

# The Democratic Sphere

Communications with the French National  
Assembly's Committee of Research, 1789-1791

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

On 28 July 1789 the National Assembly established the Committee of Research as a mechanism through which it could identify threats to its existence from amongst its large correspondence. In the time it was active, the committee received thousands of letters from across France. In the early 1990s the archivist Pierre Caillet wrote a thorough inventory and a general synthesis of the communications which further opened them up as a resource that could provide insight into popular responses to various themes. What was missing though was a comprehensive analysis of the letters that presented them as a single revolutionary practice. From clubs to newspapers and more recently elections, there has been a renewed effort amongst histories of the Revolution to recapture the democratic practices that flourished in 1789. But writing directly to the state has as yet not been added to these elements that supported popular involvement in the Revolution. These voices provide a fascinating insight into revolutionary enthusiasm and the channels of communication that existed between the state and its citizens in the period 1789 to 1791. This thesis looks at the major themes of the archive: subsistence, religion and counter-revolution as well as the practice of denunciation and the changing character and role of the Committee of Research itself. What emerges is a picture of a democratic sphere through which people presented their visions of the new regime. At the same time the letters also indicate that a process of institutional entrenchment was underway. An examination of how these two forces interacted with each other may go some way towards understanding why the Revolution developed in the way that it did.

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## List of Abbreviations

AN – Archives Nationales

AP – Archives Parlementaires

ADHP – Archives Départementales de la Haute-Pyrénées

## Introduction

*Tel est, nosseigneurs, le tableau précis des abus, dont nous réclamons avec l'espoir consolant toutefois d'en voir bientôt le terme, opéré par le résultat de vos sages et sublimes combinaisons. Mais un regret amer vient se mêler à un sentiment si doux ; Pourquoi les Representans augustes, à la justice desquels nous déférons nos plaintes, ne peuvent-ils en apprécier le mérite et nous en faire raison ; et comment se fait-il , qu'en ayant comme opprimés, des droits à leur commisération, nous ne puissions en avoir, comme Concitoyen, à leur protection immédiate ? Sans doute, nous obtiendrons justice de tous les maux que nous avons endurés, et dont le sentiment devenu à la fin insupportables, a déterminé notre réclamation : elle nous sera rendue dans la juste proportion de notre infortune et de l'esprit d'équité qui préside au système d'une constitution nouvelle : Elle nous sera rendue par quelque Tribunal que ce puisse être ; Les vues de Justice et de bienfaisance, qui dirigent les opérations de l'Assemblée Nationale, ne manqueront pas de se communiquer à tous les esprits chargés de concourir à l'importance d'une révolution tant désirée, et que les Restaurateurs du bonheur de la France, trouveront sans doute en tous lieux des Coopérateurs dignes d'eux [sic], closing paragraph of a letter from the principal inhabitants of Maubourguet <sup>1</sup>*

Nestled in the fork of two rivers, the Adour and its tributary the Echez in the Haute-Pyrénées, lies the little town of Maubourguet. With around a thousand inhabitants the little town was like many others in France in the eighteenth century; it had a church, a town hall, the remains of a former monastery, a market place and three *faubourgs* that lay about ancient walls. Although they had no seigneur, they had several families that could be described as *petite noblesse*. Alongside these there were numerous *bourgeois*-lawyers, doctors, notaries, shopkeepers and large-scale farmers amongst them and of course like any town a great number of peasants, labourers and servants who owned no substantial property.<sup>2</sup> The affairs of the town were conducted by the town council

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<sup>1</sup> The Principal Inhabitants of Maubourguet (Haute-Pyrénées), October 1789, Paris, Archives Nationales hereafter AN DXXIXbis carton 2 dossier 14 documents 1+2.

<sup>2</sup> Georges Fabre, *Maubourguet sous la Révolution*, Antenne Généalogique Parisienne Association Guillaume Mauran, Paris <<http://roger.roucolle.pagesperso-orange.fr/agp/maubourguet.pdf>> [accessed 11 July 2016] (pp.1-5).

which was organised like others in the south west of France with a mayor, a *lieutenant de maire* his second in command, six *consuls* or *jurats* and a *procureur-syndic*. There was also a royal official called the *subdélégué*, answerable to the Intendant of the area, who was the crown's representative in the province.<sup>3</sup>

In October 1789, thirty-five individuals from amongst the ranks of the *bourgeoisie* and literate townspeople gathered to write a petition to the representatives of the nation in Paris. Seven months before, on the 8 March 1789, like every town in the country, the same people had assembled with others to draft a list of grievances, a *cahier de doléances* to be compiled with others from around the Kingdom to inform a meeting of the Estates-General. This was an event which had last happened in 1614, when elected representatives across the Kingdom from each of the three social orders of France, the clergy, the nobility and the commoners, were called by the monarch to contribute their views on the future of the country. In the seven months between these two meetings of March and October 1789 extraordinary events had shaken up the very foundations of French society. The elected representatives at the Estates-General had declared themselves the National Assembly and Parisians had risen up to defend them. All across the country there had been unrest, including anti-seigneurial riots and in many places an autonomous change in local government.<sup>4</sup>

In Maubourguet there had been no revolution in municipal personnel; the same people who had sat on the town council in March 1789 were still there in October.<sup>5</sup> But whilst not much had *physically* changed, the Revolution had released a spirit of deep dissatisfaction with the political elite of the town and opened up the possibility of change. Those who signed the petition in October were not all strangers to the town hall. Many sat on the fringes of power. Bertrand Horcat, who was named as the recipient for a response from the Assembly, had a relative, Philippe Horcat, who was

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<sup>3</sup> *Registre de Délibérations de Maubourguet*, Archives Départementales de la Haute-Pyrénées, hereafter ADHP, 304 E Depot 4 BB 4, 1788-1789<<http://www.archivesenligne65.fr>> [accessed 4 July 2016] and Roland E. Mousnier, *The Institutions of France under the Absolute Monarchy 1598-1789: Society and the State*, trans. by Brian Pearce (London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p.567.

<sup>4</sup> Georges Lefebvre, *The French Revolution: From Its Origins to 1793* (London: Routledge, 2005), Chapter 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Registre de Délibérations de Maubourguet*, ADHP, 304 E Depot 4 BB 4, 1788-1789 <<http://www.archivesenligne65.fr>> [accessed 4 July 2016]



the *procureur-syndic*. Joseph Abadie, another signatory, who would call for the planting of a tree of liberty in July 1791, appeared as a signatory of several municipal registers in previous years as did Joseph Emphittes and a sieur Arthiguenave, who were notables and as such auxiliary members of the municipality in various guises right the way through to the Empire and Restoration periods.<sup>6</sup> But the mayor was not present and neither as far as we can tell were members from the major families of the *petite noblesse*. For the petition was less a petition than a denunciation, the subjects of which were the *subdélégué* Pierre Lamothe, his nephew the *Lieutenant de Maire* Denis Pascau and a judge named Perez.

They were accused by the petitioners of gross abuses of authority. The judge was embroiled in an extortion scandal and Lamothe had been fraudulently allocating to his nephew vacant properties used by the town for the holding of markets and fairs. Worst of all he had been taking advantage of the misfortune of the town. Due to its position between two rivers Maubourguet was a frequent victim of flooding. Each year the inhabitants would see their crops, for the most part grapevines on which the local economy depended, ravaged by floods. They had been receiving aid from the Crown to alleviate the subsequent hardship but the grain they received was each time siphoned off by the *subdélégué* Lamothe and sold off by him at a profit.

For the petitioners this was not just a question of one rogue official but a question of his 'unjust rights'. The Revolution gave them hope that Lamothe's crimes, and that of the others denounced, were no longer acceptable. This was because the new regime in their collective imagination was to be founded on justice and *bienfaisance*. But they did not consider themselves to simply be new subjects under the sovereignty of the National Assembly. They saw their denunciation as a natural progression from the *cahier* they had contributed to seven months before; they were active participants in the birth of the new regime. Thus whilst they expressed some reservations, 'un regret amer', about whether the new state would deliver on their hopes, they nonetheless declared that they would have justice, 'Sans doute, nous obtiendrons justice...' They imagined that all across France people were ready and united to establish a new system

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid and Fabre, *Maubourguet*, p.8 and p.14.

based on justice and equality; 'Les vues de Justice et de bienfaisance [...] ne manqueront pas de se communiquer à tous les esprits chargés de concourir à l'importance d'une révolution tant désirée [...] les Restaurateurs du bonheur de la France, trouveront sans doute en tous lieux des Coopérateurs dignes d'eux.' The Revolution, for them, was a collective project.<sup>7</sup>

The principal inhabitants of Maubourguet sent their letter directly to the National Assembly but it was not to be read out there. Instead the letter was redirected to a committee established several months before. It was called the Committee of Research, *comité des recherches*, sometimes translated as the 'investigations committee', established on the 28 July 1789, to report on threats to the state.<sup>8</sup>

The letter from Maubourguet was one of thousands that came to rest in the committee's archive, an archive which offers a rich resource for examining the nature of the collective project imagined by the inhabitants of Maubourguet and shared by many others. Just a glance at this archive gives the sense of the ubiquity of Revolutionary feeling in 1789. In it can be found thousands of letters written to the National Assembly and the Committee itself. Authors ranged from local authorities, proprietors, clergymen, nobles and townspeople, to groups of inhabitants and even labourers and women. The content ranged from complaints and denunciations to projects and petitions.

The documents of the Committee of Research allow us not only to explore the extent of revolutionary fervour, but also to understand the relationship between revolutionary enthusiasm and the institutions of the Revolution. All these voices ended up in the laps of twelve elected representatives who were for most of the first year replaced monthly.

The archivist Pierre Caillet wrote a thorough inventory of the sources contained within the archive of the committee, and following this wrote a general synthesis of some of

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<sup>7</sup> The Principal Inhabitants of Maubourguet, Haute-Pyrénées, October 1789, AN DXXIXbis. c.2 d.14 1+2.

<sup>8</sup> Edna Hindie Lemay and Alison Patrick, *Revolutionaries at Work: The Constituent Assembly, 1789-1791* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1996), p.10.

the themes within it.<sup>9</sup> But an analytical approach to the sources has until now not been undertaken. As the eminent historian François Furet wrote in an introduction to Pierre Caillet's book on the archive:

De tous les Comités de l'Assemblée constituante, le «Comité des recherches» a été peut-être le plus important. C'est en tout cas celui qui a suscité à l'époque le plus de débats, de commentaires et d'agitations, et un de ceux qui a laissé le plus de traces de son activité, bien qu'à ce jour, malheureusement, il n'ait pas encore trouvé son historien [...] En écrivant ce qui précède, j'espère donner à un jeune historien l'envie de consacrer quelques années de travail à faire le livre qui nous manque encore sur le comité des recherches de l'Assemblée constituante.<sup>10</sup>

Despite there being little in the way of research into the committee, historians have tended to view the institution in two opposing fashions. Most commonly it is seen of as a precursor to the Committee of Public Safety or the Committee of General Security, which were the repressive institutions of the state during the period of the terror (1793-1794). This view was expressed by the historian Georges Lefebvre, and later in the twentieth century by Albert Soboul.<sup>11</sup> More recently Timothy Tackett followed suit describing the committee as a 'powerful institution' and a 'kind of first-generation committee of public safety'.<sup>12</sup> These views were no doubt informed to a great extent by the manner in which the committee was described at the time of the Revolution. In the work of Edmund Burke writing in 1790 or Charles-Alexandre de Calonne the former French finance minister writing in 1791, the committee was described as an 'inquisition' that tormented and imprisoned without trial.<sup>13</sup> Later memoirs represented

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<sup>9</sup> Pierre Caillet, *Les Français en 1789, d'après les papiers du Comité des recherches de l'assemblée constituante (1789-1791)*, (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1991) and Pierre Caillet, *Inventaire analytique de la sous-série D XXIX bis* (Paris: Archives Nationales, 1993).

<sup>10</sup> François Furet in introduction to Caillet, *Les Français en 1789*, pp. 6-10.

<sup>11</sup> Georges Lefebvre, *The Coming of the French Revolution*, trans. by R.R. Palmer (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp.120-121, 212, and Albert Soboul, *A Short History of the French Revolution*, trans. by G.Symcox (London: University of California Press, 1977), p.46.

<sup>12</sup> Timothy Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary; The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), p.203 and p.222.

<sup>13</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the French Revolution*, ed. by W. Alison Phillips and Catherine Beatrice Phillips, Pitt Press Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), p.214, Charles-Alexandre de Calonne, *Mémoire de M. de Calonne, ministre d'Etat, contre le décret rendu le 14 février 1791, par l'Assemblée se disant nationale* (Venice, 1791).

it in a similar way. Charles Élie, marquis de Ferrières described the Committee in 1821 as one 'qui surpassa bientôt tout ce que l'histoire ancienne et moderne nous apprend de ces odieux tribunaux formé par des despotes pour opprimer la liberté et consacrer la tyrannie'.<sup>14</sup>

Others have viewed the committee in a different way altogether. Barry Shapiro described it as 'toothless and lackadaisical' and both he and Patrice Gueniffey have pointed to the institutions of the municipal authorities of Paris as more likely forerunners to the later committees of the terror. In particular they stressed the importance of Paris' own committee of research set up in October 1789, which from the outset was given investigative powers and played an important role in seeking out enemies of the Revolution during the period.<sup>15</sup>

Both these contrasting depictions of the National Assembly's Committee of Research have merit. It is no surprise that Barry Shapiro considered the Paris committee to be a more important institution than its national counterpart as his research is limited to the first year of the Revolution. Indeed what is missing from these accounts is a sense of the transformation of the committee from what was a weak position at the beginning of the Revolution to a more powerful one by 1791.

Whilst little empirical work has until now been done on the Committee of Research as a whole, its archive has been widely used as a means for historians to explore local responses to various themes. In 1986 Timothy Tackett used a selection of these letters in *Religion, Revolution and Regional Culture in Eighteenth Century France* to explore the phenomenon of the clerical oath of November 1790, a piece of highly divisive legislation whereby clergymen across France were required to take an oath of allegiance to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, legislation of July 1790 that subordinated the French church to the state. The oath has long been seen by historians as a watershed moment in the Revolution: just under half of the French clergy refused

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<sup>14</sup> Charles Élie, marquis de Ferrières, *Mémoires du marquis de Ferrières* (Paris, 1821), p.169.

<sup>15</sup> Barry M. Shapiro, *Revolutionary Justice in Paris 1789-1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Patrice Gueniffey, *La Politique de La Terreur; Essai Sur La Violence Révolutionnaire, 1789-1794* (Paris: Fayard, 2000).

to take it. Tackett analysed letters that addressed the oath legislation using them to reveal the attitudes of the clergy and the laity in order to better understand the motivation behind the taking or rejecting of the oath. His conclusions shed light upon the impact of this legislation on the development of the Revolution.<sup>16</sup>

More recently Judith Miller used a sample of letters written by local authorities in relation to subsistence in her book *Mastering the Market* as evidence of the failure by municipalities to cope with the demands for grain controls called for by the populace. These letters showed, in Miller's account, that the new municipalities brought in by the Revolution had little to no experience in managing the grain trade and that the combination of this with the National Assembly's misguided decree on free circulation aggravated by terrible harvests led to more radicalisation.<sup>17</sup>

In 2009 Charles Walton drew on the archive in his book *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution* to look at the manner in which sedition was denounced in the Revolution. He found that a tension existed between the new dedication to the freedom of speech and an obsession with honour that had been inherited from the *ancien régime* that saw injurious expression as a crime. Denunciations of injurious discourse served to define the boundaries of the freedom of expression, and these attempts by citizens and legislators to set limits increasingly radicalised politics.<sup>18</sup> With his view of denunciations as contributions to the radicalisation of the Revolution, Walton was the first to see the letters as political acts that had an impact on the Revolution's development.

This archive, then, is exceptionally useful for pursuing two lines of historical enquiry. On the one hand due to the fact that around half of all the letters whose authors are known in the archive were written by government bodies or municipalities it provides an opportunity to study, as Miller did, an *institutional* history of the Revolution. On the

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<sup>16</sup> Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France; the Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986).

<sup>17</sup> Judith A. Miller, *Mastering the Market; the State and the Grain Trade in Northern France, 1700-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> Charles Walton, *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution: The Culture of Calumny and the Problem of Free Speech* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

other hand due to the range of authorship, including many voices that were by and large previously unheard, it is a rare resource in the pursuit of a history of *democracy* in the Revolution, as Charles Walton has used it.

In terms of the development of local government institutions in the Revolution, not much quantitative research has been undertaken. Lynn Hunt has written an account of municipal revolution in an article, and a book on the municipal revolutions of Troyes and Reims, but no large study has yet sought to map the changes in municipal personnel across the whole Kingdom.<sup>19</sup> Surprisingly, little to no research has been conducted on the interactions between the new departmental authorities of 1790 and the citizens and state of France, with the notable exception of Ted Margadant's work on urban rivalries in the Revolution.<sup>20</sup> In an article reviewing the historiography of the French Revolution published in 2000, Susanne Desan exposed this lack of study into the French revolutionary state as a failure to explore both the institutions of the state as an analytic category and the nexus of state-citizen interactions.<sup>21</sup>

The scarcity of research into communications between state and citizen also extends to the pre-revolutionary period, although some work, notably that undertaken by Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault, can help us piece together an understanding of the avenues of communications that came before.<sup>22</sup> Petitioning as a concept was an integral ideological component of the *ancien régime*; all the people of France were equal before the King, and as the father of his people he was the ultimate source of justice.<sup>23</sup> Petitions were thus a common means through which people interacted with the government.<sup>24</sup> Petitions could be sent in the pursuit of private interests, for particular favours or privileges, but were also a key means of obtaining judicial intervention from

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<sup>19</sup> Lynn Hunt, 'Committees and Communes: Local Politics and National Revolution in 1789', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 18, 321–46.

<sup>20</sup> Ted W. Margadant, *Urban Rivalries in the French Revolution* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>21</sup> Susanne Desan, 'What's after Political Culture? Recent French Revolutionary Historiography' in *French Historical Studies* 23, 1 (2000), 163-196.

<sup>22</sup> Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault, *Le Désordre Des Familles; Lettres de cachet des archives de la Bastille* (Paris: Gallinard Julliard, 1982).

<sup>23</sup> Michel Antoine, *Louis XV* (France: Fayard, 1989), p.173.

<sup>24</sup> Gwylim Dodd and Sophie Petit-Renaud, 'Grace and Favour; the petition and its mechanisms' in *Government and Political Life in England and France c.1300-1500*, ed. by Christopher Fletcher, Jean-Phillipe Genet, and John Watts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p.240.

the King in the form of *lettres de justice*, a means through which the King could overturn a sentence passed by a Judge, or obtaining *lettres de cachet* a prerogative of the monarch allowing him to imprison people without charge; these were sent either directly to the Maison du Roi, to the Lieutenant-General of Police in Paris or to local Intendants by individuals or families seeking to have people interned.<sup>25</sup> They could also be used to challenge royal edicts that adversely affected private or collective interests.

It seems the participation in petition writing was widening by the eighteenth century. Historians of the sixteenth century found that petitions were almost exclusively sent by members of the nobility.<sup>26</sup> By the eighteenth century, Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault found in their studies of *lettres de cachet* petitions that their authorship was socially diverse, if not more commonly addressed by the more modest orders.<sup>27</sup> If this was the case it would conform well with wider developments in literacy rates and the public sphere.

But during this period the development of the bureaucratic structures of the state also changed the nature of petitioning. By the eighteenth century the days when petitioners could hand their petition straight to the King during one of his walks around the capital were long gone.<sup>28</sup> The Crown was more remote after Louis XIV moved the royal court to Versailles in 1682, and the rapid expansion of state institutions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries presented a number of layers of administration for petitioners to navigate.<sup>29</sup> Thus by the eighteenth century petitions were often addressed to the local intendant and other local authorities rather than the King himself.<sup>30</sup> Even the individual requests for *lettres de cachet* were under Louis XV often handled entirely by the Lieutenant-General of Police without consultation.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Farge and Foucault, p.16.

<sup>26</sup>Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives; Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France* (USA: Polity Press, 1987) p.15 and Dodd and Renaud, p.260.

<sup>27</sup>Farge and Foucault, p.9.

<sup>28</sup>Dodd and Renaud, p.259.

<sup>29</sup>Suzanne Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred: Lay Religion and Popular Politics in Revolutionary France* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), p.125.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid. and *Tocqueville: The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer, ed. by Jon Elster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.ciii-civ.

<sup>31</sup>Farge and Foucault, p.16.

Whilst there was some ideological continuity in petitions to central government seen between petitions sent to the King before the Revolution and those sent to the National Assembly after the Revolution, the channel of communication that linked petitioners with the Assembly was largely a phenomenon arising out of the Revolutionary break. On 28 December 1789 the National Assembly formalised this new channel, guaranteeing the freedom of active citizens to gather and write petitions.<sup>32</sup> Petitions differed significantly from those that had come before. By and large petitions of the *ancien régime* were not acts of authority. They were supplications that for the most part were requesting favours. 'Bold assertions of rights', Michael Kwass tells us, were not to be found amongst petitions on the subject of taxation pre-1787.<sup>33</sup> Gwylim Dodd and Sophie Petit-Renaud found that petitions of the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries used language that was uniform and traditional, full of stock phrases that showed deference and subordination.<sup>34</sup> Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault also noted the ritualistic and submissive language of the *lettres de cachet* petitions, although they demonstrated how a sense of the emotions and passions that lay behind them nonetheless were clear to perceive.<sup>35</sup> The petitions and letters sent to the National Assembly also had a shared language, but it was very much around the notion of citizenship; letter writers extended deference to the 'august assembly' and its enlightened wisdom, but they often justified their petitions on the basis of their own rights as citizens to participate. While petitions to the King came in a variety of pre-defined types, such as the various types of *lettres de justice* each with their own traditions, the letters written to the National Assembly broadened the scope of what the state could be petitioned about.

This transformation of the relationship between the state and its citizens is rooted in Jürgen Habermas' notion of the public sphere; the idea that a space developed in which individuals could discuss politics and society that began in the eighteenth century to shift the balance of political power away from the closed operations of the royal

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<sup>32</sup>Desan, p.125.

<sup>33</sup>Michael Kwass, *Privilege and the Politics of Taxation in Eighteenth Century France: Liberté, Egalité, Fiscalité* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.121.

<sup>34</sup> Dodd and Renaud, pp.240-278.

<sup>35</sup> Farge and Foucault, p.351.



court.<sup>36</sup> The effect of the Revolution on the public sphere is understood by Roger Chartier as simultaneously the transformation of the public sphere and the creation of a new space. He writes that 'the new public space [...] was at once inherited from and transformed by the creative energy of revolutionary politics.'<sup>37</sup> This reinvigorated space is what we might term the democratic sphere.

Why 'democratic'? The short answer is that it was open to all that had the means to write. But the term 'democratic' also ties it to a historiography that has attempted to get to the heart of the revolutionary phenomenon. In 1901 Alphonse Aulard gave an account of the Revolution as the establishment of a democratic republic, which he defined as the moment in 1792 when universal male suffrage was declared.<sup>38</sup> Early to mid-twentieth century historians who wrote 'classic' or 'marxist' interpretations of the Revolution saw democracy, or the principle of political equality, as a weapon first used by the bourgeoisie in its class struggle against the aristocracy, then later in the Revolution as a means for the artisanal and peasant classes to oppose bourgeois rule.<sup>39</sup> The first critics of a class approach to the French Revolution sought to identify democracy in the Revolution as simply an ideology imposed by a militant minority. François Furet used the work of Augustin Cochin who had described the social interactions practised in pre-revolutionary voluntary associations, for example in the freemasons, as forerunners of the Jacobin model of direct democracy.<sup>40</sup> Furet argued that although equality was practised within these political clubs and societies they remained closed to the wider public intellectually. The revolutionary concept of democracy was simply an ideological equivalent to the absolutism of the monarchy – the practise of politics by the few.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, (United Kingdom: Polity Press, 1989).

<sup>37</sup> Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, trans. by Lydia G. Cochrane (London: Duke University Press, 1991).

<sup>38</sup> F.-A. Aulard, *Histoire politique de la Révolution française: Origines et développement de la démocratie et de la République (1789-1804)* (Paris: Librairie A. Colin, 1901).

<sup>39</sup> Jean Jaurès, *Histoire socialiste de la Révolution française*, 8 vols. (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1968-1973), Albert Mathiez, *La Révolution française*, 3 vols. (Paris: Colin, 1933) and Lefebvre, *The French Revolution*, p.xix.

<sup>40</sup> Augustin Cochin, *Les sociétés de pensée et la démocratie, Étude d'histoire révolutionnaire* (Paris: Plon Nourrit, 1921)

<sup>41</sup> François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. by Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp.37-40.

More recently historians have made efforts to root democratic sensibility in practice as opposed to seeing it as merely a discourse. Isser Woloch has perhaps been most explicit in this area. He has argued that the political culture of the Revolution was sustained by three institutions that channelled revolutionary energy: elections, political newspapers and political clubs.<sup>42</sup> These had all existed in some form prior to the Revolution, but were from 1789 onwards transformed into spaces of political praxis.

Both Malcolm Crook and Melvin Edelstein have undertaken in-depth studies of the elections of the Revolution that can support this view, presenting them as democratic practices. Crook called these 'apprenticeships in democracy', and Edelstein concluded that the Revolution had instituted modern electoral democracy by establishing elections as the mechanism for political legitimacy.<sup>43</sup>

Much work has also been done in the area of the press in the Revolution. Whilst an active and critical press can be seen as a crucial part of the pre-revolutionary period and origin of the Revolution, there was clearly a politicisation of the press in 1789: political newspapers jumped from six publications to over 130 in the course of that year.<sup>44</sup> Jeremy Popkin writes that by the end of 1789 the French press was unrecognisable.<sup>45</sup>

The banding together of the patriots of 1789 into political clubs was another element of unique revolutionary practice. Going much further than pre-revolutionary clubs such as the masonic lodges, which mostly served as places of entertainment and as venues for the discussion of ideas,<sup>46</sup> the clubs of the Revolution served as political agents which could and did exert pressure on government. After the overthrow of the constitutional

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<sup>42</sup>Isser Woloch, 'A Revolution in Political Culture' in *A Companion to the French Revolution*, ed. by Peter McPhee (United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

<sup>43</sup>Malcolm Crook, *Elections in the French Revolution: An Apprenticeship in Democracy 1789-1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), and Melvin Edelstein, *The French Revolution and the Birth of Electoral Democracy* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2014).

<sup>44</sup>Hugh Gough, *The Newspaper Press in the French Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.26, Jeremy Popkin reports that 140 new periodicals started in Paris during 1789, see Jeremy D. Popkin, *Revolutionary News; the Press in France 1789-1799* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), p.33.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Antoine Lilti, 'Private Lives, Public Space: a New Social History of the Enlightenment' in *The Cambridge Companion to the French Enlightenment*, ed. by David Brewer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p.20.

monarchy in August 1792, Jacobin clubs became the means through which vast numbers from the ranks of the artisanal and tradesmen classes engaged in revolutionary politics.<sup>47</sup> Clearly whilst there was a vibrant pre-revolutionary public sphere in which those who were interested in politics could play a role, the number of participants exploded during the first year of Revolution.

Clearly democracy was not simply a discourse commandeered by a revolutionary minority as put forward by Furet, but manifested itself in new and relatively widespread political practices. The creative energy that arose out of mass participation in elections and the engagement with an expanded political press are evident in the communications that can be found in the archive of the Committee of Research. Indeed the act itself of writing directly to the state can be added to the participatory elements described by Woloch as fashioning the new political culture. Letters written to the National Assembly were democratic acts. These communications had far greater scope than petitions that had been sent to the King under the *ancien régime*, or the *cahiers de doléances*. Their tone and register were varied, their authorship was broad, and so too was the range of subjects that they petitioned the state about.

The full range of popular participation in letter writing to the state could only be revealed in a comprehensive study of all the institutions of the National Assembly in this period for although letters of the Committee of Research were fairly diverse they were also limited by the nature of the institution. The major purpose of the Committee of Research was to report on possible threats to the state and the overall complexion of the archive reflected this. This committee emerged out of the chaotic summer of 1789 when the amount of correspondence received by the National Assembly had become too great for the representatives to process as one body. Over the period it extended its reach into what were two of the greatest issues of the Revolutionary government: subsistence and religion. After the Committee was handed responsibility for collecting information on obstructions to the free circulation of grain in October 1789 it began to receive many letters on the subject of subsistence. Later in November 1790 it was put

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<sup>47</sup>Crane Brinton, *The Jacobins: An Essay in the New History* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1930), Chapter 3 and Isser Woloch, *Jacobin Legacy: The Democratic Movement under the Directory* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp.3-8.

in charge of reporting on opposition to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy.<sup>48</sup> It was additionally often directly sent many other communications which did not fall under its official remit but which by and large reflected its growing influence. In particular by the end of the period it received many petitions from prisoners calling for their release as well as reports from local authorities of arrests they had made. The committee also received pieces of unsolicited advice, praise and general projects of legislation.

Caillet's detailed and thorough inventory allows us to explore the archive in its totality in this thesis. I have transformed his inventory into a digital resource which maps all the information that Caillet collected including each document's reference, date, location, intended recipient, type, content summary and links to other documents in the archive.<sup>49</sup> This data matrix provides an overview of the themes of the archive, the extent of various tendencies, their dispersion across space, and their changing characteristics over time. It also opens up the possibility for further qualitative study.

A quantitative approach to large numbers of documents was pioneered in this field by John Markoff, Gilbert Shapiro and Sasha Weitman who analysed all surviving *cahiers de doléances* along with a variety of other archival material.<sup>50</sup> This approach gave them a unique insight into the patterns of popular demands and the general social forces at work in the revolution. The results of their method is perhaps displayed best in John Markoff's book on the abolition of feudalism which used the data to show how the peasantry interacted with legislators to bring about the destruction of the old feudal order.<sup>51</sup>

A quantitative approach can be used in a similar way to examine letters that were directed to the Committee of Research. However the documents of the Committee of Research do not lend themselves as easily to the type of analysis conducted on the

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<sup>48</sup>5 October 1789, Archives Parlementaires hereafter AP, tome 9:348 and 20 November 1790, AP, 20:557.

<sup>49</sup> Caillet, *Inventaire analytique de la sous-série D XXXIXbis*.

<sup>50</sup> Gilbert Shapiro, John Markoff and Sasha R Weitman, 'Quantitative Studies of the French Revolution', *History and Theory*, 12, 2 (1973), 163–91.

<sup>51</sup> John Markoff, *The Abolition of Feudalism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

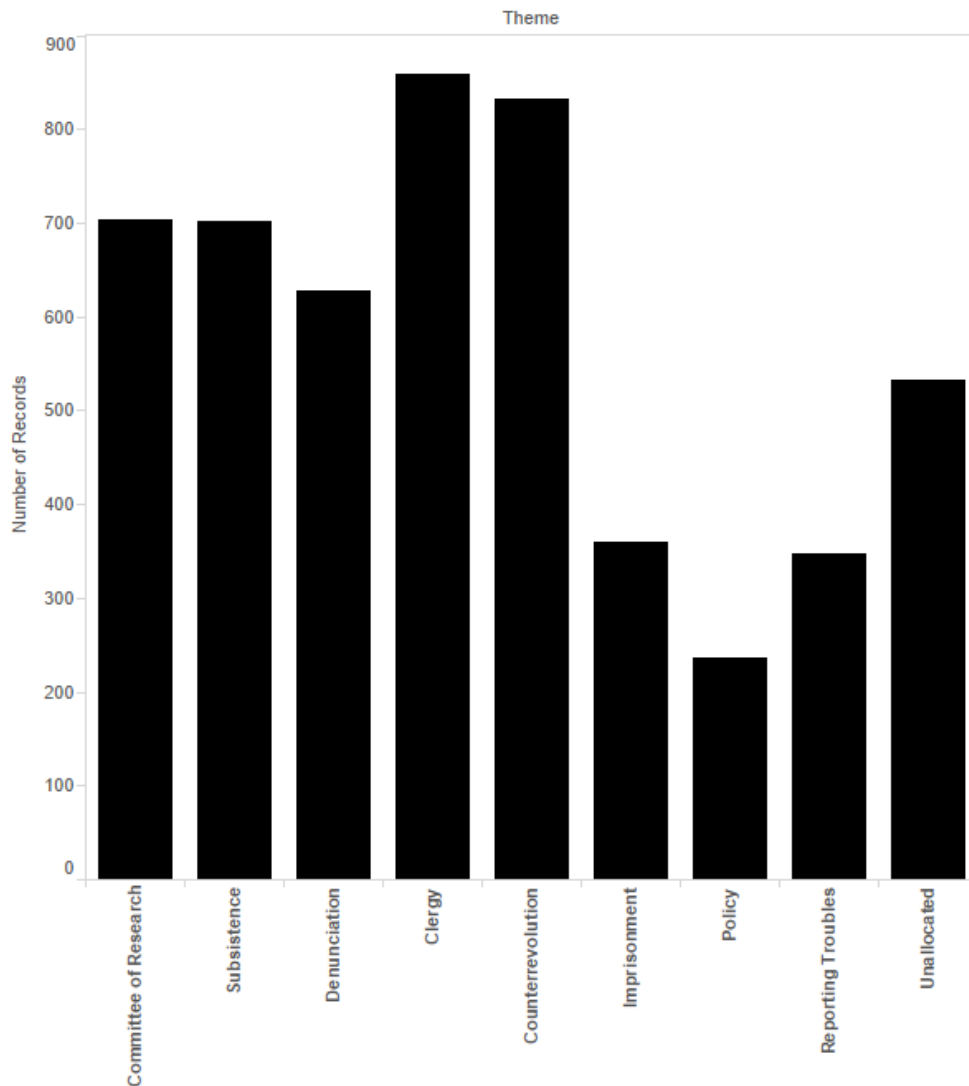
cahiers. This is because the letters were not formulaic in the same way as the cahiers were. Many cahiers follow a set framework and were designed to be a composite list of the grievances of a particular group in a particular area.

The sheer volume of letters also inhibited a comprehensive analysis. There are 44 cartons and 417 dossiers, which amounts to a total of 12,607 documents. These were divided by Caillet into 5243 references, as he subsumed documents that were related to the same case, and presumably sent as a bundle, under one reference.<sup>52</sup> Still this was far too great a number to look at for one thesis.

My approach has been to digitalise Caillet's 5243 references and add to them to form a digital resource from which I was able to divide the letters into clear themes in order to direct further study.

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<sup>52</sup> Caillet, *Inventaire analytique de la sous-série D XXIXbis*.

**Figure 1: Number of Letters by Theme**

Some of the themes were largely extraneous to the purposes of the Committee of Research. One category which I have labelled 'Imprisonment' contained many petitions from prisoners calling for their release as well as reports written by municipalities of arrests, house searches, interrogations, prisoner transfers and releases, and accounts of trials. The presence of these in the archive was more to do with the growing importance of the Committee of Research in matters of law and order than an area in which it had been given jurisdiction.

Likewise the category I have described as 'Policy' is made up of letters that proposed and criticised legislation. Whilst the Committee had the power to suggest legislation, it could only extend to suggestions connected to reports on threats to the state, not the

kind of legislation proposed by most letters that I have labelled as 'Policy'. The topics of these were varied; letters proposed policies on commerce, community works, poverty, feudal rights, finance, begging, crime prevention and many other areas that effected their lives. I have also included in this category criticisms of the National Assembly and congratulatory letters. These all provide excellent examples of the democratic sphere in action, but they represent a relatively small proportion of the archive.

The category labelled 'Reporting Troubles' did come under the official remit of the Committee of Research in the sense that the committee considered most popular disturbances examples of threats to the state. But these were distinct from letters that may be categorised as 'Counter-Revolution' because they were mostly official reports sent by local government on particular events, with little other than descriptions of what had taken place.<sup>53</sup>

Although the presence of these categories of letters in the archive is testament to the character of the Committee of Research, the institutional chaos of the early revolution and the existence of a democratic sphere I have not subjected them to close analysis. Excluding miscellaneous letters and those labelled under the three categories of 'Imprisonment', 'Policy' and 'Reporting Troubles', this left 3766 letters earmarked for further study. There were five discernible themes remaining.

Firstly there were many letters in the archive, approximately twelve percent of the total that were not written to the National Assembly but rather were sent between the various institutions of central government. These I have categorised under the label of 'Committee of Research'. Most commonly these were written by Jean-Sylvain Bailly, Mayor of Paris, or Champion de Cicé, minister of justice until November 1790. But deputies and other committees of the National Assembly as well as the various bodies that made up the municipality of Paris also wrote to the Committee of Research and transferred letters they had been sent. Additionally the archive contained some

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<sup>53</sup>Pierre Caillet's general synthesis, *Les Français en 1789* provides a good account by region of these reported troubles.

examples of drafts of letters written by the Committee of Research itself. This group of letters could clearly offer insight into the mechanisms at work within and between government institutions.

Thirteen percent of the total were letters sent in relation to the grain trade, grouped under the category of 'Subsistence'. These were mostly responses to the decree of the free circulation of grain of August 1789, and reports and denunciations of various obstructions to this decree.

I have categorised a third group of letters, approximately twelve percent, under the loose title of 'Denunciation'. This was a term used by letter writers and Caillet to describe many of the letters sent to the committee, but a great number of these could be taken together as examples of a distinct type of communication that denounced individuals, mostly members of the community, for actions deemed inimical to revolutionary values. This included denunciations for calumny, abuses of power and threats to the authority of municipalities.<sup>54</sup>

Sixteen percent of the total are subsumed under the category of 'Clergy'. These were for the most part responses to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy of July 1790 and the Clerical Oath legislation of November 1790. This category also includes letters written on the subject of the nationalisation of church property, a decree of November 1789, and many denunciations of local clergymen.

Finally another sixteen percent were letters that related to fears of counter-revolution which I have grouped together as 'Counter-Revolution': this was the original remit of the Committee of Research. These letters were mostly denunciations of counter-revolutionary speech and activities and reports of immediate threats to the revolutionary government.

These themes reveal the breadth of areas touched by letters written and received by the Committee of Research. This gives some idea of the range of issues brought by the

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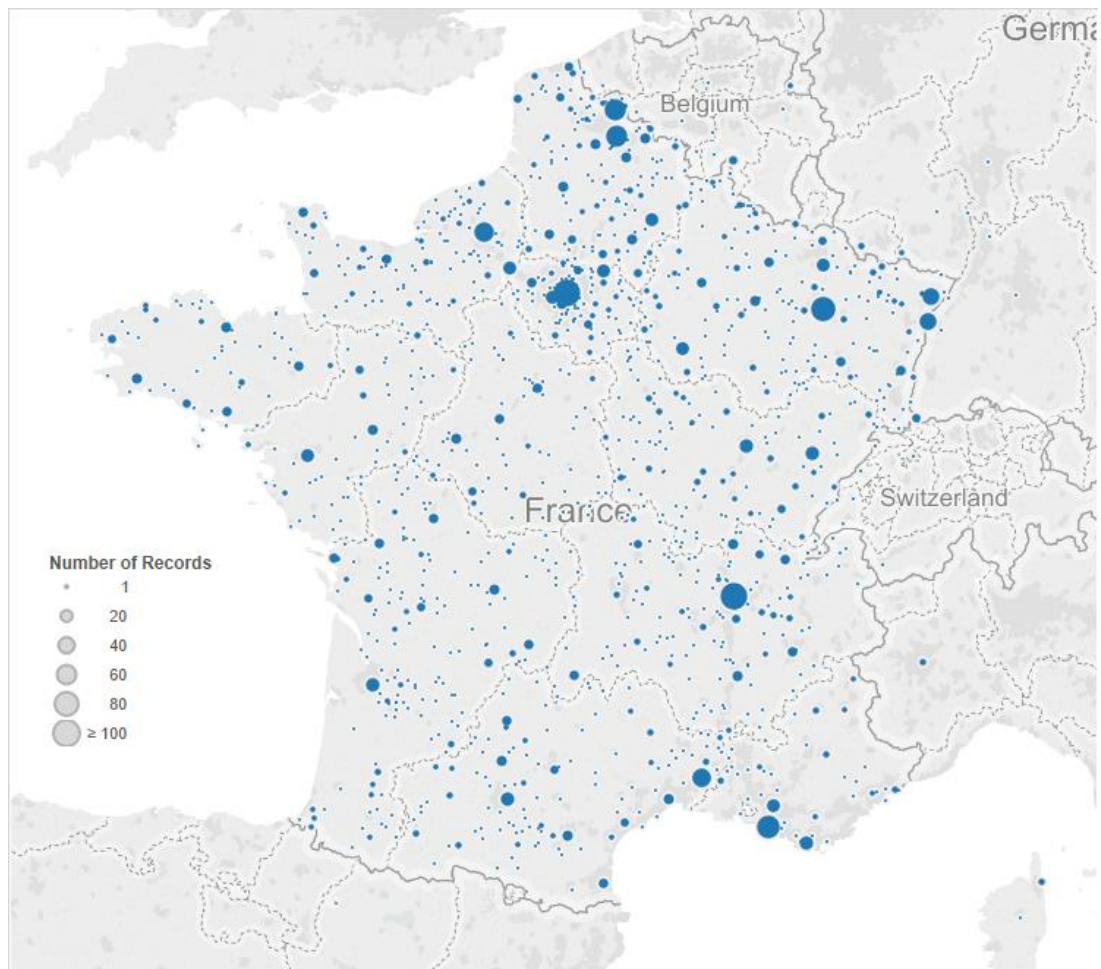
<sup>54</sup> Caillet, *Inventaire analytique de la sous-série D XXIXbis*.



democratic sphere as well as the limitations on these by virtue of the nature of the Committee of Research.

## Geography

**Figure 2: Letters by Location**



The existence of a democratic sphere can be further evidenced by the geographical extent of involvement in the practice. The practice of writing to the state was astonishingly widespread. Letters were sent from every one of the eighty-three departments of France. From the big administrative towns to hundreds of little towns in *La France profonde* the practice was far-reaching and both urban and rural. When examined in further detail, the map also shows variation and how dependent letter writing was on a variety of other factors.

From Figure 2 we can see how the volume of letters sent was linked to the size and administrative importance of where they were sent from.<sup>55</sup> The greatest number of

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<sup>55</sup>Top Ten towns by number of letters sent: Paris: 674, Lyon: 118, Nancy: 83, Marseille: 72, Douai: 63,

letters originated from Paris; 674 in total, 257 if one excludes those written by government institutions. Lyon as the second largest city was also the second most common location with 118 letters sent. Large towns were more likely to send letters; for example towns with populations of over 50,000 such as Marseille, Lille, Rouen and Toulouse sent more letters than others.<sup>56</sup>

However some smaller towns sent a great number of letters, usually due to a particular disturbance that had taken place. The Forty-three letters sent from Haguenau for example were almost entirely related to the case of Westermann, an army *sous-officier* who came into conflict with the municipality in an affair that lasted most of the period. This is also true to a certain extent of the larger towns. The eighty-three letters from Nancy were mostly in relation to the mutiny there in August 1790. Marseille too saw a period of conflict in August 1789 and again a year later which accounted for much of the seventy-two pieces of correspondence.<sup>57</sup> The same is true of Nimes, Douai and to a certain extent Rouen and Lyon.<sup>58</sup> Almost all of the top twenty letter-writing towns were capitals of their department, this meant that the department officials, the directories, were located there. Almost all of the twenty-one communications from Draguignon for example were a result of the particularly active department directory of the Var, Draguignon having been its *prefecture*.

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Lille: 62, Rouen: 54, Nimes: 48, Haguenau: 43, Strasbourg: 41.

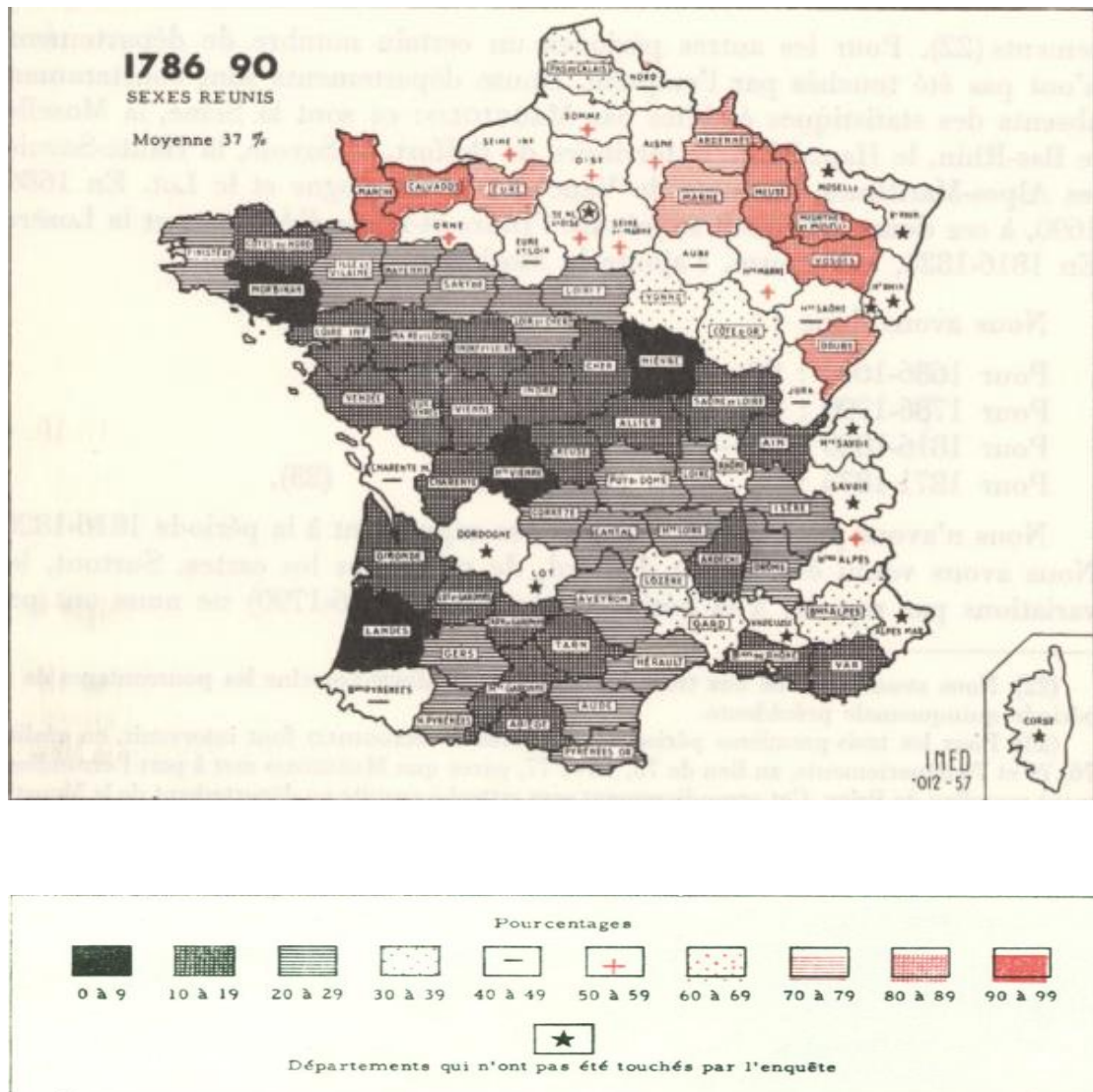
<sup>56</sup>Some towns were exceptions to this such as Nantes, with a population of 64,994 which saw only twenty-one letters sent. Population sizes from Colin Jones, *The Longman Companion to the French Revolution* (London: Longman, 1988; repr. Oxford: Routledge, 2013), pp.253-254.

<sup>57</sup> These were exceptions as most large cases were subsumed by Pierre Caillet under one reference for when the documents were next to each other in the archive they were likely to have been sent in one bundle. The large case files such as that on troubles in Illkirch or on a scandal that occurred in the Cathedral of Montauban for example contained over one hundred documents see Caillet, *Inventaire analytique de la sous-série D XXIXbis*.

<sup>58</sup>In Nimes there was a great conflict between Catholics and Protestants see Chapter 5, p.161; in Douai between two National Guard factions see Chapter 4, pp.106-108; in Rouen there were riots in 1789 and a subsequent trial against the alleged ringleaders Jourdain, Bordier and Bause, AN DXXXIXbis c.1 d.3 1-3, d.6 1-27; in Lyon there was a great conspiracy uncovered in December 1790, see Chapter 5, p.167.



**Figure 4: Fleury and Valmary's map of Maggiolo's literacy rates in 1786-90<sup>60</sup>**



His findings are often referred to as the 'ligne Maggiolo', in reference to the way in which the country was divided into two distinctive areas of high and low literacy. This line extended roughly from the bay of Mont-Saint-Michel to the department of the Jura splitting the country into a northern area with literacy rates of over fifty percent and a larger southern area of departments where literacy rates were mostly under thirty percent.<sup>61</sup> This line is clearly discernible in the map of letters of the Committee of

<sup>60</sup> Michel Fleury and Pierre Valmary, 'Les progrès de l'instruction élémentaire de Louis XIV à Napoléon III, d'après l'enquête de Louis Maggiolo (1877-1879) in *Population*, 12, 1 (1957) 71-92.

