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The First French Republic

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PREFACE

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THE FIRST FRENCH REPUBLIC

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By

Dorothy Conine

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THE FIRST FRENCH REPUBLIC

I. The People Before the Revolution

PREFACE

This thesis is intended as a study of the first French Republic during the years of 1792 and 1795.

The writer might call it the Revolution itself, so completely were the years of violence under the Convention the outcome of the attempt to preserve the advantages the Constituent Assembly had gained. To understand the conditions which were outgrown and the origin and growth of the revolutionary spirit, seems, therefore, quite as necessary as to trace the history of the destruction of abuse and the struggle for liberties and rights.

While novelties of historical matters are always to be suspected, the writer had endeavored, from her readings, to portray an unbiased picture of the first French Republic.

To her former teacher, Professor John A. McChrystal, of Marquette University, the writer owes not only her interest in the study of the first French Republic, but much of whatever her knowledge of history may be.

II. Defeat of Royalty

A. Achievements of Convention

B. Destruction of Iniquities

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To add to their misery the dry summer was succeeded by a winter of unparalleled severity. No such weather has been experienced since.

THE FIRST FRENCH REPUBLIC

1792-1795

CHAPTER I

The People Before the Revolution

Before attempting to describe the first French Republic it is necessary to indicate the ills from which the people were suffering, the reforms that they demanded, and on the other hand, the influences at work among them which diverted the movements for reform into the Channel of revolution.

Ten years of bad harvests aggravated by a bad industrial, fiscal, and political system, culminated with the summer of 1788. A great drought was followed by a violent hailstorm, which dealt destruction everywhere. The harvest was worse than ever before. From every province of France came the monotonous tale of ruin, famine, and starvation. Even the well-to-do farmer could obtain nothing but a barley bread of a bad quality, and water. The peasant who was poor had to eat bread made from dried hay which often caused the death of many children. The cry of "Bread, Give us bread!" was re-echoed within the walls of France.

"Hunger is apt to render one lightheaded; under its dizzying spell many things seem possible that with a well-nourished brain one would recognize as absurd, and so the half-famished dwellers in the provinces readily accepted the assurance that the Kings, the Queen, and the "aristocrats were at the

bottom of the trouble."¹

To add to their misery the dry summer was succeeded by a winter of unparalleled severity. No such weather had been experienced since 1709, the industrial crisis became acute in the towns, thousands of workmen were thrown out of employment owing to the introduction of recently invented machinery from England, which was beginning to supersede hand-labor in some trades. Riots and local disturbances took place daily so much so that from March onwards the whole peasantry of France may be said to have been in a state of open insurrection.

At last, the King sent out a proclamation to the whole nation to the effect that,

"All over the country the people are to meet together to discuss abuses. These confabulations are authorized, provoked from above. In the early days of 1788 the provincial assemblies demand from the syndicate and from the inhabitants of each parish that a local enquiry shall be held; they wish to know the details of their grievances, what the cultivator pays and suffers. All these figures are printed."²

These lists of grievances sent to the king were called cahiers de doléances. The summarizing of the cahiers by the National Assembly revealed that the following principles of government were laid down by the nation:

- I. The French government is monarchic.
- II. The person of the King is inviolable and sacred.
- III. His crown is hereditary from male to male.
- IV. The King is the depositary of the executive power.

1. The French Revolution, Nesta Webster; p. 131.
 2. The French Revolution, Nesta Webster; p. 7

- V. The agents of authority are responsible.
- VI. The royal sanction is necessary for the promulgation of the laws.
- VII. The nation makes the laws with the royal sanction.
- VIII. The consent of the nation is necessary for loans and taxes.
- IX. Taxes can only be imposed from one meeting of the States-General to another.
- X. Property is sacred.
- XI. Individual liberty is sacred.

In the matter of reforms, the cahiers asked first and foremost for the equality of taxation, for the abolition of that privilege by which the wealthier classes were enabled to avoid contributing their rightful share towards the expenses of the State; they asked for the free admissions of citizens of all ranks to civil and military employment, for revision of the civil and criminal code, for the substitution of money payments in the place of feudal dues, and arbitrary imprisonment.

In all these demands, one finds no element of sedition or of disaffection towards the monarchy, but the response of a loyal people to the King's proposal for reform.

Unfortunately there were great intrigues at work among the people and these alone explain the gigantic misunderstanding that arose between the King and his subjects, and that plunged the country into the black abyss of anarchy. These then were the four great intrigues of the French Revolution. Their aims may be briefly stated thus:

- I. The intrigue of the Orleanists to change the dynasty of France.
- II. The intrigue of the Subversives to destroy all religion and all government.
- III. The intrigue of Prussia to break the Franco-Austrian alliance.

