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# ENEMIES OR SAVIORS: THE COMPLICATIONS OF RESISTING REVOLUTION

MICHAEL CHRZANOWSKI

## ABSTRACT

Domestic opposition to the government in Paris was a constant throughout the French Revolution. Although the revolutionary government repressed each instance of unrest, the various opposition movements' motivations and goals provide a lens through which we can re-evaluate the values of liberty, equality, and justice that revolutionaries articulated. One domestic opposition movement, the Federalist Revolt of 1793, had major significance for the course of the Revolution. The Federalist Revolt raised questions about fundamental aspects of the Revolution itself: who were the sovereign people? Who claimed to represent the people? Was violence integral to claiming sovereignty? I explore a number of aspects of the Federalist Revolt. Why did the revolt occur? Why did its participants arm themselves? Who were the participants and detractors of the Federalist Revolt? What was the impact of the Federalist Revolt on the policies and practices of the National Convention? How did signs of the Terror reveal themselves in debates of sovereignty and acts of repression during the periods of civil unrest? Distinct regional identities and the diverse effects of revolutionary policy on these regions was the essence of the tension between Paris and the provinces.

Additionally, I challenge the past historiography on the Federalist Revolt and argue that armed resistance to perceived oppressive government had always been present in the politics of France. The Federalist Revolt was an ideological struggle between various levels of government authority. Historians in the past by and large accepted the viewpoint of the central government that the Federalist Revolt was a counter-revolutionary movement. Writers such as Paul Frolich, who defended the violent actions of the Jacobin leaders preceding the Terror, and historians like Albert Mathiez (*Le Bolchevisme et le Jacobinisme* (1920), *La Révolution Française* (1924)),

Jacques Godechot (*La grande nation: l'expansion révolutionnaire de la France dans le monde de 1789 à 1799* (1956) *La contre-révolution: doctrine et action, 1789-1804* (1961) *La pensée révolutionnaire en France et en Europe, 1780-1799* (1963)) and Georges Lefebvre (*Classes and Class Struggles during the French Revolution* (1953), *The Parisian Sans-Culottes and the French Revolution* (1964), *The Sans Culottes: the Popular Movement and Revolutionary Government* (1972), *The French Revolution 1787-1799* (1975), *A Short History of the French Revolution* (1977)), renowned yet somewhat controversial, taking hardline marxist interpretations on the Revolution, formed the general basis of thought around the narrative of counter-revolution. This paper falls in line with Suzanne Desan's understanding of the Federalists, who said "the leaders of the Federalist Revolt were not counterrevolutionaries. They were not Royalists. They were revolutionaries."<sup>1</sup> The interests of the Federalist Revolt were closely aligned with the early revolutionary years, focused on claiming sovereignty for the nation to end the injustices of the Old Regime, rather than embracing a grand revolutionary vision.

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<sup>1</sup> *Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon: Episode 24 Counter Revolution and the Vendee*. Performed by Suzanne M. Desan. 2013. Accessed December 16, 2018. [https://www.amazon.com/The-Thermidorian-Reaction/dp/B018YVZONE/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1546199983&sr=8-1&keywords=living+the+french+revolution+and+the+age+of+napoleon](https://www.amazon.com/The-Thermidorian-Reaction/dp/B018YVZONE/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1546199983&sr=8-1&keywords=living+the+french+revolution+and+the+age+of+napoleon)

**ENEMIES OR SAVIORS?  
THE COMPLICATIONS OF RESISTING REVOLUTION AND CLAIMING  
SOVEREIGNTY**

Global empire left France in a precarious situation. For decades, France had competed across the world with its rivals England, Spain, and the Netherlands. The struggle over the domination of trade and territory had cost all of the European powers much in wealth and lives, but none were as negatively impacted as France. The social, political, and economic realities created by a deteriorating empire set the conditions by which the French Revolution began. The failure of the Old Regime created a desire among the people of France to envision a new nation. However, power over the new nation, and for whom power was being claimed, was fiercely contested among the various actors of the Revolution.

All across France, many raged against the injustices of the Old Regime, but this did not mean that all their grievances or their vision of the new nation were universal. Parisians were active in shaping the nature of the Revolution, and through the events of August 10, 1792, ousted King Louis XVI from power. The suspension of the King's executive authority ultimately led to the dismantling of the monarchy and the creation of the Republic, but this presented a new series of challenges for the nation. If the inviolable figure of the King had been deposed, who or what would rule in its place? The problematic nature of how to claim sovereignty in the name of the people became clear in the wake of the removal of King Louis, as various factions within the central government and provinces vied for power over the Revolution itself.

The Jacobins, radical republicans who drew most of their support from the Paris Sections, opposed the Girondins, representatives from the provinces who focused on a laissez-faire economy and militaristic foreign policy. Even before the formal creation of the Republic, the Jacobins and Girondins had disagreed on fundamental understandings of the Revolution; the

Jacobins envisioned a revolution directed by an active people, who would create a new France by any means. The Girondins sought a transformation of laws and values through a reserved governing body. It is unsurprising that once tensions continued to escalate between these differing visions of revolutionary France, the fragile unity that had brought together the capital and provinces was broken. When the Jacobins seized power and removed the Girondins, local governments in Lyon, Marseille, Caen, and Bordeaux rose up in armed opposition to a central authority that had disregarded the interests of the provinces as to gratify the desires of Paris. The rebellion of the departments, known as the Federalist Revolt, revealed that since the beginning of the Revolution, debates over sovereignty were inherently divisive and violent in nature and led to the Terror. The Terror, the tragic period of time where the Jacobin-led central government gave emergency powers to the executive Committee of Public Safety, which sanctioned the executions of thousands of citizens, marked the end of the truly revolutionary vision for France.