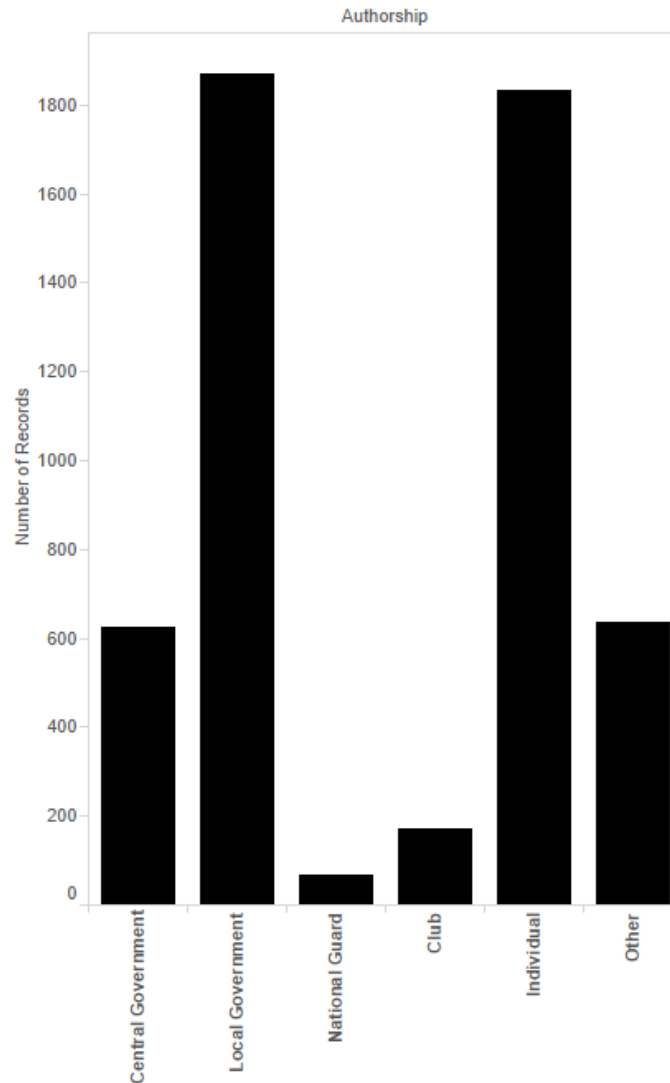
<sup>61</sup>Ibid, p.74.

Research. Small differences can be seen when it comes to the Burgundy region which sent more letters but which had low literacy rates. The south western departments of the Gironde and Landes also sent a surprising number of letters given their very low literacy levels. But the general correlation between the two data sets shows that whilst it seems obvious that an ability to write would determine whether letters were written, the fact that the number of letters sent was indicative of the general literacy rates of the department they originated from shows how representative letter-writers were of their communities. The democratic sphere, in other words, was orientated around the more literate areas of France.

## Authorship

How communities were represented in the democratic sphere can be further explored by examining the background of authors, drawing from Caillet's summaries.

**Figure 5: Letters by Authorship**



A significant number of letters, thirty-six and twelve percent respectively, were sent from local authorities and central government bodies. Most indicative of the democratic sphere were the thirty-five percent sent by individuals. Only a small proportion of letters, three percent, came from clubs. Almost all of these were sent from the *Sociétés des Amis de la Constitution* later known as Jacobin clubs, royalist

clubs did not engage at all. The category 'Other' refers to all letters without a clear author in the summary, as well as pieces of evidence etc that were most probably sent as part of a file of documents or else handed over by another government institutions. We might find here for example the famous note from the Baron de Besenval to the governor of the Bastille De Launay sent on July 14 1789 telling him to 'hold until the bitter end'.<sup>62</sup>

Amongst letters from individuals certain trends are discernible. While there were certainly a few cases where an *écrivain public*, a hired writer, or other literate spokesperson had been employed it is fair to say that the great majority of letter writers could write.<sup>63</sup> Other than this assumption of literacy, in over half of the letters written by individuals there is little more that can be assumed as the authors remained either anonymous or more commonly as only a name which gave little away about their social positions. Nonetheless some indications of identity are present from the summaries. Nobles for example were identifiable by their titles.<sup>64</sup> Some gave their identity in relation to their political involvement, for example 'vainqueur de la Bastille' or their position in the local Jacobin club.<sup>65</sup> But most information that can be derived about the authorship of these letters comes from those, around forty-two percent, that had professions and trades attached to them.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Short Letter from the Baron de Besenval to De Launay, AN DXXIXbis c.1 d.1 16.

<sup>63</sup>This letter for example was written on behalf of a group of women: Sieur de Chalain, lieutenant de roi, Guise, 12 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.50 32-34.

<sup>64</sup>Unfortunately I did not categorise these.

<sup>65</sup> For example a letter from sieur Carteron, vainqueur de la Bastille, 5 March 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.18 d.193 11.

<sup>66</sup>Some letters may have had professions included but these did not make it onto Pierre Caillet's summaries.



**Table 1: Professions and Trades of Letter-writers<sup>67</sup>**

<b>Professionals</b>	<b>433</b>
<i>Army</i>	129
<i>Judiciary or Law</i>	100
<i>Old Regime Officials e.g. receveurs, maréchaussée officials, Intendants, postmasters</i>	66
<i>National Guardsmen</i>	62
<i>Other professionals</i>	57
<i>Local Officials</i>	28
<b>Clergy</b>	<b>177</b>
<i>Secular</i>	164
<i>Regular</i>	13
<b>Trade and Commerce</b>	<b>124</b>
<i>Merchants incl shopkeepers</i>	79
<i>Tradesmen</i>	46
<b>Agriculture e.g. landowners and tenant farmers</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Service</b>	<b>13</b>
<i>Servants</i>	10
<i>Workers</i>	3
<b>Other</b>	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>768</b>

At first glance this table of professions shows that the democratic sphere was largely made up of the professional bourgeoisie. Men of law, had been a major part of the complex judicial-monarchical machinery of the *ancien régime* and were numerous amongst the ranks of the deputies to the National Assembly.<sup>68</sup> The greatest number of these were *avocats* of various types, but this category also included *procureurs*,<sup>69</sup> notaries, clerks and a handful of judges. Men of law wrote in on most themes, but were far more likely to send in projects of legislation than tradesmen for instance. Involvement in the democratic sphere was also likely to come from former old regime

<sup>67</sup>A single letter may have more than one profession or trade attached to it, for example if there were two authors who had different jobs.

<sup>68</sup>David A. Bell, *Lawyers and Citizens: The Making of a Political Elite in Old Regime France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.24.

<sup>69</sup>Roughly similar to the English solicitor see *ibid*.

officials and current local officials: municipal officers and national guardsmen writing in a non-official capacity.<sup>70</sup> Other professionals also sent letters. These were most commonly professors or doctors. Surprisingly, only five letters were penned by self-declared journalists.

Members of the secular clergy were also common authors. This is not surprising as such a great number of letters were written on the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and the subsequent oath legislation to which the Committee of Research was made responsible for adherence to. But parish priests also sent letters on other matters, particularly subsistence, as they held important positions in communities, and often acted as spokespeople for their parishioners.<sup>71</sup> A small but interesting number of letters were sent by *religieux* and four of these by *religieuses*. Most were on religious matters. One was from a monk who put forward ideas on remedying wheat shortages, another, of which only the summary remains, from a nun complaining of the ignorance of those around her when it came to the decrees of the Assembly.<sup>72</sup>

Of the hundred and thirty-one letters sent from army personnel, eighty-five were from army officers and forty-two were from soldiers. Of the letters from army officers it is difficult to gauge how many were sending letters in an official capacity. A proportion were sending reports of troubles which were more likely to be official letters, but around twenty percent were petitions against imprisonment which would have been sent as private matters.

Whilst it is clear that the practice of writing to the state was largely professional, the numbers of other people that also took part marks the democratic sphere out as something more socially diverse than involvement in the pre-revolutionary public sphere. What is perhaps unexpected is the number of tradesmen who wrote letters. Twenty eight different trades were represented: wigmakers, a watchmaker, tailors, a tanner, an upholsterer, engravers, a stonecutter, saddlers, builders, barbers, milliners, a

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<sup>70</sup> Here the figures are somewhat skewed by the fact that many of these National Guardsmen would have been volunteers with other professions.

<sup>71</sup> See Chapter 4, pp. 139-140.

<sup>72</sup> A *religieux* of the abbey of Aubignac, Creuse, 12 March 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.55 1 and *Religieuse* of the priory of St. Aubin, March 1790, DXXIXbis \*1 61 [CC 79].

draper, a perfumier...the list goes on. Eleven of these were Bakers, who as might be expected wrote largely in relation to the grain trade. Other tradesmen however were more likely to send denunciations. Merchants were more likely to write in on the grain trade than tradesmen but also sent a large number of denunciations.

Landowners, tenant farmers and cultivators, who fell into the loose category of 'agriculture', also sent letters on the grain trade and denunciations, mostly of offences committed on their land.

Least common were those from the service industry. These included three letters from self-declared *domestiques*, two coachmen and two gardeners, a concierge, a steward and a chambermaid.<sup>73</sup> Under the category of 'Other' were two letters from actors and one from a man who transported goods along the river Marne.

Whilst it is largely self-evident that the very poorest of society would not have been engaged in the democratic sphere, these various professions do suggest that a wider variety of people were involved in writing to the state than had been involved in the politics of the *ancien régime*. This is made more evident when we look at anonymous letters. Most anonymous letters were well-written and were likely to have come from amongst the ranks of the well-educated however the worst written of all the letters, with bad spelling and sometimes child-like handwriting, can often be found amongst these. This suggests that anonymity was often used as a means for the less well-educated to engage in the practice.

Thirty-one female voices can also be heard, which tells us that a small number of women did engage with the democratic sphere but that their involvement was minimal. Their background ranged from a *marquise* to a shepherdess. Most of these were in areas that would have more traditionally been open to women, petitions for *lettres de cachet* or *lettres de justice* for example. Six were petitions for their husbands, and in one case brother, to be released from prison, and another six were demands for justice against the killers of their husbands, or of violences committed against them and their

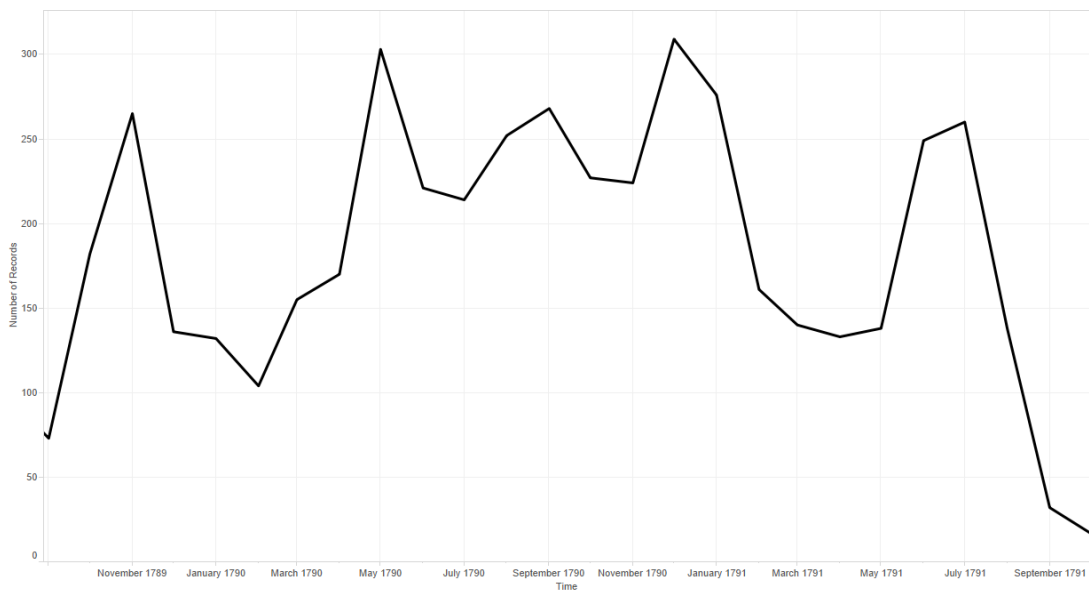
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<sup>73</sup>Two of these were servants to the Queen.

sons. Others were individual requests such as in one case for a payment to be made, or in another for a passport to be issued. However in a few cases women wrote letters in more of a public capacity, and these will have a place in the ensuing chapters.

## Chronology

**Figure 6: Letters over time**



Looking at the graph of all the letters sent over time we get a striking picture of fluctuation, with five major peaks and troughs. The first peak was in November 1789 after which there was a decline until March 1790. After this point the number of letters began to increase again. Between March 1790 and April 1790 there was a rising trend which peaked again in May 1790. There was a small decline between June and July 1790 and then an increase again between August and September 1790 to around the same number as the first peak in November 1789. There was another period of slight decline between October and November 1790 but after that the number of letters sent reached their maximum point in December 1790. For the first five months of 1791 there was a great decline, which was briefly reversed to form the fifth and final peak on the day of the King's flight.

As we shall see the first part of the period saw more letters in relation to subsistence

and the later period more in relation to religion. This is evidently connected to the timing of when the Committee of Research was handed responsibility for each of these areas, although not completely. Fears of counter-revolution grew over the period whilst denunciations in the community went into gradual decline after May 1790. Clearly within each theme other factors were at play which determined their individual peaks and troughs which called for further investigation.

### A Chronological and Thematic Account

The thesis starts by charting the development of the Committee of Research itself; examining the changing make-up of the Committee and its relationships with the other institutions of Paris. Each manifestation of the Committee of Research oversaw a consolidation of its powers to varying degrees until from the summer of 1790 onwards it became one of the most powerful institutions of the period.

The first subject to dominate the post-bag of the Committee was subsistence. Chapter 2 looks at these letters sent in the aftermath of the summer of 1789 which had been rocked by food rioting and disturbances triggered by shortages. In the context of an ongoing subsistence crisis which had been greatly aggravated by the decree issued by the National Assembly which guaranteed the free circulation of grain, the autumn of 1789 saw a number of letters putting forward ideas on the national management of subsistence. This proactive stage of offering resolutions to subsistence problems was not to last as 1790 saw the balance shift towards letters that were more indicative of a subsistence crisis, with calls for the National Assembly to crack down on various groups in society perceived to be causing the shortages. Local authorities increasingly called upon the National Assembly to help them maintain order.

Both the use of this channel of communication by municipalities to cement their authority and the period of negotiation observable in the subsistence letters of the autumn of 1789 can also be found in other letters. Chapter 3 examines denunciations that served to legitimise local authorities and provide an opportunity for citizens to

mould the new regime. Although 'denouncing' as an action had existed prior to the Revolution, it emerged as a practice that was closely tied to the concepts of citizenship and popular sovereignty. Denunciations showed how notions of the 'public' and conceptions of the role of people in politics were in flux and used both as constructs and social referents in local struggles for political legitimacy. In these denunciations the democratic sphere is perhaps most apparent, and the same enthusiasm discernible in the negotiations on the grain trade can be seen in what were often visions of the new regime expressed through the identification of unwanted elements.

Some examples of enthusiastic contributions to policy can also be found in Chapter 4. This chapter examines letters written on religion which at first, like letters on the grain trade, served as contributions to national policy. After the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was passed, many clergymen and almost all of the episcopacy openly protested. Denunciations of these protests would lead to even more radical legislation: causing the then president of the Committee of Research Jean-Georges-Charles Voidel to propose the clerical oath. Denunciations of the clergy thus played a role in provoking more religious divides. The root of these denunciations however were often only superficially over religious legislation; like denunciations looked at in Chapter 3, local power struggles gave rise to denunciations of the clergy and in turn directed the Revolution towards further dechristianisation.

The shift in the nature of letters received by the Committee of Research is also clear in letters that expressed fears of counter-revolution. These fears increased through the period. The final chapter will explore this increase and the various motors behind it including specific events, general instability, conspiracies amongst the ex-elite, political conflict and new institutions.

This thesis is an exploration of the letters of the Committee of Research that examines both the phenomenon of sending letters to the state and the changing nature of these letters. Through the concept of the democratic sphere we will explore how writing to the state was a revolutionary practice through which many engaged in the Revolution. We will also examine the interaction of the democratic sphere with the Committee of

Research and its impact on the course of the Revolution.

## Chapter 1

### The Committee of Research

*Oserais-je demander au comité quel est le but de son institution? Sans doute il agit en vertu d'un pouvoir: quel est-il? Trouve-t-il ce pouvoir dans un de vos décrets? Quel est ce décret? Celui par lequel ce comité a été créé a été présenté par M. Duport, qui, si on lui avait dit qu'il s'élèverait un pouvoir Inquisitorial, remis entre les mains d'un très petit nombre d'hommes, aurait été révolté de sa propre proposition : aussi ce n'est pas ce que Assemblée nationale à décrété. Elle a ordonné un véritable dépôt de déclarations, dont il serait rendu compte à l'Assemblée ainsi la comité n'a d'autre pouvoir que de recevoir des déclarations, Que fait-il cependant ? Il s'entoure d'espions... Duval d'Eprenesnil, criticising the Committee of Research in the National Assembly, 9 September 1790<sup>74</sup>*

By August 1789 the National Assembly was being inundated with requests, petitions, reports and all sorts of other communications; a significant part of each day was taken up with hearing various delegations that had been sent to the Assembly from across the Kingdom. The shift of authority from the crown to the National Assembly that put the Assembly in charge of the day-to-day running of the country had already occurred, and the Assembly needed to form institutions to deal with the work load. Out of this constitutional chaos arose the Committee of Reports and the Committee of Research. Both of these, as Duval Esprenesnil reminded his colleagues in September 1790, were envisaged as places where declarations were deposited but in reality the Committee of Research at least became increasingly central to the major issues that faced legislators in the early years of the Revolution.

As Duval d'Eprenesnil asked: what was the aim of the institution? At the time of its creation the Committee of Research was envisaged as a mechanism by which the National Assembly could filter information on potential dangers facing it from the

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<sup>74</sup>9 September 1790, AP, 18:668.

thousands of communications being received. It was one of thirty-three committees made up of elected deputies established in the summer of 1790 to facilitate the work of the Assembly. The roles these played in government varied. Committees designed to provide expertise on particular subjects were the most common; groups of deputies were tasked with close examination into finances, agriculture and commerce, destitution, taxation and many other areas. There were also committees set up to aid parliamentary procedure. Perhaps most importantly committees were established that took on the practical tasks of converting decrees into actions. The most prestigious of these was the constitution committee, tasked with drawing up the constitution, but others also worked towards the realisation of the National Assembly's more radical legislation.<sup>75</sup> Unlike these other committees however, the Committees of Research and Reports were focused on communications. Little is known about the Committee of Reports, although this body was envisaged as the main processor of letters sent to the National Assembly.

These new committees were part of a complex web of government bodies operating from Paris. The institutions of the Crown, though lacking legitimacy, had not ceased to exist. Jacques Necker, recalled by the King after having been dismissed in July to the role of finance minister, worked closely with the Finance Committee on the problem of the state's financial crisis.<sup>76</sup> The comte de Montmorin, minister of foreign affairs also resumed his role after a brief gap as minister of foreign affairs whilst the comte de Saint-Priest moved from the position of minister without portfolio to minister of the interior which he held until December 1790.<sup>77</sup> After Charles de Barentin resigned as Keeper of the Seals in June 1789, the King appointed the archbishop Champion de Cicé, one of the deputies of the Assembly to the role as a sign of goodwill. The archbishop quickly lost allegiance to the legislative and served the interests of the monarch until November 1790, and was thereafter succeeded by the less conservative

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<sup>75</sup>Edna Hindie Lemay and Alison Patrick, *Revolutionaries at Work: The Constituent Assembly, 1789-1791* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1996), pp.59-60.

<sup>76</sup>Timothy Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789-1790)* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), p.222.

<sup>77</sup>Colin Jones, *The Longman Companion to the French Revolution* (London: Longman, 1988), pp.77-78.



Marguerite-Louis-François Duport-Dutertre, member of the municipality of Paris.<sup>78</sup>

The newly appointed Parisian municipal authorities, like the King's ministers, were also in the process of carving up their jurisdictions in relation to the National Assembly and each other. In the Hôtel de Ville, Jean-Sylvain Bailly, a deputy of the National Assembly had been appointed by the Assembly to the position of Mayor of Paris but found his power rivalled by the Parisian districts whose electors had continued to meet despite having already voted in members to the municipal assembly. The Paris municipality got to work in the autumn of 1789 replacing the former police department, and by November a new police committee had been instituted alongside Paris' own committee of research.<sup>79</sup> Unlike its national counterpart, this committee was given the power to arrest and interrogate suspects from the outset.<sup>80</sup>

Such was the complex environment in which the Committee of Research operated. While the Paris authorities were negotiating their independence from the National Assembly, the National Assembly found itself in the difficult position of defining itself in relation to the executive power. The debates that led to the creation of the Committee of Reports and then the Committee of Research cut right to the heart of the problem. Given that a great number of communications were being sent to the National Assembly, how best to deal with them? And in doing so how were they to maintain the division of powers between the legislative and executive arms of government? On 28 July 1789 the deputy de Volney suggested the establishment of a committee to deal with the problem.

Responding to de Volney's motion, the well-known and outspoken deputy from the right Dupont de Nemours,<sup>81</sup> argued that the legislators were encroaching upon the jurisdiction of the executive power by engaging at all with issues of administration and

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<sup>78</sup>Nigel Aston, *The End of An Elite: The French Bishops and the Coming of the Revolution, 1786-1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p.193.

<sup>79</sup>Henry E. Bourne, 'Municipal Politics in Paris in 1789', *American Historical Review*, 11.2 (1906), 263–86.

<sup>80</sup>See Barry M. Shapiro, *Revolutionary Justice in Paris 1789-1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) for a history of the Committee of Research of Paris.

<sup>81</sup>Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, p.51.

police. The Third Estate deputy Jean-Louis-Claude Emmery answered that if an institution was to be created that channelled the communications away from the Assembly such a committee would be at risk of according a dangerous amount of influence to the body that could be easily abused. The majority of deputies were united under a banner of anti-despotism, and dedicated to ensuring the governance of France was not concentrated in the hands of one body. However there was little alternative save Dupont de Nemours' suggestion that they call on the people and provinces of France to address their problems elsewhere. With a great majority it was decided that a Committee of Reports would be established to process the communications and give a regular account of the content of these to the National Assembly.<sup>82</sup>

However aware the deputies were of the dangers in according too much power to their institutions, this was not as strong as anxieties over potential counter-revolution. The summer had seen a series of tumultuous events across the Kingdom. A 'great fear' had spread through various regions that a plot existed to reverse the gains of the Revolution. Immediately following the establishment of the Committee of Reports the young magistrate Adrien Duport<sup>83</sup> took to the podium to call for another Committee, this time a group of deputies assigned the task of examining and reporting on threats to the State. He referenced these troubles, particularly those in the Soissonais where reports had come in of *brigands* roaming the countryside and a plot in Brest, where there were fears the port would be taken by the English to argue that part of the job of the National Assembly was to ensure their own survival whilst they wrote the Constitution.

This was widely accepted but nonetheless many were acutely aware of the need to limit the powers of any such commission. When Jean-François Reubell<sup>84</sup> replaced Duport at the podium and called for the new Committee be given the power to open suspicious letters, he was met with audible opposition.<sup>85</sup> This was partly due to an unresolved dispute that had occurred three days before in the Assembly around the

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<sup>82</sup> 28 July 1789, AP, 8:292-296.

<sup>83</sup>Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, p.53.

<sup>84</sup>Also spelt 'Rewbell', see AP, 8:lix.

<sup>85</sup>28 July 1789, AP, 8:294.

seizing and opening of suspicious letters found on a nobleman.<sup>86</sup> This had divided deputies with many seeing the interception of the letters as an abuse of the inviolability of the post, while others considered the letters examples of potential counter-revolutionary networks that threatened to derail the revolutionary project. As the liberal noble, the marquis de Gouy d'Arsy, spoke in support of Reubell's position on the importance of intercepting letters, further suggesting that the new committee ought to operate in secret, he was interrupted by murmurs in the Assembly hall. The right wing deputy the chevalier de Boufflers pointed out that the violation of letters was an act necessary in war, but who were their enemies? They had no danger to fear except discord, their safety lay in the principles of honour and integrity. Another liberal noble, the comte de Castellane, along with the conservative and member of the first Committee of Research, the comte de Virieu, and Le Chapelier of the Breton delegation<sup>87</sup> each spoke against the measures proposed by Reubell and Gouy d'Arsy and subsequently their amendments were withdrawn. After much long and lively debate both for and against the establishment of Duport's committee it was decided that twelve deputies would sit on it and these would be replaced by new deputies every month and with that Duport's motion towards the creation of the Committee of Research was carried with a big majority.<sup>88</sup>

The concerns of the deputies during the debates establishing first the Committee of Reports and then the Committee of Research had been fairly prophetic in the sense that the two areas of unease, the undermining of the executive power on the one hand and the adoption of investigative powers on the other, were precisely the two areas into which the Committee of Research at least would extend itself as the Revolution progressed. It seems that deputies had a sense that by assuming the functions that had been previously enacted by royal institutions they would be simply re-asserting similar institutions.

This was no doubt why the Assembly voted to renew the membership of the committee

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<sup>86</sup> The baron de Castelnau had been arrested on the 23 July 1789 on the Pont-Royal in Paris and was found to be carrying four letters addressed to the King's brother the comte d'Artois, who had recently emigrated to Turin and declared his opposition to the Revolution, 25 July 1789, AP, 8:273.

<sup>87</sup>Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, p.280.

<sup>88</sup>28 July 1789, AP, 8:293-296.

on a monthly basis. While it was operative this measure succeeded in impeding the committee's consolidation of power; in the most basic sense it prevented the committee members from forging long term relationships with the other government institutions of Paris and becoming an authority that was external to the National Assembly. However each manifestation of the committee had its own understanding of the powers available to it. Thus whilst the direction of the committee's development did not change much between renewals of committee members, the rate of change was very much dependent on the characteristics of each committee. This was all the more clear as the committee came to be, throughout the remainder of 1789, something of a political football that represented the factional politics of the National Assembly.

At least five of the members of the first committee had played an active role in its establishment. This included Duport, who brought the motion and was to be the first president of the Committee, Reubell, the comte de Virieu, Charles-François Bouche and the distinguished Duc de La Rochefoucauld. Among the other members there were four respected lawyers -Parisians François-Denis Tronchet and Armand-Gaston Camus, Jérôme Pétion de Villeneuve from Chartres and Glezen of Rennes<sup>89</sup> and two parliamentary magistrates - the Jansenist Emmanuel Fréteau de Saint-Just and the young Antoine-Balthazar-Joseph André.<sup>90</sup> From the first estate, which would never have more than two representatives on the Committee at any one time, came the bishop of Chartres Jean-Baptiste-Joseph de Lubersac.<sup>91</sup> These deputies were probably elected due to their notoriety. Almost all of them are on Tackett's list of the 'top forty speakers', an appendix in his book *Becoming a Revolutionary* in which he ranked deputies by how many speeches they made during the period of the Constituent Assembly. The top two speakers of this list André and Camus were both members.<sup>92</sup> Whilst largely 'moderate', the first committee also included the radical Pétion, and two who belonged to a group known as the *monarchiens*, who were dedicated to legislating an absolute

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<sup>89</sup>Also spelt 'Gleizen', Patrice Gueniffey and Ran Halévi, 'Clubs and Popular Societies' in François Furet and Mona Ozouf, *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1989), p.461.

<sup>90</sup>Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, p.233.

<sup>91</sup>30 July 1789, AP, 8:307.

<sup>92</sup>No.1 Speaker was André, Camus was ranked no.2, Bouche Ch.-Fr no.7, Fréteau de Saint-Just no.12, Duport no.18, Pétion de Villeneuve no.28, Duc de La Rochefoucauld no.32, Tronchet no.33 see Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, Appendix, pp.321-322.

veto for the King.<sup>93</sup> This made it the most mixed of all the various Committees of Research.

There is some indication that this diversity translated into internal disagreement over the nature of the Committee. This is suggested by an early position taken by La Rochefoucauld and Lubersac that contrasted sharply with the Committee's later actions. La Rochefoucauld had been sent a letter the day following the establishment of the Committee that reported the place where the baron de Breteuil, former minister later counter-revolutionary *émigré*, was hidden.<sup>94</sup> La Rochefoucauld's response, in the name of the 'Committee of Twelve' was one of indignation. He wrote that the author of the letter, a sieur Roussel, was 'étrangement trompé' if he thought that the National Assembly engaged in such research, which was under the jurisdiction of the executive power alone. The National Assembly in giving the members of the Committee of Research such a great mark of confidence had not reduced the 'august' character of the nation's representatives to the 'vil ministre de l'Espionage'.<sup>95</sup> This drafted letter of response suggests that the Duc de La Rochefoucauld and de Lubersac (who also signed this draft) were highly sensitive to the restrictions placed on the institution.

But despite the tone of this early communication, in a letter written shortly afterwards the Committee demonstrated a subtle intention not to limit itself to the collating of information and indeed in one case at least contributed to increasing conspiratorial fears. On 16 August 1789 a deputy from the Limousin and future member of the Committee of Research, Guillaume-Grégoire Roulhac wrote to the Committee to ask for their advice on the difficult situation that the authorities in Limoges found themselves in after they had arrested participants in the agitation that had erupted in the area during the 'Great Fear' of the summer. The prisoners in their interrogations claimed that they had only assembled to defend themselves against *brigands* and indeed the authorities thought this believable and had no other proof against them. However the local population believed they were guilty and so the authorities did not know what course of action to take. The Committee in response recommended to

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<sup>93</sup>Lubersac and the comte de Virieu.

<sup>94</sup>Munro Price, *The Fall of the French Monarchy; Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette and the Baron de Breteuil* (London: Pan, 2003), chapter 3.

<sup>95</sup>Draft of a letter written by the Duc de La Rochefoucauld, 27 August 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.44 d.417 16.

Roulhac that the authorities in Limoges should keep an eye on their prisoners and not allow them to escape before clarification was obtained about their intentions. They also told them that there was agitation across the country on almost the same day that indicated the existence of a premeditated plot. This meant they ought to ask the prisoners who had told them to assemble and whether they were given any money to do so.<sup>96</sup> Thus as early as August 1789 the committee was playing a role in the directing of investigation, as opposed to simply drawing up reports on it.

This foray into investigation was partially accepted by the National Assembly when on the 22 August Reubell asked permission on behalf of the Committee of Research to examine papers from the Bastille that may have contained information on plots against the nation. He said that the committee 'n'avait pas voulu se déterminer à demander la représentation de ses papiers [...] sans l'ordres exprès de L'Assemblée Nationale'. The Assembly decreed that the committee was 'suffisamment autorisé de remplir l'objet de son institution'.<sup>97</sup>

But the greatest departure from the stance taken by the Duc de La Rochefoucauld a month earlier was in a letter written by the committee to Bailly, the mayor of Paris on the 27 August asking him to locate the author of an anonymous threatening letter sent to the president of the National Assembly, then Clermont-Tonnerre. In addition to asking him to identify the author they also recommended that these investigations be conducted in secret.<sup>98</sup> Bailly responded by reminding them that espionnage 'l'ennemi de la liberté publique et l'assemblée nationale' was 'ni dans mes principes, ni dans les votres'.<sup>99</sup>

On the 3 September 1789 elections were held to appoint new members to the Committee.<sup>100</sup> The elections came at a time when two distinct sides of the Assembly

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<sup>96</sup>Roulhac, deputy, and letter to the authorities of Limoges written by the Committee of Research, from 16 to 17 August 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.1 d.2 7+8.

<sup>97</sup>22 August 1790, AP, 8:474.

<sup>98</sup>Committee of Research, AN DXXIXbis c.1 d.2 23.

<sup>99</sup>Response to the Committee of Research written by Bailly, AN DXXIXbis c.1 d.2 26.

<sup>100</sup>It is not clear why this occurred over a month after the original committee was instituted, more research on the archives parlementaires would perhaps offer more insight. Thursday 3 September 1789, AP, 8:554.

hall had emerged and were braced for a decision that would determine the extent of royal power, a vote on the nature of the King's veto. In the run up to this vote the right side of the Assembly hall had organised itself into a veritable voting force, successfully voting in a string of conservative deputies to the presidency of the Assembly. In the vote for new members to the Committee of Research they successfully elected enough deputies to ensure that the new Committee of Research would be dominated by *Monarchiens*. Thus the composition of the second committee was significantly different to the first. None of its members were in Tackett's top forty speakers, in fact most were relatively unknown. Five members were key figures in the *monarchien* leadership and according to one source were friends<sup>101</sup> – the lawyer Noël-Joseph Madier de Montjau,<sup>102</sup> the *curé* (parish priest) Antoine Mathias, old regime official Pierre-Joseph de Lachèse,<sup>103</sup> the author the marquis de Lézay-Marnésia,<sup>104</sup> and Seignelay-Colbert, bishop of Rodez.<sup>105</sup> Its president was also from the right of the Assembly hall, the duc d'Havré et de Croi.<sup>106</sup> With the exception of one moderate, the marquis de Crillon, the others were little known third estate deputies whose affiliations are not clear.<sup>107</sup>

One of the most notable actions of this second committee was to suggest on 14 October the release of the Baron de Besenval, commander of the Swiss guards imprisoned for his role opposing the taking of the Bastille on 14 July. But, evidently having less influence in the Assembly, they were opposed by Reubell and Glezen of the former committee and instead the old Parisian court, the Châtelet, was assigned jurisdiction over *lèse-nation* cases. Thus ironically this committee presided at a time

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<sup>101</sup> *Procédure criminelle instruite au Châtelet de Paris: Sur la dénonciation des faits arrivés à Versailles dans la journée du 6 octobre 1789: Imprimée par ordre de l'Assemblée nationale* (Paris, 1790), p.168.

<sup>102</sup> *Réimpression de l'ancien moniteur depuis la réunion des États-généraux jusqu'au Consulat (Mai 1789 - Novembre 1799)*, 32 vols. (Paris: Plon Frères, 1850-1854), 2, p.568.

<sup>103</sup> Lucien Lachièze-Rey, *Cahiers de doléances du Tiers Etat de la sénéchaussée de Martel pour les Etats généraux de 1789* (France: Art et Histoire, 1989), p.xxxvii.

<sup>104</sup> Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, pp.56-57.

<sup>105</sup> Aston, *End of an Elite*, pp.183-184.

<sup>106</sup> C. de Francquen, *Recueil historique, généalogique, chronologique et nobiliaire des maisons et familles illustres et nobles du royaume, précédé de la généalogie historique de la maison royale des Pays-Bas Nassau-Orange* (France: Demanet, 1826), p.32 and Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, p.294.

<sup>107</sup> These were Guinebaud de Saint-Mesme from Nantes, Marchais from Angouleme, Roulhac from Haut-Limousin, Turpin, from Blois, Viguier from Toulouse.

when the judicial arm of government was brought far closer to the scrutiny of the Committee of Research.<sup>108</sup>

Despite this indication that the second committee had a different approach, in practice it continued in much the same vein as its predecessor, showing a similar ambiguity in their interpretation of the nature of the Committee. They were willing to continue to employ the investigative powers of the Paris police to pursue their lines of inquiry, and felt no need to be transparent in these operations. For example on the 12 September the Paris police asked them how they had come about a letter sent to Mirabeau from a sieur Monnier that the Committee had passed to them just over a week before. The Committee responded by saying that they could not tell them where the letter had come from only that it came by a means that did not hurt the '*delicatesse*' of the Committee. They then urged the Police committee to continue in their investigation.<sup>109</sup>

Additionally in spite of the majority of members believing that royal power must be upheld, they nonetheless took tentative steps into the realm of the executive power. They demanded information on trials from the ministry of justice<sup>110</sup> and even called for the Keeper of the Seals to release two people. Champion de Cicé resisted this encroachment, writing back that the King saw no reason to interrupt the course of justice, a few days later urging the Committee of Reports to invite the National Assembly to draw up a decree that would give the executive power '*la force qui lui est nécessaire*'<sup>111</sup>

This second committee received a much greater number of communications than the first. This was mostly due to the decree taken by the National Assembly on the 5 October that handed them responsibility for collecting information on the obstruction of the decree on the free circulation of grain.<sup>112</sup> They also continued the work of the first committee in investigating the 'plot' behind the anti-seigneurial actions of the

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<sup>108</sup>14 October 1789, AP, 9:445.

<sup>109</sup> Comité de police de l'assemblée des représentants de la commune de Paris, AN DXXIXbis c.1 d.3 13-24.

<sup>110</sup>For example AN DXXIXbis c.1 d.3 28.

<sup>111</sup>AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.58 1-31.

<sup>112</sup>5 October 1789, AP, 9:348.



summer, writing very similar letters to the first committee to local authorities suggesting questions to be put to prisoners. One small indication that they were more convinced of the existence of this plot than the first committee is perhaps shown in the slight change of question from 'did they receive money' to 'who gave them the money'.<sup>113</sup> All in all, however this second committee appeared to be continuing in much the same way as the first, although apparently with less notoriety; just three days before they were replaced by new members Bailly wrote to the Duc de la Rochefoucauld hoping that he was not mistaken in the belief that the duke was a member of the Committee, although he had left the committee well over a month before.<sup>114</sup>

The second committee stayed in place over a month, in most likelihood this was due to the interruption caused to the Assembly by their move from Versailles to Paris. Additionally an extra few days were added at the end due to irregularities in the election of new members to the committee when on the 14 October it was found that the same members had been elected to their positions again.<sup>115</sup> On the 20 October 1789, the election was reheld and members of the third committee were installed. This time the left of the assembly hall were more organised. The right side of the Assembly had suffered a set back when on 11 September their position in support of an absolute veto for the King was defeated in favour of the suspensive veto. They were even pushed towards abandoning the National Assembly altogether, although few actually did, after the 'October days' of 5 and 6 October when Parisians disrupted meetings of the National Assembly threatened deputies and forced the King and legislature to move to Paris.<sup>116</sup> At the vote for new members to the Committee of Research, the left would dominate with a majority of seven on the committee. This included three returnees from the first committee, including the president Glezen, Reubell and Pétion de Villeneuve. They were joined by future Jacobins: the lawyer and future Girondin deputy to the Convention François Buzot, the influential Charles de Lameth, Charles Antoine Chasset, mayor of Villefranche<sup>117</sup> and Guillaume-François-Charles Goupil de

<sup>113</sup>Committee of Research, 18 September 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.1 d.3 29.

<sup>114</sup>Bailly to Duc de la Rochefoucauld, 17 October 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.263 15.

<sup>115</sup>14 October 1789, AP, 9:445.

<sup>116</sup>Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, chapter 6.

<sup>117</sup>Hippolyte François Régnier-Destourbet, *Histoire abrégée de la Constitution civile du clergé de*

Préfelin. Also on the Committee were the well-known deputies Emmery and the unaligned *curé* the abbé Gouttes.<sup>118</sup> Less well known were Boutteville-Dumetz a lawyer from the Somme,<sup>119</sup> Guillaume-Anne Salomon de la Saugerie and the only second-estate deputy on the committee André-Jacques-Hyacinthe Le Berthon.<sup>120</sup> Many of this group sat on other committees together. Glezen, Saloman, Reubell, Boutteville-Dumetz and Goupil de Préfelin all sat on the Credentials Committee (*Comité de Vérification*). Glezen, Saloman and Goupil de Préfelin also sat on the Drafting Committee (*Comité de Rédaction*) along with Buzot and Emmery.<sup>121</sup> This committee would sit for just over a month, less than the previous committee, but made far greater steps towards the expansion of the committee's powers.

We know more about the workings of this committee than the previous two given that they left a note indicating how they divided the tasks amongst their members. Le Berthon, Gouttes and Goupil de Préfelin were charged with making a journal of the operations of the Committee where they listed 'discoveries', Le Berthon and Gouttes were charged with opening letters addressed to the Committee and passing them to the appropriate person. Saloman, Boutteville and Chasset would receive letters and packages addressed to the committee and write reports on them and replies if necessary. Lameth, Reubell and Buzot were in charge of liaising and receiving information or proof of '*délits nationaux*' from the Hôtel de Ville -including from the Paris Committee of Research, Police Committee and District authorities. Emmery, Glezen and Pétion were charged with following cases at the Châtelet, and procuring documents to report to the Committee, as well as pieces sent to the Committee from other courts in Paris and elsewhere in the Kingdom.<sup>122</sup>

This division of tasks was necessary, according to the notes left by the committee, because they had inherited chaos from the previous committee.<sup>123</sup> Indeed the letters in

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*France* (France: Gaume, 1828), p.17.

<sup>118</sup>Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, p.290.

<sup>119</sup> R. Machart, *Biographie des hommes célèbres, des savans, des artistes et des litterateurs du departement de la Somme*, 2 vols. (France, 1835), 1, p.121.

<sup>120</sup>20 October 1789, AP, 9:468.

<sup>121</sup>19 June 1789, AP, 8:136-137.

<sup>122</sup>Committee of Research, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.13 9.

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*

the archive indicate that this third committee not only worked more efficiently but also established more substantial relationships with other institutions. For a start at the beginning of their tenure the municipal authorities in Paris established their own Committee of Research with which the third national committee began a rather tense relationship. The first example of this relationship was a consultation process between the two bodies initiated by the Paris committee the day after they came into being on the landowner Jacques Augeard, accused of having drawn up a plan in which the King would escape to Metz.<sup>124</sup> But the Paris committee held its national counterpart at arms length initially. On the 10 November they responded to an invitation for a meeting sent by the national committee by saying they were too busy with other things to meet with them that evening.<sup>125</sup> On the 17 November the Paris committee refused to send the national committee the minutes of their deliberations in relation to the Augeard affair writing that 'nos occupations sont trop grandes pour nous livrer a des pareilles transcriptions, et vous savez messieurs, que nous ne pouvons pas les confier a des etrangers [*sic*]'.<sup>126</sup>

Regardless of the kind of reception they received, the third national committee was nonetheless forming new networks, and broadening their sources of information. They learnt at this time from the chief postmaster in Paris, that the King had ordered that they should not receive any letters other than those addressed to the National Assembly. Having also been tipped off by the Paris police that a number of suspicious letters and packages had arrived in France from England, they decided to send Goupil de Préfelin and Chasset on the 7 November 1789 to petition the King to give permission to the Paris police to open them.<sup>127</sup>

But their collaboration with the Paris police put the Committee under the spotlight in the National Assembly and exposed them to criticism. On 21 November the *monarchien* deputy Amable-Gilbert Dufraisse-Duchey and the high-profile conservative deputy Pierre-Victor Malouet spoke against the continuation of the

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<sup>124</sup>Interrogation of Augeard, 25 October 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.37 d.384 7.

<sup>125</sup>Letter from Committee of Research of Paris, 10 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.29 d.292 25.

<sup>126</sup>Letter from Committee of Research of Paris, 17 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.22 11.

<sup>127</sup>Committee of Research, 7 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.14 10.

committee, accusing them of speaking constantly of plots but never providing any proof. Most of all they had demeaned the office of deputy to the National Assembly by engaging in 'fonctions subalternes' after members of the Committee, Lameth and Gouttes, and a group of national guardsmen had gone at night to the convent of the Annonciades to investigate whether Charles de Barentin, former minister of justice and alleged co-conspirator of Besenval in the events of 14 July 1789, was hiding there.<sup>128</sup>

The clearest example, however, of the extension of the role of the Committee under its third configuration was the fact that they started to use spies. This was far from the use of agents of the final committee, indeed it appears to have paid only one spy. This was a sieur de Sutières-Sarcey, hired in order to conduct surveillance of the Sieur de Commeyras, accused of making counter-revolutionary enrolments. They also, on the advice of and through Sutières-Sarcey, approached a sieur de St Genié, who was imprisoned in the Abbaye and offered him two *louis* in return for secretly seizing papers from Commeyras' house, which the latter refused. In total they paid Sutières-Sarcey ninety *louis*. It seems however that the committee did not seek out the employment of Sutières-Sarcey. The spy made first contact and subsequently wrote in a letter to the Committee that whilst he would like to work for free, happy as he was to work for the *chose publique*, as deputies were paid he must ask the Committee to pay him what they thought was appropriate.<sup>129</sup> Another individual, a chevalier de Poirot had also given the Committee information on Commeyras, he was given instructions by the Committee but wrote in a subsequent letter that he had not quite understood what the Committee wanted him to do, further suggesting that the Committee was dipping its toes in the water of espionage rather than embarking upon a pre-planned course of action.<sup>130</sup>

The great changes to the nature of the committee made during its third materialisation,

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<sup>128</sup> On Malouet: Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, p.233; debate on the future of the committee: Evening session, Saturday 21 November 1789, AP, 10:168-170, on trip to Annonciades: *Procès-verbal de l'Assemblée générale des saints martyrs, confesseurs, anges, chérubins, séraphius, etc. qui a eu lieu en Paradis le 15 Nov. 1789*, p.13, Shapiro, *Revolutionary Justice in Paris*, p.157, Charles de Barentin, *Mémoire pour M. Barentin* (Paris, 1790)

<sup>129</sup> Letters from Sutières-Sarcey, from 2 to 11 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.26 25-30.

<sup>130</sup> Letters from a chevalier Poirot, 16 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.22 14+15.

were to a certain extent stalled after 24 November when the committee saw its fourth renewal and the return of a dominance of the right. Despite the setbacks of late September and early October the right could still count upon the support of many of the moderates in the Assembly who were also shocked by the October days.<sup>131</sup> The Conservative archbishop Boisgelin was elected to the presidency and there was almost a clean sweep of the Committee of Research with only two members elected from the left side of the Assembly.<sup>132</sup> It was presided over by the highly conservative deputy the marquis de Foucault-Lardimilie, and otherwise made up of stalwarts of the old regime. From the clergy, the bishop Ange-François de Talaru de Chalmazel and Sylvain Yvernault,<sup>133</sup> old regime officials: the prosecutor Constantin Tailhardat de la Maisonneuve, and the magistrate Henry de Longuève<sup>134</sup> and from the army came Gaspard De Chabrol,<sup>135</sup> and the *maréchal-de-camp* the marquis de Monspey<sup>136</sup> all of whom were of the right.<sup>137</sup> Two members of this committee were returnees - Turpin who was to be the secretary,<sup>138</sup> who had sat on the second committee and Emmery who had sat on the most recent committee, and presumably only able to return as the Jacobin Pierre-Jacques Vieillard who was initially elected did not accept the role.<sup>139</sup>

We know very little about the fourth committee as they kept few records and left only a couple of drafts of letters. However from these, and their reports in the National Assembly, it appears that they took a step back from the more investigative activities of the former committee. This committee rejected a proposal that had been accepted by their predecessors addressed to them by a man eager to investigate reports into hidden

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<sup>131</sup>Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, pp.203-205.

<sup>132</sup>These were Tuault de la Bouverie and Emmery see *ibid*, p.179.

<sup>133</sup> Jean S. Passeron, *Edme Yvernault et l'émigration* (France 1842), p.1.

<sup>134</sup>AP, 1:604.

<sup>135</sup> Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, p.32.

<sup>136</sup>Jean B. Courcelles, *Dictionnaire historique et biographique des généraux Français: depuis le onzième siècle jusqu'en 1820*, 9 vols (Paris, 1823), 7, p.456.

<sup>137</sup> the little known deputy Pierre-Antoine Durget from Vesoul was also in the Committee and also a conservative see *Procédure criminelle instruite au Châtelet de Paris: sur la dénonciation des faits arrivés à Versailles dans la journée du 6 octobre 1789* (Paris, 1790), p.238.

<sup>138</sup> AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.264 15+16.