IV. The intrigue of the English revolutionaries to overthrow the governments both of France and England.

All through the Revolution we have seen rebels inflamed with their own thirst for vengeance, mingling with the great conspiracies, and the great conspiracies in their turn joining forces with each other. Thus the Revolutionists sieged Bastille, marched on Versailles, sieged the Tuileries and completed their devastating work during the massacres of September. The monarchy had fallen. The Revolutionists were in complete control.

Republican France began its epoch with a new propagandism in behalf of liberty. All administrative, municipal, and judicial bodies were ordered to be remade, lest they should be "gangrened with royalism."¹ "Citizen" and "citizeness" replaced "monsieur" and "madame" as terms of address.

A National Convention was elected - the first political body chosen by direct, universal and equal suffrage - which did not open its deliberations until the 21st of September, 1792. After the usual preliminaries it formally abolished Royalty and proclaimed the Republic. Its next measure was to declare the new era to date from the current year as the first year of the French Republic. These measures were carried by acclamation.

1. The French Revolution - Shailer Mathews; p. 214.

1. The Age of the French Revolution - p. 215

violent, and energetic measures."

Such men, however, well intentioned they may be, and even apart from their ultimate objects, must always in the long run become the tools of reaction from their timidity and hesitancy. The Girondists accepted a Republic, led by the

CHAPTER II

The Girondists

When the National Convention met at the Manège in Paris on September 20, 1792, it was divided into three distinct parties. The great majority of the seven hundred and eighty-three deputies to the Convention sat in the Center. That meant that they were a party of moderation, unwilling to commit themselves to either extreme and prepared to vote upon each measure according to its merits or in compliance with popular pressure. Borere¹ acted as their leader. They soon acquired the name of the "Marsh" or "Plain", because their seats were on a level immediately in front of the President's desk. On the Right and Left sat the Girondins and the Jacobins respectively. There were about one hundred and sixty-five Girondins and fewer Jacobins or Montagnards, as they came to be called from the fact that they sat in the "Mountain" or raised seats.

E. Belfort Bax in The Story of the French Revolution

says:

"The Girondists were the party of orderly progress, sweetness, and light, the men who dreaded all

1. The Era of the French Revolution - Louis Gottschalk;
p. 215

of violent, i.e., energetic measures."¹

Such men, however, well intentioned they may be, and even apart from their ultimate objects, must always in the long run become the tools of reaction from their timidity and hesitancy. The Girondists desired a Republic, led by the professional middle classes. Their main strength lay in the provinces, the name being derived from the department of the Gironde, from where some of their chief men came. Among the leaders of the Girondist party may be mentioned Condorcet, Roland, Louvet, Petion, Barbaroux, Vergniaud, and Brissat. Robespierre, Danton, Marat, all the Parisian members, that is, the most advanced revolutionary leaders, belonged to the "Mountain," which had its strength in the outlying suburbs in which the populace of Paris found voice. Of them, Shailer Mathews says:

"They were men of action rather than words, and knew how to organize and control the proletariat of Paris."²

They advocated uncompromising revolutionary principles, a vigorous policy and a strong centralization, in opposition to the Girondists, who as stated before, favored strictly middle-class Republicanism, and a rather timid policy.

Almost immediately the Convention became the prey of internal dissension. Before the Convention, Girondins had been among the staunchest attendants at the meeting of the Jacobin Club. Now there had been a rift between the leaders

1. Bax, Belfort E., The Story of the French Revolution;
 2. Mathews, French Revolution; p. 216.

of both clubs. The Girondins now no longer appeared at the Jacobin Club. Instead they met at the salon of the notorious Madame Roland.

The Jacobin leaders represented Paris and the Girondins had begun to be afraid of that city. There was some reason to believe that the Commune of Paris had been more responsible for the September massacres than any other group of individuals, and the Girondins were scandalized by these occurrences. They began to agitate for removal to another city, maintaining that they encountered too much disorder at the capital. "Aulard claims that fundamentally it was nothing more than this question of whether the interests of Paris or those of the departments should predominate."¹

Robespierre and Marat were violently attacked. Robespierre was accused of aspiring to dictatorship.

