to popular notions, its feudal structure was decaying rapidly. Serfdom had disappeared almost entirely; unlike in Central and Eastern Europe, where the manorial system still prevailed, only about 140,000 serfs still existed. A great many of the peasants, who probably formed nearly 70 percent of the population as a whole, owned a modest plot of land with a cottage and garden, but an acreage that was seldom large enough to support their families year-round. "All peasant households," observes P.M. Jones, "shared one overriding ambition: to assemble, by inheritance, by marriage, by purchase or by renting, a holding which would enable them to live decently."[7]

Traditionally, the peasants lived in villages that held strong collectivist feelings, so that (the existence of small individual plots notwithstanding) individual ownership of the land was generally circumscribed in one way or another. Communities prohibited fields from being fenced off and required that crops be rotated in various ways. Harvests were often considered to be community property, and peasants shared the right to gather the stubble that remained afterward. Open fields were set aside for communal grazing in pastures, together with forested areas that were set aside for communal gleaning of wood. These common rights were absolutely essential to the peasants' day-to-day survival. Underscoring the importance of the general conception of the village as a collective entity, the most important royal tax, the *taille*, was imposed on a community as a whole, which all residents were obliged to pay as a single unit.

From a technical standpoint, most of French agriculture seems to have been small-scale, with peasant families working their own plots using simple equipment, but here too we find notable exceptions. In the north and northeast, for example, the *grande culture* (to use the term of the Physiocrat François Quesnay) was structured around the intensive cultivation of cereals, often in large-scale holdings, and even in these areas, where agriculture was so unlike the small-scale forms of cultivation practiced in other parts of France, the fields were often cultivated "by tenants on behalf of absentee landlords," Jones tells us in his authoritative work on the peasantry during the revolutionary period. "Owner exploitation was restrained and share cropping virtually non-existent."[8] In fact, in marked contrast to the innovative trends of the English, who pastured and cultivated on an increasingly large scale, the French grain cultivators of the north used very traditional methods such as a three-year-cycle rotation of crops. The lands of the *petite culture*, of course, were farmed by small peasant proprietors and sharecroppers, generally producing rye or maize, rather than wheat, as their basic cereal crop.

Although the peasantry had strong community sentiments, as a class they were anything but monolithic; indeed, like the rest of French society, they were divided into several very distinct strata. At the apex of the peasant social hierarchy stood the *gros fermiers* or great farmers who, while relatively rare, existed mainly in the rich areas to the north and east of Paris, where large-scale farming was more common than elsewhere. Significantly, they owned fertile grain-raising lands and practiced agriculture that was highly profitable and virtually capitalistic. Some were private proprietors who hired rural labor to cultivate marketable grains, while others were long-established tenants who worked the lands of large noble and ecclesiastical estates. Below them were the *laboureurs*, who also owned their own draft animals, plows, smaller freeholds, and dwellings, and who cultivated areas that were large and well-balanced enough to support their families comfortably throughout the entire year, even to accumulate a grain surplus for difficult times.

But by far the largest group of peasant landowners were those known as *haricotiers* in southern Picardy and by several other names elsewhere. These peasants owned some domestic animals, basic implements, and a few freehold plots, but no plows or draft animals. The subsistence they derived ranged from the moderate to the precarious, and in addition to cultivating their small plot, they were obliged to rent land in a leasehold or work as day laborers for more affluent, often seigneurial landlords for part of the year. In return for their labor and half of the crop they produced, the seigneur would provide them with farm equipment and animals. Finally, at the base of the peasant hierarchy were those who owned little or no land at all, the distinctly poor day-laborers, or *journaliers*, and land workers, or *travailleurs de terre*. Numbering about 21 percent of the rural population, they were frequently unemployed and traveled around looking for short-term work.

Numerically, these peasant strata varied from place to place within France. The well-to-do *gros fermiers* were at best only a very small minority. Even on the relatively prosperous Picardy plain, a small village of several hundred households might contain only two *gros fermiers*, five or six *laboureurs*, twenty *haricotiers*, and twenty to fifty day-laborers. In other areas, the majority of the peasants were *laboreurs* and *haricotiers*, and in still other areas, landless peasants formed a substantial part of the community, working as day-laborers and part-time artisans. Most French peasants, despite their ownership of some land, were very impoverished, and their day-to-day existence was miserable and extremely precarious.

In comparison with a serf, who was tied to the land, the peasant had a much looser bond with his seigneur. He could not be sold together with the land; nor was he legally tied to it. But he was nevertheless obligated to pay feudal dues and obligations left over from the past. These were delivered over to the seigneur either in kind, as in grain, or in money (*cens*), often in exorbitant amounts. Peasants were also burdened by a wide array of other seigneurial rights. Lords had the right to hunt on the lands they tilled, thereby trampling the peasants' crops, which infuriated their underlings; they enjoyed monopolistic privileges (*banalités*) over local corn mills, wine presses, and ovens, even obliging the peasant to use them instead of less expensive ones that might be available. Peasants were expected to give *corvée* labor, or road work, to the nobles, who could compel them to feed their seigneurial pigeons, a privilege that was as debasing as it was frivolous. Indeed, the seigneur had the right to demand that peasants perform a wide variety of personal services—sometimes numbering in the hundreds—for residents of the manor house. To enforce these privileges, the seigneurs could avail themselves not only of state courts but of their own seigneurial courts—and in the process levy fees on the peasants that provided them with further income. Finally, inasmuch as the *taille* was imposed exclusively on the peasantry, it and the other levies the peasant had to pay made

for a highly oppressive and bitterly hated burden. As C. B. A. Behrens observes in his work on the ancien régime: "The royal taxes hung like a millstone round the peasant's neck."[9] Thus, the countryside seethed with hatred within and between the social hierarchy, and, in various ways, divided the land-hungry peasantry and the oppressive, visibly parasitic nobility. Continually verging on civil war, the potential conflict was nourished by memories of past *jacqueries* and perpetuated by continual riots.

Taxes on the nobility varied with the status of the individual noble involved, but the nobility as a whole was exempt from paying the onerous *taille*. Indeed, enormous extremes of wealth and poverty existed among the nobles of prerevolutionary France. In the countryside the greater part of the income of the landed nobility was derived from feudal dues, but in reality these were not substantial: they provided little more than an estimated annual total of a hundred million livres for the entire French nobility. Thus, in times of rising prices, the provincial nobles tried to squeeze ever more feudal dues from the peasants, with ever greater ruthlessness, lest they be brought to ruin—and evoked a searing hatred from among the peasants themselves.

The poorer the noble, the more urgent was his need to exploit the peasant; and there were many relatively poor nobles in eighteenth-century France. As a result of the feudal right of primogeniture, the eldest son of a noble family inherited most of the patrimonial lands, with the consequence, as Albert Mathiez points out, that the younger sons were left with smaller and smaller portions on which to live. The antagonism between the well-to-do and poorer nobles increased the farther down the social scale one went.

> Reduced to straitened circumstances, they [the younger sons] sold their rights of justice, their rents in money and in kind, and their land, in order to live; but they did not dream of working, for they did not want to lose caste (*déroger*). A whole class of impoverished nobles sprang up, very numerous in certain provinces . . . where they vegetated gloomily in their modest manor-houses. Detesting the higher nobility, who monopolized court appointments, and despising and envying the middle classes in the towns, who were growing rich by trade and industry, they stubbornly defended their last rights of immunity from taxation against the encroachments of the king's agents; and their arrogance increased in proportion to their poverty and impotence.[10]

The court nobles, notably those who stayed at Versailles as courtiers, drained the resources of the country in their unrelenting pursuit of pleasure and status. As much as one quarter of the country's national budget was diverted for the use of the great nobles, who were paid lavishly in income, pensions, and sinecures. Nobles who became bishops and other clergymen could dip freely into the Church's immense treasury. Although this profligate nobility, including not only

barons but dukes, marquis, and even princes of the blood, ran up debts in the millions, they were sometimes paid off by sizable grants from the sovereign, who saw his higher nobles as supporters of the regime.

By far the most massive block of economic wealth was possessed by the bloated Catholic Church, which owned about a tenth of France's land and in theory collected a tenth of the income of rural folk as a tithe to support local priests. The revenues that the Church enjoyed are estimated to have amounted to a quarter of a billion livres yearly. With its enormous wealth, the Church supported 130,000 clerics, half of them in regular orders and half distributed over its ecclesiastical hierarchy. At its apex, the clerical hierarchy performed virtually no religious duties whatever, and at its base it consisted of grossly overworked country *curés* who subsisted on pitiful incomes. Actually, only a thin social line separated high Church officials from the nobility, since the great religious chapters with their extensive landholdings recruited their canons from noble families; indeed, noble sons became bishops at the age of twelve or thirteen and were the recipients of enormous incomes. In 1789, all 143 bishops in France were recruited from noble families and, far from living in their dioceses and attending to the souls of their parishioners, idled away their days at court. Yet this swollen and wealthy ecclesiastical establishment was completely unencumbered by taxation. At most, the Church voluntarily provided a financial balm to the state by granting a donation of approximately sixteen million livres annually, which, insofar as it was a "gift," could be withheld at will, thereby exerting a strong financial influence on the Crown's policies.

Even greater was the political power of the Church, which, through its network of country *curés*, guided the souls of the peasantry, educated much of the literate public in its schools, and used its pulpits as a means for influencing rural politics and providing a message of resignation and submission to authority. The Church, to be sure, was a source of social assistance to the poor, and controlled hospitals as well as enjoying a monopoly over the registration of births, deaths, and marriages. Its authority over the minds and hearts of the more backward rural masses in France was enormous. Rooted in time-honored medieval custom, it had its own judicial system, and its bishops held vast power in the civil administration. Yet in the end, its power ultimately rested on the monarchy—a dependency of which it was rudely reminded in 1764, when the Crown suppressed the Jesuits in the country.

THE CULTURE OF CONSUMPTION AND STATUS

The court nobility spent the income it received from the Crown with lavish profligacy. In Versailles and Paris noble expenditures on sumptuous garments,

carriages, furnishings, art works, jewelry, banquets, balls, and servants literally sustained entire industries and provided innumerable individual livelihoods, from clothiers and jewelers to wig-makers and cosmeticians. The importance of status in the aristocratic hierarchy is difficult to overestimate: one's position in life was scrupulously calculated according to the degree, if any, to which one's family's lineage was related to the royal dynasty. Not surprisingly, each noble disdained those on the social ranks below, resulting in what one historian has called a "cascade of contempt."[11] One of the most parasitic social hierarchies in history, the French nobility focused overwhelmingly on consumption rather than production. Indeed, it cultivated a debilitating national *culture* based on idleness and conspicuous consumption, which extended into all the well-to-do sectors of French society, including the middle classes, and gave rise to appetites that were, in fact, antithetical to the parsimony needed to create capital for modern industry and mass production.

Capitalists there surely were in prerevolutionary France: bankers, merchants engaged in large-scale trade, dealers in silk and other exotica that made the nation a center of good living for the rich, manufacturers of fabrics, speculators who amassed vast fortunes in land dealings and commerce, and genteel retailers who pandered to the whims of the nobility. Below them in the urban social hierarchy were lesser merchants and small-scale manufacturers; and still lower were successful artisans and retailers. But these capitalists, if such all of them could be called, were marked by very archaic features. In contrast to the thrifty puritanical capitalists of England, who made money to invest it into their enterprises in order to make still more money, French financiers, manufacturers, and merchants lived in perpetual envy of the nobility and sought above all to attain noble positions of their own, as we have seen. This is not to claim that France lacked thrifty capitalists in all fields of endeavor, for whom wealth outweighed social position; but their influence on the character of the bourgeoisie lay in the future—indeed, well into the nineteenth century. In the eighteenth century, rich capitalists normally absorbed the values of the aristocracy, as had so many capitalists in ancient and medieval times. No less than the nobility, they viewed trade as menial and its rewards merely as a means to a greater end, that of higher social status. As a result, a great proportion of capital flowed into land and the purchase of titles at the expense of industrial development. A single statistic reveals the difference in economic values that distinguished France and England: in 1789 British coal production was twenty times that of France, despite the much higher French population.

This archaic valorization of status over wealth, of land over production, and of idleness over work was particularly ironic in view of France's eminent position in the European economy. Its foreign trade was second only to that of Great Britain, and it led every Continental country in output. But England was more open to innovation, both social and technical, owing to its essentially

Protestant culture and its better-balanced, fairly modern state machinery, which was relatively free of the social archaisms that burdened French society. In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain, the idle *rentier* way of life that still characterized so much of the French nobility had given way to an activist and innovative landed nobility. Only too aware of their commoner origins during the Wars of the Roses a few centuries earlier, the English nobility mingled more familiarly and comfortably with the middle class. Moreover, together with the commercial classes of the realm, the English nobility produced an agricultural revolution of their own, not only by establishing sheep runs and enclosing land that left behind "deserted villages," but also by draining the fenlands, rationalizing crop cultivation, and constructing new roads and canals. No less than the mechanical devices that gave rise to mass manufacture, these measures paved the way for the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of modern capitalism.

The French nobility of the sword, by contrast, were overly preoccupied with flaunting their status, often claiming their ancestry in the Frankish conquerors of Gaul (for which Voltaire subjected them to much buffoonery), and exhibiting haughty contempt for tradesmen, who supplied them with goods, and the parvenu nobility of the robe, who lived in envy of the privileges and social recognition enjoyed by the blooded aristocrats. Whereas the power of the eighteenth-century English monarchy was waning as a result of parliamentary sovereignty, in France the monarchy was still the greatest power in the land, however miserably and irresolutely Louis XV and Louis XVI exercised that power. Whereas English capital increasingly flowed into industry, especially into cotton manufactures—which pioneered the industrialization of the country—French capital flowed into land and titles as the most tangible sources and evidence of social status.

The French nobility, in turn, would have found it difficult to become capitalist had they even wanted to. They were legally debarred from entering into all but a few industries, such as overseas trade and glassmaking. Moreover, whereas agricultural practices had been extensively rationalized in England, in France this process came very slowly and in piecemeal fashion. French agricultural wealth continued to derive more from the intensive exploitation of labor than from technical and scientific improvements. A French peasant who lost his land to a bourgeois knew that he was displaced primarily because his rents had gone up, not because any striking technological innovation removed him from food cultivation. In other respects his way of life, however impoverished it might become, remained unchanged; the village still retained most of the old customs that had been worked into the French rural tradition for countless generations, with very few changes in traditional methods of production and in social status, with its many restrictions as well as privileges.

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, some French officials and provincial nobles, influenced by the economic thinking of the Physiocrats, tried

to emulate their British counterparts by reforming old agricultural practices. They intensified crop production and tried to undertake farming on a larger scale by enlarging their landholdings. Agricultural societies were formed throughout France to teach and encourage new, scientific methods of food cultivation, and royal edicts were announced that permitted the enclosure of common lands. Indeed, some seigneurs impudently claimed that, according to feudal law, the common lands were actually their own property—claims that received open support from the monarchy. As Mathiez observes:

> Their seignorial courts. . . became hated instruments of extortion in the hands of their underpaid judges. They used them in particular as a means of gaining possession of the common lands. . . . The poor man's goat, deprived of its common rights, could no longer pick up even a scanty subsistence, and the complaints of the poor became more and more acrimonious.[12]

Nor were such practices confined exclusively to the landed nobility. Capitalist farmers, usually large landowners who rented out land to individual peasant households, worked hand in glove with the nobility to eat steadily into the village's common lands. Once such lands were enclosed, the new agriculturalists could abolish peasants' traditional grazing rights in common pastures and divide up the common lands for their own use, while raising the rents of their tenants and reducing them to destitute rural laborers. All of these practices aroused vehement peasant opposition and rural unrest. Indeed, "during the revolution," observes P. M. Jones, "the defence of common rights became a key issue, perhaps *the* key issue, in the political programme of the poor peasantry."[13]

But by no means were the nobles the sole acquisitors of landholdings. As Alfred Cobban, in his pathbreaking work, has carefully shown, rural and urban capitalists played a major role in the process. As indebted nobles forfeited lands from their great estates, they were greedily bought up by a new breed of agricultural bourgeois, who purchased not only seigneurial lands but even seigneurial rights, which were merchandised like so many alienable commodities. "By the eighteenth century . . . in Walloon Flanders seignorial rights were as active a market as land," Cobban observes. "Of course, some of the purchasers themselves became nobles in their turn; but by 1789 the *tiers état* [Third Estate] included many owners of seignorial rights." When peasants tried to deny these claims, their case was taken to the local *parlement*, which more often than not sided with the landowners.

Finally, some nobles employed specialists in feudal law to devise novel, self-serving interpretations of seigneurial rights, such as the right to graze cattle and sheep on common lands, or to lease common lands, claimed by peasant villages, to commercial stockbreeders. Still other lords farmed out their seigneurial rights to individuals or companies, which collected on them ruthlessly as so much

profitable raw material. By demanding that the peasant pay ever more *cens*, they drew him into a cash nexus on a scale that his feudal ancestors had never experienced; indeed, the seigneurial agents who collected feudal dues, as Cobban observes, "especially when they were paid on a commission basis, had an interest in screwing up the seignorial dues to the highest pitch." As enterprising nonnobles and nobles alike used lands and seigneurial rights to intensify this grim and dehumanizing development, the exploitation of the peasant, like agriculture itself, was becoming increasingly rationalized, albeit still by the use of many archaic techniques based on time-honored traditions. The intendant of Dijon, for example, noted in 1751 that urban elites were reducing the peasants to the status of mere day-laborers.[14] Not surprisingly, the French peasantry, despite its varied internal differences, came to detest the seigneurs, so that, by 1788 and 1789, the countryside was on the point of a new *jacquerie.*

This capitalistic offensive, if such it can be called, into the countryside stands at odds with accepted images of the French Revolution as "bourgeois" in nature. "There is at least some excuse for believing that the [peasant] revolution in the French countryside was not against feudalism," observes Cobban, "but against a growing commercialisation; and that it was not a 'bourgeois' movement but on the contrary was directed partly against the penetration of urban financial interests into the countryside."[15]

THE NONAGRICULTURAL ECONOMY

As to the nonagricultural economy in late-eighteenth-century French towns, its structure was very mixed, as was very much the case in Western Europe for centuries. Town society, like that of the countryside, was marked by pronounced social stratifications, with considerable differences in wealth, education, and lifeways. The greatest fortunes were made by financiers. Contracting with the Crown to collect its taxes, these collectors eventually transformed themselves into creditors of the government as the national debt steadily expanded. Towns also included businessmen, especially in the port cities, who were intensely hostile to the nobility. Their causes, as Hampson observes, "were social rather than economic. It was not that the middle class could not expand and prosper, but that it was increasingly excluded from the social status and privilege that prosperity had previously been able to buy more easily."[16]

Unlike towns in England, French towns and cities were hardly centers of a "rising" bourgeois economy. A powerful guild system still held a tight grip on many urban industries, and most working people were journeymen employed in small shops by master craftsmen. Fearing for their status and their livelihood,

they vigorously opposed any "free trade" measures that would have allowed rural manufacturers to sell competing products in their own markets. So strongly did the guilds defend traditional family monopolies over various trades that they even prevented many journeymen from becoming master craftsmen, swelling the number of urban journeymen who could never hope to rise above the status of hired laborers. Still, as Hampson points out, "the modern division between capital and labour was not yet clearly marked and the distinction between aristocracy and 'people' was not the same thing as the division between 'gentlemen' and 'lower classes.'"[17]

Only a limited number of authentic factories existed in France, and the few that were mechanized were located in the countryside to make use of water power. Despite its widely touted role in producing the Industrial Revolution, well into the nineteenth century the steam engine developed by James Watt was used mainly to pump water from mines. It was too bulky to be employed by most factories, except a few wool- and muslin-processing plants, and the new English spinning jennies and weaving machines had yet to reach France in any sizable numbers. Accordingly, French industry remained overwhelmingly artisanal, despite the introduction of new machines.

Yet a growing corps of merchant-manufacturers tried to evade guild restrictions by bringing their cotton and wool into the countryside, where peasant artisans spun and wove the raw produce into cloth on looms owned by the manufacturers. These "factors," as the cottage industry merchants were called in England, could easily outsell guild artisans. At Lyon, where the guild system had essentially collapsed, a few hundred rich merchants controlled the great silk industry of the city and its environs, which provided employment to as many as sixty-five thousand workers. Yet this industry too was primarily artisanal. Silk was produced either in small shops or in family cottages located within a sixty-mile radius from the center of the city. Thus, factories were far from common in France before the Revolution; most work was done on a small craftlike scale, even where workers were assembled in large numbers in a so-called "industrial" area.

Lastly, the cities also contained many men of highly uncertain occupations who depended upon day-to-day earnings, as well as a host of servants, small retailers, such as grocers and café-owners, and transport workers from wharfsmen to water carriers. Beggars abounded everywhere, roaming on country roads and filling city streets. The crazy quilt of prerevolutionary laws provided a livelihood for a host of lawyers, who not only pleaded criminal cases but, in far greater numbers, drew up contracts, mortgaged lands, and validated or challenged peasant and feudal rights. It was they who looked through the old feudal deeds that still constituted the basis for wealth, and they who could bear testimony to the burdens that choked the life out of a potentially prosperous country. Indeed, despite the fact that their very livelihood depended on the skein

of legal archaisms, the most earnest of them began to oppose feudal systems of land tenure and privilege, in effect constituting the practical men of the Enlightenment—men of action who, idealistically or demagogically as the case may be, tried to give reality to the ideas advanced by the French *philosophes*. As we shall see, they became the Revolution's most outstanding political leaders and constitution-makers.

Any attempt to find a shared bourgeois interest in the many cross-currents that marked French social life collapses in the widely disparate differences that pitted one stratum of society against another, from the base of society to its apex. Indeed, when the eminent historian of the Revolution Georges Lefebvre tried to define the eighteenth-century French bourgeois, he was obliged to divide them into five categories—each of which, in fact, stood very much at odds with the others. "Bourgeois" landed proprietors who used feudal rights to their advantage would have had very little in common with the "bourgeois" lawyers who formed such a substantial part of the Third Estate in 1789. Nor would they have much in common with the commercial "bourgeoisie," for whom the multitude of tolls were onerous to trade. "Bourgeois" officeholders in the royal administration would have regarded the "bourgeois" lawyers—if bourgeois they can be called at all—as the bane of their existence, and rallied more to the monarchy, to which they owed their status, than to their "revolutionary" class compatriots. More fundamentally, a "bourgeois" who was ennobled thought or tried to think like a noble and was very likely to conceal his own past in commerce. To speak of this mélange as a unified bourgeoisie, still less one with a profound awareness of a distinctive social role clearly directed toward attaining class objectives, is very simplistic.[18]

The French Revolution occurred not because of a resolute bourgeois leadership but often in spite of—and against—the capitalism that was slowly emerging in western society as a whole. That the Revolution was clearly directed also against the aristocracy is undeniable, but it can be called bourgeois only by reading the history of our time into the past as the predestined outcome of what was an ambiguous social development.

NOTES

1. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), p. 398.
2. Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1932), pp. xviii–xix.
3. Jean Jaurès, *Histoire socialiste*, vol. 1 (Paris: 1901), p. 47; quoted in Norman Hampson, *A Social History of the French Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), p. 20.
4. Albert Soboul, *A Short History of the French Revolution, 1789–1799*, trans. Geoffrey Symcox (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), pp. 1, 16 (emphasis added).

5. Karl Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, p. 504.
6. Norman Hampson, *A Social History of the French Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), p. 11.
7. P.M. Jones, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 8.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
9. C.B.A. Behrens, *The Ancien Régime* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1967; New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967), p. 32.
10. Albert Mathiez, *The French Revolution*, trans. Catherine Alison Phillips (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), p. 4.
11. J. Droz, introduction, *Histoire du règne de Louis XVI* (Brussels, 1839), quoted in Hampson, *Social History*, p. 6.
12. Mathiez, *French Revolution*, p. 5.
13. Jones, *Peasantry in the French Revolution*, p. 9.
14. Alfred Cobban, *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), pp. 43–4, 45, 45–6.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 48–9, 52, 53.
16. Hampson, *Social History*, p. 22.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
18. Albert Soboul's view can be found in the opening pages of his *Short History* and in his *Précis d'histoire de la Révolution française* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1962), published in English as *The French Revolution, 1787–1799: From the Storming of the Bastille to Napoleon*, trans. Alan Forest and Colin Jones (New York: Random House, 1974).

CHAPTER 16 The Origins of Revolt

The many factors that produced the French Revolution—a revolution that reached searing proportions over a span of five years—utterly transformed Western life, from traditional to new ways of thinking, even of dress, speech, and everyday manners. But was that far-reaching revolution inevitable? An answer to this question is not easy to give. The archaic French state, structured around explicit privileges and disorganized by a jumble of often conflicting jurisdictions, could hardly have lasted long into the next century. Had the royal administration been less incompetent, France might have evolved gradually in a direction similar to that of England. In fact, this possibility had been the dream of *philosophes* such as Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Diderot, whose writings, no less than Rousseau's, profoundly influenced the revolutionary intelligentsia. But none of the men who were to play leading roles during the Revolution, not even Jean-Paul Marat, in time the seeming ultrarevolutionary, could have predicted the explosive events of the late 1780s and early 1790s or the alternative trajectories they opened.

THE REVOLT OF THE NOBLES

Ironically, the French Revolution was initiated by a revolt neither of the peasantry nor of various bourgeoisies but by the nobility. The immediate cause of the upper-class revolt stemmed from France's disastrous fiscal condition. Ever since the reign of Louis XIV, costly wars and internal consolidation had swollen the state's debt to increasingly unmanageable proportions, and during the reigns of his successors, rising prices after 1733 and the large expenditures bestowed on the privileged social ranks at court had expanded enormously. Most disastrously, the monarchy had waged four major wars between 1733 and 1783, whose costs totaled about four billion livres, a stupendous sum at the time, and

attempts to curb the debt were largely failures because of the tax exemptions enjoyed by the clergy, nobility, and ennobled officeholders.

By 1776, France faced a financial crisis of disastrous proportions, worsened by the fact that the comptroller-general in the king's ministry, the Genevan Protestant Jacques Necker, was an astute banker rather than an insightful economist. Necker, in effect, had a banker's faith in the beneficent effects of borrowing. Accordingly, under his guidance the government's fiscal problems seemed to disappear under a mountain of loans, often borrowed at interest rates of up to 10 percent. Juggling the facts about the country's financial condition gave Necker's budget policies a veneer of success. In his 1781 *Account to the King of National Finances*, the first disclosure of the royal finances that had ever been made to the general public, Necker's deliberate distortions created a roseate picture of an annual surplus of ten million livres in revenues over expenses. Actually, the country's annual deficit, not to speak of its accumulated debt, greatly exceeded 46 million livres. By 1788, nearly half of France's expenditures consisted of paying off the interest on the national debt, and lacking other sources of information to contradict Necker's figures, the public remained oblivious to the state's increasingly serious financial straits.

In 1783, shortly after the debt had risen still further as a result of France's participation in the American war against Britain, Necker was succeeded as comptroller-general by Charles Alexandre de Calonne. Calonne, fully mindful that if the country were to avoid national bankruptcy, it had to overhaul the entire tax system, proposed a comprehensive, wide-ranging plan that would increase the tax liability of the nobility and clergy by establishing a direct tax on land and its produce. This plan allowed for no exceptions: the tax was to fall on the clergy, nobles, and commoners alike, and, more disquietingly, it was to be graduated, so that the greater burden would fall on the wealthy. The severity of the hated *gabelle* and *taille*, as well as the *corvée*, was to be reduced, mitigating the tax burden placed on the peasantry.

Moreover, Calonne's plan called for the election of local assemblies in all villages of a thousand inhabitants or more to assess the basis for the tax. Although these assemblies were to be attended only by landholders with an annual income of more than 600 livres, the plan created a system of district assemblies to distribute the tax burden among the villages; it also included the creation of provincial assemblies in the *généralités*, removing any distinctions between the three estates: clergy, nobles, and commoners. Thus not only were the nobility and clergy to be taxed, they were to be stripped of their accustomed dominance of local government. Had it been instituted, Calonne's plan would have significantly altered not only France's tax system but its very polity by giving considerable power to the localities. Not that Calonne sought to decentralize the French political structure; indeed, as Albert Goodwin points out, Calonne's new assemblies would remain under the close supervision of the

royal intendants: "The reform was designed . . . to achieve not so much effective decentralisation as greater administrative uniformity."[1]

But the plan outraged the *parlements*—and for good reason. These thirteen appeals courts, as we have seen, were composed of rich commoners who, by purchasing their hereditary judgeships and noble titles, had obtained exemption from most taxation. Calonne's plan for rural assemblies challenged their jurisdiction as quasi-legislative bodies, since historically the Crown's edicts had to be registered with them. In fact, the *parlements* seem to have had their own ambitions to decentralize France under their control. From the fifteenth century onward, they had attempted to transform their traditional right to register laws and edicts into a *de facto* right to veto any laws and edicts they disliked simply by refusing to register them, which brought them into direct confrontation with the Crown. Only by fiat could the monarchy override their refusal. Thus the power of the *parlements* was essentially obstructive of the king, and they were obliged continually to ally themselves with the provincial estates against royal intendants and provincial governors.

Exasperated by their obstructionism and quasi-legislative capacities, Louis XV had simply abolished the Paris *parlement*—by far the most important in the realm—and replaced it with a system of regular appeal courts whose functions were strictly judicial. But his inexperienced successor, the incompetent Louis XVI, naively revived the Paris *parlement* in 1774, and it now began vigorously to flout the monarchy's authority by claiming to possess not only the power to veto royal decrees but the power to consent to taxation. This power, in fact, really belonged to the Estates General, the assembly of the three estates of the realm, which had not met since 1614. Arbitrarily assuming the prerogative of the Estates, the *parlements* obstructed Calonne's plan and cannily tried to portray the ministry's efforts to reform the fiscal system as onerous and oppressive abuses of royal power. Moreover, the *parlements* demagogically used Necker's initial spurious report of a budget surplus to rally widespread popular support behind their efforts to curb royal authority, allowing them to posture as champions of popular liberty, even invoking ideas of the *philosophes* such as social contract theories to justify their opposition to what was in fact a plan to rescue France from financial ruin.

Calonne, who clearly saw that the *parlements* would not register his plan and that Louis lacked the character to override them, prevailed upon the king in 1787 to convene an Assembly of Notables, whose stated purpose was to discuss how his plan was to be put into effect. Inasmuch as Louis could be expected to choose as delegates nobles and other high-status personages in the land who would oppose an added tax burden, Calonne should have suspected that the Assemblies would disapprove of his proposal; instead, he seems to have inordinately relied on the resolutions of a monarch who, by now, left little doubt that he was too weak to carry much weight with any sector of French society.

Nor was the king's lack of character the sole failing of the French monarchy. The late eighteenth century was a time of profound unrest and demands for social changes. In its ever-growing cities, France saw an upswell of urban discontent with a society structured around privilege, while in the countryside rural discontent reached the proportions of open peasant outbreaks. A new phenomenon was emerging in the land: a definable public opinion. For centuries, the French people had turned to their local pastors for news about the king and his ministers; indeed, about two-thirds of the population at this time were still illiterate and essentially allowed the pulpit to shape their social views. But entirely new developments were changing the cultural landscape of the country. The Enlightenment was percolating down from the summits of French society to its very base, with results that were subversive of religious faith and feudal hierarchy alike. A new literati, an intelligentsia, began to flood France—especially its towns and cities—with pamphlets, periodicals, treatises, and books that were openly hostile to privilege. The country's financial condition ceased to be a private matter between the king and his ministers and became a yardstick by which to measure and judge the competence of the monarchical state itself. Thus, the struggle between the *parlements* and the king was watched very closely. It became a matter of growing public concern to privileged noblemen, ordinary journeymen, and literate commoners in all walks of life.

Even republican ideas were being discussed, albeit prudently. When the constitutional documents and various accounts of the American Revolution and its institutions became widely available, including the Pennsylvania state constitution of 1776, they were read and discussed with growing enthusiasm. Political clubs came to life, advancing the cause of the Third Estate in various ways and popularizing the writings of the *philosophes* to an ever wider and hungrier readership. New critical writings were read aloud for the benefit of those who were illiterate. More knowledgeable sectors of the French public were obsessed by the history of the Roman Republic, by satires that, for their time, were outrageously critical of authority, and by news of conflicts within the court and the aristocracy. The coffeehouses of the Palais Royal—the gardens that the politically ambitious Duke of Orléans had given to the people of Paris—became a center for radical agitation, as did cafés in cities and towns throughout France. Pamphlets rained down upon thousands of insatiable readers, and were read everywhere from salons to guardhouses in front of the Tuileries, the residence of the king, as contemporary visitors to the city attest. The fuel for the French Revolution, as for the American before it, in effect, was created in a public realm in which masses of people could hope to pressure the monarchy for reforms, threaten the aristocracy for its insolence—and ultimately, as time was to show, exercise violent revolutionary force to gain their own ends.

To add to the many ironies of the era, the so-called notables of the land were only too eager to be assembled and thereby create another forum for challenging

the monarch's control of the state. Still chafing at their lack of institutionalized corporate power, the French nobility were eager to regain the power they had lost after the Fronde. When, at length, the Assembly of Notables convened at Versailles on January 29, 1787, it consisted overwhelmingly of nobles, including princes of the blood and dukes, provincial governors, clerics, and mayors; indeed, only 10 of the 144 notables were not members of the nobility. In short, the Assembly was composed precisely of highly privileged men who were in no way willing to accept any new tax burdens or rival institutions and were bent on patently weakening the monarchy's authority. Calonne, despite his methodical attempt to reveal the grim state of the public finances, had grossly miscalculated the intention of the notables; indeed, the majority of them, no less than the members of the *parlements*, categorically opposed any diminution of their privileges, particularly of their tax exemptions. Nor were they willing to surrender any of their authority to his proposed assemblies, still less to those that were to be supervised by royal intendants.

To the contrary, falling back on Necker's spurious report, the notables vilified Calonne in pamphlets, which, in turn, obliged the abused minister to retaliate by publishing the full text of the assembly's secret proceedings, thereby inviting the public into the most hidden and sordid recesses of the state—its financial extravagances—and the behavior of its leaders. Perhaps for the first time in French history, the proceedings of a once-hidden assembly of France's elite—with all the charges and countercharges that filled the air—had been opened like a lanced abscess for all to see, and whether the public chose to believe Necker or Calonne, discussions of the assembly's proceedings in clubs and cafés enormously raised the political temperature of the country, especially in Paris.