<sup>139</sup> AN DXXIXbis \*1 Page 31 and F.A. Aulard, *La société des Jacobins; Recueil de documents pour l'histoire du club des Jacobins de Paris* (Paris, 1889) p.lxxvii. The twelfth member of the Committee was the relatively unknown deputy Pierre-Joseph Vernin, third estate deputy of Moulins, 24 November 1789, AP, 10:249.

treasure at the charterhouse of Val-Dieu.<sup>140</sup> They also proposed a decree in the Assembly calling for correspondence to always remain confidential, which was adopted.<sup>141</sup>

But they did, it seem, have a less clear cut attitude to what constituted the realm of the executive power. Foucauld-Lardimilie supported the primacy of royal authority when he called for the executive power to decide in the case of troubles in Troyes, where the old regime authorities were in dispute with a new committee after an attempted municipal revolution. The bailliage had rejected the newly established municipality and asked for the National Assembly to support them. Foucauld-Lardimilie called for the decision to be passed on, clearly showing a preference for the new municipality not to be recognised by the National Assembly.<sup>142</sup> This Committee of Research also unanimously supported a *subdélégué* in Alençon, Bayard de la Vingtrie, accused of embezzlement, recommending that the National Assembly not interrupt the course of justice.<sup>143</sup> However this committee did leave some evidence to suggest that they were not shy of encroaching into areas that were traditionally considered to be within the remit of the executive power. They seem to have been the first committee to order the release of somebody held by local authorities. The prisoner in question was a sieur Rouget held by the Commune of Besançon for advising inhabitants not to pay seigneurial charges. The Committee were sent a letter from Champion de Cicé asking them why they had ordered the release of this prisoner to which the committee drafted two replies arguing that the sieur Rouget had done nothing wrong because he was consulting the inhabitants before the decree on seigneurial charges had been published.<sup>144</sup>

The committee was once again to change in character after its fifth renewal on Christmas eve 1789. Although it is unclear why, this committee would sit for four

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<sup>140</sup>See letter from the Pierre Mallet, surgeon, and response from Committee of Research, from 10 to 14 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.22 7-9 and letter from the same, 3 February 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.35 12+13.

<sup>141</sup>5 December, AP, 10:408.

<sup>142</sup>10 December 1789, AP, 10:498.

<sup>143</sup>12 December 1789, AP, 10:515.

<sup>144</sup>Letter from the Ministry of Justice to Foucauld-Lardimilie, and drafts of response, 3 December 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.29 d.293 1-3.

months and presided at a time when changes in the powers given to committees were decreed by the Assembly. The make-up of this committee was vastly different to the previous committee; it was dominated once again by the left, which had successfully elected eleven of the twelve members. By this point the left side of the Assembly had regrouped and organised themselves into a Club – The Society of Friends of the Constitution, soon to be known as the Jacobins, which no doubt was the most important factor in securing the election.<sup>145</sup> Perhaps to institute some degree of stability a third of the members of this fifth committee had also served in the third committee. These members were Buzot, Saloman, Boutteville-Dumeiz and Goupil de Préfelin. Buzot and Goupil de Préfelin were joined by fellow and fairly unknown Jacobins: the lawyers Verchère de Reffye and Gaultier de Biauzat, and four future deputies to the convention: Charles-Jean-Marie Alquier from La Rochelle, Augustin Le Goazre de Kervélégan from Quimper, Claude Christophe Gourdan from Gray, and Christophe Saliceti from Corsica.<sup>146</sup> The president of the committee was the Jacobin Julien-François Palasne de Champeaux<sup>147</sup> who had been the vice-President of the Committee of Reports.<sup>148</sup> There was only one new non-Jacobin member, the abbé Joubert, deputy of the clergy from Angoulême.<sup>149</sup>

Despite their longer tenure there is surprisingly little information about the activities of this committee. They did however come under scrutiny in the National Assembly very early on. Just two days after they were formed, the decision taken by their predecessors to not engage with the case of the intendant and *subdélégué* of Alençon accused of embezzlement led to accusations during a meeting of the National Assembly by the Jacobin deputy Hébrard<sup>150</sup> that the committee had no right to declare this without first consulting the National Assembly. A motion by Duport stipulating that no committee be allowed to state their views publicly without going through the National Assembly

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<sup>145</sup>Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, p.206.

<sup>146</sup>Aulard, *La société des Jacobins*, 1, p.xxxiii-lxxxix.

<sup>147</sup>Aulard, *La société des Jacobins*, 1, p.viii.

<sup>148</sup>AN DXXIXbis c.25 d.255 30-32.

<sup>149</sup>24 December 1789, AP, 11:2 and Philippe-Joseph-Benjamin Buchez and Abbé Pierre-Célestin Roux, *Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution française, ou journal des Assemblées nationales, depuis 1789 jusqu'en 1815* (Paris, 1834), p.463.

<sup>150</sup>Aulard, *La société des Jacobins*, 1, p.liv.

was adopted.<sup>151</sup> Later, on 13 March 1790 the staunchly right wing deputy Duval-Epremesnil launched an attack on the committee of research during a debate on *lettres de cachet* and imprisonment without charge. He blamed it for the fact that Augéard had been detained without charge for two months and called for it to be disbanded.<sup>152</sup> On 15 April, after Palasne de Champeaux reported that the country was infested with propaganda against the Assembly, a deputy quipped that the committee should be called the 'comité sans recherches'.<sup>153</sup>

Despite these criticisms and set-backs however the fifth committee came to end in April 1790 more powerful than it had been in December. The decree brought by Duport that limited the public voice of the committee was tempered by one on the 5 February brought on behalf of the Committee of Reports which allowed committees to respond to questions put to them and to give advice related to decrees without going through the Assembly.<sup>154</sup> The committee also benefited from a motion adopted on the 16 February which gave committees the right to demand any documentation needed for their work from any departmental authority or court.<sup>155</sup> Although past committees had sent advice and instructions without going through the Assembly, these new permissions gave the committee a discernible voice. Thus on 16 March they drafted a heavy-handed letter to the municipality of Neuville<sup>156</sup> scolding them for allowing their citizens to obstruct the decree on the free circulation of wheat, writing that when the municipality negotiated with 'the people', they were very close to losing their authority.<sup>157</sup>

The fifth committee also continued to be involved like previous committees with decisions that were in the jurisdiction of the Keeper of the Seals. This manifested itself in very trivial cases. They lobbied on behalf of a sieur Cappy who had complained to them about the high legal costs he accrued whilst defending himself from accusations

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<sup>151</sup>26 December 1789, AP, 11:24.

<sup>152</sup>13 March 1790, AP, 12:161.

<sup>153</sup>15 April 1790, AP, 13:65.

<sup>154</sup>5 February 1790, AP, 11:436.

<sup>155</sup>16 February 1790, AP, 11:619.

<sup>156</sup> Near Poitiers, probably Neuville-de-Poitou.

<sup>157</sup>Draft of a Letter by the Committee of Research to the Municipality of Neuville, 16 March 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.40 d.410 23+24.



that his donkey had been found in someone else's field, a case which had been sent directly to the Committee but was certainly not under its remit. Champion de Cicé responded that it was the man's own fault for appealing a fine.<sup>158</sup> They also wrote to the minister calling on him to pardon an inhabitant of Ingouville (Seine-Inférieure) who had been condemned to nine years of banishment for forcing open a granary, which Champion de Cicé also refused to do.<sup>159</sup>

At this point the atmosphere in the Assembly hall had intensified to such a degree that the left and right sides were no longer on speaking terms. The *Monarchiens* were in decline and the right began increasingly to be represented by more extreme conservatives. Moderates were shifting to the left; by mid-January the National Assembly room had already had to have more benches installed on its left hand side.<sup>160</sup> Despite this shift, the right did experience a short resurgence around the time of the vote for members to the sixth committee, no doubt as a result of the clash over whether or not to declare Catholicism the religion of the State. This motion towards the protection of the position of the Catholic Church narrowly lost on April 11 but which for a time united many under the commonality of religion. Thus on two occasions in April the right succeeded in electing presidents to the National Assembly.<sup>161</sup>

The Jacobins had around 200 deputy members at the time of the vote for new members to the Committee in April. Membership of the Jacobin club, as was in all likelihood previously the case, was the most important factor in their election to the Committee, evident by the fact that the eight successful Jacobin candidates got almost exactly the same number of votes.<sup>162</sup> For the first few months this committee was presided over by Guy-Félix comte de Pardieu who had been the president of the Committee of Reports. The vice-President was the Jacobin and future *feuillant* Jean-Georges-Charles Voidel, who would later succeed de Pardieu as president. A close ally of Voidel's, Charles Cochon de Lapparent, who would be elected to the Convention was the secretary. The

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<sup>158</sup>Ministry of Justice to Champeaux-Palasné, 27 April 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.264 1 and c.26 d.260 5.

<sup>159</sup>Letter from Keeper of the Seals, 27 April 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.5 d.65 1.

<sup>160</sup>Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, chapter 8.

<sup>161</sup>Ibid., p.264.

<sup>162</sup>Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, p.252n.

committee also saw the return of the abbé Joubert and Verchère de Reffye from the previous committee. They were joined by the Jacobins: the liberal Charles-Alexis Brûlart, marquis de Sillery, who would also be elected to the Convention but guillotined with other *Girondins* in 1793, and little known Jacobin third estate deputies the lawyer and future *conventionnel* Athanase-Marie Babey, mayor of Saint-Brieuc Jean-François-Pierre Poulain de Corbion and Jean Payen de Boisneuf and François-Gérôme Lédean both of whom were involved in overseas commerce, Payen having made a fortune in the colonies and Lédean as a supercargo.<sup>163</sup> There were two non-Jacobins – Michel Rousselet, third estate deputy from Provins and second estate deputy the baron de Macaye from Labour.<sup>164</sup>

By the time of the sixth and final committee in April 1790, the nature of the Committee of Research as an institution had already changed in a number of significant ways. Its remit had extended not only into matters concerning subsistence but also into cases that were traditionally in the remit of the executive power. It had also developed methods of investigation – collaboration with the Paris Police and the employment of an agents for example, that earned it criticism from the right side of the Assembly hall. However alongside the shift in the National Assembly towards the adoption of more radical policies, the final Committee of Research would undergo a transformation that made it almost entirely unrecognisable from the committee's first manifestation.

Firstly it began to extend its influence in the Assembly itself. This was achieved partly through the manner in which the tasks of the committee were divided. Each case was assigned a member of the committee to write a report on. Macaye, for example, was in charge of the report on the clashes between Catholics and Protestants in Nimes in the summer,<sup>165</sup> in June Sillery was chosen to work with the Military Committee on troubles in Aix as well as subsistence problems in Rouen, in September he was given

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<sup>163</sup> A supercargo was an officer in charge of the cargo on board a merchant ship. Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, p.43 and Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, p.lix.

<sup>164</sup> 26 April 1790, AP, 15:295.

<sup>165</sup> For more on the events in Nimes see Chapter 5, p.161. For Macaye's involvement in drawing up the report see note in margin AN DXXIXbis \*1 84 [FF 27].

the case of a mutiny in Nancy.<sup>166</sup> In the same month Payen-Boisneuf was researching riots in Albi.<sup>167</sup> This gave it a much stronger presence in the National Assembly as each would report their findings and recommend a course of action.

They also began to extend their reach through the employment of various agents. This was made possible through the gift to the committee of fifty thousand livres from fellow Jacobin M. de Laborde de Mereville, deputy and wealthy banker. The first spend was twelve livres on employing a woman to conduct various research. On the 22 May 1790 a thousand livres went on 'secret research', on the 10 June over a thousand more. It continued in much the same vein.<sup>168</sup> This sudden influx of wealth had a profound effect on the nature of the Committee.

By June 1790 the Committee was becoming decisively more hardened and severe as Voidel took over as president. Voidel's difference in style from de Pardieu is immediately obvious. In May de Pardieu annotated a letter from the municipality of Mâcon in which he praised their enthusiasm and engagement in continuing surveillance, writing in the same manner in which the Committee had done on multiple other occasions since its inception - seeking to arbitrate between two disputing bodies.<sup>169</sup> However this would be the last 'moderate' response in the archive. On 28 June 1790 in response to a letter from a sieur Nervo complaining of a sieur Tissay who had threatened to burn down his *château*, Voidel and Cochon de Lapparent drafted a letter to the Municipality of Theizé urging them to use 'all means of force and surveillance at their disposal' against Tissay to protect the property of Nervo.<sup>170</sup> On the same day they drafted a letter reprimanding the authorities of Saint-Jean-de-Luz for their inaction in a case of insults directed at the National Assembly. They wrote that 'Les personnes des représentants de la nation sont sacrées et inviolables et que les

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<sup>166</sup>Letter from Marquis de Rostaing, president of the military committee, 9 June 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.262 11, note in margin AN DXXIXbis \*1 109 [KK 62], and note on letter from the Deputies of the King's Regiment, 6 October 1790 AN DXXIXbis c.13 d.142 19+20.

<sup>167</sup>Note on letter from commune of Albi, 23 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis \*1 141 [QQ 69].

<sup>168</sup>Expenses of the Committee of Research, from 10 May 1790 to 27 September 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.40 d.410 26.

<sup>169</sup>Note on letter from Municipality of Mâcon, 17 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.5 d.77 12.

<sup>170</sup>Draft of a letter from the Committee of Research to the Municipality of Theizé, 28 June 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.32 d.333 12.

insultes qu'on leur fait sont des plus graves'. Tellingly they added that 'L'assemblée nationale ne peut donc voir avec indifférence, et son comité des recherches ne peut fermer les yeux sur tel excès'.<sup>171</sup> In this sentence they were representing themselves alongside and as spokespeople for the Assembly.

In the first months of his tenure Voidel also openly pushed for more powers to be awarded to the Committee. He called for the committee to be given authorisation to arrange with ministers for Trouard de Riolles, a man accused of counterrevolutionary plotting, to be moved to Paris, at the same time calling for the committee to be given permission to interrogate a deputy involved in the Maillebois affair<sup>172</sup> and to draw up a law in relation to the establishment of a high court. These requests were opposed by Lachèze and Reubell. In relation to the former request Lachèze accused the Committee of attempting to act in the role of the executive power. Reubell described the latter two requests as 'inadmissible', for the interrogation of the deputy was 'extra-judicial' and the establishment of a high court had not yet been decided by the Assembly.<sup>173</sup>

The committee had also begun to elevate themselves above the municipal institutions in Paris. On 16 June 1790 Voidel and Cochon de Lapparent wrote to Lafayette, the commander of the National Guard of Paris to '*invite et requiest [sic]*' that he take measures against the crowds of deserters and foreign beggars in the capital.<sup>174</sup> Later in January 1791 Voidel would again issue orders to the Paris authorities telling Bailly that he must take suitable measures to inform the people, who had been sharing their concerns with the Committee of Research, on the reasons why there were brigades of the *gendarmérie* assembling in Paris. If the presence of these brigades was unnecessary, Bailly ought to give orders for their removal.<sup>175</sup>

Their relationship with the Ministry of Justice had also shifted. This was mostly due to the fact that after November 1790 Champion de Cicé had been replaced by Duport-Dutertre who unlike his predecessor was eager to ask the committee for advice and

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<sup>171</sup> Draft of a letter by the Committee of Research, 28 June 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.7 d.97 17.

<sup>172</sup> See pp.60-61 and Chapter 5, p.160.

<sup>173</sup> 3 August 1790, AP, 17:585.

<sup>174</sup> Copy of a letter written to Lafayette, 16 June 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.6 d.94 1.

<sup>175</sup> Letter from Voidel to Bailly, 19 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.17 d.186 15.

follow it. In April 1791 for example he asked the Committee to look at pieces sent to him from St-Pol-de-Léon and decide whether the accused should be tried for crimes of *lèse-nation*.<sup>176</sup>

The dynamic between themselves and the Committee of Research of Paris would also change in the period of the sixth committee. On the day following the establishment of the sixth National Committee the Paris Committee introduced itself in a manner that asserted its authority in much the same fashion as it had done with the previous committees, asking the national committee to agree as a first gauge of their relationship to send them a declaration that they needed.<sup>177</sup> However throughout May they sent multiple letters asking for meetings with the National Committee, in contrast to their first dealings with them back in 1789 when they had been too busy to meet.<sup>178</sup> By the following May Lohier, the president of the Paris Committee who had been trying to get hold of them complained that he always found their office in the place Vendôme closed.<sup>179</sup> However the two committees evidently did hold regular meetings, as one letter asking to meet at the 'ordinary time' attests,<sup>180</sup> but the power balance had certainly begun to change. One factor that could in part explain this difference was that in July 1790 the Committee of Research of the National Assembly began funding the Hôtel de Ville, handing Bailly a lump sum of two thousand livres on the 5 July 'for research'.<sup>181</sup>

The relative independence they enjoyed in spending the fifty thousand livres gifted to them by La Borde is apparent through the expenses towards beer noted on 15 September for Voidel, Cochon de Lapparent and Sillery.<sup>182</sup> Ironically, they most probably drank these beers on a night when their actions would place this independence under the spotlight in another, this time much more forceful

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<sup>176</sup> Letter from Duport-Dutertre, 28 April 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.22 d.240 1.

<sup>177</sup> Committee of Research of Paris, 27 April 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.29 d.293 33.

<sup>178</sup> For example letter from Committee of Research of Paris, 7 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.29 d.293 19 and letter from the same, 25 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.44 d.417 33.

<sup>179</sup> Letter from Lohier, president of the Committee of Research of Paris, 12 May 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.33 d.343 16.

<sup>180</sup> Letter from Committee of Research of Paris, 5 June 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.262 10.

<sup>181</sup> Expenses of the Committee of Research, from 10 May 1790 to 27 September 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.40 d.410 26.

<sup>182</sup> Note of Expenses, 15 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.265 46.

condemnation of the Committee from the right side of the National Assembly. However it would also be a turning point after which they became far more open about their policing. On the 8 September the Committee had been handed a letter found by a laundryman in the pocket of a Mme Persan advising her to leave Paris to avoid a mine set to go off there. The Committee worked into the night making enquiries into the identity of the author of the letter, a 'comte Henri', even hiring someone, a local saddler, to go to Mme Persan's apartment. They seized her papers and at two in the morning called her in to account for the letter. On the 9 September Voidel reported the events to the Assembly sparking a bitter debate between the right and left sides of the Assembly hall. Duval d'Eprenesnil attacked the Committee of Research for its treatment of Mme Persan, and called into question its very existence: 'Oserais-je demander au comité quel est le but de son institution? Sans doute il agit en vertu d'un pouvoir: quel est-il? Trouve-t-il ce pouvoir dans un de vos décrets?' But despite this damning condemnation of the Committee's self-appointed powers, the Assembly decreed that the case should be handed to the Châtelet to begin criminal proceedings against the alleged conspirator.<sup>183</sup> This was essentially tacit approval for the Committee's more investigative activities.

Following this the committee announced in the National Assembly, for it seems the first time, that they had made arrests. Although they had been ordering local authorities to make arrests from as early as July 1790,<sup>184</sup> on 25 October they reported to the Assembly that they had arrested M. Bussy and eight others for conspiring against the state. This would lead Foucault Lardimilie, ex-president of the Committee, to argue that as the Assembly had not been able to suppress the committee, instead it might increase the committee's powers by adding the capacity to absolve people to that of arresting them.<sup>185</sup> Indeed since the committee had started making arrests they had also started receiving petitions from their prisoners- asking to go to trial, calling for their release or asking for permission to receive visitors. Their high-profile prisoner Bonne-Savardin, an *aide-de-camp* of the comte de Maillebois who was accused of taking part

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<sup>183</sup>9 September 1790, AP, 18:667 -668.

<sup>184</sup>Municipality of Limoges, 23 July 1790, AN DXXIXbis c. 10 d.110 11.

<sup>185</sup> The comte de Bussy, a military officer, was charged with recruiting for a counter-revolution in the Beaujolais, 25 October 1790, AP, 20:20.

in a counter-revolutionary plot,<sup>186</sup> sent multiple petitions to the committee which, going unanswered, eventually resulted in a letter from Bailly and one from the Paris Committee member and journalist Jacques-Pierre Brissot, who had also received petitions from Savardin urging the committee to respond.<sup>187</sup> One prisoner of the Committee, J.G. Virchaux, would even write publicly declaring his incarceration as illegal and condemning the fact that the committee had refused to respond to his letters.<sup>188</sup>

By October 1790, just under sixteen thousand of the fifty thousand livres remained of the money they had been gifted by Laborde.<sup>189</sup> On the 24 De Pardieu formally handed control of the finances over to Voidel and once in control the latter employed a regular group of spies.<sup>190</sup> This group of agents was made up of five individuals – Goisset, Drouet, Michaud, Le Blanc and Beguer -and operated between late August 1790 and March 1791. Their most elaborate mission, part funded by the Hôtel de Ville, was a trip to spy in Switzerland, accompanying a M. d'Aubonne to gain information on a plot involving the sieurs d'Autichamp, de Bonneville, d'Algrain and the vicomte de Mirabeau.<sup>191</sup> Things turned sour when the agents asked for more money to pay off debts accrued whilst they were in Switzerland. After sending countless letters to no avail, they threatened to reveal all the work that they had been commissioned to do.<sup>192</sup> Aside from this major trip, which was clearly in pursuit of information relating to the counter-revolutionary threat from *émigrés*, the group was mainly focussed otherwise on spying on possible threats from the political left, conducting surveillance of the Palais-Royal, the printing house of Marat's *Ami du Peuple* and the club of Swiss patriots the *Société Helvétique*.<sup>193</sup> This shows that the committee now spent time and

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<sup>186</sup> See Chapter 5, p.160.

<sup>187</sup> Letters from Bonne-Savardin, 29 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.30 d.297 37+38; Letter from Bailly, 16 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.30 d.297 39; Letter from Brissot to Committee of Research, 30 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.30 d.297 36.

<sup>188</sup> J.G. Virchaux, *Violation de la loi, par le Comité des recherches de l'Assemblée nationale* (Paris 1791)

<sup>189</sup> Expenses of the Committee of Research, from 10 May 1790 to 27 September 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.40 d.410 26.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Pieces relating to the mission to Switzerland, AN DXXIXbis c.32 d.329 7-44.

<sup>192</sup> Letter from Goisset and co., 6 April 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.32 d.339 30 and Letter from Goisset, 10 April 1790 and 16 April 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.32 d.339 37 and 39.

<sup>193</sup> Reports on the Palais-Royal, from 19 November to 10 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.32 d.330 32-34, Reports on the printers of *Ami du Peuple*, from 10 to 12 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.32 d.339 45-47, Reports on the Club littéraire des loyalistes/ Helvetic Society, from 24 August to 30

money not only investigating counter-revolutionary threats from the royalists abroad but also surveying possible threats to its own power from elements on the left that existed outside of the Assembly.

By the end of 1790 the non-Jacobins in the Committee were getting increasingly uncomfortable with the way in which it was developing. On the 17 November 1790 the Committee decreed that the letters and packages addressed to it would only be opened by the President, Vice-President and Secretary, forbidding the Secretary from communicating any pieces to anyone other than members of the Committee without an express deliberation authorising them to.<sup>194</sup> This would cause Macaye to leave the Committee and to write a public letter to the President of the National Assembly in January 1791 giving his formal resignation, citing the Committee's 'pouvoir inquisitorial' that was not in the public interest. He urged them to suppress the committee in line with the principles of liberty, adding that since De Pardieu had also left the committee, the decree of the 17 November meant that Voidel and Cochon were the sole custodians of the secrets and all the power conferred to the institution; 'Il n'est point de Citoyen qui ne doive trembler de voir concentrer entre deux individus une autorité illimitée & aussi arbitraire.'<sup>195</sup>

Voidel, on behalf of the Committee, responded by writing Macaye a letter. He argued that the decree limiting who was able to open letters was not designed to concentrate power, but simply a means of preventing the leaking of information, in particular in response to a minister who was learning about the communications sent to them often before they were. All manner of people were coming and going from the offices of the Committee and so this was a necessary measure to take in their internal policing. He likened his position to the president of the National Assembly asking whether Macaye had a problem with the president opening the communications addressed to the whole constituent body. But only eight members would have their names on this letter, the abbé Joubert was seemingly no longer present and Rousselet's name was also

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November, AN DXXIXbis c.32 d.330 6-31 and 10 November 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.32 d.330 35.

<sup>194</sup> Committee of Research, AN DXXIXbis c.33 d.339 14.

<sup>195</sup> *Le Comité des recherches démasqué par M.le vicomte de Macaye, l'un des membres de ce comité* (Paris, 16 January 1791)



absent.<sup>196</sup> Rousselet himself resigned in May 1791. In his letter he wrote that as he no longer assisted in the deliberations of the committee there seemed no point in continuing to be a member. He asked the Committee to pass his resignation on the National Assembly and to ask them whether they thought it was appropriate to replace him alongside the three other members who had already resigned.<sup>197</sup>

But despite the loss of two and then four of its members the Committee of Research continued in its role until the flight of the King to Varennes on 20 June 1791. The crisis that engulfed the National Assembly after the King renounced the Revolution and attempted to flee the country led to calls in the Assembly Hall to increase the number of members on the Committee of Research. The National Assembly decreed on the 21 June that the Committee of Research would combine with the Committee of Reports and occupy themselves with the present circumstances.<sup>198</sup> This new institution became essentially a ministry of the interior. When the minister of foreign affairs, M. de Montmorin arrived and declared that he would mount an investigation into letters left by the King on his departure, the left of the Assembly hall shouted 'Non! Non! Au comité des recherches!'<sup>199</sup> What was left of Laborde's donation was added to three thousand livres handed over by the King's ministers and this new institution proceeded to takeover many of the functions of the latter.<sup>200</sup>

The transformation of the Committee of Research from its establishment on 28 July 1789 until its amalgamation with the Committee of Reports in June 1791 is a striking example of the direction that the Revolution took in its early years. Initially it had little power and little impact; its members barely had time to get comfortable in their new positions before they were replaced by new ones. Nonetheless from its first manifestation onwards the Committee showed an inclination towards the adoption of a more investigative and authoritative role than it had been assigned when it was instituted. From April 1790, with the onset of permanent members, nearly all of whom

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<sup>196</sup> Committee of Research, AN DXXIXbis c.33 d.339 14.

<sup>197</sup> Rousselet letter of resignation, 15 May 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.19 d.207 25.

<sup>198</sup> 21 June 1791, AP, 27:373.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Expenses of the Committee of Research, 10 May 1790-27 September 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.40 d.410 26.

sat on the left hand side of the Assembly hall and particularly under the presidency of Voidel the committee was no longer simply involved in the collecting of information, it conducted secret research, interrogated suspects and even ordered arrests. By the end of the period the accusations thrown at the committee by Duval d'Espremesnil in September 1790 seem justified.

The development of the Committee of Research is crucial to understanding the Revolutionary process. At first it was uncertain whether the left or right of the Assembly would ultimately determine the culture of the institution, with the committee passing from one to the other each time with more of a majority. Even if the right had succeeded however, it is questionable whether there would have been much difference in the outcome. For while the committees that were dominated by the left were on the whole more inclined towards the strengthening of the committee's powers, as we have seen there was a tendency across all manifestations of the committee to move in this direction. Hastened by the collapse of royal power, the institutions of government entrenched themselves and as they did, gradually became more homogeneous to the exclusion of a variety of political positions and possibilities. In the coming chapters we shall see how this entrenchment played out across the entire nation, and in doing so closed up the democratic space that had flowered in 1789.

## Chapter 2

### Negotiating Subsistence

*En fin pour nous résumer, nous dirons que le bien général l'emporte sur le particulier; qu'en permettant l'exportation dans le Royaume, et en autorisant les ventes en maison particulières, on faciliteroit les amas, on rendroit les marchés désertés, et on mettroit les peuple en danger de souffrir; au lieu qu'en employant les moyens que nous indiquons pour amener l'abondance et la moderation dans le prix de ces denrées si nécessaires aux besoins de l'humanité, il en résulteroit un plus grand bien pour tout le Royaume, et un avantage infiniment préférable au système de la propriété qui ne tend qu'a favoriser quelques individus au détriment du plus grand nombre.*

M. Lucy to Clermont-Tonnerre, president of the National Assembly, 10 September 1789<sup>201</sup>

On 29 August 1789 the National Assembly legislated that the grain trade was to be free of the controls that had traditionally regulated the market. Local administrators would no longer have the wide range of powers at their disposal that had enabled them to force merchants to take their grain to market, restrict sales to marketplaces and allow small buyers precedence over merchants and bakers.<sup>202</sup> Having set up a Subsistence Committee in the early days of the Revolution the Assembly soon decided that there was no longer any need for one, such was its doctrinal commitment to free trade.<sup>203</sup> Indeed legislators were convinced that a policy of non-interference in the economy was an essential part of the liberties offered by the Revolution.<sup>204</sup>

For M. Lucy, a notary from the grain growing area of Meaux, and many others, this was a move that was ill-judged given the scarcity of grain that had followed two consecutively poor harvests. It was also greatly out of keeping with the Assembly's

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<sup>201</sup>Letter from M. Lucy to Clermont-Tonnerre, Meaux, 10 September 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.17 34+35.

<sup>202</sup>Judith A. Miller, *Mastering the Market: the State and the Grain Trade in Northern France, 1700-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.125 and Louise A. Tilly, 'The Food Riot as a Form of Political Conflict in France', in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 2 (1971) 23-57 (p.27).

<sup>203</sup> 13 October 1789, AP, t.9: 440.

<sup>204</sup> Rebecca L. Spang, *Stuff and Money in the Time of the French Revolution* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), p.15.

supposed dedication to the *bien général*. This was the point at which the National Assembly declared itself dedicated to a 'système de la propriété' as M. Lucy put it, and thus excluded from its vision great swathes of the French populace.<sup>205</sup> But many people, M. Lucy among them, still believed that they could change the minds of their representatives by writing to them and putting forward their own ideas on the subject of subsistence.

M.Lucy was one of many letter writers from the grain-producing areas around Paris where grain shortages had increased tensions to such an extent that there were regular eruptions of popular violence.<sup>206</sup> Frost had blighted the harvest of 1788, and the winter of 1788-1789 was bitter, a great proportion of the country's vine production was ruined. Even landowners were suffering from food deprivation. In July a crowd had set fire to the Hotel de Ville of Rouen, and many other places saw similar disturbances. Much of the agitation of the spring and summer of 1789 was triggered by dearth.<sup>207</sup>

This was unusual only in scale; food rioting was historically the most common consequence of such shortages. Not just simply reactive, the food riot was a political event or as R.B. Outhwaite described them 'learned' rather than 'spontaneous' responses.<sup>208</sup> Food rioting was driven by the belief that subsistence was a right - a way of thinking that was described by E.P. Thompson when looking at English crowds as 'the moral economy'. In the context of this sensibility, riots were not just reactive displays of distress but political acts where what constituted a fair grain trade was communally agreed.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>205</sup>Letter from M. Lucy to Clermont-Tonnerre, Meaux, 10 September 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.17 34+35.

<sup>206</sup>Alan Forrest, *Paris, the Provinces and the French Revolution* (London: Arnold, 2004), p.59.

<sup>207</sup>P.M. Jones, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.60-61 and Miller, *Market*, pp.121-122.

<sup>208</sup>R.B. Outhwaite, *Dearth, Public Policy, and Social Disturbance in England, 1550-1800* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1991), p.53.

<sup>209</sup>E.P Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century' in *Past and Present*, 50, 1 (1971) 76-136; Cynthia Bouton, *The Flour War: Gender, Class and Community in Late Ancien Régime French Society* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993); Steven Kaplan, *Provisioning Paris: Merchant and Millers in the Grain and Flour Trade during the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1984) and George Rudé, 'La Taxation populaire de mai 1775 à Paris et dans la région parisienne' in *Annales Historique de la Révolution Française*, 28 (1956) 139-179 among others.

Riots did not just impact the grain trade at a local level but shaped royal policy. The Crown was seen by all but a few as ultimately responsible for its subjects' subsistence in times of shortage. The 'paternalist tradition' saw the provision of the means of existence as an imperative to monarchical rule, without which it was feared that the populace would be driven to unfettered excess.<sup>210</sup> The Crown itself was the first to consider shortages as a man-made phenomenon, coining the term 'pacte de famine' to describe how grain was purposefully held back for political gain, an assumption that was deeply rooted in popular consciousness.<sup>211</sup> Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the French state had as a result of these notions developed increasingly sophisticated interventions in the trade; As Judith Miller's research shows, the state machinery around provisioning had by and large, with the exception of experimentation in free trade, assured general stability in the cereal-trade of cities.<sup>212</sup>

But a growing public sphere had been increasingly shifting the discourse around economic policy. The enlightened public sphere was providing alternative modes of communication on economic matters out of which new economic theories were emerging that influenced popular thinking as well as crown policy.<sup>213</sup> Physiocracy had a great impact; first developed by François Quesnay in articles written for Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*, it became a popular economic theory that emphasised agricultural labour as the chief creator of wealth. When applied to the grain trade it advocated the lifting of controls to increase cost and thus profit which could be re-invested in production to create higher yields.<sup>214</sup> These new theories of free trade had inspired the Crown to lift controls on three separate occasions between 1763 and 1789.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>210</sup>Steven Kaplan, *Provisioning Paris*, p.23.

<sup>211</sup>Richard Cobb, *The Police and the People; French Popular Protest 1789-1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p.270.

<sup>212</sup>Miller, *Mastering the Market*.

<sup>213</sup>Jeremy Caradonna for instance has shown how the subject of essays written for academic essay competitions shifted focus from royal cultural policies and religious matters during the reign of Louis XIV to more political topics by the middle of the eighteenth century see Jeremy Caradonna, *The Enlightenment in Practice: Academic Prize Contests and Intellectual Culture in France, 1670-1794* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

<sup>214</sup>Jones, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution*, p.17.

<sup>215</sup>Miller, *Mastering the Market*, p.6.

These attempts at introducing the free circulation of grain were disastrous, and each time controls had to be re-instated. As a result of these changes, popular responses began to shift too. Cynthia Bouton's research into the 'flour war' of 1774, a series of riots that followed one of these experiments with the free commerce of grain, showed how rioting advanced from the targetting of distributors of grain, the intermediaries selling it and the state regulations controlling it, to attacks against the producers themselves. She argued that in 1775 subsistence problems began to be associated with 'property rights and power relations' within a local context which was a stepping stone to the battleground of 1789 when the processes of profiteering and production took on national proportions.<sup>216</sup>

M.Lucy's letter was a product of all of these factors. As an educated townsman he was an example of how new modes of public discourse on the economy had begun to scrutinise the commerce of grain. His letter was not only part of this new enlightened public sphere but also descended from the long tradition of the negotiation of the grain trade between the state and the people, with the 'moral economy' at its core. M.Lucy stated this clearly when he wrote at the beginning of his letter that 'Le cytoyen le plus pauvre a droit a la vie comme le plus riche, son indigence lui donne droit a la protection du Gouvernement'.<sup>217</sup> Whilst the letter was clearly a continuation of discourses and sensibilities that had come before, the changing mentalities that Bouton recognises as part of the revolutionary phenomenon of 1789 are strikingly present. M.Lucy saw the problem of grain provision on a national scale as a confrontation between a 'système de la propriété' on the one hand and grain distribution designed to meet subsistence needs on the other. Most importantly of all he offered his views as an active participant in the Revolution.

The fact that M.Lucy was from Meaux was also an important factor. Meaux was a town where the movement of grain was highly visible, and as a result shortages were particularly alarming. As a major hub for the transport of wheat from the area of Brie to Paris, the population frequently saw grain, the substance on which their livelihoods

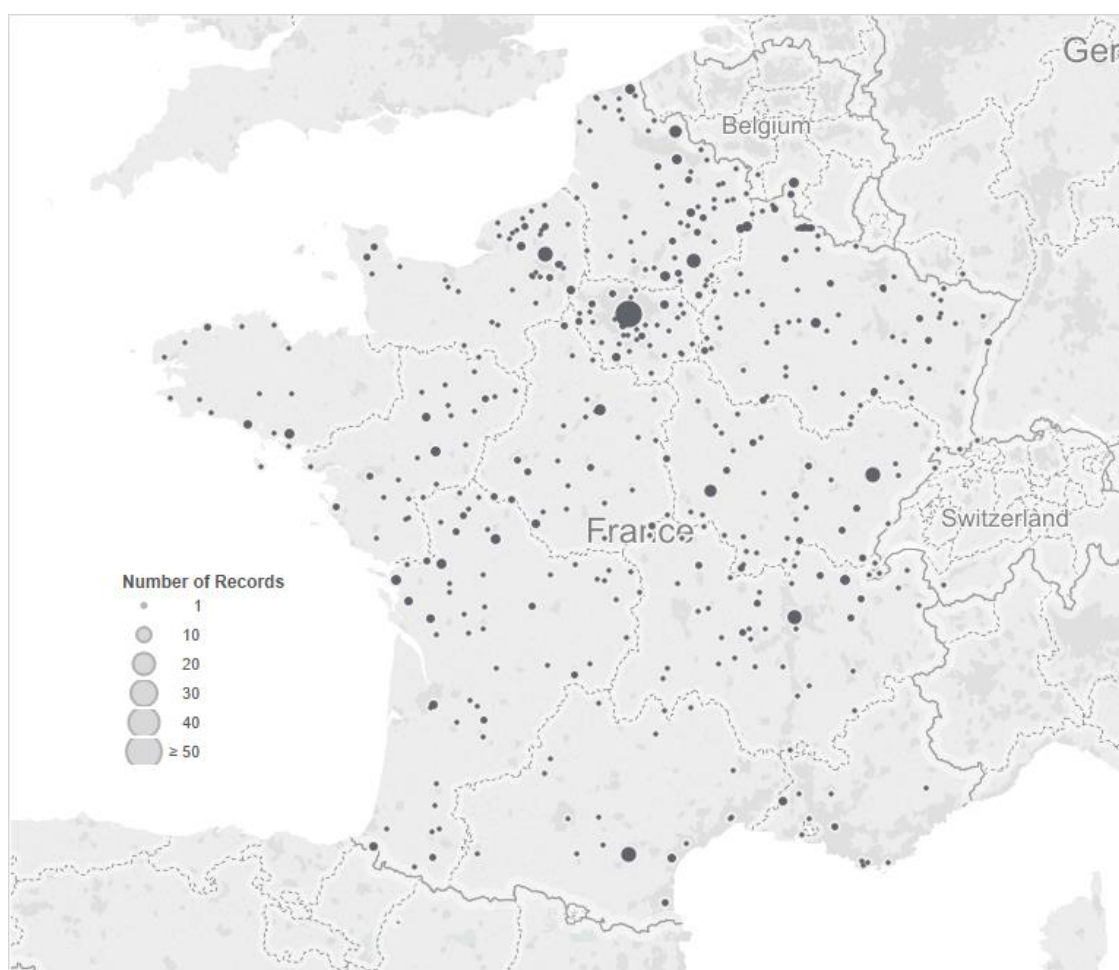
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<sup>216</sup> Bouton, *The Flour War*, p.259.

<sup>217</sup>Letter from M. Lucy to Clermont-Tonnerre, Meaux, 10 September 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.17 34+35.

depended, moving out of the area.<sup>218</sup> Louise Tilly has identified that food rioting was more likely to occur in grain producing regions, known as the *pays de grande culture*, for this very reason; as less fertile regions bought up grain from the more productive ones, populations risked seeing their own supply diminish.<sup>219</sup> The sending of letters on subsistence appears to follow this same trend; letters originated in greatest number from the *pays de grande culture* in the North and North-East.

**Figure 7: Letters on Subsistence by Location**

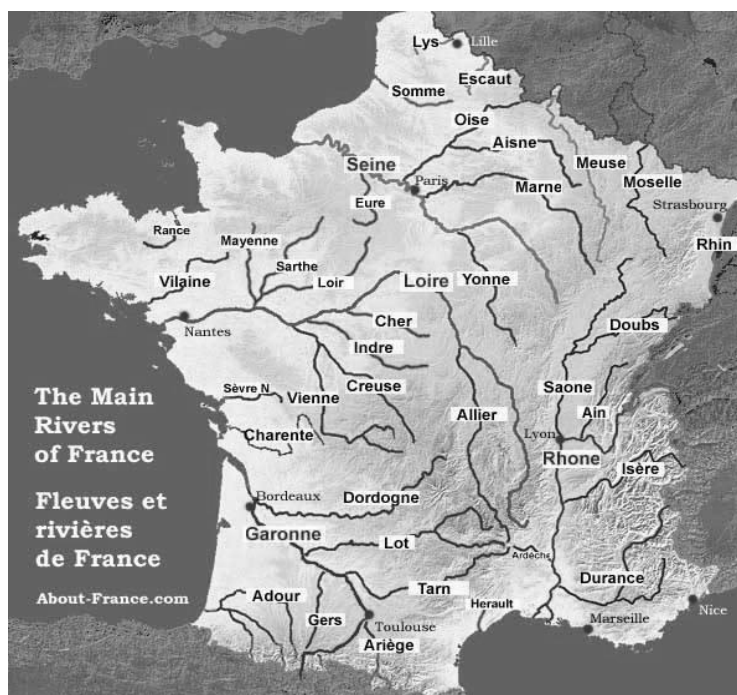


The map of where letters on subsistence were sent from also correlates well with population density. Less letters were sent from areas of low population in the South, whilst a greater number of letters were sent from the highly populated North.<sup>220</sup>

<sup>218</sup>Micheline Baulant and Jean Meuvret, *Prix des céréales et extraits de la mercuriale de Paris: 1520-1698*, 2 vols (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1960-1962), 1, 26 bis.

<sup>219</sup>Louise Tilly, 'Food Riot', p.26.

<sup>220</sup>Fernand Braudel and Ernest Labrousse, *Histoire Économique et Sociale de La France* (Presses

**Figure 8: Rivers of France<sup>221</sup>**

However the single most important factor shown by the map of where letters originated from are supply routes. Grain travelled mostly by water. Where grain travelled in bulk down the Seine from Le Havre to Paris, letters were sent in great number. The same pattern can be seen along the river Oise and the Loire which were also major supply lines. To a lesser extent this is also noticeable along the Aisne and the Yonne, the Rhône and the Saône. Richard Cobb found when looking at what he calls the *cartes des arrivages*, a map of towns through which grain most frequently passed, that this was practically identical to a *cartes des troubles*, the places that saw subsistence disturbances.<sup>222</sup>

Alongside this Cobb found that grain seizures, 'arrêts', or other obstructions to the trade were most likely to take place in March and April when the rivers were unfrozen, whilst the traditional riot months were May to August.<sup>223</sup> These important months in the agricultural cycle are unsurprisingly the times at which most letters relating to

Universitaires de France, 1979), 2, p.166.

<sup>221</sup> Map of the Rivers of France <<http://about-france.com/french-rivers.htm>>

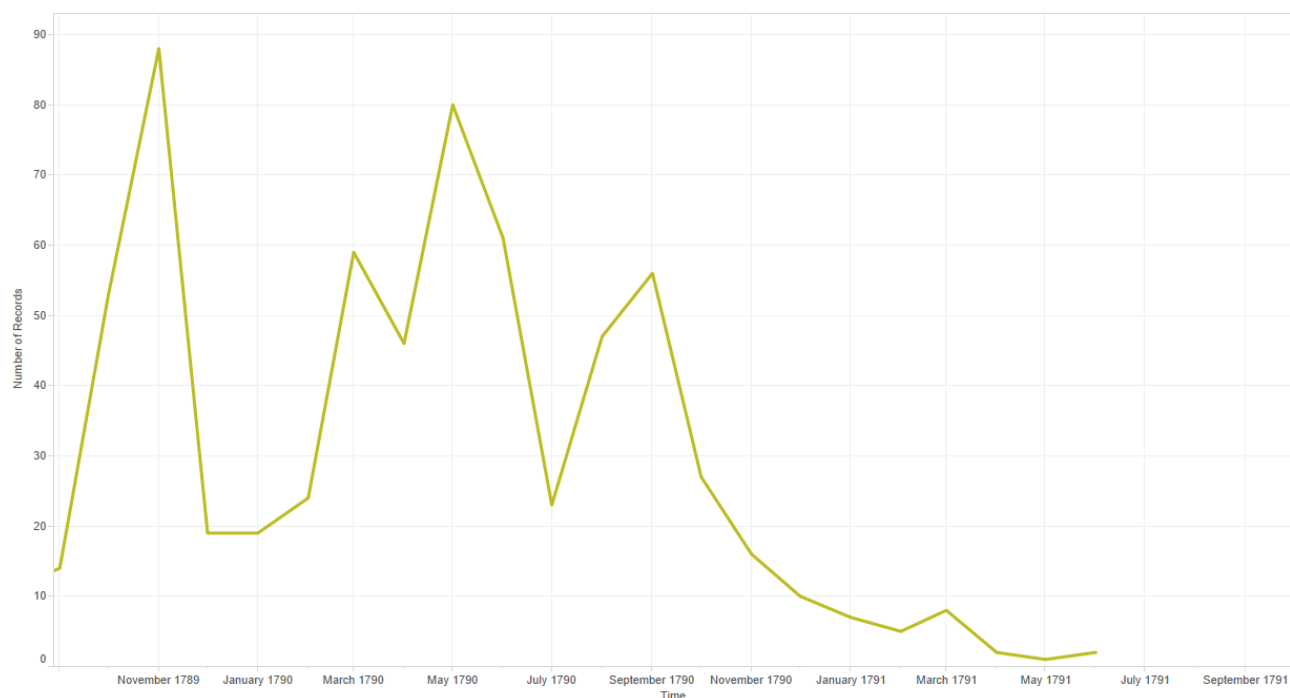
<sup>222</sup>Cobb, *The Police and the People*, pp.261-262.

<sup>223</sup>Ibid. p.264.



subsistence were sent in 1790.

**Figure 9: Letters on Subsistence over Time**

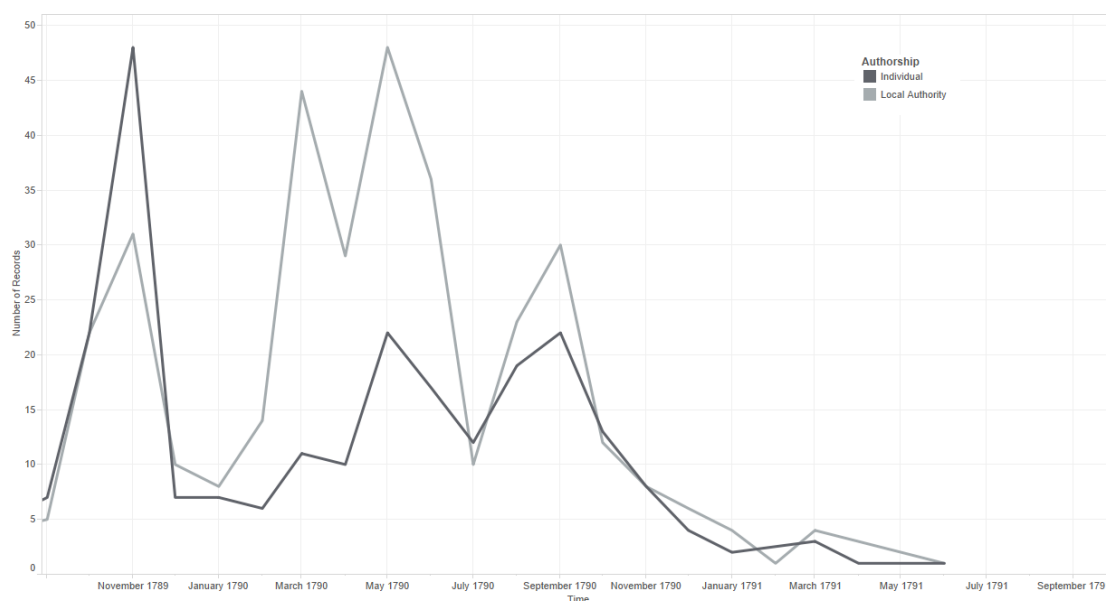


March 1790 predictably saw letters rise, and May 1790 even more so, this was when grain stores were at their very lowest. The decline in July 1790 comes at the point at which a relatively good harvest was yielded, although a peak similar to March 1790 occurred in September 1790 where it is likely that concerns about the distribution of the harvest were taking hold.

Harder to explain is the maximum point in November 1789. This did fall at a time of local unrest when old town councils were being replaced by new municipalities. Fears of a famine plot that had plagued parts of the country in the summer no doubt also spilt into the autumn. It may be the case that letters sent in November 1789 were part of a wider peak including earlier months, unrepresented in our data due to the fact that the Committee of Research was not responsible for letters relating to subsistence matters until after 5 October 1789. It is likely that letters questioning the decree on the free circulation of grain began to be sent from the moment the decree was first announced, further examination of the archive of the Committee of Reports might reveal more of these.

However if we compare this graph to John Markoff's data on insurrections related to



**Figure 11: Letters on Subsistence over Time by Authorship**

When we look at who sent the letters the difference in the nature of the first peak in November 1789 and that beginning in March 1790 is first revealed. The letters of November 1789 are more likely to be sent by individuals, whilst the letters of 1790 are in contrast mostly sent by local authorities. These graphs clearly warrant more careful analysis.

### Autumn 1789

In the Autumn of 1789 municipalities were struggling to meet the needs of their constituents at a time when their authority was insecure, needs were pressing and volatile crowds were an everyday reality. New municipalities were inexperienced and forced to implement the highly unpopular decree of free circulation.<sup>226</sup> The details of this decree were not always clear to them. Some learnt from the papers that controls of the trade were to be lifted, others must have been confused by a circular sent around on the 18 August by the Committee of Subsistence warning that grain must be sold in the markets.<sup>227</sup> The involvement of the Committee of Research in communications on subsistence in 1789 appear minimal, they seemed to simply respond to letters on

<sup>226</sup>Miller, *Mastering the Market*, p.133.