Thus "the whole force of Girondist eloquence was brought to bear upon the lean and cadaverous ex-advocate of Arras, though without result."²

Undoubtedly, charges were made by one party against the other which were without foundation. The Girondins accused the Jacobins of what we to-day would loosely call communism, and the Jacobins replied with a charge of federalism, a desire to break France up into a loosely knit group of small republics. It must be remembered that the Girondins were social leaders, therefore, among the wealthiest men in France.

1. The Era of the French Revolution - Louis Gottschalk; p. 216.

2. The French Revolution - E. Belfort Bax; p. 50.

The Jacobin leaders, while influential men had come into power through lower - class support, their championing of popular measures, and the success of revolutionary movements. Naturally, opposition prevailed. The Jacobins had already advocated and the Girondins had already opposed certain measures by which the cost of the war would be borne by the wealthiest classes. Yet the Girondins, during the latter months, were able to control the Convention.

"But one great problem, whose solution would determine who really were the masters was yet to be solved - the disposition of Citizen Louis Capet, ex-king of France."¹ A truce to personal squabbles having been for a moment agreed upon, the question of the disposal of the king was declared urgent. Popular resentment against the dethroned monarch had been growing for some time.

Meanwhile Louis was being strictly guarded in the "Temple", where he had now been confined nearly four months. On the eleventh of December, Louis was conducted to the bar of the National Assembly. Barere, the President, greeted him, "Louis, the French nation accuses you; you are now about to hear the act of accusation. Louis, you may sit down."²

There were fifty-seven counts of the indictment relating to acts of despotism, conspiracies, and secret intrigues. Louis, whereupon, demanded legal counsel. The

1. The French Revolution - Shailer Mathews; p. 217-18.
2. The Story of the French Revolution - E. Belfort Bax;
P. 53.

Convention decided after some discussion to allow his old friend Melcherbes, with two others, Tronchet and Deseze, to undertake the office. Despite the eloquent pleas of these three men, the Convention voted upon the death of the king. The cowardly Girondins who really favored the king took no definite stand.

On January 21, 1793, Louis XVI paid upon the guillotine. The penalty for what were principally the sins of his father. Neva Webster gives us a fine description of that memorable day:

"All the shops were shut; silent patrols, composed of ill-clad men moved slowly about the streets, where one met only pale, sad and gloomy faces, stupor alone seemed to inhabit Paris. Such was the situation of that famous city, once so brilliant and the rendezvous for all pleasures."¹

In The Era of the French Revolution by Louis Gottschalk, it is said;

"Up to the very last, his conduct was such as to call forth admiration even from his bitterest critics. On the eve of his doom, he took a tender farewell of his family, like himself prisoners of State at the Temple, and then dismissed them that he might spend his last hours alone."

On November 19, 1792, the National Convention declared that "it would accord fraternity and aid to all peoples who should wish to recover their liberty." This declaration greatly frightened England. At the beginning, the English favored the revolutionists. But as soon as the French went beyond the English scheme of things and adopted a republican form of government, English statesman began to feel that

1. The French Revolution - Neva Webster; p. 375.

England was too uncomfortably close to French shore. It was an acknowledged fact that Wolf Tone, the Irish leader, was a republican. Very soon he was to get in touch with the statesman of France on behalf of his Society of United Irishmen.

On December 15, the propaganda decree was carried to its logical conclusion by putting at the command of French generals the wealth and welfare of occupied territories; France was going to force freedom upon all territories under her control and would "treat as enemies the peoples who, refusing liberty and equality, or renouncing them, may wish to preserve, recall, or treat with the prince and the privileged castes."¹

In the meantime, the Convention had considered the fate of Belgium. Dumouriez, commander of French armies, was constantly winning victories for France. In the battle of Jemmapes (November 6, 1792), he placed the former Austrian Netherlands under the control of the French. For England it was essential that Belgium should not pass into the hands of any energetic state, since Belgium was in a position to rival English commercial supremacy. In the hands of France, it was afterwards remarked that Antwerp would be a pistol pointed at the heart of England.

On February 1, 1793, the Convention declared war on

1. The Era of the French Revolution - Louis Gottschalk; p. 224.

George III assigning as reasons England's preparations for hostilities and their unfriendly attitude in recent affairs. Spain, having made valiant attempts to save Louis' life joined forces with Austria, Prussia, Sardinia, England, and Holland. Thus republican France stood alone against a coalition of five of Europe's oldest monarchies and one of her proudest republics.

Despite the paralyzing dangers which surrounded France on her borders, the debates between the Jacobins and the Girondins continued unabated. The lack of party organization in the Convention made it difficult to say that the execution of the king was a Jacobin victory. The Girondins remained superior in the Convention.