Typically, after four fruitless months of wrangling, Louis yielded to the complaints of the outraged notables and replaced Calonne with a more amenable comptroller-general, Brienne, whose name had been suggested to him by the queen. Despite Brienne's attempts to soften Calonne's proposals, he was ultimately obliged to adopt much of his predecessor's plan, including the uniform land tax, only to meet once again with the obstinate resistance of the Assembly of Notables. Indeed, denying that it lacked any fiscal authority, the notables—to their everlasting detriment—reminded the king and the country that only the defunct Estates General had the right to levy taxes. The Marquis de Lafayette, fresh from fighting in the American Revolution, called for the "convocation of a truly national assembly" to settle the problems confronting the kingdom. Angrily, the king's brother, the Count of Artois, asked him, "What, Sir—are you calling for the Estates General?" to which the young marquis pointedly replied, "Yes, my lord, and even better than that."[2] What Lafayette, possibly speaking for many in France, patently had in mind was to convert the Estates General into a legislative assembly modeled on the American Congress, with a constitution to ensure that it met at regular intervals and exercised clearly delineated powers.

With the incredible myopia that so often blinds ruling elites to the crises they are fostering, many of the notables took up the demand for a convocation of the Estates, in most cases cynically so, in the hope of avoiding any new taxation. The traditional structure of the Estates itself guaranteed hegemony to the nobility—lay and clerical combined: at its last meeting in 1614, each of the three orders—clergy, nobility, and commons—had had an equal number of representatives and had met, deliberated, and voted separately, by order, not by individual members. This procedure had given the nobility and clergy the two-to-one majority needed to outvote the Third Estate on all controversial matters. Understandably, perhaps, the king viewed uneasily the prospect of convoking the Estates, which he may well have associated with the uprising of Étienne Marcel in the 1350s; at any rate, he dismissed the Assembly of Notables in May, leaving France's fiscal problems completely unresolved.

Once again, in the summer of 1787, Brienne, as naively as Calonne, tried to register a new stamp tax on newspapers, receipts, and other documents—a common enough practice in other European countries—only to be rebuffed by the *parlements* with the claim that the Estates alone could ratify any new levy. The call for a meeting of the Estates now became a rallying cry among the aristocracy and *parlements*, percolating downward to all strata of French society. Indeed, it now became a national cause propagated by lawyers, clerics, tradesmen, and nobles—among them Lafayette, the Marquis de Condorcet, and the Count Mirabeau—who formed a quasi-republican faction that hoped to transform France into a constitutional monarchy. The ideas of these "Americans" or "Patriots," as they were commonly called, became immensely popular in the cafés, which, as one observer declared, were becoming "public schools of democracy and insurrection."[3]

The king simply floundered with little support from his own nobles, still less other strata of French society. Emulating his predecessor, he tried once again to virtually abolish the *parlements* and replace them with his own courts of appeal (*grands bailliages*), while issuing edicts for new taxes, but the *parlements* openly defied him and issued remonstrances demanding the Estates General. At length, Louis agreed, initially, to convoke the Estates five years later, in 1792; finally, in May 1789. The opposition faced by the monarchy to any delay, even among the aristocracy, was massive. A "noble revolt," as the king called it, swept across France, especially in Béarn, Brittany, and Dauphiné. Provincial nobles provocatively convened their own unauthorized assemblies, secure in the knowledge that they had the full support of the clergy and officer corps. Major riots broke out in several cities. In the Dauphiné province the *parlement* was expelled from its courthouse, but its magistrates subversively announced that if the royal edicts went through, Dauphiné would no longer regard itself as owing fidelity to the king. When the military governor tried to silence the *parlement* by sending troops to Grenoble on June 7 (later known as the Day of Tiles) the

citizens bombarded the troops with roof tiles, drove them out, and then enthusiastically escorted the *parlement* back to the courthouse.

Nor was it only the nobles who revolted. In the new municipal structures that Brienne created, the mayor, supposedly appointed by the royal intendant, was elected by the peasants and held accountable to them. "In Alsace," observes Mathiez, "as soon as the new municipalities were formed, their first care was to bring actions against their feudal lords, and the latter complained bitterly of the 'innumerable abuses' which the establishment of the municipalities had occasioned."[4]

THE ESTATES GENERAL

Finally, when the time came for Louis to convoke the Estates, the monarchy, following precedent, structured them into three deliberative and voting orders, each of which was to have an equal number of representatives. But nearly two centuries had passed since 1614, when the nobility and clergy could still be allowed to combine and outvote the Third Estate, and the old procedure now aroused a furor throughout the country, which saw it as a flagrant attempt to flout the will of the people and avoid reform. After the Day of the Tiles, the Dauphiné assembly met and resolved that the Estates should cast its votes by individuals (*par tête*) rather than by orders (*par ordre*), and further, that the Third Estate should have twice as many representatives—"double representation"—so that it could achieve parity with the two privileged orders. The plan immediately became immensely popular. Indeed, in September, when the *parlement* of Paris tried to support the traditional 1614 arrangement, the people turned against their erstwhile allies, whom they had recently lionized, and denounced them with fury.

The political temperature of France now began to soar, raised higher almost weekly by an extraordinary outpouring of pamphlets affirming the sovereignty of the nation—as opposed to sovereignty of the king and the estates—and calling for the creation of a declaration of rights and a constitution. The Abbé Sieyès's famous brochure *What Is the Third Estate?*, which appeared in February 1789, played a role much like Paine's *Common Sense* in the American Revolution. With its pithy formulations, it galvanized the public sentiment around the notion that the Third Estate alone was the sole body that spoke for the nation.

Again, a second Assembly of Notables was summoned in November 1788—this time by Necker, who had replaced Brienne—to persuade the nobles to forgo some of their privileged status among the Estates. But predictably, the assembly flatly refused to grant the Third Estate its demand for "double representation";

Necker gained approval for it only after much behind-the-scenes maneuvering. To stoke the already rising flames still more, the assembly left open the question of whether the three orders would vote as separate groups or as individuals in a united body, a grave omission, as time was soon to show, that provoked a national crisis.

The upcoming meeting of the Estates General became a source of enormous national expectation. For the first time in generations, millions of people, even the lowest strata of the population, who had been ignored by the monarchy and oppressed by France's elites found themselves called upon to participate, however indirectly, in matters of state. "Politics," wrote Madame de Staël, "were a fresh sphere for the imagination of the French; everybody flattered himself that he would play a part in them, everybody saw an object for himself in the many chances which offered themselves on all sides."[5] The process of electing representatives to the Estates was accompanied by uprisings and pillagings of grain stores. A crowd in Nantes surrounded the city hall crying "*Vive la liberté!*" Very much like the American revolutionaries, members of the Third Estate met in extralegal assemblies and established networks for correspondence from town to town. Addressing the Crown, these assemblies listed for the king's edification a series of grievances and demands, addresses that were meant to be a model for people in their localities to follow in listing their own grievances, the *cahiers de doléances*. The *cahiers* now flooded the royal government, presenting complaints that, by the very process of drawing them up, became in themselves a form of political education, much like the process that the Massachusetts towns had experienced in 1774.

But the procedures for electing representatives to the Estates were willfully complex and indirect. Elections of the clergy and the nobility, of course, presented no difficulties: all male members of the two orders over the age of twenty-five could attend an assembly in their locality or urban district and there vote directly for their representatives who would attend the Estates meeting at Versailles. For the Third Estate voters, however, the voting system was different, indeed tortuous in its complexity. All male members of the Third Estate who were over twenty-five and paid taxes were obliged to meet in their rural parishes, urban guilds, or urban district assemblies to choose two electors for every hundred valid participants. These electors, in turn, would then be expected to meet at the city hall and choose yet another set of electors to represent the assembly or district. This third group of electors would meet with electors from other towns in their *bailliage* to choose a fourth group of electors, this time representing a new district that had been created expressly for electoral purposes, and it was they who finally chose the actual representatives to the Estates General in Versailles. The overly guarded indirectness of this procedure may account for the fact that the majority of the Third Estate representatives were lawyers, the people who were best able to navigate the process, which

inadvertently filled the Third Estate with highly articulate and informed individuals for whom the nobles and clerics were no match.

At each stage of the voting process for all orders, citizens drew up *cahiers de doléances* for their given electoral jurisdiction, assembled and combined them into a general list of the jurisdiction's grievances, then sent them off to the next electoral stage, where they underwent the same process of consolidation. The grievances listed in the *cahiers* were remarkably similar among all the orders. All agreed that the Estates General should destroy royal and ministerial despotism; that there was a need for a constitution that would restrict the king's rights; and that a national assembly, which would meet periodically, should be created. They agreed in supporting trial by jury, freedom of speech, and a certain degree of structural decentralization. The nobility even accepted the principle of equality of taxation—on the condition that it was assessed by elected local assemblies and not by the king's agents.

Yet not all was unanimity in the *cahiers*: the nobility and the clergy did not yet accept the political equality of the Third Estate. As Goodwin observes,

> The clergy were determined, if possible, to retain their corporate independence and the nobility to defend their traditional social distinctions, their feudal dues and their political control of the provincial estates. To that extent the *cahiers* reflect the political and social conflicts which divided France as the ancien régime drew to its close.[6]

Other serious grievances hardly made it onto the lists in the *cahiers*: the last versions of the Third Estate's *cahiers* were edited mainly by their urban lawyer representatives, who simply deleted many peasant demands for protection of their traditional village lifeways against the encroachments of capitalist agriculture.

THE TAKING OF THE BASTILLE

The dramatic first stage of the French Revolution is well known. In less than two months—from May 5 to June 27, 1789—the three estates convened together in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles for the opening ceremonies. The next day the Third Estate was informed that the orders would be required to meet separately, an instruction that the Third Estate flatly refused to carry out, demanding that it vote together with the nobility and clergy as a single body. The nobility remained uncompromising on this score, asserting their separate identity, a position with which the king firmly concurred. In response, the Third Estate called upon its supporters in the other orders to meet with it, and on June 17

this meeting constituted itself as a National Constituent Assembly, thereby assuming temporary legislative sovereignty with a view toward writing a constitution for France. When the king refused to allow this seeming usurpation of power, the new National Assembly (as the Third Estate was to be generally called) was literally shut out of its meeting place on June 20. Its members, outraged by the monarch's behavior, defiantly met next door in a tennis court, where they swore an oath not to disband until they had written a constitution for France. Four days later, the majority of the clergy—particularly a large numbers of poor *curés*—joined the Third Estate, followed by forty-seven nobles on the day that followed. However unwillingly, the king was obliged to yield: on hearing that a crowd of thirty thousand people from Paris would invade the palace if he refused, the king on June 27 invited "his loyal clergy and his loyal nobility" to convene with the National Assembly.

Yet Louis's agreement to accept the unity of the three estates was patently a ruse to gain time—and gather loyal troops—to forcibly disband the National Assembly. Scarcely a week before he ostensibly yielded, he had signed marching orders to bring soldiers to Paris, and on June 26, a day before he expressly conceded to the existence of the National Assembly, he signed more orders strengthening the forces at Versailles and around Paris. As early as July 7, the visible massing of troops on the outskirts of the city generated mass consternation throughout Paris, justifiably arousing popular suspicions that the king was about to invade and take over the capital.

The closing days of June should have provided Louis with ample evidence that his troops in the capital, particularly the blue-uniformed French Guards (*Gardes françaises*), were completely unreliable. The officers of this force had imposed severe military rules and Prussian-style discipline on the soldiers, which profoundly disaffected them, as did their steady contact with the city's increasingly insurrectionary population. Mindful that the *Gardes* were vulnerable to the sentiments of the populace, Louis decided to rely primarily on regiments of mercenary foreign troops, who were less likely to favor the popular cause. Yet, as their commanders warned, even the foreign regiments, including the usually loyal Swiss mercenaries, were unreliable. As Paris grew increasingly restless, inflamed by its mounting suspicions of the king's intentions, so too did the troops who were stationed there; between June 24 and June 28, several companies made it clear, by their behavior both to the people and to their officers, that they would refuse to quell any disorders by rioters. The ringleaders of this near-mutiny were arrested, but in a daring rescue a crowd of three hundred spirited them away from prison, after which they were feted and hailed in open defiance of the royal authorities.

Meanwhile, a new political force was taking shape in the capital. Although the four hundred electors who had gathered in sixty district assemblies to choose Parisian representatives to the Third Estate were obliged to disband after

fulfilling their mandates, the assemblies remained in place even after the Estates General had convened. Meeting again on June 25, they began to explore the developing political situation as quasi-legal bodies, even moving into the Hôtel de Ville (the city hall) where they carefully maintained organized surveillance of the city's aristocrats and retained close contact with the National Assembly at Versailles. On June 29 these "districts," as the assemblies were called, laid plans to establish a militia of two hundred citizens from every part of the city, partly to intimidate the king should he try to disband the National Assembly, partly to keep watch over the more radical elements that might instigate transgressions of property. They placed this militia under the control of a Permanent Committee at the Hôtel de Ville. On the same evening that the militia was created, the districts merged with the existing municipal government, which traditionally had been appointed by the king, to constitute a new Paris Commune, or city council. The reemergence of the Paris Commune revived troubling memories of the insurrectionary body led by Étienne Marcel centuries earlier and, in time, the Commune was to become one of the civic hotbeds of the Revolution. By mid-July, when the fever in Paris reached insurrectionary proportions, the Commune and districts constituted a latent dual power even rivaling the Estates, and organized the capital's defense against the king's troops.

In fact, the French people had been arming themselves for more than a year, creating citizens' militias (*milices bourgeoises*) in various cities and peasant militias in the countryside, presumably to protect property and harvests from vagrants. Now that Parisians could reasonably expect to be attacked by foreign regiments of the king, rumors flew wildly all over the city at the slightest hint of a troop movement. The citizens of the capital needed more than weapons for what they were convinced would be a siege of the city by a well-trained army, which left open only one course of action: to seize the means of life wherever they could be found. On July 10–13 they destroyed the hated customs barriers around the city, mainly to remove any impediments to the entry of arms and food supplies. On July 13 they captured the Saint-Lazare monastery, where more arms and grain had been stored. As armories were plundered for weapons, citizens massed in self-defense, turning the capital into a loaded gun that required only one spark for it to go off.

On July 11 the gun was fired when the popular comptroller-general, Necker, who the people believed tried to hold down the rising price of bread, was fatuously dismissed by the king. Necker's dismissal initiated a chain of spontaneous riots throughout the capital. Huge crowds gathered in the Palais Royal, where, as a number of accounts have it, on July 12 an incendiary speech by Camille Desmoulins summoned the people to arms. "Citizens, you know that the Nation has asked for Necker to be retained, and he has been driven out!" the improvident young lawyer declaimed to an eager audience from atop a table. "Could you be more insolently flouted? After such an act they will dare

anything, and they may perhaps be planning and preparing a Saint-Bartholomew massacre of patriots for this very night! . . . To arms! to arms!" Desmoulins cried out, dramatically raising one or two pistols—as the stories go—or none. To the police who observed him, he taunted, "At least they will not take me alive, and I am ready to die a glorious death!"[7] Whether this speech was accurately recorded or not, it was typical of the fiery oratory that by now filled the Palais Royale and that was to mark popular agitation throughout the Revolution.

On the same day, in the gardens of the Tuileries itself, Paris exploded into an outright insurrection against the throne. A crowd of some five to six thousand armed Parisians defiantly engaged the Royal-Allemand regiment of German mercenaries, which had been sent to disperse them. Although the crowd, reinforced by sympathetic French Guards, managed to put the Royal-Allemand regiment to flight, rumors rapidly spread throughout the city that the mercenaries had massacred peaceful citizens in the Tuileries. Open fighting now broke out in the city between the German troops and the French Guards, plunging all of Paris into open insurrection. In fact, nearly all the king's troops in the capital were unreliable, and none of the contingents stationed there could be safely deployed against the insurrection that rapidly engulfed the city.

Even as conflicts spread from one neighborhood to another, new rumors again swept through the city on July 14 that the king's troops, stationed on its outskirts, were beginning to invade the capital. The citizenry were desperate for additional arms. The Permanent Committee of the districts now issued a call for barricades to be erected and for sympathetic French Guards to be mobilized, simultaneously dispatching its militiamen—soon to be called the National Guard—to protect banks and property against looters. All carts were prohibited from entering or leaving Paris, with the result that food and military stores in sizable quantities were collected at the Place de Grève, facing the Hôtel de Ville. Shortly after dawn, a huge crowd converged around the Hôtel des Invalides, Paris's military hospital and compound, demanding that the governor provide them with the weapons inside. When the demand was refused, the crowd stormed the building and carried off 28,000 muskets and ten cannon—while the Invalides guards passively stood by their artillery without firing a shot. Nor did the governor of the Invalides dare to call upon the troops encamped nearby, at the Champs de Mars, for assistance; he had been advised by their uneasy officers that they were completely unreliable.

But if the crowd acquired sizable numbers of muskets and cannon from the Invalides, the building was lacking in powder and shot—and powder and shot were what they now desperately needed. Rumor had it these military stores could be found in the Bastille. This fourteenth-century prison-fortress, whose eight rounded towers rose some seventy feet above the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, was equipped with eighteen imposing cannon that, even now, were trained on

the city's insurrectionary eastern *quartiers*. At the same time that the Invalides was being besieged, other Parisians, intermingling with sympathetic soldiers, began to converge on the fortress, which had been heavily reinforced with artillery and garrisoned by Swiss soldiers. At ten o'clock in the morning, four deputations from the new Commune at the Hôtel de Ville tried to negotiate the Bastille's peaceful surrender with its commander, the confused Marquis de Launey, asking him to withdraw his ominous cannon from the parapets and then allow the Commune's militia to take custody of the fortress. De Launey was totally incapable of dealing with the situation that faced him. Alternating between craven cowardice and mindless belligerence, he behaved with incredible indecision. His cannon were first pulled back, then reappeared, only serving to infuriate the poorly armed crowd outside the fortress.

In retrospect, it seems evident that de Launey had no intention of surrendering the Bastille. In any case, the people outside the fortress realized that they had to take it by storm, if they were to gain it. Around two o'clock, two men managed to get into the inner courtyard of the fortress, smashing the drawbridge pulleys, and the huge doors fell open with a crash. Immediately, shooting broke out between the crowd and the garrison, even while the Commune delegation was futilely asking de Launey to surrender. In the late afternoon, around three-thirty, a former sergeant in the French Guards, one Pierre-Augustin Hulin, hearing cannon fire from the Bastille, decided to lead a contingent of French Guards and several hundred civilians to the fortress. Well-equipped with muskets and some four cannon, they reached the Bastille, only to be joined by another column of armed citizens, under the command of a Lieutenant Jacob Élie. Firing their cannon directly into the fortress gate, the two columns surged over the lowered drawbridge into the Bastille, followed by other armed besiegers, and forced its surrender at five o'clock. De Launay, while escorted from the Bastille, was summarily killed by the crowd near the Hôtel de Ville, and his head was impaled on a pike, together with the head of Jacques de Flesselles, a royal municipal authority whose apparent attempts that morning to misdirect the crowd away from arms stores had aroused popular suspicion. The entire conflict claimed the lives of some ninety-eight assailants of the Bastille and perhaps two or three of its defenders.

The fall of the Bastille marked the climax of the insurrection of July 13–14. At the same time, it abruptly marked the end of royal tyranny in France and validated the shift of power to the National Assembly at Versailles and to the new Commune of Paris.

The *journée*, or "day," as the French revolutionaries were to call their eventful insurrections, could not have been won without the support of the troops in the capital, or at least their benign neutrality. Within the French Guards, the mutinies at the company level in early June were soon followed by the outright participation of entire regiments in the popular uprising. The authorities, for

their part, had been irresolute and senselessly provocative even when it was apparent that the people had won the battle in the capital. The "bourgeoisie" were characteristically prudent. They mistrusted the people even more than they mistrusted the monarchy, an attitude, as time was to show, that surfaced throughout the Revolution.

THE PARISIANS

Who were the people who made this insurrection? A list of 954 of those who were subsequently awarded the title "conqueror of the Bastille" records the professions of 661 of them. To judge from this list, they came from a distinctly preindustrial world. The great majority were artisans, including joiners, cabinetmakers, locksmiths, and engravers, as well as more or less casually employed men. They included cobblers, gauze weavers, wine sellers, jewelers, hatters, nailsmiths, monument masons, tailors, dyers—in all, 332 artisans and nondescript workers. What might pass for "bourgeois" included a few tradesmen, small-scale manufacturers such as the brewer Santerre who hired workers for his enterprise, together with a variety of merchants and rentiers. To the insurrectionaries, we might also add a large contingent of soldiers and a number of officers. We have no way of knowing the financial status of these "conquerors," and among the artisans it is impossible to distinguish between masters and journeymen. Since the majority (425 out of 602) came from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, the most radical neighborhood or *quartier* of the Revolution, they might well have been the kind of people who later became the more radical elements of the famous *sans-culottes*—the men in long trousers instead of knee breeches—and the bare-armed laborers, or "*bras nus*."

Like the yeomen and artisan Levellers in the English Revolution or the backcountry farmers in the American Revolution, the artisans of Paris were often fiercely independent, took immense pride in their skills, and were very self-reliant and expressively individualistic. The ownership of property in their eyes seems to have simply meant that they enjoyed a measure of personal freedom from the vicissitudes of the market and from the servility inculcated in unskilled workers, who could be easily hired and fired by an unfeeling employer. They had no commitment to what we would call socialistic views; property, to them, was a means of assuring their independence from employers and other figures in authority. By the same token, they viewed unwarranted privilege and excessive wealth as heinous. There were also many poor, even economically destitute *sans-culottes* who had nothing to lose in participating in, even stirring up, *journées*, which often approximated to food riots. This nascent, as yet unformed, proletariat of *bras nus* in the closing years of the Revolution found its

most articulate spokespersons in the *enragés* of 1793 (a French word that can be variously translated as "enraged men," "madmen," or "fanatics," depending on one's political persuasion) and the various revolutionary societies that mushroomed in the slum areas of the cities.

Although Albert Mathiez contends that the attack upon the Bastille was a typically Parisian *journée*, Jacques Godechot notes that "most of [the participants] had only recently become Parisians; if we study the references to their birthplaces, we find that 345 of them came originally from the provinces,"[8] especially from the North and Northeast. Having moved to Paris from rural villages and towns, these people lived in cultural tension between the slower rhythms and natural surroundings of rural life, and the faster, seemingly artificial pace of city life. They would have been inclined to favor a fairly egalitarian society of provincial craftspeople and farmers, who traditionally enjoyed the competence and freedom to create their own chosen lifeways. During the Revolution their sense of independence, whether real or imaginary, would guide them toward a fairly decentralistic social structure and an economy based on intimate ties between buyers and sellers—in short, toward a direct democracy based on a moral economy rather than a representative republic structured around profit-making and acquisition.

Using the sobriquet of *sans-culotte*, a document of April 1793 describes this kind of artisan as

> a man who goes everywhere on foot, who has none of the millions that you would like to have, no châteaux, no valets to serve him, and who lives quite simply with his wife and children, if he has any, on the fourth or fifth floor [in contrast with the well-to-do, who lived on lower floors]. He is useful because he knows how to plow a field, how to use a forge, saw, and file and cover a roof, how to make shoes and to fight to the last drop of his blood for the safety of the Republic. . . . In the evenings, he goes to his section [that is, his neighborhood assembly] not powdered, perfumed, and manicured so that the citoyennes in the galleries will notice him, but to support sound resolutions with all his might and to crush the abominable faction of the governing men of state [*hommes d'état*]. When he is at rest, a *sans-culotte* always keeps his sword sharpened, so that he can clip the ears of those who wish him ill.[9]

As Gwyn A. Williams observes, the term *sans-culotte* became "a concertina word"[10] that could expand to include people who did not fit this description, like the wealthy brewer Santerre and even the carpenter Duplay, who never deigned to sit at the same dinner table as his men and earned 10,000 to 12,000 livres from his rents. At the other extreme, the word could include utterly impoverished revolutionaries like Pierre Ducroquet, a radical who could barely find clothing for his newborn baby and was 700 livres in debt when he was executed.

Between these two extremes, the small-propertied *sans-culotte* of independent means cherished the Spartan virtues and strong collective identity of the craftsman. Such people would eventually form the radical working class of Paris well into the 1860s and 1870s, until they were supplanted by a more regimented industrial proletariat who had become disciplined by a highly rationalized factory routine. The later *journées* of the French Revolution were fueled no less by this small-propertied or highly skilled *sans-culotte* than by the desperately poor who, under the pressure of demoralizing economic need, seldom rose beyond a food riot or else fell easy prey to oratorical demagoguery.

Like *sans-culotte*, the word *peasant* too became a "concertina word," encompassing well-to-do capitalist farmers at one extreme and landless laborers at the other. But for the most part, the French peasant who owned a small plot of land was little more than a subsistence farmer and still had to work as a day laborer or rent a leasehold to make ends meet. Like the urban artisan, the peasant also valued property, more as a means to a modestly good life than as a springboard for wealth and power. During the Revolution, he too sought to attain his independence by gaining a secure if modest competence to meet the needs of his family year round. He tried to obtain material security, but, unlike his urban cousin, he hoped to find it by preserving traditional collective village practices by which his community shared draft animals, plows, and common lands. For him, part of attaining security meant eliminating the seigneurial privileges that allowed the nobility to grind him into the dust, and freedom from the rapacious royal tax-gatherers and engrossing capitalist farmers who threatened his traditional way of life. From this immense population of peasants came the great *jacqueries* that effectively shredded the remnant feudal order of privilege—and placed a powerful brake on capitalist agriculture.

Nor were the prerogatives of the nobility the only source of French popular anger. The artisan and the peasant alike detested the feudal privileges retained by the masters of closed guilds, and by self-serving and patently hypocritical bishops. They deeply resented the slights that the wealthy of all strata inflicted daily on their "inferiors," as if they were less than human. No less did they detest the centralized state, with its military officers, bureaucrats, and officials of all kinds who bore down heavily on all the lower strata of French society. The centralization of the previous two centuries, they saw or implicitly understood, undermined their time-honored customs of communal autonomy and self-rule.

Similarly, the typical small artisans and peasants bitterly hated the encroachment of capitalism on their traditional lifeways. The free market, so widely lauded by the Physiocrats and the king's comptroller-general, set them adrift in an increasingly atomized and fearfully insecure world. Many corporate features of France's quasi-feudal ancien régime were still popular desiderata: a master craftsman was at least expected to see to the welfare of his workmen and servants, however much he honored this responsibility in the breach. The

Church, however oppressive and parasitical, was expected to care for the sick and helpless and provide education for the poor. Guild masters were obliged to care for their apprentices and journeymen, and villages as a whole were expected to care for their infirm or impoverished residents. Capitalism, at least in the commercial towns, threatened to shred these time-honored relationships, offering in their place the cold indifference of a free market economy without any public responsibility. Both artisan and peasant were placed at the mercy of heartless employers, grain hoarders, speculators, and land-grabbers, who ruthlessly raised prices during food shortages and profited enormously from the misfortunes of the poor. And since nearly half of an artisan's income might go on bread for himself and his family, any inflated prices that followed grain shortages could be completely devastating.

Hence, economically and even culturally, the *sans-culottes* and the peasantry tended to lean toward traditional forms of economic life, more redolent of the Middle Ages than of modern times. The urban masses demanded price controls, the distribution of grain to feed the hungry population, and an active concern for social welfare, while the poorer peasantry and the landless rural workers favored measures designed to restore the common lands that the nobility and rural bourgeoisie had expropriated. Although none of these demands was opposed to private property as such, they implied a hostility to extremes of wealth and poverty—ideas that were expressed in liberal interpretations of Rousseau and even by Robespierre and Saint-Just in the final weeks of their rule.

In the towns and cities of France, the basically traditional economy that existed in the eighteenth century generated an intensely social way of life, with a sense of community in urban *quartiers* and rural villages that still haunts the popular imagination of our own communally desiccated society. The Faubourg Saint-Antoine, which surrounded the Bastille, throbbed with human activity, discussions, peddlers hawking their wares, children playing games, women shouting to each other or to passersby from windows overlooking streets and alleys, beggars and prostitutes intermingling with ordinary workmen and even bourgeois with modest incomes, a multitude of open retail stores, workshops, apothecaries, notaries, bakers, greengrocers, and wineshops that were filled with people after working hours who played cards, gossiped, discussed, and in times of social upheaval laid plans for *journées.* Here news was exchanged, peppered with exhortations to action. Here, too, newspapers and pamphlets were fervently read aloud to the illiterate as well as individually in silence. The streets and wineshops of the *quartier* became the lived forums of the Revolution where, during a *journée*, the tocsin would be sounded, alarm guns fired, and drums beaten, calling the people to insurrection. With one out of three inhabitants unemployed, the Saint-Antoine became the easily ignited source of the great *journées* and the public arena of its most radical egalitarian demands.

NOTES

1. Albert Goodwin, *The French Revolution* (London: Hutchinson, 1953; New York: Harper Torchbook 1966), p. 28.
2. Quoted in William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 74.
3. Counsellor Sallier, quoted in Albert Mathiez, *The French Revolution*, trans. Catherine Alison Phillips (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), p. 26.
4. Mathiez, *French Revolution*, p. 34.
5. Madame de Staël quoted in Mathiez, *French Revolution*, p. 36.
6. Goodwin, *French Revolution*, p. 49.
7. I have reconstructed the events of July 14 from several sources, including Jacques Godechot, *The Taking of the Bastille* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), pp. 187–8; and Christopher Hibbert, *The Days of the French Revolution* (New York: William Morrow, 1980; published in Great Britain under the title *The French Revolution* (Allen Lane/Penguin Books, 1980)), pp. 65–6. Whether Desmoulins, whom Hibbert treats unsympathetically, raised one or two pistols is difficult to determine. Contrary to legend, it was not Desmoulins's speech that sent the people marching to the Bastille.
8. Godechot, *Taking of the Bastille*, p. 222.
9. "Réponse à l'impertinente question: Mais qu'est-ce qu'un Sans-Culotte?" in Walter Markov and Albert Soboul, eds., *Die Sansculotten von Paris: Dokumente zur Geschichte der Volksbewegung, 1793–1794* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1957), p. 2.
10. Gwyn A. Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes* (London: Edward Arnold, 1968), p. 19.

CHAPTER 17 The *Journées* of 1789–1790

As the news resounded throughout Europe, indeed in many of its remote towns, the fall of the Bastille seemed for millions to usher in a new historical era. Nearly all thinking people waxed enthusiastic, celebrating in fervent prose and poetry the heroism of the Bastille "conquerors" and planting liberty trees, where they could, as symbols not only of the victory over tyranny in France but of a historic step toward liberty for the entire world.

Still, not everyone's heart was gladdened at the news. Terrified by the events of July 14, many French nobles, led by the Count of Artois, fled in a steady stream out of the country and settled abroad. These numerous aristocratic *émigrés* subsequently devoted themselves to turning back the revolutionary tide. As for the king, two days after the fall of the Bastille, he was still considering suppressing Paris by force, a plan that his minister of war advised him was impossible given the uncertain loyalty of his army. The queen brightly suggested that Louis flee northeast to Metz, where he could reconvene the Estates General under the protection of troops loyal to himself. Although Louis would have readily escaped the uproar of his unruly capital, he feared the possibility of repeating all the blunders of his English predecessor, Charles I, who lost his head in the throes of an earlier revolution. Once again, his minister of war discouraged the queen's plan, warning that he could not guarantee the royal family's safety traveling through a countryside in the throes of revolutionary upheaval.

Finally, seeing no alternative, the king acceded to the implacable facts that he confronted and withdrew the troops at Versailles and the military cordon that ringed Paris. He deigned to inform the delegates in the National Assembly, which was jubilant at this concession, that he planned to undertake no military moves against the body. Paris, too, naively greeted this news with enthusiasm and Parisians turned out in masses, wearing the revolutionary emblem: the tricolor cockade of red and blue—the traditional blue and red colors of the city—and white, the color of the Bourbons. The Assembly was now secure from the threat

of dissolution. Even the judges of the *parlements*, who had recently urged counterrevolution, quietly bowed to its authority. The delegates thereupon set about their primary task, which was to draw up a constitution for France based on the *cahiers* and prevent a resurgence of despotism and feudalism.

Significantly, the sixty Parisian district assemblies, initially a creation of the old regime, continued to meet daily at the Hôtel de Ville, providing remarkable evidence that a seemingly ad hoc civic institution of the past could transform itself into a revolutionary institution of the present and future, a lesson that modern radicals, in fact, have yet to absorb. Following the fall of the Bastille, the electors chose Jean-Sylvain Bailly, the president of the Assembly, to be mayor of the city, while the Permanent Committee of Paris named the Marquis de Lafayette commander of the new National Guard—that is, of the militia. This important appointment transformed Lafayette into a mediator between the king, the Assembly, and the people—a role he apparently relished in his aspirations to become the George Washington of France.

PROVINCIAL REVOLTS

In the provincial towns, the assumption of sovereign authority by the National Assembly led to the nearly complete collapse of the ancien régime's centralized infrastructure. The fall of the Bastille and the establishment of the Commune in Paris revived with new fervor the antioligarchical ferment that had erupted during the elections of the Estates General. Municipal revolts swept across the country; as Michelet tells it, everywhere "the people go to the communal house, take the keys and assume power in the name of the nation."[1] In some towns, the change involved a peaceful broadening of the basis of municipal authority as in the case of the Parisian districts; in others, change meant the establishment of a Permanent Committee as well as special committees to address problems such as food shortages. The first order of business of the Permanent Committees was to establish a municipal militia or National Guard to guard against counterrevolution and to maintain order, which entailed taking over local arsenals and whatever weapons were needed to safeguard the Revolution.

In some towns it was the electors of the Estates General deputies who chose the Permanent Committee; in others it was a general assembly of the citizens, as at Dijon, Montpellier, and Besançon. Typically, the members of these new committees tended to come from the property-owning strata, not from the poorest townsfolk, but a precedent for recreating new and broader sovereignties was being created that would also serve radicals as the Revolution moved to the left. Few of the old royal administrators dared to put up much resistance; indeed, the intendants typically fled their offices. But in some towns, like Strasbourg and

Amiens, the old order was more intransigent, and a rising of the people was necessary to quell royalist resistance. When existing municipal corporations failed to meet the townspeople's demands for price controls on food, they would invade the Hôtel de Ville and forcibly expel the old authorities, replacing traditional institutions and their officeholders with more democratic forms and personnel. Once again, the unreliability of the army made these changes possible. At Strasbourg, for example, royal troops looked on passively as the Hôtel de Ville was sacked by demonstrators. By such various means did the vast local officialdom of the ancien régime—from the loftiest intendant to the lowliest bureaucrat—withdraw from the places they had occupied, causing the collapse of the central authority. Effectively, France was now decentralized: the new municipal governments agreed to accept the decisions of the Assembly, but only with the proviso that those decisions accorded with the wishes of the local population.