<sup>227</sup>Committee of Subsistence circular, 18 August 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.25 d.253 1.

subsistence with copies of the decrees. Thus it appears that once having made its dedication to the free circulation of grain clear in the summer of 1789 the National Assembly then washed its hands of management of the trade.

Thus communities had little action left but to appeal to the perceived paternal nature of legislators, calling on the Assembly to bring back controls or provide them with wheat. Some were 'frantic' as Judith Miller described them.<sup>228</sup> 'Nos compatriottes manquent de pain, manquent d'argent, ils periront la plus part cet hiver si le bled reste cher' wrote the Municipality of Attichy (Oise) 'L'assemblée seule peut les secourir elle seule peut les sauver'.<sup>229</sup>

But they were also confident that they knew the source of their woes. A typical conclusion drawn by individuals and municipal officials alike was that grain merchants were creating an artificial shortage. The Permanent committee<sup>230</sup> of Châlons-sur-Marne (Marne)<sup>231</sup> wrote that daily the markets were stripped by monopolists in order to keep grain at a high price. Letter writers railed against the 'tyrannical cupidity' of landowners, and the 'awful misery' they placed them in.<sup>232</sup> *Curés* were hoarding grain according to an inhabitant of Valognes (Manche), in the knowledge that they were losing the *dîme*.<sup>233</sup> The nobility were making artisans suffer and speculators were described as 'inhuman' for their role in holding back grain from the market in a decree issued by representatives of the commune of Mansle (Charente).<sup>234</sup> In continuation of the fears that had swept across France in the summer, there were even a few that believed grain was purposefully held back to reverse revolutionary gains.

But for most letters the ultimate cause of the shortages was clearly the decree on the

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<sup>228</sup> Miller, *Mastering the Market*, p.131.

<sup>229</sup> Letter from the Municipality of Attichy (Oise), from 24 to 25 December 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.40 12.

<sup>230</sup> An early form of local authority replacing old regime officials.

<sup>231</sup> Now Châlons-en-Champagne.

<sup>232</sup> The inhabitants of Riceys (Aube), from 23 to 25 August 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.17 38-41.

<sup>233</sup> A tax on church lands abolished during the night of 4 August, Fitzsimmons, *The Night the Old Regime Ended: August 4, 1789, and the French Revolution* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), p.14.

<sup>234</sup> Representatives of the Commune of Mansle (Charente), 12 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.22 26+27.

free circulation of grain. 'Il ne vous échappera pas non plus que la libre circulation indéfinie semble trop faciliter l'accaparement et les projets désastreux des ennemis de l'état' continued the Permanent Committee of Châlons-sur-Marne, convinced free circulation in its reliance on market forces caused merchants to hold onto grain as they awaited a rise in prices.<sup>235</sup> From the moment they read about the decree in the newspapers the Municipal Committee of Samer (Pas-de-Calais) felt they had to write to the National Assembly to warn them that it was not the best way of assuring equality of distribution or price.<sup>236</sup>

Most of these letters did not just criticise the decree on free circulation but tried to convince the National Assembly, which they continued to hold in high esteem, that it was not an effective or egalitarian policy. 'Pleins de respect pour les actes émanés de votre sagesse – c'est avec une véritable peine, et avec beaucoup de défiance de nous-mêmes, que nous nous portons à vous adressés nos très humbles représentations sur votre décret relatif aux subsistances.' wrote Members of the General and Permanent Assembly of Dreux who asked legislators to introduce controls and oblige cultivators to sell in the markets.<sup>237</sup> Inhabitants of St-Quentin (Aisne) similarly expressed their alarm at hearing the decree, for although export abroad continued to be forbidden, grain merchants were, under cover of the decree, buying up huge quantities of wheat and exporting it through woods and hidden paths to Liège. They suggested a variety of amendments to the legislation.<sup>238</sup>

Some were more direct in their condemnation. 'Vous faites des lois, des réglemens, mais à quoy serviront-ils lorsque tous les citoyens seront détruite par la famine?' asked an anonymous Parisian.<sup>239</sup> A sieur Hedoin de Pons from Reims in his letter calling for controls wrote: 'si vous trouvez, messieurs, que mes idées soient fausses, combattez les & je crois pouvoir les étayer par la seule raison.'<sup>240</sup> Many like M. Lucy, focussed on the

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<sup>235</sup>Permanent Committee of Châlons-sur-Marne (Marne), 5 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.256 3-5.

<sup>236</sup>Municipal Committee of Samer (Pas-de-Calais), 5 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.256 8+9.

<sup>237</sup>Members of the Permanent and General Assembly of Dreux, 12 October 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.25 d.254bis 23+24.

<sup>238</sup>Inhabitants of St-Quentin (Aisne), 12 October 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.50 1+2.

<sup>239</sup>Anonymous, Paris, 9 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis d.50 44+45.

<sup>240</sup>Sieur Hedoin de Pons, Reims, 7 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.256 32+33.

underlying economic relationships as problematic. The Committee of Gueugnon (Saône-et-Loire) wrote that the National Assembly could hardly ignore the fact that even in areas abundant with wheat, workers still had to rely on the proprietors having humanitarian and economic 'wisdom'.<sup>241</sup>

Indeed what distinguishes the letters of the autumn of 1789, is the view that their letters are contributions to a national debate. Sieur Joly from La Seyne-sur-Mer (Var) wrote in October that 'Le gouvernement a invité tous les Bons français a communiquer leurs idées sur ce sujet si important'.<sup>242</sup> Sieur Sabault from Uxeloup (Nièvre) believed the same writing to the deputies of the National Assembly that 'vous recevez avec plaisir tous les avis qu'on vous adresse, et qui ont le Bien général pour objet, c'est dans cette vue que j'ose vous faire parvenir quelque reflexions, elles sont d'un coeur vraiment patriote'.<sup>243</sup>

Calls for a return to strict market control were thus joined in 1789 by many letters that proposed alternative measures. Some of these written by individuals were even presented as essays with a cover letter and title. These authors would also often take pains to identify themselves either as having knowledge of French economic theories and the history of grain policy or otherwise being in a position of responsibility for the welfare of others. One anonymous author writing in October began by stating that he had been asked many questions about the decree on free circulation attached to the church door, another, a sieur Thubé writing from an inn in the district of Saint-Martin-des-Champs in Paris saw his letter as a continuation of his work on policing prostitutes, understood as ensuring 'la tranquillité des Bons-Citoyens de la Capitale'.<sup>244</sup> A cursory look at where some of these individuals pop up in local archives seems to confirm that they are mostly non-noble but held stable and important positions in local society. Parish priests, for instance, are most likely to write these types of communication.

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<sup>241</sup> Municipality of Gueugnon (Saône-et-Loire), 6 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.256 24-26.

<sup>242</sup> Sieur Joly, La Seyne-sur-Mer (Var), 29 October 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.25 d.253 34-36.

<sup>243</sup> Sieur Sabault, Uxeloup (Nièvre), 28 October 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.25 d.253 39+40.

<sup>244</sup> Anonymous, 6 October 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.25 d.254bis 28+29 and sieur Thubé, at the residence of Gaillier, innkeeper, rue au Maire, district of Saint-Martin-des-Champs, Paris, 16 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.257 37+38.

It is not their social background alone that these authors use to add legitimacy to their projects. Being a 'good patriot', showing that one's aims and passions are aligned with those of the representatives of the state and that one holds the general interest over the particular is the ultimate justification given for sending opinions to the Assembly.

While writing directly to the state was clearly experienced as an exciting new opportunity, these types of projects were being published well before the Revolution as Jeremy Caradonna has shown in his work on academic essay competitions.<sup>245</sup> One author, François-Joseph L'Ange who addressed his work on granaries to the National Assembly in November, is a good example of the continuity between pre-revolutionary publications and essays sent to the Assembly. L'Ange had both published and sent to the state<sup>246</sup> his work in which he argues that the state alone should buy grain and distribute it in 30,000 granaries which would be managed by elected heads of families.<sup>247</sup> He had been publishing since 1785 when he produced his first essay on hot air balloons and continued to publish during the Revolution, writing a dozen or so radical essays on popular sovereignty and grain distribution until he became a victim of the terror in 1793.<sup>248</sup>

L'Ange's political focus on social reform was not out of the ordinary for these types of letters or, as R.B. Rose discovered, for other publications on the grain trade during the Revolution.<sup>249</sup> The creation of granaries and the taking of grain censuses were the most common suggestion alongside other methods of organising subsistence nationally. These projects took existing methods of nationalising grain distribution and revamped them with new conceptions of the possibilities of popular sovereignty. The creation of

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<sup>245</sup>Caradonna, *The Enlightenment in Practice*.

<sup>246</sup>Although not, it seems, at the same time. His letter to the National Assembly was sent two years before he published the same ideas in a pamphlet intitled *Les moyens simples et faciles de fixer l'abondance et le juste prix de pain* see R.B. Rose, 'The French Revolution and the Grain Supply: Nationalization pamphlets in the John Rylands library', in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of Manchester*, 39 (1956) 171-187 (p.180).

<sup>247</sup>Letter from Sieur L'Ange, 10 November 1789, Lyon, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.257 24+25 and Rose, 'The French Revolution and the Grain Supply', pp.179-180.

<sup>248</sup>His ideas of decentralisation and fair distribution are cited as inspirations to the nineteenth century co-operative movement as well as contributing to the ideas of the philosopher and early socialist Charles Fourier see Ludovic Frobert, André Tiran, Jean-Pierre Potier, *Économistes en Lyonnais, en Dauphiné et en Forez* (Lyon, 2000), pp.168-176.

<sup>249</sup>Rose, 'The French Revolution and the Grain Supply', pp.176-187.

public granaries had been enacted as an emergency measure before, but L'Ange's idea was for granaries to be a permanent public fixture, state-backed but managed by elected local officials.<sup>250</sup> The taking of a grain census was also something that had been done before alongside mass-confiscations, but was now imagined as a measure that could be disassociated from tight state control. Sieur Joly imagined that a grain census could be community-led, run by 'personnes de tout etat, outre les officiers municipaux' and Sieur Pannetier, a grocer in Paris, similarly suggested a census be conducted by someone chosen 'des nomée cittoin (comme pour lever de la tail) [*sic*]'<sup>251</sup>

Alongside calls for public granaries and grain censuses, other, more radical ideas were put forward. A sieur Burette living in Spain imagined that wheat could be used as a currency, and in such a way be separated from the fluctuations of coinage. This would be the most effective way of encouraging its circulation he argued.<sup>252</sup> Sieur Thubé suggested that public ovens be set up which distributed free bread to the poor.<sup>253</sup> Also with the poor in mind a 'miserable woman' from Paris called for a new tax of one livre to be levied that would provide bread for poor children. She believed that a revolutionary spirit existed that supported greater equality: 'au temps présent...l'énergie du peuple qui tout porter au biens publicque ne se refusera pas a la satisfacion de contribuer a une aumone quiconque de peu de valeure offre dans la multitude un avantage. [*sic*]'<sup>254</sup>

Letters on the grain trade in the autumn of 1789 thus ranged from calls for the re-introduction of controls to ideas on other ways in which the grain trade could be

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<sup>250</sup>The idea of constructing public granaries for use in emergencies was used by the Paris Lieutenant General of Police René Hérault in 1729 to amass supplies that could be called upon in times of shortage, Controller General Machault repeated this in 1749 and so did his successor, Moras, in 1757. Like public granaries, collecting information of what grain was available had been tried before during the shortages of 1709 by Controller General Desmarests alongside mass confiscations. Miller, *Mastering the Market*, pp.54-55 and p.136.

<sup>251</sup>Sieur Joly, La Seyne-sur-Mer (Var), 29 October 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.25 d.253 34-36 and Sieur Pannetier, grocer in the faubourg St Antoine, Paris, 4 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.258 12+13. The collection of the *taille*, a direct tax of the old regime, was typically organised within communities by an inhabitant elected to the role of *asseeurs* see Pierre Goubert, *The French Peasantry in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1986), p.185.

<sup>252</sup>Sieur Burette, Spain, 19 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.47 9.

<sup>253</sup>Sieur Thubé, at the residence of Gaillier, innkeeper, rue au Maire, district of Saint-Martin-des-Champs, Paris, 16 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.257 37+38.

<sup>254</sup>Anonymous, Paris, December 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.263 3.



organised nationally. The revolutionary spirit for equality identified by the woman from Paris is present in many of these letters, showing that aspirations for the grain trade were to a great extent egalitarian in nature. All were examples of how subsistence was negotiated in an unprecedented fashion.

But these communications largely fell on deaf ears. As early as October 1789 it had become clear that the National Assembly was unwavering in its commitment to the decree on free circulation. It suppressed the Subsistence Committee, a body that could have absorbed and presented feedback on the decree of free circulation, and passed jurisdiction on subsistence matters to the Committee of Research whose instructions were to pursue those found to be violating the decrees.

### 1790

By the winter of 1789-1790 the debate on free circulation within the letters had ground to almost a complete halt. Denouncing had become more common than lobbying and denunciations would increase in number until they reached a peak in May and June when inter-municipal disputes over seizures of wheat and anxious reports of food riots would flood in to the Committee of Research. Lobbying for specific legislation, while resurfacing to an extent in the spring of 1790 was not the main focus of these letters, instead they appealed to the National Assembly in its capacity as provider of justice and above all force. Inhabitants of both town and country were taking matters into their own hands, seizing wheat as it passed through their village or storming the marketplace of their town.

Many individuals called for prompt measures against hoarding. The language used plainly represented their perception of the battleground as being between consumers and producers. A group of over two hundred inhabitants of the cantons of Charente-Inférieure, many barely able to sign their own name, directly pitted themselves against landowners 'presque tout' of whom 'acapare les Bleds' describing the change as 'les premiers de l'estat, les Seigneurs, les propriétaires et les fermiers se sont enrichy et la

classes des artissants, petits marchands ouvriers et journalier sont venu jeux'.<sup>255</sup>

One letter in particular revealed that the practice of lobbying the state was, if found ineffective, interchangeable with rioting. Sieur de Chalain, lieutenant du roi in Guise (Aisne) under pressure from a group of women who had visited him in his house wrote to the National Assembly on their behalf saying:

j'ai beaucoup loué mes braves concitoyennes du parti quelles prennent de se plaindre [...] j'ai été bien content de leur docilité, elles paroissent se repentir de s'etre livré a quelque excés, et promettent d'obeir, jusqu au moment ou le plus impératif des besoins, les forcera de rompre leurs promesses.<sup>256</sup>

Evidently a compromise had been reached between these women and the lieutenant du roi, they had accepted his praise for taking their complaints through the less direct avenue of writing to the state whilst he had, at the same time hinting that it may be under a certain degree of duress, conveyed their message: 'je vous supplie, Messeigneurs (toujours en presence des memes dames) de vouloir bien donner des ordres d'une assez grande sévérité pour faire trembler les accapareurs.' We can see in this example for these women 'imperatives of need' were justification enough for engaging in riots, which seem to be for them simply another means of political expression. This political expression uniting rioters and more obscure letter writers, was unequivocally opposed to hoarding, now directly associated with landowners.

Consumers were not the only people describing the situation as a battleground between themselves and producers. A number of farmers and merchants identify the 'bas peuple'<sup>257</sup> or the 'populace'<sup>258</sup> 'ivre de la Liberté'<sup>259</sup> as being the perpetrators of this

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<sup>255</sup>Inhabitants of the cantons of Charente-Inférieure, Rochefort, 11 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.135 8.

<sup>256</sup>Sieur de Chalain, lieutenant de roi, Guise (Aisne), 12 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.50 32-34.

<sup>257</sup>Landowners, tenant farmers, farmers and merchants around Isigny (Calvados), 2 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.5 d.75 1.

<sup>258</sup>Three Merchants, Provins (Seine-et-Marne), 22 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.137 1, Sieur Dutertre des Aigremonts, general tenant farmer of the priory of Vivoin, Beaumont-le-Vicomte (Sarthe), from 14 to 29 March 1790 AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.56 13-15, Sieur Audemard, wheat merchant, Aix-en-Provence (Bouches-du-Rhône), from 24 to 25 January 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.6 d.86 11+12 among others.

<sup>259</sup>Sieur Audemard, wheat merchant, Aix-en-Provence (Bouches-du-Rhône) from 24 to 25 January 1790,

new wave of action against producers. In many cases it is their ignorance which is highlighted. 'Le Peuple a toujours envisagé avec haine les Negocians en bled' wrote Sieur Audemard, a wheat merchant in Aix-en-Provence (Bouches-du-Rhône), they are 'incapable de sentir qu'ils lui sont nécessaires, il calomnie les Spéculations qui le nourrissent, il rend responsables de la cherté de sa subsistence ceux qui la lui assurent'.<sup>260</sup> Whilst similarly regarding the people as unable to comprehend anything but high prices, a couple of merchants writing in joined the more proactive calls for granaries and grain censuses although it is not clear whether they are wheat merchants or merchants of another trade.<sup>261</sup> Other attempts were also made to suggest remedies to this problem, still with the theme of popular ignorance as its base; in May three wheat merchants from Bourg-Fidèle (Ardennes) suggested that the National Assembly decree that all schoolmasters familiarise children with the decrees on free circulation, this way the children could in turn educate their fathers to not engage in 'les injustices'.<sup>262</sup>

Above all, however, these individuals are united in their condemnation of municipalities. In general terms those who owned wheat denounced municipalities for seizing it off them as well as holding local authorities partly responsible for the seizures and violence of other citizens while those without wheat denounced municipalities for being complicit in hoarding practices. Two inhabitants of Lépaud (Creuse) who had their grain taken from them by several individuals from Chambon-sur-Voueize (Creuse) blamed the municipality of Chambon-sur-Voueize due to the fact that they had clearly not made their inhabitants aware of the decrees on free circulation.<sup>263</sup> Other landowners talk of populations acting with 'impunity',<sup>264</sup> a result, according to the landowners of Isigny (Calvados) of municipalities being weak and without any real power.<sup>265</sup> The national guard are no help to them, as the anonymous merchant from Périgueux explains 'il non que labit qui les distingue des autre', more

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AN DXXIXbis c.6 d.86 11+12.

<sup>260</sup>Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Sieur Debrun, merchant, La Capelle (Aisne), 15 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.6 d.88 3+4 and Anonymous merchant, Périgueux, August 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.134 26.

<sup>262</sup>Three Wheat Merchants, Bourg-Fidèle (Ardennes), 27 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.6 d.81 27+28.

<sup>263</sup>Two inhabitants of Lépaud (Creuse), 24 August 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.127 16.

<sup>264</sup> Landowners, tenant farmers, farmers and merchants around Isigny (Calvados), 2 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.5 d.75 1.

<sup>265</sup>Ibid.

than half are suffering with the same hunger as the rioters they are supposed to be controlling.<sup>266</sup> Four tenant farmers from Poussy (Calvados) complained similarly about members of the militia in November 1789, when they wrote that these *bas-officiers* refuse to oppose brigandage because they were friends and relatives of those who committed it.<sup>267</sup>

On the other side, those denouncing hoarding often saw municipalities as paying no attention to the abuse<sup>268</sup> or even committing the hoarding themselves.<sup>269</sup> Sieur Maupillier, a notary from Chapelle-Saint-Laurent (Deux-Sèvres) reported that people had very little confidence in municipalities, as they were mostly composed of bourgeois landowners, saying 'la plus part des municipallité et autres gens aizés ne tendent que pour leurs interest particuliers'.<sup>270</sup>

In their letters, municipalities confirmed this state of affairs. It would appear that they had very little room for manoeuvre in the face of pressure from inhabitants, landowners, new district authorities and the need to ensure that the National Assembly's decree on free circulation was adhered to. The Municipality of Roscoff (Finistère) stated in January 1790 that their agreement to send to the National Assembly the complaints of their inhabitants was their last resource in the battle they were fighting to maintain public tranquility. They despaired that the slightest preference shown to commerce put them in the firing line of their populace.<sup>271</sup> By April 1790 many municipalities joined the municipal authorities of Tarascon (Bouches-du-Rhône), Marmande (Lot-et-Garonne) and Merville (Nord) and no doubt others who had already given in to duress from below,<sup>272</sup> writing in to the Assembly

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<sup>266</sup> Anonymous merchant, Périgueux, 24 August 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.134 26.

<sup>267</sup> Several tenant farmers, Poussy (Calvados), 12 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.257 35+36.

<sup>268</sup> Sieur Laugier, national soldier, Apt (Vaucluse), 12 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.138 3, Inhabitant of La Rochelle, 22 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.5 d.75 11.

<sup>269</sup> Anonymous, 6 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.129 6, Anonymous, Tarascon (Bouches-du-Rhône), 22 August 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.11 d.123 7.

<sup>270</sup> Sieur Maupillier, notary, Chapelle-Saint-Laurent (Deux-Sèvres), 18 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.13 d.139 5.

<sup>271</sup> Municipality of Roscoff, Roscoff (Finistère), 11 January 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.44 6.

<sup>272</sup> Municipality and Permanent Committee of Tarascon (Bouches-du-Rhône), 27 October 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.23 9, Members of the Committee of Marmande (Lot-et-Garonne), from 24 to 26 October 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.25 d.254 29-31, Municipal Officers of Merville (Nord), December 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.37 19+22.

that they could no longer guarantee the free circulation of grain. Municipalities such as that of Varennes-sur-Allier (Allier), Montlhéry (Seine-et-Oise) and the mayor of Drosay (Seine-Inférieure)<sup>273</sup> argued that they had no force to prevent people from seizing grain and setting a price for it. These admissions caused embarrassment in some,<sup>274</sup> and appeals for the National Assembly to understand all the sacrifices and attempts to avoid it made in others.<sup>275</sup>

Other Municipalities however were more defiant when declaring they had not followed the decrees on free circulation. Many positioned themselves on the side of their citizens. The Municipality of Romarantin (Loir-et-Cher) even called for the Assembly to approve damage charges to be brought against a M. Baranger, landowner of the area who, through his own cupidity and unwillingness to provide for his fellow citizens in such difficult times, necessitated the spending of considerable funds to assure his personal security.<sup>276</sup> The Municipality of Sainte-Menehould (Marne) took a similar line when defending the seizure by their inhabitants of wheat destined for Metz saying that the liberty of circulation is simply used as a cover for the liberty of hoarding.<sup>277</sup> In the background to all their decisions was a hungry populace. In these circumstances municipalities such as that of Bertric (Dordogne) saw the choice about whether to honour the decrees as clear; 'Il sembleroit nos Seigneurs que dans de pareilles circonstances un riche propriétaire qui auroit dans ses greniers une quantité considerable de grains [...] devroit s'empreser d'ouvrier ses greniers à ses voisins' for them 'il se peut qu'il n'existe à cet egard que des loix dictée par l'humanité'.<sup>278</sup> Members of the committee of Pessac (Gironde) were so appalled by the quality of bread on offer to their inhabitants that they sent a sample of it to the Assembly saying

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<sup>273</sup>Curé-mayor of Drosay (Seine-Inférieure), 27 April 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.5 d.69 20, Municipality of Varennes-sur-Allier (Allier), 8 June 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.6 d.89 22 and Municipality of Montlhéry (Seine-et-Oise), from 13 to 15 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.133 29+30.

<sup>274</sup>Municipality of Roscoff (Finistère), 11 January 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.44 6 and Municipality of Montlhéry (Seine-et-Oise), from 13 to 15 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.133 29+30 and Municipality of Chazelles-sur-Lyon (Loire), from 18 to 30 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.7 d.99 15+16.

<sup>275</sup>Mayor of Ladapeyre (Creuse), 20 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.6 d.95 19, Municipality of Doudeville (Seine-Inférieure), 26 April 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.5 d.69 21 and Sieur Guignet, former mayor of Duras, administrator of the district of Marmande (Lot-et-Garonne), 28 June 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.7 d.100 6, Municipality of Parthenay (Deux-Sèvres), 12 March 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.54 21.

<sup>276</sup>Municipality of Romarantin (Loir-et-Cher), 14 August 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.134 16.

<sup>277</sup>Municipality of Saint-Menehould (Marne), 27 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.5 d.78 11-22.

<sup>278</sup>Municipality of Bertric (Dordogne), 27 April 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.6 d.87 6+7.

'vos coeurs vont frémir'.<sup>279</sup>

But some municipalities were not so allied with their population. Municipalities like that of Marcigny (Saône-et-Loire) wrote in to ask for the sending of troops to quell popular dissent,<sup>280</sup> the municipality of Guémené (Morbihan) wrote asking for a court to be set up in the town to deal with those arrested in protests<sup>281</sup> and others wrote in to tell of such arrests made and sentences given.<sup>282</sup> The municipality of Saint-Maixent (Sarthe) even submitted the dispute they were having with their inhabitants over perceived unlawful arrests during a protest where women marched through the town led by a young man playing the violin. While a letter from the inhabitants claimed no criminal act had taken place, the municipality argued that the *citoyennes* arrested had caused alarm and posed a threat to their authority.<sup>283</sup>

It was not only the relationship with their own citizens that posed problems for municipalities; the pressures of managing the decree of free circulation at a time when stores were running low also brought them into conflict with other municipalities. Large towns, which had long been reliant on the surrounding countryside for their subsistence,<sup>284</sup> were in dispute with smaller surrounding towns and communes who refused to contribute to their provision whilst small towns and communes were outraged at the attempts made by their large neighbours to procure wheat from them, often through means that were in violation of the free trade policy.

The Committee of Research was more involved in this type of dispute once its members had become permanent after April 1790. After this point it sent more letters ordering the municipalities who were not following the free circulation of grain to start doing so. This was particularly evident for example in the case of wheat getting to Gex

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<sup>279</sup>Members of the Committee of Pessac (Gironde), n.d., AN DXXIXbis c.25 d.253 17.

<sup>280</sup>Municipality of Marcigny (Saône-et-Loire), from 20 to 21 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.6 d.87 3-5.

<sup>281</sup>Municipality of Guémené (Morbihan), from 31 May to 7 June 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.6 d.91 1-5.

<sup>282</sup>Municipality of Bernay (Eure), 14 June 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.7 d.100 4 and Municipality of Remiremont (Vosges), from 4 May 1790 to 25 June 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.7 d.99 12-14.

<sup>283</sup>Some inhabitants of Saint-Maixent and the Municipality of Saint-Maixent (Sarthe), from 30 August to 11 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.13 d.141 6+7.

<sup>284</sup>Peter Mcphee, 'The Economy, Society, and the Environment' in *A Companion to the French Revolution*, ed. by Peter Mcphee (United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p.458.

(Ain), whose deputies transmitted a letter to the committee from the municipality in October 1789. In this they complained that the municipalities of Saint-Claude (Jura) and Nantua (Ain) had been obstructing the transport of grain needed to support the troops stationed there who performed the vital job of preventing export across the borders.<sup>285</sup> Whether their need was considered important due to this function of sustaining troops, or whether it was that the deputies of Gex were involved, most likely it was due to the consolidation of the Committee itself but five months later the Committee of Research wrote to both the municipalities of Saint-Claude and Nantua ordering them to not impede Gex's grain purchases. These letters were not received well, and it is unclear whether the Committee posted replies to the letters received in response from the two municipalities, both adamant that they were right to limit Gex's supply.<sup>286</sup>

Other local authorities asked for the Committee's indulgence. After having received approval from the Committee of Research in July for their decision to suspend an assembly of people which was producing 'un mouvement tumultueux dans le peuple' the authorities of Soissons were unable to continue to do so.<sup>287</sup> The Committee of the National Guard of Soissons (Aisne), accused of blocking the transport of grain to Metz, said they wished the inhabitants wanted to maintain the decrees of the National Assembly as much as they did but those taking part in the prevention of free circulation, for the most part women and non-active citizens, believed they were acting in the interests of the nation as they held suspicions that the needs of Metz was just a cover for the intended supply of Austrian troops. They would have used force had they and the Municipality of Soissons not feared that the non-active members of the National Guard would turn on the active ones.<sup>288</sup>

They were unlikely to get indulgence from a Committee that was increasingly intolerant of dissent. At the beginning of May 1790 the National Assembly had

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<sup>285</sup>Girod de Thoiry and Girod de Chévy, deputies of the communes of the bailliage of Gex (Ain), from 29 September to 19 October 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.25 d.254bis 8-10.

<sup>286</sup>Municipal Officers of Saint-Claude (Jura), 24 March 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.55 16 and Municipal Officers of Nantua (Ain), 15 March 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.53 1.

<sup>287</sup>8 July 1790, AP, 16:761-766.

<sup>288</sup>Committee of the National Guard of Soissons (Aisne), 17 August 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.13 d.148 27.

charged the Committee of Research to redouble its efforts to prevent any obstruction to the decree on free circulation.<sup>289</sup> Later that month the Committee of Research put together a report on measures to educate and discipline the populace.<sup>290</sup> On 13 September 1790 Voidel outlined the Committee's view on the letters it had received complaining of hoarding in a report to the National Assembly. In this he claimed that the committee had received a multitude of letters on hoarding, none of which could point to specific facts, hoarding, or fears of hoarding were being used by enemies of the *bien public* to excite the countryside against the towns and the poor against the well-off.<sup>291</sup>

It seems that letter writers in the first nine months of 1790 had for the most part pushed aside the discussions on the long-term viability of free circulation that had been the root of the communications of 1789. In its place short-term intervention was called for in the management of the decree, by landowners who faced grain seizures and price fixing, ordinary citizens who saw the decree as facilitating hoarding and export and municipalities who, regardless of where they believed their loyalties should lie, faced dissidence, inter-municipal rivalry and universal shortages.

By September 1790 letters began to be sent by department authorities, particularly relating to a wave of insurrection that appears to have occurred around the area of Brittany and the west. But, while some letters reporting exports of wheat abroad continued into 1791, voices on subsistence had quietened to almost nothing. It may be that fears relating to subsistence matters had not abated but were now being sent to department authorities rather than the state. Indeed the Directory of the Department of the Sarthe reported in September 1790 that they received complaints about various removals of wheat from the region everyday.<sup>292</sup> However it is also likely that popular concerns had shifted in the face of a much improved harvest, as we will see in coming chapters; as letters relating to subsistence declined, those relating to fears of counter-revolution began to increase.

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<sup>289</sup> 5 May 1790, AP, 15:389-390.

<sup>290</sup> Record of report by Committee of Research, 27 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.44 d.417 130.

<sup>291</sup> 13 September 1790, AP, 18:722-723.

<sup>292</sup> Directory of the Department of the Sarthe, from 9 to 19 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.135 14-21.



The movement of communications to the state from envisaging long-term possibilities in the organisation of subsistence to calls for short-term intervention mirrors a change occurring in the experience of Revolution. This could be described as the emergence of intense social conflict from what had been in 1789 a more optimistic and society-wide belief that each citizen could play a role in political and social change. The autumn of 1789, while dominated by anxiety, fears of scarcity and complaints about high prices, was also the time of the greatest society-wide engagement in imagining various methods of alleviating subsistence problems. They were offering practical solutions to real problems as expressions of popular sovereignty. Into 1790 letters were less likely to present themselves as contributions to the building of national legislation, and were instead more reactive with a narrower focus on social conflict.

Why did this development occur? Much is down to the National Assembly. When on the 5 October 1789 the National Assembly decided to allocate these communications to the Committee of Research rather than the Subsistence Committee it expressed not only a firm attachment to the decree of free circulation but also a lack of toleration for any obstructions to the trade.<sup>293</sup> This was greatly problematic for municipalities who faced shortages without any means of alleviating them. With no response or remedial action offered by the state, municipalities and citizens were left to fight amongst themselves.

It was not only that the Committee of Research was, like the Assembly in general, dedicated to the free circulation of grain but also that they failed to interpret the denunciation of hoarding as the voice of the non-producer, that is to say as calls by non-producers for the National Assembly to address the fact that subsistence rested in the hands of those who owned land. In a limiting and ultimately exclusionary manner the committee viewed hoarding fears as the consequence of rumour and ignorance.

In the next chapter we will look further into the phenomenon of denunciation to examine how the practice served as a mechanism through which people could express their involvement in the Revolution and their visions of the new regime.

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<sup>293</sup>5 October 1789, AP, 9:348.



### Chapter 3

#### Denunciation

*Un Dénonciateur [...] est un homme public qui, par horreur du vice, par amour de la vertu, & toujours par les grandes vues de l'intérêt général, scrute d'un regard profond les oeuvres secretes des agens de l'autorité, & se fait un devoir de révéler des abus douloureux, des erreurs dangereuses, quelquefois des atrocités...dont l'accumulation ignorée auroit étouffé en peu de temps la voix plaintive des malheureux* comte de Gouy d'Artsy, 1790<sup>294</sup>

Given its role as a functional part of totalitarian state terror, the practice of denunciation is often understood to be at best an expression of paranoia and at worst a tool of vengeance and political jostling.<sup>295</sup> The historiographical grappling with the definition of denunciation mirrors the same problem encountered by revolutionaries in 1789; namely what distinguishes *dénonciation* from the *délation* (informing) of the Old Regime. For Colin Lucas, who wrote an article on denunciation in the French Revolution, there was very little difference between the two; indeed, the notion of a difference was symptomatic of the inherently dangerous revolutionary attachment to the ideals of virtue and publicity.<sup>296</sup> Like other revisionist histories this view centres on the Revolution as primarily a political event in which denouncing was the same as informing only re-branded as an act of virtue. In the work of François Furet, denunciation was part of discourse on conspiracy, utilised in the scramble for power amongst elites even as early as 1789.<sup>297</sup> Under this persuasion one could only dismiss as nothing but rhetoric the definition of a denouncer given by comte de Gouy, who saw denunciation as a recourse through which instances of institutional abuse could be

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<sup>294</sup> Gouy D'Artsy, Louis Henri Marthe de, Marquis, *Première dénonciation solennelle d'un ministre faite à l'Assemblée nationale, en la personne du comte de la Luzerne, Ministre d'État, de la Marine, et des Colonies, par le comte de Gouy, député de Saint-Domingue, au nom de la députation & de ses commettans, etc.* (Paris 1790).

<sup>295</sup> *Accusatory Practices; Denunciation in Modern European History 1789-1989*, ed. by Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), Introduction.

<sup>296</sup> Colin Lucas, 'The Theory and Practice of Denunciation in the French Revolution' in *Accusatory Practices; Denunciation in Modern European History 1789-1989*, ed. by Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>297</sup> François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. by Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp.66-69.

raised. Even recent histories of the Revolution that feature denunciation condemn it as a practice that stemmed from fear and mistrust, seeing early denunciations as part of a culture that prefigured the Terror.<sup>298</sup>

Charles Walton however has resisted the temptation to view denunciation in the Revolution through the lens of the twentieth century and reasserted it as a phenomenon that belonged culturally to its time. In his work on calumny in the Revolution Walton described the denunciation of speech and writing as a product of the democratic and disciplinary tendencies of the Revolution. Denunciations were an opportunity for people to show adherence to revolutionary values and loyalty to the state whilst 'giving vent' to 'collective outrage'.<sup>299</sup> Denunciations of calumny also served the purpose of proposing where the boundaries of free speech lay.<sup>300</sup> In this last point Walton broadens his definition to include a sense of denunciation as an informative and democratic exercise.

The comte de Gouy when he wrote his definition of a denouncer was describing this democratic exercise, not as a means of expressing his own political ideals, but as an observation of what was already a political reality. Denunciation in the early years of the revolution was *in itself* a democratic act. French men and women addressed themselves directly to the state, not only professing commitment to revolutionary sensibility but also using the medium to articulate their own authority within it. The great majority of denunciations at this time conformed to the comte de Gouy's statement above; it was not neighbours who were denounced, but those holding various degrees of political power. Denunciation was not the practice of malice but of political praxis; their purpose was to build the new regime locally.

Denunciation in this period emerged as a means through which individuals and nascent institutions could lay claim to new political powers. Local authorities used denunciation to derive legitimacy from the state. Individuals used it to demand the

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<sup>298</sup> Timothy Tackett, *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp.128-135.

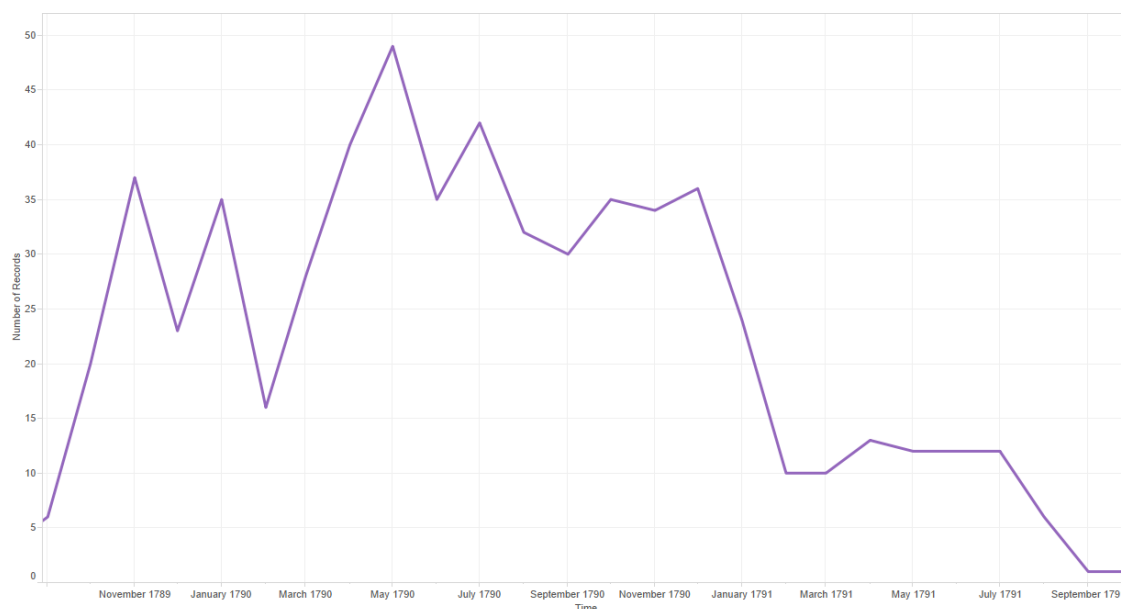
<sup>299</sup> Charles Walton, *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution: The Culture of Calumny and the Problem of Free Speech* (Oxford University Press), p.122.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*

justice they believed was owed to them in line with the principles of the new regime. All were a product of local political struggles through which the nature of the new regime was to be decided.

A great number of denunciations were sent to the Committee of Research under its remit of receiving communications related to the security of the State. However not all denunciations were directly related to counter-revolutionary activities. Most in the first year of the Revolution dealt with individuals or institutions that were involved in abuses of power, criminal or antisocial behaviour. These types of denunciations were sent at a relatively steady pace for most of 1790.

**Figure 12: Letters classified as ‘Denunciation’ over time**



We can see from this graph of denunciations that there was a general rising trend in the number of denunciations<sup>301</sup> sent up until December 1790 from which point there was a rapid decline. Denunciations increased at a time when the consequences of the tumultuous events of the summer of 1789 were beginning to take shape. Most of the municipal revolutions were completed by November 1789 when the first peak in denunciations occurred. The decree issued by the National Assembly on 14 December 1789 which instituted municipal elections and a new administrative system seems to

<sup>301</sup> Excluded from these are denunciations related to subsistence, religion and counter-revolution.

have had the effect of channelling democratic energy from denunciation to the election process – only four of the denunciations sent in December were sent after 14 December. Denunciations began to increase again in March 1790. Between April 1790 and January 1791, they remained at a level of an average of around forty-five letters a month. This also corresponds with the consolidation of the Committee of Research itself, to which denunciations were increasingly addressed as opposed to being transferred. A great many institutional changes were underway in this period including the implementation of the new system of departments and districts as well as the growing power of political societies. Once these institutions were established they no doubt filtered many of the denunciations that would have previously been sent straight to the National Assembly. Denunciations increased again briefly at the time of the King's Flight, although many more denunciations relating to counter-revolution were sent in July and August 1791.

### Denunciation: A Definition

The historical specificity of denunciation in this period is apparent from the grapplings with the definition of the denunciation at the time. The question of defining denunciation is not only difficult for the historian, but was also greatly important to contemporaries in relation to the key question of how the new regime differed from the old. For Colin Lucas the 'function and necessity of denunciation resided in the fragility of a Revolution perceived to be surrounded by pervasive and dangerous enemies' which he describes as 'banal self-evidence'.<sup>302</sup> This, however, is not how denunciation was entirely conceived of in the first years of the Revolution. Much of the discussion around denunciation at the time related to its function as a means by which popular sovereignty could be expressed, in particular by denouncing abuses of authority. Practically, this popular sovereignty was already being expressed in the very fact that denunciations were sent at all. Nonetheless it was important for revolutionaries and denouncers themselves to define the practice.

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<sup>302</sup>Colin Lucas, 'The Theory and Practice of Denunciation in the French Revolution', p.769.

This was to some extent a result of the historical implications of the word. In dictionaries of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the word '*dénonciateur*' was described as someone who hands another individual over to justice, but it also appeared as a synonym of 'délateur', which was defined as someone who secretly hands over information for financial reward.<sup>303</sup> In practice denunciation was used to describe a process during the *ancien régime* by which one could initiate trials; around five percent of trials were initiated this way. But the burden of association with *délation* was ever present, as Albert Hamscher notes denunciation as a means of provoking trials came under scrutiny from judges as it operated 'a thin line between selfless public service [...] and the potential abuse of malicious prosecution' particularly as the identity of the denouncer could remain secret, revealed only if the defendant was found not guilty.<sup>304</sup>

By the beginning of 1789 the use of the word *dénonciation* had shifted. By tracing the use of the term in the *cahiers de doléances* of 1789 we can see the increasing importance of the notion of the 'public'. The 'nation' or 'public' were increasingly to be the receivers of the information given by denouncers; they were not only to be directed to the judiciary. For example a handful of *cahiers* used the expression 'denonciation à la nation' in a stock phrase describing how the role of the *parlements* or Provincial Estates as regulatory bodies should continue to keep the Kings ministers in check by denouncing any misdeeds to the nation.<sup>305</sup> In the *cahier* of the nobility of Vitry-le-François it was even envisaged that denunciation be extended as a tool by inhabitants and syndics to make known instances where the policing of the *corvée* had been neglected by local judges.<sup>306</sup> This idea was to a certain extent pre-empting the manner in which denunciation would be used as a means of holding authority to account in the Revolution.

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<sup>303</sup>*Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (France, 1762) <<https://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/content/dictionnaires-dautrefois>> [accessed: 15 August 2016]

<sup>304</sup>Albert N. Hamscher, *The Royal Financial Administration and the Prosecution of Crime in France 1670-1789* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2012), pp.18-19.

<sup>305</sup>See for example the cahiers of the Nobility of Auch, AP, 2:94, Nobility of Lauraguais, AP, 2:556, Nobility of Etain, AP, 2:214, and the Third Estate of Bigorre, AP, 2:360.

<sup>306</sup>The *corvée* was a feudal obligation in the form of unpaid labour, AP, 6:212.

With the outbreak of Revolution, and with it the transfer of sovereignty from the King to the Nation, the term *dénonciation* was linked further in public dialogue with the notion of publicity, and unlike in the *cahiers* it was not limited to the *parlements* or as a practice of last resort within existing structures but came to be understood as an expression of popular sovereignty and even a 'civic duty'.<sup>307</sup>

In the press the term was initially the subject of intense debate; how to dispense with the overlap of *dénonciation* and *délation*, given the latter was associated with the closed and secret politics of the *ancien régime*. In December 1789 Camille Desmoulins and Jean-François de La Harpe debated in the newspapers *Mercure* and *Révolutions de la France et de Brabant* whether *délation* could be rehabilitated as a synonym of *dénonciation* or whether indeed the two ought to be distinguished from each other. La Harpe argued that the denouncer, unlike the informer, denounced a crime that troubled order 'publicly' and 'authentically' with proof, Desmoulins countered this by arguing that denouncing counter-revolution and informing against an individual acting against the rights of man were in effect both defences of these rights.<sup>308</sup> For the archetypal denouncer, Jean-Paul Marat, denunciation was a necessary mechanism to prevent the state being run by criminals, but he was wary of possible misuse of the practice and like La Harpe believed that publicity would safeguard it, writing that anonymous denunciations must not be tolerated.<sup>309</sup>

The Committee of Research would follow La Harpe by dismissing a denunciation as a *délation* due to it being 'vague and unsubstantiated'.<sup>310</sup> But in the denunciations sent to them the distinction between *délation* and *dénonciation* is rarely made. Indeed the words '*dénoncer*', '*informer*', '*accuser*' were used fairly interchangeably in letters that

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<sup>307</sup>This concept is clearly stated by Etienne Barry in his "Essay on Political Denunciation" of July 1793, see Albert Soboul, *The Sans-Culottes: The Popular Movement and Revolutionary Government, 1793-1794* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), p.143.

<sup>308</sup> Christiane Kohser-Spohn, et Michaela Hohkamp, 'La Dénonciation ou l'Apprentissage de la Docilité Citoyenne' in *Revue Européenne d'Histoire*, 7, (2000) 33-43 (p.34).

<sup>309</sup>Jean-Paul Marat, *L'Ami du Peuple*, (13 November 1789)

<<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1046572b.item>> [accessed 3 August 2016]

<sup>310</sup>See for example the response by the Committee of Research to a letter from a sieur Roussel, 1 August 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.44 d.417 16.



were in essence practising the same thing: that is writing to the National Assembly or Committee of Research to accuse an individual or institution of wrongdoing.<sup>311</sup> But these debates over the definition of denunciation, whilst not explicitly present in the denunciations sent to the Committee of Research were still nonetheless reflected, or were reflections of, a recognition of the importance of transparency to the practice that is discernible from many letters.

This is particularly evident in relation to anonymity. Anonymity was widely discouraged not just by Marat and other political figures but also in the popular imagination; several *cahiers* called for more freedom of the press but explicitly excluded anonymous writings.<sup>312</sup> Despite this, six percent of the denunciations sent to the Committee of Research were anonymous. Many included an explanation of why they remained anonymous for the most part on the grounds of the dangers they faced. One anonymous denunciation of incendiary writing wrote that 'mon coeur est navré de ne pouvoir point dire ouvertement ma façon de penser' but that those who thought differently from him may even plot his death if he did so.<sup>313</sup> Another denouncing the cutting of unripe grain wrote that he had not included his name because he feared 'les jens isont vindicatiffe et pourrait marivee quelque maleur [*sic*].'<sup>314</sup> An anonymous writer denouncing the parlement of Toulouse wrote that he would have signed but this 'aristocratic' body still in operation could take revenge on him as they had done to a justice officer, arrested by the parlement for his role in the writing of the local *cahiers* which called for justice reform.<sup>315</sup> Occasionally some were more defiant in the face of the possibility of their denunciation being discounted due to it coming from an anonymous source. One such author wrote that his anonymity 'nenpêche pas que je soy un bon et vray citoyen [*sic*].'<sup>316</sup>

So whilst there was in many an awareness of the importance of transparency, it was by

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<sup>311</sup>For this reason I have included letters in this chapter that do not identify as denunciations but which take much the same form as those that did.

<sup>312</sup>Cahier of the Clergy of the sénéchaussée of Angoumois, AP, 2:1, Cahier of the Community of Ventabres, AP, 6:439.

<sup>313</sup>Anonymous, 2 January 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.43 2.

<sup>314</sup>Anonymous, Saint-Germain-lès-Couilly (Seine-et-Marne), 14 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.5 d.70 7.

<sup>315</sup>Anonymous, Toulouse, 22 September 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.21 14+15.

<sup>316</sup>Anonymous, Turin, 3 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.23 20.

no means an essential part of the practice of denunciation. Nonetheless the fine line that Hamscher recognises in *ancien régime* denunciation between selfless public service and malicious intent was still something that people were highly attuned to. Perhaps the greatest example of this is the fact that many felt they needed to justify their denunciations. Most stressed the duty they felt as citizens, often claiming that they were writing in the general interest, and not in a personal capacity. This was also expressed by frequent invocations of the 'public' as the victims. Jeopardising 'le bonheur du peuple',<sup>317</sup> and 'la tranquillité publique',<sup>318</sup> were common components of denounced crimes. The manner in which the term 'public' was used was indicative of the change in the broadening importance of the notion; the public were the victims, the beneficiaries, and in some cases the jury. This is line with the changing concept of 'public opinion' as identified by Keith Baker. Baker argued that in the later years of the *ancien régime* the term was a political construct used to provide legitimacy to competing powers.<sup>319</sup>

But these terms were not just abstract concepts. 'Public' was also used to simply mean people. For instance a captain of the merchant navy was denounced for having the audacity to order the 'public' to leave a performance of a play.<sup>320</sup> The compound form was similarly used to describe a set number of people; one inebriated elected official who broke into the local distillery, was accused of disturbing the 'repos publique' due to 'L'interruption de plusieurs habitans qui ont été fort allarmé [*sic*]'<sup>321</sup> This suggests that the use of 'public' was in flux and tied up with wider attempts to define and enact the notion of popular sovereignty. It was used to provide legitimacy to denunciations both as a term that invoked an ultimate political authority, and because it represented a material collective: local people with a shared objective.