### I. THE DETERIORATION OF THE OLD REGIME

The failure of the Old Regime to respond to the collapse of the economic stability of the nation led to the creation of the initial revolutionary spirit and questioned the absolute sovereignty of the Monarchy.

By the time King Louis XVI took the throne of France in 1775, the national debt was quite substantial, and supporting the American independence movement only made the situation worse. After a decade of continual high-interest borrowing without a raise in revenues, the French government practically defaulted, unable to make its payments to European bankers.<sup>2</sup> In addition to a default on payments, France was also in the midst of a famine. The price of grain

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<sup>2</sup> Hunt, Lynn, and Jack R. Censer. *The French Revolution and Napoleon. Crucible of the Modern World*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. 3

increased and created discontent among Parisians as access to affordable food became restricted.<sup>3</sup> Worse than the famine itself were the political implications it brought when the monarchy failed to respond in a satisfactory way to demands for food.<sup>4</sup> King Louis knew that changes were required to set France on a successful course once again, but when he convened the Estates General, the governing body of the nation, hoping to raise revenues and resolve fundamental financial problems facing the government, he could not have anticipated the budding passion for sweeping change.

However, an inability to curb fiscal irresponsibility was not the only governing concern the Old Regime faced. A lack of national unity on social, political, and economic policies and practices made the Old Regime ineffectual. The structural instability of the Old Regime directly related to the Revolution's desire to create an organized government at the local and national level. From the moment it took power in the summer of 1789, the revolutionary government had the difficult task of "drafting France's first written constitution; setting up electoral, administrative, financial, and judicial structures, and most urgently, dealing with the deficit and the growing debt."<sup>5</sup> In short, the Revolution needed to resolve current problems while at the same time creating an effective system that would not fail as the Old Regime had. Through the creation of a comprehensive and efficient bureaucratic system overseen by the central government, revolutionaries hoped to dispel the paralyzing issues that the Old Regime had faced in governing France. Yet, to create an institutionally unified bureaucratic structure, a single conception of sovereignty needed to be agreed upon by the people of the new nation. King Louis had acted as the sole sovereign of France, just as the absolute monarchs before him, but the

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<sup>3</sup> Hunt and Censer, *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Hunt and Censer, *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 46.

National Assembly that formed out of the Estates General sought to reclaim sovereignty for the people as a whole. So, the desire to re-evaluate the concept of sovereignty arose out of the structural failures of the Old Regime.

## II. SOVEREIGNTY IN THE AGE OF REVOLUTION

Claims to sovereignty during the Revolution were starkly different to power in the Old Regime. Defining a revolutionary conception of sovereignty was important to the legitimacy of the new government.

Even before the Revolution began, new understandings of sovereignty and the nation were created. The most prominent and influential new concept of sovereignty was presented by Abbe Sieyes in his essay, *What is the Third Estate*, published in January 1789. “What is the will of a Nation? It is the result of individual wills, just as the Nation is the aggregate of the individuals who compose it. It is impossible to conceive of a legitimate association that does not have for its goal the common security, the common liberty, in short, the public good.”<sup>6</sup> Sieyes’ understanding of sovereignty as the collective will in the interest of the public good was appealing because to many, the Old Regime had resoundingly failed to even understand the “public good” much less create policies to engender it. Sieyes’ essay set the standard for determining who the nation was (The Third Estate) and how they would practice sovereignty (upholding the public good). The institution that was created in the interests of the public good was the National Assembly. Originally founded on June 17, 1789, the National Assembly was an

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<sup>6</sup> Hunt, Lynn. *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief History with Documents*. “Abbe Sieyes, What is the Third Estate? January 1789”. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2016.



elected body with representatives from across France, but it was an unruly group, with over one thousand members. It did not always act as one mind, and this was especially the case when it came to understanding Sieyes' 'public good'.

Were the representatives of the National Assembly of 1789 actually empowered with the nation's sovereignty? According to Michael Fitzsimmons:

Despite the power the Assembly assumed during the summer of 1789, their justifications for holding power remained problematic. How the deputies embodied national representation appeared complicated, particularly given the often-competing representations of its unity in one person (the king) or the assembled people (as assumed by such groups as electoral assemblies, clubs, or popular protesters).<sup>7</sup>

So, the King's sovereignty and the Assembly's sovereignty were at odds with each other. In this way, one of the first contentions around sovereignty began. Not only was the question of *how* the National Assembly claimed sovereignty an early revolutionary problem, but what power the new representatives could wield in regards to the King was also not fully understood. How would the Assembly work towards the 'public good'? The answer was not simple or universal, and by the time the monarchy was disbanded, divergent understandings of revolutionary vision had already taken hold.

### III. FACTIONALISM IN THE CAPITAL

A number of political actors were present in the central government in the early years of the Revolution, differing in their revolutionary visions, eventually leading to factionalism.

From the Revolution's inception, Paris and its people were at the center of political activity, often in the form of violent protest, or at the very least, the threat of such. Some of the

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<sup>7</sup> Andress, David. *Oxford Handbook of the French Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015. 192.

most memorable moments of the Revolution, such as the storming of the Bastille or the attack on the Tuileries Palace, all took place in the capital, were facilitated by Parisians, and were violent efforts to muster the sluggish central government to action. All of the political actors within the Revolution attempted to draw support from and impose their will upon the people of Paris, but the methods they employed through their revolutionary views differed greatly.