In March 1793, word reached France that Dumouriez suffered a disastrous defeat at Neerwinden and what was more appalling, that Dumouriez had gone over to the enemy.

This was no time for dissensions in the Convention. The real greatness of Danton appears at this moment. In his speech of March 10, 1793, he said:

"What matters my reputation? May France be free and my name forever sullied! Let us conquer our liberty. Let us conquer Holland. Let us make France march forward, and we shall go down glorious to posterity. No more debates, no more quarrels, and the country is saved."¹

It was he who tried to unite the two parties. But foolishly the Girondins refused to unite with his party, charging it to be stained with the blood of September massacres.

1. The French Revolution - Shailer Mathews; p. 221.

The final struggles came about through an effort to control the agitators of Paris by a committee of twelve, but even more immediately by a new attack upon Marat, who had angered the Girondins by nicknaming them "the little statesmen". The Girondists were able to bring about a vote to send Marat before the newly established tribunal - only to have him unanimously acquitted by judges.

The Girondists were now divided among themselves. The Commune came to the aid of the Mountain. They demanded that the "royalist" Girondins be arrested. Finally the Convention decreed the arrest of thirty prominent deputies. The Girondins had fallen.

Lyons, Bordeaux, and Caen, rose in rebellion. But here again the inefficiency of the Girondins showed itself, and the Convention was able to deal with each city independently, while the Girondins themselves were declared outlaws.

The Constitution of 1791 provided that, in order to amend it, a Constitutional Convention must be convened. After June 2, 1793, the Mountain drew up a new constitution. On June 24, 1793, the report of its committee was adopted. The people were declared to be the seat of all power, and the government was to consist of a legislative assembly and an Executive Council of twenty-four ministers, chosen by the assembly. The most remarkable feature of this instrument was the "referendum" provision, according to which every law of exceptional importance was to be referred to

The people for approval. It provided for universal manhood suffrage, a responsible ministry, and a bill of the usual rights of man.

CHAPTER III

The immediate results of the "coup d'etat" of June 2, 1793, were on the one hand, the supremacy of the Mountain and of the Commune, but on the other, the increase of the danger by which France was beset. Several of the Girondin leaders including Barbaroux and Buzot, left Paris, and endeavored to head a revolt of the departments against the Convention.¹ Four of the largest cities of France, Lyons, Marseilles, Bordeaux, and Caen, rose in rebellion. But here again the inefficiency of the Girondins showed itself, and the Convention was able to deal with each city independently, while the Girondins themselves were declared outlaws.

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1. Stephen's French Revolution; II Chs. 9,10.

the people for approval. It provided for universal manhood suffrage, a responsible ministry, and a bill of the usual rights of man.

A Committee of Public Safety was devised. It was composed of twelve well-educated men. Each member of the Committee was assigned to a special task. Carnot supervised the army, Andre cared for the navy, Lindet for economic matters, Saint Just for constitutional legislation and Robespierre for "education" and "public spirit".

Subordinate to this Committee of Public Safety was the Committee of General Security, consisting of twenty-one members whose duty it was to maintain order in Paris and throughout France. The chief agent of this latter committee was the Revolutionary Tribunal of Paris. Its office was that of frightening the people of Paris and France into submission to the Committee of Public Safety by mercilessly arresting, trying, and probably executing any person suspected of disloyalty to the French Republic. Thus, on September 5, 1793, the reign of Terror was inaugurated.

However, early in October, 1793, the principle of Terror was seen. During that month the guillotine in Paris began its systematized work, and in that month fifty persons were executed, including the unfortunate Marie Antoinette and twenty-one prominent Girondins. In November, fifty-eight were executed including Madame Roland, Girondist advocator. On the scaffold she was heard to utter these words:

"O Liberty, how many crimes are committed in thy name!"¹⁻²

As the Terror developed, it took ever less evidence to make a person a "suspect." Any man who was of noble birth, who had held office under the Old Regime, who was a servant or relative of a noble, any one who could not show that he had made some sacrifice for the Revolution - all such were legally declared to be suspects, liable to instant arrest and summary trial before the Revolutionary Tribunal. Consequently, many were sent to the guillotine.

Carrier invented the "noyades" or drownings. E. Belfort Bax in The French Revolution says, "Those suspected of Royalism or Moderatism were placed in boats with false bottoms and drowned in the Loire."

Shailer Mathews in The French Revolution said, "The mouth of the river was stopped with corpses, and thousands of the inhabitants of the city died from the pestilence resulting from unburied bodies."