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<sup>317</sup>For example Anonymous, Colombey-lès-Choiseul (Haute-Marne), 20 April 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.29 d.294 25.

<sup>318</sup>For example M.Neuilly, lieutenant-colonel of the regiment of Mestre-Camp-Général-Dragons, Neufchâteau (Vosges), from 20 to 23 August 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.126 33.

<sup>319</sup>Keith Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.167-199.

<sup>320</sup>Sieur Bernodau, Man of Law, Bordeaux, 22 February 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.18 d.192 17.

<sup>321</sup>Several inhabitants of Auxy-le-Chateau (Pas-de-Calais), 11 October 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.29 d.295 9.

The fact that these denunciations justified themselves by appeals to the rights of citizenship further suggests that the act of denunciation was not an entrenched concept. 'L'interest que tout citoyen doit prendre à la chose publique m'engage a vous supplier de vouloir bien dénoncer à l'assemblée nationale [*sic*]',<sup>322</sup> 'Tout homme qui pense est mauvais citoyen, S'il ne vous denonce ce qui a sa connoissance pourroit porter atteinte et prejudicier au chef d'oeuvre du patriotisme et de la liberté',<sup>323</sup> 'La Constitution nous fait un devoir de dénoncer les abus de Pouvoir.'<sup>324</sup> These are all examples of how denunciations were understood by their authors to be civic acts, and also how the concept of denunciation as a civic act was by no means routine, if it had been there would be no need for these communications to justify themselves in such a way. If we look at this process of defining denunciation as a constituent part of the act of sending denunciations it is clear that this process was not only an exercise in crafting ideological coherence, more importantly it was an organic response to the enactment of popular sovereignty.

The process of defining denunciation was thus part of the phenomenon. Public discourse on the difference between *délation* and *dénonciation* clearly emerged as a means of conceptualising the new practice. Over a year in to the Revolution one letter asked, for the benefit of a friend, how to carry out a denunciation, another had read in the papers that the Committee of Research had been set up to look into 'knaveries', and even directed the committee on how to respond to their denunciation.<sup>325</sup> There was clearly a change in the definition of denunciation that tied it through permutable notions of the public, citizenship and popular sovereignty to local political struggle. The unique use of denunciation in the early years of the Revolution is not only in evidence through the change in the definition of the word but also in the nature of the letters themselves.

### Democratising Authority

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<sup>322</sup>Sieur Choiset, Châlons-sur-Marne, 31 December 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.43 3.

<sup>323</sup>Sieur Trottin, notary, Coullons (Loiret), 30 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.262 12.

<sup>324</sup>Sieur Bernodau, Man of Law, Bordeaux, 22 February 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.18 d.192 17.

<sup>325</sup>Sieur Bellin, Vernoux (Ardèche), 28 June 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.7 d.101 10 and Anonymous, 20 April 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.29 d.293 16.

The novelty of the practice is not just revealed by the manner in which people defined it, but by clear differences in authorship and content that distinguished it from *ancien régime* practices. Petitioning the King was perhaps the most obvious parallel practice under the *ancien régime* to the writing of denunciations in the Revolution. Petitioning was a key means through which the governed and the governors interacted. However, there was a great difference in register, authorship and intent between *ancien régime* petitions and communications to the National Assembly.<sup>326</sup> In terms of register denunciations written to the National Assembly were decidedly less deferential although some did retain elements of supplication. An anonymous writer from Thionville began their denunciation with: 'Mesieugneur de lasemblé nationale nous avons recour à votre misericorde [*sic*].'<sup>327</sup> Similar pleas to be given justice were made in other denunciations. One doctor wrote in his 'mémoire ou denonciation'<sup>328</sup> that 'nous osons espere M.M. que vous voudrèz bien entendre nos raisons et nous rendre justice [*sic*].'<sup>329</sup> However these elements were for the most part only expressed in the opening lines of denunciations. Many others were not deferential at all, and instead expressed their rights to be heard. An anonymous author from Cambrai began their denunciation with the belief that 'Quand on se signale par des Bienfaits, on a droit de la reconnaissance, et c'est a titre qui m'a fait prendre la plume [*sic*]',<sup>330</sup> the Sieur Estagniol, knight of Saint-Louis declared that 'homme et cytoyen, cés deux qualités me donent le droit de reclamer votre justice [*sic*].'<sup>331</sup> A sieur Venter begun his denunciation with 'Veillez interrompre quelques instant vos penibles travaux pour donner votre attention à mon Recit'.<sup>332</sup>

This difference in register is observable in the space of a few months. Whilst there are a great many variables to be taken into account, differences in authorship and purpose,

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<sup>326</sup>See Introduction pp. 9-10.

<sup>327</sup>Anonymous from Thionville (Moselle), 20 October 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.21 19.

<sup>328</sup>Another example of the flexibility of the term denunciation.

<sup>329</sup>Sieur Laugier, medical doctor and professor at the college of Marseille, 26 August 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.126 35.

<sup>330</sup>Anonymous from Cambrai (Nord), 7 December 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.28 6.

<sup>331</sup>Sieur d'Estagniol, Knight of Saint Louis, Marville (Meuse), 6 January 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.39 1.

<sup>332</sup>Sieur Venter, Bayonne (Basses-Pyrénées), 20 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.35 19.

it is nonetheless worth noting the contrast between *cahiers de doléances* and letters written to the National Assembly during the Revolution. One of the more stark examples that can be used here is between an anonymous letter sent from Heudicourt, a little commune in Normandy, denouncing counter-revolutionary preparations, in which there is no reverence at all and in which it is assumed that the National Assembly will promptly intervene<sup>333</sup> and the cahiers de doléances of the Third Estate of the same parish, in which the authors referred to themselves in third person and devoted several lines to declarations of love and loyalty to the sacred body of the King.<sup>334</sup>

Denunciations were written from a range of authors of different abilities. Although rare, some denunciations show that the practice was considered an option for those hitherto excluded from political life. A monk of the Cistercian abbey of Grandselve in Bouillac (Tarn-et-Garonne) denouncing the prior hoped that the deputies of the National Assembly would not compromise him due to his being 'inferior'.<sup>335</sup> This feeling of inferiority was probably more to do with the hierarchy within the church than in society at large for the rare letters that appear to come from the lower orders do not mention their lower standing. Usually anonymous, only identifiable by poor handwriting and spelling these tended to be more direct than other letters. One anonymous letter reassured the Assembly that he would 'taché toujours de metre en surete vautre auguste asemblé, lors que je pourai découvrir des chause einteresante jaurai lhonneur de vous en faire par [*sic*]'.<sup>336</sup> A self-declared peasant even denounced two priests for insulting him on his way to the mill to grind the little grain he had.<sup>337</sup> Both these authors considered their denunciations to be of great importance.

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<sup>333</sup> Anonymous, Heudicourt (Somme), 27 October 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.32 d.336 3.

<sup>334</sup> We cannot, of course, know whether the contributors to this cahiers de doléances were the same as the contributors to the denunciation, although according to the *cahiers*, all 19 inhabitants who knew how to sign, signed it. However a quick look at the quality of the text, the spelling and grammar, indicates that the person who wrote it was not the same.

*Cahiers de Doleances de la parroisse d'Heudicourt*,  
<membres.multimania.fr/cabinethistoire/heudicourt/vcd.doc.> [accessed 1 May 2013]

<sup>335</sup> Brother of the Cistercian Abbey of Grandselve in Bouillac (Tarn-et-Garonne), 5 December 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.32 26.

<sup>336</sup> Anonymous, 4 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.32 d.338 48.

<sup>337</sup> Anonymous, Noisy-le-Sec (Seine-et-Oise), 24 October 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.21 13.

The few denunciations written by women also suggested that they too believed their denunciations were important and part of a great revolutionary project. One woman, signed Hérard, denounced a prophetess for predicting the return of the *ancien régime*.

Si l'amour de la liberté porta l'entousiasme dans tous les coeurs vraiment français, craignez que le fanatisme ne renverse cette idôle chérié élevée par vos mains [...] la voix d'un faux prophètes peut y porter de nouveaux troubles, et renverser pour jamais ces beaux sixtemes de fraternité et de patriotisme qui animent aujourd'hui tous les bons citoyens. L'amour de ma patrie et celui du bon ordre m'animent seuls, j'ai rempli ma mission auprès de vous [*sic*].<sup>338</sup>

Although not explicit, the sense that the Revolution was universal, and of interest to both men and women is evident. This sentiment is also present in a denunciation of the National Guard of Dompaigne (Vosges) written by Marie-Catherine de Feriet, widow of the former *prévôt* of Dompaigne. She finished her letter writing that the National Assembly not only brought about 'Le miracle d'une fraternité entre tous les françois, mais même la fraternité de tous les peuples de l'europe'.<sup>339</sup>

### Legitimising Authority

Whilst denunciation provided opportunity for many to express their revolutionary enthusiasm and take part in the political process, the new institutions that arose out of the flux simultaneously used the practice to legitimise their positions as arms of the state. This was necessary largely due to the way in which these institutions were formed; the process of dismantling the old regime in its local form was autonomous, in some areas it did not happen at all until after the National Assembly's decree of the 14 December.<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>338</sup>Dame Herard, Beigne (Charente), 8 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.44 d.417 105.

<sup>339</sup>Marie-Catherine de Feriet, Dompaigne (Vosges), May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.6 d.84 15.

<sup>340</sup>See Lynn Hunt, 'Committees and Communes: Local Politics and National Revolution in 1789' in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 18 (July 1976) 321-346.

Early denunciations written by some of these bodies reveal the precariousness of their situations as they called upon the authority of the National Assembly. The Permanent Committee of Saint-Nicolas-de-Port (Meurthe-et-Moselle) elected by the commune appealed to the Assembly in December to authorise their management of the administration in the face of opposition from the former municipal corps. They complained that these former officers refused to acknowledge them, attached ridiculous epithets to their members, offered no support to them and wanted generally to continue their 'gestion tirannique'.<sup>341</sup> In Ludon (Gironde) the conseil municipal denounced the local judge for undermining their authority and reducing them to the role of denouncer.<sup>342</sup> Even in large towns the authorities sought ratification from the Assembly through denunciation. The municipality of Amiens denounced a piece of writing published in the town that proposed a new plan for the municipality that discredited the current administration. Their position in the community was clearly so tenuous that they felt it necessary to defend their foundations which included formal meetings with electors and receiving letters from both the National Assembly and the executive power approving of their conduct.<sup>343</sup>

At the same time as municipalities were attempting to establish themselves, so too were local militias. A National Guard was established in Paris in July 1789, and throughout the provinces local militias sprung up around the same time, largely in response to local unrest.<sup>344</sup> They also used denunciation to legitimise themselves. In September 1789 'officiers de la milice nationale' of Beaumont-de-Lomagne (Tarn-et-Garonne) complained that a rival militia calling itself a 'troupe de volontaires' had been set up with a regime and constitution that was entirely opposed to its own. It urged the Assembly not to pay attention to any contrary opinion that might be suggested to them. They also sent their denunciation to the minister Saint-Priest, the commander of the

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<sup>341</sup>Permanent Committee of Saint-Nicolas-de-Port (Meurthe-et-Moselle), from 19 to 26 December 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.37 13+14.

<sup>342</sup> Conseil Municipal of Ludon (Gironde), 25 October 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.25 d.253 18.

<sup>343</sup>Municipal Officers and Conseil of the Town of Amiens, from 6 to 8 October 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.20 11+12.

<sup>344</sup> These would soon assume the name of National Guards, gaining national statute in 1791. See Dale L. Clifford, 'Can the Uniform Make the Citizen? Paris, 1789-1791', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 34 (2001), 363–82 (p.365 and p.379n) and Hunt, 'Committees and Communes', p.333.

Province and to the intendant to cover all foreseeable avenues of legitimacy.<sup>345</sup> Other militia groups even used denunciation in attempts to replace the municipalities to which they were supposed to be subordinate. In early December 1789 officers of the 'troupes national' of Vouziers (Ardennes) proclaimed themselves the true representatives of the people as they denounced the municipality for excluding them from deliberations.<sup>346</sup>

Many of these rivalries between competing administrative structures were settled after the National Assembly instituted municipal elections. But while the formalising of municipalities as part of the hierarchical administrative structure suppressed their more immediate rivals, municipal officers and the citizen militias, now uniformly named National Guards, were still being challenged from many different angles. In addition to coming up against resistance in their attempts to manage the grain trade<sup>347</sup> and in some cases competing for influence with the local *curé*,<sup>348</sup> they also came up against members of the former administration, local seigneurs and most problematically the local citizenry. Several municipalities and national guards denounced groups of inhabitants for insulting them, and even threatening them. Officers of the National Guard of Puy-Notre-Dame (Maine-et-Loire) appealed to the National Assembly for protection against their co-citizens who, they stated, wanted nothing less than to destroy them and their houses.<sup>349</sup> Indeed the most pressing threats came from fellow inhabitants who were mobilised as a result of the Revolution. The Municipality of Sète (Hérault) denounced a threatening letter they had received which warned them that if they did not do something about the tobacco manufacturers in the town mixing 'horrors' into the tobacco to the detriment of the poorest class an army of twelve thousand citizens would descend upon them.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>345</sup>Officers of the National Militia of Beaumont-de-Lomagne (Tarn-et-Garonne), 27 September 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.21 1.

<sup>346</sup>Officers of the National Troop of the town of Vouziers (Ardennes), 9 December 1789 AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.32 6.

<sup>347</sup>See Chapter 2.

<sup>348</sup>See Chapter 4.

<sup>349</sup>Officers of the National Guard of Puy-Notre-Dame (Maine-et-Loire), 12 April 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.62 4+5.

<sup>350</sup>Municipality of Sette (now known as Sète) (Hérault), 27 February 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.48 12+13.



For many municipalities the relaxation of press laws and the disruption to the system of the policing of speech presented a challenge to their authority. The law regarding freedom of speech was ambiguous; the Declaration of the Rights of Man proclaimed the free communication of ideas but excluded those that constituted abuses under the law; an addendum that was left unelaborated for most of the period of the Constituent Assembly.<sup>351</sup> They were thus confronted with the difficulty of how to accommodate the new freedoms of the revolution whilst maintaining order and establishing legitimacy.

Denunciations of seditious pamphlets and other writings could provide an opportunity for municipal institutions to assert themselves and express their loyalty to the National Assembly.<sup>352</sup> This was demonstrated by the many declarations of admiration for the Assembly which these denunciations contained. '[N]ulle municipalit e ne respecte plus les decrets de l'assembl e nationale est nest plus soumise aux ordre de notre Roi que celle de Bourg de mezidon [*sic*]' wrote the Municipality of M ezidon (Calvados) in their denunciation of a pamphlet.<sup>353</sup> The majority shared similar sentiments, expressing their dedication, the zeal of their co-citizens and the general dismay at anti-Revolutionary works. Many asked for acknowledgement from the National Assembly that they had received their denunciations and approved of them. The municipality of Troyes were very pleased to receive approval from the Committee of Research for their denunciation of a newspaper.

L'approbation que vous daign es nous donner [...] est bien capable d'encourager notre zele et notre surveillance pour faire observer et respecter les d crets de l'auguste assembl e. Nous regardons toujours cette partie de nos devoirs comme la plus sacr e; et notre fidelit e   la remplir vous sera, dans tout le temps de notre ministere la preuve de notre d voiem ent   ses loix.<sup>354</sup>

Municipalities were also keenly aware, as were the Committee of Research, of threats

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<sup>351</sup>Walton, *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution*, p.7.

<sup>352</sup>Walton also found this to be the case see *ibid*, p.122-123.

<sup>353</sup>Municipality of M ezidon (Calvados), 10 January 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.38 21+22.

<sup>354</sup>Municipality of Troyes, 8 March 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.46 15.

to their authority from below. They thus also used denunciation to entrench the new political structure as a whole towards the avoidance of any further revolutionary upheaval. The Committee of the National Guard of Douai would describe their job as the prevention of any enterprises of enemies of the public good, particularly in current circumstances when the Constitution was still to be written: 'Il ne faut pas toujours que ces enterprises soient des conspirations, des trames odieuses, de noirs complots pour mériter l'attention des gardes-nationales [...] tout ce qui tendent à soulever les esprits porte avec soi le caractère de la rebellion.'<sup>355</sup> Several pamphlets that promoted further revolutionary change caused a stir among municipalities. In May 1790 one pamphlet, *Adresse aux assemblées primaires du département de Châlons*, was sent under the stamp and counter-signature of the National Assembly to various municipalities. It called for the dissolution of the current government and for the primary assemblies to be given administrative and legislative power. According to its plan a new assembly (which would meet in a town at least thirty leagues from Paris)<sup>356</sup> would draw up legislation, the King would address the nation on the advantages and disadvantages of this legislation and then it would be sent to each primary assembly to deliberate and vote on.<sup>357</sup> On receipt of this pamphlet several municipalities hastened to denounce it to the National Assembly. The Municipality of Montier-en-Der (Haute-Marne) condemned it as an attempt to alter the patriotism of citizens and to trouble order, the Municipality of Lille accused it of encouraging men to forget the gratitude they owed to the National Assembly for their security and happiness and the Municipality of Saint-Hilaire-du-Harcouët (Manche) called for the author to be punished 'comme un traître à la patrie'.<sup>358</sup> The tone of these denunciations was echoed back by the Committee of Research whose president at the time de Pardieu drafted a letter of response to one of the letters calling for more precise information to be sent in order to unmask these disturbers of the peace.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>355</sup>Committee of the National Guard of Douai (Nord), 14 January 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.32 18.

<sup>356</sup>Around one hundred and twenty kilometres.

<sup>357</sup>*Adresse aux assemblées primaires du département de Châlons* (Paris: L'Imprimerie de Carole, 1790).

<sup>358</sup> Municipality of Montier-en-Der (Haute-Marne), 29 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.5 d.72 19, Municipality of Lille, 19 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.264 2 and Municipality of Saint-Hilaire-du-Harcouët (Manche), 23 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.6 d.82 4.

<sup>359</sup> Draft of letter of response by Pardieu on letter from sieur Fleury, *procureur* of the commune of Vertus (Marne), 20 -22 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.44 d.417 108.

Municipalities would respond equally excessively in the face of what appeared to be relatively minor cases of public disturbance. Two women were denounced by the Municipality of Neufchâteau (Vosges) and the lieutenant-colonel of the Mestre-de-Camp-Général-Dragons regiment garrisoned there for shouting abuse at the soldiers, calling them cowards, 'couillons' and 'jean foutres' for submitting to discipline and declaring in front of them that insurrection was a sign of patriotism.<sup>360</sup> The mayor of the small commune of Ecorcei (Orne) wrote a denunciation of one of the parishioners, a horse merchant who had insulted the entire parish by saying they were all 'pouilliards' who he did not give a damn about 'comme une merde et merde de mon cul', biting one of them on the hand when they tried to restrain him. The mayor warned the National Assembly that if this man remained unpunished then the seigneurs, 'tous les plus gros membres de la paroisse' would not want to take part in the assemblies called for by the Assembly and presumably their administration would fall apart.<sup>361</sup>

A significant impediment to the consolidation of municipal power was the fact that citizens also had a recourse to denunciation which undermined the position of the local government as state intermediary. In Vitry-sur-Seine (Seine-et-Oise) a master builder, Jean Louis Picard denounced the National Guard for wrongly imprisoning him for twenty four hours with the complicity of the Municipality.<sup>362</sup> The Committee of Research followed this denunciation up by writing to the Municipality of Vitry who denied any maltreatment and instead accused Picard of insulting them and the batallion, making atrocious remarks about the new order of things and generally being a 'bad citizen'. They urged the National Assembly not to pay any attention to his complaints.<sup>363</sup>

This use of denunciation as an avenue of popular complaint could cause even greater trouble for municipalities when used by disgruntled municipal officers and National Guardsmen wanting to appeal to the State independently of their institution. In Douai

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<sup>360</sup> M.de Neuilly, lieutenant-colonel of the regiment of Mestre-de-camp-général-dragons and the Municipality of Neufchâteau (Vosges), from 20 to 23 August 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.126 31-33

<sup>361</sup> Mayor of Ecorcei (Orne), from 4 to 5 April 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.60 9+10.

<sup>362</sup> Sieur Picard, master builder, Vitry-sur-Seine (Seine-et-Oise), 8 July 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.7 d.103 6+7.

<sup>363</sup> Municipality of Vitry-sur-Seine, (Seine-et-Oise), 16 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.132 3.

(Nord) a National Guardsman, sieur de Foy, captain of the 7 National Guard regiment of the town called upon the National Assembly for support against a sieur Berenger, former *garde du corps*.<sup>364</sup> The two were in dispute over an alleged insult suffered by the sieur Berenger's brother, a *chevalier* and also a member of the National Guard. The Committee of Research, as they had done in the case of Jean Louis Picard directly undermined the municipality of Douai by acting upon de Foy's denunciation, sending a letter to the municipality of Douai and a copy of it to de Foy.<sup>365</sup> This was not lost on the municipal officials who wrote back to the Committee saying there was no unrest in the town other than that caused by the lack of respect shown by de Foy's faction in the National Guard towards the municipality, which, they reminded the Committee of Research, was as an institution, the work of the National Assembly and the 'premier effet sensible de la révolution'.<sup>366</sup> Subsequent letters sent from the municipality further show the anxiety they felt around de Foy's communication with the State. They preemptively described a situation in which de Foy had had a confrontation with a bookseller over an alleged calumny printed against him (presumably written by Berenger) they feared he was preparing to write again to the Assembly and denounce them for denying him justice, which indeed he did.<sup>367</sup> Three days later they denounced him for writing a calumnious pamphlet against them, an attempt they argued to harm the municipality in the eyes of the people.<sup>368</sup> The committee of the National Guard was also anxious about de Foy's denunciations to the State. This committee sent a letter to the National Assembly imploring them to take as truth only letters written to them by the committee of the National Guard.<sup>369</sup> For local authorities the practice of denunciation, when used by others, was an act that undermined their authority.

### Visions of the New Regime

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<sup>364</sup>Letters from de Foy and other National Guardsmen, Douai (Nord), from 1 to 9 January 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.40 7-10.

<sup>365</sup>Draft of a letter written to de Foy from the Committee of Research, AN DXXIXbis c.40 d.410 24 and Municipality of Douai, from 7 to 13 March 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.47 17+18.

<sup>366</sup>Municipality of Douai, from 7 to 13 March 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.47 17+18.

<sup>367</sup>Municipality of Douai, from 11 to 16 April 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.61 11, Sieur La Foy, Lawyer and Commander of the 7<sup>th</sup> Company of the National Guard of Douai, 27 April 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.5 d.66 12-14.

<sup>368</sup>Municipality of Douai, 19 April 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.62 16.

<sup>369</sup>The Committee of the National Guard of Douai, 26 April 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.5 d.66 11.

What de Foy's denunciation also shows is that the National Assembly was petitioned to provide legitimacy not only to municipal institutions but to also provide support for those who believed themselves to be embodying the political culture of the new regime. The struggle between de Foy and Berenger was a small enactment of the greater disturbance to the political elite brought about by the Revolution. Their dispute arose following a rendition of *Le Souper de Henri IV, ou le laboureur devenu gentilhomme* at the town's amphitheatre. According to Berenger's account (which de Foy would send later) the captain, enthralled at the portrayal of Henri IV turned to Berenger's older brother and said 'Voilà un Roi celui-la, ce n'est pas un imbécile!' to which the *chevalier* replied that de Foy was the only imbecile he knew. De Foy, insulted, called the *chevalier* an aristocrat. After the performance Berenger the younger confronted de Foy, accusing him of grossly insulting his brother and issuing his own tirade of insults.<sup>370</sup> In de Foy's account the original insult did not occur, it was a result of misinformation given to Berenger by another National Guardsman, a tanner who de Foy had refused to have a drink with. He condemned the sieur Berenger for publicly insulting him and drew up the dispute, along with witness statements and sent it to the National Assembly, denouncing Berenger and his supporters as 'ennemis de la liberté naissant'.

Whether or not the comments at the play had taken place, clearly at the heart of the disagreement was animosity built up as a result of the shake up of the elite and the shifts in power occurring within the institutions of the police. De Foy was a former lawyer at the court of the Parlement of Flandres, his position as National Guardsman a product of the change in personnel brought by the Revolution. Berenger had been a member of the *garde du corps du Roi*, bodyguards of the King, a regiment made up entirely of nobility now thought to be archaic and costly,<sup>371</sup> a symbolic representative of the *ancien régime* under Louis XVI. The play itself was no doubt highly emotive for both of them, in it Henri IV, incognito, dines with the family of a peasant landowner, ennobling the commoner at the end for the welcome he received.<sup>372</sup> The underlying

<sup>370</sup>De Foy, Douai, from 25 to 27 April 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.5 d.66 12-14.

<sup>371</sup>Gilbert Bodinier, *Les gardes du corps du Louis XVI* (France: Mémoire & Documents, 2005), p.642.

<sup>372</sup>*Annales dramatiques, ou dictionnaire général des théâtres*, ed. by Babault, 9 vols. (Paris, 1811), 8,

symbolism in the play of the triumph of merit over birthright could have easily appeared in the eyes of de Foy and Berenger as the victory of the former over the latter. On the surface the dispute appears to be a matter of honour. But while these 'old regime habits' that Walton holds responsible for the later repression of the revolution are clearly an escalating factor, this 'culture of honour' is only the manifestation of a power struggle between the old political class and the new.<sup>373</sup> This is made even more evident by de Foy's later denunciation of a pamphlet published by Berenger. While de Foy is clearly attached to the new Revolutionary ideals of reason and equity, Berenger's pamphlet subtly mocks the newness of de Foy's uniform and his 'grossieretés'.<sup>374</sup> De Foy highlighted, by way of drawing a pointed gloved hand, all parts of Berenger's text that could be construed as insulting for the National Assembly and National Guard in general.<sup>375</sup> Through the action of denunciation de Foy asserted his vision of the political loyalties of the National Assembly. Thus denunciation tied the local political struggle engaged in by the denouncer to the aims and purposes of the National Assembly.

Perhaps most indicative of the extent of the practice were the many opposing views of where the National Assemblies loyalties lay. In 1789 whilst direct action against the ruling class was under-way in various areas of France<sup>376</sup> several proprietors used denunciation as a means to call upon the National Assembly as allies against anti-seigneurial action. The 'vile populace' had been pillaging, destroying dovecotes and killing poultry according to one anonymous denunciation and found hunting more lucrative to the point that they no longer had a taste for work.<sup>377</sup> Another anonymous letter from Quercy, a former province in the south west where the abolition of privileges was met with particular enthusiasm,<sup>378</sup> wrote that the people believed all was equal and that the rich should be deprived of their comforts and reduced to brown

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p.387.

<sup>373</sup> Walton, *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution*, pp.7-13.

<sup>374</sup> De Foy, Douai, from 1 to 9 January 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.40 7-10.

<sup>375</sup> De Foy, Douai, from 25 to 27 April 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.5 d.66 12-14.

<sup>376</sup> P.M. Jones, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.68.

<sup>377</sup> Anonymous, 15 November 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.15 d.163 1.

<sup>378</sup> Eugène Sol, 'La perception de la dîme ecclésiastique en Quercy sous la Révolution' in *Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France*, 10 (1924) 461-465.

bread. They warned that the property and the life of the nobility and bourgeoisie were in danger; suggestions that property had once been common land was enough for it to be re-appropriated.<sup>379</sup> The anonymity of these letters suggests some ambiguity in the authors over whether the National Assembly did indeed represent the interest of property owners, but not all of these denunciations were anonymous. The *maîtres gardes* of the Factory of Lyon reported that their workers realised that absolute equality was an illusion but unfortunately the people in general did not understand what legislators meant by the word liberty, 'le grand nombre croit avec ce sublime mot que tout est permis à chacun.'<sup>380</sup> These authors had good reason to believe that the National Assembly's loyalties lay with proprietors. The National Assembly's commitment to property rights was well defined, both in the Declaration of the Rights of Man but also more relevantly to this case in the awarding of compensation to seigneurs for the loss of their feudal rights.<sup>381</sup>

But other denunciations went further assuming that the National Assembly represented the interests of the established nobility over the commoners in local administration. Sieur d'Estagniol, a Knight of Saint Louis, denounced the *prévôt* of Marville who was also the leader of the municipality and a colonel of the National Guard for forcing him to house soldiers of the Aquitaine regiment. He railed against this man who he wrote only admitted into the municipality and National Guard prosecutors, lawyers and notaries. He accused all these '*gens d'affaires*' who seized control in small communities of promoting animosity and vengeance by brandishing about the word 'aristocrat', particularly in the *cabaret*, the 'sanctuaire de leurs insinuations'.<sup>382</sup> In this way he criticised not only the commonness of new political figures, but also the politicisation of common public spaces.

Sieur d'Estagniol's observation on the use of the word 'aristocrat' can be confirmed to some degree by its regular use by denouncers to describe the subject of their

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<sup>379</sup>Anonymous, Quercy, 25 September 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.21 31.

<sup>380</sup>*Maîtres Gardes* of the Factory of Lyon, 8 January 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.39 12.

<sup>381</sup>In a decree of the 4 August 1789 see Georges Lefebvre, *The French Revolution: From Its Origins to 1793* (London: Routledge, 2005), p.126.

<sup>382</sup>Sieur d'Estagniol, Knight of Saint Louis, Marville (Meuse), 6 January 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.39 p.1.

denunciation. An anonymous Parisian denounced a community of schoolmasters in the faubourg Saint-Antoine as aristocratic, led by a 'petit souverain' who 'on se le represente (et comme il le désire) comme une lionne à qui l'on à ravi les petits [*sic*]'.<sup>383</sup> The town of Coutances (Manche) was filled with aristocrats of all types wrote another anonymous writer, including members of the municipality and National Guard.<sup>384</sup> Sieur Venter from Bayonne (Basses-Pyrénées) dismissed the local authorities in a similar manner describing those in power as 'bourgeois aristocracy' and 'subaltern tyrants'.<sup>385</sup> A soldier visiting the area of Clermont-en-Beauvaisis<sup>386</sup> from Amiens was shocked to discover that those in positions of authority were 'aristocratissimes'.<sup>387</sup>

The word 'despot' was also used to link individual cases to the perceived interests of the National Assembly. A doctor from Marseille denounced the secretary of the Royal Society of Medicine who had refused him authorisation to sell a remedy he had concocted in Paris, restricting him to the provinces. The doctor wrote to the Assembly that 'puis que vous avés cru nécessaire M.M. de proscrire les despotes de tous les corps, qui jusqu'à present ont exercé une tiranie des plus revoltantes nous osons esperer M.M. que vous voudrés bien entendre nos raisons et nous rendre justice.'<sup>388</sup> Municipalities were often accused of despotic actions or of employing a despotic tone.<sup>389</sup> So whilst terms such as 'aristocrat' and 'despot' were constructed to provide a sense of a united enemy, they were also almost always used to describe members of the ruling elite.

Many denunciations sought the support of the National Assembly against seigneurs who represented the tyranny of the old regime. These types of denunciations saw their own struggles as microcosms of the greater national struggle against despotism. A *curé*

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<sup>383</sup> Anonymous, Paris, 13 July 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.7 d.104 15.

<sup>384</sup> Anonymous, Coutances (Manche), 20 June 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.7 d.100 18.

<sup>385</sup> Sieur Venter, Bayonne (Basses-Pyrénées), 20 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.35 19.

<sup>386</sup> Now Clermont (Oise).

<sup>387</sup> Sieur Delavault, soldier of the national guard of Amiens, 5 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.16 d.178 4+5.

<sup>388</sup> Sieur Laugier, doctor, Marseille, 26 August 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.126 35.

<sup>389</sup> Vandergracht, regular canon of the Congregation of France, prior rector of the parish of Couet-Bugat (Morbihan), 28 October 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.40 d.410 46, The community of Guillotière, Lyon, from 6 to 10 October 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.25 22-24, and the National Guard of Guémené (Morbihan), from 28 to 30 August 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.128 1+2.



from the town of Caunettes-en-Val, a small village near Carcassonne, denounced the former seigneur of the valley for taking possession of all the decrees coming from Paris 'les met sous le tapis'. This man and his children, he wrote, 'ont tellement glacé le coeur des habitans de Rieux' who dared not make any move towards forming a municipality.<sup>390</sup> Another *curé*, this time from Thors (Charente-Inférieure) denounced the local seigneur a M. de Puy-Montbrun, on behalf of the seigneur's tenants who he had mistreated but also for himself accusing the seigneur of persecuting him and his family, bringing on the early death of his father and mother through the grief he had caused them.<sup>391</sup> Seigneurs were also denounced for continuing in their feudal rights long after these had been removed from them. A proprietor from Villeneuve-Saint-Salves (Yonne) denounced Leclerc de Torigny for planting boundaries on his land.<sup>392</sup>

Workers and community groups denounced their employers and other authorities for poor treatment, believing that the National Assembly would not accept these injustices. In January 1790 the Community of Bénéjacq (Basses-Pyrénées) hit back at attempts to prosecute inhabitants for troubles in the area the month before, arguing that the instigators of the *brigandage* were aristocrats. They wrote that they were authorised to take measures to protect their property and their persons from abuses of authority given that the Declaration of the Rights of Man guaranteed the political and civil liberties of each citizen.<sup>393</sup> A sieur Lacroix, a priest in Léogats (Gironde) believed that the National Assembly 'a toujours mis au rang de ses devoirs les plus essentiels de secourir les foibles et protéger les malheureux [*sic*]'.<sup>394</sup> The feeling that the National Assembly was the great defender of justice was felt deeply and by many.

Denunciation offered a chance to right individual injustices which people they felt they were the victims of. This was particularly true when the perpetrator was connected with the local justice system and when the victim was from a social group with little political standing in the community. A Parisian woman wrote to the Committee of

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<sup>390</sup>L'Abbé Dumont, *curé* of Caunettes-en-Val (Aude), 5 February 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.37 6.

<sup>391</sup>Sieur Duvergier, *curé*, Thors (Charente-Inférieure), n.d., AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.264 3.

<sup>392</sup>Sieur Perreau, proprietor, Villeneuve-Saint-Salves (Yonne), 14 November 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.15 d.164 22.

<sup>393</sup>Community of Bénéjacq (Basses-Pyrénées), 3 January 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.39 5-7.

<sup>394</sup>Sieur Lacroix, priest of Léogats (Gironde), 4 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.29 d.296 9.

Research in order to seek justice against her landlord, who was also her seigneur and the local judge, as all other avenues were closed to her.<sup>395</sup> A shepherd from Courlandon (Marne) sought protection from the deputies of the National Assembly after the local seigneur took his gun and threatened to shoot him with it.<sup>396</sup> Some used the denunciation of individual injustices to call for more radical legislation. Godefroy Bouchereau, a woman from Saint-Macaire in the Gironde, wrote a denunciation against her husband and his family, prominent members of the judiciary and municipality, for persecuting her; chasing her from her home, falsely imprisoning her and compromising her honour. At the outbreak of Revolution she saw a chance to obtain the justice she had been seeking for ten years. She called on the National Assembly to legislate against the oppression of women.<sup>397</sup>

Thus many denunciations in these early years of the Revolution were as the comte de Gouy had imagined them to be - the plaintive voices of the unfortunate, denouncing the abuses of authority. But there is a sense that these authors are not simply unfortunate subjects to which things happen, but active participants in the Revolutionary process. This was a radically new practice which the denunciations themselves were engaged in defining. Many different people took part in the process, and it served multiple agendas. Just as letters on subsistence had offered ideas and opinions on how to manage the grain trade nationally, denunciations served to mould the new regime by calling on the National Assembly as an arbitrator in community disputes.

The centrality of communal conflict to the early years of the Revolution was convincingly put forward by Samuel F. Scott in 1975 when he argued that far from being a ‘peaceful’ year, 1790 saw a great number of local rivalries over political legitimacy; crucially around who had the power to deploy police forces. At the heart of these was a battle to determine the direction the Revolution was to take.<sup>398</sup> The denunciations of the period clearly conform to this reading. New local authorities used

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<sup>395</sup>Widow Certain, Paris, 11 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.131 13.

<sup>396</sup>Shepherd, Courlandon (Marne), AN DXXIXbis c.5 d.65 14+15.

<sup>397</sup>Godefroy Bouchereau, Saint-Macaire (Gironde), 5 December 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.32 4.

<sup>398</sup> Samuel F. Scott, ‘Problems of Law and Order during 1790, the “Peaceful” Year of the French Revolution’, *American Historical Review*, 80 (1975), 859–88.

the practice to legitimise themselves, while others used it to promote their own interpretations of the new regime. Despite the plurality of these impressions, most were unified in the understanding that they were engaged in a collective revolutionary project.

Conflicts over religious legislation were similarly rooted in local struggles for political legitimacy. The next chapter will look at how religious tensions emerged out of the same environment of communal conflict.

## Chapter 4

### Denouncing the Clergy

*Mais me demanderai nous quel est le remede et quel est le moyen de faire autant d'hommes constitutionnels qu'il y a des français: le voicy c'est de supprimer sans indemnité au profit des emphiteoses toutes les censives toutes les redevances seigneuriales [...] Le remede est violent, j'en conniens; mais a des grands maux il faut des forts remedes et ce n'est que par ca moyen que l'assemblée nationale peut raffermier cette constitution, qu'elle a elle meme en quelque façon ebranlée, j'ose le dire par son decret impolitique sur le serment des pretres [...] s'il ya des pretres refractaires et qui prechent l'insurrection et la guerre civile ouvertement, ce qui est tres commun dans ces environs, il faudrait les faire prendre et les envoyer en exil An anonymous juring priest, Southern France, 1 May 1791<sup>399</sup>*

Conflict over the religious legislation of the National Assembly is often considered a major cause of the Revolution's descent into terror.<sup>400</sup> From early on it became clear that the Church was going to lose the independence that it had carefully guarded for centuries. In the days following the night of 4 August 1789 the clergy lost a substantial part of their income through the abolition of the *tithe*, a tax of a proportion of the harvest.<sup>401</sup> On 2 November 1789, it would lose further sources of income when the National Assembly decreed that church property was to be 'at the disposal of the nation'.<sup>402</sup> The following year saw even more radical reforms. The church suffered a symbolic loss when in April a motion towards establishing Catholicism as the official religion of the state failed to gain enough votes to pass. On 12 July 1790 the National Assembly passed the 'Civil Constitution of the Clergy' a major piece of legislation that included the introduction of elections to fill clerical posts, the realignment of dioceses and the abolition of the regular clergy. Perhaps most divisive of all, as the anonymous priest quoted above suggests, was the decree of 27 November 1790 which required all clergymen to pledge allegiance to this legislation or lose their posts.<sup>403</sup> By 1791

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<sup>399</sup> Unsigned, sworn priest from the surroundings of the departments of the 'Lozère, Aveyron, the Gard and Haute-Loire', 1 May 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.265 17.

<sup>400</sup> John McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, Church History Outlines, 4 (London: S.P.C.K., 1969), p.38; Timothy Tackett, *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015) pp.105-110; William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.144.

<sup>401</sup> John Markoff, *The Abolition of Feudalism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), p.38 and p.445.

<sup>402</sup> Georges Lefebvre, *The French Revolution: From Its Origins to 1793* (London: Routledge, 2005), p.154.

<sup>403</sup> Timothy Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary, The Deputies of the National Assembly and the*

relations between Catholicism and the Revolution were strained and would soon rupture leaving a counter-revolution that had a distinctly Catholic identity.

Some disagreement exists between historians over the extent to which this turn towards dechristianisation in the Revolution was the playing out of pre-existing tendencies or whether it was a phenomenon that was largely contingent on changes within the Revolution itself.<sup>404</sup> Dechristianisation has been identified as a trend of the eighteenth century and explained by elements of enlightenment thinking. Michel Vovelle has located a decline in participation in church traditions in the pre-revolutionary period.<sup>405</sup> Culturally, elements of the church, particularly the regular clergy, had begun to be considered archaic; ideas around the freedom of the individual had led to a general decline in monastic life and religious orders were increasingly associated with scandal, images of forced vows and locked away daughters.<sup>406</sup> Mid-twentieth century grand narratives of the Enlightenment directly pitted philosophies of reason against the superstitions of the Church.<sup>407</sup>

But since this point it has been widely acknowledged that the only strand of the enlightenment with openly hostile views on Christianity was the largely French 'radical' enlightenment explored by Margaret C. Jacob and Jonathan Israel.<sup>408</sup> The role of the enlightenment in anticlericalism has even been broadened to take into account a more complex picture in which Catholicism had its own enlightenment of sorts.<sup>409</sup> In

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*Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789-1790)* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1996), p.267-292 and Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791* (USA 1986), p.22.

<sup>404</sup> Dale K. Van Kley, 'Christianity as Casualty and Chrysalis of Modernity: The Problem of Dechristianization in the French Revolution', *American Historical Review*, 108 (2003), 1081–1104.

<sup>405</sup> Michel Vovelle, *Piété baroque et déchristianisation en Provence au XVIIIe siècle: Les attitudes devant la mort d'après les clauses des testaments* (Paris: Éditions Seuil, 1973).

<sup>406</sup> Nigel Aston, *Christianity and Revolutionary Europe, 1750-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.39; and McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, p.31.

<sup>407</sup> Van Kley, 'Christianity as Casualty and Chrysalis of Modernity', p.1085.

<sup>408</sup> Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans*, *Early Modern Europe Today* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981), and *ibid* p.1087.

<sup>409</sup> Jeffrey D. Burson, 'The Catholic Enlightenment in France from the Fin de Siècle Crisis of Consciousness to the Revolution, 1650-1789' in *A Companion to the Catholic Enlightenment in Europe*, ed. by Ulrich L. Lehner and Michael Printy, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, 20 (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

the early part of the eighteenth century the Jansenist movement, which sought to reform the Church along the lines of early Christianity, had been a vocal critic of the power of the Pope and episcopacy.<sup>410</sup> Similar ideas were spreading through the ranks of the lower clergy. Many of the parish clergy, who were increasingly more educated and better versed in enlightenment ideas felt that the economic realities of being a *curé* did not match their usefulness in society and complained of the growing gulf between the lower and the opulent upper clergy.<sup>411</sup> Growing in popularity was Richerism - an argument emphasising the divine origins of *curés* and their rights to play a role in the governing of the Church.<sup>412</sup> By 1789 there was a common enemy for both members of the parish clergy and those that identified themselves as the third estate in that segment of society who were unwilling to renounce their commitment to Old Regime privilege.

In addition to the effect of these political movements, The Crown and *parlements* themselves had already prefigured the encroachment of the State into Church jurisdiction through various unwelcome incursions in the eighteenth century. These included the granting of benefices, the appointing of parish clergy and the reorganisation of tithe collection.<sup>413</sup> The *Commission des réguliers* was set up by the Crown in 1766 to examine the state of the Church, which increased the age at which monastic vows could be taken and abolished some smaller orders outright.<sup>414</sup>

But the movement towards the subordination of the church to the state was far from complete in 1789. Darrin McMahon has recently identified a strong reactionary movement against incursions by the state in the eighteenth century which he has coined the 'Catholic counter-enlightenment', thus finding that a 'conservative' France and a 'liberal' France both existed in the lively pamphlet literature of the eighteenth century.<sup>415</sup> While bishops had made some concessionary nods towards reform, and a

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<sup>410</sup>Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth Century France*, p.7.

<sup>411</sup>M.G. Hutt, 'The Curés and the Third Estate: the Ideas of Reform in the Pamphlets of the French Lower Clergy in the period 1787–1789' in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 8 (1957) 74-92 (p.92).

<sup>412</sup>Aston, *Christianity and Revolutionary Europe*, p.181.

<sup>413</sup>Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth Century France*, p.9.

<sup>414</sup>Aston, *Christianity and Revolutionary Europe*, p.39.

<sup>415</sup>Darrin McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) and Dale Van Kley, 'Church, State, and the Ideological Origins of the French Revolution: The Debate over the General Assembly of the Gallican Clergy in 1765' in *Journal of Modern History*, 51 (December 1979) 629-666 (p.630).

few were influenced by enlightenment thinkers, the mainstream response amongst the prelates was to reject the enlightenment's critical take on tradition entirely.<sup>416</sup>

At the revolutionary juncture Necker would deal a heavy blow to the episcopacy when he allowed parish priests to bring their grievances to the National Stage; giving every priest the right to stand for election to the Estates-General. Bishops were not guaranteed a place, they had to stand for election alongside the *curés* in the same electoral assemblies.<sup>417</sup> This sudden democratisation, the experience for elected *curés* of the Estates-General itself<sup>418</sup> and the underlying desire for Church reform would firmly tie a great deal of the lower clergy to the Third Estate and the Revolution; so much so, M.G Hutt argues, that many clerical deputies failed to sufficiently analyse their place within the Revolution leaving them vulnerable to the push by non-clerical deputies towards secularisation.<sup>419</sup>

While it seems evident that movements towards a redefinition of the relationship between the Church and State were under way before the Revolution, and that these movements were already accompanied by groups in opposition, it is also certainly the case that as the Revolutionaries continued to legislate on religious matters they increasingly lost support amongst the clergy and third estate alike. For John McManners and Nigel Aston it was the actions of the revolutionaries themselves that would ultimately lead to the radical dechristianisation of the Revolution; for most of the clergy were willing to compromise but for the lack of pragmatism shown by the deputies of the National Assembly.<sup>420</sup>

The anonymous priest writing in May 1791 would seem to support the view of McManners and Aston. He considered the *impolitique* decree requiring the clergy to

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<sup>416</sup>Aston, *Christianity and Revolutionary Europe*, pp.28-29.

<sup>417</sup>Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth Century France*, p.143.

<sup>418</sup>See Ruth Necheles, 'The Curés in the Estates General of 1789' in *Journal of Modern History*, 46 (September, 1974), 425-444.

<sup>419</sup>M.G. Hutt, 'The Curés and the Third Estate: the Ideas of Reform in the Pamphlets of the French Lower Clergy in the period 1787-1789' in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 8 (1957) 74-92.

<sup>420</sup>John McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society under the Ancien Régime: A study of Angers in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester: University Press, 1960) and Aston, *Christianity and Revolutionary Europe*.

declare an oath of allegiance to the Revolution to have shaken, *ebranlée*, the National Assembly's *raison d'être*, their constitution. It had brought on the need for extreme measures, imagined by him to include the deployment of the army to forcibly remove refractory priests, those who had not taken the oath, from the country.<sup>421</sup> He was one of many who wrote to the National Assembly and Committee of Research on religious legislation and the clergy, which, much like letters on subsistence acted as both contributions to a national debate and increasingly denunciations of those who violated the new legislation.

The decree of the clerical oath, highlighted by this anonymous priest and accredited by many historians for changing the direction of the Revolution was to a great extent provoked by the numerous denunciations of the clergy sent to the Committee of Research prior to November 1790.<sup>422</sup> In no other area is the contribution of denunciation to the formation of national policy clearer. However these denunciations were not necessarily the result of divisions inspired by religious sentiment. Indeed, much like the denunciations looked at in the previous chapter, these too were largely products of local political struggles.

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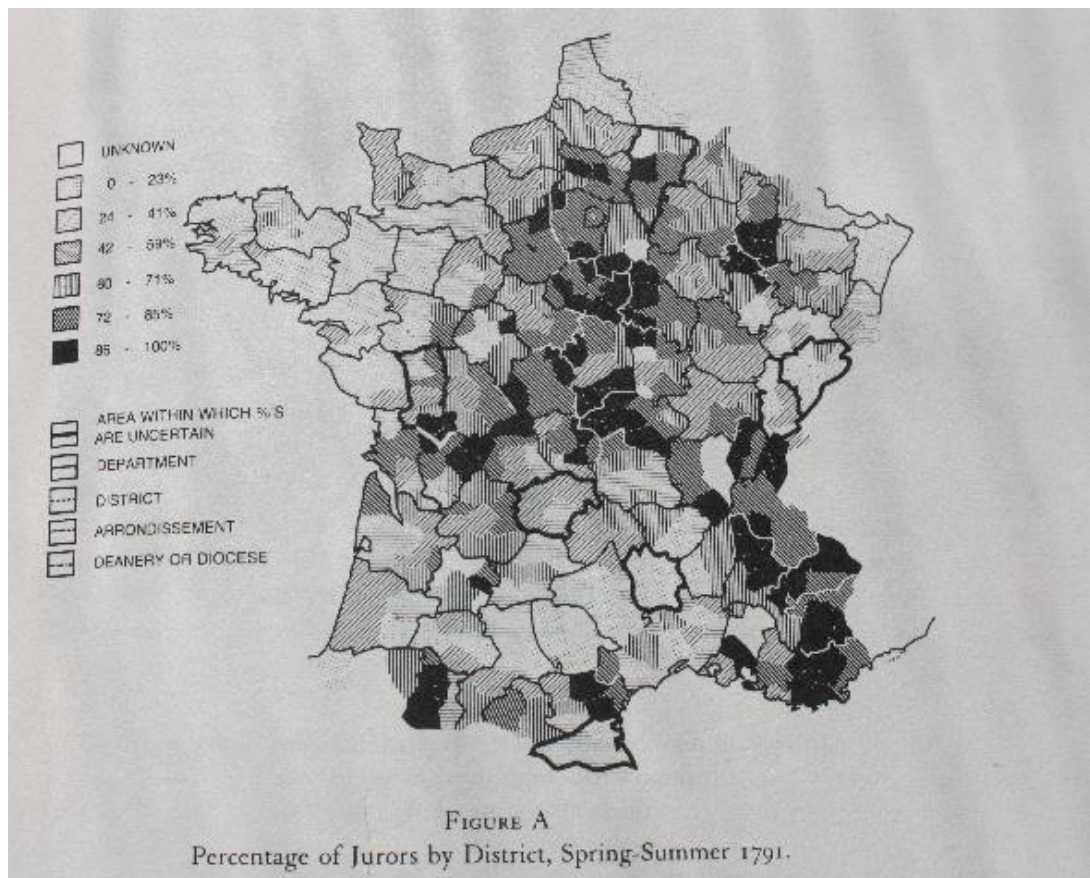
<sup>421</sup> Unsigned, sworn priest from the surroundings of the departments of the 'Lozère, Aveyron, the Gard and Haute-Loire', 1 May 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.265 17.