While the National Assembly and its successor governments claimed popular sovereignty, the Jacobins and Girondins had competing understandings of what that sovereignty meant and how to use it. To all revolutionaries, there was little doubt that it was the Assembly which represented the public good, not the holdovers from the Old Regime, but ‘The Left’ and ‘The Right’ (given those designations based on their seats within the hall of the National Assembly) had contending ideas of the public good. Yet to many revolutionaries, the competition for control over the Revolution was dangerous and antithetical to revolutionary values; factionalism was strictly counter-revolution, for division only benefited the enemies of the Revolution by weakening its champions. As the famous Jacobin Le Chapelier said in his speech on June 14, 1791 in a debate over forbidding Workers’ Guilds, “No one is allowed to inspire an intermediate interest among the citizens or to separate them from the public interest.”<sup>8</sup> However, the revolutionary desire for perfect unity was never a reality, as “division had plagued the National Convention since its earliest days.”<sup>9</sup> The Jacobins and Girondins were not political parties or factions, even though they may have exhibited some of those qualities; neither had an ideological identity that fit into a singular mold, rather, they are best compared to caucuses,

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<sup>8</sup> Hunt, *A Brief History with Documents*, “Isaac Le Chapelier, “Law Forbidding Workers’ Guilds and Professional Corporations, June 14, 1791.”

<sup>9</sup> Hanson, Paul R. *The Jacobin Republic under Fire: The Federalist Revolt in the French Revolution*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003. 18.

loosely unified around specific positions. However, when it came to many aspects of the Revolution, the Jacobins and Girondins disagreed greatly.

Firstly, who were the major figures in both groups? The Girondins had many members, such as Brissot, Condorcet, and Roland, but the most famous came to be the representative Vergniaud. Once the Girondins were removed from power and placed on trial for failing to support the Revolution, Vergniaud would be one of the leading representatives to make a case for defense. Vergniaud often directly butted heads with the leading Jacobins, and he, his caucus “and their supporters in the provinces, embraced a vision of a republic that rested more on the law than on popular sovereignty for its legitimacy.”<sup>10</sup> The desire for the rule of law rested in the fear of “anarchy and the threat of mob violence. Out in the provinces, Republicans shared Girondins’ fears.”<sup>11</sup> Among the Jacobins, or as they are alternately referred, Montagnards, the most famous orators and writers were Robespierre, Danton, Marat, and Saint-Just. These men were deeply passionate in their revolutionary zeal, and each had garnered massive support from the Parisian sections, though none were from the city itself; “Like Robespierre, Desmoulins, and Marat, Danton was elected as one of the 24 Deputies from Paris; indeed, he got more votes than any of the others, a sure sign of his popularity in the sections of the capital city.”<sup>12</sup> The Jacobins took a radical stance, generally advocating for the end of the monarchy, the total abolition of privileges, the implementation of market prices controls, and the enfranchisement of all men. Yet, a seemingly progressive agenda was not what made the Jacobins the subversive force of the Revolution; rather, it was their sanctioning of violent action by the Parisian sections, since “the

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<sup>10</sup> Hanson, *The Jacobin Republic*, 242.

<sup>11</sup> *Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon: Episode 26 Revolution in Crisis Summer 1793*. Performed by Suzanne M. Desan. 2013. Accessed December 16, 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Hunt and Censer, *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 79.

Jacobins had made the decision to draw power from allying with the popular classes.”<sup>13</sup> Whereas the Girondins were a more moderate and reserved caucus of the Revolution, “The Montagnards, then, based their political vision not on the rule of law but rather on the will of the people.”<sup>14</sup> The ‘people’ to whom the Jacobins appealed, however, were the active members of the Parisian sections, which were responsible for a series of violent crimes.

One of the greatest arguments that erupted over sovereignty in the National Convention occurred during the September Massacre of 1792. The people of Paris stormed prisons throughout the city and extralegally tortured and killed thousands of prisoners out of fear that they would foment an insurrection against the Convention. The Girondins criticized the Parisian sections for allowing such violent action to occur, but the Jacobins saw the September Massacre as ‘a triumph of the Revolution’<sup>15</sup>, for the enemies of liberty had been destroyed. Once King Louis was removed from power, the ideological battle over sovereignty only worsened and set the stage for civil war.

#### IV. THE KING’S DEATH: COLLAPSE OF UNITY

King Louis XVI’s execution drastically changed the course of the Revolution, creating a Republic with conflicting notions of sovereignty. The Jacobins’ and Girondins’ differing revolutionary visions of ‘The People’ was irreconcilable and ended the tentative unity that had mostly existed in the early years of the Revolution.

The intense struggle in Paris between the Jacobins and Girondins truly did not begin until the Trial of King Louis XVI. While King Louis had been made a constitutional monarch under

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<sup>13</sup> *Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon: Episode 26 Revolution in Crisis Summer 1793*. Performed by Suzanne M. Desan. 2013. Accessed December 16, 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Hanson, *The Jacobin Republic*, 242.