Meanwhile, the rising price of bread in Paris had produced a highly volatile urban populace, beleaguered by fears of imminent counterrevolution and conspiracies to create famine. Edgy nearly to the point of panic, Parisians once again erected barricades in the streets of the capital. When the lieutenant-mayor of Saint-Denis refused to lower the price of bread, they chased him through the streets and decapitated him. A reactionary minister who speculated in grain and had allegedly declared that the people should eat hay was lynched, and his son-in-law, the intendant of Paris, was murdered for making similar statements. As a deputy from Paris lamented, the city had "no more army and no more police," while Bailly, the mayor, ruefully acknowledged that "everyone knows how to command but nobody knows how to obey."[2]

As for the peasantry, the Assembly delegates at Versailles had assured them that their needs would soon be addressed, and for a few weeks the peasants' hopes remained high. But when the Assembly procrastinated, the patience of the peasants wore thin. Not only was the countryside suffering from rising feudal payments, but it had known bad harvests from 1788 into 1789, creating near-famine conditions in certain rural communities. Bread prices soared until they were twice as high in the countryside as in the towns (where the price was carefully controlled), with the result that peasants crowded into the towns to obtain bread at lower prices. Once there, the municipal revolts they saw inspired them to follow in the tow of urban dwellers, and they now surrounded manor houses, brazenly shooting the pigeons of their seigneurs in manorial courtyards. Indeed, throughout France, peasants tried to retrieve seigneurial title deeds to the land, upon which feudal dues had been based, and often burned the hated documents on the spot. Seigneurs who refused to hand over the documents risked the very real likelihood that peasants would burn their manor houses (a common practice, in fact). Nor were landlords alone targets of peasant fury: millers and prosperous farmers suspected of hoarding grain saw their premises plundered and burned as well.

By late July and early August, a panic swept the countryside as rumors spread that the aristocratic *émigrés* who had fled France after July 14 were scheming, if not returning, to abolish the Assembly, awakening fears that foreign states were on the brink of invading France to restore Louis to his former sovereign status. Perhaps most fearful of all was the belief that aristocrats were inciting roving brigands to despoil crops and wreak havoc in the countryside. Although many starving beggars had indeed been reduced to thievery, this "Great Fear," as it was called, that swept the countryside had no foundation in fact; nevertheless, the peasants established protective village associations in ever larger regions of the countryside, and, as Michelet observes, these associations

> confederated against the stewards, collectors, managers, attorneys, and bailiffs . . . against those troops of pillagers, who were [supposedly] overrunning France, people starving for want of work, beggars turned thieves, who, at night, cut down the grain, even when unripe, thus destroying hope. . . . All the villagers armed, and promised each other mutual protection. They agreed among themselves to unite, in case of alarm, at a given spot, in a central position, or one commanding the principal passage by land or by water.[3]

Finally, in late summer and early autumn of 1789, the peasants launched a full-scale assault on privilege: they openly reclaimed enclosed lands, refused to pay feudal dues, and now began in earnest to burn châteaux, abbeys, and tax offices and destroy whatever feudal records they could find. In effect, a widespread *jacquerie* spread over the land, a veritable peasant war that buoyed up the Revolution—even as it frightened many of its middle-class spokesmen. In some places, the urban oppressed made common cause with their peasant brothers: in Lyon, for example, town laborers, the *bras nus*, joined the peasants against their allied enemies, the noble and bourgeois strata of the city. Typically, the largely bourgeois National Guards, guided by the permanent committees, used force to put down the peasant revolt—as, for example, in Beaujolais, but not until the peasants had burned seventy-two manor houses.

"DEFEUDALIZATION"

If the Assembly looked with favor on the revolts in the towns because the bourgeois civic leaders exhibited a prudent respect for property, they were blatantly horrified by the peasant revolts and even passionately advocated their repression. To many nobles, the peasant uprising boded an agrarian civil war. As their châteaux went up in flames, they recognized that if they were to save any of their property, at least nominal concessions were called for. Indeed, the Breton

Club, composed of deputies from Brittany to the National Assembly, shrewdly planned what was to be hailed as a spontaneous and memorable event: an official, seemingly disinterested dismemberment of the feudal privileges that the peasants had in fact already largely achieved with their pitchforks and scythes. On the night of August 4, one nobleman after another, including ranking members of the clergy, rose at the Assembly and, with high emotion and rhetoric and theatrical expressions of self-sacrifice, voluntarily renounced their ancient seigneurial rights and privileges "on the altar of the nation." The clergy gave up their tithes, and the nobles surrendered their hunting and fishing rights and their immunity from taxation, eschewing the purchase of judicial offices and governmental sinecures. "The people is at last trying to cast off a yoke which has weighed upon it for so many centuries past," exulted the canny Duke of Aiguillon, one of the wealthiest of all the landowners. "Though this [peasant] insurrection must be condemned . . . an excuse can be found for it in the vexations of which the people has been the victim."[4] These staged self-immolations continued until two o'clock in the morning, with the nobles cheering each other's self-denial for privileges that the peasants had already abolished, and mutually congratulating one another with tearful embraces.

In reality, in the week that followed August 4, the Assembly, in the course of recasting its revolutionary assertions into legislative decrees, preserved many aspects of the old order. While it abolished personal servitude, for example, it required the state to compensate the nobles for the loss of feudal dues related to the land itself. Not only did it mandate state reimbursement, but it allowed feudal dues to be levied as they always had been during the interim, even upholding the unproven and hotly contested principle that the landlords were the original owners of peasant holdings, without any serious regard to the existence of title deeds. Thus, when it came to legislative practice, the renunciations of August 4 were often honored in the breach.

The initial response of the peasantry to the Assembly's "abolition" of the feudal regime was typically one of naive exultation. The peasants were all too prone to accept mere declarations of the regime as established fact. But as rents continued to be collected, the evident speciousness of the "defeudalization" decrees quickly disabused them of their enthusiasm. Indeed, little seemed to have changed from the old regime, apart from the abolition of clerical tithes. Thereafter, for three torturous years, the peasants would have to continue to struggle, often fruitlessly, to gain Assembly acceptance of their legitimate claims, and during that time they would rise up again and again, even after each uprising was quelled by National Guards from the towns. Not until the Assembly was replaced by the Legislative Assembly and, later, by the relatively radical Convention would feudal rents finally be completely abolished.

Yet innocuous as the Assembly's "defeudalization" decrees proved to be, the king vetoed them. Worse still, he proceeded to veto the Declaration of the Rights

of Man and the Citizen, which the Assembly had completed on August 26. The Declaration was a keystone document of the Revolution. It expressed philosophical principles that broadly reflected the wishes expressed in the *cahiers* and was intended as the preamble to a new constitution. Upholding law above arbitrary power, the Declaration essentially inventoried basic "natural rights" and inalienable rights, such as those of individual liberty and security, freedom of speech, and trial by jury, affirming the right to resist oppression and thereby legitimating all the revolutionary events of the previous six months. All men, the Declaration said, were "equal in [these] rights"; indeed, reflecting the doctrines of the Physiocrats, property, too, was an "inviolable and sacred right" on which social life was based.

Of equal importance, the Declaration upheld the sovereignty of the nation, as opposed to the supremacy of the king. Louis had previously been "Louis, by the grace of God, King of France and Navarre," which had implied that France was his personal property; after October 10, when the Constitution was adopted by the Assembly, his title was pointedly changed to "Louis, by the grace of God and the Constitution of the State, King of the French," a far less proprietary formulation according to which monarchical authority was derived from the sovereign nation: that is, the people. The King of the French could be their leader, never their feudal lord. By vetoing the document, Louis laid down a gauntlet to the Assembly, indeed to the Revolution itself, that not even the most moderate of the deputies could ignore.

THE MARCH ON VERSAILLES

Such royal stupidity and arrogance created the seedbed for another *journée*; indeed, one that was to have far-reaching consequences. Throughout September, the Assembly continually requested that Louis overturn his vetoes of the August "defeudalization" decrees and the Declaration, which the king adamantly refused to do. To add fuel to this incendiary situation, in mid-September, Louis, ordered the loyal Flanders regiment to be transferred to Versailles, where it arrived on September 29. This flagrantly counterrevolutionary act aroused such popular fears that even Lafayette, whose views were fairly moderate, demanded that the regiment be removed. Moreover, the sixty Parisian districts and the Commune reinforced the marquis's sentiments with similar demands, none of which had any effect on Louis's behavior. As if to exacerbate all of their suspicions, two days after the arrival of this regiment Louis's personal guard feted the officers of the Flanders regiment with a sumptuous welcoming banquet at the palace's Opera House in Versailles. What should have been a purely ceremonial affair, presided over by the king and queen, turned into a

heady royalist demonstration. Flushed with wine and counterrevolutionary fervor, the officers of the newly arrived regiment arrogantly tore off their tricolor cockades and replaced them with Bourbon white, while the courtiers and ladies who filled the large chamber serenaded Louis with royalist airs.

Rumors in Paris variously described this as a "royalist plot" or "orgy," and were all the more inflammatory because they surfaced at a time of severe bread shortages in the city and lengthening lines for food. Popular opinion had long blamed the near-famine conditions in the capital on counterrevolutionaries and speculators, and the sixty Parisian districts were obliged to ask the National Assembly for an explanation for the high prices. Camille Desmoulins once again mounted a table at the Palais Royal, this time demanding that the king move from Versailles to Paris, where he could be kept under the surveillance of the people. Newspapers such as Jean-Paul Marat's *Ami du Peuple* (Friend of the People), in turn, called upon the Parisian districts to arm themselves, march on Versailles, and bring the entire national government—including the Assembly—back to the capital.

On October 5, hundreds of market and working women of Paris, fishwives and prostitutes, stormed the Hôtel de Ville to gain arms. Then, as a young girl beat a tattoo on a drum, they set out to march the fifteen miles to Versailles. This *journée*, the first since July 14, was expressly intended to demand bread from the king and to punish those who had dishonored the tricolor cockade. Others in the crowd demanded the removal of the royal family to Paris. Bearing pikes, scythes, pitchforks, and muskets, some six thousand women—interspersed with sympathetic men—resolutely marched along the road to Versailles despite a heavy downpour. Lafayette, commander of the National Guard, prudently refused to participate in the march unless he received the approval of the Paris Commune; indeed, it was not until after dusk that he set out with some twenty thousand National Guards along the road the women had taken hours earlier.

The women arrived at Versailles at around five o'clock, swarming into the Assembly, where the delegates were debating the king's constitutional status. The king himself was hunting, and when he heard the news of the *journée* he considered fleeing, then hesitantly agreed to receive a small deputation of the women. He answered their demand for bread with facile expressions of sympathy, even declaring in writing that he would take appropriate steps to furnish Paris with flour. With the arrival of Lafayette who subserviently promised the king that he would preserve and expand his remaining powers, Louis reluctantly agreed to accept the "defeudalization" decrees and the Declaration of Rights. Once the king told the Commune delegation that he would consider moving to Paris, the crisis seemed to be over; ironically, in fact, even the Flanders regiment was fraternizing with the crowd.

At dawn, however, some of the women came upon the body of a workman whom a royal bodyguard had apparently killed during the night. Enraged by

what they took to be the murder of one of their own kind, they invaded the château, racing through its courtyards and up its staircases. A group shouting "Death to the Austrian! Where is the whore?" broke into the queen's bedroom, only to find it empty; the "Austrian whore," as Marie Antoinette was contemptuously called, had fled only a few moments earlier to her husband's quarters, leaving her bed to be shredded by the angry women. Elsewhere, encounters between the armed women and the troops claimed the lives of several royal bodyguards. To put an end to the fighting, Lafayette showed himself to the crowd at the window with the royal couple, only to be greeted by shouts of "The king to Paris!" Denied any choice by now, the king announced that he would depart with them. Hostages to the crowd of armed women, the king and queen, along with their two children and governess, entered a royal carriage and were led away by the National Guard along the muddy road to Paris, followed by wagonloads of wheat and flour and by the disarmed Flanders regiment. Behind this train came a hundred or so deputies of the National Assembly in their own carriages. All were received in Paris by a huge crowd that conspicuously cried "*Vive la nation!*" rather than "*Vive le roi!*" The procession installed the royal family in residence—more precisely, for all practical purposes, under house arrest—in the Tuileries Palace, and ten days later the Assembly too officially moved to Paris, where it took up quarters in a former riding school, the Manège, near the Tuileries.

This *journée* marked a turning point in the Revolution. For two long years, Louis would live as a captive of deeply mistrustful Parisians; indeed, the National Assembly ordered six National Guardsmen to follow him everywhere, under close supervision. Shortly after his removal from Versailles, the Constitution of October 10 was adopted, which turned France into a limited constitutional monarchy, divesting the king of all his autocratic powers. Although the Constitution granted Louis 25 million livres a year to pay a civil list of bureaucrats and administrators, he could neither initiate legislation nor personally dispose of public funds. Beyond these administrative functions, the Constitution gave him a "suspensive veto": that is, the power to suspend for four years the execution of laws that the Assembly had passed.

Louis's acceptance of the August 4 decrees and his new role as a constitutional monarch had been brought about only under the threat of crowd violence. Nor did many believe that his agreement was wholehearted. To the contrary, increasing numbers of people viewed the king as a source of obstructive vetoes, sinister plots, and outright treachery to France. If anyone prepared the way for the establishment of a French republic, it was the fatuous monarch, his wife, the court cabal, and royalist counterrevolutionaries, who unrelentingly resisted the wishes of an increasingly radicalized people.

THE NEW GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE

If the revolution could be said to have a "bourgeois" phase—"bourgeois" in the sense of an amorphous middle class of professionals, tradesmen, *rentiers*, officials, and small-scale manufacturers as distinguished from a definable self-conscious capitalist class—it began when the full National Assembly gathered at its permanent quarters at the riding school.

The October Constitution that had just been adopted by the National Assembly divided France into eighty-three departments (*départements*) of roughly equal size and population, each of which was further subdivided into districts, cantons, and communes. The old semimedieval provincial France was abolished. Ancient municipal, corporate, and provincial privileges—privileges that had survived Richelieu and Mazarin—were no more, nor were there to be *bailliages* and *généralités*, *pays d'État* and *pays d'élections*. Where people in some provinces had previously been governed by Roman law and others by customary feudal law, they would now all be subject to what was basically Roman law, and all would pay the same taxes. Prized traditions of provincial autonomy were erased, and distinctions between Provençals and Dauphinois and Bretons were subsumed under the all-encompassing national category of "French". The Constitution imposed on France a purely legal and territorial grid, within which France remained relatively decentralized in that each department could function juridically very much on its own; nor in the departments were there any royal agents to execute the arbitrary wishes of the monarchy.

Formally speaking, the new Constitution embodied the egalitarian notion that since "the law is the expression of the general will," "all citizens have the right to co-operate in its formation, whether personally or by their representatives." But some citizens were plainly more equal than others. The same document went on to draw a distinction between "active citizens" and "passive citizens," who differed in the number and kind of rights they could exercise. "Active citizens" were those who possessed "political rights"; that is, they could actively participate in public life. A small fraction of the total population, they were the educated stratum that had a modest livelihood, adequate leisure, and paid taxes equal in value to three days of labor. Only they could become members of the National Guard. By contrast, "passive citizens" were people who possessed no property and were uneducated or illiterate; as ordinary laborers and servants, they enjoyed only "civil rights," such as fair trials and freedom of expression, and did not possess the franchise or right to hold public office. Thus, only about four million out of twenty-six million qualified as "active citizens."

When it came to actual voting, the new Constitution enshrined yet another distinction, creating an oligarchy within the oligarchy it had established.

Although only active citizens who paid taxes on *ten* days of labor were granted the right to vote, the electoral system was frustratingly indirect. Active citizens met in primary assemblies in the major town of their canton (only the better-off could afford the journey) and chose electors to a secondary or electoral assembly, which, in turn, met at the capital of the department and selected National Assembly deputies, judges, bishops, and other officials. Deputies to the National Assembly could be elected only from those who paid taxes equal to at least a "silver mark" (about fifty francs) and owned some land, so that a mere fifty thousand men in the entire country were eligible for membership in the National Assembly. Maximilien Robespierre and Jean-Paul Marat, the future leaders of the radical Jacobins, protested the system, while Camille Desmoulins, who also played a major role in the Jacobin Club, acidly observed that Rousseau could not have held office under this Constitution.

The two-stage system for election to the National Assembly was carried over to the departmental level, with the result that each departmental government was run by a council of thirty-six elected by the departmental electoral assembly. At the level of the communes, however, the new local regimes, created by the summer municipal revolts, sought to preserve the popular structure of village communities and towns. Unlike the old provinces, towns and parishes retained their traditional boundaries and were simply renamed communes. But the summer municipal revolts had produced a variety of local forms of self-government that the National Assembly found distasteful, and in December 1789 it passed a decree that restructured the communes along uniform lines based, in each case, around three essential bodies, all of which were elected by active citizens: a mayor and municipal officials; the general council of the commune; and the town clerk.

These changes did not prevent the towns from remaining hotbeds of political activity. Indeed, as Mathiez observes, "it was above all the intense activity of its municipal life which gave revolutionary France its resemblance to free America."[5] The old oligarchs had fled during the summer revolts, and each town now constituted an electoral assembly. All remnants of the old three-Estate system were stripped from the constitution of local assemblies, as they "may not be formed according to crafts, professions, or corporations." As the December 14 municipal decree stated, communes could be structured "only according to quarters or arrondissements"[6]—that is, by residence; hence, unlike the indirect voting at the higher levels of government, voting in the municipalities was direct. In larger towns, the decree noted, "where there are several special assemblies of active citizens, such assemblies shall be regarded only as sections of the general assembly of the town or community" (Article 18). Thus, in all the large cities of France, neighborhood sectional assemblies became the bases for municipal life. Lyon and Marseilles, for example, each had thirty-two sections, Bordeaux, twenty-eight, and Toulouse, fifteen, all of which exercised control

over the central municipal authority in their respective towns. "In towns with more than twenty-five thousand inhabitants the sections, like the cantons in the country districts," Mathiez tells us, "had permanent officers and committees, and could hold meetings which controlled the action of the central municipality."[7]

Moreover, the communes had the right to deal not only with local affairs but with matters of national concern. "The communes," continues Mathiez,

> possessed extensive powers. . . . They had the right to call out the National Guard and the troops. They enjoyed a wide autonomy under the inspection and supervision of administrative bodies which sanctioned their financial enactments and audited their accounts. The mayor . . . might be suspended, but the municipal assembly could not be dissolved.[8]

In effect, about 44,000 autonomous local authorities blanketed France, many in the form of citizen assemblies or sections.

In the years that were to follow, these sections and communes became increasingly democratic and radical:

> At the outset the mayors and municipal officers were chosen from the rich middle classes, but they were far more exposed to the constant pressure of the people than the departmental and district directories, so that in 1792, and especially after the declaration of war, a certain lack of harmony was apparent between the communes, which were rather more democratic in character, and the administrative bodies, which were more conservative.[9]

Indeed, as we shall see, the communes and sections formed the bases for a radical popular, face-to-face democracy—a municipalist democracy—that, in Paris at least, was to challenge the centralized nation-state.

THE FEDERATIONS

The formation of confederal structures can be dated back at least to the time of the "Great Fear" in the summer of 1789, when the towns of various provinces such as Franche-Comté and Dauphiné formed confederations with each other in common defense against "brigands" and aristocrats. Thereafter, towns continued to confederate, partly to evoke the feeling of fraternity that the Revolution had promoted as a spiritual expression of its social goals. Federations of towns within a single province soon formed federations with those of other provinces, to affirm their sense of common citizenship. In February 1790,

for example, delegates from Anjou joined hands with delegates from Brittany to swear that they were "neither Angevins nor Bretons, but citizens of one and the same community."[10] The federation of Franche-Comté, Burgundy, Alsace, and Champagne, says Mathiez, was "carried out amid a patriotic exaltation which assumed a religious character."[11] Partly civil and partly military, these celebrations were attended by representatives of the various provincial National Guards—the *fédérés* or federals—who swore to uphold the new social order, enforce its laws, and suppress disorder.

In the year after the fall of the Bastille, federation became "the new religion" of a France that abhorred centralization and royal despotism. On the first anniversary of July 14, provincial federations fused together temporarily into a national federation in Paris that was marked by an enthusiastic national celebration known as the *Fête de la Fédération.* Contingents of National Guards from the eighty-three departments poured into the capital in a huge amphitheater on the Champs de Mars, where, despite a heavy downpour, thousands assembled with raised banners to the music of a twelve-hundred-piece orchestra to reaffirm their solidarity and revolutionary commitment. After Lafayette swore on an altar to uphold the Constitution and be faithful to the nation, the crowd of deputies, Guardsmen, and spectators in turn shouted the same oath: "I swear it!" When the king and queen themselves took the oath, the crowd cheered them wildly, after which all departed singing "*Ça ira,*" the lively and authentically popular song of the Revolution.

THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

This show of unity, however, barely concealed the major social and political differences that persisted in France, as could even be seen in the seating arrangement of the National Assembly itself. Facing the tribune on the left were the more radical deputies, who pressed for further limitations on the monarchy, far-reaching economic and political reforms, and the abolition of all status ranks. The seats on the right were occupied by monarchist and conservative deputies who dreaded the danger to authority and stability that came from the revolutionary people and strongly believed that the monarchy should have greater authority to hold the country in tow. From this time onward, the terms *Left* and *Right* became part of the vocabulary of modern politics.

But the number of those who sat on the right was relatively low, in great part owing to their own lack of organization and to the headlong emigration of monarchists, which gave the Left considerable leeway in making drastic changes in French society. It made them with alacrity. Accordingly, the Assembly abolished the *parlements* and replaced the hereditary judiciary of the ancien

régime with a graduated system of tribunals independent of the king, accountable only to the sovereign nation. Judges had to be elected and draw their salaries from the state; torture was abolished as a hated relic of medieval barbarism.

Perhaps the National Assembly's most radical economic acts at the time concerned the Catholic Church, the largest landowner in France. In November the Assembly confiscated all the landed estates of the Church, without compensation, and auctioned them off to raise funds to avert the immediate bankruptcy of the state. Presumably, these confiscated lands were meant to underwrite interest-bearing treasury bonds—or *assignats*, as they were called—which later became the legal paper currency of the realm.

Having already abolished the Gallican Church's corporate status, feudal prerogatives, independence, tithes, and landed estates, the National Assembly now forced the Church to yield to another innovation. French kings had long enjoyed the prerogative of choosing Gallican bishops, but in July 1790 the Assembly established a Civil Constitution for the Clergy that brought the Church completely into accord with the principles of the Revolution. It stipulated that thenceforth all clerics, bishops and priests alike, were to be elected by active citizens, that is, by the laity, and the salaries of the clerics were now to be paid by the state, essentially reducing the clergy—formerly a separate estate of the realm—to civil servants. The number of bishops was significantly reduced in each department, and the contemplative monastic orders were disbanded as parasitic. Finally, the Civil Constitution forbade clerics to acknowledge the supremacy of the pope, who was now seen as a foreign monarch, thereby severing the ties of the Gallican Church to Rome. It was with great reluctance, indeed, that the king was obliged formally to approve the Civil Constitution on August 24, 1790.

For many of the clergy, this drastic change was an abomination. Reactionary traditionalist bishops who had accepted civil changes by the Assembly flatly refused to acknowledge the validity of the Civil Constitution. The Assembly, in turn, by no means oblivious of the fact that coercion would be necessary to reform the Church, required all clerics to take an oath to uphold the new Civil Constitution on pain of losing their benefices. Only seven bishops and about 54 percent of the lower clergy took the oath, and these mainly in Paris, and in Dauphiné, Provence, and the Pyrenees. In the western departments, the clergy overwhelmingly refused, opening a schism between so-called "constitutional" clergy, who took the oath, and "refractory" clergy, who refused, that was to widen into an irreconcilable rupture with enormous consequences for the future of the Revolution. Indeed, the Civil Constitution became the basis for a more widespread counterrevolution among devout peasants than anything the aristocratic émigrés could generate, but in 1790 neither open counterrevolution nor radical *journées* were as yet the order of the day.

NOTES

1. Jules Michelet, *History of the French Revolution*, abridged ed., trans. Charles Cocks, ed. Gordon Wright (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 434.
2. Christopher Hibbert, *The Days of the French Revolution* (New York: William Morrow, 1980; published in Great Britain under the title *The French Revolution* (Allen Lane/Penguin Books, 1980)), p. 92.
3. Michelet, *History of the French Revolution*, pp. 435–6.
4. Quoted in Albert Mathiez, *The French Revolution*, trans. Catherine Alison Phillips (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), p. 53.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
6. "Decree Establishing Municipalities," December 14, 1789, article 7, in John Hall Stewart, ed., *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), pp. 120–7.
7. Mathiez, *French Revolution*, p. 90.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 89, 90.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
10. Quoted in Hibbert, *Days of the French Revolution*, p. 112.
11. Mathiez, *French Revolution*, p. 55.

CHAPTER 18 *Journées* toward the Republic

The Left in the National Assembly following the fall of the Bastille was by no means republican, still less radical. It was composed largely of constitutionalists, who accepted the monarchy as an indispensable part of the new government, and its deliberations were guided by prudent lawyers who tilted toward fairly conservative views. Far more liberal—even radical—were the elected officials in the municipalities, whose constituencies were more open to public scrutiny and pressure than departmental officials or Assembly deputies.

The authentic radicals of this period could be found in the Cordeliers district, on the Left Bank of the Seine. Perhaps the most militant district in the capital and a major propaganda center of the Revolution, the Cordeliers played a strategic role in awakening public consciousness in favor of a republic. Led by the ebullient lawyer Georges Danton, who presided over the district's assembly, as well as other fervent leaders of the Revolution who also lived and worked there, it became at once a center and a protective haven for radicals throughout the city. Jean-Paul Marat moved to the district for a time to seek refuge from the police, and it was here that the printer Antonio Momoro's press published some of the most incendiary pamphlets of the period. Here, too, the famous Café Procope attracted some of the Revolution's ablest journalists, intellectuals, lawyers, and artists, continuing a tradition that dated back to Molière and Diderot. Finally, most of the radical publishers were located in the district: the Cordeliers was home to Desmoulins's newspaper *La France Libre* and the older *Révolutions de Paris*, among others of the same fiery genre.

The Cordeliers district had led all other districts in the *journées* of the preceding years. In the summer of 1789 it issued fierce denunciations of the king's gathering of troops in Paris, and in the *journée* of October 5 it petitioned Lafayette's National Guards to follow the women to Versailles. This activity was due in no small measure to the head of the Cordeliers district, Danton himself. Gargantuan in build, richly endowed with oratorical gifts, Danton helped to establish perhaps the most vigorous example of a militant direct democracy, at least of active citizens. "Danton realised the political capital to be made out of appeals to local autonomy and denunciations of municipal despotism," observes Norman Hampson in his biography of the revolutionary leader.

> He was the inventor of what were to become the tactics of every radical group fighting for its place in the sun: the basis of all authority was the local meeting which claimed to reflect the direct democracy of the sovereign people, even if, in fact, it stood for no more than a militant minority. As far as possible, all power was to be located in such gatherings, and when concerted action on the Parisian scale was necessary, it should be taken by the spontaneous co-operation of the Districts (and later, of the Sections), communicating their resolutions to each other and electing *ad hoc* executive committees as necessary. All men elected to any higher body were to be delegates, not representatives, the mere agents of the Districts and subject to instant recall. Throughout the Revolution this was to be the programme of the men at the bottom.[1]

The French were by no means unaware of the grassroots popular network created during the American Revolution—the great committee "engine," as John Adams called it. Indeed, from the outset of that revolution, committees and assemblies had formed throughout France, comparable to the American Committees of Correspondence, Committees of Safety, and conventions, on which the districts and later the sections depended for their effectiveness.

The sixty electoral districts of Paris had essentially become permanent neighborhood assemblies of active citizens, many of which were gadflies for the less radical National Assembly, which had transformed itself into a Constituent Assembly to write a constitution, and later the Legislative Assembly that followed the constitution's adoption. In June 1790, the reticent municipal authority, fearful of the districts' radicalism, persuaded the National Assembly to diminish their influence by reducing them to forty-eight sections in the vain hope that the fewer their number, the more controllable they would be. Unlike the districts, whose origin stemmed from the election of the Third Estate, these new sections were the creation of the Assembly, and as such the Assembly sought to define and limit their powers as it saw fit. Participation in sectional assemblies, it stipulated, would remain legally open only to active citizens. (Each section ranged from seventeen hundred to eighteen hundred potential participants.) A section's assembly meetings were to be circumscribed: it could meet only to elect officials or when fifty members requested a meeting. Perhaps naively, right-wing deputies probably congratulated themselves "on decimating certain of the 60 electoral districts which had begun to function as centres of popular radicalism," observes William Doyle.[2]

But the various clubs and revolutionary societies, especially those in the Cordeliers district, campaigned vigorously against the change, and although

they lost, the reorganization and name changes—the Cordeliers district, for example, was renamed the Théâtre-Français section—failed miserably to have their intended effect. The new sectional assemblies still claimed a wide latitude of political authority; indeed, in practice the distinction between active and passive citizens was honored less and less as time went by. Danton's formidable political machine continued to influence not only the other sections of Paris but the nation as a whole. In fact, almost from the start, the new sections jealously upheld their own autonomy and developed a critical stance not only toward the National Assembly but toward the fairly conservative Paris Commune at the Hôtel de Ville. As early as September and October 1790 many of the sections voted to censure the ministers for conniving with aristocrats, a proposal that Danton himself brought to the National Assembly. Although it was defeated, the vote was so close that all the ministers but one resigned.

Still another reason why the sections remained powerful and became increasingly radicalized was the growing influence that the new popular clubs and societies exercised on the people of Paris. One of the most important clubs that was to play a major role in the events of the Revolution was the Society of Friends of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, formed in the summer of 1790 and located in an old Franciscan monastery on Cordeliers street in the Théâtre-Français area of the Left Bank. Not to be confused with the old Cordeliers district, it generally became known as the Cordeliers Club and proved in time to be an action group rather than a debating society, dedicated to protesting the grievances of the poor and voicing some of the most radical goals in the Revolution. According to the founding Cordeliers charter, its "main object is to denounce before the tribunal of public opinion the abuses of the various authorities, and every sort of infringement of the rights of man."[3] An eye was imprinted on the club's public papers, symbolizing a "vigilant eye" always on the alert to detect the misdeeds of elected representatives and officials. The club famously conducted investigations into abuses, drew up petitions for redressing malfeasances, and played a leading role in mobilizing popular demonstrations.

The Club drew no distinctions between active and passive citizens, and its membership fee was kept very low (only two sous a month) so that the poor, as well as shopkeepers and artisans, could join it. Significantly, unlike many other clubs in Paris, the Cordeliers also opened its doors to women. During the winter of 1790 and 1791, in fact, fraternal societies that were in sympathy with the Cordeliers were formed throughout Paris, and by May 1791 the Cordeliers formed a confederation with other clubs that was linked by a central committee. As Mathiez observes in his history of the French Revolution:

> Their ideal, borrowed from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, was that of direct government. They held that the constitution and even the laws should be subject to the ratification of the people, and they were not slow to express their distrust of the oligarchy of politicians which had replaced the oligarchy of nobles and priests.[4]

By the end of 1790, the Cordeliers in Paris numbered a thousand members, who constituted themselves into a highly democratic vanguard of the Revolution, making the Club a major propelling force in the drift toward the Left.

In contrast to the Cordeliers, the Jacobin Club was initially quite moderate, even rather elegant. Formed in the earliest days of the Revolution under the name of the Society for the Friends of the Constitution, its meeting rooms were located in the Jacobin monastery, hence the clerical name. Deputies of all political shades attended Jacobin meetings at one time or another. Although by no means a club of the Left in its early days, the Jacobins maintained a confrontational stance that reflected a wide spectrum of revolutionary public opinion, as Desmoulins grandiously observed:

> Not only is it the grand inquisitor which strikes terror in the aristocrats; it is also the great accuser, redressing all abuses and coming to the aid of all citizens. It is, indeed, as though the club exercised the functions of a public prosecutor to the National Assembly. In its bosom are poured out the grievances of the oppressed, which come to it from every side before being taken before the august assembly.[5]

Indeed, after October 1791 the debates of the Jacobins were opened to the public, and very often the club's galleries were filled to overflowing. More so than the Cordeliers, who remained largely Parisian, the Jacobin Club was replicated throughout the provinces until some four hundred clubs formed a network across France, with which the Parisian society maintained a close correspondence, sharing publications, ideas and strategic advice and spreading its political ideas.

If the societies exercised increasing influence on the sectional assemblies, the sectional assemblies, in turn, continually tried to extend their powers, despite attempts to restrict them. Thus, even before May 1790, Paré—who became president of the Cordeliers district after Danton abandoned his role in it for national office—denied that the Paris Commune's police had legitimate authority to search for Marat, who was hiding in the district at the time. The district, in effect, claimed the sole right to arrest malefactors in its territory, a claim that openly flouted the authority of the Paris Commune itself.

In fact, by the summer of 1790, the mood in Paris and in France was anything but placid. After a year, the Constituent Assembly, it became clear, had failed to deal with the needs of the urban poor and the peasantry. The popular song "*Ça ira*"—to which radicals had added the line "Let's hang the aristocrats from the lanterns"—created panic among the aristocrats of the city, with the result that carriages of nobles heading for the frontier could be seen daily in the streets of

Paris. No one doubted that an outright royalist counterrevolution was being plotted to restore the king and the Church to their former status. *Jacqueries* continued to flare up in the countryside as peasants, who refused to pay feudal dues after the August 4 "defeudalization," repeatedly invaded seigneurial forests and game parks and destroyed the hated châteaux that had dominated rural life for centuries.

Once again, enough tinder was accumulating so that the Revolution needed only a spark to ignite it—and that came, surely enough, from the king, his "loyal clergy," and the pope.

THE FLIGHT TO VARENNES

On April 13, 1791, the pope formally instructed the Gallican bishops not to take the oath for the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, an order that the radicals were only too eager to challenge. Anticlericalism, always popular in the political clubs and the theaters, now increased in intensity among the people, who burned the pope in effigy, invaded convents, and prevented the refractory priests from conducting mass. In the church of Saint-Sulpice, for example, whose *curé* was refractory, an invading crowd ordered the organist to play "*Ça ira*," which they sang menacingly together with the panicked congregation.