<sup>422</sup> See p.99n and p.119.

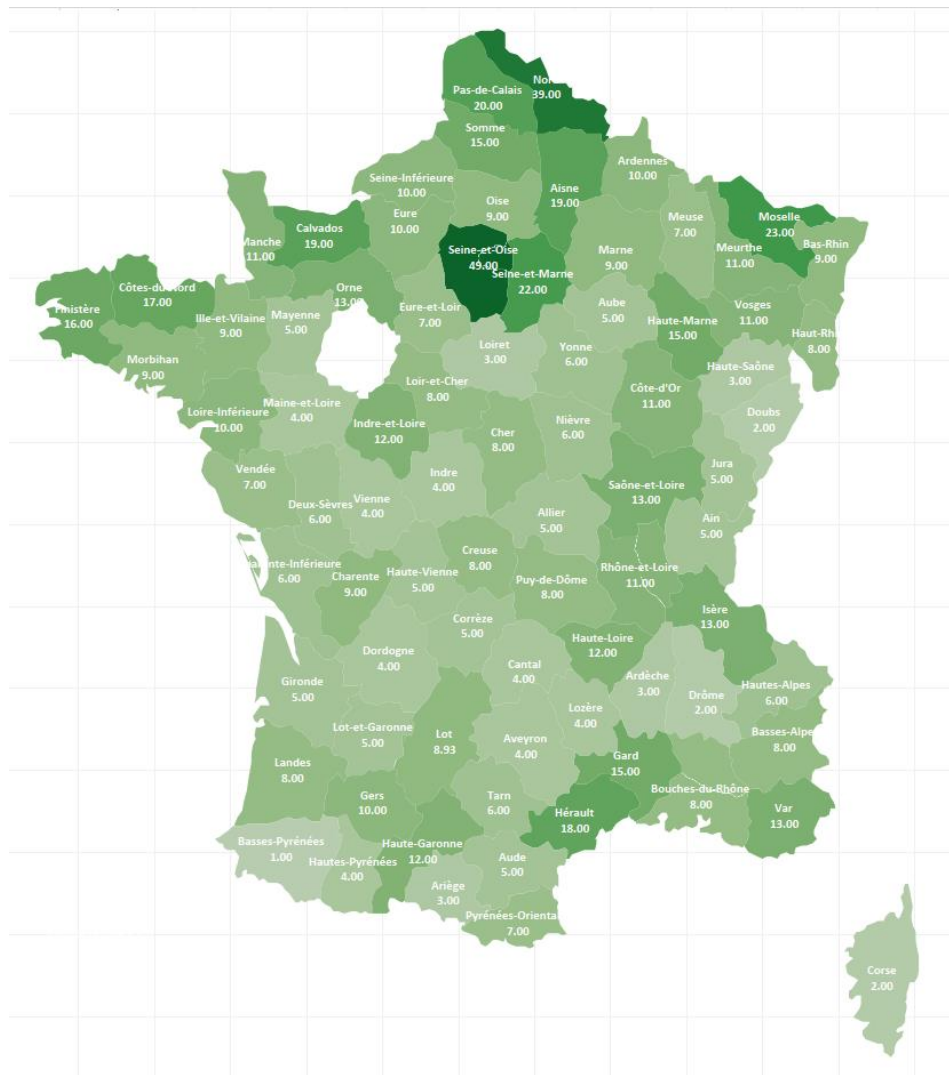


**Figure 13: Timothy Tackett's Map of Percentage of Jurors by District, Spring-Summer**

1791<sup>423</sup>

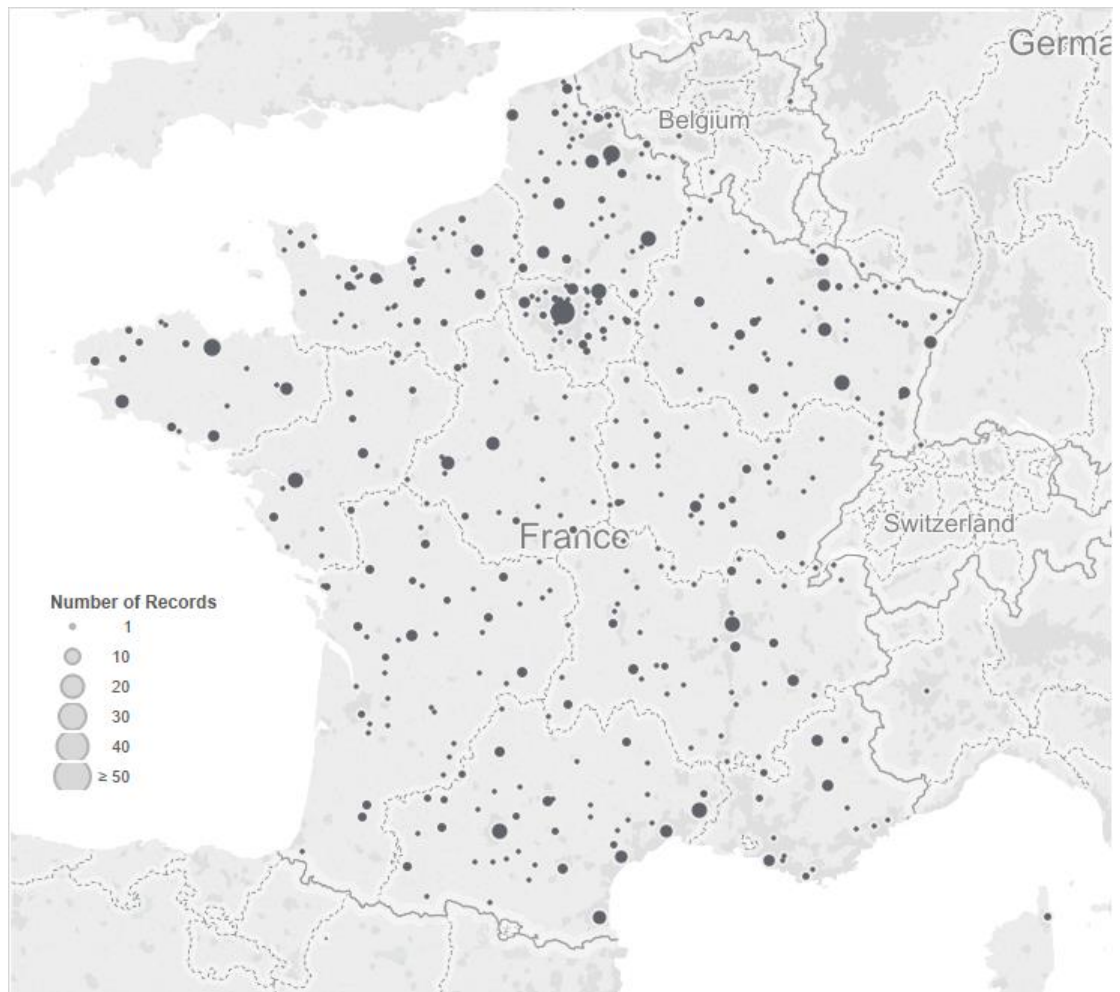


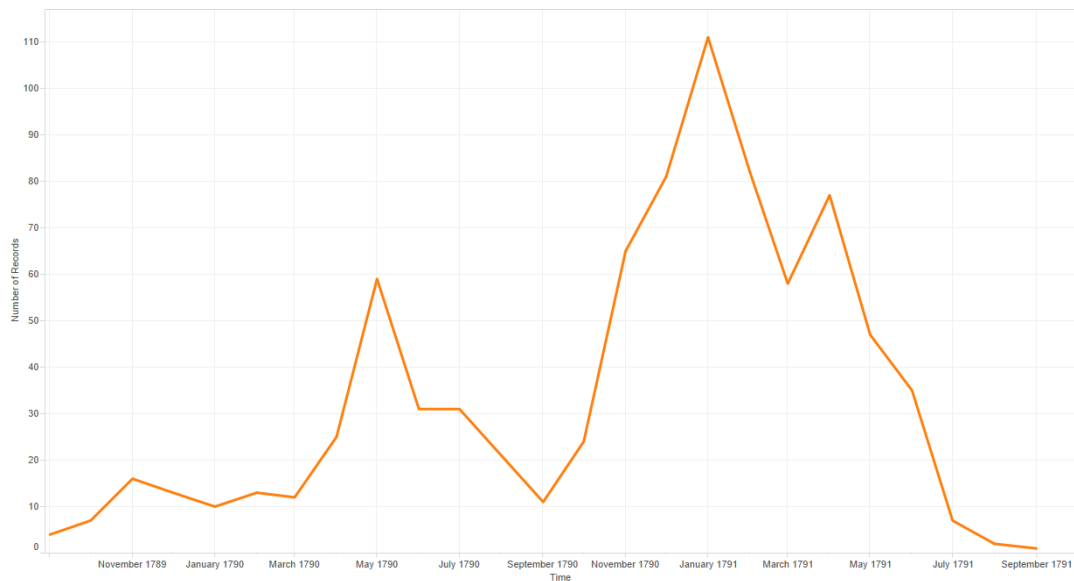
<sup>423</sup> Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France*, p.53.

**Figure 14: Letters on Religion by Department**

Indeed in general the number of clergymen who took the clerical oath in an area seems to have had little bearing on how many letters on religious matters were sent from it. The map of the origins of communications relating to religion does not correlate to a great extent with Timothy Tackett's map of oath taking districts. The areas from which most communications were sent were the Ile-de-France region, a largely constitutional area and the Nord-Pas-de-Calais, a fairly refractory zone. Comparatively few letters were sent from the strong constitutional core of central France, whilst the highly refractory region of the Franche-Comté seemed to have totally disengaged with the National Assembly sending a mere nine letters in total, over eight times less than the Ile-de-France. In general however the map shows just how widespread letters relating to matters of religion were.

**Figure 15: Letters on Religion by Location**



**Figure 16: Letters on Religion over Time**

The importance of religious legislation to the phenomenon of sending letters to the state is however clear when we look at a graph of when letters on religion were sent. The impact of the oath legislation passed at the end of November 1790 and enacted in the first weeks of January 1791 is immediately evident with a great increase in letters sent between November 1790 and January 1791. Each major piece of legislation is reflected to some degree in the graph; there was an increase in frequency at the time of the debates around the nationalisation of church property in October and November 1789, and a further rise in April when the decision was made over whether Catholicism would be declared the religion of the state. A peak in letters occurred in May 1790 when church property was transferred to the local authorities as a result of the legislation of November 1789. A downward trend from May 1790 was interrupted in July 1790 at the voting in of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Although letters went into decline after the crucial oath-taking of January 1791, there was an increase in letters in April 1791 that can perhaps be attributed to an increase in religious agitation. It is likely that more letters were sent on religious matters prior to November 1790 than are represented here as it was at this point that the Committee of Research was handed responsibility for letters on obstructions to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Many letters on religion no doubt were sent and handed to the Ecclesiastical Committee and the Committee of Reports before and after this time.

### Religious Policy of 1789-1790

The revolutionary enthusiasm of 1789 can be detected in various letters sent relating to the National Assembly's early religious legislation. From the outset the debates taking place in the Assembly hall were joined from across France with voices on both sides; many of the first letters on religious matters sent to the National Assembly in September and October 1789 were related to the possibility of using the wealth of the Church to alleviate the debt crisis. On 28 September 1789 an anonymous letter addressed to the president of the National Assembly declared that they awaited the moment that the Assembly would finally decide to suppress and seize the great properties of the monasteries 'avec beaucoup d'impatience'.<sup>424</sup> Two days after this another anonymous letter originating from the town of Vermenton in Burgundy would suggest the transformation of religious houses into retirement homes and hospitals.<sup>425</sup> At this stage nobody quite knew the extent to which the State would encroach upon the Church but as John McManners put it the siphoning off of clerical wealth and reform of the Church would be policies that were 'obvious deductions for anyone who looked at the state of the Gallican Church in the light of the attack on privilege'.<sup>426</sup> It was the bishop of Autun, Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand who first suggested on 10 October 1789 that the National Assembly cast its gaze on ecclesiastical property and on 2 November the motion was passed that put church property 'at the disposal of the nation', and stipulated that it would pay the clergy and provide relief for the poor. On the 19 December 1789 the Assembly's intention to sell off part of these holdings became clear as they put 400 million livres worth up for auction.<sup>427</sup>

As these early letters indicated it was widely assumed that most of the church property to be sold would be monastic leaving the majority of church land unaffected.<sup>428</sup> Some letters however did foresee more radical confiscations. In November an anonymous author from Lorient in Brittany advised the Assembly to sell the unused silverware of

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<sup>424</sup> Anonymous to Mounier, 28 September 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.263 18.

<sup>425</sup> Anonymous, Vermenton (Yonne), 30 September 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.21 7.

<sup>426</sup> McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, p.25.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid. p.27.

<sup>428</sup> Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, p.265.

the Church and 'une partie des cloches qui ne sert qua étourdire le monde [*sic*]'.<sup>429</sup> On the opposing side an anonymous benefice holder was greatly concerned by the possible removal of silverware; they warned the Assembly that France would lose her reputation if she sullied the Church: why did they not just limit the legislation to giving clergymen a salary and taking the *dîme* and other rents? 'il vous restera des sommes immenses'.<sup>430</sup> Other letters opposing nationalisation put forward similar compromises. From the Hainaut province an anonymous author wrote hastily that if the National Assembly removed the abbeys, the religious houses and church property their province would be lost: why did they not manage the property of the religious houses, giving them what they needed and using the surplus to repay the debt?<sup>431</sup> Indeed the willingness to compromise with the property of the religious houses seems common. Outright hostility to all nationalisation can rarely be found in these letters uncoupled from outright hostility to the Revolution in general.

Not only were most of the authors of the letters on the Church property debate willing to accept the confiscation of monastic property but some of the earliest denunciations sent to the National Assembly on religion were in relation to potential violations of the decree by various *religieux*. In November 1789, the *procureur au présidial* of Autun warned that the Benedictines of Saint-Martin d'Autun were selling off timber. In December 1789 the monks of Candail were anonymously denounced for spoiling furniture.<sup>432</sup> By early 1790 *religieux* were denounced for selling whole abbeys<sup>433</sup> and items ranging from cows to linen.<sup>434</sup>

The regular clergy were from the outset to be not only the target of initial denunciations but also of the Assembly's early reforms of the Church. Monastic vows were suspended in October 1789 and abolished outright on 13 February 1790.<sup>435</sup> As far

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<sup>429</sup> Anonymous, Lorient, 13 November 1789 AN DXXIXbis c.29 d.291 6.

<sup>430</sup> An anonymous Benefice holder, October/November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.21 18.

<sup>431</sup> Anonymous, Hainaut, 20 November 1789 AN DXXIXbis c.29 d.291 10.

<sup>432</sup> Suchet, *Procureur au Présidial* of Autun (Saône-et-Loire), 13 November 1789 AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.50 50+51, Anonymous, December 1789, AN DXXIXbis \*1 38 [Y24].

<sup>433</sup> Sieur Vaillant, master saddler to Champeaux-Palasné, president of the Committee of Research, Beauvais, from 23 January to 20 February 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.41 2+3 and Anonymous, Cérisy-la-Forêt (Manche), 1 February 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.37 21.

<sup>434</sup> Sieur Duché, mayor of Corniéville (Meuse), 6 March 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.47 11.

<sup>435</sup> McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, p.31.

as the letters that ended up in the archive of the Committee of Research convey, these decrees also met with very little resistance. Prior to the decrees the assumption was evident from letters on this subject that at the very least the regular clergy would be reformed if not suppressed entirely; 'J'entends [...] tous les jours me dire que vous allés prononcer, sinon sur la destruction générale des religieux, au moins sur la majeure partie de leurs maisons [*sic*]' wrote a 'friend of the third estate' in September.<sup>436</sup>

The reforms of the regular clergy were not just expected but in some cases actively encouraged. Petitions were sent from various members of the religious orders inspired by the outbreak of Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man to call for their liberation. 'Comme vous vous proposez de rendre liberté à chaque individu; nous esperons que vous nous ferez la même faveur [...] je puis vous assurer que tous les Religieux réclament cette liberté si chère' wrote an anonymous religieux, he argued that there were not enough regular clergy to fill the religious houses and that they were unjustly treated by their superiors.<sup>437</sup>

In April 1790 there was a flurry of letters supporting the deputy Dom Gerle's motion towards declaring Catholicism the religion of the State. But this was, it seems, to be the last instance of enthusiastic contribution to legislation. There was a sense in 1789 and early 1790 that there was a national debate taking place on religious matters, but the Civil Constitution of the Clergy seemed to cement the direction that the National Assembly was taking. This legislation was rejected by most of the upper clergy, who had up until then held back from expressing their more general opposition to the Revolution.

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<sup>436</sup> 'A friend inseparable from the Third Estate', 28 September 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.263 10

<sup>437</sup> Anonymous, n.d., AN DXXIXbis c.2 d.21 p.25.

## The Civil Constitution of the Clergy

On the surface the Civil Constitution seemed to address many of the reforms called for by members of the clergy in the late Eighteenth century. The income of the average *curé* was improved; from now on all would be paid a decent wage. The despotic powers of the bishops were curtailed; the positions of *curé* and bishop would be filled via election rather than through the whims of the episcopacy and *curés* would be allowed to choose their own *vicaires*. The organisation of the Church was made more efficient; parishes were made more logical, dioceses were to be aligned with the new departments and bishops were to be forced to reside there. Other clerical groups too were to be optimised; the practice of devoting one's life to religious contemplation was abolished and nearly three-fifths of the regular clergy removed from their posts. The cathedral chapters, which acted as the bishop's aides, would be abolished outright.<sup>438</sup> In many ways these were reforms that were much needed, but elements of the legislation, particularly the more secular, would be the catalyst for mass disengagement with the Revolution. For almost all the bishops and many of the lower clergy the prospect of election by non-clergymen, the suppression of many parishes and fifty-seven of the one hundred and thirty dioceses of the Kingdom would inspire outright hostility.<sup>439</sup>

Over two-thirds of the episcopacy would be pushed into open protest by the Civil Constitution. Some bishops had been vocal opponents of the Revolution from the outset. The bishop of Tréguier, for example, in his pastoral letter of 14 September 1789 had declared the Revolution to be against the Church, appealing to ministers of God to mount their pulpits and preach support for the nobility and clergy.<sup>440</sup> Most bishops however had kept silent throughout the first year of the Revolution,<sup>441</sup> Bishop deputies expressed their opposition to the Revolution by quietly withdrawing from their posts, and out in the dioceses some bishops had already left their sees, even emigrating.<sup>442</sup> It

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<sup>438</sup> Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France*, p.15.

<sup>439</sup> *Décrets sur la Constitution Civile du Clergé*, Collection de décrets de l'Assemblée Nationale, 19 (Lyon: Lambert-Gentot, n.d.), pp.335-339. Google ebook.

<sup>440</sup> 15 October 1789, AP 9: 454.

<sup>441</sup> Nigel Aston, *The End of An Elite: The French Bishops and the Coming of the Revolution, 1786-1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p.210.

<sup>442</sup> Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France*, p.111.



was left to the Archbishop of Aix, Boisgelin, by far the most outspoken, to lead the remaining episcopal deputies in early 1790 (notably those of Toulouse, Aix, Nancy, Chartres, Montpellier) towards limiting what they saw as the excesses of the Revolution.<sup>443</sup> Nonetheless by the end of 1790 episcopal participation in the Assembly was less than a quarter of what it had been.<sup>444</sup>

Despite this exodus the majority of prelates and many chapters would not leave their jurisdictions without first appealing to the clergy and faithful of their dioceses to protest against the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. The majority also secretly petitioned the King in letters that were later found in his *armoire de fer*.<sup>445</sup> Eighty-six of the one hundred and thirty bishops of France<sup>446</sup> were denounced to the National Assembly through the Committee of Research, a further seven denounced to other bodies<sup>447</sup> as they came up against department officials in their rebellion against the legislation.

In the months following the decree of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy bishops were most commonly denounced for refusing to execute these decrees.<sup>448</sup> Many actively ignored the limits and extensions made to their dioceses. The bishops of Grenoble and Meaux for example refused to nominate temporary incumbents to vacant parishes reassigned to their bishoprics.<sup>449</sup> The bishops of Nantes, Béziers, Saint-Dié, Saintes and no doubt others similarly refused to adhere to the new organisation of their dioceses. The bishop of Saintes explained that he did not consider himself, either before or after the decrees of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, in possession of the

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<sup>443</sup>Aston, *The End of An Elite*, p.215.

<sup>444</sup>Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, p.292.

<sup>445</sup>*The Compromising of Louis XVI: The Armoire de Fer and the French Revolution*, ed. by Andrew Freeman, Exeter Studies in History, 17 (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1989), p.63.

<sup>446</sup>The figure of 130 bishops is from Aston, *The End of An Elite*, Appendix 2, and includes Strasbourg, Metz, Cambrai, Belley, Toul, Besançon, Verdun and Nancy but excludes the five Corsican sees, the five Papal enclaves, Tournai and Ypres.

<sup>447</sup>These were either mentioned in trial pieces sent to the Committee of Research, or mentioned by Nigel Aston in his summaries of the careers of Bishops during the Revolution see Aston, *The End of An Elite*, Appendix 5.

<sup>448</sup>After this the most common reason for denunciation is for writing and circulating seditious pastoral letters.

<sup>449</sup>*Procureur-syndic* of the department of the Seine-et-Marne, 15 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.211 12 and Directory of the District of La Tour-du-Pin, from 29 to 31 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.224 11+12.

power to make changes to his diocese and that the National Assembly 'n'a pu me communiquer une puissance qu'elle n'avait pas elle même'.<sup>450</sup> In a similar vein, bishops of suppressed bishoprics were denounced for continuing to exercise their functions. The former bishops of Gap and Laon both illegally nominated pastors and the former bishop of Senez a canon to his chapter despite no longer having bishoprics. The former bishop of Grasse was denounced for interrupting the election of a superior to the convent of the Visitandines of Grasse, committing, in the words of the department who denounced him, a 'double délit' – that of interrupting elections and of exercising functions despite being suppressed.<sup>451</sup> The archbishop of Vienne and the bishop of Toul were both denounced for illegally issuing marriage banns.<sup>452</sup> The archbishop of Auch similarly rejected the suppressions, refusing to strip the bishop of Lectoure of his jurisdiction.<sup>453</sup> Other former bishops mounted protests against the suppression of their bishoprics. The bishops of Senez, Glandève and Sisteron were denounced for their protests, others, the bishops of Lavaur, Arles and Castres for their hostility.<sup>454</sup> However, unlike the outspoken suppressed bishops of the South East, many of the bishops of the smaller suppressed bishoprics of the South West left their sees without fuss. Overall bishops were more likely to be denounced if their bishopric was retained than if it had been suppressed.<sup>455</sup> This is no doubt due to there being more opportunity to flout the Civil Constitution and run into conflict with officials when in office.

This disobedience to the law caused departments, frustrated at their lack of progress towards conformity to the Civil Constitution, to send copies to the National Assembly

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<sup>450</sup>Copy of a Letter written to the Department of Charente-Inférieure by the bishop of Saintes, 9 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.210 9+10.

<sup>451</sup>Directory of the Department of the Var, from 29 January to 1 February 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.222 31+32.

<sup>452</sup>Administrators of the Department of the Isère, 23 November 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.25 d.248bis 5 and Municipality of Neufchâteau and Poullain-Grand-Prey, *procureur général-syndic* of the department of the Vosges, from 22 November to 26 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.213 30+31.

<sup>453</sup>*Procureur-Syndic* of the District of Lectoure, from 7 November to 8 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.211 24-27.

<sup>454</sup> Chauvet, *procureur général-syndic* of the department of the Basses-Alpes, from 7 November to 23 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.215 13-22 and Foulquier, member of the directory of the department of the Tarn, 15 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.32 d.338 45 and Directory of the department of the Bouches-du-Rhône, from 9 January to 5 February 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.223 13-18.

<sup>455</sup> Fifty-six percent of the bishops of suppressed bishoprics were denounced as opposed to seventy-three percent of bishops who were kept.

of their fruitless exchanges with the uncooperative bishops. The department of the Isère despaired of the 'longue énumération de sarcasmes contre les loix' sent to them by the bishop of Grenoble, who, in another letter, described his refusal to enact the decrees as 'établi sur le respect que tout bon catholique doit avoir pour les loix de l'Église de Jésus Christ'.<sup>456</sup> Other bishops took a similarly intransigent tone. The bishop of Blois wrote to the department of the Loir-et-Cher that God had given the church a doctrine, forms, a government and veritable power in the governing of souls but also in its own regulation. He tried to persuade the department to say enough was enough.

Nous espérons, Messieurs, que nos sentimens toucheront votre coeur, mais si par malheur il était insensible, notre douleur ne sera pas une tristesse de confusion et abatment [...] nous sommes sur un vaisseau qui ne doit pas périr. Un chrétien ne connaît point la fierté humaine ni un langage présomptueux. Sa vigueur est plus inébranlable [*sic*].<sup>457</sup>

The archbishop of Lyon similarly gave the department of the Rhône-et-Loire a long enunciation of Catholic dogma ending with 'Tel est, MM, l'enseignement de l'église auquel tous les Pasteurs, comme tous les fideles doivent se soumettre sous peine de n'être plus compris au nombre de ses enfants [*sic*]'. Departments were understandably concerned. The department of the Rhône-et-Loire deliberated on this letter from the archbishop of Lyon deciding it was not enough of a punishment to deprive him of his salary, the only thing to be done was to declare his seat vacant.<sup>458</sup> The department of the Corrèze in a similar fashion condemned the bishop of Tulle urging the National legislators to 'lancés vos foudres sur tous les rebelles' or risk civil war saying 'le pretexte de religion est le voile dont il couvre ses desirs ambitieux'.<sup>459</sup>

Worse than refusals to adhere to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, at least for the department of the Isère,<sup>460</sup> were the attempts by bishops to influence others. Having

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<sup>456</sup>Directory of the Department of Isère, from 24 to 26 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.222 25+26.

<sup>457</sup>Administrative Assembly of the Department of the Loir-et-Cher, from 25 November to 10 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.210 23-27.

<sup>458</sup>Conseil Général of the Department of the Rhône-et-Loire, 3 -13 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.211 1-3.

<sup>459</sup>Administrators of the Department of the Corrèze, from 26 November to 2 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.210 2-8.

<sup>460</sup>Directory of the Department of Isère, from 24 to 26 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.222 25+26.

had little success in moderating religious policy at the national level, bishops turned to their old power base in a bid to influence their flock. Pamphlets, mostly taking on the form of pastoral letters, were written and distributed by prelates in every archbishopric save the two bishoprics that made up the archbishopric of Besançon.<sup>461</sup> Sparked by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy they continued to be written and circulated at a rate that did not decrease until June 1791. Even foreign prelates joined in with propaganda designed to incite opposition to the Civil Constitution amongst the lower clergy.<sup>462</sup>

This propaganda was largely framed around the argument that the Church should exercise independence in spiritual matters, taking inspiration from a highly influential pastoral letter on spiritual authority published on 24 October 1790 by the Bishop of Boulogne, Jean-René Asseline.<sup>463</sup> In this he argued that civil power is sovereign, absolute and independent in all that concerns temporality, but has no jurisdiction in that which concerns spirituality, God himself had established this distinction of powers.<sup>464</sup> His pastoral letter and public readers of it, were denounced in Boulogne-sur-Mer and the Pas-de-Calais region but also in Montpellier, Meaux, Curnier (Drôme), Dugny (Seine) and Saint-Dizier (Haute-Marne). Pastoral letters directly adhering to this were published by the bishops of Grenoble, Limoges, Laon, Metz, Saintes and Poitiers and denounced by their respective departments.<sup>465</sup>

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<sup>461</sup>The bishop of Belley died in January 1791. The Archbishop of Besançon was not denounced but refused to take the oath and emigrated in April 1791, see Aston, *The End of An Elite*, Appendix 5.

<sup>462</sup>Including the Archbishop of Trèves and the bishops of Liège, Urgel, and Ypres.

<sup>463</sup>E. Van Drivel, *Histoire des évêques de Boulogne* (Boulogne-sur-Mer: Berger frères, 1852), p.254. Google ebook.

<sup>464</sup>Jean-René Asseline, *Instruction pastorale de M. l'évêque de Boulogne sur l'autorité spirituelle*, 1 January 1790. Google ebook.

<sup>465</sup>Municipality and the Directory of the district of Boulogne-sur-Mer and the directory of the department of the Pas-de-Calais, from 1 to 23 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.214 2-8, President of the court of the district of Montpellier, from 11 to 16 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.219 25-28, Bernier, President of the Société des amis de la Constitution of Meaux, 18 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.220 15, *Curé* of Curnier (Drôme), 27 March 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.232 24, Municipality of Dugny (Seine), 23 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.220 22, Directory of the district of Saint-Dizier (Haute-Marne), from 8 to 9 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.216 8+9, Directory of the department of the Isère, from 24 to 26 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.222 25+26, Municipality of Chénérailles (Creuse), from 8 to 14 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.265 43+44, Directory and *procureur général-syndic* of the department of the Haute-Vienne, from 2 December 1790 to 19 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.218 19-22, Municipality of Laon, the *procureur-syndic* of the district of Laon and the directory of the department of the Aisne, from 1 to 4 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.215 26-29, Municipality of Rozoy-sur-Serre (Aisne), 20 March 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.231 20, Municipality of Thionville, 12 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.218 4, Directory of the department of the Charente-Inférieure, from 20 April to 2 May 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.22 d.239 6+7, President of the court of the district of Niort (Deux-Sèvres), from 24 October 1790 to 10 May 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.39 d.397 1-4.

Also influential was the *Exposition des Principes sur la Constitution Civile de Clergé* of 30 October 1790 drawn up by Boisgelin and the episcopal deputies and signed by almost every bishop.<sup>466</sup> In this document similar arguments on spiritual authority are made in addition to a defence of the position of bishops within the church and the absolute necessity for all changes to the Church to be approved by the pontiff.<sup>467</sup> References to the *Exposition* can also be found in bishops' letters to departments, but it was also directly used as propaganda; the bishop of Le Puy sent handsigned copies of the document to all the parish priests of his diocese.<sup>468</sup> In 1791 bishops would mount campaigns against the elections of new prelates to their sees, some addressing themselves directly to the electoral assemblies.<sup>469</sup>

However despite the concern of most departments anxious about the influence prelates had on their priests, Tackett has found little connection between strong campaigns by the bishop and oath taking. Bishops of the south, west and extreme east of the country were denounced less frequently than the north, south east and centre, in a strikingly similar pattern to Timothy Tackett's map of oath-taking. In other words bishops of the more constitutional areas seem to be denounced more frequently than those in refractory areas, their opposition to religious decrees perhaps being more conspicuous in contrast to the position taken by the priests of their dioceses. The rate of denunciation is also to do with the zeal of particular departments, the department of the Var for example sent in a total of eight separate denunciations of the bishops of their jurisdiction. But unlike Tackett's belief that there were 'seemingly as many or even more letters from patriots announcing the failure of episcopal efforts to stimulate *curé* opposition' I have found a greater number of letters feared the influence of the bishops.<sup>470</sup> The department of Morbihan said it was difficult to calculate the consequences of the bishop of Vannes' incendiary pastoral but 'ils peuvent etre terrible

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<sup>466</sup>Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France*, p.108.

<sup>467</sup>Jean de Dieu-Raymond de Boisgelin de Cucé, *Exposition des principes sur la Constitution civile du clergé: Par les évêques deputed à l'Assemblée nationale* (Paris: Le Clere, 1801) Google ebook.

<sup>468</sup>Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France*, p.110.

<sup>469</sup>President of the electoral assembly of the department of the Haute-Vienne, from 6 to 18 February 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.225 29-31, Electoral assembly of the department of the Oise, from 18 to 26 February 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.228 17+18, Jaubert, *procureur général-syndic* of the department of the Bouches-du-Rhône, from 22 February to 6 March 1791 AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.229 21+22 and others.

<sup>470</sup>Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France*, p.113.

dans un canton encore imbué du fanatisme aveugle'.<sup>471</sup> The department of Ile-et-Vilaine wrote to the Assembly that regretfully only a small number of clergymen had taken the oath, laying blame on a seditious letter written by the bishop to the clergymen of his diocese. These clergymen had at first applauded the constitution which recalled *les beaux jours* of the church but were hoodwinked by the bishop who obliged them to change their opinions.<sup>472</sup> Other departments similarly denounced letters sent from bishops to their *curés*. The department officials of the Eure on the other hand were pleased to report to the National Assembly that the attempts made by the bishop of Évreux to dissuade the clergy of his diocese from taking the oath had been unsuccessful.<sup>473</sup>

Not all denunciations of bishops were sent by departments. Districts and Municipalities also sent in denunciations of pastorals and pieces relating to legal proceedings begun against their authors. Around seventeen came from different Societies of the Friends of the Constitution (four of which were societies in the Auvergne where clubs seem particularly vocal). Individuals too wrote denunciations of the bishops, mostly denouncing them for engaging in seditious activities. Fewer than these but significant nonetheless were the handful from members of the lower clergy. Most denounced circular letters sent to them by their bishops. For the *curé* of Breuil (Marne) whose bishop had sent him a circular letter adjoined to a discourse of the Archbishop of Aix, it was one thing for the archbishop to express these views in the assembly where they could be opposed but for the bishop of Soissons to spread them under the guise of a pastoral was to undermine the legislative power. He proposed that the Assembly send to each municipality a summary of the opposing viewpoint.<sup>474</sup> The *curé* of Curnier (Drôme) had been nominated by the sworn priests of his area to denounce to the Assembly the circulation by refractories of the bishop of Boulogne's pastoral. They likewise asked that the Assembly dispatch to them copies of the

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<sup>471</sup>Directory of the Department of Morbihan, from 15 to 28 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.215 8-12.

<sup>472</sup>Directory of the Department of Ile-et-Vilaine, from 10 December 1790 to 14 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.217 15+16.

<sup>473</sup>Department of the Eure, from 17 to 19 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.219 6-9.

<sup>474</sup>Sieur Le Cerf, *Curé* of Breuil (Marne), from 30 June to 5 August 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.11 d.115 4+5.

refutation written by the *curé* of Bonny (Pas-de-Calais), a substituting deputy of Artois to counter it.<sup>475</sup> Two letters denounced bishops for sending them personally threatening letters. A sworn vicar from Rosendael sent in the letter he had received from the bishop of Ypres where he accused him of cowardice in taking the oath - a 'serment par le quel vous vous êtes souillé de plusieurs crimes horribles'.<sup>476</sup> A monk, Père Félicien, denounced the bishop of Toulon for his threats towards religieux 'prêts à profiter de la liberté que leur offre la déclaration des droits de l'homme'.<sup>477</sup>

Opposition to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy led to the most divisive of legislation – the requirement for all parish clergymen and bishops to take an oath of allegiance to the Revolution. The denunciations of this period would directly influence the proposition of the legislation, put forward by the president of the Committee Voidel on 26 November 1790. He quoted from the protest of the bishopric of Tréguier and also used the examples of protests of the bishops of Soissons, Verdun, Dijon, Nantes, Lyon and Lisieux as well as the chapters of Lyon, Saint-Brieuc, Vannes, Quimper and Laon, all having been the subject of denunciations, as evidence to support the decree. He also spoke of the protests of individual priests which although appearing isolated from each other, served 'les projets de la ligue'.<sup>478</sup>

### The Oath

The decree imposing the clerical oath drafted by Voidel was voted in on the 27 November 1790 and sanctioned by the King on the 26 December. Oath ceremonies were to take place in the first week of January 1791 when clergymen were to stand before the community and declare their allegiance to the nation, the law the King and the constitution. This would initiate a new phase in the Revolution which sought to reveal and suppress dissidence of any kind. Around half of the clerical population

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<sup>475</sup>*Curé* of Curnier (Drôme), 27 March 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.232 24.

<sup>476</sup>Sieur d'Espinoy, sworn *vicar*, Rosendael (Nord), from 11 to 18 February 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.226 35+36.

<sup>477</sup>Père Félicien, Capuchin monk, 2 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.6 d.81 14.

<sup>478</sup>26 November 1790, AP, 21:3-9.

would soon be considered 'suspect' under laws brought in by the Legislative Assembly.<sup>479</sup> However in the immediate aftermath of the legislation the National Assembly, no doubt surprised by the number of non-jurors and still retaining a faction representing clerical interests, published a series of decrees which significantly softened their approach. In their 'instruction' of 21 January 1791 they attempted to explain the motives behind the oath, expressing the legislation as simply a desire to reform the organisation of the Church, not to trespass in spiritual affairs. They subsequently lessened the consequences for non-conformity according refractories a modest pension and on 23 February giving them the right to remain in their parishes until replacements were found. In March they removed the deadline for taking the oath and in May, in a bid to honour their commitment to toleration as laid out in the Declaration of the Rights of Man, they allowed refractories to continue their religious practice in parallel with the juring clergy so long as they did not openly express views against the Constitution or constitutional priests.<sup>480</sup>

This string of legislation caused some confusion in the provinces. Not helped by the variation in times at which the decrees were received, local authorities were often left uncertain about how to deal with non-jurors. The Committee of Research sent letters responding to some denunciations of refractories in attempts to regulate procedure. They gently reminded the department of the Charente-Inférieure that all those who excited opposition to the laws were to be prosecuted referring to articles 6,7 and 8 in the decree of the 26 December 1790.<sup>481</sup>

In some cases things were further complicated by the fact that the local authorities could not always be counted on to enforce the legislation. The vicaires of Craponne-sur-Arzon (Haute-Loire) were shocked when the mayor and municipal officers refused to hear their oath.<sup>482</sup> The mayor of Chanu (Orne) warned that 'certaines municipalités

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<sup>479</sup>When the decree of November 1791 labelled them 'suspect' see McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, p.63.

<sup>480</sup>Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France*, pp.27-28.

<sup>481</sup>Response from Committee of Research to the Department of the Charente-Inférieure, 2 May 1791, c.22 d.238 6+7.

<sup>482</sup>Vicaires of Craponne-sur-Arzon (Haute-Loire), from 6 February to 10 March 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.230 1-3.



dont les maires hipocrites et les membres ignorans [*sic*]' were rallying behind priests against the Constitution.<sup>483</sup> Craponne-sur-Arzon was one of several places where the Society of Friends of the Constitution, soon to be known as the Jacobins, monitored and denounced the handling of the oath by local authorities; if not for opposition to it then for not doing enough to limit the damage caused by refractory priests. But chaos was, perhaps, inevitable in light of the nature of the legislation.

In February several letters denounced violence committed against authorities by inhabitants who opposed the religious decrees. In Sainte-Foy (Gironde) a confrontation between the mayor and the *curé* led to a loud show of support amongst the women in the congregation for the priest shouting 'nous voulons notre curé, nous le garderions'.<sup>484</sup> The Society of Friends of the Constitution of Rodez denounced the 'horribles violences' committed against the Mayor of Millau by inhabitants imbued with religious fanaticism.<sup>485</sup> Graver were the events in Vannes (Morbihan) where an armed crowd of twelve to fifteen thousand peasants, reportedly stirred up by the bishop of Vannes and a group of priests, had to be violently suppressed with help from neighbouring municipalities.<sup>486</sup> In April two attacks against sworn priests were reported<sup>487</sup> and from May onwards several reports were made of agitation surrounding the arrival of new *curés* set to replace the refractory ones. The new *curé* in the parish of Sénezergues (Cantal) was ambushed and fired upon by a crowd whilst being escorted by the National Guard to the church.<sup>488</sup> The elected *curé* of Orsennes (Indre) was apparently wounded by an axe-wielding parishioner.<sup>489</sup> Tackett has found other instances of violent responses to the oath by laymen, including some committed against non-juring priests by patriotic parishioners.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>483</sup>Garnier, Mayor of Chanu (Orne), from 30 to 31 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.222 18+19.

<sup>484</sup>Municipality of Sainte-Foy (Gironde), 13 February 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.224 22.

<sup>485</sup>Society of Friends of the Constitution of Rodez, 14 February 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.226 37.

<sup>486</sup>Municipality and the directory of the district of Vannes, the directory of the department of the Morbihan and Jean-Michel Beysser, major of the *Dragons Nationaux* of Lorient, Vannes, from 8 to 14 February 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.17 d.190 17-22.

<sup>487</sup>President of the Administration of the Department of the Hérault, from 8 January to 23 April 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.22 d.240 7-48 and Directory of the District of Challans (Vendée), from 9 to 11 April 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.22 d.235 1-3.

<sup>488</sup>Committee of Surveillance of the Society of Friends of the Constitution of Aurillac, from 31 May to 5 June 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.33 d.344 29+30.

<sup>489</sup>Directory of the Department of the Indre, from 18 April to 11 May, AN DXXIXbis c.22 d.243 6-8.

<sup>490</sup>Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France*, pp.165-172.

But nonetheless it seems the fear of religious insurrection was greater at this time than the actual number of incidents. Reports of agitation resulting from religious legislation were relatively few compared to other kinds of rioting; only around twenty letters reported religious agitation as opposed to at least fifty-five reports of food rioting and at least forty-five reported incidents of anti-seigneurial activity in the archive. These are not so different from the findings of John Markoff who calculated that religious events accounted for sixteen percent of the total number of revolts from June 1788 to June 1793, subsistence events twenty-six percent and anti-seigneurial events a substantial thirty-six percent.<sup>491</sup> However it is most likely that many incident reports were sent directly to the courts, others were certainly sent to the Committee of Reports and some perhaps to the Ecclesiastical Committee. It may also be the case that authorities were reluctant to report religious agitation, preferring instead to denounce those whom they believed to be the perpetrators. This would apparently be the expression of a longstanding tendency to focus on leaders of riots rather than followers<sup>492</sup> and is suggested by the efforts made in reports of agitation to absolve rioters from culpability. The Society of Rodez wrote that efforts to provoke sedition made from the pulpit were responsible for events and were principally 'dirigés vers l'imagination d'un sexe que son ignorance profonde en matières politiques et theologiques rend susceptible de toutes les impressions [*sic*]'. For the department of the Maine-et-Loire it was the refractories who 'échauffent les esprits ignorants et superstitieux'.<sup>493</sup> Nonetheless it is undeniable that various attacks against clerics, both non-jurors and jurors arose as a result of the oath legislation which only served to heighten fears of further religious agitation.

The perceived influence of refractories in the community led to sometimes desperate calls for additional legislation to be drawn up. Two letters in February sought to make the distinction between jurors and non-jurors clearer; one calling for special badges for constitutional priests so that they might be more easily identified and praised for being

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<sup>491</sup>Markoff, *The Abolition of Feudalism*, p.218.

<sup>492</sup>Jill Maciak Walshaw, *A Show of Hands for the Republic: Opinion, Information and Repression in Eighteenth-Century Rural France* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press; Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), p.90.

<sup>493</sup>Directory of the Department of the Maine-et-Loire, 13 February 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.225 20.

true ministers of the Catholic religion<sup>494</sup> and another, from a sworn priest suggesting special costumes for jurors.<sup>495</sup> Calls most commonly came however in the spring of 1791 when petitions increasingly called for the banishment of refractories. The new bishop of the department of the Finistère in Brittany, a heavily refractory zone, wrote to his friend the deputy Lanjuinais urging the National Assembly to take action to prevent disastrous confrontations amongst the clergy, describing, like many others, the situation as 'autel contre autel'. He adjoined to his letter the plan of a decree which he hoped to gain approval for from the Assembly. Written in collaboration with department officials it suggested that refractory *curés* be required to leave their parishes and go a distance of at least four leagues.<sup>496</sup> Others, particularly in Brittany, likewise suggested minimum distances and even time-frames. The Society des Amis de la Constitution of Lorient proposed a distance of five leagues for a period of six months to give new *curés* a chance to ingratiate themselves with the local populace.<sup>497</sup> The department of the Côtes-du-Nord asked for at least ten leagues.<sup>498</sup> A desire to see refractories leave was, according to Sieur du Bouillon a former regiment captain, widespread. He reported from Coutances (Manche) that according to the local bread merchant they were complaining in the countryside that the obligation for refractory *curés* to leave their parishes had not been made by the National Assembly.<sup>499</sup> Perhaps the most urgent calls for action against refractories were the letters from the juring clergy, under pressure from their non-juring neighbours. The sworn priests of Brioude in the Auvergne, another highly refractory zone,<sup>500</sup> were chastised by their non-juring colleagues who preached that it would be better to confess to a tree than to them along with a 'mille autres impietes pernicieuses'.<sup>501</sup> They wrote directly to Voidel in an attempt to appeal to what they saw as an earlier intransigent position on non-jurors asking him whether his threats about non-submission to the laws were sincere or just

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<sup>494</sup>Municipality of Suresnes (Seine-et-Oise), 21 February 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.226 43.

<sup>495</sup>Demoré, Civil Servant Priest, Tours, 19 February 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.33 d.340 5.

<sup>496</sup>Expilly, bishop of Finistère to Lanjuinais, Quimper, from 21 to 22 April 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.22 d.235 19+20.

<sup>497</sup> *Société des Amis de la Constitution* of Lorient (Morbihan), 20 April 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.22 d.237 7.

<sup>498</sup> Directory of the Department of the Côtes-du-Nord, 28 May 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.23 d.245 10.

<sup>499</sup>Sieur Du Bouillon, Former Captain of the Regiment of Monsieur, Coutances (Manche), 20 May 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.22 d.243 22.

<sup>500</sup>Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France*, p.53.

<sup>501</sup> Civil Servants of the Department of the Haute-Loire, District of Brioude, 1 April 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.22 d.237 1.

political rhetoric.<sup>502</sup>The *curé* of Solliès-Toucas (Var) similarly called for 'les mesures solides' to stop the work of enemies of the *bien public*.<sup>503</sup> An unsigned letter from a group of sworn priests in Montpellier described the motives behind the awarding of a pension to refractories as touching but warned them to 'prevenez l'incendie, plutôt que de vous préparer à l'éteindre'.<sup>504</sup>

Rarely in these letters do we hear from the refractory clergy themselves. It seems that non-jurors addressed their thoughts on the Civil Constitution and Oath to the local authorities rather than the National Assembly in much the same way as the bishops did to departments, although it appears to a lesser extent.<sup>505</sup> Writing to the National Assembly perhaps gave the government a legitimacy which they did not want to accord it. They did of course address themselves to their parishioners, much to the alarm of local patriots. I have found only two examples of letters written to the National Assembly by non-juring clergymen on the oath. Both were clearly torn between loyalty to the nation and devotion to their religion. The *curé* of Lagraulet (Gers) wrote to them that he prayed for them and prayed that they would see the error in their work<sup>506</sup> while the sieur Lebreton, priest near Château-Gontier (Mayenne) and his colleagues wrote that they had 'trop de droiture et respect pour l'august assemblée pour la trompe sur nos vrais sentiments sur le serment civique'.<sup>507</sup>

Parishioners too seemed to choose to address the local authorities rather than the National Assembly in their petitions to maintain their non-juring *curés*. The inhabitants of Biville (Manche) for example wrote to their district proclaiming their dedication to the church and their refusal to accept a new priest who 'nous fuirons comme les Brébis fuient le Loup'.<sup>508</sup> The rare examples sent to the National Assembly seem to be a lot

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<sup>502</sup>The Sworn Civil Servants of the District of Brioude' to Voidel, 14 April 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.22 d.234 18.

<sup>503</sup>Sieur Rastin, *curé* of Solliès-Toucas (Var), 16 April 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.22 d.237 8.