<sup>15</sup> Danton, Georges Jacques. *Speeches of Georges Jacques Danton, with a Critical Introduction*. New York: International Publishers, 1928. 11.

the Constitution of 1791, passed by the National Assembly, his role in the Revolution came into question in 1792. King Louis had and always would represent an obstacle to the ability of the people to hold complete sovereignty, but his vocal displeasure over his lack of authority in the new nation challenged the values of the Revolution. The struggle for sovereignty between the King and the Assembly began when “Louis was particularly concerned that under the new constitution he enjoyed only a ‘suspensive’ rather than an ‘absolute’ veto over legislation, which seemed to leave him in a secondary position to the National Assembly. This was an awkward position indeed for a man who had once ruled as an absolute monarch. It raised in a fundamental way the question of where sovereignty lay.”<sup>16</sup> Matters were only made worse when King Louis fled the capital for the town of Varennes, on the border of France and Austria, hoping to receive sanctuary with his nation’s enemies. Exactly why the Royal Family fled is unclear, as the King himself loudly denied that he was actually trying to run; it most likely came from Louis’ fear over the ever growing discontent that the Parisians had for the monarchy, especially in the debate over the Veto power.

Once King Louis was captured and returned to the capital, the National Assembly had to determine whether the monarchy was even necessary within the Revolution. For a millenium, monarchy had been the only form of government in France, and yet for the most part, the revolutionaries had seen that its usefulness had come to an end. The debate around what exactly to do with King Louis was controversial and created issue over how the National Assembly exercised sovereignty. Killing the King was no simple decision, and rather than leaving the choice to the Representatives in Paris, “Brissot and the Girondins raised the prospect of delay [on

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<sup>16</sup> Hanson, *The Jacobin Republic*, 6.

the King's Trial] by arguing for a national referendum to decide the king's fate [...] Robespierre, Saint-Just, and the Montagnards denounced the Girondins as hypocritical fomenters of civil war."<sup>17</sup> The Jacobins argued that the National Assembly *was* the will of the people, and that a referendum would have been pointless and time-consuming. By a single vote, King Louis XVI was sentenced to death for crimes against France and her people, and on January 21, 1793, he was executed.

Once King Louis was dead and the Republic was established, the ideological battle between the Jacobins and Montagnards greatly escalated. After repeated protests by the Parisian sections that the Girondins were 'royalists' who wanted to uphold the interests of the Old Regime, the Jacobins secured enough political capital to proscribe the Girondin leaders in the National Convention and put them on trial for counter-revolution. The specific charges placed against the Girondins were royalism and federalism, serious offenses to the sovereignty of the people. The Girondins disputed that they had opposed the sovereignty of the people in any way. Instead, the Girondins argued that the Jacobins had given into the pressures of the unruly Parisian crowds and subverted the interests of the people of provincial France. The supposed crimes of the Girondins were impossible and revealed the Jacobins' political coup; "To Vergniaud as well as the deputies in Caen, the dual charges that they were both royalists and federalists were clearly contradictory. How could one advocate a restoration of the monarchy and at the same time favor a decentralization of governmental power?"<sup>18</sup> The courts of Paris were controlled by Jacobins, and a fair trial was impossible<sup>19</sup>; the defendants were not allowed to present evidence for their case. Instead, they were at the mercy of the Parisian sections, and

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<sup>17</sup> Hunt and Censer, *The French Revolution and Napoleon*, 80.

<sup>18</sup> Hanson, *The Jacobin Republic*, 17.

<sup>19</sup> Hunt and Censer. *The French Revolution and Napoleon*. 99.

hoped that their provincial governments, who had sent them to Paris, would be able to save the Revolution from coup. Forty-seven departments called for the National Convention to return the Girondins to their elected positions, and when that failed, revolt began.<sup>20</sup>

## V. THE HISTORY OF RESISTANCE TO AUTHORITY IN FRANCE

What did past relationships to claims of political agency say about future struggles? Was it surprising that the Federalist Revolt gathered arms against the central government in Paris? To understand why violence was seen by the Federalists as a legitimate way to reclaim the Revolution, it is important to know how local governments existed and functioned under the Old Regime and their relationship to Paris. Before the Revolution, local governments existed in a different capacity. The Revolution's desire to create uniformity at the national level created the Departments. Previously, the 83 departmental governments created at the beginning of the Revolution had been parts of larger, regionalistic governments headed by nobility.

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<sup>20</sup> Hanson, *The Jacobin Republic*, 98.

However, the effort to end Old Regime regionalistic identity does not fully explain why the Federalist Revolt was connected to French conceptions of political resistance. The history of peasant uprisings in France, called ‘*Jacqueries*’, gives us an idea of why rebellion against the National Convention was not out of character with social norms and did not necessarily signal a counter-revolutionary interest in the movement. In the past, peasants upset with new taxes or policies would gather together and march with arms against their officials. In an era where voicing political opinions peacefully mattered very little in the actual setting of policy, it follows that peasants believed armed conflict would change the minds of their overlords, and sometimes, they were right. Even if the peasants failed in waging a successful long term war, they caused enough disruption to the success and profitability of Old Regime government that unpopular policies were rolled back. Many would die, but those who survived generally reaped the benefits of the rebellion. One of the most famous examples of *jacqueries* came long before the Revolution roused the spirits of people to claim their freedom: In 1630, the Crown suddenly increased taxes to pay for the Thirty Years War. Peasants in Perigord led by the nobleman La Mothe de la Foret rebelled. Though they lost their rebellion on the battlefield, they succeeded in lightening the taxes and receiving amnesty.<sup>21</sup> The *Jacqueries* can provide a historical social explanation for why provincial people felt compelled to revolt by armed conflict, for as we will see in later sections, the Federalists were driven by their desire to rollback the power of a central government that infringed on the provinces’ conception of sovereignty. The Federalists employed past conceptions of resistance to authority through violence, for as Paul Hanson states,

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<sup>21</sup> *Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon: Episode 24 Counter Revolution and the Vendee*. Performed by Suzanne M. Desan. 2013. Accessed December 16, 2018.