The king, never at peace with the Civil Constitution, patently regretted he had signed the document; and Paris, ever mistrustful of his behavior, grew still more suspicious of his intentions after he helped his aunts, who were also his close advisers, to journey to Rome in February 1791 to discuss the affairs of the French Church personally with the pope. Louis was accused of taking communion from a refractory priest, for which outraged Parisian pamphleteers called him a traitor to the nation. By now, Parisians were so incensed toward the monarchy that when Louis tried to leave the capital to spend Easter Week at Saint-Cloud, a hill overlooking the city, a crowd actually prevented the monarch's carriage from moving. With good reason, they were convinced that he planned to escape abroad to organize a counterrevolution with the *émigrés* and invade France at the head of a foreign army. Indeed, so numerous were antiroyalist and anticlerical riots in Paris that Lafayette sent the National Guards rushing around the city in a fruitless effort to suppress them.

The Constituent Assembly could do little to calm the situation. Exacerbating popular fears of a counterrevolution were serious economic dislocations that made Paris more restive than at any time since July 1789. Unemployment was rising, earnings were declining, and workers and journeymen were in a dangerously sullen mood. The Assembly's abolition of guilds in March 1791 had freed working people, especially carpenters and blacksmiths, to organize for

higher wages, which, with the support of the popular clubs, seemed to portend a wave of strikes for a minimum wage. But the Assembly, horrified by this prospect, promptly passed the notorious Le Chapelier law on June 14, which prohibited workers from forming any associations—what would later be called trade unions—on the excuse that any economic combinations were redolent of feudal corporations. The law, which was to remain in effect well into the next century, deprived workers of the right to strike. Ironically, Le Chapelier, who had proposed the bill, had been a leading radical and a founding member of the Jacobin Club, but by 1791 he decided that the course of the Revolution had to be slowed down because popular emotion threatened to render it uncontrollable.

To allay popular suspicions that the king was trying to elude the people's surveillance (and possibly to protect him), hundreds of National Guardsmen were dispatched to stand guard around the Tuileries. In fact, as the summer of 1791 approached, the king and his closest advisers had laid detailed plans for him to flee with the royal family to Montmédy, on the Luxembourg frontier. There, Louis hoped to gain the necessary military support from *émigrés* and the Austrian emperor, Leopold, Marie Antoinette's brother, to undo all the achievements of the Revolution. Finally, on the night of June 20, the king and queen, their two children, and an entourage consisting of the king's sister, two seamstresses, and the children's governess slipped out of the Tuileries through an unguarded door and left Paris in a large, heavily laden carriage, accompanied by a cabriolet for the royal servants. Traveling incognito toward the frontier with imprudent dilatoriness, they arrived four hours late at Pont de Somme Vesle, where the escape plan called for the royal party to meet up with a cavalry escort. But these plans misfired completely. By the time the carriage arrived, the escort that was assigned to accompany them had withdrawn because it had aroused suspicion among the local peasants who, fearful that the troops were there to collect overdue rents for a local landlord, menacingly threatened them with pitchforks.

As the party continued unescorted to Sainte-Ménehould, it could not remain unnoticed for long. The postmaster of the town, who recognized the king from his picture on the *assignat*, excitedly rushed to Varennes, the next town along the route, raising the alarm over the entire countryside. By the time the royal carriage reached Varennes, the entire town came out to intercept the escapees. Like the many blunders that marked his reign, Louis's attempted flight had failed because of an arrogant disdain for his opponents—his carriage was slowed down to a leisurely pace once it left the environs of Paris—and the royal family was escorted back to Paris under guard. The people came out to witness his return in sullen silence. Louis had left behind a written statement abjuring the Revolution and his previous endorsements of its acts and condemning the Constitution, which outraged revolutionaries all over the country. The king's position as head of state was now completely untenable. On June 24 the

Cordeliers Club, backed by a crowd of thirty thousand, presented a petition to the Constituent Assembly demanding that it either depose the king or hold a referendum on his fate. Talk of republicanism, considered heinous two years earlier, now became open, and the symbols of royalty were desecrated throughout the capital.

To add to all the mishaps that plagued Louis's flight, the Emperor Leopold of Austria issued an arrogant circular note from Padua calling upon the European powers "to vindicate the liberty and honor of the Most Christian King and his family, and to limit the dangerous extremes of the French Revolution."[6] An Austrian invasion, with or without Louis at its head, seemed imminent, and French military forces, ranging from the local National Guards to the army, were mobilized on a war footing.

The Constituent Assembly now found itself in a hopeless dilemma. France without a king seemed unthinkable to many of its deputies, and a republic would require the writing of a new constitution to replace the one that had just been so painstakingly completed. Moreover, the deposal of the monarch would almost certainly, it seemed, invite invasion by foreign powers as well as vindicate republican demands for basic changes in the state. With the typical awkwardness of moderates in a searing revolutionary situation, the Assembly resolved to preserve the unpreservable monarchy. Two days after the flight, it issued a patently false statement that the king had been kidnapped by royalists and that his compromising statement had been coerced from him by sinister advisers. But no one believed the story. The Cordeliers militantly protested against the whitewash, as did other radical clubs throughout France, but Louis remained king. The Assembly, for its part, temporarily deprived him of his constitutional functions and took over the power of the executive for itself, issuing decrees without royal approval.

None of these actions served the Constituent Assembly well among the Parisian masses. Indeed, the firmly republican Cordeliers prepared another petition calling for a republic, and called upon the people of Paris to sign it by placing it upon the Altar of the Nation in the Champ de Mars—the site of the 1790 *Fête de la Féderation*. On July 17 a crowd of fifty thousand gathered in the parade ground. Some six thousand had signed it when two suspicious men were discovered hiding under the altar; the surly crowd decided they were spies and hanged them. Bailly, the mayor of Paris, used the lynching as a pretext to declare martial law and called out the National Guard, to which Lafayette responded with alacrity. The marquis, apparently eager to disperse the crowd, marched to the Champs de Mars with the mayor and his mainly bourgeois troops. When the Guard raised the red flag of martial law, the crowd greeted them with stones and a few shots. After they refused to disperse, Lafayette ordered his troops to fire several volleys point-blank into mostly unarmed people, and when the smoke cleared, fifty people were lying dead on the parade ground.

With the massacre of the Champs de Mars, the popularity of Lafayette and Bailly came to a definitive end. Lafayette and his circle of members, who favored retaining the monarchy, withdrew from the Jacobin Club, of which they had been members, rather than sign a petition demanding the overthrow of the king, and formed a new club that met at the former convent of the Feuillants. All the Jacobin deputies to the National Assembly departed with them. Maximilien Robespierre, who stayed behind, managed in effect to keep the club from dissolving completely by holding together a handful of wavering republicans. Indeed, all that remained of the Jacobins were its Left elements, which Robespierre and his supporters rebuilt, in time, into a powerful political machine.

The Constituent Assembly, in turn, used the Champ de Mars massacre to launch an attack not upon the royalists, who had supported the king's flight, but the growing number of republicans in the capital, who were outraged by it. Using a law against so-called "tumults" that had been passed as early as October 1789, municipal authorities and police were unleashed on antiroyalist revolutionaries. The radical presses and newspapers that had supported republican views were closed; radical leaders were arrested and tried in the hundreds; and generally, every effort was made to intimidate known republicans. Thereafter, the Assembly passed a law—unanimously, except for Robespierre's dissent—restricting freedom of the press for those who "deliberately provoke disobedience to the law" or "disparagement of the constituted powers and resistance to their acts."[7] Danton was obliged to flee from the city and take refuge in England, while Marat, whose newspaper had raged against the royalists, hid in the cellar of the Cordeliers Club.[8] Desmoulins, Santerre, and other vocal Cordeliers were placed under proscription and went into hiding.

The new Constitution, which had yet to be completed, was made more moderate. It removed the Civil Constitution of the Clergy from the document, thereby allowing refractory clergy to support the Constitution and enabling the Constituent Assembly's successor, the Legislative Assembly, to modify it, if it so chose. Still another change raised property qualifications for voting for Assembly deputies so high that only the fairly well-to-do could exercise the franchise. With these amendments, Louis agreed to sign the new Constitution and, despite his flight to Varennes, was officially restored to the throne.

THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY AND EUROPEAN WAR

The old National Constituent Assembly disbanded, having completed its labors, and a new Legislative Assembly convened on October 1, 1791. Since deputies to the former assembly were excluded from becoming deputies to the latter, the

membership was entirely new and consisted largely of lawyers and the bourgeois elements of the period. The largest single political bloc in numerical terms was the royalist Feuillants. They expressly called for the loyalty of the king to the changed Constitution, reconciliation with the refractory clergy, and the return of the *émigrés*. But the Feuillant bloc, despite its size numerically, was still a minority in the new Assembly—and a diminishing one whose uneasy members and supporters were trickling into foreign exile.

Far more influential than the Feuillants, on the whole, were the leftists, mainly lawyers, journalists, and merchants, who constituted a new type of radical. They were extremely ambitious and eager to mouth revolutionary slogans to gain popular support. These young people and their supporters were generally known as Brissotins; not until later would they acquire the more familiar name of Girondins. Led by Jacques-Pierre Brissot, a gifted orator and a prolific author and pamphleteer, the Brissotins dominated the Assembly with their skillful leadership. In contrast to the royalists' views, their platform called for a war against the *émigrés*, who were gathering in cities near the French frontier, and, if necessary, with European monarchies who protected them. This demand was basically tactical: a war against the enemies of the Revolution, the Brissotins emphasized, would force the king to work with the Legislative Assembly, heighten patriotic fervor, and rally the country around the Revolution. "Do you wish at one blow to destroy the aristocracy, the refractory priests, the malcontents?" cried Brissot. "Then destroy Coblenz [the center of *émigré* military activity]. The head of the nation will then be obliged to reign in accordance with the Constitution."[9] A war, Brissot argued, would also spread the principles of the Revolution, fomenting civil conflicts against tyrants in other European countries.

The Jacobin deputies, for their part, were divided over the issue of war, although their divisions had little immediate impact. Their authority lay with their club, which was shifting to the Left, rather than in the Assembly. Indeed, the various clubs and popular societies were now developing into an extra-parliamentary political sphere of considerable power in Paris, particularly in the forty-eight Parisian sections. Economic shortages and rising food prices during the spring of 1792 had given a new impetus to the growth of radical societies, which now began to parallel the sectional assemblies. As Goodwin observes;

> Pétion, who replaced Bailly as mayor of Paris in November, Danton, as assistant deputy of the town clerk, and Robespierre, as public prosecutor of the department of Paris, did much to extend the power and influence of the municipality and to develop the activity of the political clubs. It is significant that the most vital issue of foreign policy at this time—war or peace with Europe—was fought out as much in the Jacobin club as in the Legislative Assembly, and that the most important issue of domestic politics—the fate of the monarchy—was decided by the Parisian sections.[10]

Moreover, the prospect of war was very popular in the provinces. Peasants still saw very little change in their situation. Although their noble landlords might reside in Savoy or Coblenz, their agents still remained in France and exploited the peasants as much as before. The redistribution of the Church lands had been neither thorough nor equitable, producing growing rural unrest and even armed peasant revolts.

The war fever in the countryside and among the Brissotins notwithstanding, however, the French army was in no way prepared for what might well become a major European conflict. Most of the army's erstwhile officers had deserted to various *émigré* centers, and its regular troops were demoralized, undisciplined, and disorganized, lacking equipment, weapons, and ammunition. The risks opened by a war would be enormous: well-equipped foreign armies could decisively defeat the Revolution, and even if France were victorious, such a conflict could easily lead to a military dictatorship at home. Both Marat and Robespierre insightfully foresaw these dangers and spoke out strongly against the war fever generated by the Brissotins—but to no avail, as events soon revealed.

The queen and the *émigrés*, on the other hand, welcomed a war and the prospect of a foreign invasion. Indeed, Louis, not surprisingly, brought several pro-Brissotin ministers into the royal council, including the vain and ambitious but able General Charles-François Dumouriez. At length, Louis declared war against Austria on April 20, 1792, with the enthusiastic assent of the Assembly. Three months later, Prussia allied itself with Austria and declared war against revolutionary France.

Almost from the outset, the war went badly for the French, who, after advancing into Belgium, were obliged to retreat precipitously toward Lille, while still another force fell back on Valenciennes. For their part, the Brissotins were rapidly losing credibility in the capital, while the war had the effect of raising Robespierre's star owing to his bitter criticisms of the king, the war, and the Brissotins.

Yet on one matter the Brissotins at least had been correct: the war revealed the hatred of the monarchy for the Revolution. Almost openly, the king and queen of France sided with the enemy, and rumors abounded among the people of machinations by the queen on behalf of Austria. With good reason, she was accused of providing Vienna with intelligence, and her alleged "Austrian Committee" in the Tuileries was popularly blamed for the defeat in Belgium. As it turned out, Marie Antoinette had actually disclosed the plan for the French military campaign to the enemy, which, after the behavior of the royal couple became known, could lead to nothing but the end of the monarchy.

THE *JOURNÉE* OF AUGUST 10

In the early summer of 1792, faced with military defeats and fearing treachery in the Court and army, Paris was reaching a state of revolutionary fervor comparable only to its mood on July 14, 1789. The polarization of the country between even constitutional monarchists and republicans was now acute. As French armies rolled back toward Longwy and Verdun, Lafayette frantically rushed from the front back to Paris to rally the Assembly in support of the king and quash the Jacobin Clubs immediately. The once-moderate marquis was apparently planning a military coup to restore order, perhaps to abet the king in another flight out of the country. The Assembly received Lafayette coolly, its suspicions reinforced by the fact that he was neglecting his troops in the face of a Prussian advance, and he despondently returned to the front. Reports of pro-Austrian plots in the court and among refractory priests in the provinces filled Paris with alarm, pushing public sentiment increasingly in a republican direction.

On June 8, 1792, the Legislative Assembly passed a decree summoning twenty thousand *fédérés*, or provincial National Guards, to Paris for the annual *Fête de la Féderation* on the third anniversary of Bastille Day. These *fédérés* were expected to free up the regular troops in the capital for service at the front. Around the same time, the sectional assemblies of the capital petitioned the Assembly to abandon the distinction between active and passive citizens at their meetings and allow them to meet every day—in permanent session. They also requisitioned a large number of pikes for general distribution to citizens, even though carrying weapons was still a privilege officially reserved to the National Guard.

As the month drew to an end, the sections carried out a demonstration against the king on June 20, that is, on the anniversary of the Tennis Court Oath. In view of the economic crisis that the war was creating (rising prices had already caused widespread food riots), some ten thousand Parisian *sans-culottes*, both women and men, illegally armed with pitchforks, muskets, and pikes, gathered in the eastern faubourgs, and then invaded the Tuileries with petitions against the king's veto of Assembly decrees and his recent dismissal of several popular ministers. The crowd chopped down doors of the palace with hatchets and even dragged a cannon up a staircase. Behind a smashed door they found Louis, wearing a red *sans-culotte* bonnet. Although the monarch calmly refused their demands, the new mayor of Paris, Pétion, persuaded the crowd to leave the palace after it became clear that Louis would stand firm on behalf of his royal prerogative.

Finally, on July 11 the Assembly tried to convey the full sense of danger that faced the country from its foreign and *émigré* opponents, proclaiming a national state of emergency. At the urging of the sections, which felt that the resources of the nation should be completely thrown into the war effort, the Assembly called

the National Guards everywhere to arms. Within a few days, fifteen thousand Parisians had answered the call, and new battalions of volunteers were quickly formed. The Commune of Paris, in turn, decreed that all citizens who possessed pikes be drafted into the National Guard, thus opening its ranks to ever-lesser members of the social hierarchy. As *fédérés*, or National Guards from the provinces, began to arrive in the capital, Robespierre addressed them with the icy warning: "Citizens, have you hastened here for a mere ceremony, the renewal of the Federation of July 14?" The generals, including Lafayette, were deserting, he told them, and the Legislative Assembly "has been outraged and degraded, but [owing to its own inaction] has not avenged itself!" He then charged the *fédérés* with the sweeping—patently republican—task of saving the nation.[11] Within short order, petitions flowed into the Legislative Assembly, calling for the deposition of the king.

The celebrations of July 14 were observed without incident—and with no shouts of "*Vive le roi!*" Most of the *fédérés* prudently remained on in the city after the celebration lest counterrevolution rear its head, and their very presence in Paris proved incendiary. The *fédérés* overwhelmingly supported the demands of the sections; indeed, on July 17, they established a central committee of their own at the Jacobin Club to back up the radicals and *sans-culottes* in an insurrection against the king. The Cordeliers, in turn, openly called for a National Convention, so similar to the American conventions decades earlier, that would unseat the king and write a strictly republican constitution for France.

Meanwhile, in the sectional assemblies, the distinction between active and passive citizens had essentially disappeared. The Théâtre-Français section (formerly the Cordeliers district) officially initiated the distinction by opening its doors to all the underprivileged in the neighborhood. This democratization of the Théâtre-Français assembly was quickly emulated by other sections and finally validated by the Legislative Assembly itself. On July 25 the Legislative Assembly permitted the sections to meet daily, whereupon they officially went into "permanent" session. Moreover, many sections opened their National Guard battalions to former passive citizens, radically transforming the Parisian National Guard from a middle-class force into a *sans-culotte* militia. The irresolute Assembly, which did little to intervene in these changes, was patently losing control of the capital.

Amidst this steady flow of events, on July 28, Parisians awoke to a provocative manifesto from the Duke of Brunswick, commander of the enemy forces, in which he declared that his Austrian and Prussian armies would invade French soil to restore the king to his rightful place. Any National Guards who tried to impede the allied armies, the Duke warned, would be shot, and if the Tuileries were invaded again or the royal family harmed in any way, savage vengeance would be wrought upon Paris, reducing the city to rubble. Two days after the manifesto was published, it is worth noting, five hundred *fédérés* from Marseilles

arrived in Paris, after stopping to put down a royalist revolt at Arles, and were quartered in the old Cordeliers district. Marching through the streets, they sang Rouget de Lisle's stirring "Marseillaise," the intoxicating hymn that revolutionary organizations throughout the world were to adopt well into the next century.

Brunswick's declaration can be regarded as the turning point in the Revolution, the event that forced France to change from a constitutional monarchy into a republic. With fears of invasion running high and royalist plots abounding, the revolutionary Parisians had little doubt that the king intended to resist the Legislative Assembly and the sections, indeed to open the way for a foreign invasion that could establish his full control over the city. To head off this looming disaster, the sections and the *fédérés* were decided that they had to force the king to abdicate without delay.

Within the week, on August 9, delegates from the sectional assemblies arrived at the Hôtel de Ville and disbanded the old conservative Commune, replacing it with a new revolutionary municipality, the Insurrectionary Commune. The mayor was confined to his house under guard and the brewer Santerre was placed in charge of the National Guard. In response to protests by moderates against this action, the delegates flatly replied, "When the people place themselves in a state of insurrection, they withdraw all power from other authorities and assume it themselves."[12]

The insurrection had been thoroughly planned, and there is no reason to doubt that the Jacobin leaders, including Danton, had been complicitous in carrying it off. On August 10, the following day, the revolutionary Commune ordered its supporters to march on the Tuileries. To the sound of the tocsin, some twenty thousand armed *fédérés* and *sans-culottes* attacked the palace, and the royal family, warned in advance, fled to the nearby Legislative Assembly, which nervously agreed to protect them. With their flight, most of the remaining National Guard battalions that had been accountable to royalist sections shifted their allegiance to the insurrection. The Tuileries was now left to defend itself with only nine hundred Swiss Guards and a few hundred courtiers. The crowd tried to fraternize with the Swiss, but following a chance shot by one of their men, others opened fire and a fruitless battle ensued.

Crying "treachery," the Marseillais streamed into the palace under fire, cutting down everyone in sight. Of the Swiss Guards, who surrendered after their ammunition ran out, six hundred were massacred—while the insurrectionaries lost about four hundred. By the afternoon, they were in complete control of Paris. With the Assembly members fearful for their own lives, the king was surrendered and confined to a small prison known as the Temple.

This *journée* of the *fédérés* and *sans-culottes* sealed the fate of the monarchy, and marked the definitive end of the so-called "bourgeois" Revolution. Like it or not, the king had been dethroned, and the Constitution of 1791, so recently

completed, was abrogated. The *sans-culottes* had not only avenged the Champs de Mars massacre, but after playing a crucial role in *journées* that unseated the ancien régime, they now moved to the center stage of the Revolution and pushed it ever farther to the Left.

NOTES

1. Norman Hampson, *Danton* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), pp. 33–4.
2. William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 127.
3. Quoted in Albert Mathiez, *The French Revolution*, trans. Catherine Alison Phillips (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), p. 122.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
5. Desmoulins quoted *ibid.*, p. 77.
6. "The Padua Circular," July 5, 1791, in *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, ed. John Hall Stewart (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 221.
7. Christopher Hibbert, *The Days of the French Revolution* (New York: William Morrow, 1980), p. 155.
8. The story that Marat hid in the sewers of Paris and there contracted the nerve condition that produced his skin disorder is entirely apocryphal.
9. Quoted in Hibbert, *Days of the French Revolution*, p. 138.
10. Albert Goodwin, *The French Revolution* (London: Hutchinson, 1953; New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 97.
11. Quoted in Mathiez, *French Revolution*, p. 157.
12. Quoted in Hibbert, *Days of the French Revolution*, p. 154.

CHAPTER 19 The Sections of Paris

The triumph of August 10, 1792, produced an exuberance that infected nearly every aspect of Parisian life. The more affluent abandoned their powdered wigs and adorned clothing for the simple garb of artisans; jewelry and fans that depicted revolutionary scenes became fashionable; newborn infants were given names that reflected the revolutionary era. In conversation, *citoyen* (citizen) replaced *monsieur* (sire) as a form of address. The "Scythian" red cap (*bonnet rouge*), the ancient headgear of freed slaves, had already been a popular way of proclaiming fidelity to the Revolution; now, after August 10, various sections adopted it—"the red cap of freedom"—as the required headgear for their officials to wear. Indeed, it became a symbol of the sections' political power. Many sections once again changed their names, giving themselves more revolutionary appellations: the section Théâtre-Français now became the section Marseilles, while the section Place-Royale became the section des Fédérés, and the section Roi-de-Sicile became the section Droits-de-l'Homme. Nor was the republican fervor any less intense in the provinces. Upon hearing the news that the king was dethroned, army volunteers in the Vosges cried, "Long live the nation with no king!" while the Jacobins of Strasbourg demanded, "Long live equality! Down with the king!"[1]

Although many *fédérés* had participated in the invasion of the Tuileries Palace, "the dethronement of Louis XVI was, in fact, a victory above all else for the direct democracy of the Parisian sections," observes Albert Goodwin.[2] Up to this point, the sections had looked to the National Assembly for leadership and supported it during earlier *journées* with their armed strength. But the newly elected Legislative Assembly had not carried out the *journée* of August 10; indeed, its role had been hesitant and dilatory, and its passivity and ambivalence toward the uprising morally discredited it. The Insurrectionary Commune, a municipal body, coordinated the *sans-culottes* of the sections in overthrowing the monarchy.

As the vanquishers of royal treachery, the sections were acutely conscious that they had performed the culminating service to the Revolution and to the nation.

They had gone well beyond neighborhood, even municipal concerns, and viewed themselves, says Mathiez, "as the incarnation of the public interest and as having acted in the name of revolutionary France as a whole,"[3] or, in Doyle's words, "as the guardians and watchdogs of the new republic, and the arbiters of what it should stand for."[4]

By the same token, the new Insurrectionary Commune had gone far beyond the scope of the previous Paris Commune, which in the past had continually attempted to encroach upon the sovereignty of the sections by trying to "regularize" them, appoint their officials when it could, and limit the size of their committees and the range of their activities. The Insurrectionary Commune was the visible center of the sectional democracy. It contained twice as many members as the old Commune: where the sections had sent three delegates each to the old Commune, they now sent six, expanding the Insurrectionary Commune to a total of 288 members. All were elected on the basis of near-universal manhood suffrage. Moreover, the new members were politically more radical and less wealthy than their predecessors: although some were lawyers and professionals, most were small shopkeepers and artisans—that is to say, *sans-culottes.*

The new Commune was also more active than the old Commune had been; where the old Commune had met irregularly, the new one met daily. "The result," observes Goodwin, "was that the sectional representatives were now consulted at every turn on the smallest matters of administration, as well as on large questions of national policy."[5] Accordingly, the sections enjoyed an intense feeling of moral superiority over the Legislative Assembly. Not only did they play the leading role on August 10, but, while the Assembly delegates were regarded as less representative of the people—having been chosen through an indirect voting system with property restrictions on the franchise—the sections now voted for their officials directly without any limited franchise.

Nor was the sections' superiority over the Assembly merely moral: they also possessed a major military force in the capital. The National Guard was answerable to the sections and the Commune, while the Assembly, meeting in Paris, possessed no reliable military force by which it could defend itself from popular pressure. In 1792 and 1793, every man who could have been spared for a separate force like the National Guard was sent to the front, leaving the Assembly vulnerable to demonstrations and future *journées.* Nor was the National Guard necessarily eager to carry out the Assembly's will. No longer made up of the selected bourgeois soldiers of the kind who had fired on the petitioners at the Champs de Mars, it was now open to all citizens and consisted primarily of *sans-culottes* under Santerre's command.

The Legislative Assembly, in turn, despite its reluctance, was increasingly obliged to carry out the measures favored by the sections. On August 10, it decreed that "the classification of Frenchmen in terms of active and non-active

citizens was abolished,"[6] and it sent emissaries out to the provinces to justify the dethronement of the king to gain popular support for Louis's removal. In many of the provinces, this was not a difficult task: the communes outside of Paris were losing their largely bourgeois membership and becoming ever more radicalized. In Lyon and Marseilles, among others, Commune members had been discredited by their failure to solve the problem of scarce bread and high prices, leading to the outbreak of food riots. There "the lower middle classes and even the artisans," working through their local Jacobin clubs, "took the power into their hands."[7] On August 26 and 28 the Assembly abolished all the feudal landed dues that had remained, except where the landlord could produce an original title deed to the lands that the peasants tilled. It declared that all common lands belonged solely to the village communities, and directed that the lands of the *émigrés* be divided up into small lots. In a helpless position vis-à-vis the Commune, the Assembly futilely tried to assert itself on August 30 by issuing a decree dissolving the Paris Commune and calling for new elections. This decree was completely ignored by the Commune and sections, and the Brissotins had to withdraw it in ignominious embarrassment. The Insurrectionary Commune of Paris now stood at the head of the revolution, even of the armies and the provinces. As one radical Assembly deputy, Chabot, sternly warned his colleagues in the Assembly, "Never forget that you were sent here by the sans-culottes."[8]

THE SEPTEMBER MASSACRES

Hardly had the king's dethronement been agreed upon when the military situation seriously deteriorated; during the month of August, the French war effort at the eastern frontier took a severe turn for the worse. The now-despised Lafayette finally defected to the enemy in mid-August, as republicans had long expected; nor was he alone. Other army officers joined the royalists in exile and threw their support to the Austrians and Prussians. The older generals who remained in the French army could no longer be trusted, which left the revolutionaries without enough reliable commanders. Under the hated Duke of Brunswick, the Prussians captured the fortress at Longwy on August 23, after a resistance so brief that it was obvious that French treachery had assisted the invaders in their victory. A Prussian invasion of France now seemed imminent, stoking deep fears among the Parisian masses of royalist conspirators, Church spies, and the danger of a counterrevolution in the undefended capital.

A week later, on September 1, news reached the capital that Verdun was about to fall, together with reports that a counterrevolutionary uprising had taken place in the western department of the Vendée. Paris went into a frenzy. The

Commune decreed two days of house-to-house searches in which suspects were to be disarmed and their weapons given over to volunteers for the army. At its call, the newly armed volunteers assembled in the Champs de Mars before their departure for the front, where Danton gave a rousing speech—perhaps his most famous—summoning the country to fight heroically and audaciously—"*L'audace!*"—for its Revolution.

At the same time, two of the more popular newspaper publishers were demanding not only the defeat of the Revolution's enemies abroad but the extermination of those within Paris as well. Jean-Paul Marat had been engaged in populist politics through his own journal, *L'Ami du Peuple* (The friend of the people), since 1789, followed by Jacques-René Hébert, in his *Le Père Duchesne*, which demanded the most extreme measures against the Revolution's enemies. "*Nous sommes trahis*" ("We are betrayed") was Marat's constant cry, actually with greater accuracy than demagoguery about the realities of the situation at times. The betrayers that both Marat and Hébert singled out were variously the royal family, the Assembly, the Brissotins, and even moderates in the Commune. "In order to ensure public tranquillity," Marat warned, "two hundred thousand heads must be cut off."[9] By late August 1792, he flatly demanded: "Let the blood of the traitors flow. That is the only way to save the country"[10]—a demand that was not lost on the increasingly furious *sans-culottes.*

In particular, the enemies that Marat and others singled out were the prisoners in the city's jails, many of whom were detained political suspects, and it seemed only too obvious to Parisians that when the Prussian–Austrian invasion approached Paris, royalist plotters would throw open the prison doors to gain supporters for a counterrevolution. Not unreasonably, alarmed *sans-culottes* felt that this danger from within was all the greater because increasing numbers of volunteers were departing for the front, leaving the city itself defenseless. Indeed, in the first week of September, the fear of internal counterrevolution in the capital reached such frenzied proportions that it led—with or without planning—to what was to go down in the history of the Revolution as one of its most desperate acts. Large crowds began literally to butcher the city's prison population. The first to be killed were recalcitrant priests who were imprisoned in convents and seminaries, followed by hundreds of inmates in the city's jails.

The September massacres, as these rulings came to be called, continued for seven days, during which twelve hundred people—about half the entire prison population in Paris—were killed, either outright or after extremely summary trials. Perhaps no more than one-third of the dead were political suspects, priests, nobles, or speculators; most of those killed were common criminals, thieves, debtors, and prostitutes. Although the Commune tried to establish tribunals to try the prisoners, its efforts were largely ineffectual; indeed, Marat, who had helped to incite the massacres, was himself a member of the

Commune's vigilance committee, while one of the Commune's deputy commissioners, Billaud-Varenne, went to the prisons while the massacres were under way and encouraged them, exclaiming, "You are slaying your enemies! You are doing your duty!"[11]

The massacres ceased only after the popular hysteria ran its course. Yet terrible and deplorable as they were, they served to strike terror into the hearts of counterrevolutionary forces within Paris, upon whom Brunswick seems to have counted to capture and destroy the capital, and their very savagery inadvertently served to undermine any potential resistance to the creation of a republic.

THE CONVENTION

The idea of establishing a National Convention that would give France a republican constitution originated in the Parisian sections and the Jacobin Club. Although the Paris Commune tried to persuade the Assembly to agree to universal manhood suffrage in electing the Convention's delegates, the Brissotins, with the support of moderate elements, took pains to restrict the franchise. Accordingly, when the Convention finally assembled on September 20, the moderate and Brissotin members held the majority. Owing to the fact that many Brissotin leaders were elected from the Gironde department, the group now acquired the name of Girondins, who shifted from the Left in the Legislative Assembly toward the Right in the new Convention in reaction to the radicalization of the Revolution.

On at least one issue, the new Convention was virtually unanimous: the official abolition of the monarchy. This new social dispensation—the declaration of a republic—was heralded by establishing a revolutionary calendar in which September 22, when the Convention began to take up its historic tasks, was designated as the first day of Year One of the French Republic. Thereafter, very few were the tasks that the body carried out with general agreement among the members. A breach almost immediately opened up between two major factions: the provincial Girondins and the Jacobin Montagnards, who specifically represented Paris. Both favored the end of the monarchy and the establishment of the republic, but agreed on little else. The Montagnards, who now constituted the Left in the Convention, acquired their name because they occupied the upper benches of the Convention—hence the widespread use of the term "Mountain" to designate their deputies and the view they expressed.

That they had major differences became especially clear during the Convention's debate over the future of the king. The Girondins wanted to avoid trying Louis for his treacheries, while the Montagnards sought, and gained, a

trial for him, charging him with treason against the Constitution and the nation. After heated debate, on December 11 the Convention found Louis guilty, but having once condemned him, its members could not agree on his punishment: the Montagnards strongly favored a death penalty while the Girondins vehemently opposed it. Following a close vote favoring execution, Citizen Louis Capet—as the former king was now designated—was guillotined on January 21, 1793, an act of popular self-assertion against royalty that stunned Europe's upper classes.

Thereafter the two factions in the Convention began to attack each other bitterly, often over trivial as well as important issues. Underpinning the acrimony that separated them was the Girondins' fear that Paris was playing a decisive role in the Revolution—notably, the Parisian *sans-culottes*, the sections, and the Commune, whom the Girondins detested with unrestrained fury but upon whom the Montagnards, for their part, depended for support, together with the Jacobin Club, whose policies they seemed to echo. Indeed, nearly all the twenty-four delegates to the Convention from Paris were either Montagnards or Montagnard supporters, as well as Jacobins, most notably Robespierre, Danton, Marat, and Desmoulins. Presumably following Rousseau's notion of the "general will," they professed to constitute the will of the nation, which they patently identified with insurrectionary Paris. Thus, when rebellions against Paris later broke out in the provinces, the Montagnards were quick to designate the rebels as opponents of the national will, which, in the language of the day, they derogated as "federalism."

The Girondins, for their part, derived most of their support from the provincial cities—although they were not without supporters from Paris as well. Consumed with an intense hatred of the Insurrectionary Commune and Montagnard dominance, they often quite provocatively tried to undermine the prestige of the capital in the country at large, reducing its hegemonic role in the Convention, and later fomenting anti-Parisian and essentially anti-Jacobin revolts. Increasingly, the Girondins portrayed the capital as the victim of bloodthirsty, pike-wielding radicals who had either carried out or connived in the September massacres, now a *cause célèbre* for opponents of the Revolution. The Paris Commune, in turn, was depicted by the Girondins as a nest filled with "*anarchistes*," who, with the support of bloody lower-class ruffians, threatened to impose a tyranny on the nation as a whole.

The Girondins themselves were open to grave charges which the Montagnards eagerly exploited. In contrast to the Montagnard leaders, particularly Robespierre, they were primarily identified as the war party, having led the call for France to take up arms to maintain and spread the revolution. Such a charge would have carried no weight in the fall of 1792, when French revolutionary armies won their famously important victory over the Prussians at Valmy and occupied Savoy and Nice soon thereafter; indeed, on November 6, under

General Dumouriez, the French defeated Austria at Jemappes, and on the nineteenth, the Convention decreed that France would offer "fraternity and assistance to all peoples who wish to recover their liberty." A month later, the Girondins decreed that whenever French troops occupied a country, they would confiscate the property of the nobles and the Church and destroy feudal dues and obligations, a decree which was applied to Belgium the following month, in the wake of advancing French troops. In this respect, it should be noted, the Girondins were no less revolutionary than the Montagnards and the two differed very little in their basic principles—including a shared fear of the "*anarchistes*" in the poorest *sans-culotte* quarters of Paris.