In the Convention, there were many groups that opposed the increasing authority of the Committee of Public Safety over the Convention itself and attacked it in principle and in personnel. Somehow it always managed to come out of these debates successful.

Robespierre, member of the Committee of Public Safety,

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1. The French Revolution, Nesta Webster; pp. 2136-439.
 2. The French Revolution, Shailer Mathews; p. 233.

became the most popular man in France. Robespierre, whose official business on the Committee was the supervision of Public Education, became the personification of the Committee to every one else. Though Barere still acted as official spokesman, it was made to appear as if the Committee were under Robespierre's domination.

During the autumn of 1793, the Commune of Paris was dominated by the brutal and anarchic Hebert. Robespierre, fearing their popularity, undertook to reduce the Commune to the subjection of the Committee. In November 1793, Hebert was charged with a plot to send the leaders of the Convention to the guillotine, and then, with his friends, to take control of the State. But Hebert, at the time, was too strong in the Jacobin Club to be overcome. Robespierre's enmity increased by the obscenity and lawlessness of Hebert's journal. On November 17, 1793, Robespierre denounced the Hebertists as engaged "in the basest of all crimes, counter-revolution under the mask of patriotism".¹

Robespierre with the aid of the Dantonists, made use of the journals to fix all the atrocities of the Terror and the inefficiency of the generals upon Hebert. On March 13, 1794, Hebert and a number of his friends were arrested, and eleven days later were guillotined.

The Committee of Public Safety was bound to maintain the Terror. Any plea, therefore, for the moderation of the

1. The French Revolution, Shailer Mathews; p. 252.

Terror seemed to them treasonable; "who dared urge moderation with the enemies at the gate and rebellion within?"¹ Danton, and all who following Danton's lead, were beginning to plead for a more lenient policy, were looked at askance by them.

The time had now come for the Dantonists. Robespierre told Camille Desmoulins, Dantonist, that the later numbers of *Le Vieux Cordelier* had displeased him by their too obvious pleas for clemency. Several notes of warning were sent to the Indulgents, as Danton's party became known. Robespierre was eventually convinced, probably by the arguments that Danton and Danton's party, by their moderation and laxity of behavior, stood in the way of the establishment of that ideal Republic of Virtue for which he and Saint Just were striving.

Saint Just led the attack against the Dantonists in the Convention; a number of charges were made, some true, others untrue. The Convention voted for the impeachment of the entire group. They were allowed no counsel. April 5, 1794, they marched to the scaffold. "Show my head to the people," said Danton on the scaffold to the executioner; "they do not see the like every day."²

The fall of the Hebertists and Dantonists left Robespierre for the first time in control of the Committee. So complete was his mastery over the Jacobins that for more than three months he was virtually dictator of France.

1. The Era of the French Revolution, Louis Gottschalk; p. 251
 2. Danton, Beesley, Ch. 29.

Shailer Mathews in The French Revolution says:

"A mediocre man of narrow, pedantic honesty, a legalist in morals and a martinet in action, he was determined to found a well-ordered republic upon virtue; but with perverted vision he was a slave to consistency, a false judge of other man's motives, ready to kill any person who stood between him and the achievement of his Utopia."

Things were soming to pass that were soon to destroy Robespierre. No one knew who next would fall to his displeasure, though all were troubled in their consciences. Finding his faction in the minority in the Committee of Public Safety, Robespierre had recently absented himself more than was wise from their conferences. In the Convention, itself, there were two parties violently opposed to him. There were those who were sure that Robespierre was the genuine soul of the Terror, while others accused him of being a moderate.

July 27, 1794, the blow had fallen. Robespierre and Saint Just attended the Convention. The sitting was opened by Saint Just. He had scarcely begun his speech, attacking the Committees when he was interrupted and denounced by the ex-commissioner Tallien. Billaud Varennes¹ then spoke of threats made against the representatives. At this point of Billaud's speech the whole Convention rose and swore to defend the national sovereignty amid the applause of the public in the galleries. Everyone turned toward Robespierre who finally made a dash at the tribune. Before he could speak, however, the cry of "Down with the tyrant!" resounded

1. The Story of the French Revolution, E. Belfort Bax; p. 90

through the hall. His immediate arrest was demanded on all sides. Upon hearing the final decree, Robespierre shot himself, but only succeeded in breaking his jaw. His brother committed suicide by leaping from a window. Couthon mangled himself with a knife. Lebas shot himself. St. Just alone awaited his death with dignity and calmness.