“The Revolution did not invent popular violence [...] We need to remind ourselves, though, that for elected officials at all levels during the revolutionary decade, the danger of popular violence was a constant preoccupation.”<sup>22</sup> Just like other the other revolutionaries, the Federalist Revolt recalls past methods of political change through violence, but only after the new political mechanisms failed to respond to the concerns of the provincial governments about the course of the Revolution.

## VI. CHARACTERIZING THE PROVINCES DURING THE EARLY REVOLUTION

The Revolution’s vision of a uniform and centrally organized state contrasted greatly with the structure of the Old Regime and was difficult to implement in the provinces because “when it re-juggled local power dynamics, the early Revolution provoked conflict.”<sup>23</sup> Since protests broke out in the south of France in 1790, long before any major counter-revolutionary stirrings, provincial peoples showed their distaste for revolutionary policies that disrupted established social, political, and economic norms in their regions. However, it was in the Vendee Rebellion and the Federalist Revolt that anti-parisian sentiments were able to create a program of decisive action against the central government.

The provinces responded quite differently from Paris to the revolutionary reforms because the Old Regime had not held the same power and laws from region to region. One specific example that inflamed tensions between the provinces and Paris before the Girondin proscription was the implementation of the new tax system. Suzanne Desan contextualizes the provincial disappointment with the new system by clarifying that “for centuries, because of the patchwork nature of Old Regime privilege [...] revolutionary tax reforms to make things more

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<sup>22</sup> Hanson, *The Jacobin Republic*, 239.

<sup>23</sup> *Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon: Episode 24 Counter Revolution and the Vendee*. Performed by Suzanne M. Desan. 2013. Accessed December 16, 2018.

equal meant that western peasants actually had to pay more taxes than before.”<sup>24</sup> Parisians were used to hefty taxes, but this was not always the case in the provinces, so “abolishing seigneurial dues and the tithe to the Church benefited lots of peasants across France. But once again, local differences mattered.”<sup>25</sup> Polarization of revolutionary vision came to the forefront by 1793 because the Revolution became more radical with the execution of the King and the creation of the Republic. France also went to war with most of Europe despite its internal strife, a divisive move by the central government. The more radical aspects of the Revolution cut to the heart of daily life, challenging long standing local power dynamics and norms.

Broadly, the provinces were opposed to the policies of the central government made economic conditions worse than they had been under the Old Regime. Even so, there was a great divide with provincial communities themselves, complicating and layering the civil unrest that erupted in the summer of 1793. When the provincial governments entered formal rebellion against the Jacobin government in Paris, it failed to gain widespread support and overthrow the violent Republic, and this was due to the nature of local politics. If peasants were dissatisfied with the government in Paris, why did they by and large fail to support the Federalist Revolt? There may never been a definitive answer, but it is clear that the leaders of the Federalist Revolt were disconnected from most of the resentments of local people. Rather, they were largely concerned with how to challenge the monopoly on sovereign power that the central government held. Dissatisfied peasants were more interested in directly challenging the very existence of the revolutionary government itself. Even though the Federalists fought the Jacobins, it wasn't for

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<sup>24</sup> *Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon: Episode 24 Counter Revolution and the Vendee*. Performed by Suzanne M. Desan. 2013. Accessed December 16, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> *Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon: Episode 24 Counter Revolution and the Vendee*. Performed by Suzanne M. Desan. 2013. Accessed December 16, 2018.

counter-revolutionary reasons; the federalists were not the way in which peasant resentments would be widely understood or reflected.

Provincial peasants seemingly disapproved of their local elites as much as they did the central government; “impoverished sharecroppers were furious when their far-away urban landlords started to add onto the rents the cash equivalent of the old tithe and the noble dues.”<sup>26</sup> These landlords, who were often elected officials, did not challenge economic elitism in a way that would have appealed to most peasants when they led the Federalist Revolt.

It was clear that rather than seeking economic egalitarianism for peasants, “the leaders of the Federalist Revolt were moderate Republicans. Often they were merchants or solid members of the ‘middle class’ who expected to benefit from the Revolution.”<sup>27</sup> The earliest years of the Revolution were very different than the climate created by the time of the Federalist Revolt; many were happy that elected officials were replacing the Old Regime noble elites, but it was only the urban rich, not the whole of the provinces, which had a voice in local government. When the Jacobins became more popular in Paris after the King’s Trial, “official political power began to move further down the social scale. Artisans, shopkeepers, and men of more modest means swept into office.”<sup>28</sup>

A representative of the new wave of socially diverse local politicians was Joseph Chalier. Chalier led violent riots in Lyon, killing a number of suspected counter revolutionaries. His revolutionary zeal brought him into office in Lyon in the Spring of 1793, but it was short lived.

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<sup>26</sup> *Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon: Episode 24 Counter Revolution and the Vendee*. Performed by Suzanne M. Desan. 2013. Accessed December 16, 2018.

<sup>27</sup> *Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon: Episode 26 Revolution in Crisis Summer 1793*. Performed by Suzanne M. Desan. 2013. Accessed December 16, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> *Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon: Episode 26 Revolution in Crisis Summer 1793*. Performed by Suzanne M. Desan. 2013. Accessed December 16, 2018.