But when the Girondin-controlled Convention declared war on Great Britain, then on the Netherlands, and Spain, France by March 1793 found itself at war with almost every major European power. The military tables that had favored the French armies now began to turn. With a British blockade that choked off France's economic life and with serious reverses on the northern front, the unfavorable military situation in Paris, at least, evoked growing hostility toward the Girondin deputies, who seemed to occupy most of their time pouring venomous scorn on the Mountain and its lower-class supporters in the capital. While the *sans-culottes* in the sections worked ardently to save the Revolution from foreign invasion—manufacturing and distributing pikes, constructing a camp for soldiers outside the city, enlisting more troops, and seizing weapons from suspects—the Girondins exhibited less concern about the war and more in bolstering their political advantage over the Montagnards. With extraordinary ineptness, they steadily infuriated the radical and powerful Parisian sections, which they targeted for unrelenting attacks.

It is arguable whether the differences in social principles between the loosely formed Girondin faction and the Montagnards, who were to be ecumenically called the Jacobins, were quite as basic as they seemed from the harsh Convention debates between the two. Brissot and Robespierre, who typified the membership of the two factions, belonged to the same Jacobin club in the early years of the Revolution. Both, too, were provincial lawyers, essentially of similar social backgrounds, with shared political values. Despite their populist rhetoric, the Montagnard deputies in the Convention were no less uneasy about the Paris Commune than were the Girondins; indeed, for a time, Robespierre and his associates were essentially its captives who simply required its support to preserve their parliamentary dominance. Differences in personalities may have played as much a role in the conflict between the two factions as secondary issues, such as the various power bases on which the two factions rested: on one hand the Girondins, in relatively moderate or conservative provinces; on the other the Mountain, in Paris with its extremely democratic sections, whose powers Robespierre was to eviscerate after the Girondins were defeated.

THE SECTIONAL DEMOCRACY

What, then, were these little-known forty-eight sections of Paris, where the more radical of the *sans-culottes* exercised so much influence on public affairs? How were they organized? And how did they function?

Ideologically, the *sectionnaires* (as their members were called) believed primarily in sovereignty of the people. This concept of popular sovereignty, as Albert Soboul observes, was for them "not an abstraction, but the concrete reality of the people united in sectional assemblies and exercising all of their rights."[12] It was in their eyes an inalienable right, or, as the section de la Cité declared in November 1792, "every man who assumes to have sovereignty [over others] will be regarded as a tyrant, usurper of public liberty and worthy of death."[13]

Sovereignty, in effect, was to be enjoyed by *all* citizens, not pre-empted by "representatives," as was the case in earlier national bodies and even the Convention. In this respect, the sectional movement that emerged in Paris in that year was perhaps the most self-conscious and explicitly democratic phenomenon to appear in history since ancient Athenian times, and certainly the most popular in its composition. The radical democrats of 1793 thus assumed that every adult was, to one degree or another, competent to participate in management of public affairs. Thus, each section, whether its members were politically radical or not, was structured around a *face-to-face democracy*: basically, a general assembly of the people that formed the most important deliberative body of a section, and served as the incarnation of popular power in a given part of the city. At the height of the radical sectional democracy, the general assembly comprised all male residents within a section's jurisdiction, which, meeting in expropriated chapels and churches, each elected six deputies to the Commune, presumably for the purpose merely of coordinating all the sections in the city of Paris.

Each section also had its own various administrative committees, whose members were also recruited from the general assembly. These committees performed the functions of police, supply, finance, and neighborhood surveillance. Broadly, they may be grouped into three categories.

The *civil committees*, dating from the days of the districts, were responsible for administrative problems such as food supply and finance, as well as record-keeping, and were normally overburdened with work in these practical areas. Initially, under the mayorship of Bailly in 1789–90, the civil committees' members were directly appointed by the Commune and had a dual accountability to the Commune and the assembly, which they seem to have shrewdly negotiated by staying out of politics as much as possible. Their meetings were normally businesslike, and their outlook was fairly conservative.

After the *sans-culotte* Pétion replaced Bailly as mayor, however, civil committee members were elected by the sections' general assemblies, to whom they were directly accountable.

Shortly after the August 10 *journée*, the Legislative Assembly, as evidence of its populist credentials, shifted the task of prosecuting political crimes to the Paris Commune, which for its part, delegated much of this responsibility to the sections. The sections thereupon set up *vigilance committees* to handle suspected counterrevolutionaries. Elected directly by the assemblies, these vigilance committees proliferated enormously after the August *journée*. Since they were empowered to levy accusations and arrest suspects, the political views of the committee members became a source of increasing contention between radical and conservative sections—indeed, between the sectional democracy as a whole and the Commune, and, generally, between members of the Commune and the Convention—escalating from the base to the summits of society as the Revolution itself became more radical.

A large number of *ad hoc committees* were organized for special tasks such as providing the unemployed with work, collecting gunpowder or seeing to its production, mobilizing recruits for the war, establishing contact with other sympathetic sections, and even planning *journées*. During festive periods, open-air suppers for the poor and for neighborhood people generally were common and were regarded as ways of fostering fraternity within a community.

Of paramount importance, each section had its own battalion of National Guard, over which it had complete control and whose movements it alone could authorize. Usually the battalion was entirely subordinate to the orders of the section's general assembly, many of whose members were part of the Guard itself. Assembly meetings in which National Guard officers were elected drew high attendance, higher even than those in which civilian officials were elected. Clearly, Parisians fully recognized the importance of the armed force their section commanded and held strong views on the kind of commander it should have.

During the height of the Parisian radical democracy, sectional life was vibrant, disputatious and earthy, as Albert Soboul tells us in one of the livelier accounts in his study on the *sans-culottes*:

> A section was headed by a president, whose work was aided by an executive committee. A recording secretary chronicled the section's proceedings—indeed, the activities of many of its committee meetings as well as the debates and decisions of its general assembly. Ushers maintained order during assembly proceedings, while tellers counted the votes, which were expressed by standing up or recorded in roll calls. Democratic practice, so important in a section's life, required that the assembly elect or reelect the executive committee each month, often by acclamation if there were no complaints about its activities. The president usually occupied his position for a year, although he resigned when he differed from the decisions of assembly, as occurred during the bitter fights in early 1793 over plans to engage in an insurrection against the Convention. What kept the sections going, in reality, was a core of committed militants who remained at their posts and were fervently devoted to an ideal of direct democracy even when the general assembly dwindled to a small number of participants.
>
> Meetings of the general assembly opened with a reading of the minutes, followed by a reading of the Paris Commune's decrees and laws, and the proposed agenda which was drawn up by the president and his committee. This was commonly followed by protracted debates.[14]

Periods of crisis and episodes that evoked popular anger might draw as many as a thousand citizens or more to an assembly meeting, in which case various factions contended vigorously with one another, debates were heated, and every seat in the assembly hall was occupied. Meetings were commonly quite raucous, even indecorous, and extremely fervent, leading to threats, shouts, mutual recrimination, and even fistfights. During the heated Year II of the revolutionary calendar (1793), when one crisis followed soon upon another, Soboul tells us,

> many citizens talked at random or screamed deafeningly, making all discussion impossible; this was in the *République* section. In the *Chalier* section on 1 Ventôse [February 19], the president of the assembly drank a glass of wine in a chair, and some wanted to dismiss him: "This place is a wineshop now; it will soon be a tobacco shop as well." Others remarked that several citizens had done the same; after an hour's confusion, they merely returned to the order of business.[15]

Indeed, the sections were real political battlegrounds, and few of the forty-eight were politically unified. Within a particular *quartier* or neighborhood, citizens' interests might differ enormously according to their economic status, ideologies, and overall social background. Royalists and moderates did not disappear from sectional assemblies during even the most militant periods of the Revolution. But a relative uniformity of views existed primarily in the poorest sections of Paris and in the wealthiest ones; in between, radical and conservative views often competed with each other furiously and were often resolved with highly intimidating tactics.

Nor was each section drawn entirely into its own life and problems. Radicals, moderates, and conservatives often communicated directly with their own kind across sections and formed joint committees that bypassed the Commune and the Convention altogether. During intense internal disagreements, *sectionnaires*

did not hesitate to "call" upon their ideological allies in other sections for aid, which at times led to the outright invasion of one section by members of another. More often than not, it was the radicals who would invade the general assemblies of nearby sections on the pretext of fraternizing with their colleagues but in fact to combine forces to shift a vacillating assembly to their side.

POVERTY AND REVOLUTION

The poor and ragged *sans-culottes*, whom Jules Michelet in his famous history of the French Revolution was to call the *bras nus*, or "bare arms," and in whose name the Montagnards often professed to speak, were especially unruly; the middle classes consistently labeled them "*le canaille*" and, in 1792–93, "*les anarchistes.*" Grinding poverty starved and debilitated thousands of Parisians, leading to food riots and even more brutal behavior in times of social unrest and fear, such as the September massacres. Poverty may have elevated riots to a near-insurrectionary level, but in itself could not sustain a revolution. Poor *sans-culottes* who were little more than wage-earners remained active adherents of the Revolution and direct democracy until their movement was crushed, but it was an economically more privileged stratum that actually shaped the overall radical tendencies of the Revolution. As we have seen, artisans, tradesmen, and small entrepreneurs could also be called *sans-culottes* because they were not nobles or men of great wealth. The famous *enragé*, Jean Varlet, in fact, was well-to-do. Yet he was willing to risk his life for the downtrodden and, like Marat, chose to live among the poor and share their living conditions.

Nevertheless, moral factors alone cannot sustain a revolution, given the material conditions in which the poorer Parisian population lived. Even with the distinction between active and passive citizens, the percentage of more affluent people who took part in the political process during the French Revolution was strikingly low. Of the fifty thousand citizens in Paris who had the right to vote in 1789, less than a quarter took part in the elections for the Estates General, and fewer than one in ten participated in electing deputies to the Legislative Assembly in 1791. Even at sectional assembly meetings, attendance rarely exceeded 10 percent of the citizenry and was often substantially less, to judge from the limited available data.[16] Normally, in fact, as few as thirty citizens attended—especially in affluent areas, since many conservative bourgeois considered nonparticipation in political affairs to be a more honorable course than participation together with the despised *sans-culottes.*

Nor could the full participation of laborers and artisans have been possible, considering the working hours that the poorest *sans-culottes* had to endure. "In many trades a sixteen-hour day seems to have been normal," observes R.B. Rose,

> beginning at first light (in the summer as early as 4 a.m.) and finishing at 8 p.m. In the building trades the working day was normally about twelve hours, but during the summer the workers, women and children included, were often on the site from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. The workers at the Saint-Gobain royal mirror works were slightly better off: their day stretched from 5 a.m. to 7 p.m., with half an hour for breakfast, an hour for lunch and a half-hour for tea. Wage rates varied from eight livres a day for some goldsmiths and jewellers down to two or three livres for building workers and joiners and one or two livres for labourers.[17]

Those in the lower wage rates—and they numbered in the tens of thousands—led lives of desperate poverty. Cost-of-living calculations indicate that a day's food cost one livre and four sous on the average, while "the most basic lodging," to use R.B. Rose's expression, cost one to three livres a week. "Basic lodging" might mean that a family of four lived—and sometimes worked—in a single room on the sixth or seventh floor. Living conditions in the Faubourg Saint-Marcel, whose thirty thousand craftsmen and workers provided crowds for *journées* comparable in numbers only to the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, were described as miserable by Sebastian Mercier, a contemporary observer. "An entire family occupies a single room," Mercier related,

> in which the four walls are bare, the wretched beds lie without covers, and the kitchen utensils are piled up with chamber-pots. All the furniture together is not worth twenty crowns. Every three months the inhabitants, thrown out for owing back rent, must find another hole to live in. Thus they wander, taking their miserable possessions from refuge to refuge. No shoes are to be seen in their lodgings; the stairs echo only with the sound of wooden clogs. The children are naked and sleep helter-skelter.[18]

People who lived under such conditions were necessarily preoccupied with obtaining food, shelter, clothing, and the simplest amenities of life. They could hardly have participated actively in running revolutionary institutions or attending assembly meetings regularly, especially when so many of those meetings overlapped with their working hours. A journeyman or laborer could hardly report to work in fit condition at six in the morning or even earlier after attending a general assembly meeting until eleven or later the evening before. What is admirable is the extent to which laborers like the *bras nus* and artisans did participate in their sectional assemblies; indeed, the *bras nus* and lowly artisans were often present in politically precarious situations in sufficient numbers to tip the balance in favor of radical policies. But their ability to mold events and decide policies was patently limited. Only a few of their names appear on lists of members of sectional committees, which commonly met in the afternoon and consumed full days of tedious work. Thus, members of the

civil committees of the sections usually had independent incomes, and only fairly well-off or highly dedicated citizens could afford to staff the sectional institutions, still less participate in their demanding activities.

That is not to say that there were no paid officials in the sections. The police commissioner was normally paid a living salary by the Commune, as were the justices of the peace, who handled minor legal disputes, such as defaults of debts, petty fraud, broken contracts, and damage suits. In September 1792 these jobs brought in annual salaries of 3,000 and 2,400 livres respectively, roughly the wage of a highly skilled artisan. Recording secretaries received more modest salaries, approximately 800 livres a year. Other *sectionnaires* who did public business, whether as part of a civil or revolutionary committee, were given stipends for the hours or days they lost in doing their regular work. But on the whole, most section officials were not regularly paid and received only minimal incomes.

THE *ENRAGÉS*

In February and March 1793, the worsening military situation reduced the already straitened condition of the Parisian *sans-culottes* to crisis proportions. British warships successfully blockaded France to a point where the capital was experiencing severe shortages of basic goods and high prices; grain was once again scarce, and the price of bread rose steeply in Paris as elsewhere in France. The *assignats* were losing value so precipitously that a laborer in Reveillon's wallpaper factory, for example, spent 80 percent of his income on bread.[19] On February 24, when the cost of soap rose sharply, laundresses simply seized whatever soap they could lay their hands on and sold it at pre–1789 prices. Riots were becoming commonplace as crowds in large numbers looted shops and warehouses.

This growing crisis provided fertile ground for populist orators and writers, particularly the *enragés*, who tried to articulate the ideas and suspicions of the *sans-culottes*. By no means did the *enragés* form a united political group with a coherent social program; what they did share were naive, often formless commitments to what Anglo-American radicals would generically call "levelling." That is to say, they believed in a broad redistribution of goods favoring the poor at the expense of the wealthy. Owing to the Le Chapelier law of 1791, the laboring *sans-culottes* were not permitted to organize themselves to strike for higher wages; accordingly, the *enragés* demanded that the Convention impose heavy taxes on the wealthy, fix the price of foodstuffs with a maximum, requisition food from the countryside, and stringently enforce the laws against speculation in wheat (a practice that was very widespread). Basically, they placed blame for the worsening economic conditions on those who intrigued against

the Revolution, especially speculators and war profiteers, whom they often associated politically with the Girondins.

Not that better-known propagandists such as Marat and Hébert failed to attack speculators and profiteers; in fact, this theme was central to their speeches and writings. But their propaganda was marked more by moral outrage than by demands for social measures to relieve economic distress. By contrast, a few *enragés* flirted with quasi-socialistic beliefs, in some cases hinting that the property of the wealthy should be shared among the poor according to material need. In any case, vague as their social views may have been, they carried on an intense and effective agitation in the poorer sections of Paris and generated deep-seated fears in the Commune as well as the Convention.

Perhaps the most clear-sighted of this inchoate group of *enragés* was Jean-François Varlet, an active *sectionnaire* and the secretary of the radical section Droits de l'Homme (Rights of Man). Varlet worked in the post office, despite the fact that he had an independent income. A young man in his early twenties, he was a prolific pamphleteer, as well as a revolutionary songwriter and orator; his works were immensely popular among the *sans-culottes*, of whom he wrote, "The poor devils of the garret . . . reason more surely, more boldly than the best gentlemen, the great speech-makers, the groping savants; if they wish to attain true knowledge, let them go as I among the people."[20] Early on, Varlet came to loathe the Jacobins, as well as the Convention and the Paris Commune, for their political opportunism and centralistic policies.

In fact, Varlet had no faith in representative forms of government. He was fascinated by theories of direct democracy, which he drew in part from his readings of Rousseau. As Morris Slavin puts it, "Varlet consistently advocated direct democracy as a practical alternative to the newly established parliamentary system, which he found corrupt and neglectful of the needs of the sans-culottes for whom he spoke. He dreamt of a universal democracy."[21] This view dominated his political thinking. At the time of his election as secretary to the section Droits-de-l'Homme, he is reported to have said, "We [the sections] have . . . unlimited powers; we are the sovereign [bodies]. We shall break the [established] authority; we shall reconstruct it and give it sovereignty. It will smash the Convention. What is more legal?"[22]

Varlet's maximum program aimed at nothing less than the abolition of the Convention and establishment of a revolutionary committee, structured provisionally around ten bureaus, whose strictly defined functions would be dictated by the Paris sections. The sectional assemblies were to meet *en permanence*: that is, either daily, or whenever the people cared to convoke them without having to gain permission from higher authorities. The delegates that the assembly elected to his proposed revolutionary committee had to be clearly mandated and subject to recall, a doctrine embodied in the term *mandat impératif*. Thus, the committee would be directly accountable to the general

assemblies of the sections. Essentially, Varlet and his supporters sought to replace the Convention and its ministers with a direct communal democracy, a "Commune of communes" (to use the revolutionary vocabulary of a later era) of a kind that was to find considerable favor with nineteenth-century anarchists.

These democratic views gained Varlet little if any support from the Commune or the influential factions in the Convention, be they Montagnards or Girondins. The Commune's General Council openly denounced him as "an intriguer," while Marat expressly dissociated himself from the young *enragé*. The Jacobins expelled him from their club for "an excess of *civisme*."

Another leading *enragé* was Jacques Roux, a constitutional priest whose profession brought him into daily contact with the poor. Vigorously castigating hoarders, speculators, and the *nouveaux riches* who were immorally profiting from the Revolution, he openly advocated a policy of terror against the wealthy and the counterrevolutionaries. His rhetoric, marked by bloody threats against the rich and resplendent, was filled with appeals to liberty and equality, which easily assured him a warm reception from the poor.

> Speculators, show me your pocket-books; your sudden wealth will attest without retort to your larcenies, your betrayals, your crimes. Before the capture of the Bastille, you were covered with nothing but rags; today you inhabit palaces; you owned but a plow and now you are rich landlords.[23]

The more radical sectional assemblies, in fact, voted to read aloud his speeches, normally delivered at the Gravilliers section, twice weekly, while his writings sold widely in Paris.

Roux's zealotry in behalf of the people's real concerns disquieted not only the authorities but other ostensible popular spokesmen, particularly Marat, whom Roux, in fact, adored and to whom he gave refuge when the "friend of the people" was pursued by the police. Marat was by no means flattered by the attention of his overly enthusiastic acolyte, who often acted politically as well as personally from impulse and failed tragically to provide his supporters with the far-seeing leadership they so desperately needed. His social concepts were naive: they consisted largely of a moral commitment to alleviate hunger and furious, often tactless, attacks upon the rich, whom he blamed for the afflictions of the poor. Curiously, he found no inconsistency in the fact that he was a constitutional priest who continued to retain his parish and state-subsidized income, while advancing eminently un-Christian and bloody methods for purging the Revolution of profiteers and careerists. In every sense a man of blood, Roux was a radical inquisitor who frightened his Montagnard enemies as much as he frightened the hoarders and speculators against whom he railed.

Nor is it surprising to learn that the eminently egalitarian *enragés* included fiery Parisian women, such as Pauline Léon and Claire Lacombe, who

cofounded the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women and energetically guided it through its brief but stormy existence from May to October of 1793. Léon, married to Théophile Leclerc, an *enragé* journalist in his early twenties, managed her own family's chocolate-making business, and had been radicalized during the fall of the Bastille. With the characteristic boldness of a Parisienne, she did not hesitate to stand before the bar of the all-male National Assembly and declare that the Rights of Man applied to women, who should also be able to bear arms so that they too could defend themselves and the Revolution. Her associate, Claire Lacombe, had been an actress of some distinction in Toulon, where her avowal of militant republican views displeased her director, and she came to Paris in 1792 in time to participate in the August *journée*. The Society of Revolutionary Republican Women self-consciously advanced the rights of women as equals of men in every respect, and one of its orators who appeared before the Jacobin Club bluntly asserted that she and her fellow members had ceased to be "servile women, domestic animals."

But France was still a patriarchal society during the Revolution, and neither the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women nor its leading figures were permitted to play any important role in the *sans-culottes* movement. Indeed, the Society often evoked the anger of the market women in Les Halles—especially peasant women who came from the countryside to sell their produce—by demanding that they wear tricolor cockades and trying to gain their support for the republic. Not that the market women were counterrevolutionary or necessarily lacking in revolutionary zeal: they had, after all, been among the crowds who marched to Versailles in October 1789 and incited many of the food riots that rocked Paris over the years. But a deep disenchantment with the Revolution was setting in among the poorer people of the capital, men and women alike. They deeply mistrusted the Convention, the Commune, and even the more demonstrative republicans who fed them rhetoric instead of bread.

This distrust was partly justified. For the *sans-culottes* generally, the most profound institutional problems of the Revolution lay in the conflict between their own popular democracy and those who attempted to centralize authority, be they the leaders of the Convention or the Commune. Nor were the heroic figures in the early days of the Revolution immune to the lure of power. Danton, one of the founders of the sectional democracy, had long abandoned the Cordeliers district and entered the ruling ministry. Robespierre and Hébert, at least in the eyes of Jacques Roux, were little more than careerists who masked their appetite for power in radical verbiage. As "the men at the bottom rose in the political hierarchy," observes Norman Hampson, "they became impressed by the virtues of centralisation, only to find a new generation of aspiring grassroots politicians turning their old weapons against them."[24] The growing conservatism of major revolutionary leaders did not escape the attention of the lower classes, for which the Revolution had yet to supply even modest rations or plots of land.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Albert Mathiez, *The French Revolution*, trans. Catherine Alison Phillips (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), p. 193.
2. Albert Goodwin, *The French Revolution* (London: Hutchinson, 1953; New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 116, 117.
3. Mathiez, *French Revolution*, p. 165.
4. William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 220.
5. Goodwin, *French Revolution*, pp. 116, 117.
6. Quoted in Albert Soboul, *The Sans Culottes: The Popular Movement and Revolutionary Government, 1793–1794*, trans. Rémy Inglis Hall (1968; New York: Doubleday & Co., 1972), p. 165.
7. Mathiez, *French Revolution*, p. 90.
8. Quoted in Doyle, *Oxford History*, p. 220.
9. Quoted in Christopher Hibbert, *The Days of the French Revolution* (New York: William Morrow, 1980), p. 140.
10. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 169.
11. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 176.
12. Soboul, *The Sans Culottes*, p. 95.
13. Quoted *ibid.*, pp. 95–6.
14. Albert Soboul, *Les Sans-culottes parisiens en l'An II: Histoire politique et sociale des sections de Paris, 2 juin 1793–9 thermidor An II* (La Roche-sur-Yon: Henri Potier, 1958), pp. 583–4.
15. Soboul, *The Sans Culottes*, pp. 166–7.
16. The minutes of the sections, recorded by the sectional secretaries, were lodged in the Hôtel de Ville and were lost irrevocably when the building was set on fire by the Communards of 1871 during their desperate battle for Paris. But observers' and newspaper accounts of the sectional assemblies allow for some rough estimates.
17. R.B. Rose, *The Making of the Sans-Culottes: Democratic Ideas and Institutions in Paris, 1789–92* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), p. 15.
18. Sebastian Mercier quoted *ibid.*, p. 16.
19. Morris Slavin, *The French Revolution in Miniature: Section Droits-de-l'Homme, 1789–1795* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 128.
20. Quoted in Morris Slavin, *The Making of an Insurrection: Parisian Sections and the Gironde* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 134.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 131–2.
22. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 133.
23. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 140.
24. Norman Hampson, *Danton* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), pp. 33–4.

CHAPTER 20 The Insurrection of June 2, 1793

THE REVOLUTION IN LIMBO

The period from late 1792 to early 1793 was marked by an uneasy truce, broken by growing eruptions of differences between the Girondins and the Montagnards in the Convention, and increasing tension between the radical sections and all other governmental institutions.

The direct democracy, embodied by the Parisian sections, had essentially become a popular dual power that confronted the republican state, embodied by the Convention. This historic confrontation was blurred by the political conflict between the two parliamentary factions in the national government. The Girondins now detested Paris and addressed themselves primarily to the provinces in harsh opposition to the radicals in the capital. The Montagnards, in turn, did not hesitate to appeal to the radical *sans-culottes* when they needed them, albeit not without fear that the Revolution might slip out of the hands of the *Conventionnels* into those of the *sectionnaires*. Thus, when the sections early in March 1793 demanded the establishment of a Revolutionary Tribunal to exact swift justice on all suspects, it was Danton, speaking for the Montagnards, who took up the call in the Convention and saw to its formation. Alas, months later, it was to be this institution that began to try the popular leaders of the sections and, in the following year, to send Danton and his supporters to the scaffold.

The Girondins, for their part, were becoming increasingly loathsome to the radical sections. Basically, these provincial deputies were convinced that the Revolution had gone far enough in fulfilling its tasks and that it should be arrested, even rolled back, if possible, to a moderate republic. By the same token, the radical sections were convinced that the Revolution had not gone far enough in fostering democracy, and demanded a more equitable distribution of the means of life, such as the greater availability of consumer goods at reasonable prices.

The fact that the Convention met in Paris continued to dismay the Girondins, since it left the body vulnerable to popular pressure from armed radical *sans-culottes.* At each opportunity, the deputies not only portrayed the Paris Commune and the sections as irresponsible extremists and bloodthirsty "Septembrists," but steadily escalated their attempts to turn the departments against the capital.

Moreover, the conflict between the sectional democracy and the central authorities was also complicated by the civil war raging in the western part of the country. After the Convention issued a military levy for 300,000 men on February 23, 1793, the west of France erupted in violent defiance of the Republic's call to arms, to the anger of the radicals and even many moderates. In the Vendée department and in Brittany, major revolts broke out, as peasants, led by local refractory priests, refused to be conscripted into the revolutionary army. Massacring local republicans, they openly fought the National Guard and connived with Britain against revolutionary France. Nor were other parts of the country spared similar peasant uprisings, which in Paris were generally blamed on the Girondins—in some cases not without good reason.

The Convention responded to the revolts by further centralizing its authority through a series of important emergency decrees. On March 9, it selected eighty Convention members, most of whom were Jacobins, to function as "representatives on mission" to the army and the troubled areas of the country, endowing them with powers to crush the rebellions at any cost and by any means whatever. Still another decree empowered military commissions to execute anyone who resisted the levy, as well as *émigrés* who returned to France. All rebels who were captured bearing arms were to be killed, and any priest who had been denounced by six citizens was to be deported.

Barely two weeks later, on March 21, the Convention charged each section and commune in the country to elect a watch committee (*comité de surveillance*) with a view toward maintaining local surveillance, searching houses for hoarders, rounding up suspected counterrevolutionaries, and enforcing obedience to sectional decisions. On April 6 it created a nine-member Committee of Public Safety which was soon to become its famous—and much maligned—executive authority, with sweeping powers to crush the counterrevolution and innovate new social policies for the Revolution.

Initially, these repressive and centralizing measures had little effect on dealing with the counterrevolution or the war. The provincial rebels, undeterred by actions in Paris, proceeded rapidly to capture town after town and soon swelled into a major force, mobilizing an estimated forty-five thousand men, who vastly outnumbered the fifteen thousand republicans who had been sent from Paris to quell them. The Paris Commune, in turn, was drawn into the sections' revolutionary vortex as the political crisis in the capital intensified and as the counterrevolution deepened in the provinces. No longer did the Commune

embody the increasingly radicalized sectional democracy, as had been the case after the August 10 *journée.* To the degree that the radical ordinary laborers or *bras nus* moved to the forefront of the conflict with other institutions, its General Council—which was composed of three more or less well-to-do delegates from each section—became more fearful of the masses and more moderate in its policies.

This growing vortex of tendencies and countertendencies in the Revolution produced major changes, particularly in Paris, that began to throw once-united political forces into growing conflict with each other. With its influential deputy *procureur* Hébert, no less than its *procureur* Anaxagoras Chaumette, sitting on its General Council, the Commune tried to maintain ties both to the *enragés* in the sections *and* to the relatively prudent Montagnards in the Convention. These two tendencies were basically hostile toward each other and were never to be reconciled. The Commune, in turn, like the Montagnards, increasingly distrusted the sections that were influenced by the *enragés*; in fact, it seemed to fear any sections that it could no longer control. Yet, if it could trust neither the *enragés* nor the Jacobins, it was obliged to retain sufficient influence over the popular movement in Paris to maintain itself against complete Montagnard control, which would have destroyed its independence, if not its very identity. Thus, apart from the Girondins, who relied for support on the moderate center in the Convention (or "marsh," as it was called), the provinces, and a few of the conservative sections, all the different tendencies in Paris were making fragile ad hoc alliances that were readily broken, and basically played one political group against another in order to retain or enhance their power. Put bluntly: the Revolution had come to a crossroads, and its direction—whether it would move leftward or rightward—was patently uncertain.

As the war effort faltered, as bread prices rose, and as counterrevolution spread in the provinces, the discontent of the *sans-culottes,* especially the *bras nus,* in Paris increased in direct proportion to the evident instability of all the existing institutions—the Commune no less than the Convention—to carry the Revolution forward. At length, on March 10, 1793, Varlet and other *enragés* tried to stage an insurrection against the Convention, presumably with the intention of removing its Girondin members and ministers, as well as army officers whose loyalty to the republic was suspect. The failure of the *journée* can be attributed to lack of support which the insurrectionaries had hoped to receive from the Jacobin Club, the National Guard and, to be sure, the Commune, which Varlet did not hesitate to accuse of "infection with aristocracy."[1] In fact, Santerre, the National Guard commander, mobilized nine thousand Guardsmen to deploy against the rebels and restore order.

Despite its failure, however, the *journée* established a precedent: the sections might one day, by sheer force of numbers, be able to intimidate the seemingly inviolable Convention and get it to do their bidding. In Convention debates the

failed *journée* became more fodder for the growing rivalry between the Girondins and the Montagnards. The Girondins portrayed it as yet another attempt on the part of the bloodthirsty Parisian deputies to massacre them, while the Montagnards could truthfully claim that they had nothing to do with it. Within the Commune, Hébert and Chaumette, not to be outdone by the Girondins and the Mountain, charged the insurrectionaries of plotting with Prussia and Britain, a preposterous accusation among the many that were being made at the time, and one that further alienated the radicals from the municipal body.

A few days after the aborted insurrection, Varlet defiantly appeared before the Jacobin Club and chastised its members for their failure to support the uprising, harshly contrasting their behavior with the bold women of the October 5 *journée* who had brought the king back to Paris. Nor would the March insurrection be the last one, Varlet pointedly warned them. It was now clear that the March uprising was essentially a dress rehearsal for a more far-reaching one: a final reckoning between all the contending forces, particularly the *bras nus* and the Convention.

And, indeed, the differences between the radical sections and the Convention could be resolved in favor of the sections only by a new insurrection: that is, a "third revolution." In early 1793, this expression was much in vogue among various political tendencies. For the Girondins, who used it in their oratory at the Convention, the third revolution portended an insurrectionary resurgence of the Parisian "*anarchistes.*" "As I have been saying ever since this Convention began," Brissot observed on March 24, 1793,

> we have to put an end to the third revolution, the revolution of anarchy. We will only be able to finish it off by establishing a good constitution in place of this system of disorganization and of despotism, which some people would like to perpetuate.[2]

To Danton, in his more militant Jacobin posture, a third revolution would have meant a curtailing of the Girondins, who, despite his overtures to them, persistently refused to collaborate with the Mountain. To Hébert and his associates on the Paris Commune and in the war ministry, the expression would have summarized their attempts to enhance their own waning revolutionary prestige and find ministerial places in the national government. But to Varlet and his supporters, a third revolution clearly meant an insurrection that would successfully overthrow the Convention and establish a direct democracy throughout France.

THE ÉVÊCHÉ ASSEMBLY

If any single event could be said to have broken the political deadlock that existed in Paris, it was probably General Dumouriez's denunciation of the Revolution and his attempt at the beginning of April to march on the capital, restore the king, and reestablish the Constitution of 1791. Only the refusal of the army to follow him prevented the country from plunging into a civil war of monumental proportions, possibly leading to the defeat of the Republic. That Dumouriez was wrongly identified in the public mind with the Girondins (he was, in fact, more of a constitutional monarchist than a republican) heightened the sentiment that there was treason at home, in the very heart of the Revolution, and that extraordinary measures were needed to extirpate the dangers that confronted Paris from "royalist" *Conventionnels* and from suspect military leaders.

Faced with the rising political fever of the people, the Paris Commune, roused out of its lethargy, began to round up more suspected counterrevolutionaries and conduct more house searches. But many sections now felt that such measures were half-hearted—that they needed an extralegal body to meet the coming crisis, one that was more resolute and revolutionary than the Commune; in fact, a body that could bypass the Paris municipal authorities, the Convention, and its executive committees to engage in effective political and economic action.

On March 27 the section Droits de l'Homme, strongly influenced by its secretary, Varlet, passed a resolution decrying "the dangers facing France" and summoning Parisians to "save the country and liberty" from the "liberty-killing faction."[3] It called upon all the sections to send commissioners to a meeting at the Évêché, the expropriated palace of the city's archbishop.

Nominally, the purpose of the meeting was to discuss a forced loan that had been imposed in order to wage the war. But the real, and decidedly secret, intention of the meeting was to take forceful measures to purge the Convention of the Girondins and their supporters who were fomenting civil war in the country. Indeed, if Varlet had his way, the Évêché Committee would try to overthrow the Convention itself. On April 1, delegates from the twenty-seven Parisian sections that had sent commissioners to the Évêché formally constituted themselves into an extralegal but public "Central Assembly of Public Safety and of Correspondence with the Departments," which, in short order, opened the doors of the Évêché to some five or six hundred people. This Évêché assembly left little doubt that it intended not only to make food requisitions, levy contributions on the wealthy, and round up counterrevolutionary suspects, but also to purge the Girondins from the Convention.