E. Belfort tells us what happened next:

"It was now about one o'clock in the morning. The conspirators were conducted first to the Committee of General Security. Robespierre lay on a litter suffering horribly, exposed to the taunts and jeers of the bystanders, who upbraided him with all his crimes. They were afterwards taken to the prison of the Conciergerie, and brought up thence the next day before the Revolutionary Tribunal. They were of course condemned, and were executed the same evening at six o'clock. Immense crowds, hooting and jeering, thronged the streets to see the tumbrils as they passed."¹

Thus Robespierre speedily degenerated from the most popular to the most hated man in all France. With the fall of his head all France breathed freer. For if the dream of a republic founded upon morality had passed, so also had passed the Terror.

1. The Story of the French Revolution, E. Belfort Bax;
p. 93.

CHAPTER IV

The Thermidorian Reaction

It is plain to us now that the fall of Robespierre meant the end of the Terror, although the partisans of the system on the Committees could not see it. Three parties came to be clearly distinguished in the Convention - the considerable group of the Mountain; the Thermidorians, most of whom had been Dantonists; and the great body of the Swamp or Center, now daring to become Moderates.

In consequence legislation began to retrace its course. Wholesale execution of suspects ceased, and although trials and condemnations continued for several months, the terrible law of denying counsel to prisoners brought before the Revolutionary Tribunal, was repealed, and the number of executions was small. The irresponsible rule of the Committee of Public Safety was ended by the provision that one-fourth of its members should be renewed every month, and at least one month should pass before a member was reelected. The Revolutionary Tribunal was reorganized, with a jury and a proper provision for the defense of the accused, while the former public prosecutor, Fouquier - Tinville, was arrested, tried and after some months, together with fifteen of his former jurors, was executed. The Commune of Paris was replaced by two commissions, and the Jacobin Club was ordered to rid

itself of the friends of Robespierre, to cease corresponding with other societies in its own name, and at last, on November 12, 1794, was suppressed and its hall closed. The restriction upon the freedom of the press was, at least in large part, removed; amnesty was offered the Vendéans who should lay down their arms; the secrecy of letters was declared inviolable; the observance of the Catholic faith was again sanctioned, and the worst elements of the law of the "maximum" were repealed. In the meantime, the prisons were emptied of all those who had been illegally arrested.

The undoing of the centralized government of the Committee of Public Safety had brought France into the most serious economic embarrassment. The "assignats" were depreciating with frightful rapidity, and the price of food rose enormously. With a million men withdrawn from agriculture, famine was actually at the door of nearly every town in the nation. From all over France there went up the cry of hunger.

"Never before had starvation claimed so many victims as now. Death by the guillotine was succeeded by death from hunger."¹

The crops in many of the departments failed. In Picardy, men and women scoured the woods for mushrooms and berries. In the towns the misery was more intense. The poor were given a daily allowance of grain, but this was sometimes as

1. The Story of the French Revolution, E. Bax; p. 100.

small as three ounces of wheat for each person every eight days.¹

Crowds of frenzied women tried to intimidate the legislators, and on April 1, 1795, a mob forced its way into the Convention. For four hours it howled and threatened violence, until at last the wealthier sections of Paris armed themselves and came to the relief of the Convention. Then the mob fled. As a result of this riot several members of the Mountain were arrested on the explicit charge of having been Terrorists, and a little later the occurrence or danger of riots in Amiens, Rouen, Marseilles, and Toulon led to the arrest of still others of its members.

On May 20, 1795, the Jacobins, after careful preparation, again summoned the people to insurrection, declared the end of the revolutionary epoch, the dismissal and arrest of the members of the existing government, the establishment of the Constitution of 1793, and summoned a new Assembly to meet within a month. A desperate mob again filled the Convention Hall. So unexpected was the uprising that the Convention was totally unprepared, but it dared oppose its foes even after they had killed a deputy named Feraud. Again the wealthier sections armed, and their troops with fixed bayonets cleared the hall of its murderous invaders.

The next day, six members of the Mountain who had been leaders of the uprising were arrested, brought before a

1. The French Revolution, S. Mathews; p. 270.

military commission and condemned to death.

While the Convention was crushing that aggressive minority which had been so long its master, it was forced also to repress royalist uprisings. A "White Terror" or anti-Jacobin violence swept over the Republic and particularly southern France.

"The royalists and the "bourgeois" inflicted on the Jacobins the same horrors they had themselves suffered at the hands of the Jacobins."¹

Louis Gottschalk in The Era of the French Revolution, says the advocates of the "White Terror" "perpetrated atrocities that might have shamed a carrier."