<sup>504</sup>Unsigned, Sworn Clergymen of the District of Montpellier, 25 March 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.232 29.

<sup>505</sup>See Municipality of Aubenton (Aisne), 25 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.220 21, Municipality of Poyans (Haute-Saône), 19 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.212 4, Directory of the Department of the Morbihan, from 15 to 28 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.215 8-12, Directory of the Department of the Mayenne, from 19 January to 16 March 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.228 24+25 and others.

<sup>506</sup>Sieur Lapeyre, *curé* of Lagraulet (Gers), 22 February 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.229 1.

<sup>507</sup>Sieur Lebreton, priest in Château-Gontier (Mayenne), 23 February 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.229 2.

<sup>508</sup>*Procureur-syndic* of the district of Cherbourg, from 26 April to 4 May 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.22 d.241 29+30.

less direct. Montalembert de Monbeau writing from a chateau in Villeneuve d'Agen (Lot-et-Garonne) posed his petition in terms of how well-loved the non-jurors of his parish were, pleading that one was old and attached to his parishioners so much that they say he was offered a more lucrative benefice but turned it down.<sup>509</sup>

### Denouncing the local *Curé*

Letters such as these on the impact of the oath legislation show how visible the effects of religious policy were at a local level. Alongside letters on religious legislation and denunciations by departments of bishops, denunciations of local *curés* show how central religious divisions were to even the smallest of communities. But denunciations of priests were more complex than accounts of violations of decrees alone. This can also be said to be true of the conflict between bishops and their departments, which were no doubt largely power struggles. But denunciations of the local priest transcended religious dispute even further. This was due to the fact that the parish priest occupied a unique position at the heart of rural life. He was a spiritual advisor, with a paternal role in guiding his parishioners in even the most intimate areas of their lives but he also more often than not played a vital administrative role in the community. He was often the only member of a community that could read and write and was thus frequently called upon to represent his parishioners in communications with the outside world.<sup>510</sup>

Due to this firm footing in the local power structure, the Revolution did not only effect the parish priest's job specifications, but upset his position in local society. For some this was a welcome change. Not only did the Civil Constitution of the Clergy improve the income and experience of the profession for most of the lower clergy but many were already before the outbreak of revolution identifying themselves as citizen-priests. This concept fore-fronted the practical duties of a priest in the community

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<sup>509</sup>Montalembert de Monbeau, Villeneuve d'Agen (Lot-et-Garonne), 20 April 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.22 d.241 18.

<sup>510</sup>Timothy Tackett, *Priest and Parish in Eighteenth-Century France: A Social and Political Study of the Curés in a Diocese of Dauphiné, 1750-1791* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), Chapters 6 and 7.

above his spiritual position in the clerical hierarchy.<sup>511</sup> His role amongst his flock, in education, poor relief and administration would bound many priests to the ideals of the Revolution. 'Aussi n'ai je cessé de lire à mes paroissiens avec le plus grand zèle et le plus vif intérêt les sages et lumineux décrets émanés de votre auguste Sénat' wrote the sieur Brillon, *curé* of Foug (Meurthe-et-Moselle) describing 'les beautés de votre Constitution au clergé'.<sup>512</sup>

Some would take advantage of the dissolution of Old Regime laws which in most provinces forbade clergymen from being involved in village politics by becoming local officials or even a *curé*-mayor.<sup>513</sup> Most of the patriotic priests writing to the Assembly had managed to reconcile their religious role with their secular one. The *curé* of Saint Romain in Blaye (Gironde) wrote of the 'imbecillité' of the argument that the Civil Constitution was trespassing on the realm of the spiritual.<sup>514</sup> The *curé* of Thorigny-sur-Oreuse (Yonne) articulated both his temporal and spiritual allegiances.

Nous professons ouvertement mes confrères et moi la validité des décisions du corps législatif sur tout ce qui n'intéresse ni le dogme ni l'enseignement de l'église. Nous mettons notre gloire dans notre soumission à ses décrets, et notre bonheur et l'inspirer à nos paroissiens.<sup>515</sup>

But not all weathered the change. For parish priests who were not at the forefront of revolutionary action one piece of early legislation would cause upset that is little commented on by historians of the subject. The decree of 23 February 1790 requiring the secular clergy to read and explain revolutionary decrees from the pulpit<sup>516</sup> would be rejected by many *curés* who were then denounced to the Assembly by their local authorities. Although Sunday Mass had been used before to inform congregations of royal orders, enshrined in law it required priests to be complicit in the revolutionary decrees, and thus served as a polarising factor pushing priests to take a public stance

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<sup>511</sup>Ibid, pp.297-298.

<sup>512</sup>Sieur Brillon, *curé* of Foug (Meurthe-et-Moselle), 21 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.213 29.

<sup>513</sup>Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France*, p.96.

<sup>514</sup>*Curé* of Saint Romain, Blaye (Gironde), from 10 to 24 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.213 1+2.

<sup>515</sup>*Curé* of Thorigny-sur-Oreuse (Yonne), 11 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.211 11.

<sup>516</sup>P.M. Jones, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.40.

against the Revolution. The *curé* of Saint-Amé (Vosges) avoided reading the decrees for a while before being confronted by a municipal officer. When asked by this officer to read the decrees at the pulpit he rejected the decrees with disdain.

je luy demandai, avec raison, pourquoi il ne l'avoit pas publiée, il ma repondu, affichez-la![...]s'etant en suite levé subitement pour me chasser ignominieusement, en une criant, affichés-la, est-ce que suis fait pour etre votre chien; et disant que j'ettoit un effronté, que je le menacoit et qu'il me seroit mettre en prison, la dessus j'ai sorté bien subitement [*sic*].<sup>517</sup>

Refusing to publish decrees was also bound up with general animosities felt between the new municipal authorities and the *curé*. Many new municipalities complained of being insulted openly by the *curé*, who refused to read decrees even when they explicitly asked him to. The Municipality of Ginestet (Dordogne) had to resort to calling upon the National Assembly to put a brake on the rebellious conduct of their *curé* after he had declared from the pulpit that he did not recognise the National Guard.<sup>518</sup> The Mayor of Hagetmau (Landes) complained that their *curé* had refused to hand over the key for the chapel so that the bells could be rung on the birthday of a citizen who had been a Knight of the Order of St Louis.<sup>519</sup> The *curé* Sieur Baudry was denounced multiple times by the municipality and inhabitants of Armentières and Isles-les-Meldeuses (Seine-et-Marne) for refusing to read decrees from the pulpit but moreover for being a 'homme absolu faux, violent, vindictif et sans moeurs' having scandalised the parish for thirty years.<sup>520</sup> In this way municipalities and parishioners took the opportunity to pile old regime grievances in with the new. The *curé* of Aubervilliers (Seine-et-Oise), for example, had not instructed his parishioners of the work of the National Assembly, he had also concealed donations for the poor and had opposed the nomination of an honest man to the position of churchwarden in 1787.<sup>521</sup>

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<sup>517</sup> Municipal Officers of the community of Celle, parish of Saint-Amé (Vosges), 27 April 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.52 13.

<sup>518</sup> Municipality of Ginestet (Dordogne), from 9 to 15 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.7 d.97 18+19.

<sup>519</sup> Sieur Lalanne, Mayor of Hagetmau (Landes), from 24 May to 9 July 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.11 d.115 8-13.

<sup>520</sup> Municipality and the Inhabitants of Armentières and Isles-les-Meldeuses (Seine-et-Marne), 26 June 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.7 d.96 26.

<sup>521</sup> Priests of the *Oratoire*, Paris, 24 March 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.52 14.

Parish priests themselves would also contact the National Assembly about conflicts with the local authorities. One *curé*, denounced for fanaticism by his municipality a month before<sup>522</sup> made his own counter-claims against the mayor, municipal officers and parishioners. He denounced them for not pursuing a case of theft in the Church as well as denouncing the violence committed against him by the Mayor's wife and niece and the Mayor himself who he described as 'un manouvrier dans tout la vigueur du terme, le plus pauvre du paroisse, mais le homme le plus hardi et le plus intrigant'.<sup>523</sup>

Other *curés* would make similar claims during the course of 1790, and some would even denounce municipalities for not communicating decrees. The *curé* of Etables (Ain) wrote that he was unable to perform the 'glorieuse tâche' of combining Catholic dogma with the dogma of the august French senate due to the refusal of the Municipality to share decrees with him.<sup>524</sup> It seems that while genuine opposition to the Revolution caused some parish priests to refuse to cooperate with the decree requiring them to read decrees at the pulpit, it was complicated by significant tensions between the secular clergy and the new municipal bodies. Denunciations of this nature would continue right up until the end of the period of the Constituent Assembly.

As time went on *curés* were increasingly denounced for injurious discourse, seen as an intention to incite rebellious behaviour amongst their congregations. 'Sr Deshéault *curé* de Lacellette' wrote the commandor of the national guard of the small commune of La Cellette (Creuse), 'se permet de ne pas publier les decrets de l'assemblée nationale & dit pour ses raisons que cela l'ennuye & que le sont des betises [*sic*].'<sup>525</sup> Other discourse against the National Assembly or comments on the unfortunate times were reported alongside denunciations of seditious sermons and the reading from the pulpit of incendiary pieces of writing and pastoral letters.<sup>526</sup> Members of the lower

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<sup>522</sup>Municipality of Saint-Aurin (Somme), 25 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.6 d.80 17.

<sup>523</sup>Abbé Paulinier, *curé* of Saint-Aurin (Somme), 25 July 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.10 d.110 3.

<sup>524</sup>Abbé Pupunat, *curé* of Etables (Ain), 22 July 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.10 d.110 2.

<sup>525</sup>Sieur Furgaud, commandor of the National Guard of La Cellette (Creuse), 8 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.15 d.171 27.

<sup>526</sup> Municipality of Marvejols (Lozère), from 15 to 16 August 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.11 d.123 21+22, Anonymous, Longchamps (Aisne), 21 August 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.11 d.121 14, Directory of the District of Champlitte (Haute-Saône), 27 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.25 d.251 22-24, Sieur Lagarde, Douai (Nord), 3 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.16 d.174 4 and others.



clergy were also denounced for the circulation of incendiary material and other attempts to urge their colleagues not to acknowledge the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. But *curés* seem to be just as occupied with changes occurring on a local level, as they are with national legislation. Several *curés* were denounced for refusing to cooperate with the sale of *biens nationaux*; some for discouraging parishioners from purchasing them, others for issuing direct threats of excommunication to those that did. One district took offence at the terms of a request made by the *curé* to retain some ornaments up for sale from his parish, in which he described it as a means to ensure the ornaments were 'sauvés du naufrage'.<sup>527</sup>

Actions taken by the parish clergy were made all the more serious in the minds of the local authorities by the presumption that people were credulous and volatile. The authorities of Boulogne-sur-Mer would thus consider the *curé* of Transloy in his protest against the sale of *biens nationaux* 'plus coupable' as 'les devoirs de son état lui prescrivent de recommander les soumissions aux loix'.<sup>528</sup> In the face of these attempts to 'corrompre un peuple crédule' municipalities felt that their position within the community was fragile.<sup>529</sup> The Municipality of Saint-Pol-de-Léon (Finistère) wrote that they had neither the faculties nor the authority to counter the incendiary sermons of their *curé* who was protected by 'les puissances aristocratiques'.<sup>530</sup> Conflicts arose in July 1790 when priests refused to perform special services requested by the municipality. In Quiers (Seine-et-Marne) and Germay (Haute-Marne) clergymen refused to commemorate the fall of the Bastille when asked to by the local authorities.<sup>531</sup> In Stains (Seine) the general assembly of the commune accused the *curé* of humiliating the mayor when he publicly refused to sing a *veni creator spiritus* and even prevented the mayor himself from doing so.<sup>532</sup> Clergymen were denounced for

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<sup>527</sup>Conseil Général of the District of Angers, from 21 September to 2 November 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.14 d.153 18-22.

<sup>528</sup>Municipality and the Directory of the District of Boulogne-sur-Mer and the Directory of the Department of the Pas-de-Calais, from 1 to 23 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.214 2-8.

<sup>529</sup>Conseil général of the commune and municipal office of Saint-Pol-de-Léon (Finistère), 10 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.20 d.212 1.

<sup>530</sup>Ibid.

<sup>531</sup>Municipality of Quiers (Seine-et-Marne), from 14 to 16 July 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.16 d.177 15 and Community of Germay (Haute-Marne), 15 July 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.11 d.118 9.

<sup>532</sup>General Assembly of the Commune of Stains (Seine-et-Oise), 19 July 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.129 3.

'rude remarks', indecency and in one instance inciting parishioners to hang the mayor, offering to march at their head.<sup>533</sup> The Society of Saint-Amand-Mont-Rond (Cher) denounced the *curé* Damont for saying at the pulpit that he found the oath repugnant to his conscience 'un tel discours, Monsieur le président, ne pouvant faire que de funestes impressions sur le nombre des esprits crédules et fanatiques de cette ville'.<sup>534</sup> The Conseil Général of the commune of Montilly (Orne) warned of the potential insurrection that could be provoked by the incendiary discourse of the *curé*, 'non seulement dans cette paroisse, mais dans les voisines, desja ebranlées [*sic*].'<sup>535</sup>

Clearly religious legislation had a polarising effect on community-level tensions. Letters sent in 1789 on the subject of church property provide evidence for popular engagement in debate, much like letters that proposed various methods for improving subsistence nationally. However the Civil Constitution of the Clergy would provoke great campaigns of protest, led it seems largely by bishops, against the religious reforms. Denunciations of the clergy involved would directly lead to the passing of the oath legislation which created a schism between those who had taken the oath and those who had not. Religious agitation followed, and on a greater scale fear of religious agitation, which led to many calls for more radical legislation to be brought against non-jurors. Refractory priests would be almost totally disengaged from the democratic sphere.

But religious tensions also resulted from the revolutionary dynamic itself as old elite structures were falling apart and new municipal authorities were attempting to install themselves. Religious legislation and local shifts in power structures were also to some extent part of the same phenomenon: the church was an institution of hierarchy and privilege that stood in contrast to the new political culture of the Revolution. The National Assembly itself was split on the issue of clerical reforms, broadly speaking a

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<sup>533</sup>*Procureur du Roi* at the bailliage of Péronne (Somme), 6 November 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.14 d.152 17-19.

<sup>534</sup>Société des amis de la Constitution of Saint-Amand-Mont-Rond (Cher), 7 February 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.225 3.

<sup>535</sup>Conseil Général of the Commune of Montilly (Orne), 17 February 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.21 d.225 23.

struggle was played out between the Jacobins and the conservatives.

But as the denunciations of *curés* show clearly, it was not always the case that local authorities were the vanguard of a new secular culture; occasionally parish priests considered themselves the pro-revolutionary force. This suggests that the most important factor behind increasing religious tensions was a power struggle among local elites initiated by the Revolution, the denouncers largely believing themselves to be involved in a fight to defend and progress it. Whilst the requirement of decrees to be read from the pulpit and the oath legislation in particular heightened and made visible bitter divides, clearly institutional fragility also played an important role in intensifying discord, and indeed itself led to the radical legislation as we saw in relation to the clerical oath. Departmental authorities struggled to legitimise their authority in the face of rebellious bishops whilst municipalities rivalled local priests; both felt that their positions were highly insecure. The same sense of instability had led municipalities to denounce local grain producers and identify violators of the free circulation of grain. Denunciations of *curés* by municipalities also have much in common with denunciations sent by municipalities in relation to other communal disputes, which in large part served to legitimise and impose their authority.

Local political conflict would also be a factor in explanations of why there were fears of counter-revolution in the period despite the fact that counter-revolutionary threats were insubstantial. In the next chapter we shall examine the complex causes behind the intensification of these fears.

## Chapter 5

### Fear of Counter-Revolution

*Malgré toutes mes recherches, j'avoue, Monsieur le duc, que je ne suis pas encore parvenu à découvrir les auteurs des bruits qui se répandent et des écrits qui circule au très grand détriment du repos public. Il est certain que plusieurs soldats ont de l'argent, quoique tous les désordres, qui pendent 4 jours ont été portés à l'excès, n'aient donné lieu à aucune plainte de vols. Il est également évident que c'est la plus basse classe du peuple qui s'agite, qui fermente, qui débauche les soldats [...] je crois en appercevoir plusieurs causes:*

1. *Nos voisins peuvent sacrifier quelques millions avec la certitude que, par nos troubles intérieurs, ils nous feront plus de mal que par la guerre la plus longue.*
2. *Un corps considérable voit avec regret sa destruction et cherche à se venger.*
3. *Le silence des lois et la cessation de toute autorité engagent le Peuple à une licence sans bornes qu'il qualifie de liberté.*

Letter from the Marquis de Langeron, commandor in chief in the Franche-Comté addressed to the duc de La Rochefoucauld, outgoing member of the Committee of Research, 3 September 1789 <sup>536</sup>

From the moment the Estates-General of May 1789 was assembled there was a popular suspicion that elements of the former elite were plotting to dissolve it. Troops were accumulating around Paris and rumours spread daily that the nobility and clergy would exact revenge upon the Third Estate. A belief in plots was central to the engine of revolutionary change; on the 14 July 1789 Paris awoke to rumours that the troops around the city had begun their attack and intended to massacre the population, crowds assembled and went in search of gunpowder to defend themselves eventually descending upon the Bastille. In the days following, the King's brother the comte d'Artois left Paris with a band of courtiers and was shortly thereafter followed by the prince de Condé, the Contis and other court nobles. This emigration further stoked counter-revolutionary fears and rumours spread that these nobles would return with foreign powers and that vagrants 'brigands' would join with them to foment riots in Paris and sabotage the harvest in the provinces.<sup>537</sup> These rumours culminated in the Great Fear that spread around the country at the end of July. Some places saw anti-

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<sup>536</sup> Letter from the Marquis de Langeron to the duc de La Rochefoucauld, Besançon, 3 September 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.1 d.3 30.

<sup>537</sup> Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France*, trans. by Joan White (London: NLB, 1973), pp.59-62.

seigneurial uprisings, in many places the old town councils were forced out. Amidst this agitation, the Committee of Research was established to seek out plots against the State.

Thus fears of counter-revolution were sown into the Revolution from the beginning, and indeed intense belief in conspiracy became a defining feature of the period of the terror. By that point it was not only the more obvious opponents of the Revolution who were presented as the enemy, but even its most ardent supporters. For this reason, finding the roots of conspiracy fears has been at the forefront of much historiographical debate. Historians writing in the last ten years on the topic of conspiracy in the Revolution largely agree that the notion put forward by revisionist historians that conspiracy was an inevitable part of Revolutionary ideology needs reassessing.<sup>538</sup> Not only were conspiratorial politics and conspiracy thinking a key part of the political culture of the *ancien régime*, but the revolutionary process itself offered many points at which beliefs around conspiracy erupted and developed in line with changing circumstances. Timothy Tackett for example has stressed the importance of the King's flight to Varennes as a turning point in the Revolution. Prior to the King's flight in June 1791, Tackett found that the Revolutionaries had been largely unaffected by a preoccupation with conspiracy outside major episodes like the Great Fear.<sup>539</sup>

For the revolutionaries, the issue of counter-revolution was multifaceted for they interpreted most disturbances as examples of counter-revolutionary plotting. Conspiracy-explanations were deeply ingrained in popular belief; under the *ancien régime* any disruption to order was instinctively considered a result of conspiracy.<sup>540</sup> From the moment the Committee of Research was established they were also receiving hundreds of reports of unrest. One such report was sent by the marquis de Langeron on

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<sup>538</sup>For example Timothy Tackett, *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), *Conspiracy in the French Revolution*, ed. by Peter R. Campbell, Thomas E. Kaiser, and Marisa Linton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), David Andress, *The Terror: The Merciless War for Freedom in Revolutionary France* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006) and Dan Edelstein, *The Terror of Natural Right: Republicanism, the Cult of Nature, and the French Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>539</sup>Timothy Tackett, 'Conspiracy Obsession in a Time of Revolution: French Elites and the Origins of the Terror, 1789-1792' in *American Historical Review*, 105, (June, 2000), 691-713.

<sup>540</sup>David Andress, 'Horrible Plots and Infernal Treasons': Conspiracy and the Urban Landscape in the Early Revolution' in *Conspiracy in the French Revolution*, p.86.

the revolts of the Franche-Comté. His explanation for the anti-seigneurial actions of the peasantry here and the mutiny seen in Besançon was as follows: firstly foreign powers were fomenting civil war, secondly a group in society saw themselves as victims of the Revolution and were taking vengeance and thirdly a lack of authority was making people licentious in the name of liberty. As a matter of course he considered the troubles as the work of agents, both local and foreign, understanding lower class unruliness as a product of a systemic lack of authority.<sup>541</sup>

The Committee of Research clearly believed the same. Reports from the provinces of anti-seigneurial riots and municipal upheavels were it seems often interpreted by the Committee as the work of particular individuals against the Revolution.<sup>542</sup> With hundreds of these kinds of reports arriving at the desks of the Committee members, each presenting no clear or uniform cause, it is unsurprising that the first two Committees at least believed in a nationwide premeditated plot against the Revolution and saw their role as unearthing 'les auteurs des troubles qui agitent le Royaume'.<sup>543</sup>

This culture of conspiracy-thinking, described by Peter Campbell as a consequence of the integral nature of secret collaborations and cabals to court politics under the *ancien régime*, was not confined to elite circles.<sup>544</sup> Conspiracy belief was present in every stratum of society, under the *ancien régime* and into the new.<sup>545</sup> In many cases these beliefs were unfounded, but conspiracy was by no means solely imaginary. Jacques Godechot has explored the activities of the main organ of counter-revolution to show that plots against the Revolution certainly existed however ineffectual. The comte d'Artois and his early band of *émigrés* set up in Turin where from September 1789 they organised themselves into a committee dedicated to counter-revolution. On the advice

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<sup>541</sup>Letter from the Marquis de Langeron to the duc de La Rochefoucauld, Besançon, 3 September 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.1 d.3 30; for more on revolt in the Franche-Comté see P.M. Jones, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Chapter 3.

<sup>542</sup>Rouilhac, deputy, and letter to the authorities of Limoges written by the Committee of Research from 16 to 17 August 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.1 d.2 7+8, Committee of Research, 18 September 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.1 d.3 29.

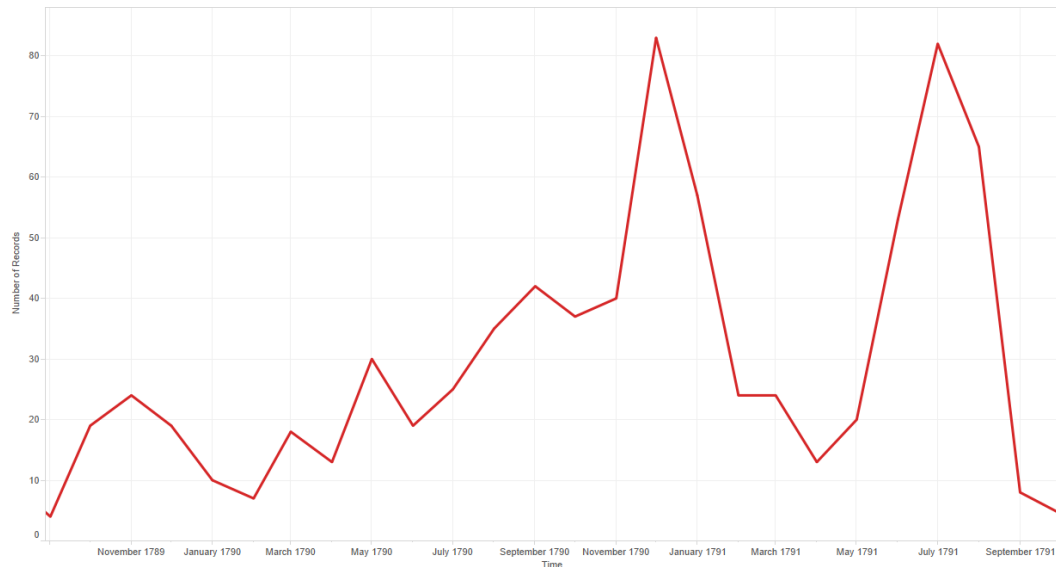
<sup>543</sup>Response by Committee of Research to the Committee of the District of Saint-Germain des Prés, 22 September 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.1 d.7 2.

<sup>544</sup>Peter Campbell, 'Perceptions of Conspiracy on the Eve of Revolution' in *Conspiracy in the French Revolution*, ed. by Peter R. Campbell, Thomas E. Kaiser, and Marisa Linton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

<sup>545</sup>For example many believed in the 'famine plot' see Chapter 2, p.67.

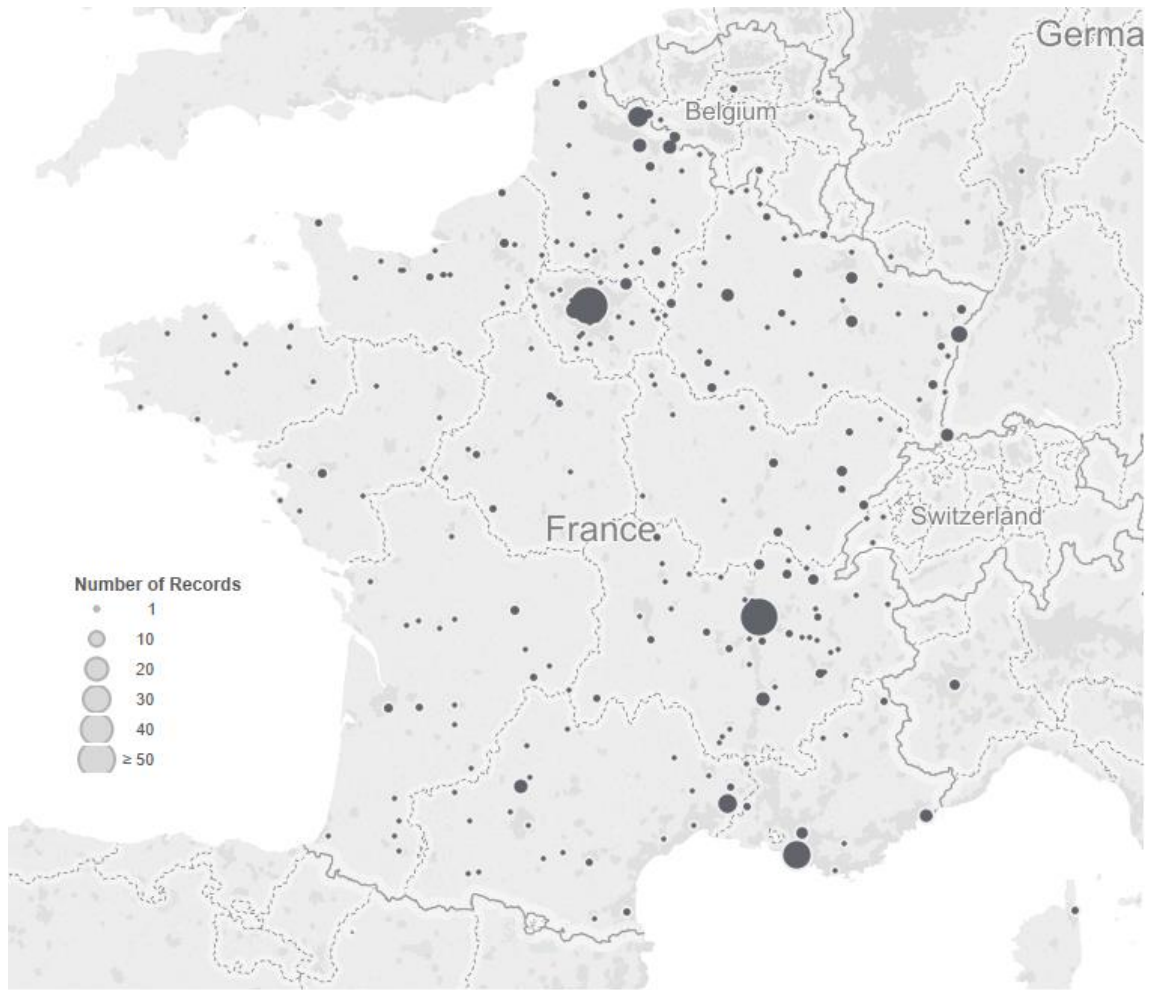
of Calonne, the former controller-general of finance now in England, their earliest efforts were to be towards recruiting soldiers to their cause. Army officers reported receiving letters urging them to join counter-revolutionary forces and various figures during the time of the Constituent Assembly were found to be connected in some way to attempts to abduct the Royal Family.<sup>546</sup>

**Figure 17: Letters on Counter-Revolution over Time**



Looking at a graph of the number of letters sent expressing fears of counter-revolution over time we can see that in general these fears increased across the period. But the importance of external influences on conspiracy belief is clearly marked out by great peaks and troughs showing how there were times of acute anxiety. November 1789 saw the first rise in fears, these can largely be understood as responses to the tumultuous series of events of the summer and a sweep of municipal revolutions and further provincial troubles in the early autumn. March, May and September 1790 also saw an increase in letters, possibly because these were key points in the agricultural cycle. December 1790 and late June to August 1791 were the dates of two major eruptions of fear. In December 1790 this was due to the discovery the plot in Lyon, in late June it was a result of the King's flight to Varennes.

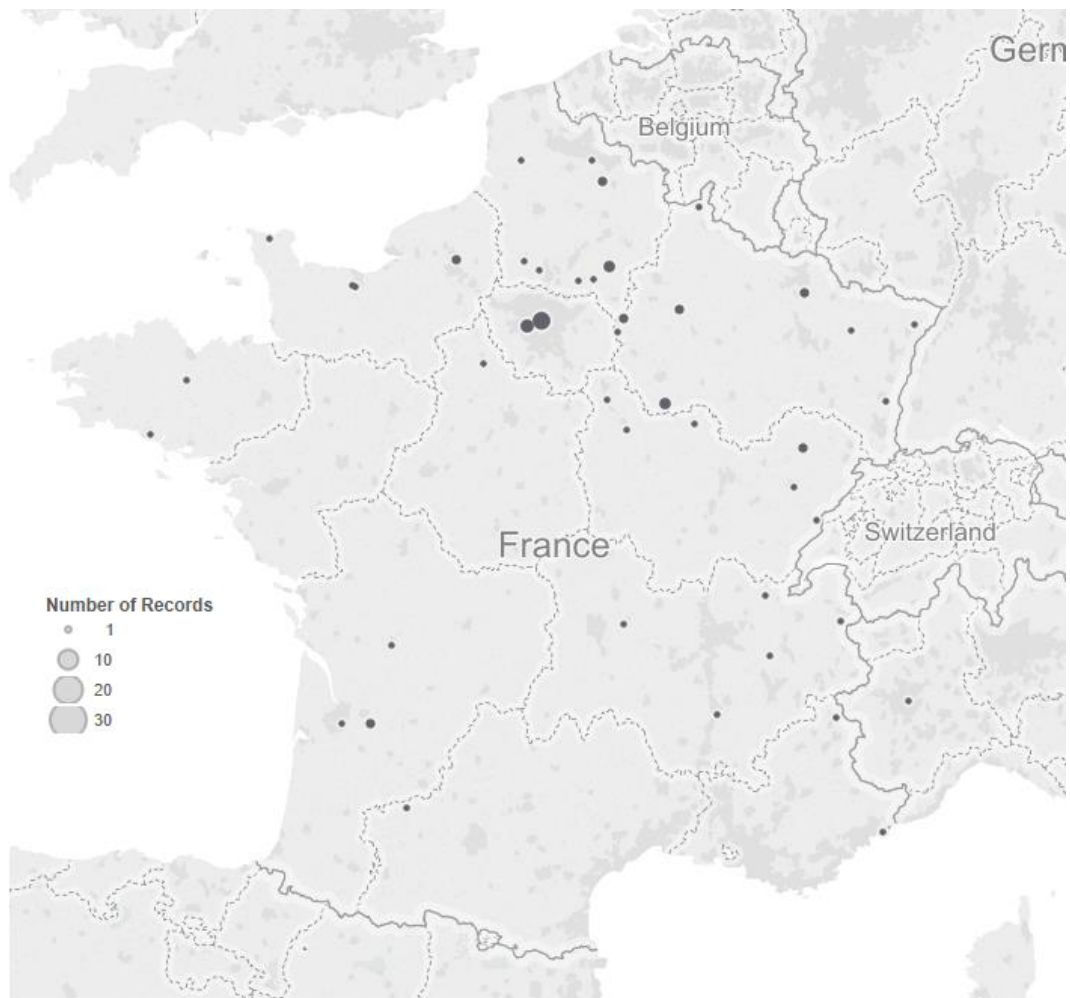
<sup>546</sup> Jacques Godechot, *The Counter-Revolution; Doctrine and Action 1789-1804* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), Chapter 9.

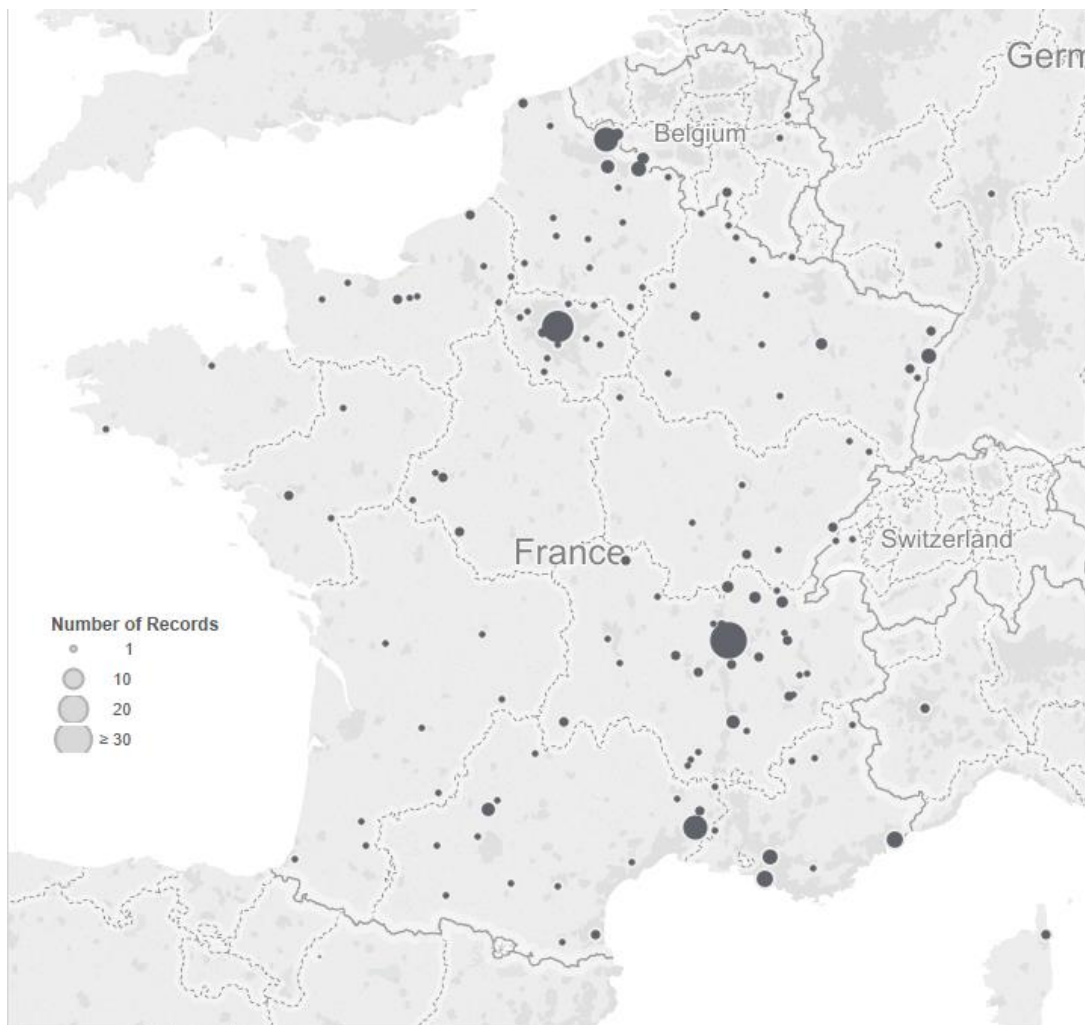
**Figure 18: Letters on Counter-Revolution by Location**

These acute times of anxiety were also in large part localised until 1791, with various epicentres of fear. Paris and its satellites sent around half of all the letters sent in 1789 on the subject of counter-revolution. As custodians of both the legislative and executive arms of the state the population of Paris were alert and ready to mobilise at any hint of a threat to themselves or the institutions of government. Towns that were close enough to Paris be up-to-date with events, but far away enough to feel removed from the action had their own particular brand of anxiety over counter-revolution.



**Figure 19: Letters on Counter-Revolution sent in 1789 by Location**



**Figure 20: Letters on Counter-Revolution sent in 1790 by Location**

By 1790 the area of the south-east, particularly the environs of Lyon and the Rhône valley had become a bed of counter-revolutionary anxiety. In the Bas-Languedoc a series of religious conflicts in the summer of 1790 would give flesh to the face of the anti-revolution, those who called for a return to the *ancien régime* without being dedicated to the armed overthrow of the National Assembly. Later in December 1790 Lyon became the centre of a great conspiracy. Both were tied to some degree with the Turin Committee. Rumour spread along the river Rhône and among the inhabitants of its valleys. Fears of invasion plagued towns and communities along the borders of the North-East, who were more likely to see troop movements, emigrations and potentially the arrival of Germans or Austrians. By 1791 Paris was back to centre-stage, and fears of counter-revolution more widely spread across France.



### Paris and the Provinces 1789

Drawing from a belief long-held in the *ancien régime* that secret plots were the means by which states were overthrown,<sup>547</sup> Parisians certainly feared in 1789 that deputies of the National Assembly would be assassinated. Rumours of poisoning were rife, on the 18 and 19 July word spread that this was the fate of the *gardes-françaises* and a riot was incited after a guardsman had stomach pains in the street.<sup>548</sup> Many feared that the Assembly rooms would be blown up.<sup>549</sup> Parisians were quick to report evidence that deadly attacks of this kind were being prepared. One surgeon rushed to make a statement to the Committee of Research in which he reported that a woman had been badly burnt by combustible materials.<sup>550</sup> Others urged the deputies to set up surveillance of the cellars and underneath the terraces of the Assembly hall. According to one anonymous author who lived nearby and knew the building well there were vaults underneath that could be used to place gunpowder, whilst they had not heard of a plot in particular 'après les trahisons réitérés des aristocrates on ne peut pas prendre trop de précaution pour sauvé la nation'.<sup>551</sup>

Threats were also sent directly to the National Assembly. 'Vous nous verrez ou ne nous verrez pas arriver a Versailles pour mettre le feu a cette fameux salle d'etats [*sic*]' wrote one anonymous letter to the then president Clermont-Tonnerre, 'Peut-être serai-je a coté de vous au moment ou vous recevrez ma letter.'<sup>552</sup> One letter threatened to cut out the deputies' poisonous tongues,<sup>553</sup> another to cut their throats as they lay in their beds ending with 'adieu monstres, tremblés et frémisses à la lecture de ce billet', hastily adding in a postscript that they would spare those who they considered to have earned the esteem of honest men.<sup>554</sup> Unlike the fears of the anonymous author who had heard the repeated treasons of the aristocrats, these letters threatening the Assembly do not

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<sup>547</sup>D.M.G Sutherland, *France 1789-1815 Revolution and Counter-Revolution* (London: Fontana, 1985).

<sup>548</sup>Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789*, p.62.

<sup>549</sup>Ibid, p.61.

<sup>550</sup>Chayron, surgeon at the Hotel-Dieu, Paris, 19 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.29 d.292 14+15.

<sup>551</sup>Anonymous, Paris, 16 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.29 d.291 43+44.

<sup>552</sup>A reactionary calling himself 'Secretary of the Company of Paris' to comte de Clermont-Tonnerre, from 23 to 29 August 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.1 d.2 23.

<sup>553</sup>La Boissière, 26 August 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.1 d.3 12.

<sup>554</sup>Anonymous, 3 May 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.5 d.70 19+20.

seem to be penned by the resentful ex-elite. Rather the letter written to Clermont-Tonnerre gave the president a window of fifteen days to give the French people some solid decrees to save his assembly from their attack suggesting that the aim of the author was not to reverse the Revolution but to cement it. Similarly the letter threatening to cut out tongues began with the statement 'Paris n a point de Pain, messieurs, vos bavardage ni finisse point sans vous plaisée a faire le mal vous aites des montres [*sic*]<sup>555</sup> – the poor writing and mention of bread shortages indicating that this probably came from the lower orders. This suggests that they too were products of the same climate of fear in which the safety of the Revolution was at stake.

After the period of the Great Fear the provinces were relatively calm, although many eyes were fixed on the old elite and their potential counter-revolutionary intentions. Fears were partly sustained by the continued existence of the *parlements*. These high courts that had once been the major challengers to royal despotism, were the subject of some popular concern around counter-revolution. The first president of the parlement of Rennes for example was reported to be holding assemblies each day of more than one hundred magistrates of different *parlements* and sovereign courts, which was a cause of alarm to local people.<sup>556</sup> In other places parliamentary magistrates and advisors were seen mixing with local seigneurs and intendants, going to and from various chateaux at all hours of the day and night. These letters were often just as much attempts to consolidate the Revolution as the denunciations explored in Chapter 3. Sieur Trocmé in Cambrai for example denounced the illicit assemblies held by six members of the administration of the provincial estates of Cambrésis as part of a local power struggle after they printed and circulated their discussions in the region, falsely suggesting that all the citizens and inhabitants of the province were distressed by the decrees of the National Assembly.<sup>557</sup>

In spite of what appeared to be a scene created more out of revolutionary upheaval and uncertainty than a veritable counter-revolution, many of the various manifestations of

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<sup>555</sup>La Boissière, 26 August 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.1 d.3 12.

<sup>556</sup>M. Du Prest Le Breton, sénéchal d'Uzel to Tuault, deputy of the sénéchaussée of Ploërmel, 15 November 1789, Uzel (Côtes-du-Nord), AN DXXIXbis c.44 d.417 67+68.

<sup>557</sup>Sieur Trocmé, elector in Cambrai (Nord), 15 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.3 d.40 11.

the Committee of Research leant more towards acting on the assumption of the latter than the former; although there was a high degree of disagreement amongst them and between the wider institutions of central government.<sup>558</sup> The threatening letter penned to Clermont-Tonnerre for example was dismissed by Bailly who told the Committee of Research that anonymous threats were just part of the job.<sup>559</sup> The first two committees at least believed in the existence of an aristocratic plot, whilst the incarceration of the fermier Augéard, accused of plotting the King's escape to Metz was the subject of much contention in the National Assembly between the left and right sides of the Assembly Hall.<sup>560</sup> But, if we are to accept the findings of Barry Shapiro, there was what he refers to as a 'right-fayettist cover-up' of the counter-revolutionary activities of Monsieur, the comte de Provence and an active policy of leniency towards conspirators.<sup>561</sup>

Whatever the extent to which the institutions of government believed in a grand conspiracy, the conflation of disturbance and counter-revolution also served as a means to prevent disorder before it happened. Thus in December 1789, the Permanent Committee of Montmirail denounced a sieur Chavigny, *chevalier de Saint-Louis*, to the Committee of Research for saying that an army of 190,000 nobles would join with foreign soldiers to liberate the King. Although the Committee of Montmirail were convinced that the counter-revolutionary operations he spoke of were nothing but 'êtres de raison', figments of the imagination, it was enough that order had been troubled for them to denounce him for counter-revolutionary speech.<sup>562</sup>

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<sup>558</sup>See Chapter 1.

<sup>559</sup>See Chapter 1 p.44.

<sup>560</sup>See Chapter 1 p.54.

<sup>561</sup>Barry M. Shapiro, *Revolutionary Justice in Paris 1789-1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>562</sup>Permanent Committee of Montmirail (Marne), from 7 to 13 December 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.26 d.264 20-23.

### Spring and Summer 1790 and the *Bagarre* of Nîmes

A culmination of factors in the summer of 1790 would cause a small but noticeable shift in attitudes to counter-revolution. Grain reserves were low and there was another wave of emigration following a decree abolishing noble titles on the 19 June. Additionally the intentions of those counter-revolutionaries abroad among whose ranks these *émigrés* were to join were becoming better known. While on the whole threats continued to be taken lightly, high-profile conspiracy cases with links to deputies and a series of religious confrontations in the Languedoc would be perceived by many as evidence of a rising counter-revolutionary threat.

Firstly the scarcity of grain reserves in May caused a number of subsistence riots that no doubt created an atmosphere of instability. Fears of counter-revolution were closely related to subsistence troubles as 'the famine plot persuasion' was such a defining part of *ancien régime* conspiracy theory.<sup>563</sup> Fears that enemies of the Revolution would cut down grain before it was ready were everywhere. While hoarding was more commonly associated in these letters with greed rather than counter-revolutionary intentions, nonetheless there were instances of accusations of hoarding for political gain. Some letters shared their concern that people in their desperation would turn their backs on the Revolution. An anonymous merchant writing in August from Périgueux urged the National Assembly to take into account the life of the poor as enemies of the constitution wanted the people to be discontented, all the better to lure them to their side.<sup>564</sup> Louise de Larivière from Paris, one of the very few women to write to the Assembly, expressed the same fears; 'dan se monman 20 mille homme san pain san argan peuvese tournes du cotes des aristocrate [*sic*].'<sup>565</sup>

Secondly it seems there was a growing anxiety about the schemes of the Turin Committee. Reports increased of what we might call the 'classic invasion plot'- a

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<sup>563</sup>See Chapter 2 p.67 and Steven L. Kaplan, *The Famine Plot Persuasion in Eighteenth-Century France*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1982), LXXII.

<sup>564</sup> Anonymous, Périgueux, 24 August 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.134 26.

<sup>565</sup> Louise de Larivière, Paris, September 1790, Paris, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.134 24.

coalition of foreign powers allied with the princes and an army of a size that varied in each account to defend the noble cause. These rumours were not always but often attributed to the *émigrés* in Turin. Many had heard speak of their plans to liberate the King either through securing foreign support or inciting insurrection amongst the French populace. Other groups of people from within France would also, it seems, discuss plans for the counter-revolution. But most informants reported these plots with a great deal of skepticism, if not ridicule. One anonymous author writing in May relayed the type of conversations he had had with some counter-revolutionaries: 'jay demandé quels sont les moyens qu'ils ont a employer pour retablir le despotisme, leur reponse est cele des gens qui ont perdu la tette.'<sup>566</sup> A Parisian named sieur Gillet also dismissed the talk of armies as ridiculous saying that since the October days 'je n'ai jamais eu le moindre crainte de contre-revolution'. In fact attempts to trigger a counter-revolution according to sieur Gillet would have quite the opposite effect.

Si apprèsan on vouloit aissayer comme on le dit une contre-revolution alors les ouvriers dans le rage en porté a son comble ne menagerrais plus rien seigneur; ecclesiastique; magistras et beaucoup de gens riche connut pour profiter des malheurs du temp [...] je crois que les ci devans seigneur de toute les province peut aitre les eveque et beaucoup de prêtre eussent etre massacre. [*sic*]<sup>567</sup>

The committee of Saint-Roch (Indre-et-Loire) passed on a letter found by a *limonadier*<sup>568</sup> written to the comte d'Artois but dismissed it completely mocking its 'stile insensé' and the 'projets plus que ridicules qu'elle manifeste'.<sup>569</sup>

Despite this lack of serious concern over the counter-revolutionary threat eyes were still firmly fixed upon the ex-nobility. In the summer of 1790 there was a surge in the number of letters denouncing the suspicious activities of the ex-elite. In part this was no doubt due to a second wave of emigrations following a decree on 19 June which abolished the nobility, but it was also a response to general unrest and political conflict. Letters written to the Assembly extended denunciations of suspect seigneurial

<sup>566</sup>Anonymous, from 15 to 17 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.6 d.80 4+5.

<sup>567</sup>Sieur Gillet, Paris, 24 August 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.15 d.160 11.

<sup>568</sup>A drinks vendor.