As news of the Évêché assembly and its committee spread through Paris, the Girondins were infuriated and the Mountain felt very uneasy over an emerging

movement it did not control; indeed, as we have seen, it was no more eager to see a sectional democracy than its rivals in the Convention. Marat, the "friend of the people," speaking at the Jacobin Club, denounced the meeting as "unpatriotic" (*anticivique*), nor did it gain any support from the General Council of the Commune, least of all its Hébertist members. Even earlier, on April 2, the Commune had set up its own committee of correspondence with other municipalities throughout the country, to countervail any initiative of the kind that actually occurred with the establishment of the Évêché assembly.

THE ROAD TO INSURRECTION

The events that were to follow the convocation of the Évêché assembly and the various efforts by the Girondins, Montagnards, and members of the Commune's General Council to cope with the *journée* of June 2 form one of the muddiest chapters in the history of the Revolution, based on unclear facts, some conjecture, unrecorded negotiations, concealed compromises, and mutual betrayals. Indeed, it is often necessary for any history of this brief but remarkable period to speculate about the intentions as well as the actions of the various actors and committees that soon became involved in this decisive *journée*, which was to set a new and fateful course for the Revolution and the lives of its most important figures. The one guiding thread that explains what little is known about the events leading up to the *journée* is the fact that all of the Montagnard deputies, leaders of the Jacobin club, major figures in the General Council of the Commune, and even many moderates in the sections were determined to prevent Varlet and his supporters from establishing a sectional democracy; and by all means, fair and foul, they employed whatever measures were at their disposal to neutralize the influence of the radicals in the Évêché assembly—which itself was far from unified in its social goals.

Perhaps the best foil at the disposal of these moderate worthies in dealing with Varlet and his supporters was the Girondin leaders, who, with incredible political ineptness, inadvertently diverted public attention away from the social goals of the Évêché radicals toward themselves. The Girondins, in effect, proceeded by their tactics in the Convention to make themselves appear to be the cause of all that was going wrong with the Revolution, from Dumouriez's defection to the Austrians to the counterrevolution that was spreading through the provinces.

The events in the mid-spring of 1793 have an almost funereal quality about them and were grim in the inexorability of their development. Following news of Dumouriez's defection, a majority of the sections petitioned the Convention to expel the Girondin leaders, who were "guilty of the crime of treason against

the sovereign people."[4] In fact, even the Montagnard deputies were now in the unenviable position of seeming to be reticent about removing the twenty-two Girondins who figured most in the public mind, for to do so would have been a gross violation of republican legality that could have been used against the Mountain itself.

But the radical sections were adamant. Addressing the Mountain directly, they bluntly declared that if the Convention refused to do so, they would take on the task themselves. Although the petition was signed by thirty-three of the forty-eight sections, the Convention denounced it as "slanderous" five days later. Indeed, with predictable ineptness, the Girondins retaliated against the sections by ordering the arrest of Marat, who was not only a Montagnard deputy but one of the Girondins' most consistent critics. To the fury of the *sans-culottes*, the "friend of the people" was arraigned before the new Revolutionary Tribunal. Again, the thirty-three sections adamantly demanded that he be released, repeating their call for the expulsion of the twenty-two Girondins. As the Girondins should have foreseen, not only did the Tribunal acquit Marat, but he was returned to his seat at the Convention borne on the shoulders of *sans-culottes*, amid even greater public acclaim than before.

Spurred on by their victory over the Girondins, the radical sections pressed the demand that the Convention impose controls on the price of bread, which was now skyrocketing, and in mid-April the Commune and the mayor met at the Jacobin Club to draw up a petition demanding the setting of a maximum price. When the petition was presented at the Convention, the Girondins, in yet another political blunder, tried to bury the demand by referring it to the agricultural committee. Adding insult to injury, they reproved the *sans-culottes* for failing to understand the sublime economics of free trade—this at a time when bread prices were soaring and hunger was rampant in the capital, in no small part owing to speculators and to ineptness in the distribution of food.

For many radicals and even moderates, these tactics of delay and factionalism were unendurable. On May 1, eight thousand outraged *sans-culottes* from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine invaded the Convention and declared themselves in a state of insurrection until controls were established, and the Commune's General Council, mindful of the importance of the issue to the sections, proclaimed itself "in a state of insurrection" in an effort to place itself at the head of the popular movement. The Montagnards, it should be noted, were not at all sympathetic to the price maximum. Like the Girondins, they too had been arguing in favor of free markets against feudal restrictions, but, faced with the popularity of the demand, they demagogically expressed their support for the maximum, to which the Convention capitulated three days later by imposing price controls on grain and bread prices.

The month of May 1793 was marked by a steady radicalizing of many sections, opening the prospect for a new *journée*. Most of the Faubourg Saint-

Antoine sections (albeit by no means all of them) were probably controlled by the radicals, as was the section La Cité and, on the Left Bank, the sections Marseilles and Sans-Culotte. Often in pitched battles in assembly meetings, five more sections, including the Gravilliers and Bon Conseil, finally purged themselves of moderate members, as did eight others, many of which voted to grant the Évêché assembly "unlimited powers."

These developments served only to spur the Girondins and their moderate supporters into more foolhardy behavior. Having decided that the sections had acquired too much power through the intolerably radical Commune—a gross misjudgment on their part of the relationships of forces in Paris—they set about to eliminate it once and for all, and, in the process, to curtail the power of the sections. Amid proposals that the Commune be suppressed and the Convention be moved away from Paris to Bourges, on May 21 the Girondins established a Commission of Twelve, composed mainly of their own deputies, to investigate the vexatious conduct of the Commune, the sections, and their committee at the Évêché. Over the protests of Danton, the Convention provocatively ordered the sections to turn over all their minutes and registers to the new Commission for scrutiny.

The Commission had little difficulty in showing that a *journée* was being planned; the evidence of insurrectionary activity was apparently abundant enough in the sectional minutes. When several Girondin commissioners attended a meeting of the Paris Commune, they encountered an agenda laden with items such as "Identify members of the Convention to be expelled" and "Compile lists of suspects." After only four days of work, the Commission issued its conclusions and recommendations, which the Girondins followed to the letter. It ordered that the National Guard contingents stationed around the Convention for the security of its members be reinforced, and that all section meetings be adjourned by ten in the evening to make it difficult for the *bras nus*, who worked long hours, to attend them. Amusingly, the latter stricture failed to produce its desired effect: when a sectional assembly wished to continue a session beyond the legal hour, it simply declared the assembly adjourned and thereupon resumed its proceedings as a meeting of a popular society.

Additionally, the Girondins issued orders for the arrest and imprisonment of those individuals whom the Commission had identified as the main plotters of insurrection; in all, four men, including Varlet and Hébert. Hébert was brought before the Commission to answer for his last issue of *Père Duchesne*, in which, with his usual vitriol, he had encouraged the *sans-culottes* to rise up against the Girondin "plotters against the republic," alleging that they were conspiring with Britain in the war against France and with the Vendée in the revolt against Paris.[5] On May 25 the president of the Convention, the exasperated Girondin Henri Isnard, countered the threats to the Convention by issuing a threat of his own: "If harm should ever befall the national representation, I declare in the name of all France, Paris would be reduced to nothing; it would not be long before people had to search the banks of the Seine for evidence that Paris ever existed."[6] With this warning, which scandalously echoed the Duke of Brunswick's earlier manifesto, the Girondins were openly threatening to foment a civil war against the capital.

Nor did Paris have any reason to doubt the reality of such a threat. The counterrevolution, which many Parisians attributed in part to the Girondins, was spreading throughout the provinces. Rebellious communes overthrew the local Jacobin leadership, not without bloodshed in many cases. In Marseilles, where the thirty-two sections had previously constituted a well-known Jacobin stronghold, port workers joined with merchants in the face of shared economic distress to overthrow the local Jacobin commune and declare the city in a "state of insurrection" against the Convention. Other cities specifically went into revolt against Paris itself: on May 21, Bordeaux, a Girondin stronghold, declared that it would overthrow the *sans-culottes* authorities in the capital, followed two weeks later by Caen, also Girondin in sentiment, which declared itself in a state of insurrection to "resist oppression."

This "federalist" revolt, as it was to be called, attained serious proportions in the last days of May, especially in Lyon, the second-largest city in France, which, before 1789, had been the silk-manufacturing center of the country. The loss of the industry's wealthy customers, who had emigrated in great numbers as a result of the Revolution, left little employment for the silk workers. This was a problem that the local Jacobins could hardly be expected to solve for a city based on the production of a luxury fabric. On May 24 warehouses of provisions intended for the armies were ransacked, and the goods were then sold off by crowds of women at prices they judged to be fair. Four days later, the Jacobin commune at Lyon was overthrown.

When news of these revolts reached Paris, the *enragés* and *sans-culottes* in the sections decided that they had to remove the Girondins, whom they accused of summoning the provinces to rebel against the capital. Again, radical *sectionnaires* found themselves allied uneasily with the Montagnards. "Deputies of the Mountain," wrote Jacques Roux on May 29,

> we implore you to save the country. If you can and do not want to do so, you are cowards and traitors. If you want to but cannot, say so. This is the purpose of our mission. One hundred thousand men are armed to defend you.[7]

In fact, even before Roux's threatening plea, on May 27 a crowd of *bras nus* burst into the Convention and demanded that Hébert, Varlet, and the other prisoners be promptly released and that the Commission of Twelve be abolished for exceeding its authority—a demand with which the cajoled Convention temporarily complied, only to restore the Commission on the next day. The

backtracking, furious factionalism, realigning of positions, and repeated interventions of the *sans-culottes* had brought the political crisis in the capital to an impasse which only the victory—or defeat—of a popular *journée* could resolve.

THE MAY 31–JUNE 2 *JOURNÉE*

The actual steps that led to this unavoidable *journée* are among the most difficult to unravel from the skein of events that immediately preceded it.

On May 28, delegates to the Évêché, speaking for thirty-three sections, began to take decisive steps toward a *journée*, empowering a secret Committee of Six to act as an executive for planning the uprising. As Morris Slavin observes:

> There seem to have been two plans under deliberation when the [Évêché] assembly met the following day [May 29]. The first was public and was discussed openly [and] on the whole was moderate in tone and was noncommittal about the insurrection. The second plan, in contrast, was formulated by commissioners who were tacitly invested with a sort of executive mandate to determine the course of action. This plan was meant to launch an insurrection.[8]

And, in fact, during the night of May 30 and early morning of May 31, the Évêché assembly announced that Paris was in a state of insurrection against "the aristocratic and liberty oppressive faction," notably the Girondins.[9] Declaring itself to be in permanence, the Évêché delegates elected a Committee of Nine, which supplanted the Committee of Six, and placed Varlet at its head. It was this new committee, the authentic "insurrectionary committee," as the Évêché Committee of Nine was loosely called, that laid the initial plans for the *journée*, while a second assembly, convoked by the Commune, was established shortly afterward, and included representatives from the Paris department as well as the General Assembly of the Commune itself.

The night of May 30–31 was marked by considerable confusion, for two committees now occupying separate rooms in the Évêché palace were apparently at odds with each other. In one, la Grande Salle, could be heard the mixed voices of Marat, who detested the *enragés*, and Varlet, who had been the original head of the Committee of Nine. Less explicably, the Committee of Nine sat in "a neighboring hall," Slavin tells us, "about to declare itself in a state of permanence and insurrection." Apparently, it was out of these two committees that the "Évêché committee" was composed, which "organized itself into ten different departments" corresponding with the Convention's own executive and administrative bodies. "Exercising the powers embodied in these department made the Évêché committee the real government of France," Slavin concludes. "For a few days, it was just that."[10]

Which raises the question: precisely what was this "Évêché committee," as it has been broadly called, during the night of May 30–31? How did it function when it was under the guidance of Varlet, and how was its character changed in the days, indeed hours, that followed?

The difficulty in answering these questions arises from the multitude of meetings that were being held throughout Paris: at the Évêché palace, the Hôtel de Ville, and the Jacobin and Cordelier clubs among other places, where one group often combined with another or met independently, if not secretly, as a faction. Very few of these meetings left any records behind, and what little we do know about them was only to be disclosed in obviously tendentious and self-justifying letters, pamphlets, and memoirs, particularly after the Revolution. Nor is there any reason to believe that Varlet and his supporters on the old "insurrectionary committee" ceased to meet after two committees were merged under the rubric of a broad Central Revolutionary Committee; indeed, there is sketchy evidence that its radical members were to retain close ties with each other and function, to the extent that it was possible, as a caucus within the Central Revolutionary Committee itself, together with such presumably supportive organs as the General Council of the Commune. What can be said with reasonable certainty is that the Évêché militants surrounding Varlet on the committee wanted the insurrection to accomplish aims radically different from those of the moderates.

Most immediately, the new Central Revolutionary Committee wanted the Girondin leaders expelled from the Convention. The *bras nus* among the *sans-culottes* wanted to put an end to speculation and hoarding, and to make bread and other staples available; and they prepared a petition demanding not only price controls on basic goods but the establishment of a "revolutionary army" to search out suspects in the countryside, to impose measures against "suspects" in the city, to purge the army and civil service of unreliable elements, and to levy a forced loan on the rich.

Varlet, for his part, obviously wanted to go much further. He saw the coming insurrection as an opportunity to dissolve the entire Convention and even the Paris Commune, replacing both bodies with a direct sectional democracy. In this respect, he was carrying out what R.B. Rose, in his study of the *sans-culotte* movement, calls the "basic principles" of the sectional movement:

> the inalienable embodiment of sovereignty in the primary [face-to-face] assemblies of the people, popular legislation by referendum, binding mandates for the people's deputies and the constant right of recall; *in extremis* the reserved right of insurrection to dislodge usurping governments and to insure the effective continuity of the sovereignty of the people. This fiercely intransigent

interpretation of the meaning of democracy would remain a central feature of the sans-culotte movement during its period of greatest solidarity and influence, in 1793 and 1794.[11]

It was the realization of the democracy that the Montagnards, no less than the Girondins; the Commune, no less than the Convention; posturing Héberts, no less than staid Robespierres; "friends of the people" like Marat, no less than disdainful opponents of "*les anarchistes*" like Vergniaud—all were resolutely determined to prevent. The conflict between the Committee of Nine and its largely Jacobin opponents was joined during the fateful night of May 30–31, when the committee, on Varlet's proposal, voted to abolish the Paris Commune and its General Council and to suspend the authority of Mayor Pache and the Paris Department. That the Évêché's "programme failed," observes Rose,

was due to two things: the stubborn resistance of the Commune and the municipal administration, who refused to disband on the orders of the Évêché, and refused to back the insurrection on the Évêché's terms, and the skillful tactics of the Mountain, particularly Marat and some of the rank-and-file Jacobins, who managed to divert the popular pressure for the dispersal of the Convention into the more manageable channel of a demand for a purge of a handful of Girondin "public enemies." Meanwhile Varlet and his supporters gradually lost control of the central insurrectionary committee.[12]

How were Varlet and the *enragés* on the Committee of Nine outmaneuvered? This question is one of the most vexing of the Revolution, given the decisive shift it produced in the uprising's aims and its dismal sequelae.

In the absence of written evidence, we may surmise that during the night of May 30–31 the Montagnards, the Commune, and the Department of Paris recognized the potential danger of the Committee of Nine and were frantically looking for a way to neutralize it. The *enragés*, they rightly suspected, were taking the upcoming insurrection out of the government's control, and the fact that a committee headed by Varlet might set masses of armed men in motion gave this fear an intense urgency. On this score, there could be little doubt that the Commune, particularly Hébert and his supporters, openly sided with the Montagnards in usurping the influence of the radical elements on the committee and, in time, quashing their influence.

Casting around for an emissary to the Committee, the Montagnards and Commune seem to have settled on Claude-Emmanuel Dobsen, the influential president of the revolutionary section de-la-Cité—the section in which the Évêché palace was physically located. Dobsen was immensely popular with the *sans-culottes*, not only for his revolutionary fervor but because during the investigations of the Commission of Twelve he had defiantly refused to surrender his section's registers to the Convention. The fact that he had been one of the four who were arrested by the Girondins greatly enhanced his status among the *sans-culottes*.

On the critical night of May 30–31, persons unknown (did they include Marat, who seems to have been showing up everywhere?) approached Dobsen while he was still in prison, presumably with pleas to neutralize the influence of the *enragés* on the Committee of Nine—a task which he apparently agreed to perform. Released from captivity on that fateful night, Dobsen wasted no time in going to the meeting of the Évêché palace, where the nine-member committee welcomed him and made him its tenth member.

Again, the sequence and causes of the events that immediately followed are not entirely clear. But we do know that Varlet thereafter ceased to be president of the committee and was replaced in that crucial office by Dobsen. We also know that the actions of the new Committee of Ten, as the original Évêché Committee was now known, were abruptly moderated. From his new position of power Dobsen seems to have set about redirecting the militants from their fairly radical goals toward policies more congenial to the Commune and the Montagnards. It is easy to speculate that he brought about this shift—over Varlet's furious objections—by persuading his fellow committeemen that the need for "unity" with the Commune and the Mountain must override their seemingly "minor" differences. As in so many radical movements since, the plea for "unity" to create a "broad-based" movement that presumably could be more "effective" has been one of the most common techniques for disarming the left wing of a movement and persuading naive elements in moments of decision to acquiesce to less principled, safer, and more socially congenial policies.

Finally, it was probably on Dobsen's motion that the Committee of Ten was supplanted by a newly created and presumably broader Central Revolutionary Committee, which consisted not only of the Committee of Ten but fifteen additional members from the Commune, an assembly of moderate sections, and the Jacobin-controlled department of Paris.[13] Since the new Central Revolutionary Committee had a total of twenty-five members, the *enragés* found themselves in the minority. The Central Revolutionary Committee now took control of the insurrection, shunting the *enragés* to the side. "There was no question," writes Slavin, "that the Jacobins, with the connivance of the departmental authorities, aimed at subordinating the Évêché committee to their own" in order to keep the insurrection within existing institutional boundaries.[14]

One of the new Committee's first acts, at nine in the morning of May 31, was to neutralize the order of the former Committee of Nine—the one Varlet had signed before the arrival of Dobsen—to abolish the Paris Commune, which they symbolically "dissolved" and immediately reinstated after it took an oath recognizing the authority of the "sovereign people." Varlet's intention of abolishing the Commune was now turned into a purely ceremonial act and

became—wrongly, as R.B. Rose points out—little more than a farcical gesture rather than a major betrayal of the Committee of Nine's original revolutionary intentions.[15]

The process of diluting the influence of the radicals in the Central Revolutionary Committee and the Évêché Assembly proceeded at a steady pace, until their impact was soon negligible. When a citizen (who Daniel Guérin opines may have been Varlet) came forward at the General Council of the Commune and offered to lead the Paris battalions in their march on the Convention, the Council's prudent majority expressed "their complete indignation, their complete horror at such a proposal."[16] Mayor Pache pompously asserted that "the people of Paris can distinguish between their true friends and the fools and imbeciles who try to mislead them and embroil them in perverted schemes." When a young radical, Sébastien de Lacroix, tried to present a "certain very violent project," Dobsen cut him off, and some months later he was brought before the Revolutionary Tribunal on charges that on that night, he "almost went beyond the limit at which the revolution stopped." When still another citizen raised the question of the arrest of the Girondin leaders, which the Jacobins were later obliged to do, the Jacobin Anaxagoras Chaumette at the time tried to quell all discussion of the subject, while another member proposed to censure anyone who brought it up. The Central Revolutionary Committee, as Chaumette later wrote, did all it could to "moderate the volcanic activity" of the *sans-culottes.*[17]

It was now apparent to Varlet and his supporters that they had been deceived. In a pamphlet published much later, in the fall of 1794, Varlet recalled the day: "The insurrectionary committee contained the germ of a revolutionary government, conceived secretly at the very beginning. The false insurgents substituted Robespierre for Brissot; for federalism, a revolutionary dictatorship, decreed in the name of public safety."[18]

Yet for all its moderation, the real power in Paris now lay in the hands of the Central Revolutionary Committee. It shut the gates of the city and installed the Jacobin François Hanriot as commander of the National Guard. Since the 31st was a Friday and therefore a work day, which would prevent many needy *sans-culottes* from participating in the *journée*, the Central Committee decreed that all armed working men would be compensated in the amount of forty sous per day from funds levied on the wealthy. Early that morning, Varlet ordered the tocsin sounded (this act has wrongly been imputed to Marat), and thousands of *sans-culottes* from the radical sections streamed toward the Tuileries.

Their numbers, however, were small, and the *journée* was more a demonstration than an intimidating insurrection. The Central Revolutionary Committee apparently had been remiss in reaching the *sans-culottes*, who were already at work when the *journée* started in the afternoon. The Convention, in turn, disdainfully ordered that the "insurrection" be investigated, even as it was still

under way, and some Girondins even proposed disarming the people and transferring control of the armed forces from the sections to the Convention.

The Montagnards, to retain the support the *sans-culottes*, were obliged to take action against the Girondins, however irresolutely. Marat moved that the Committee of Public Safety report in three days on the possibility of arresting the twenty-two Girondins—a remarkably tame proposal in view of the excoriations he heaped upon them—and later in the day, Robespierre finally proposed that the twenty-two Girondin leaders be impeached. By that time, the crowd, which numbered several thousand, was already dissipating. The Convention's only real concession was to abolish the despised Commission of Twelve once and for all, a concession to which the Montagnards readily agreed.

This done, some moderates tried to portray the events on the Friday as a success. Although it could hardly be compared with the *journée* of August 10, one speaker extolled it as a nonviolent "*insurrection morale*" as opposed to a violent "*insurrection brutale.*" The normally volatile Hébert called it one of the most "beautiful" *journées* of the entire Revolution, and he commended the citizens of Paris, who, he declared, "always counted on the force of reason rather than on that of arms."[19]

Yet the twenty-two Girondin delegates still sat in the Convention, and no motion had been passed to expel them. Faced with Girondin intransigence and Montagnard equivocation, the Évêché militants around Varlet patently felt that the insurrection had miscarried, and they persevered in their demands for resolute action. On June 1, a Saturday, crowds of *sans-culottes* came out into the street, complaining of the Montagnards' sluggishness the day before. Indeed, the section Piques, to which Robespierre belonged, issued a statement announcing that the Central Revolutionary Committee was "unworthy of the confidence of the section" and warned that

> If, within twenty-four hours, the country is not saved, the sections will be invited to elect new commissioners worthy of their confidence, who will meet in the Évêché, and who, invested with unlimited powers, shall be charged with taking sweeping measures which alone can save public affairs.[20]

The *sans-culottes* movement had reached a boiling point. That there would now be an insurrection seemed unquestionable; all that had to be settled was its aim. Would it be content to force the expulsion of the twenty-two, or would it overthrow the Convention altogether, possibly establishing Varlet's coveted sectional democracy?

That same Saturday morning, the Committee of Public Safety expressed its alarm at the events of the day before and its fear that another insurrection was in the offing, this time a violent one. The Central Revolutionary Committee, in turn, dispatched Dobsen to the Committee of Public Safety to consider "means

to save the country."[21] There he conferred with the Committee members, and if he received instructions from them, which is very likely, the Committee of Public Safety and by extension the Convention itself were brought into active complicity with a committee—the Central Revolutionary Committee—that had initially been created out of the earlier Committee of Nine to overthrow them. That very evening, in fact, Varlet openly accused Dobsen of obstructing the work of the Committee—to which Mayor Pache responded, "This is what happens . . . every time you place a Varlet at your head; he will go beyond you."[22]

A completely uncertain situation existed the next day, on June 2, a Sunday. Hanriot had been ordered to ring the Tuileries with sixty cannon and hand-picked, heavily armed battalions of National Guardsmen, some five to six thousand strong. Once again, Varlet had the tocsin sounded, and since the *sans-culottes* did not have to be at work, an overwhelming crowd of citizens—estimates range from 75,000 to 100,000—assembled behind the National Guardsmen, who were stationed between them and the Convention. In an arrangement typical of the ambiguity of the situation that existed, the Guardsmen were so positioned that, given the appropriate order, they could either attack the Convention together with the *sans-culottes*, or effectively defend the Convention from the crowd. To further complicate the situation, Hanriot ordered his men to arrest any deputy who left the Tuileries before the twenty-two were expelled. A delegation of *sans-culottes* thereupon entered the palace headed by a member of the Central Revolutionary Committee to demand the arrest of the Girondins "and threatened to have the people save public affairs should the Convention refuse."[23]

In the raucous debate that followed, some deputies tried discreetly to leave the palace, only to find their passage at the gate barred by National Guardsmen. Infuriated at this behavior, the Convention ordered that the National Guards be withdrawn, only to be told in no uncertain terms by Hanriot: "Tell your f—— president that I f—— him and his Assembly, and that if within one hour, he doesn't deliver to me the twenty-two, I'm going to blast it."[24]

Faced with this earthy challenge to the Convention's dignity, the deputy Barère now suggested that the deputies dramatically demonstrate their defiance of the Guard and the *sans-culottes* by leaving the building *en masse*, much to the horror of Robespierre, who is reported to have reproached Barère: "What are you doing? You're making a mess of it."[25] In any case, the deputies of the right and the center—the majority—rose forthwith and headed toward the Tuileries courtyard. The Montagnards remained seated. But after being scolded for not braving the common danger with their fellow deputies, the majority of them rose and joined the others.

Scarcely had the Convention deputies reached the outside of the palace when armed *sans-culottes* furiously shouted at them to remain in the Tuileries until they decreed the arrest of the Girondins. Indeed, Hanriot told the president of

the Convention, Hérault de Séchelles, a fellow Jacobin, to "swear to me on your head that the twenty-two members will be surrendered within twenty-four hours." When Hérault de Séchelles refused, Hanriot responded menacingly, "In that case, I shall not say anything." With a gesture to his troops, he was heard to order: "To arms, gunners, to your cannon!"[26] Some of the Guards cried, "Down with the Right! Long live the Montagnards! To the Guillotine with the Girondins! Long live Marat!"[27] A crucial moment of truth, as it were, seems to have arrived when the artillerymen were prepared to fire, while the cavalrymen, with drawn sabres, and infantrymen at the ready, pointed their weapons at the *Conventionnels*.

So delicate was the situation, now, that even a slight altercation between the deputies and the Guards might have led the crowd as well as the militia to fire on the *Conventionnels*. Indeed, had a single shot been fired, all the guns and artillery ringing the Tuileries could have gone off at once. The *sans-culottes* might very well have dissolved the Convention and possibly tried to establish a sectional democracy in France.[28] Varlet reportedly shouted at Hanriot to fire and was beside himself when the commander failed to do so.

At this point, Marat, the "friend of the people," stepped in and defused the crisis by shouting to Hérault de Séchelles, "I call on you and your followers to return to the posts which you have abandoned like cowards."[29] This was a clever ruse. It gave the deputies the excuse they needed to return to the Tuileries with the Montagnards in the lead. To Varlet's alarm, Hanriot permitted the delegates to make their retreat without firing a shot. Even though the deputies had been humiliated, the decisive moment had passed. Viewed from the standpoint of the *enragés*, the nearest France had come to a third revolution had failed.

Having escaped dissolution, the Convention deputies resumed their seats and nervously debated the fate of the Girondins, a debate whose outcome was essentially decided as soon as news arrived that the Jacobin commune in Lyon had been overthrown. Marat proposed that thirty-one Girondin deputies be arrested. Despite resistance from most of the center and right deputies, who were unwilling to make such a decision under duress, the Montagnards resolutely pressed their demand until Marat's motion prevailed.

Not only would a failure to remove the Girondins have reopened a confrontation between the Convention and the people, but the Mountain was only too aware that, had it failed to support Marat's motion, it would have lost the allegiance of the *sans-culottes*. Nor was the vote wholly distasteful to them, politically; by voting for the arrests of their opponents' leaders, they were assured of becoming the dominant party in the Convention.

The expelled Girondins were treated with extraordinary leniency. At most, they were placed under house arrest and watched over by a gendarme, while others simply slipped away and fled to the provinces, where they were to produce mayhem for the new Jacobin republic. A messenger was sent outside to inform

the crowd of the vote, and the way was cleared for the deputies to leave. Marat, in effect, had shrewedly manipulated the situation to contain the insurrection within institutional boundaries and in the process had awarded political supremacy to the Montagnards. His assassination by Charlotte Corday several weeks later, on July 13, was no great loss for the *sans-culottes*, particularly the *bras nus*, who revered him—and whom he betrayed in the May 31 and June 2 *journées*.

The initiative for the insurrection on Sunday had been taken by the *enragés* and their *sans-culotte* allies. And it was they alone who had formulated its demands and propelled it forward toward a revolutionary confrontation with the Convention over the preceding weeks. Moreover, as Slavin points out, "It was the sectionnaires who composed the bulk of the armed crowd that surrounded the National Assembly. It was their insistence that forced the Convention to bow before them."[30] The Montagnards trailed behind the *enragés* and the *sans-culottes* with fearful trepidation. Apart from opposing the Girondins, Robespierre had kept discreetly silent during much of the affair, while Marat had turned a potentially decisive *sans-culottes* uprising into mere Jacobin *coup d'état*. In Paris, at least, the Girondins were either expelled or silenced, and they ceased to be to be a viable political grouping after June 2.

AFTERMATH

Although the Montagnards now controlled the Convention, the most immediate demands of the *sans-culottes* and the *enragés* remained unfulfilled. Bread was still scarce, and speculation and hoarding continued. The Montagnards now had to perform the delicate task of quelling the power of the *sans-culottes* without thoroughly alienating them. They still required the support of the sections, albeit with their powers trimmed. The first task of the Jacobin-controlled Convention was to reclaim for itself all the authority that the Central Revolutionary Committee had acquired, where the "dangerous elements," as they were called, still found an institutional home in addition to the sections. The fact that the Committee had no funds gave the Jacobins their initial opening in dissolving it. Before the June 2 *journée*, it should be recalled, the Committee had promised the *sans-culottes* that, in compensation for lost wages, they would receive forty sous for each day (May 31 to June 2) on which they were involved in the insurrections. This responsibility was now given to the Committee of Public Safety, which agreed to approve compensatory funds provided that the Central Revolutionary Committee disband—a requirement with which Dobsen and his supporters complied only too willingly. To close the sordid chapter on Dobsen and company, shortly afterward, on June 8, the Department of Paris, in collusion with the Montagnards, created a new,

completely innocuous "Committee of Public Safety for the Department of Paris," which provided sinecures for the members of the former Central Revolutionary Committee. The *enragés* were conspicuously excluded from it.

What can be said about the remarkable miscarriage of the *journées* of May 31 to June 2? The failure of the *enragés* to create a well-organized political force and advance a coherent program had not only been their undoing; it had cost the radical *sans-culottes*, particularly the *bras nus*, the Revolution. Although the Girondins had been finally expelled from the Convention, the *journées* had simply replaced them with a government dominated by vigorous Jacobin centralizers—one that differed from the preceding government by virtue of its greater resoluteness and its seemingly unlimited willingness to employ violence. Unlike the insurrection of August 10, which had dethroned the monarchy, created the republic, and broadened the powers of the sections and the Commune, the uprising of June 2 merely replaced the authority of one faction in the Convention by another—the Girondins by the Montagnards. Institutionally, the Montagnards left the Convention intact. Indeed, nothing could have been further from their minds than the direct democracy that Varlet and his supporters envisioned.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Morris Slavin, *The French Revolution in Miniature: Section Droits-de-l'Homme, 1789-1795* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 132.
2. Quoted in J.M. Thompson, *The French Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 338.
3. Quoted in Slavin, *French Revolution*, p. 135.
4. Quoted in Daniel Guérin, *La Lutte de clas ses sous la Première République*, vol. 1 (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1946), p. 116. A highly abridged version of the first volume has been translated by Ian Patterson under the title *Class Struggle in the First French Republic* (London: Pluto Press, 1977), p. 73, hereinafter referred to as "the English translation."
5. Quoted in William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 233.
6. Quoted in Guérin, *La Lutte de classes*, vol. 1, p. 127; English translation, p. 90.
7. Quoted in Morris Slavin, *The Making of an Insurrection: Parisian Sections and the Gironde* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 139.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 72
9. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
11. R.B. Rose, *The Making of the Sans-Culottes: Democratic Ideas and Institutions in Paris, 1789-92* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), pp. 171–2.
12. R.B. Rose, *The Enragés: Socialists of the French Revolution?* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1965), p. 25. Rose wisely puts a question mark after his subtitle. There is very little reason, if any, to believe that the *enragés* were "socialists" in any sense comparable to the word's meaning, which was created a generation later.

13. The complex events have been ably researched by Morris Slavin in his *French Revolution in Miniature* and *Making of an Insurrection.*

14. Slavin, *Making of an Insurrection*, p. 143.

15. See R.B. Rose, *Enragés*, p. 25, note 2, which cites original sources to disprove the flippant treatment of a number of historians of the Committee of Nine's original intentions to completely abolish the Commune.

16. Guérin's opinion that it may have been Varlet appears in *La Lutte de classes*, vol. 1, p. 121; it is not presented in the English translation. Guérin's opinion seems highly plausible; it is very unlikely that the meeting would have exhibited "*indignation*" and "*horreur*" if the citizen were just an ordinary individual rather than a prominent radical like Varlet.

17. All quotations in this paragraph are from Guérin, *La Lutte de classes*, vol. 1, pp. 121–2; English translation, pp. 86–7.

18. Quoted in Slavin, *French Revolution*, p. 155.

19. Quoted in Slavin, *Making of an Insurrection*, p. 105.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

21. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 146.

22. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 105.

23. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 111.

24. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 144.

25. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 115.

26. Quoted Guérin, *La Lutte de classes*, vol. 1, p. 125; English translation, p. 89.

27. Quoted in Christopher Hibbert, *The Days of the French Revolution* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1980), p. 201.

28. It is worth noting that Slavin draws much the same conclusion as mine: "If a few hotheads among the *Conventionnels* had made a threatening move and their counterparts among the troops had fired on them, the whole Convention could have been massacred on the spot." *Making of an Insurrection*, p. 115.

29. Quoted in Hibbert, *Days of the French Revolution*, p. 201.

30. Slavin, *Making of an Insurrection*, p. 162.

CHAPTER 21 Terror and Thermidor

The power gained by the Montagnards as a result of the June 2 *journée* was considerable and increased with every passing month. Even before the insurrection, the central government had already vastly expanded its authority over France by means of the February conscription decree, the establishment of the Revolutionary Tribunal, the imposition of the maximum price for bread, and the formation of a powerful executive, the Committee of Public Safety, which worked in tandem with the Committee of General Security. Once the Jacobins were the dominant faction in the Convention, the government became even more centralized than it had ever been in the past, and commensurately more authoritarian.