Just like their counterparts in Paris, Chalier and his local Jacobin supporters “carried out judicial pursuit of ‘hoarders’ and ‘speculators’”<sup>29</sup>, anyone viewed as antithetical to revolutionary ideals. Moderate Republicans and poor urban citizens were worried by the Jacobins’ violent nature and took matters into their own hands. With the support of the local sections and National Guards, Chalier was removed from power and thrown in prison, an act of defiance against the central government, but also a clear indicator of a divided provincial mindset. As the Federalists of Toulon wrote later in their declaration of rebellion, “we want to enjoy our goods, our property in peace... yet we see them incessantly exposed to threats from those who have nothing themselves.”<sup>30</sup> The challenge to revolutionary elites, both Parisian and local, was an important aspect of the power dynamics during the Revolution, but was not present in the Federalist Revolt and therefore gives us an understanding of why when the provincial governments rose in armed rebellion in the summer of 1793, they lacked the same popular support that the Vendean rebels had enjoyed.

## VII. UNCERTAINTY IN THE PROVINCES

With the tensions between the Girondins and the Jacobins escalating in Paris, debates around sovereignty were brought to the forefront of provincial politics. The Jacobins monopoly on sovereign authority in Paris altered the relationship of power between the local and central government.

Since the beginning of the Revolution, the provinces were active in shaping revolutionary discourse and policy. In their *cahiers* (a collective list of community grievances) to the Estates General in 1789, many provinces which would later be labeled as ‘royalist’ or

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> *Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon: Episode 26 Revolution in Crisis Summer 1793*. Performed by Suzanne M. Desan. 2013. Accessed December 16, 2018.

‘counter-revolutionary’ during the Federalist Revolt, demanded the abolition of feudalism and a desire for egalitarian social reforms, such as the legalization of divorce.<sup>31</sup> The rise of the National Assembly “emboldened the peasantry to make ever more radical demands through sporadic uprisings and violent attacks, passive resistance, and petitioning lawmakers. Yet as a group the peasantry were diverse with differing linguistic and cultural practices as well as inhabiting distinct topographical regions with contrasting economic structures.”<sup>32</sup> In short, the way in which Paris conducted its political affairs was not much different from the provinces, it seemed. However, there was a distinct hatred for Paris among the provinces, especially those who became armed rebels. As the representative Francois Buzot said, “Where I come from [the town of Evreux], laws are observed, authorities are obeyed, and taxes are paid. Here [in Paris] laws are openly violated, authorities are defied, and taxes are never paid.”<sup>33</sup> The provinces had always paid higher feudal taxes, and the abolition of noble privileges did little to improve the economic situation of peasants, as the new taxes imposed by the National Assembly were higher than before the Revolution.<sup>34</sup> The execution of King Louis only worsened the provincial situation as the Girondin power waned, for “political uncertainty, the provisioning demands of the war, and spiraling inflation had combined to produce economic difficulties in both town and country throughout France.”<sup>35</sup> Once the Girondins were removed by the Jacobins and the Parisian sections, those who were not arrested fled to sympathetic provincial governments. The Girondins made efforts to convince the local people of the need to oppose the Jacobins, as “The National

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<sup>31</sup> Boyer, John W., Julius Kirshner, and Keith Michael Baker. *University of Chicago Readings in Western Civilization: The Old Regime and the French Revolution*. Vol. 7. University of Chicago Press, 1987.

<sup>32</sup> Fitzsimmons, Michael. *Oxford Handbook of the French Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015. 346.

<sup>33</sup> *Notices Historiques sur la Révolution dans le département de l'Eure, Evreux*, 1894.

<sup>34</sup> *Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon: Episode 24 Counter Revolution and the Vendee*. Performed by Suzanne M. Desan. 2013. Accessed December 16, 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Hanson, *The Jacobin Republic*, 62.

Convention, Birotteau [a Girondin representative in hiding] reported, no longer existed. The majority of deputies were either in chains or had scattered in fear.”<sup>36</sup> The call for resistance was appealing to those who had been negatively impacted by the Revolution’s lack of successful progress, especially the provincial ‘middle class’ who headed local governments.

### VIII. TO PROTECT THE REPUBLIC

Provincial governments and the elites in power were sympathetic to the Girondins and their stance on sovereignty through the rule of law. The Jacobins in Paris opposed the provincial governments because “French Federalists wanted local power instead of centralized national power.”<sup>37</sup> However, local governments had difficulty raising any serious forces to challenge the central government, and non-elites only rallied to the Federalist Revolt when the Assembly brought violent reprisal to legitimate their authority.

In June, in the wake of the removal of the Girondin representatives from the National Convention, the provincial governments of Lyon, Marseille, Bordeaux, Caen, and their allied departments took steps to oppose the central government in Paris by issuing decrees of revolt, gathering supporters into an army, and marching on the capital. Unlike the rebellion in the Vendee which had begun in March of 1793 and had clear counter revolutionary sentiments, “the Federalist Revolt pitted revolutionaries against the Revolution.”<sup>38</sup> As one revolutionary said in the aftermath of the King’s execution and the rise in tensions between the varying factions, “The battle in those days was between the friends and the enemies of liberty; the battle today is

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>37</sup> *Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon: Episode 26 Revolution in Crisis Summer 1793*. Performed by Suzanne M. Desan. 2013. Accessed December 16, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> *Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon: Episode 26 Revolution in Crisis Summer 1793*. Performed by Suzanne M. Desan. 2013. Accessed December 16, 2018.

between friends of the Republic on both sides”<sup>39</sup> Once the Girondins were unable to advocate the provincial governments’ interests, Federalists asked “why should they follow any orders from the Convention when an unruly mob in Paris seemed to be calling the shots for the Republic?”<sup>40</sup> The disconnect between the capital and the provinces had always been present, but never before had it led to the questioning of the revolutionary government’s legitimacy.