In The French Revolution, Shailer Mathews says in speaking of anti-Jacobinists violence against the Jacobins:

"In Marseilles several hundred former Terrorists had been arrested and lodged in prison. On June 5, 1795, many of them were massacred, and then the prison was set on fire, many of the prisoners being burnt alive. In Tarascon, Jacobins were thrown from the tops of a tower upon the rocks of the river bank; in Lyons, Avignon, in fact in twenty departments, similar acts of vengeance were perpetrated."

In the meantime, the Convention had been engaged in negotiations that were to break up the coalition against France. In December, Pichegru became master of Amsterdam. Holland was closely allied to France. On February, Charette, leader of the Vendeanes agreed to peace at La Jaunaie, although it later developed that he could not enforce the peace himself. In April, Prussia, fearful lest Austria and Russia might conspire to divide what remained of Poland between them

1. The French Revolution, S. Mathews; p. 275.

and leave her out just as Austria had been left out in 1793, negotiated peace with the French Ambassador at Basel. By this treaty, Prussia surrendered to France all of her possessions on the left bank of the Rhine, while France withdrew all her troops in Prussian territory on the right bank.

The death of King Louis had removed a formidable obstacle to the way of peace with Bourbon Spain. The effective alliance against France had now been reduced to only England, Austria, and Sardinia; and all of these were on the defensive.

Thus relieved from foreign disturbances, the Convention turned to the duty for which it had originally been summoned, the making of a Constitution. A committee, of which Boissy d'Anglas was chairman, reported the first draft of such a document, in which, after a review of the work of the Constituent Assembly and the Terror, it insisted that the legislative and executive branches should be independent. These two principles were embodied in the Constitution of 1795. The legislature was to consist of two Councils, that of the Five Hundred and that of the Ancients, each to be elected by electors chosen by the people. An executive body known as the Directory, was to be established, consisting of five members, one of whom should retire every year, to be chosen by the Ancients from a list submitted by the Council of the Five Hundred.

"The influence of the "bourgeoisie" was felt in the provision that all officials should be property-holders, and that, although the suffrage was declared a natural right, all persons should be excluded from voting who

did not pay some kind of tax."¹

Freedom of labor, commerce, religion, and the press was established; all political clubs were prohibited. The Directory was to have full control over military affairs and the various agents of the government. It had, however, no power of initiating measures or of dissolving the Councils.

In many ways the new constitution was evidently a return to the ideas of the Constituent Convention and in so far favored the royalist reaction. The Convention, however, was farthest possible from planning a reestablishment of the monarchy, and remembering its own history under the Terror, was determined that the government about to be established under the new constitution should abandon neither republicanism nor the Terrorist delegates to the mercy of those who had injuries to avenge.

So unpopular was the Convention that if the country were granted absolutely free election, it was almost certain that reactionists would be elected to both the new Councils. Hardly had the discussion on the proposed constitution come to a close when a royalist outbreak took place in Normandy, and Charette again resorted to arms in the Vendee. The danger of a royalist reaction was by no means negligible. Louis Gottschalk in The Era of the French Revolution said:

"Large numbers of the population, some of them influential in the government itself, were known to favor a return of the monarchy, and more would probably reveal their true feelings as soon as

1. The French Revolution - S. Mathews; p. 277.

pressure was removed. A royalist restoration would have spelled ruin for the members of the Convention."

It was they who had voted for the death of Louis XVI and had created the Republic. In the eyes of the old aristocracy they were Regicides and traitors. They must see to it, therefore, that the old aristocrats did not regain power. Therefore, they passed the famous "two-thirds" decree": two thirds of the seven hundred and fifty members of the two houses in the coming "Corps Legislatif" must have been members of the Convention!

Immediately there was a general outcry against this high-handed procedure of the Convention. The two-thirds decree was submitted to a plebiscite, but, as it was not carefully distinguished from the Constitution itself, it received a majority vote, much smaller, however, than the Constitution itself received. In Paris it was defeated.

In order to insure order at the elections, large bodies of troops were assembled near Paris. The approach of the troops added suspicion already aroused by the actions of the Convention, and section after section appeared before it to protest against the decrees. When their protests were unheeded, the bourgeois and reactionists determined to crush the Convention with the weapons of the mob. The issue became increasingly one to be determined only by military force. All over France the agents of the Convention were insulted and abused.

Yet when the Constitution and the decrees were submitted to the nation, despite all the efforts of Paris, they

were accepted by large majorities. The announcement of this fact caused even wilder agitation in Paris, and by October 4, 1795, forty-four of the forty-eight sections of the capital were in open revolt and organizing armed resistance. In a short time an army of nearly thirty thousand men of the National Guard, mostly "bourgeois", were ready to march upon the Convention. The government, in its turn, brought in the regiments it had concentrated near the city, and prepared for actual battle.