<sup>569</sup>Committee of Saint-Roch (Indre-et-Loire), from 30 to 31 July 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.10 d.111 34-36.



assemblies to include their stockpiling of arms and the various plots they intended to put into action. 'La Province du Périgord' wrote sieur Pipaud des Granges, deputy of the commune and of the national guard of Périgueux in a letter that was fairly representative of others at the time 'renferme un nombre infini de gentilhommes, pretres et privilegiés interessés et tout ardentés à maintenir l'ancien régime et à empêcher la régénération de la France. Il est peu de moyens qu'il ne employent à cet effet'. He continued to outline their latest plan to spread the rumour of counter-revolution whilst threatening their tenant farmers and sharecroppers with starvation by plotting to demand their rents all at the same time. Their preparations would be 'méprisables et ridicules' if it were not for this latest bid to excite the people. Given the poor state of the harvest that year, the tenants would be unable to pay the rent and would revolt, bringing them into confrontation with the National Guard or failing that with soldiers. This would cause a civil war in which this 'coalition aristocratique du Périgord' could use the war ammunition they had been stockpiling in their chateaux.<sup>570</sup> Fears of counter-revolution here were no doubt shaped by recent anti-seigneurial events, interpreted by the local authorities as the work of enemies of the Constitution.<sup>571</sup>

Letters often looked outwards for enemies. Nice, not part of France at this time, was another bed of the counter-revolution according to several letters. 'Il est inconcevable combien des français peuvent trouver tant de plaisir à presumer qu'une partie de la nation égorgera l'autre, les monstres d'Afrique ne sont pas si avides de sang que ceux de Nice' wrote one anonymous writer.<sup>572</sup> Here a Madame de Rohan, in correspondance with *émigrés* in Turin, presided over a number of assemblies, with an advisor to the parlement of Paris as her secretary.<sup>573</sup> It was not just the group itself that posed a threat but their network within France; 'on connoit l'armée d'émigrans sortis de France mais on ignore bien sa marche et sa raports avec leurs adhérents' wrote an anonymous letter writer denouncing them.<sup>574</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> Sieur Pipaud des Granges, deputy of the commune and of the national guard of Périgueux, 2 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.5 d.69 10.

<sup>571</sup> Representatives of the Commune of Périgueux, 23 February 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.40 d.408 16+17.

<sup>572</sup> Anonymous, Nice, 24 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.44 d.417 28.

<sup>573</sup> Anonymous, 5 April 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.4 d.63 6+7.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid.

In addition to concerns of threats from abroad, the summer of 1790 also saw the uncovering of plots with links to the very heart of the Revolution. The minister Saint-Priest had been under suspicion from early on in the Revolution, which had caused something of a stir in October 1789 when Mirabeau openly denounced him, but after this point suspicions had calmed until the marquis de Favras was arrested on Christmas Eve 1789 for his role in a plot to abduct the royal family.<sup>575</sup> Favras was hanged in February 1790 but questions remained about his accomplices. The comte d'Antraigues, nephew of the comte de Saint-Priest left France shortly after the discovery of the Favras conspiracy for his role in it and after this became the key agent in an intelligence network that delivered information on the Revolution to foreign powers.<sup>576</sup> In the summer of 1790 a deputy of the National Assembly, Toulouse-Lautrec was arrested for attempts to recruit a counter-revolutionary militia in Toulouse, but was subsequently released.<sup>577</sup> Shortly after this two deputies were implicated in another case of counter-revolutionary conspiracy around the comte de Maillebois whose *aide-de-camp* Bonne-Savardin had been sent in March, on the orders of his master, to Turin to present a plan for counter-revolution. Maillebois quickly fled to Holland when he discovered that another of his staff had left for Paris to denounce him, but Bonne-Savardin returned to France where he was arrested a month later. In July Bonne-Savardin was able to escape from prison with the help of two men disguised as National Guardsmen, he was later found in the company of the abbé Perrotin de Barmond, member of the National Assembly and Foucault-Lardimilie, former president of the Committee of Research revealed that he too had also harboured the fugitive. Voidel's committee was at the forefront of the disputes arising in the National Assembly on this affair.<sup>578</sup> Whilst Shapiro has found little evidence of public outcry, there is no doubt that it contributed to growing tensions in the Assembly hall, and a sense of the pervasiveness of counter-revolution.<sup>579</sup>

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<sup>575</sup> Shapiro, *Revolutionary Justice in Paris*, p.131.

<sup>576</sup> Godechot, *The Counter-Revolution*, Chapter 10.

<sup>577</sup> After the Committee of Research reviewed their previous recommendation that the trial in Toulouse proceed, and with the Constitution Committee instead called for him to be released until the establishment of a high court that could deal with trials against members of the legislature see 25 June 1790, AP, 16:466.

<sup>578</sup> Shapiro, *Revolutionary Justice in Paris*, pp.175-180; 23 August 1790, AP, 18:228-233 and 3 August 1790, AP, 17:585.

<sup>579</sup> Shapiro, *Revolutionary Justice in Paris*, p.179.

Anxiety around counter-revolution also significantly increased as a result of events in the Languedoc which began in the spring of 1790 and reaching an apogee in the summer. Longstanding tensions in the towns of Montauban and Nimes between the majority Catholic and minority Protestant communities would erupt in spectacular fashion as the shake-up of the Revolution disturbed the institutions of the Catholic elite. In Nimes a strong Catholic contingent had organised a declaration in April in which they declared their devotion to the faith and called for supreme authority to be returned to the King. In Montauban on the 10 May the Catholic municipality were, perhaps wittingly, prevented by a crowd of four to five thousand women from carrying out the inventory of the religious houses as ordered by the National Assembly.<sup>580</sup> Later the National Guard of the town, almost entirely Protestant, decided to go to the Hotel de Ville to safeguard the arms stored there to avoid the crowd from seizing them. This was quickly announced to the crowd as an attempt to seize control of the city. As the two groups converged the situation rapidly got out of hand with the guardsman firing into the throng and eventually being forced to take refuge in the building where they were besieged for two hours.<sup>581</sup> A month later similar tensions would cause a much greater confrontation in Nimes. Like Montauban, Nimes had a significant population of Protestants who, on acquiring equal rights, sought positions in the nascent National Guard units and other popular committees whilst local government and a great majority of the poor remained largely Catholic and Royalist.<sup>582</sup> On June 13 a crowd of Catholic militiamen held a protest at the bishop's palace against its use as a National Guard garrison. The confrontation escalated with both sides calling for support from neighbouring towns and villages. More successful in drumming up support the Protestants proceeded to massacre Catholics, killing over three hundred in a two day period.<sup>583</sup>

The response to these events in the Languedoc mark it out as a turning point in the

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<sup>580</sup>Donald Sutherland, *The French Revolution and Empire; the Quest for a Civic Order*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p.101.

<sup>581</sup>Clarke Garrett, 'Religion and Revolution' in *Essays on the French Revolution: Paris and the Provinces*, ed. by Steven G Reinhardt and Elisabeth A Cawthon, The Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures, 25 (Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1992), pp.54-55.

<sup>582</sup>Arno Mayer, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), p.493.

<sup>583</sup>*Ibid.* pp.498-499.

evolution of attitudes to counter-revolution. The troubles had links to the Turin Committee, Froment, a lawyer from Nimes had just returned from Turin where he had counseled the Committee there on the possibilities of using the longstanding religious tensions in the Languedoc to the advantage of the counter-revolution.<sup>584</sup> However despite these ties the events were largely political conflicts involving *anti-revolutionary* sentiments, in other words opposition to Revolutionary decrees considered anti-Catholic and anti-Monarchy rather than a desire to overthrow the National Assembly. But this distinction was not made by many letter writers on the subject. Over a hundred communications were received by the Committee of Research from all over the country on the troubles in Nimes, and many were also sent from and about Montauban. Letter writers linked the municipality of Montauban, the bourgeois guard and the Languedoc regiment all 'aristocrats' to the wider counter-revolutionary movement that sought to foment insurrection. The municipality of Alais (Alès) wrote that the enemies of the constitution continued to 'foment l'execution du projet insensé d'une contre-revolution' their 'unconstitutional and seditious principles' had already caused a civil war in Montauban.<sup>585</sup>

The Committee of Research would also present the events in the Languedoc as a serious threat. On 16 June as part of a report on the troubles in Nimes Macaye recommended to the National Assembly on behalf of the Committee of Research that all signatories of the declaration of the Catholics of Nimes be brought to the National Assembly to explain themselves and until then be deprived of their rights of citizenship.<sup>586</sup> The response of the National Assembly to remove the Catholic municipality in Montauban as well as their support of the Protestants in Nimes hardened positions and led many Catholics to feel alienated from the Revolution. In August over twenty thousand National Guardsmen convened on the plains of Jalès in the Ardèche to protest these measures, out of which a form of counter-revolutionary leadership within France emerged.<sup>587</sup>

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<sup>584</sup>Godechot, *The Counter-Revolution*, p.152.

<sup>585</sup>Municipality of Alais, Gard, from 25 April to 28 June 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.7 d.101 14+15.

<sup>586</sup>15 June 1790, AP, 16:229 -232.

<sup>587</sup>Hubert C. Johnson, *The Midi in Revolution: A Study of Regional Political Diversity, 1789-1793* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), p.130.

The Committee of Research played no small part in intensifying responses to these events as well. In his report on the camp of Jalès in September Sillery like Macaye in June warned that 'on cesse d'etre citoyen quand on trouble l'ordre et qu'on n'obeit plus aux lois' setting out his plan for the written declaration of the camp to be declared unconstitutional and for the instigators of the event to be put on trial.<sup>588</sup> The Committee of Research was more determined that the state was in danger than many deputies of the National Assembly, who notably interrupted Macaye's report on Nimes, Duval Espremesnil dismissing the Committee's research as reliant on anonymous informants.<sup>589</sup>

On 27 July 1790 Voidel described the state of the Kingdom as 'critical', citing what he described as veritable sources that spoke of troops amassing in Savoie.<sup>590</sup> Voidel's committee, as we saw in Chapter 1, was far more resolute than previous committees in its search for counter-revolution, and while it is clear that this was a result of multiple factors the importance of the many letters they were sent on counter-revolutionary plots in shaping their views on counter-revolution is clear. They often quoted from original letters and remarked on the volume of letters on a particular subject.<sup>591</sup>

### The Autumn of 1790 and the Conspiracy of Lyon

The concern over internal and external enemies that had been growing in the summer would reach acute levels over the last four months of 1790. By the autumn of 1790 those calling for a reversal of the Revolution had finally organised themselves into a coherent voice of opposition which would cause more anxiety around internal counter-revolutionaries. Fears of counter-revolution would be in many ways legitimised by the emergence of departments and patriotic societies devoted to seeking out the Revolution's enemies. Crucially there were very real plots involving internal counter-revolutionary networks linked with the Turin Committee, the most famous of which

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<sup>588</sup> 7 September 1790, AP, 18:639 -645.

<sup>589</sup> 15 June 1790, AP, 16:229-232.

<sup>590</sup> 27 July 1790, AP, 17:380.

<sup>591</sup> See for example 28 July 1790, AP, 17: 394.

was discovered in December 1790 in Lyon.<sup>592</sup>

The majority of letters sent in the autumn of 1790 were focussed on internal enemies. The threat of counter-revolution seemed to be increasingly attached to individuals living in France rather than those who had already emigrated. Suspicious behaviour, suspect meetings and incendiary works were all denounced in the search for counter-revolutionary networks and plots. There were fears that counter-revolutionaries were mixing with workers enrolling them to their cause. One letter to Bailly denounced a counter-revolutionary agent who was going amongst the *petits marchands* of Rouen putting on an air like them which gained their confidence then 'il leur insinue le poison de ses sentimens qu'il a basement vendus à l'aristocratie.'<sup>593</sup> Descriptions were sent of those believed to be carrying messages from Turin,<sup>594</sup> as well as copies of these messages that in one case apparently had fallen from the messenger's pocket.<sup>595</sup> Suspicious meetings of troops and particularly of aristocratic clubs were denounced. One poorly written letter declared that everyone was ready to combat these aristocrats who were plotting a return to the power that they had under the old regime.<sup>596</sup>

Indeed it seems there was an increasing awareness of home-grown opposition to the Revolution. This awareness was no doubt related to the growing strength of anti-revolutionary opinion. As William Murray described it in his book on the right wing press the summer and autumn of 1790 had seen a coalescence of the right wing into a veritable force of opposition to the increasingly radical decrees of the National Assembly.<sup>597</sup> 1790 saw more denunciations of pamphlets and prints than 1789 and 1791 put together. While right-wing newspapers were denounced, efforts were made to distinguish between these and pamphlets and prints which called for outright counter-revolution. Abbé Sabatier then Rivarol's *Journal politique national* was unusual in that it was denounced a couple of times and even banned by the Municipality of

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<sup>592</sup>Godechot, *The Counter-Revolution*, p.153 and Sutherland, *France 1789-1815*, p.111.

<sup>593</sup>Letter of unknown origin written to Bailly, AN DXXIXbis c.32 d.327 14.

<sup>594</sup>Letter of unknown origin, AN DXXIXbis c.32 d.335 36.

<sup>595</sup> Directory and *procureur général-syndic* of the department of the Aude, comte de Béon, sieur Chevalier, former *garde-maison*, from 26 September to 27 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.16 d.175 8-12.

<sup>596</sup>Sieur Bernet, 24 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.13 d.142 3.

<sup>597</sup>William James Murray, *The Right-wing Press in the French Revolution: 1789-92* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1986), Chapter 5.

Villeneuve-de-Berg (Ardèche)<sup>598</sup> but the other regular right wing newspapers such as the established *Mercure de France* edited by Mallet du Pan, the *Journal général de France* and Royou's *Ami du Roi* and others were rarely denounced outright, only occasionally for particular articles. In November a printer found printing a counter-revolutionary pamphlet used as his defence the fact that he had been told the pamphlet was no different from the *Ami du Roi*.<sup>599</sup> Other opposition to the Revolution could be seen in the meetings of aristocratic clubs. One letter called for the reinstatement of noble titles in order to prevent counter-revolution after witnessing a meeting of aristocrats in a café discussing another revolution to bring back the nobility and return church property.<sup>600</sup> Another letter warned that former members of the aristocratic club the *Amis de Paix* 'viennent de lever le marque et de marcher a la contrevolution'.<sup>601</sup>

It was not only aristocratic clubs that were established at this point. Jacobin clubs were appearing all over the country. While the relationship of political societies and the Committee of Research was not an extensive one<sup>602</sup> they declared themselves with great energy to be dedicated to the uncovering of enemies of the constitution. One society in particular, that of Lille, would be the pioneer of this role sending nine of the nineteen letters received from patriotic societies by the Committee of Research in 1790. They were not only using a new register in the denunciation of counter-revolution – one that spoke with authority and certainty but they were also promoting societies as instruments for the surveillance and investigation of counter-revolution.

Nous croyons devoir vous informer que bien certainement il existe ici des contrevolutionnaires' they wrote in September 'Nous présumons qu'il y a de ces coquins là dans les villes frontières qui travaillent la classe inférieure et peut-être les troupes [...]

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<sup>598</sup>Municipality of Villeneuve-de-Berg (Ardèche), from 4 to 10 May 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.5 d.78 23+24.

<sup>599</sup> Société des amis de la Constitution of Tours, affiliated with the Jacobins of Paris and the Municipality of Tours, from 3 to 11 November 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.14 d.154 20, discussed in Walton, *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution*, p.168.

<sup>600</sup>Sieur Babin, Paris, 2 November 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.15 d.160 5.

<sup>601</sup> Administrators of the department of the Pyrénées-Orientales, from 24 to 25 November 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.15 d.169 4.

<sup>602</sup>There were only 19 letters sent relating to counter-revolution by societies in 1790. Only around 3% of the total communications received by the Committee of Research were from societies. On the 26 April 1791 the National Assembly passed a motion limiting rights to send collective petitions, which sought to prevent societies from sending them see Jacques Godechot, *Les Institutions de La France: Sous La Révolution et l'Empire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951), pp.69-70.

Indépendamment de la suite locale de cette découverte, nous allons informer les sociétés des principales villes frontières de ce qui se passe ici et exciter leur surveillance en leur faisant part de notre méthode.<sup>603</sup>

Whilst the number of communications on counter-revolution from departments and districts were low in comparison to those on religious matters for example, these newly formed institutions also brought a new vocabulary to bear upon communicating the counter-revolutionary threat and many clearly saw their role in a similar way to the political societies. Strong language was used by members of the directory of the department of the Aude who described the comte de Béon as 'violemment soupçonné' of corresponding with enemies of the Revolution, and also by administrators of the department of the Nord who described a comte de Gusman and a sieur Falconnet, *avocat au parlement de Paris* as 'infiniment suspecte'.<sup>604</sup> The directory of the district of Pontarlier announced that 'Le salut public est nôtre première occupation [...] à exercer une surveillance active sur les démarches des ennemis de nôtre Empire naissent, de dénoncer les machinations contre nos législateurs, de publier les manoeuvres qui tendent à renverser l'ouvrage de nôtre Constitution [*sic*]'.<sup>605</sup>

The Committee of Research itself was developing a far tougher line of counter-revolution.<sup>606</sup> Reports made to the Assembly by the Committee of Research clearly had the effect of inspiring more denunciations to be made to them. After the Henri Cordon affair for example,<sup>607</sup> one anonymous letter writer wrote that the case 'exige tout l'attention de l'assemblée nationale' claimed to offer more information on the plot linking the comte Henri to the comte d'Artois and his project to invade France.<sup>608</sup> Another, also anonymous, had read about the case in the papers and was inspired, despite knowing of the danger of false alarms at a time of revolution, to report to the

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<sup>603</sup>*Société des amis de la Constitution* of Lille, from 12 to 15 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.32 d.335 4-6.

<sup>604</sup>Directory and *procureur général-syndic* of the department of the Aude, from 26 to 27 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.16 d.175 8-12 and Administrators of the Directory of the Department of the Nord, 23 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.12 d.137 2.

<sup>605</sup>Directory of the district of Pontarlier (Doubs), from 14 to 19 October 1790, AN DXXIXbis d.32 d.337 30+31.

<sup>606</sup>See Chapter 1 pp.55-63.

<sup>607</sup>See Chapter 1 p.60.

<sup>608</sup>Anonymous, 12 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.32 d.335 20.



Committee an unrelated aristocratic plot to set off a mine in Paris.<sup>609</sup> It is clear that the development of institutions that had a more aggressive response to counter-revolution played an important role in amplifying fears.

But they were not fears alone; this preoccupation with internal enemies cannot be disconnected from very real attempts at counter-revolution. In October 1790 the Turin committee, encouraged by the events in the Languedoc, launched their plan to incite a general insurrection that would permit them to enter France via Chambéry and assemble in Lyon where they had been assured by the magistrate Imbert-Colombès that it was possible to foment an insurrection. They would rely on the troops of the comte de La Chapelle to seize the city and would there be joined by the King as well as nobles from the Forez and the Auvergne.<sup>610</sup> This plan, set to commence on December 15 would ultimately fail, not only was it discovered through multiple sources but it had also been partially postponed when Louis XVI refused to take part.<sup>611</sup> From the beginning of this conspiracy in October, André Frachon, *aide-major-général* of the National Guard of Lyon seemed to be aware that a counter-revolutionary plot of this nature was afoot and was in frequent communication with the Committee about it.<sup>612</sup> In November an anonymous letter warned the Committee that it was evident from the number of inflammatory pamphlets that a popular insurrection was being plotted in Lyon.<sup>613</sup> But the actual details of the plot came to light through the discovery of a letter found during the search of the papers of Pascalis, a barrister in Aix, also tied to the Turin committee, who had been arrested for attempts to facilitate the invasion of the prince de Condé. The plot was also denounced by an anonymous letter sent to Lafayette on December 11, to Frachon by two conspirators, allegedly the week before<sup>614</sup> and also apparently denounced to the municipality of Lyon.<sup>615</sup>

Given the enormous amount of documentation relating to the case (eight dossiers in

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<sup>609</sup>Anonymous, 30 September 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.13 d.144 12.

<sup>610</sup>Godechot, *The Counter-Revolution*, p.153 and Sutherland, *France 1789-1815*, p.111.

<sup>611</sup>Godechot, *The Counter-Revolution*, p.154.

<sup>612</sup>Frachon, *aide-major général* of the national guard of Lyon, 16 October 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.32 d.336 53.

<sup>613</sup>Anonymous, Lyon, 12 November 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.15 d.167 13.

<sup>614</sup>Frachon, *aide-major général* of the national guard of Lyon, 9 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.32 d.338 47.

<sup>615</sup>Sutherland, *France 1789-1815*, p.111.

total) it was clearly considered to be very serious by the Committee of Research. On the December 18 Voidel would give a report on the conspiracy of Lyon to the National Assembly in which he called for a decree requiring all Frenchmen to return to France or risk having their salaries and pensions suspended. This would cause further tensions in the Assembly between the left and right sides as the abbé Maury spoke in defence of the alleged conspirators and called for their denouncers to be arrested.<sup>616</sup> The conspiracy would also have a great effect on the letters sent to the Committee of Research in the latter half of December with a great number warning of imminent counter-revolutionary action and invasion. Some of these strayed into the realms of the ridiculous. One letter recounted how an aged servant walking ahead of a *berline* wearing a hat lined with silver and a long grey redingote was shouting 'vive les aristocrats, à Paris les aristocrats!' on the streets outside his house.<sup>617</sup> One very poorly written letter denounced all the priests of the countryside. 'Set un contrerevolution dans laquelle l'on doi Faire les dernié efor et on l'on doi employe le feu le fer et le poison [*sic*]'.<sup>618</sup>

### 1791 and the Flight to Varennes

Unsurprisingly in the aftermath of the discovery of the conspiracy of Lyon letters sent at the beginning of 1791 were heavily focussed upon the movement and activities of *émigrés*. After the failure of the conspiracy and a dispute between the King of Sardinia and the French princes, most of the *émigrés* who had been in Turin moved northwards into Switzerland where they joined the vicomte de Mirabeau who had already established a 'Black Legion' there.<sup>619</sup> Reports on these movements were sent to the Committee of Research, the presence of troops causing the department of Doubs to call for arms in order to defend itself. Other frontier towns similarly shared concerns about the threat from across the border. But many were simply reporting on the *émigrés* in

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<sup>616</sup>18 December 1790, AP, 21:556.

<sup>617</sup>Sieur Lavallery, municipal officer of Étampes to Lafayette, Étampes (Seine-et-Oise), 18 December 1790, AN DXXIXbis c.32 d.338 13.

<sup>618</sup>AN DXXIXbis c.32 d.338 48.

<sup>619</sup>Godechot, *The Counter-Revolution*, p.154.

light of the failed conspiracy of Lyon. A servant of an *émigré* in Basel described how his master had received a letter from France that urged the counter-revolutionaries not to be disheartened as the oath required of clergymen would cause more people to sympathise with them.<sup>620</sup> Others described how the court of Turin had told the *émigrés* to retreat, their disappointment at receiving the King's letter and related their plans to return to France.<sup>621</sup>

Letters were also occupied with pinpointing how the *émigrés* were funding themselves. One tentatively accused a lottery winner, sieur Valin, of having raised funds for the conspiracy of Lyon under the pretence of collecting money for *bien nationaux*.<sup>622</sup> Another denounced stagecoaches filled with cash on their way through Strasbourg destined for the sustenance of counter-revolutionary troops.<sup>623</sup> But as one letter would lament whilst those opposed to the Revolution were a minority, they were also the wealthiest.<sup>624</sup> This was of a concern especially given the new focus in 1791 on counterrevolutionary enrolments. The department of the Côte d'Or reported that young people in Dijon were being recruited to the army of the prince de Condé with the promise of new clothes and an advantageous salary.<sup>625</sup>

The build up of suspicion continued to intensify. Potential adherents to counter-revolution were discovered more and more through conversations, either overheard or conducted with suspicious individuals. One man was denounced for asking suspicious questions about how taxes were being perceived by the populace.<sup>626</sup> A young recruit in Phalsbourg (Moselle) reported a conversation he had overheard between two conspirators who were discussing ways that Imperial soldiers could be brought to the town. This was purely fear-based as no description was given of the conspirators, the purpose of the report was simply the perceived high possibility that the scheme would be successful given that the town was only nine leagues from Strasbourg, surrounded

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<sup>620</sup>Servant of an *émigré*, Basel (Switzerland), 26 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.33 d.339 35.

<sup>621</sup>Analyses of Letters, from 1 to 4 January 1791, c.33 d.339 22.

<sup>622</sup> Anonymous, 24 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.33 d.339 31.

<sup>623</sup> Anonymous, Saint-Dizier (Haute-Marne), 27 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.17 d.186 8.

<sup>624</sup>L'Aube, Couches-les-Mines (Saône-et-Loire), 22 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.17 d.186 14.

<sup>625</sup>Directory of the Department of the Côte d'Or, 20 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.32 d.328 14.

<sup>626</sup>Sieur Cochet to Merlin, Deputy, Catallon (Nord), from 11 to 15 March 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.18 d.195 3+4.

by mountains and had no levelled cannon.<sup>627</sup> Never before had such little evidence of counter-revolution been denounced with such virility. Even in areas which were not fearful of imminent counter-revolution, the rhetoric around threats continued. For the municipality of Lisieux (Calvados) there was little question of a successful counter-revolution in their area as the population was so imbued with revolutionary fervour that even though ex-nobles used every means in their power to promote insurrection they would never succeed. This being said they were ready to 'marcher au secours de nos freres' in Paris and the border towns 'et du vaincre ou mourir avec eux'.<sup>628</sup>

It was not just ex-nobles who were suspicious; by the spring of 1791 there was a further extension in the types of people who were considered suspect. The requirement of the oath of allegiance to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, which had forced clergymen to declare themselves supporters of the religious policies of the National Assembly and the Revolution or be removed from their posts, meant that now refractory priests were increasingly considered among the number of counter-revolutionaries. Refractory priests were joining with the former privileged and exciting revolt amongst the populace according to the National Guard of Condé-sur-l'Escaut (Nord), the Society of Friends of the Constitution of Guingamp (Côtes-du-Nord) and others.<sup>629</sup> One anonymous letter even warned that whilst enemies of the Revolution were united under the cause of the nobility they were not necessarily of its ranks; there were prelates, soldiers, *financiers*, women and servants, even members of the National Assembly and local officials who had the appearance of being patriots who were part of this 'aristocratic association'.<sup>630</sup> But aside from this letter, it was not until after the King's attempted flight in June that suspicions would really extend beyond the more obvious candidates for counter-revolution.

The King's attempted escape would be by far the most important event in changing attitudes to counter-revolution. On the night of the 21 June 1791 the Royal Family

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<sup>627</sup> Young recruit of Phalsbourg (Moselle), 17 January 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.33 d.339 10.

<sup>628</sup> Municipality of Lisieux (Calvados), 12 March 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.33 d.341 40-42.

<sup>629</sup> Officers of the national guard of Condé-sur-l'Escaut (Nord), from 17 to 18 May 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.33 d.343 13, *Société des Amis de la Constitution* of Guingamp (Côtes-du-Nord), 7 February 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.17 d.189 1.

<sup>630</sup> Anonymous, 8 June 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.33 d.345 27.

slipped away from the Tuileries Palace and made their way to Montmédy as part of a plan put together by the bishop of Pamiers and the baron de Breteuil both of whom had already emigrated to Switzerland. At the Paris end the Swedish count, Axel von Ferson orchestrated the escape from the Palace and the general marquis de Bouillé was to meet the family at the frontier and had been secretly moving weapons to this end. But due to a number of setbacks, mistakes made and ultimately being recognised in Sainte-Menehould and stopped in Varennes the royal family was returned to Paris.<sup>631</sup> The event would irreversibly destabilise the French government and alter the path of the Revolution. The fallout could be discerned almost immediately. In the week that followed letters were sent to the Committee of Research that reported sightings of the King, warned of future escape attempts, and expressed joy at the King's capture. From this point until their dissolution in September the Committee of Research now joined with the Committee of Reports received floods of letters denouncing individuals and conspiracies.

Paris was at the centre of the crisis caused by the King's flight. The city was awash with feelings of instability, exacerbated by a period of interregnum while the National Assembly decided what to do about a King who had so obviously abandoned his post and flouted his previous oaths of dedication to the Constitution. Many in Paris, radicalised over the course of the previous two years, were quick to abandon any support they had had for the Crown; symbols of royal power were destroyed across the city as people declared their support for a republic even before the National Assembly had made a decision on whether or not to reinstate Louis.<sup>632</sup> The National Assembly, which had already found itself up against the popular societies of Paris in May when they had come together to call for the extension of the franchise,<sup>633</sup> now found its legitimacy undermined further. On the day that the National Assembly announced its decision to return Louis to the throne, a crowd rallied together on the Champs de Mars to sign a petition against the decree. The day would end in bloodshed as the National Guard fired on the crowd, killing perhaps as many as fifty people.<sup>634</sup> The commander

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<sup>631</sup> Timothy Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* (London: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>632</sup> *Ibid.* p.111.

<sup>633</sup> R.B.Rose, *The Making of the Sans-Culottes; Democratic Ideas and Institutions in Paris 1789-92*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), p.124.

<sup>634</sup> David Andress, *Massacre at the Champs de Mars: Popular Dissent and Political Culture in the*

of the National Guard Lafayette, who was, alongside the Mayor of Paris Bailly, considered most responsible for this tragedy was warned that plots were being hatched against his life in the gambling houses of the rue de Richelieu,<sup>635</sup> in another letter a sieur Félix was denounced for threatening to kill the general along with the mayor and municipality.<sup>636</sup> Lafayette had been the victim of threats as early as 1789,<sup>637</sup> but now appeared to be openly hated.<sup>638</sup> Bailly and even some deputies were accused of complicity in the King's flight.<sup>639</sup> On the other hand some Parisians clearly felt that the National Assembly was wrong in its hesitation and temporary assumption of executive power. Evidence was sent in of counter-revolutionary sentiments felt by some Parisians in the wake of the King's return to Paris. One handwritten tract, apparently one of many spread about Paris, warned 'nous sommes au nombre de 50 mille qui avais jure la ruine total de la capital'<sup>640</sup>, another, this time a placard declared that workers 'de differand etat [*sic*]' were ready to defend the crown with their lives.<sup>641</sup> Another little placard found pinned to a door also appeared to have originated from the lower orders:

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*French Revolution*, (Woodbridge, UK: Royal Historical Society/Boyden Press, 2000), p.2.

Interestingly there are not many references to the Champs de Mars massacre in the archive.

<sup>635</sup> Anonymous to Lafayette, 18 August 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.34 d.351 3.

<sup>636</sup> Armand, President of the Committee of Reports to Administrators of the Police Department of Paris, 17 -29 July 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.33 d.347 25.

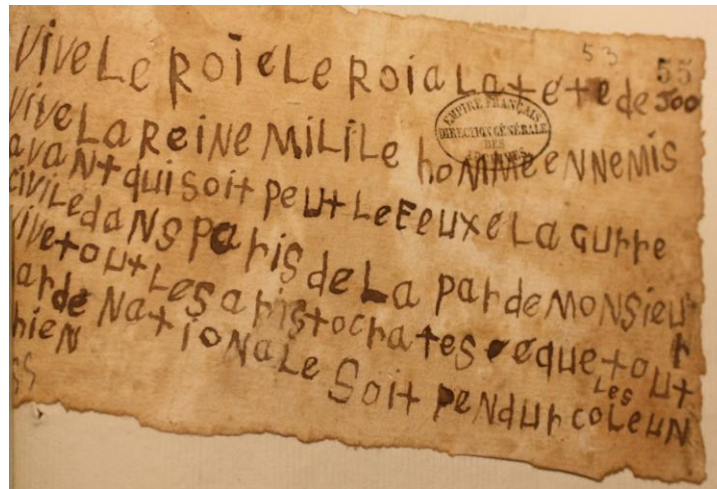
<sup>637</sup> Committee of the Capuchin district, Paris, 28 December 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.44 d.417 21-23.

<sup>638</sup> Lohier, President of the Committee of Research of the Municipality of Paris, from 19 to 24 July 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.33 d.370 42-44.

<sup>639</sup> For example Police commissioner of the Luxembourg section, Paris, from 14 to 15 August 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.34 d.350 49 and Sieur Chatenay, man of law, Paris, 18 July 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.34 d.349 30.

<sup>640</sup> Tract found by a sieur Winal, rifleman of the battalion of the Filles-Saint-Thomas, Paris, from 17 to 18 August 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.34 d.352 19.

<sup>641</sup> Placard found by Ghemar, sergeant of the second company of the battalion of Saint-Opportune, Paris, from 7 to 8 July 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.33 d.347 1+2.

**Figure 22: Placard found in Paris, 14 August 1791<sup>642</sup>**

There was clearly a sense in Paris that it was on the verge of being attacked. One letter called for a fortification to be built around Paris with a great ditch filled with water from the Seine.<sup>643</sup> More suspicious comings and goings were reported.<sup>644</sup> There was a bout of declarations made against various tailors for fabricating blue uniforms for the counter-revolutionaries.<sup>645</sup> But for the most part declarations made to the Committee or to the Paris sections were principally denouncing enrolments, not surprising given the role played by Bouillé's army in the conspiracy. One father declared that his son had disappeared and had probably joined the prince de Condé's army.<sup>646</sup> Other written denunciations were directed against ex-noble officers for intending to emigrate, threatening others or engaging in anti-revolutionary discourse.<sup>647</sup> There is no doubt that the King's flight had mobilised more Parisians in the search for possible conspiracy.

<sup>642</sup>Placard found by Sieur d'Herbelot, sub-lieutenant of the National Guard, Paris, 14 August 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.34 d.350 55.

<sup>643</sup>Sieur Dumoulin, 11 July 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.35 d.365 45.

<sup>644</sup>Secretary-clerk of the section of the Théâtre-Français to Cahier de Gerville, *procureur-syndic-adjoint* of the commune of Paris, 7 August 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.33 d.348 11+12, Declaration by sieur Petit, leather currier in rue Guénégaud, Paris, 29 July 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.33 d.347 32 and others.

<sup>645</sup>Declaration made by sieur Borel, 8 rue Neuve-Saint-Marc, Paris, 10 August 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.34 d.350 56, Declaration of sieur Claude Noël, draper's assistant, Paris, from 22 to 23 July 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.36 d.372 24+25, Declaration of sieur Jean-Louis Lefebure, tailor, Paris, 24 August 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.34 d.352 31 and others.

<sup>646</sup> Declaration by Sieur Jean Lallemand, *limonadier* lodging at the hotel Garni rue de la Bûcherie, Paris, 23 August 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.34 d.350 64.

<sup>647</sup> Sieur Harel, volunteer in the battalion of Louis-le-Grand, section of the Filles-Saint-Thomas, Paris, 6 August 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.34 d.353 2, Sieur Simon de Troyes, secretary of the société des Feuillants, Paris, 15 August 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.34 d.350 51 and Sieur Cholot 'vainqueur de la Bastille', wine seller on rue des Noyers, Paris, 15 August 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.34 d.350 47+48.

The existence of a great number of institutions in Paris with overlapping roles meant that fears of counter-revolution could lead to excessive responses. The section of the Place Royale had received several 'vague denunciations' against a convent, accused by its neighbours of stockpiling arms and sheltering refractory priests. The local police commissioner took these to the Committee of Research of Paris. Four days later having not heard back from the Committee the president of the section wrote to the administrators of *biens nationaux* of the Municipality saying that people believed their concerns were being neglected and were getting increasingly agitated. The police commissioner of the section had urged him to issue orders to search the house but he felt that would be an arbitrary measure that went against the freedom of the individual guaranteed in the constitution. His idea was to search the property under the cover of taking an inventory, as the nation was the owner of the convent and all the objects within it. The administrators of *biens nationaux* referred this letter to the police administrators saying this idea was not feasible as an inventory had already taken place and additionally that it was for them to pursue this matter. Both the Committee of Reports and the Committee of Research of the Municipality had received separate denunciations on the same subject. The former had placed police spies to watch the entrances and exits of the convent, whilst the latter passed the case on to the police commissioner of the section. After several nights the spies reported to have not found anything suspicious but upon meeting with the neighbours and the police commissioner they reiterated his calls for a thorough search to be undertaken, their findings having not done anything to calm the suspicions of the local inhabitants who insisted that they had seen loaded vehicles entering the convent during the night. With so many individuals and institutions involved, and the ambiguity around who was ultimately in charge, it is not hard to see how the original fears of the neighbourhood could have been amplified.

Paris was to be the focal point not only in the fears of the Parisians but across the country as well. Reports came in from locals from twelve different departments across France warning the Committee of Research and other correspondants in Paris that nobles from their area were grouping and heading for the capital, presumably to defend



the King. From Ormes (Vienne) a sieur Lalette wrote to his friend in Paris that there was not a noble to be found for 30 leagues in all directions as all the former nobles of the place 'les Grands et les petits' had all left for Paris. He warned his friend who was a national guardsman not to employ 'les moyens doux' these aristocrats were wearing patriotic dress.

Si Paris est surpris, si Paris ne se reveille pas; tout le Royaume est perdu. Veillez, veillez sans cesse, furetez, cherchez, examinez, inquisitionnez sil le faut, mais sauvez vous, sauvez nous, sauvez la patrie, tout est dans le plus grand danger.<sup>648</sup>

The arrival of provincial nobles in the capital was confirmed by reports from within Paris.<sup>649</sup>

Elsewhere in the provinces ex-nobles still living in their communities were under intense suspicion, even more so if they were army officers, approximately three-quarters of whom would emigrate by the end of 1791.<sup>650</sup> In a few cases these suspicions resulted in violent confrontations. In Lubersac (Corrèze) the Society of Friends of the Constitution reported that a fight had broken out at news of the King's flight between themselves and 'les personnes riches qui perdent a la Révolution'<sup>651</sup> and there was at least one account of an anti-seigneurial attack carried out after the news.<sup>652</sup> Locals were also on the look out for emigrations, directed no doubt in part by the National Assembly's decree halting all movements across frontiers.<sup>653</sup> Freedoms enshrined by earlier legislation were also under threat as local authorities abandoned the inviolability of the post,<sup>654</sup> searched and seized arms from local chateaux,<sup>655</sup>

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<sup>648</sup>Sieur de Lalette to Sieur Henault from the section of the Arsenal, Ormes (Vienne), from 21 to 24 September 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.34 d.354 3.

<sup>649</sup>Bailly, Mayor of Paris, from 8 to 20 July 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.37 d.381 25-30.

<sup>650</sup>Tackett, *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution*, p.112.

<sup>651</sup>Société des amis de la Constitution of Lubersac (Corrèze), from 27 to 30 June 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.29 d.296 16+17.

<sup>652</sup>Administrators of the department of Rhône-et-Loire, the districts of the town and the area of Lyon and municipality of Lyon, 27 June 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.36 d.374 13.

<sup>653</sup>Tackett, *When the King Took Flight*, p.159.

<sup>654</sup>M. de Richebourg, President of the Directory of the Post to M. de Lessart, Minister of the Interior, from 25 June to 2 July 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.38 d.389 1-5.

<sup>655</sup>M. de Sarcus, former cavalry captain, Illois (Seine-Inférieure), 6 July 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.36 d.376 27, Municipalities of Paris and Pontoise, from 2 to 12 July 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.36 d.373 13-18.

interrogated 'suspicious' travellers<sup>656</sup> and made countless arrests, often with little evidence. Three former officers for example, were arrested in Laon simply on allegations that they wanted to emigrate.<sup>657</sup> In the aftermath of the King's flight authorities were clearly overstepping the boundaries put in place at the beginning of the Revolution.

Fears of counter-revolution at the end of the period of the Constituent Assembly were evidently far more intense than they had been throughout much of it. The cause of fears of counter-revolution are clearly complex. A difference of interpretation between Timothy Tackett and Georges Lefebvre on the causes of the Great Fear offer two readings that can be used to explain fears of counter-revolution more generally. Georges Lefebvre whose widely acclaimed book on the Great Fear mapped the development of the fear argued that rural panic was driven by the popular belief that an 'aristocratic plot' was underway, providing the impetus for populations to rise up and attack *chateaux* and other symbols of seigneurial privilege.<sup>658</sup> Tackett and other recent scholarship saw the Great Fear and anti-seigneurial events as largely separate, Tackett arguing that the Great Fear often increased community cohesion in the face of what was understood to be the work of external enemies as opposed to the internal enemies identified by popular revolt. The connecting factor was in his view a general fear of a collapse in law and order.<sup>659</sup> The marquis de Langeron had presented both views in his letter on the anti-seigneurial events in the Franche-Comté. Like Lefebvre's view, he saw a social group who had lost to the Revolution behind these disturbances and like Tackett also pointed to a lack of authority which inspired licentiousness.<sup>660</sup>

Letters expressing fears of counter-revolution generally conformed to these readings. Evidently amongst the group labelled 'aristocrats', mostly members of the ex-elite, there were opponents of the Revolution a minority of whom were actively engaged in

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<sup>656</sup> Municipality of Cahors (Lot), from 6 to 13 July 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.35 d.364 1-5.

<sup>657</sup> Committee of Reports to Duport-Dutertre, minister of Justice, 26 August 1791, AN DXXIXbis c.31bis d.322 1+2.

<sup>658</sup> Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789*.

<sup>659</sup> Tackett, 'Conspiracy Obsession in a Time of Revolution', p.33.

<sup>660</sup> Letter from the Marquis de Langeron to the duc de La Rochefoucauld, Besançon, 3 September 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.1 d.3 30.

counter-revolution. This contingent was on the whole fairly impotent, and indeed many letters dismissed them to that effect. The existence of epicentres of fears suggests that Tackett was right to see conspiracy fears as separate outbreaks.<sup>661</sup> The climate of instability in Paris caused by the Revolutionary events of the summer of 1789 and later the King's flight demonstrates that as Tackett suggested fears of an absence of law and order were also generating conspiracy-beliefs.

But reducing fears of counter-revolution to general instability does not sufficiently take into account the level of popular investment in the Revolution. The at times amplified threat of those opposed to the Revolution was part of the same struggle for political legitimacy highlighted in previous chapters. Threats were taken to be more serious because the stakes were high. For individuals and local institutions alike, fears of counter-revolution were mostly part of the struggle both locally and nationally to determine the direction of the Revolution.

Thus it can be said as our graph of letters over time suggests that letters expressing fears of counter-revolution both steadily increased over the period as well as oscillating as a result of changing circumstances and particular events. Behind the increasing volume of suspicion lay a tendency that was both a cultural continuity with the former regime but mostly arose as a result of the nature of ongoing political struggle.

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<sup>661</sup> Tackett, 'Conspiracy Obsession in a Time of Revolution'.

## Conclusion

*Nosseigneurs,*

*Tandis que les provinces se disputent à l'envie l'honneur de vous présenter leur hommage & leur adhésion à la sagesse de vos décrets, un citoyen de la ville de Blois brûle du désir de joindre à ces tributs son grain d'encens. Faible atôme, il comprend que sa voix doit se perdre dans l'immensité; il s'arrête: mais bientôt un regard jetté sur vos travaux lui montre le développement que vous y présentés des droites de l'homme, & les bases solides sur les quelles vous les fondés. Il y apprend que nul n'est petit à vos yeux, que chacun a un droit égal à la protection tutélaire. Il en tire celui de vous faire ici l'exposé de son voeu particulier, du voeu de ses concitoyens, dont il est l'écho, quoiqu'il néglige de s'appuyer de leur signature.*

*Ce Voeu, nosseigneurs, est celui de voir se réaliser enfin l'espoir au quel par vous-mêmes nous somme depuis long-tems appellés, d'apprendre, par la liste imprimée des pensions, quelles sont désormais les bornes fixées à ces largesses du Gouvernement, quel emploi sera fait du fruit des sueurs des peuples, quelles mesures prises pour l'assurer.*

*Le vif intérêt que nous attachons à ces connoissances prend un nouvel accroissement de Justice & de force dans la disposition où nous sommes tout également de leur subordonner l'offrande de quart de nos revenus, par laquelle nous brûlons de manifester notre dévouement patriotique.*

*Je suis avec le plus profond respect*

*Nosseigneurs*

*Votre très humble & très obeissant serviteur*

*Un Citoyen*

*Blois le 17e 9bre 1789 <sup>662</sup>*

The revolutionary enthusiasm within this letter from an anonymous *Blésois* is palpable. The author burned with the desire to join his voice with others to praise the representatives of the people. The declaration of the rights of man had convinced him that the Assembly cared about every voice, and that everyone had an equal right before them. This was a defining characteristic of the democratic sphere. Letters such as this bring alive the novelty of the practice and the excitement of the period.

In many ways this view of the National Assembly is similar to the popular sentiment prior to 1789 towards the King, a sovereign before whom it was imagined that all were equal subjects and who like a father offers them his 'protection tutélaire'. But this letter does not indicate simply an ideological shift from the King to the National Assembly. This author was engaging in a debate that was ongoing in the National Assembly, that

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<sup>662</sup>Anonymous, Blois, 17 November 1789, AN DXXIXbis c.29 d.291 8.

of pensions.<sup>663</sup> At the time a great proportion of the state budget was being used to pay pensions, with some favoured courtiers and administrators having been awarded large sums under the former regime.<sup>664</sup> The author expressed his wish to see a limit placed upon these. The issue of pensions had taken on a new significance, 'un nouvel accroissement de Justice & de force', since all were now to pay a quarter of their income in tax. In such a way the author was offering his view on a current political topic, and subtly asserting his right to do so as a taxpayer. Furthermore his letter was progressive in the sense that he emphasised the people's labour and equal taxation as a consideration of how this tax ought to be allocated.

This view centred on equality is shared amongst a great number of letters. In letters on subsistence many focussed upon the inequality caused by the decree on the free circulation of grain. They wrote to the state to call for grain controls to be re-instated and even proposed their own legislation on how the grain trade could be managed nationally. For the most part these centred on the need for equality in food distribution. On religion too letters were sent in on how church property could be utilised and how the regular clergy should be offered their freedom. Denunciations exposed abuses of power and rejected the injustices of the former regime.

Thus the act of writing to the state was clearly a practice through which people expressed their engagement in a collective revolutionary project. Participation in the Revolution through the democratic sphere not only acted as a means to project visions of the new regime onto the nascent state, but also served the purpose of delegitimising the old political elite and legitimising new institutions.

But sadly the trepidation that this author from Blois expressed at the beginning of his

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<sup>663</sup>The National Assembly had ordered the printing of this list on 22 September 1789, but the Finance Committee delayed printing it until 1790. See *Réimpression de l'ancien moniteur, seule histoire authentique et inaltérée de la révolution française depuis la réunion des États-généraux jusqu'au Consulat (mai 1789-novembre 1799)*, 32 vols. (Paris: Plon Frères, 1850-1854) 1, 22 September, p.502, on refusal of finance committee: 2, 1 October 1789, p.2.

<sup>664</sup>The full list of these pensions was published in April 1790 in the 'livre rouge', see Ambrogio A. Caiani, 'Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette' in *The Oxford Handbook of the French Revolution*, ed. by David Andress (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.319.

letter, the fear that he was simply a 'faible atôme' and that his voice 'doit se perdre dans l'immensité', appeared to be well-founded. In neat cursive script a member of the Committee of Research had written on the letter the words: 'Lettre anonyme de peu de consequence.' For this letter, despite being transferred to them, did not fall under the committee's remit. The reality was that the National Assembly did not have a committee designed to incorporate the views and desires of the French populace, nor the capacity to offer a political platform to them.

As we saw in the first chapter the Committee of Research became more and more uncompromising as the period progressed. This process appears to be the result of a natural tendency of institutions towards entrenchment, as each manifestation of the committee moved towards the assumption of greater powers, regardless of whether its members were mostly left-wing or right-wing. Thus the ambition for, and the imagined existence of, a collective revolutionary project in which every citizen had a direct role to play was not realised by government institutions which, although giving some impression of flux and porousness when they were first established, necessarily consolidated the myriad of hopes and aspirations that the Revolutionary moment had fostered into a single course of action.

Decisions taken by the National Assembly impacted the nature of letters sent to it. In Chapter 2 we saw how letters calling for national management of the grain trade fell on deaf ears as the National Assembly remained dedicated to the free trade of grain, thus these types of communications were for the most part no longer sent to the Committee of Research by 1790. It appears that the Civil Constitution of the Clergy also failed to generate the level of discussion and ideas that the decree on the nationalisation of church property had.

However whilst aspirations for more direct democratic involvement in the Revolution were not realised through writing letters to the state, these letters, and particularly denunciations, certainly collectively influenced the actions of the Committee of Research and the National Assembly.

Denunciations called on the National Assembly and Committee of Research to arbitrate in local political conflicts, often between progressive and more conservative elements in the community, new elites and old elites. But the centralisation of letters to the Committee of Research appears to have been a mechanism through which these denunciations were translated into more substantial threats to the Revolution. Thus we saw in Chapter 4 how denunciations of bishops and local clergymen directly led to the divisive clerical oath legislation and in Chapter 5 how denunciations created a stronger belief in the existence of grand conspiracies within the Committee of Research.

Thus we have seen how letters written to the state formed a unique democratic practice which helped fashion a new political culture. The letters themselves have given us an insight into the extent of revolutionary fervour and also into the nature of local political struggles. Crucially we have unearthed an interaction between citizens and the state which formed a dynamic that helped propel and cement the development of the Revolution. It appears that the democratic sphere was in decline by 1791, further research may uncover new avenues of communication initiated by the establishment of the Legislative Assembly. It may well be the case that as letters to the state decreased, involvement in political clubs increased. Certainly, it seems that the denunciations and projects sent to the Committee of Research in 1789 were unique to the Revolutionary break.

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