Perhaps the most immediate problem the government faced was to counter the revolt in the countryside. Throughout the provinces, the news that the people of Paris had intimidated the legitimate, elected Convention and driven out the Girondins met with widespread outrage. "Federalist" uprisings had already displaced republicans in Marseilles and Lyon in the spring; they now spread to Bordeaux in June and Toulon in July. Lyon fell under the control of Royalists, who initiated a "white terror" by executing their republican predecessors. By mid-June, sixty out of the eighty-three departments were in varying degrees of open revolt against Paris, and civil wars raged around Lyon, Marseilles, and Toulon as well as in the Vendée, where the counterrevolutionary peasants, priests, and nobles gained notable victories.

Eager to gain peasant support, which had been dwindling steadily after 1792, the Convention on June 3 confiscated the lands of *émigrés* and divided them up into small lots for sale on fairly advantageous terms to the rural poor—a policy that had been previously avowed but not enforced. On July 17 it finally abolished what remained of seigneurial dues, without compensation to the landlords.

Moreover, to assure the *sans-culottes* in Paris and the provinces generally that a dictatorship was not in the offing, the Convention rapidly completed its work

on a new republican constitution and accepted the final document on June 24. Given the era, this famous "Constitution of '93" was an enlightened document indeed. Echoing the American Declaration of Independence, it declared that society was instituted for the happiness of the people, and it expanded the original Declaration of Rights by including the right to worship and to acquire gainful employment. The state, so the Constitution declared, had a duty to provide work to those who could not acquire jobs, even public assistance to disabled persons. It affirmed the universality of public education for all the children of citizens and established annual national elections based on universal manhood suffrage. When the "Constitution of '93" was submitted to a national plebiscite in July, it was approved overwhelmingly by the voters.

But the Convention was patently troubled by this constitution, which, had it been put into effect, would have meant the dissolution of the Jacobin republic. Indeed, it is doubtful whether national elections during the hectic years of 1793 and 1794 would have made the Mountain the majority in the proposed assembly. Thus Robespierre and his fellow Montagnards saw to it that the Constitution was stored away in a place of honor in the Convention and discreetly held in abeyance as long as various crises continued to beleaguer the country. Nor was it ever put into effect. Its authors were only too eager to retain the highly centralized state and emergency decrees that kept them in power. The Constitution thus became little more than a symbol for militant *sans-culottes* who increasingly opposed the Jacobin government and sought to replace the Convention by a sectional democracy.

THE ASSAULT AGAINST THE *ENRAGÉS*

Although the Girondin deputies were gone and the Jacobins had agreed to some *enragé* demands, most of these demands remained unfulfilled. No additional measures against hoarding and speculation were taken by the Convention, nor was price-fixing extended to all staples of life, as the *enragés* had called for. On June 25, Jacques Roux led a deputation of the radical sections to the Convention, where he scathingly denounced all the deputies for their failure to take action against hoarders and speculators, singling out the Montagnards for behaving much like their now-overthrown Girondin predecessors. To Roux the Jacobins were all the more treacherous because, unlike the Girondins, they opportunistically appealed to the *sans-culottes* with radical rhetoric but little action. Somberly warning that the Convention was ignoring the material needs of the *sans-culottes*, he stridently declaimed to the Mountain: "Do not end your career in ignominy!"[1] The threat particularly unnerved the Montagnards, who were acutely aware of public unrest over Paris's economic difficulties. Once

again, the poorer women of Paris were sacking soap suppliers and selling off the merchandise, while other *sans-culottes* broke into the shops of grocers, demanding lower prices for the means of life.

By the summer of 1793, such expropriative *taxations populaires*, as the pillaging was called, aroused the Convention's fears that the radical *sans-culottes* were regaining their political vigor, and the Jacobins made a concerted effort to remove Roux and other *enragés* from the political scene. On the initiative of Robespierre, the Committee of Public Safety instituted a massive propaganda campaign against them, maligning Roux and discrediting his supporters. Roux was expelled from the Cordeliers Club and from his position as the Paris Commune's news editor. Rather ineptly, he tried to countervail this attack after Marat was assassinated (July 13) by laying claim to the martyr's mantle (although Marat had attacked him vituperatively while he was alive) through the adoption of the sobriquet "friend of the people." Theophile Leclerc, in turn, started up a newspaper of the same name. Appealing to Marat's memory, the *enragés* generally demanded that granaries be constructed in each district of Paris and that funds be allocated to the people to purchase from it. Further, they called upon the Committee of Public Safety to extend price controls to all basic articles for general consumption: a *maximum général.*

Nor were the *enragés* the only contenders for Marat's mantle. The Jacobins too tried to exploit the memory of the revered "friend of the people" by crudely memorializing his name. Streets were designated in his honor, and his bust was placed in the Convention, together with David's memorable painting of his dead body. Marat's companion, Simone Évrard, was trotted out to denounce Roux before the Convention for perpetrating the "murderous calumny" that Marat had been "an insane apostle of disorder and anarchy"[2] comparable, as they saw it, to Roux himself.

To effectively wage a propaganda campaign against the *enragés* without alienating the *sans-culottes*, the Jacobins were obliged to make concrete concessions to at least some of their demands, which they did in an attenuated form. The two great executive committees, the Committee of Public Safety and the Committee for General Security, introduced some experimental economic measures that contravened the doctrine of free trade and the sanctity of property, to which the Jacobins were normally committed. Some efforts were made to see to the needs of the indigent, and they even proposed to turn a number of enterprises owned by "enemies of the republic" into state-run industries. These initiatives were clothed in radical rhetoric, which vaguely suggested overall visions of economic justice.

However, the two committees refused to depart entirely from the *laissez-faire* economics of the Physiocrats or to adopt the *enragés'* more radical demand for a *maximum général.* Here, the Montagnards balked; general price controls were too blatant a violation of their free-trade principles. The price of bread

continued to be a major bone of contention, and the city remained restive. Rather than imposing the dreaded *maximum général*, the Montagnards chose the less distasteful alternative of establishing public granaries and allocating a hundred thousand livres so that the public could purchase it. "In this way," observes Albert Goodwin, "the committee managed to avoid a renewal of sectional disturbances in the capital without capitulating completely to the economic demands of the Enragés."[3]

Yet the growing attacks upon them notwithstanding, the *enragés* continued to press for Jacques Roux's demand that the Convention make it a capital crime to hoard food and speculate on the price of items necessary for life, which the Convention was finally obliged to do on July 26, even establishing municipal commissions to enforce antihoarding measures. It was a poorly written law: not only were its terms ill-defined, but death still seemed like an unduly harsh punishment for speculators. Moreover, the law was difficult to enforce, and many arrested merchants were ultimately acquitted, with the result that the embarrassed and conflicted Jacobins had essentially tried to co-opt the *enragés*' demand with legislation that was largely ineffective. The *sans-culottes*, for their part, demanded that the law be resolutely enforced. Juries, they enjoined, should be composed entirely of *sans-culottes*, who presumably would not flinch at imposing the death penalty. To the hesitant Jacobins, they firmly responded: "The sans-culottes are rich in virtue, and hence can best apply the law."[4]

Nor did it add to the credibility of the Jacobins that the Convention passed a sweeping Law of Suspects, in which all individuals who were under suspicion of being counterrevolutionaries were to be arrested and tried by the Revolutionary Tribunal. Yet not even the much-hated Marie Antoinette, as the *enragés* noted, had been tried and sentenced, let alone the Girondin leaders. After Claire Lacombe scathingly attacked the Montagnards in the Convention for their lax treatment of counterrevolutionaries, on August 12, Danton, now president of the Convention, finally introduced a motion that all suspects be indiscriminately arrested and tried, which the cowed Convention duly passed. But again the definition of a suspect remained troublingly vague, with the result that this law was also difficult to enforce.

While the Jacobins were cynically playing carrot-and-stick with the *enragés* and their *sans-culotte* allies, the military situation worsened seriously following Dumouriez's defection in the spring. Alsace and Lorraine as well as Savoy were now highly vulnerable to invasion, and the possibility that Paris would fall to the Austrians loomed once again. The Committee of Public Safety under Danton's leadership had been following a fruitless policy of conciliation toward the enemy, with the result that the great orator, who had rallied France a year earlier against foreign invaders, was suspected of seeking a compromise with France's enemies. He was finally removed, and in mid-August retired to a semi-private life at his country home in Arceis with his young new wife, to be replaced by the more implacable Robespierre. The reconstituted Committee now prosecuted the war with renewed vigor and eventually reversed its course, which made it possible to move a sizable number of troops from the foreign front to the Vendée, where they laid waste to large areas of the department. Republican battalions also marched on Lyon and finally deposed the royalist counterrevolutionaries who controlled the city. The Revolution was thus scoring military successes on all of its fronts, diminishing the dangers of foreign invasions and internal counterrevolution.

The radical sections, in turn, had been waging a petition campaign for a law to require the permanent and universal enlistment of the French people in defense of the republic. On August 23 the Convention acceded—this time fully—to the *sans-culotte* demand and declared the *levée en masse*, a decree that was to enter into history as the most revolutionary mobilization of an entire people against invaders and counterrevolutionaries. With the *levée*, the Convention could requisition the entire adult population, male and female, as well as all material resources whatsoever, for the military defense of the Revolution. Not only were all able and single young men conscripted into the army, but the republic could call up for service anyone in any occupation, and commandeer any resource it needed to defeat enemies on the frontiers and counterrevolution at home. Funds were authorized to construct armaments factories in the city, where married able-bodied men were expected to produce a thousand muskets daily, while women were called upon to sew, old men to give inspiring republican speeches, and their children to collect rags. The *levée*, to be sure, was more sweeping on paper than it could possibly have been in practice, but its scope satisfied the *sans-culottes*, while simultaneously filling the military needs of the army. At length, French forces prevailed at the Battle of Hondschoote on September 8, 1793, replaying the major defeat of the invaders at Valmy at year earlier and vastly raising republican morale.

On September 17, an all-embracing Law of Suspects was passed, according to which vigilance committees could now arrest anyone who "by their conduct, associations, talk, or writings have shown themselves partisans of tyranny, of federalism and enemies of liberty."[5] In fact, they could arrest anyone who seemed to oppose the Revolution even passively, including individuals who had not been able to obtain a "certificate of good citizenship (*civisme*)" from their section's vigilance committee. This sweeping law soon became a mandate for trying anyone who might express the least complaint against Jacobin rule.

At the same time, the Montagnards in concert with the Hébertist Commune united their efforts to finally crush the *enragés*. Not only had the Cordeliers been persuaded by Robespierre and Hébert to expel Roux, but two days later, a resolution by the Commune's General Council expressed its strong disapproval of his activities. Attacks upon him now followed one after another, including denunciations by Marat and others. Following Marat's assassination on July 14,

Roux was temporarily arrested as part of a roundup of "suspects," and was arrested again on August 22 for a few days as a warning against his agitation on food shortages in Paris. In September, after still further persecution by the authorities, Roux found himself in prison, from where he continued to publish his criticisms of the Jacobin regime. When, at length, it became clear that even his supporters at the section Gravilliers were being imprisoned, he humbly petitioned the Robespierrists for release, asserting his good intentions as a *patriote*, but his appeal was ignored. As the Terror began to reach its height, the Robespierrists, who had finally taken full control of the state, seemed determined to crush the *enragé* movement definitively. On February 10, 1794, Roux succeeded in mortally stabbing himself in Bicêtre prison rather than face a humiliating trial before the Revolutionary Tribunal.

The other well-known *enragés*, notably Varlet, Leclerc, Pauline Léon, and Claire Lacombe, barely managed to survive the Terror. On September 18, only one day after the Law of Suspects was passed, Varlet was arrested for openly opposing new limitations on the sectional democracy, and he remained in prison for nearly two months before he was released as a result of Hébert's attempt to curry favor with the radical sections. When Lacombe publicly denounced the Committee for General Security for its "infamous policy of imprisoning the best patriots" (a clear reference to Roux and Varlet), she too was temporarily arrested.

While nearly all the *enragés* were to fade from the scene as the Terror intensified in 1794, Varlet was to reenter revolutionary politics with the fall of Robespierre—again trying to revive his cherished sectional democracy when it seemed less perilous to do so. But as the waning Revolution was finally replaced by triumphant reaction, and his efforts brought him only extended and tormenting imprisonment, Varlet seems to have lost all hope for the Revolution. Although broken and penniless, he remained a political suspect as late as 1813, living well into the nineteenth century as a relic of a bygone era rather than the prophetic voice that he really had been.

In this respect, Varlet stands almost alone among the leading *enragés* of his time. Jacques Roux's vision of social justice rarely went beyond a simplistic, levelling impulse to correct the gross economic inequalities that the Revolution never resolved and, in this respect, was not unlike that of radical agitators in previous and later social conflicts who demanded a hazy "equalization" of the necessities of life. Varlet, by contrast, educated in what he construed to be the social egalitarianism of Rousseau, looked far beyond the formal republicanism of even the most extreme Jacobins and called for a revolutionary social democracy based on the direct participation of all citizens in political and economic affairs.

THE HÉBERTIST INTERLUDE

By undermining the *enragé* opposition, the Jacobins were producing a political vacuum, particularly among the *bras nus*, that Hébert and his circle were eager to fill. The Hébertists were not particularly close to the sections; their main strength lay in the Paris Commune's executive bodies, in the War Ministry, and in the Jacobin and Cordeliers clubs. Indeed, Hébert himself had even joined in the clamor against the *enragés* and helped to suppress them. His radicalism found its expression more in rambunctious oratory and journalism than in serious measures to mobilize popular support for a coherent goal. But having been defeated in an electoral bid to become Minister of the Interior on August 20, he began to turn for support to the sections—an effort in which he was aided by serious revolutionaries like Antoine Momoro and François Vincent, who led the left wing of the Cordeliers.

Thus, Hébert now took up many of the *enragé* demands, such as the enactment of harsh measures against speculators, suspects, the Girondins, and the queen. He also called for the *maximum général* and the formation of a Parisian "revolutionary army," or militia, to go into the countryside to punish hoarders and confiscate their grain. Having incorporated these *enragé* goals into his own program, his *Père Duchesne* succeeded Marat's *L'Ami du Peuple* as the best-selling newspaper among the *sans-culottes*.

Hébertist policies were faced with a serious challenge in the summer of 1793, when a severe drought brought the flour mills in the countryside to a virtual halt, and a severe shortage of bread produced widespread discontent in the capital. The price of all basic goods rose sharply during July and August. By September, the *bras nus* and poorer *sans-culottes* held massive, almost, insurrectionary, demonstrations, demanding bread and higher wages. The shortages were blamed on the "moderates" in the municipal establishments, and demands for the establishment of a Parisian "revolutionary army" to get more grain for the capital from the countryside intensified sharply.

Addressing demonstrators at the Hôtel de Ville in September 4, Hébert and his supporters in the Commune called upon them to march to the Convention on the following day, where a delegation of Hébertists from the Jacobin Club pointedly declared that terror was the order of the day. Moreover, they called upon the Convention to accept the *sans-culotte* agenda, notably, that the Girondins be tried, that suspects be thrown in prison and speedily judged, that a *maximum général* be established. They also called for a huge forced loan to be levied on the rich. Although Robespierre, who was now president of the Convention, tried to mollify the delegation by proposing diluted versions of these demands, the Convention's deputies were so intimidated that they assented to most of the proposals precisely as they were submitted.

Nor was it lost on anyone that the frightened Convention, for the second time in only a few months, had yielded to popular demands under crowd pressure—so much so, in fact, that two Hébertists were elected to the Committee of Public Safety. Once a Parisian "revolutionary army" was organized and departed for the countryside, other "revolutionary armies" surfaced in different parts of France as well. These "armies" were militias rather than professional military forces; they contained the most zealous of patriots who, apart from requisitioning supplies for the cities, were empowered to arrest any provincial whose activities, in their view, seemed hostile to the Revolution.

At length, at the end of September, the *maximum général* was enacted. The Convention imposed price controls on a wide range of basic goods including food, fuel, clothing, and even wine and tobacco, placing the "sacred Terror," as it was to be called, on the agenda of the regime.

AGAINST THE SECTIONS

Even as the Hébertists tried to benefit from the elimination of the *enragés*, the Jacobin regime took advantage of the same opportunity by moving resolutely against the sectional democracy. In the autumn of 1793, the Committee of Public Safety and the Committee of General Security transformed volunteer or elected sectional officers and commissioners into salaried bureaucrats answerable to the centralized bodies of the nation-state and decided to pay the revolutionary committeemen a daily three-livre salary.

As Soboul observes:

> Payment of revolutionary commissars transformed the job. Until now they had been elected by the general assemblies, and seemed to be agents of the sections, acting independently of administrative authorities. Now they became salaried officials, responsible to the Commune; on September 5, at the same time that the Convention gave the commissars the three-livre payment, it ordered them to submit to an investigation of the General Council [of the Commune], which was authorized to dismiss and replace them if necessary.[6]

In fact, elected officials soon came to be appointed by the state, and powers that were once exercised by sectional committees were transferred to agencies of the Jacobin republic.

As in the case of the *enragés*, the Montagnards now adopted a carrot-and-stick technique for dealing with the sections. On September 5, Danton proposed that all *sans-culottes* who attended the sectional assemblies be indemnified for losing time from work. Taken by itself, this proposal might have increased *sans-culotte*

participation in sectional activities, but his proposal contained a highly restrictive proviso: their assemblies—which had heretofore been meeting *en permanence*, for consecutive evenings and even days at a time—were not permitted to meet more than twice a week, and their hours were limited to between five and ten in the evening. This ploy was patently designed to trim the activity of the assemblies and effectively reduce the participation of the *bras nus* in public affairs.

In fact, before Danton's proposal could be adopted, the Convention restricted its forty-sou indemnity exclusively to poor citizens, "notably those who have nothing to live on but their daily work," or, as the recording secretary of the Convention put it: "every citizen who has no other source of income save his daily wages was entitled, *in case of need*, to an indemnity."[7] (Original emphasis.)

This indemnity was given with patent disdain for its recipients. The Convention even appointed sectional commissioners to determine "the eligibility of those citizens" who qualified for the forty sous, often challenging the eligibility of *sans-culottes* who were clearly in need of the indemnity. Others were obliged to obtain certificates or letters or cards that attested to their poverty, making the indemnity process all the more humiliating. Indeed, some *sans-culottes* who were eligible to receive the indemnity flatly rejected it, refusing to become what was disdainfully known as "forty-sou patriots," "*quarante sous.*"

Considerable tension developed during the following months between the nonpaid and therefore presumably more "patriotic" citizens, and the "*quarante sous*," who seemed to benefit materially from attending sectional assemblies. Lists of recipients were prepared, revised, curtailed, and repeatedly purged until the Committee of Public Safety finally treated the forty-sou stipend more as a form of charity than as a modest recompense for public activity. The Hébertists, it is worth noting, offered only limited resistance to the antisectional drive.

Thus, after Danton's law was passed, sectional meetings were hardly flooded with indigent *sans-culottes*; in fact, behind the welter of revolutionary decrees, the sectional militants could clearly see a concerted attempt by the authorities to limit their powers. The section Théâtre-Français, which had led the others in eliminating the barrier between active and passive citizens, provided the forty sous for only eighty-four recipients, although nearly 850 citizens were known to be indigent. Some sections, to be sure, paid the stipend to a large number of citizens, but this figure rarely exceeded more than a third of the indigents who were entitled to the forty sous. Radical sections such as Varlet's Droits de l'Homme and Jacques Roux's Gravilliers petitioned the Convention to abolish the two-meeting restriction and the forty-sou stipend, which they regarded as an insult to genuine patriots, but the Jacobin regime, intent on weakening the sectional democracy, insisted on retaining the humiliating practice.

Thereafter, the *sans-culottes*' later battles were mainly defensive ones. With each passing month their power waned steadily, despite the formation of the

"revolutionary armies" and the general arming of the people. The winter of 1793–94 saw the marked eclipse of the *sans-culottes* as a major force in the Revolution.

TERROR

At the same time, the centralization of the state proceeded at a rapid pace. For some time the Committee of Public Safety under Robespierre had been usurping the authority of the Committee of General Security to summon and arrest people. Finally, on October 10, the Committee of Public Safety, advancing the excuse that mounting emergencies required a government that had to function quickly and efficiently, declared that it would take over the entire state structure and be accountable only to the Convention. By December, the Committee had gained complete control over all the ministries of the government and acquired the power to choose the army's generals (subject to the Convention's approval) and the right to conduct foreign policy.

Perhaps most portentously, during the same month the Committee gained the power to purge local authorities. The departments of France were reduced to mere administrative entities, while the local districts were limited to the job of executing "revolutionary" decrees. Like every other commune in France, Paris now had to submit to the Committee of Public Safety, obey its decrees, and issue a report on municipal affairs to it every ten days. In fact, the leading officials (*procureurs*) of the districts and communes, including those in Paris, were replaced by "national agents," who were essentially functionaries of the Committee. Thus, all the municipal gains that the towns and cities of France had made from 1789 onward were essentially undone, and France was now governed by an administrative system that was even more centralized than any structure that had existed under the monarchy.

Ironically, Robespierre, who did much to centralize the republic, ordinarily respected governmental legality almost to a fault. He had played no active role in the *journées* that pushed the revolution in a leftward direction, and he seemed to respond to the insurrection of June 2 with outright fear. The opinions he normally voiced had been moderate and appeared eminently reasonable to bourgeois Paris. That he seemed more like an ideologue than a demagogue—indeed, his demeanor was puritanical and he modestly boarded at the home of the master joiner Duplay—earned him the sobriquet of "the Incorruptible." If his moral zeal reached lofty dimensions, even during the bloodsoaked heights of the Terror, he appeared nevertheless to be thoroughly imbued with a deeply felt and lofty sense of "republican virtue" and idealism.

This outlook, in many respects, may have been his undoing. He tended to respond to the material demands of the *sans-culottes* with almost blind disdain,

extolling the claims of virtue over those of survival. Nor did he accede to the egalitarian currents that flowed through the Revolution; indeed, his idealism notwithstanding, he seems to have regarded equality as little more than a utopian human condition. He never decried the ownership of property as such, however much he dismissed a concern for material things. His speech on property on April 24, 1794, before the Convention represents a traditionalist contempt for wealth even as it subtly accepts it. "You souls of mud who value nothing but gold," he declaimed, "I am not going to touch your treasure, however foul its source. You should know that this agrarian law"—which notoriously, at the time, called for the equal or common allotment of land for all in France—"of which you have spoken so much is only a bogey raised by knaves to frighten fools."

What dispensation, then, did he propose to the "souls of mud" whose "gold" he simultaneously vowed to protect? His message was basically a moral one. "Certainly, a revolution is not necessary to convince us that the extremes of wealth and poverty are the source of many evils and many crimes," he declared. "For myself I think it even less necessary for private good than for public happiness. It is much more important to make poverty honourable than to proscribe riches."[8]

But these accolades to virtue and poverty did not put bread on the table of the poorer *sans-culottes* and peasants. Although many *sans-culottes* adhered to strong republican views, even rejecting the forty-sou indemnity despite their need for it, they were hardly prepared to sacrifice themselves and their families for moral ideals that left them hungrier than ever, especially as economic conditions worsened almost daily. To the last, Robespierre maintained his distance from these *bras nus*, however much they all but revered him in the early years of the Revolution. He retained the costume and bearing of the ancien régime: a powdered wig, meticulously tailored clothing, and traditional knee breeches. We have no pictures of "the Incorruptible" in the long trousers and wearing the *bonnet rouge* of the *sans-culottes*, nor is there any evidence that he adopted the more familiar personal mannerisms initiated by the Revolution.

As hunger became more widespread, moreover, the Terror grimly continued through the autumn of 1793 and into the winter of the following year, bringing some three thousand people to the guillotine in Paris and about fourteen thousand in the provinces. The Committee of Public Safety incessantly justified these executions by declaring they were needed to eliminate the intrigues of royalists and "federalists." Louis de Saint-Just, an astute but icily unfeeling young man, who by this time had become Robespierre's *alter ego*, now regarded all "dissidents" as criminals and treated them as such, while another Jacobin, Brichet, wanted the Law of Suspects to apply to everyone who was well-to-do. In each village, he argued, the richest farmer should be identified, detained, and guillotined immediately.

By the spring of 1794, the Terrorist government had created an atmosphere of fear so far-reaching that in many respects it anticipated the terror produced by the Stalinist regime a century and a half later. Ordinary citizens, not to speak of politically prominent ones, were afraid to speak their mind on any public issues that might antagonize the Jacobin authorities—even to behave in a manner that might cast suspicion upon them as lacking in *civisme*. A general fear, in which each person suspected another as a possible informer, permeated Paris and extended in diminishing degrees to outlying areas of the capital. Even the *enragés*, such as Jacques Roux, who had been an advocate of stringent, frankly terrorist measures against counterrevolutionaries and the wealthy, were to turn against the Robespierrists for the fear they generated by the "sacred Terror." Varlet was outspoken in denouncing its scope and the paralyzing effect it had on public life.

In practice, moreover, the poor were no less victims of the Terror than the rich, whether they were young or old, women or men. Suspects were guillotined for "depraving public morals," for failing to "testify properly," for provisioning soldiers with sour wine, or even for losing their temper at the wrong moment. Some were executed through clerical errors, when their names resembled those of actual prisoners, and, typically, others were denounced by neighbors who had personal grudges against them.

Although the Terror embraced all potential counterrevolutionaries, its largest numbers of victims were in areas of the so-called "federalist revolt." At Lyon, three hundred condemned suspects were executed by cannonfire. Thousands died in overcrowded prisons at Nantes, while two thousand were drowned in barges in the Loire. The many thousands who perished in the provincial cities by far outnumbered the thousands who died on scaffolds at the Place de la République and other squares of Paris. In all, only a small percentage of those executed in the Terror were nobles, well-to-do, or clergy; most were members of the former Third Estate, often speculators, tradesmen, dissidents, and ordinary working people.

THE FALL OF THE HÉBERTISTS

The Hébertists, having triumphed in September 1793 as champions of the *sans-culottes*, in November and December now shifted their attention from menacing economic issues to fairly safe ideological ones by launching a campaign to eliminate Christianity. That the Church was not popular among the Parisian *sans-culottes* was understandable in view of its collusion with the aristocracy, but Hébert's denunciations of its "superstition and hypocrisy" were more of a distraction than an attempt to address the real material problems of the

ordinary people. Accordingly, the Hébertists began publicly to destroy crucifixes and church monuments, advancing a cult of reason and replacing statues of Mary by busts of Marat. Streets that bore names of saints were secularized, as were those of entire towns and villages, and notices were placed outside cemeteries saying that "death is an eternal sleep."

The Revolution had tried to modernize the calendar to reflect seasons, fruits, and flowers, and, following the introduction of the decimal system, weeks were changed from seven to ten days. Ironically, in fact, de-Christianization reduced the number of free days because the Sabbath now fell every ten days instead of every seven, and the abolition of religious holidays added to the grinding work the *sans-culottes*, had to perform. No less disturbing, the Hébertists closed churches, where they could, or converted them into temples of reason. Indeed, the de-Christianization campaign assumed such extravagant proportions that it did more to alienate the incurably Catholic French peasantry than to secure the Hébertists the support of the sections, whose afflictions in early 1794 were overwhelmingly economic.

Mindful that many of the French, certainly in the countryside, were still devout Catholics, the Jacobins, viewing the Hébertists as troublesome rivals, denounced de-Christianization in increasingly harsh terms. At the same time, Saint-Just proposed the famous Laws of Ventôse, enacted on February 26 and March 6, 1794, which called for the sequestration of property owned by detained and convicted "enemies to the Revolution," which were then to be distributed among "indigent patriots."

Neither Saint-Just nor Robespierre, to be sure, was a socialist in any present-day sense of the word. They were not prepared to challenge property as a basic human right; nor did they advance views that opened so radical a prospect. The Ventôse laws, which have been celebrated by certain socialist historians of the Revolution, might very well be interpreted as a stratagem on the part of the Robespierrists to wean radical *sans-culottes*, who supported the Hébertists, to their own camp. In no way did the laws propose to significantly alter the mode of production in France by collectivizing shops and land, which might have provided a definitive solution to society's economic problems. Rather, it was directed primarily toward rendering access to the means of life somewhat more equitable or, at least, not too desperate a problem for the very poor. This secondary approach to the economic problems of the country was a typical strategy of even the most radical elements in the French Revolution, and it would require another generation to raise the key problem of rearranging the productive apparatus of the country along socialized lines.

Alternately wooing and circumscribing the *sans-culottes*, Robespierre opened his attack on the Hébertists, denouncing them as atheists and warning that their de-Christianization campaign would encourage hatred of the Revolution both within France and abroad. Nor did "the Incorruptible" hesitate to form an

unsavory alliance with Danton and his supporters to eliminate the Hébertists, curb the powers of the Commune's executive, and defang the Cordeliers Club. Using the customary wild charges of counterrevolutionary conspiracies that were now being leveled by one faction against another in the government, this alliance took steps to bring the de-Christianizing Hébertists before the Revolutionary Tribunal as agents in a "foreign plot" against the government.

Hébert seems to have been panicked by the prospect of seriously confronting the Jacobin leaders, even as he kept making reckless charges against them. He vainly called for the "completion" of the Revolution—that is, for a third revolution—and with the support of Momoro and Vincent attempted irresolutely to initiate a *journée* at the beginning of March 1794. This effort, faint as it was, miscarried completely. Badly planned and equivocal in its goals, its instigators made no serious attempt to determine the extent to which they could gain *sans-culotte* support, of which they had very little.

Although the Cordeliers draped the Declaration of the Rights of Man in a black shroud, indicating their support for the upcoming enterprise, their more moderate members soon fraternized with the Montagnards and quickly subverted what support the Hébertists had in the club. Most of the sections did not respond to the insurrectionary appeal; only Momoro's section showed any will to act.

A cowering Hébert, pushed to the forefront by his own rhetoric, retreated before the prospect of a conflict became real, typically defusing his support by trivializing the *journée* as "hypothetical."[9] Momoro and Vincent, who were made of sterner stuff, patently despised him. Before the *journée* could be initiated, the Jacobins used the effort, such as it was, as a pretext to move against Hébert and his supporters. In the early hours of March 14, 1794, Hébert, Momoro, and Vincent were arrested, brought before the Revolutionary Tribunal on trumped-up charges, and guillotined on March 24, before a crowd of insulting spectators.

With the defeat of the leading Hébertists, the Jacobins stripped the Commune of Hébert's remaining supporters and replaced them with Robespierrists. Now that the Commune was largely neutralized, the Jacobins were free to eviscerate the sections. By appointing sectional police commissioners, justices of the peace, and their secretaries, they further eroded the remaining elective functions of the general assemblies. The "revolutionary armies" were essentially disbanded, and all who were suspected of being too zealous by the Mountain's standards were removed from their offices, if not jailed outright. The Left—or at least the popular movement—had been crushed, and the Robespierrists, who were now ascendant among the Jacobins, were obliged to turn to the Right to retain their credibility as a revolutionary group.

THE FALL OF THE DANTONISTS

The French Revolution now began to unwind in reverse order. Even the memory of Marat was so desacralized and defamed by the authorities that, as a police spy reported, a citizen warily declared, "Alas, who can one put one's trust in now?"[10]

To the extent that it is possible to speak of a Right among the Jacobins, it was embodied by the figure of Danton, who had sought to compromise with the Girondins, conclude peace with France's foreign enemies, and end the Terror. For some months during the fall of 1793 Danton had been living in the countryside with his new sixteen-year-old wife. He returned to Paris when he heard that the Girondins had been executed—wrongly, in his view—only to find himself in the midst of the de-Christianization campaign conducted by the Hébertists. Although he had allied himself with Robespierre and the committees to arrest the Hébertists as perpetrators of a religious terror, he was no less opposed to the extensive spilling of blood in the capital. His policies were distinctly conciliatory or "indulgent," to cite the accusation that the Robespierrists were to direct against him and his supporters, although his views earned him considerable sympathy among moderate Jacobins and *Conventionnels*, who regarded the Terror and war as needless.

A clash between the Dantonists and the Robespierrists, who emphatically favored the Terror, was inevitable, even though some historians tend to reduce their differences merely to personal rivalries. "Having decided on the elimination of the Hébertists," observes Goodwin, "the government could not have allowed the Dantonists to survive, for their acquittal would have meant its downfall."[11] The destruction of the Left, in effect, had to be balanced by the destruction of the Right if the Jacobins were to retain popular support. The case that Robespierre could develop against Danton was considerable. Over the years Danton had notoriously tried to find common ground with constitutional monarchists, including Dumouriez, certainly with moderates, and possibly even with foreign agents to end the war. He made an effort to come to terms with the Girondins, only to be arrogantly rebuffed by them in the Convention. It was even suspected, perhaps not without reason, that he had offered advice to the royal family until their intransigence became too obvious to endure. And he had amassed a suspiciously large fortune in landholdings, whose sources were dubious. His shady financial adventures and sybaritic tastes during a time that favored republican simplicity and virtue opened him to charges of moral and financial corruption.

Yet the Dantonists were hardly an inconsequential faction politically. Both Danton and his close supporter, Desmoulins, had stood at the forefront of the revolution since 1789. It was Danton who, more than anyone else, had paved the way in the Cordeliers district for the sectional democracy that followed, and

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whose oratory rallied France against its invaders in September 1792. Now in 1794, Danton and his supporters gave expression to a growing sentiment within the Convention and among the people generally against the Terror, which seemed to be getting out of hand, and the hope for stability in the country. Wearied by Robespierre's perpetual invocations of "revolutionary virtue," Danton once exclaimed, "I'll tell you what this Virtue you talk about really is. It's what I do to my wife every night!" Such talk infuriated Robespierre, who declared: "Danton derides the word Virtue as though it were a joke. How can a man with so little conception of morality ever be a champion of freedom?"[12]

Nor could Danton's vocal public objections to the present course of the Revolution fail to evoke the concern of the Robespierrists. His advocacy of a Committee of Clemency to reconsider the guilt of suspects already thrown in prison challenged the very integrity of the "sacred" Terror as an unimpeachable "purifying" endeavor that allowed for no compromises, while Desmoulins's public expression against the demise of the Girondins constituted a flagrant reproach of Robespierre. "Love of country cannot exist when there is neither pity nor love for one's fellow countrymen," Desmoulins boldly declared, "but only a soul dried up and withered by self-adulation."[13] Given the undisguised description of Robespierre that the closing lines of this passage contained, these words amounted to an open declaration of war against "the Incorruptible." Saint-Just responded in kind by virtually calling Danton a traitor. "A man is guilty of a crime against the Republic when he takes pity on prisoners," he stated pointedly. "He is guilty because he has no desire for virtue. He is guilty because he is opposed to the Terror."[14] In time, Robespierre himself concluded that the "Indulgents" were overt counterrevolutionaries and that Danton, who was always distasteful to "the Incorruptible," would have to be eliminated together with his supporters.