Once the revolt officially began, the Jacobins responded quickly by deploying their own forces to crush the rebel armies. One of the Republican generals tasked with ending the revolt in Bordeaux reported back to the Convention that “they [the Federalists] do not want a king, they want a Republic, but a rich and tranquil Republic.”<sup>41</sup> This account clearly contradicts the rhetoric that the Jacobins employed to justified crushing the resistance, and it raises the question of whether the central government even cared about what motivated the rebels, or if they simply want to consolidate their authority over the local governments.

The title of ‘Federalist Revolt’ is often misleading, in that it ascribes a sense of unified and cohesive resistance against Paris, an idea the Jacobins of the Convention created when they spoke of conspiratorial counter revolutions in their speeches. While it was true that Lyon, Marseille, Caen, and Bordeaux had similar motivations for rebelling, “they all resisted a more centralized state and worried about popular anarchy, they did not hesitate to turn to violence themselves”<sup>42</sup>; they did not coordinate their efforts in any way. Each city acted independently of the other, raising their own recruits and preparing various plans for how to stop the National

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<sup>39</sup> Hanson, *The Jacobin Republic*, 33.

<sup>40</sup> *Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon: Episode 26 Revolution in Crisis Summer 1793*. Performed by Suzanne M. Desan. 2013. Accessed December 16, 2018.

<sup>41</sup> *Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon: Episode 26 Revolution in Crisis Summer 1793*. Performed by Suzanne M. Desan. 2013. Accessed December 16, 2018.

<sup>42</sup> *Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon: Episode 26 Revolution in Crisis Summer 1793*. Performed by Suzanne M. Desan. 2013. Accessed December 16, 2018.

Convention. In addition to their separation, each of the cities experienced a lack of enrollment for their armies. Very few people, it seemed, were willing to risk their lives over an ideological dispute between the central and provincial governments. Caen only managed to raise a meager army of 2000, which stood little chance of defeating the sizable defense force of Paris. Almost as soon as they began their journey towards the capital, the Caen Army was crushed at the town of Evreux.

Though Lyon held out for several months under siege, quick and humiliating defeat was true for most of the rebellious departments. For their ability to stand against the might of Paris, however, Lyon paid dearly; the central government made plans to completely remake the town in the image of the radical revolutionaries: “The town of Lyon will be destroyed. All those buildings occupied by the rich will be demolished. All that will remain will be the houses of the poor, the homes of the patriots who were slaughtered or proscribed, those buildings solely devoted to industry, and those monuments dedicated to humanity and to public education.”<sup>43</sup> The National Convention would show no mercy to those who openly defied the Revolution, and as Danton famously declared in a speech: “When a ship is in danger of going foundering, the crew throw overboard everything that adds to the danger. Similarly, everything that might injure the nation must be cast out from its midst.”<sup>44</sup> The dissenters in the provinces, just like their Girondin representatives, had come to constitute a serious threat to the people’s sovereignty in the eyes of Jacobins like Danton. It is this merciless approach to revolutionary thought that led to the deaths of thousands of people, ‘rebel’ and otherwise; “there is no episode of the Terror more appalling

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<sup>43</sup> *Decree of the National Convention*, October 12, 1793.

<sup>44</sup> Danton, Georges Jacques. *Speeches of Georges Jacques Danton, with a Critical Introduction*. New York: International Publishers, 1928. 34.



than the bloodletting that occurred in Lyon [...] Lyon was not ‘pacified’ - it fell to military conquest, and the repression there resembled reprisal more than revolutionary justice.”<sup>45</sup>

Although the central government charged the departments of the Federalist Revolt as treasonous counter-revolutionaries, it is quite clear that the local governments saw themselves as defending the Republic from illegitimate authorities in Paris who had overthrown elected officials. When the Jacobins removed the Girondins from their seats in the Convention and proceeded to arrest them, the legitimacy of the Revolution was questioned. While the Jacobins clearly saw the Girondins’ disagreement over the use of extralegal violence as a tool of revolutionary progress as a sign of dangerous factionalism, the provincial governments had grown weary and fearful of a consolidation of power in the capital. The Girondins had been elected to represent many of the provinces of France, and their expulsion therefore handed over the Revolution to representatives of Paris alone. Time and again, the provinces allowed popular revolt in the capital to go unchallenged, and the Parisians were able to impose their vision of the Revolution, but as soon as that vision questioned the necessity for representatives of the whole nation, armed rebellion was seen as necessary. As Vergniaud would argue during his imprisonment, “The insurgent departments had rebelled not for the sake of the deputies, but rather for the sake of the National Assembly whose integrity had been violated.”<sup>46</sup> Even though the remaining members of National Convention purported to control the course of the Revolution, it was clear to many of the provincial governments, such as Bordeaux, that “national sovereignty resided in the National Convention, and it was being usurped by the Paris Commune and the Parisian sans-culottes.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Hanson, *The Jacobin Republic*, 193.

<sup>46</sup> Hanson, *The Jacobin Republic*, 15.

<sup>47</sup> Hanson, *The Jacobin Republic*, 22.

## IX. THE END OF THE REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT

The central government's response to the Federalist Revolt was brutally violent and repressive, as the revolutionaries in Paris hoped to prevent the Federalist Revolt from becoming a full-scale rebellion and civil war like the Vendee. Through the demonization of the perceived enemies of the Revolution by restrictive and oppressive policies, the ideals of liberty and egalitarianism that had popularized revolutionary zeal faded into authoritarian rule.