"Had the National Guard advanced promptly, it might have crushed the Convention, but it preferred to spend the night of October, the fourth, in shouting and torchlight processions."¹

The Convention meanwhile remained in permanent session, and among other steps for its defense appointed Barras commander-in-chief of its forces. He had under him a force of perhaps five thousand men, but no second in command. Immediately he turned to one of his friends, Napoleon Bonaparte, a young Corsican of twenty-five, and a former friend of Robespierre. He was well-known to Barras, who had discovered in his face a likeness to Marat, to whom he had been closely attached. Bonaparte took half an hour for calculation, and with the true adventurer's instinct accepted the command.

In the morning the National Guard began to gather for its attack, but found itself confronted by Bonaparte's troops. In the afternoon, the leader of the insurrectionists gave the signal for attack. Instantly, Bonaparte ordered his guns to

1. The Story of the French Revolution - S. Mathews; p. 280.

be fired upon the crowd. Although the insurrectionists were brave, and were led by brave men; they could not equal Bonaparte's strength. After one last stand on the steps of St. Roch, they broke ranks and fled to their homes. The army had saved the government.

The achievements of the Convention

The days of the Convention were fast drawing to a close. On October 26, 1793, it met for the last time. Its final measures were decrees to the effect that there should be a general amnesty for all except the Vendémariens; that the death penalty be abolished on the day of the coming of the general peace; that the name of the Place de la Revolution, where the guillotines had stood be changed to the Place de la Concord.

Its last chapter closes such more pleasant reading than the earlier ones. But whatever harsh judgments may be pronounced against it, however bitterly some of its work may be condemned, its acts were not alone destructive.

"Several of the measures that were to form the most glorious features of the Napoleonic era - the reorganization of the school system, religious toleration, the codification of the laws, the creation of a national financial system, the formation of a well-trained and equipped army, the perfect system of local government - were inaugurated by the Convention."

Amid the stress of war and terror, the Convention had not neglected the arts. Someone has described the Revolution itself as a "Greek drama, verse by Chénier, music by Desdés, setting by David." Under the capable drafts, Martini,

1. The Age of the French Revolution - J. W. Aldrich, p. 272
2. The Age of the French Revolution - J. G. Cooper, p. 272

CHAPTER V

The Achievements of the Convention

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Amid the stress of war and terror, the Convention had not neglected the arts. Someone has described the Revolution itself as a "lyric drama, verse by Chenier, music by Gossec, setting by David."² Under the capable artists, Martini,

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1. The Era of the French Revolution - L. Gottschalk; p. 278
 2. The Era of the French Revolution - L. Gottschalk; p. 279

Mehul, Gretry, and Cherubini, music flourished upon the emotional attitude of the day. In 1793, the national school of music that today makes France a musical center was created; in 1795, it was given the name of Conservatoire de Musique.

The theaters were constantly crowded, though actors and playwrights were frequently imprisoned because of their royalist sentiments. All art, sometimes because of artificial pressure, took on a revolutionary manner.

A point the Convention teaches us is the effective power of minorities.

"The Terror itself, it cannot be denied, was kept up for nearly two years by a comparatively small but energetic minority in all the towns of France."¹

The extraordinary enthusiasm which we find, the reckless readiness of all to inflict and to suffer death, might lead the readers to suppose the men of the time to have been a race of born heroes, or monsters. However, the average of them were neither the one nor the other. They were the products of social forces far beyond their control. Prior to the Revolution, they were probably no more courageous than ourselves. The same courage might manifest itself in any man of character under like circumstances.

That the Convention did not do more is attributable to the monopoly of its efforts by the civil war within and the foreign war without. Indeed, the greatest accomplishment of the Convention was neither its constructive nor its destructive enterprises. What made it great was its preventive

1. The Story of the French Revolution - E. B. Bax - p. 118

measures - its armies, its committees, its deputies on mission, its Terror saved the Revolution. That the restoration of the Bourbons came only in 1814 and not in 1793 or 1795 was the glory of the Convention. Had the restoration come in 1793 or 1795, who can say that the Bourbons would have been as liberal, yielding, as willing, in defiance of Bourbon tradition to learn and forget, or the allies as sparing of French soil, as they were in 1814-15? And who can say that the message of the French Revolution would ever have reached beyond the boundaries of France?

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