On the night of March 30, scarcely more than two weeks after the Hébertists had been dispatched, the Dantonists were rounded up and arrested on charges largely fabricated by Saint-Just. Upon learning that his arrest was forthcoming, Danton is said to have remarked, "It was at this time of year that I had the Revolutionary Tribunal set up. I pray to God and men to forgive me for it." But he made no attempt to escape, despite the pleas of his friends. "A man cannot carry his country away with him on the soles of his shoes," he is reported to have resolutely declared.[15]

That the "Indulgents" would be found guilty seemed like a foregone conclusion; but the charges brought against Danton himself were so flimsy that his oratory nearly turned the tide against a seemingly predetermined verdict. Denied the opportunity to call witnesses and explore the evidence against him, he nevertheless nearly succeeded in winning the crowd inside and outside the Tribunal against his accusers. It is said that his voice could be heard across the very banks of the Seine. "You are murderers," he cried out. "Murderers! Look at

them! They have hounded us to our deaths! . . . But the people will tear my enemies to pieces within three months."[16] So forceful was his defense that the Robespierrists had to peremptorily cut the trial short and, lest he be rescued by the people, were obliged to sentence the defendants to death *in absentia*.

The verdict was returned on April 5, 1794. As the tumbrels took Danton and Desmoulins—both only thirty-four years old—to the guillotine, they passed the Duplays' home, where Robespierre boarded. "You will follow us, Robespierre," Danton cried out prophetically. They were executed at the end of the day, before a crowd that clearly admired them. Danton's last words to his executioner were characteristic of the man. "Don't forget to show my head to the people," he said peremptorily. "It's well worth having a look at."[17]

Thereafter, the Robespierrists began to execute people less for specific acts than for being potential opponents—indeed, for failing to live up to the vague republican moral standards advanced by Robespierre himself. On April 16 the government decreed that all alleged conspiracy cases in France were to be tried exclusively in Paris, partly to close down the provincial revolutionary tribunals and partly to dilute whatever tolerance for dissenters existed outside the Parisian courts. The jails became overcrowded with suspects brought to Paris from the provinces. On June 10, the Convention passed the notorious Law of Prairial to speed up the Tribunal's proceedings, a law that broadened the definition of counterrevolutionary crimes enormously, often giving them a vague and ineffable character. The Revolutionary Tribunal was exempted from having to interrogate accused people before bringing them to trial, since, it was claimed, that only "confused the conscience of the judges," and the accused were deprived of all defense counsel and virtually denied the right to call witnesses on their behalf. The Tribunal was no longer required to provide positive proof of guilt; "moral proof" was regarded as evidence for a capital sentence. In fact, the Tribunal could deliver only one of two verdicts: guilty or not guilty; and there was only one sentence for those whom it found guilty: immediate execution. No longer was the Tribunal even the semblance of a court of justice. As the Jacobin Couthon observed, it was "less a question of punishing" the "enemies of the Republic" than of "annihilating" them.[18] Accordingly, from June onward, the rate of executions soared, and fifteen hundred people were executed in the eight weeks before the end of July.

THE FALL OF ROBESPIERRE

To strengthen their popular base, the Jacobins now adopted measures favoring the poorer strata of the population, among both the peasantry in the countryside and the *sans-culottes* in the cities. Church lands were sold off on

terms more favorable to the poorer peasantry. And the Laws of Ventôse remained in effect even as Marat's former Jacobin admirers were dragging his portrait through the mud and removing his bust from prominent places in the capital. Yet to the *sans-culottes*, the Ventôse laws were made less credible when the Robespierrist regime imposed wage controls on July 5, 1794, undercutting what popular support it had, while providing little consolation for its overall conduct to the well-to-do. Perhaps no *maximum* raised a greater furor among the *bras nus* and poorer *sans-culottes* of the city than the one that placed a ceiling on their already miserable earnings. Cries against it were to follow the tumbrels that later carried the Robespierrists to the scaffold, whose execution evoked hoots and shouts from a bitterly hostile crowd of poor and wealthy alike.

Indeed, less than three weeks after wage controls were established, Robespierre and his supporters fell, with virtually no support from the sections. To foresee the blow that finally came would not have been difficult, and Robespierre was not insensitive to the reaction he was producing. Yet he remained overconfident, even petulant, with respect to his authority. To counteract the atheistic reputation that the Hébertists had given to the government, he staged a public Festival of the Supreme Being on June 8, in which his pomposity was equaled only by his arrogance. To many *Conventionnels*, it now seemed that "the Incorruptible" had completely succumbed to the lures of power and aspired to be a dictator. Nor were they reconciled to the expulsion of the Girondin leaders and the execution of the Dantonists. The guillotine seemed relentless in its claims of victims, and never had the Terror seemed more intolerable than in the spring of 1794.

On June 26, after six weeks of a strange absence from the Convention, "the Incorruptible" appeared before the assembly and delivered a rambling speech including threats to unspecified counterrevolutionaries. The Convention, having recovered its own confidence while he was gone, was no longer docile. It responded with angry demands that he name the "enemies" who were apparently slated for the guillotine, which Robespierre adamantly refused to do, leaving the unruly hall in a cold fury. During the night of July 26 and well into the next morning, Jacobins and moderates alike from the two great committees desperately mobilized supporters to unseat him. When the following morning came, Robespierre and his supporters were furiously denounced, and "the Incorruptible" was even denied the opportunity to respond to his attackers.

It is ironical, perhaps, that Robespierre was still not prepared to violate republican legality. Even after the Convention voted unanimously for his arrest and execution, he procrastinated before calling upon the sections for support. Indeed, like many revolutionaries in periods of crisis that lead to their downfall, he seems almost to have been sleepwalking, roused to action only by his immediate supporters. Rescued from the Convention by the Commune, where he still had support, he withdrew to the Hôtel de Ville and almost indifferently

permitted his aides to call for an insurrection against the *Conventionnels*. The response by the sections indicates that his support among them had virtually disappeared; scarcely seventeen out of forty-eight sectional battalions of the National Guard answered the calls of the Robespierrists, and even then only falteringly. During the night, most of the National Guards who responded simply drifted away. Even the sections that had been most strongly committed to the Left, like Roux's Gravilliers and the Hébertist L'Unité, eagerly joined the Convention to attack the Hôtel de Ville, which in the early morning hours was virtually unguarded. On the afternoon of July 28 "the Incorruptible," his brother Augustin, Saint-Just, Couthon, Hanriot, and several others were led to the guillotine, where they were executed amidst the hoots and insults of a huge crowd. The fall of the Robespierrist regime occurred on 10 Thermidor, according to the revolutionary calendar, a date that thereafter gave his moderate successors in the Convention the name of "Thermidorians"—a term that was to find a dishonorable place in the revolutionary vocabulary for generations to come.

THERMIDOR

Although the Thermidorian regime was politically moderate, the destruction of the Robespierrist regime allowed the Left to recover again. The *journées* of the *sans-culottes* and the conspiracies of the revolutionary societies revived, albeit on a scale much smaller than in the past. Worsening economic conditions, provocations by Parisian gangs of royalist gilded youth, the growing centralization of power in the ruling Directory (the small handful of men who increasingly became the principal governmental power in France) and the steady undoing of the gains that the masses had achieved during 1793 all served to foster popular unrest that culminated in two *sans-culotte*, largely *bras nus*, uprisings. The first, in April 1795, in which the Convention was briefly occupied by the masses, rapidly fizzled out into what Soboul has aptly called a demonstration rather than an insurrection. It served merely to alert the Directory to the more important one that followed a month later. This *journée*, organized by the radical sections, had all the trappings of the older, more organized uprisings of the past. On May 21, the tocsin and church bells sounded throughout the capital, followed by the alarm cannon and the march of sectional battalions to the Convention, which, after several skirmishes, was taken over by the armed masses. But apart from a good deal of oratory, simulated concessions by the frightened deputies, and the passing of resolutions demanding a return to the old revolutionary democracy, the Directory, and the great committees of 1793–94, which still remained in the aftermath of the Thermidor, were permitted to muster their own sympathetic troops. They

finally drove the insurrectionary people back to their neighborhoods, where they soon surrendered their arms to the Directory's better-disciplined and more determined military forces. Apart from limited riots and expressions of protest, the period of the *journées* had come to an end.

A "white terror" followed the May uprising, and the radicals who were not rounded up were now obliged to turn to secret conspiracies against the increasingly reactionary regime. Of these diffuse conspiracies, the most notable and legendary was the Conspiracy of Equals, led by Gracchus Babeuf, which tried to stage a communistic coup in 1796. Babeuf's vision of communism has been aptly described as a levelling of the great economic disparities that the Revolution had not eliminated. The Babouvist ideal of a new society consisted of an economic order in which the distribution of goods would guarantee to all the satisfaction of the people's needs under fairly spartan material conditions. This distributive communism was to be administered by a centralized system of nationalized property, not unlike the visions of a new society that were later advanced by the followers of Auguste Blanqui and by Karl Marx.

The execution of Babeuf and several of his supporters in May 1796, after a lengthy trial, might very well have passed as just another tragic episode had not Philippe-Michel Buonarroti, one of Babeuf's collaborators who escaped the death penalty, written a full account of the event and the ideas that guided the conspiracy. Buonarroti's account, published early in the nineteenth century, became a program and an organizational guide for conspiratorial movements that proliferated well beyond the Revolution and shaped the radicalism of the new century—the nineteenth—that was emerging out of the debris of the one that had passed.

Following the Napoleonic Wars and attempts to restore the ancien régime at the Congress of Vienna, radically new ideals began to replace the republican goals of the Jacobins: some, redolent of Varlet's image of a confederation of communes, under the rubric of anarchism; others, inspired partly by Babeuf, turning to a new and highly economistic body of ideas under the rubric of socialism. These conceptual frameworks, however, belong to the century that followed, and were to live well beyond the mystique of the "republican virtue" propounded by the Jacobins.

NOTES

1. "*Ne terminez pas votre carrière avec ignominie!*" Roux's belligerent speech appears as "Convention nationale, séance du 25 juin (soir)," in Jacques Roux, *Scripta et acta: Textes présentés par Walter Markov* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1969), pp. 488–90.

2. Quoted in Louis R. Gottschalk, *Jean Paul Marat: A Study in Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 188.

3. Albert Goodwin, *The French Revolution*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 143.

4. Quoted in Morris Slavin, *The Making of an Insurrection: Parisian Sections and the Gironde* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 139.

5. "The Law of Suspects," September 17, 1793, in *Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, ed. John Hall Stewart (New York: Macmillan Co., 1951), p. 478.

6. Albert Soboul, *The Sans Culottes: The Popular Movement and Revolutionary Government, 1793–1794*, trans. Rémy Inglis Hall (1968; New York: Doubleday & Co., 1972), p. 190.

7. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 172.

8. Maximilien Robespierre, "Speech on Property in the National Convention, April 24, 1793," in Raymond Postgate, ed., *Revolution from 1789 to 1906* (London: Grant Richards, 1920), pp. 43–4.

9. Quoted in Daniel Guérin, *La Lutte de classes sous la Première République*, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1946), p. 101.

10. "*Hélas! à qui se fier maintenant?*" Quoted *ibid.*, p. 131.

11. Albert Goodwin, *The French Revolution* (London: Hutchinson, 1953; New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 156.

12. Danton and Robespierre quoted in Christopher Hibbert, *The Days of the French Revolution* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1980), p. 237.

13. Desmoulins quoted *ibid.*, p. 236.

14. Saint-Just quoted *ibid.*, p. 236.

15. Danton quoted *ibid.*, pp. 238–9.

16. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 243.

17. Quoted *ibid.*, pp. 248, 244.

18. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 246.

Bibliographical Essay

GENERAL WORKS

The revolutions discussed in this book raise issues that are still alive today. Their histories shade into broad debates about the value, feasibility, and limitations of a direct democracy; alternative ways of owning, controlling, and sharing property; the institutionalization of expansive ideas of liberty and equality; and the importance of leadership in focusing the often inchoate feelings of an insurrectionary people. The number of books that deal with these and related issues are immense in number. The writings of major "left-of-center" thinkers such as Karl Marx, Mikhail Bakunin, and John Stuart Mill provide a mere framework for dealing with these problems. The reader may gain a more complete understanding of the great revolutions and their importance from the immense number of contemporary pamphlets, broadsides, and programs written by revolutionary publicists and authors.

The French Revolution of 1789–94 immensely influenced revolutionary analyses throughout the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. Several books of varying value—whose authors are not necessarily socialists—have attempted to interpret modern revolutions in its general terms, even schematically. Perhaps the best known is Crane Brinton's *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1952). Since Brinton essentially adopted this approach, his book is valuable as a guide to revolutionary thinking in the first half of our century. Lyford P. Edwards's *The Natural History of Revolutions* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965) has a pattern very similar to Brinton's.

Of a broader and more flexible nature is Mark N. Hagopion's *The Phenomenon of Revolution* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1974). E.H. Carr's *Studies in Revolution* (New York: Universal Library Edition, 1964) should probably have been called *Studies in Revolutionaries*, since it fleshes out Brinton's scheme with

biographies of major revolutionaries. Howard Mumford Jones's *Revolution and Romanticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974) is a highly stimulating discussion of the individualism that was emphasized in the Romantic movement generally as well as in the great eighteenth-century revolutions. Lawrence Kaplan and Carol Kaplan's *Revolution: A Comparative Study* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973) is a useful compilation of papers on various revolutions, beginning with the English and continuing through more recent, largely nationalistic upheavals. The opening essay by the Kaplans is valuable. *Revolutions: 1775-1830*, edited by Merryn Williams (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), opens with an informative introductory essay, then gets down to specific documents of major revolutions and revolutionaries. *Socialist Thought*, edited by Albert Fried and Ronald Sanders (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1964) contains a wide range of revolutionary documents and introductory sketches. These overviews of the revolutionary era constitute only a small number of the many general books on revolutions and the ideas of outstanding revolutionaries.

PART I: PEASANT REVOLTS

The outstanding—certainly the most informative—book on the early revolutions is Perez Zagorin's *Rebels and Rulers: 1500-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). It has no equal for this period, to my knowledge, and deserves the closest study. Norman Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970, revised and enlarged) is highly tendentious but has become a hardy perennial emphasizing the so-called "anarchic" element in millenarian movements, including the English Revolution.

The radical historical literature often represents these important movements as "premature"—tragically, in my view, since they constitute suppressed potentialities that might have changed the course of Western history. The reader should not disdain Barbara Tuchman's popular *A Distant Mirror* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1978), which gives a vivid and informative account of the English and French peasant uprisings. Jean Froissart's *Chronicles* is one of the principal original sources for the outlook of the ruling elites of the time. *The Cambridge Modern History*, vol. 2 (specifically the 1904 edition, "planned by Lord Acton") and Anne-Marie Cazalis's *1358: La Jacquerie de Paris: Le destin tragique du "maire" Étienne Marcel* (Paris: Société de Production Literaire, 1977) are very valuable discussions, as is Rodney Hilton's *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381* (New York and London: Methuen, 1977). The materials on late medieval peasant uprisings from recent years are too numerous to adduce, but the reader may wish to consult the pages of the distinguished British quarterly *Past and Present*.

Among the numerous books on the Reformation uprisings, Friedrich Engels's classic *The Peasant War in Germany* (New York: International Publishers, 1926) incorporates the war into Germany's revolutionary tradition but tends to subordinate it to the proletarian movements that he cherished. George H. Williams's substantial overview, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962) covers various radical clerics and movements in considerable, informative detail, while Kenneth Rexroth's *Communalism* (New York, Seabury Press, 1974) has been unduly neglected. Notable in the most recent general literature are Peter Blickle's *The Revolution of 1525* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); *The German Peasant War of 1525: New Viewpoints*, edited by Bob Scribner and Gerhard Benecke (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979); and *The German Peasant War of 1525*, edited by Janos Bak (London: Frank Cass, 1976).

PART II: THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION

On the religious background on the English Revolution, Michael Walzer's *The Revolution of the Saints* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), Robert Ashton's *Reformation and Revolution: 1558-1660* (London: Paladin Books, 1985), the opening chapters of William Haller's *Liberty and Revolution in the Puritan Revolution* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1955), and Christopher Hill's *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolution England* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972) are very valuable accounts. Early-seventeenth-century English thought is explored in Gerald R. Cragg's *Freedom and Authority* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975). Lawrence Stone's *The Crisis of the Aristocracy: 1558-1641* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967) is a balanced account of the social background of the elite classes.

The best short overview of the Revolution itself from a radical viewpoint is Christopher Hill's pamphlet-size *The English Revolution* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976), which takes the reader up to Cromwell's establishment of the Commonwealth. Hill, a Marxist, tends to provide a rather simplistic "historical materialist" interpretation of the English Revolution as a "bourgeois" affair. But this able historian nonetheless often exhibits a sympathetic understanding of the "ideologies" of the Puritans and the cultural features of their revolution. His *Puritanism and Revolution* (New York: Schocken, 1964) is a superb account of early modern England and the ideas that nourished the revolutionary period, as is his *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). Hill's *Century of Revolution* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1966) is a more detailed overview of the revolutionary period from 1603 to 1714. His memorable *The World Turned Upside Down* (New York: Viking Press, 1972) deals with the libertarian tendencies that surfaced in revolutionary England between 1640 and 1660. Hill and Edmund Dell have excerpted and collated a splendid collection of original documents under the title *The Good Old Cause: Documents of the English Revolution of 1640-1660* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1969).

Lawrence Stone's *The Causes of the English Revolution, 1529 to 1642* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) deals very ably and less schematically with the English Revolution than Hill's major works. A number of papers written on the Revolution from a grassroots standpoint appear in *History from Below*, edited by Frederick Krantz (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988). Although Eduard Bernstein's *Cromwell and Communism* (New York: Schocken, 1963), written in 1895, is dated, it can still be read with considerable profit. (Its German title is *Sozialismus und Demokratie in der grossen englischen Revolution.*) The times of the Revolution are captured in David Underdow's *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

The Levellers produced numerous tracts, manifestos, and broadsides, which appear in several collections. *The Levellers in the English Revolution*, edited by G.E. Aylmer (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975; London: Thames & Hudson, 1975), contains a good selection of original documents, as does A.L. Morton's selection in *Freedom in Arms* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975; New York: International Publishers, 1975), with a fine introduction. The best collection, however, is Don M. Wolfe, ed., *Leveller Manifestoes of the Puritan Revolution* (originally published in 1944, New York: Humanities Press, 1967). H.N. Brailsford's thorough study of the Levellers, *The Levellers and the English Revolution* (Nottingham: Spokesman University Press, 1976), is of outstanding quality, the best available account of this movement and its ideas. (Brailsford left it unfinished at his death, but it was completed by Christopher Hill.) On the Levellers in the context of English political thought, G.P. Gooch's *English Democratic Ideas in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927) remains outstanding.

Undoubtedly the best detailed account of the New Model Army is C.H. Firth's *Cromwell's Army* (London: Methuen & Co., 1962). The transcript of the Putney Debates taken by William Clarke is found in C.H. Firth, ed., *The Clarke Papers* (London: Camden Society, 1891-1901).

A.L. Morton's *The World of the Ranters* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970) is an excellent and ably researched account, equalled by P.G. Rogers's *The Fifth Monarchy Men* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973). Gerrard Winstanley's often bittersweet writings appear in *The Law of Freedom and Other Writings*, ed. Christopher Hill (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974).

On major figures in the Revolution, Jasper Ridley's biographical sketches in *The Roundheads* (London: Constable & Co., 1976) are valuable, as are Christopher Hill's *God's Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution*

(New York: Harper & Row, 1970) and his superb account of John Milton's ideas and activities, *Milton and the English Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979). The extent to which the elite classes retained considerable power after the Revolution is explored in Jerome Blum's *The End of the Old Order in Rural Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978) and Arno J. Mayer's very readable *The Persistence of the Old Regime* (New York: Pantheon, 1981). The shading of the English Revolution into the American can best be understood by the papers assembled in *Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776*, ed. J.G.A. Pocock (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980).

PART III: THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

The question of whether the American Revolution was a war for independence or a revolution has long been subject to debate. Readers who care to explore conflicting views should examine the essays in *The American Revolution: How Revolutionary Was It?*, ed. George Athan Billias (Hinsdale, Ill.: Dryden Press, 1970) and *The Reinterpretation of the American Revolution: 1763-1789*, ed. Jack P. Greene (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

Among general histories of the American Revolution, the chapters devoted to the Revolution in Charles and Mary Beard's *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1949) are still insightful and eminently readable, despite the book's economistic thrust. Outright Marxist works on the subject include Herbert Aptheker's *The American Revolution, 1763-1783* (New York: International Publishers, 1960) and Jack Hardy's *The First American Revolution* (New York: International Publishers, 1937). The tendentiousness of these books should not cause us to overlook the considerable value of their accounts of class conflicts in the emerging United States. Nor should the reader overlook the section on the American Revolution in R. R. Palmer's splendid *The Age of the Democratic Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1959).

The innovative, quasi-democratic town meetings of colonial New England are explored in several highly readable accounts. Sumner Chilton Powell's pioneering *Puritan Village* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1965) traces the social and political origins of New England towns to English villages from which the inhabitants emigrated. On the institutional origins of the Massachusetts town meeting, Edmund S. Morgan's *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1958) is lucid and insightful. Kenneth Lockridge's outstanding *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1970) traces the development of one Massachusetts town, Dedham, over the course of the colonial period. Michael Zuckerman's *The Peaceable Kingdom: New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Random House, 1970) overemphasizes the degree of consensus in New England town meetings but vividly conveys the remarkable autonomy that the town meetings enjoyed in the eighteenth century.

I cannot recommend too highly T. H. Breen's *Puritans and Adventurers: Change and Persistence in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) for its explorations of the commonalities and differences between the colonies and Britain. David S. Lovejoy's *The Glorious Revolution in America* (Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), an excellent and eminently readable account of early conflicts with Britain, provides fascinating material on republican ideology. The ideological ferment that led to republicanism in the colonies is discussed in detail in Ralph Ketchum's *From Colony to Country* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1974), while Bernard Bailyn's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967) lucidly expounds the importance of the True Whigs to American revolutionary thought. Nor can the reader ignore Staughton Lynd's *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism* (New York: Random House, 1969).

The colonial drift toward conflict with Britain is well chronicled in Pauline Maier's *From Resistance to Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1974). On the role of Massachusetts in the Revolution, Robert E. Brown's *Middle-Class Democracy and the Revolution in Massachusetts, 1691-1780* (New York: Harper & Row, 1955) is informative albeit neoconservative. The activities of the Boston Town Meeting and Boston Committee of Correspondence are covered in Richard D. Brown's *Revolutionary Politics in Massachusetts: The Boston Committee of Correspondence and the Towns, 1772-74* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970) and Dirk Hoerder's *Crowd Action in Revolutionary Massachusetts: 1765-1780* (New York: Academic Press, 1977). The agrarian revolutionary environment in New England is developed with considerable sensitivity in Robert A. Gross's *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976). For the mid-Atlantic coast and southern colonies, Charles S. Snyder provides a pithy account of Virginia's revolutionary politics in *American Revolutionaries in the Making* (New York: Collier Books, 1962). Elisha P. Douglass's *Rebels and Democrats* (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times Books, 1955) is highly recommended, ably covering class conflicts in all parts of the colonial America. The chapters on the southern colonies are particularly fine.

On the issues, passions, and conflicts that surged up in the Revolution, there is no substitute for *Common Sense* and *The Crisis*, works by the greatest polemicist and propagandist of the period, Tom Paine. Carl L. Becker's study of the natural rights doctrines that imbued radicals in British America, *The Declaration of Independence* (New York: Random House, 1942) is insightful. Salient documents, declarations, and polemics of the time are gathered in Samuel Eliot

Morison's *Sources and Documents Illustrating the American Revolution and the Formation of the Federal Constitution: 1764-1788*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972) and a *Documentary History of the United States: The American Revolution, 1763-1783*, ed. Richard B. Morris (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

The revolutionary leaders come to life in a multitude of biographies and collections of their correspondence. Two of exceptional value are Pauline Maier's *The Old Revolutionaries* (New York: Random House, 1982), which includes some of the lesser-known figures of the Revolution such as the admirable Thomas Young, and A.J. Langguth's *Patriots: The Men Who Started the American Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988). For further studies into the living aspects of the Revolution, the reader may want to consult the *American Archives*, easily available in a respectable university library, and the papers that appear in the *William and Mary Quarterly*.

Essential for an understanding of the popular movement are Jesse Lemisch's essays "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., vol. 25, no. 3 (July 1968) and "The American Revolution Seen from the Bottom Up," in *Towards a New Past*, ed. Barton Bernstein (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968). Charles G. Steffen's *The Mechanics of Baltimore* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984) is an in-depth account of one city, as is Ronald Hoffman's *A Spirit of Dissension* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), on Maryland as a whole.

The literature on the Committees of Safety is regrettably sparse and scattered. Agnes Hunt's slender *The Provincial Committees of Safety of the American Revolution*, originally published in 1904 (reprinted by New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1968), is still the most comprehensive account of this revolutionary engine, although its focus is on the committees at the provincial level rather than at the more local levels. The opening chapters of Margaret Burnham Macmillan's *The War Governors in the American Revolution* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1965) also contain a valuable discussion of the formation of the Provincial Committees throughout the colonies. Ironically, the literature sympathetic to the Loyalists during the Revolution often tells us a great deal about the patriot committees that "persecuted" them. The best works of this kind are Alexander Clarence Flick's *Loyalism in New York during the American Revolution* (originally published around 1900; republished by New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969) and Claude Halstead Van Tyne's *The Loyalists in the American Revolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1902).

The best source for the local committees is accounts of the popular revolutionary upsurges in the individual provinces. For Pennsylvania, Richard Alan Ryerson has explored in detail the social makeup and revolutionary role of the radical committees in Philadelphia in his remarkable *The Revolution Is Now Begun: The Radical Committees of Philadelphia, 1765-1776* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978). This book, together with J. Paul Selsam's *The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1942) and Robert L. Brunhouse's *The Counter-Revolution in Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical Commission, 1942), gives a fine picture of the internal conflicts, grievances, and the committees that surfaced in that stormy province.

Robert J. Taylor's *Western Massachusetts in the Revolution* (Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press, 1954, reprinted in 1967 by Kraus Reprint Corp.) provides a comprehensive background of the social changes that led to Daniel Shays's rebellion. The latter event is presented very perceptively in David P. Szatmary's *Shays' Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), which details the significance of the uprising fully and sympathetically.

The conflicts and issues surrounding the Constitution of 1787 and its ratification in 1789 are vividly depicted in Merrill Jensen's *The Making of the American Constitution* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1964). The public debates that followed the convention are examined in the famous *Federalist Papers* of James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, which are available in a large number of editions, most recently and outstandingly in *The Debate on the Constitution*, ed. Bernard Bailyn (New York: Library of America, 1993). Also essential for understanding the public consideration of the Constitution is Jackson Turner Main's *The Anti-Federalists: 1781-1788* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1961), along with the fine documentary source *The Anti-Federalist Papers and the Constitutional Convention Debates*, edited with a valuable introduction by Ralph Ketchum (New York: New American Library, 1986). Merrill Jensen's *The Articles of Confederation* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), in conjunction with same author's *The New Nation: A History of the United States during the Confederation, 1781-1789* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), is an outstanding study.

PART IV: THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

An overview of the Revolution that covers its salient events is Albert Goodwin's brief *The French Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), which provides more valuable interpretative material than one might expect from so short a work. J.M. Thompson's *The French Revolution* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) is another fine introductory account and is particularly valuable because of the details it supplies on the popular sectional assemblies and the direct democracy of the Parisian *sans-culottes*. Georges Lefebvre's two-volume *The French*

Revolution (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962) is one of the best of the contentious narrations of the events. A highly absorbing account is William Doyle's *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

The narrative events and important *journées* of the Revolution are well covered in Jacques Godechot's *The Taking of the Bastille, July 14, 1789* (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1970); Christopher Hibbert's *The Days of the French Revolution* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1980); R.R. Palmer's *Twelve Who Ruled* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969); and Stanley Loomis's *Paris in the Terror* (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1964). These narrative works also give serious interpretation to the Revolution's events, but, most important, they bring the reader into the streets of Paris at various times during the Revolution.

The system of privileges, the various social and economic crises, and the declining legitimacy of the ancien régime prior to the Revolution are taken up in C.B.A. Behrens's *The Ancien Regime* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1967; New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967, 1975); Franco Venturi's *The End of the Old Regime in Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989); and George Rudé's *Europe in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985).

Broadly social accounts of the Revolution include Alfred Cobban's controversial *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), a "revisionist" account of changes in privilege and property relationships during the Revolution, that is of inestimable value and interpretive importance. Norman Hampson's *A Social History of the French Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966) and Lynn Hunt's *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) and her *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) are outstanding. Linda Kelly's *Women of the French Revolution* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989) helps fill a major void in accounts of the Revolution, although a great deal can be found about militant *sans-culottes* women in works specifically on the *enragés*. The opening chapters of H. Sewell, Jr.'s, *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) provide an exceptionally insightful, indeed bedrock discussion of the *sans-culotte* artisans. Gwyn A. Williams's comparative study of popular movements in Britain and France during the Revolution, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes* (London: Edward Arnold, 1968) is a small but nonetheless immensely rewarding study. Yves-Marie Berce's *History of Peasant Revolts* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990) provides a fine analysis of peasant revolts in the centuries before the French Revolution, while P.M. Jones's *The Peasantry in the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) accounts for the Revolution in rural areas. Jacques Godechot's *The Counter-Revolution: Doctrine and Action, 1789-1804* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971) shows the "other side" of the Revolution.

Albert Mathiez's *The French Revolution* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), originally published in Paris in 1922, is favorable to Robespierre and was the progenitor of more radical histories of the Revolution later in this century. Other radical interpretations of the French Revolution include a Trotskyist version by Daniel Guérin, *La Lutte de classes sous la Première République* in two fully documented volumes (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1946); a highly abridged version has been translated into English under the title *Class Struggles in the First French Republic* (London: Pluto Press, 1977). For an anarchist interpretation of the Revolution, Peter Kropotkin's *The Great French Revolution* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989) remains eminently readable, despite its datedness.

Albert Soboul, an outstanding Marxist scholar of the Revolution, has provided a veritable library of his own on the subject. His *Short History of the French Revolution: 1789-1799* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977) qualifies less as a history than as five interpretative essays. His massive *Précis* has been translated into English under the title *The French Revolution: From the Storming of the Bastille to Napoleon* (New York: Random House, 1974). But Soboul's most pioneering work—a masterpiece by any political standards—is his monumental reconstruction of the Parisian sectional novement, *Les Sans-culottes parisiens en l'An II: Histoire politique et sociale des sections de Paris, 2 juin 1793–9 thermidor An II* (La Roche-sur-Yon: Henri Potier, 1958). Part II of this important work has been translated into English as *The Sans Culottes* by Rémy Inglis Hall (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1972), along with the Marxist generalizations in the original French introduction and conclusion. Soboul and Walter Markov have assembled a remarkable set of documents from 1793–94, with the original French side by side with a German translation, under the title *Die Sansculotten von Paris* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1957).

The social background, lives, views, and activities of individual revolutionary leaders are sketched out in biographical surveys such as J.M. Thompson's *Leaders of the French Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1929) and *Robespierre and the French Revolution* (New York: Collier Books, 1962). Thompson's biography *Robespierre* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) is expansive. Norman Hampson has also written a series of fine biographies, notably *Danton* (1978), *The Life and Opinions of Maximilien Robespierre* (1988), and *Saint-Just* (1991), all of which are published by Basil Blackwell at Oxford. A modest biography of Marat is Louis Gottschalk's *Jean Paul Marat: A Study in Radicalism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

A stunning monographic literature on the Revolution has appeared in English in recent years. Particular note should be made of R. B. Rose's *The*

Making of the Sans-Culottes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983) as well as his *The Enragés: Socialists of the French Revolution?* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1965). Morris Slavin's *The French Revolution in Miniature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984) is a remarkable reconstruction of the activities of the section Droits-de-l'Homme, where Jean Varlet served as secretary, throughout the Revolution. Slavin's *The Making of an Insurrection: Parisian Sections and the Gironde* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1986) explores in detail the abortive *sans-culotte* insurrection of June 2, 1793. Richard Cobb's *The People's Armies* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987) is a fascinating, detailed account of the revolutionary militia that the Committee of Public Safety used to deal with its opponents in the countryside; Cobb's *The Police and the People: French Popular Protest, 1789-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) is also valuable. Marc Bouloiseau's *The Jacobin Republic: 1792-1794* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) is an up-to-date account of the interaction between the Jacobins, the Girondins, and the popular movement.

Recent revisions advanced by François Furet appear in his essay "The French Revolution Is Over," in François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge University Press, 1981). Alfred Cobban provides a cursory survey of recent interpretations of the Revolution in the second chapter of *Aspects of the French Revolution* (London: Granada Publishing, 1971), while a selection of readings from different interpretive viewpoints appears in *New Perspectives on the French Revolution*, edited by Jeffrey Kaplan (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965).

Accounts of the period between Thermidor and the emergence of Napoleon appear in Albert Mathiez's *After Robespierre: The Thermidorian Reaction* (New York: Grosset & Dunlop, 1965), which gives a good account of the *sans-culottes*' last rising in the Prairal Insurrection of 1795. Georges Lefebvre's *The Thermidorians* (New York: Random House, 1966) is more a summary account than Mathiez's. On the Babeuf conspiracy, David Thompson's *The Babeuf Plot: The Making of a Republican Legend* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1947) includes a pertinent discussion of the ramifications of the conspiracy into the nineteenth century. R.B. Rose's *Gracchus Babeuf: The First Revolutionary Communist* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978) is a detailed intellectual biography. Babeuf's own statements from his trial appear directly in *The Defense of Gracchus Babeuf*, edited and translated by John Anthony Scott (New York: Schocken, 1972).

For documents, pamphlets, *cahiers*, articles and official documents for each phase of the Revolution in English translation, an outstanding selection is *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, a massive work selected and annotated by John Hall Stewart (New York: Macmillan Co., 1965). *Le Moniteur*, the periodical that contained much of the official material and reports during the revolutionary period, is available in good university libraries.

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