The repression of the Federalist Revolt marked the end of the French Revolution, as the integrity of the National Convention had been compromised in the wake of the proscription of the Girondins, as well as their support of Parisian violence like the September Massacres. The employment of tyrannical and brutal policies of repression made the central government illegitimate and incapable of carrying on the revolutionary goals of Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité. The Convention and the Committee of Public Safety used the military resources at their disposal to crush resistance in the provinces, a tragic choice given their innumeral options. As historian Suzanne Desan proposed, “maybe pronouncing France’s commitment to a rule of law would help to tame the opposition.”<sup>48</sup> However, the Jacobin leadership in Paris would not embrace a vision of the reserved and peaceful revolution, as they were dedicated to instilling Republican ideals by any means necessary. All throughout history it seems, as we have witnessed in contemporary policies of the War on Terror, “rights that are guaranteed in constitutions and laws come under pressure when states feel threatened from within or without.”<sup>49</sup> The Revolution was no different, and even without threat of domestic opposition looming, there was always a complicated

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<sup>48</sup> *Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon: Episode 26 Revolution in Crisis Summer 1793*. Performed by Suzanne M. Desan. 2013. Accessed December 16, 2018.

<sup>49</sup> Hunt, Lynn. *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief History with Documents*. “Isaac Le Chapelier, Law Forbidding Workers’ Guilds and Professional Corporations, June 14 1791. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2016. 131

relationship with violence. As it should be noted, the first event which launched the revolutionaries into action was a violent uprising at the Bastille prison in Paris; “without the power of popular violence, there was no French Revolution, no overthrow of privilege, no Republic, no chance to reinvent the world.”<sup>50</sup>

Violence as a tool for revolutionary ideals became more common as the Revolution progressed, and especially “after France went to war against most of the other European powers, restrictions on any form of dissent grew more and more draconian.”<sup>51</sup> The Jacobins were not the only group responsible for promoting violence, as it was the Girondins who had pushed France to war on the continent in 1792, but they were certainly its most passionate advocates. The former journalist turned deputy Marat was the worst proliferator of incendiary speech. A figure greatly admired and loved by the routy Parisians, “no one personified the anarchic violence of the crowd and of Paris more than Marat.”<sup>52</sup> In a debate in Marseille over the appropriate response to the Jacobin coup of the Convention, one Federalist said of the opposition, and specifically Marat, “he was put on earth to preach murder, pillage, civil war, and every kind of excess.”<sup>53</sup> It is unsurprising then that even after the Federalist Revolt had been quelled by the end of the summer in 1793, the National Convention continued to pass laws that limited the civil liberties of all individuals, giving way to paranoid fear of conspiracy. In the Law of Suspects, enacted on September 17, 1793, the National Convention defined the parameters of what it meant to be an

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<sup>50</sup> *Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon: Episode 26 Revolution in Crisis Summer 1793*. Performed by Suzanne M. Desan. 2013. Accessed December 16, 2018.

<sup>51</sup> Hunt, Lynn. *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief History with Documents*. “Isaac Le Chapelier, Law Forbidding Workers’ Guilds and Professional Corporations, June 14 1791. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2016. 131

<sup>52</sup> *Living the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon: Episode 26 Revolution in Crisis Summer 1793*. Performed by Suzanne M. Desan. 2013. Accessed December 16, 2018.

<sup>53</sup> Gottschalk, Louis R. *Jean Paul Marat: A Study in Radicalism*. New York, 1927.

ally of the Revolution; anyone outside of the rigid definition of patriotism was vulnerable to arrest and execution. The law turned neighbor on neighbor and encouraged an environment of authoritarian measures, worse than anything stipulated under the ‘tyrannical’ King Louis XVI. As mentioned in section VIII, how the central government dealt with those residing in rebellious departments was horrifying by any definition. Though reports are often contradictory, a widely accepted estimate shows that “the repression of the federalist revolt, particularly in the city of Lyon, would mark the first manifestations of the Terror in France. Roughly 10 percent of the Terror’s victims were charged with the crime of federalism.”<sup>54</sup>

One of the most famous addresses made by the National Convention during the Terror was the speech of Robespierre, “On Political Morality”, February 5, 1794. Robespierre’s speech outlined the values of the Revolution, equality, justice, and virtue by means of a democratically sovereign people. To defend the Republic from collapse by pressures of counterrevolution, “we must smother the internal and external enemies of the Republic or perish, in this situation, the first maxim of your policy ought to be to lead the people by reason and the people’s enemies by terror.”<sup>55</sup> Robespierre was interested in a harsh, violent reaction to dissent because he argued that it was the only way in which the values of the Revolution could survive the attack of ‘counter-revolutionary’ forces such as the Federalists. While terror is often regarded as something quite negative, associated with bad governance, to Robespierre, “Terror is nothing but prompt, severe, inflexible justice; it is therefore an emanation of virtue.”<sup>56</sup> The ideals of moral

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<sup>54</sup> Hanson, *The Jacobin Republic*, 9.

<sup>55</sup> “Robespierre, “On Political Morality,”” Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, accessed November 4, 2018, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/413>.

<sup>56</sup> “Robespierre, “On Political Morality,”” Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, accessed November 4, 2018, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/413>.

virtue and terror seem contradictory, but in Robespierre's revolutionary mindset, they were inseparable in times of chaos. Chaos had seemingly passed, but government sanctioned death prevailed as the order of the day, and it would until the overthrow of Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety and the installation of the Directory, a conservative government that ruled until Napoleon Bonaparte came to power. The tragedy of the Revolution was its inability to peacefully resolve competing ideas of sovereignty, which ultimately led to civil war and mass repression.

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