Peter McPhee, "Reform, Conflict, and a Second Revolution, 1789-1792," The French Revolution, 2nd Ed. (Melbourne University Press, 2017), pp. 56-80.

Chapter 3

Reform, Conflict, and a Second Revolution, 1789–1792

[3.1] The Revolution at October 1789

By October 1789, the National Assembly had—thanks to popular support—succeeded in securing its permanent place within government and in articulating the principles of a radically different type of political system and civic culture. The transition was awesome in the breadth of its vision.

The two key statements of principle—the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen and the August Decree on Feudalism—represented both the repudiation of the old order, and a statement of intent for the future. This was to be a polity in which absolute monarchy would be succeeded by constitutional monarchy. Legitimate public authority would no longer be based on the divine right of kings answerable only to God for the people's wellbeing but on the principle of popular sovereignty. There could be no more fundamental political change than this: from a hierarchical principle of sovereignty to one where legitimate power came 'from below'.

A society in which privilege, exemption and favour were embedded in every aspect of public life would instead be founded on the principles of equality before the law, of tax obligations, and of rights to worship and speak freely. The social order would no longer be based on a hierarchy of birth and status but on capacity, one in which citizens would choose their leaders on the basis of merit.

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5 In the southern village of Camps-sur-l'Agly, on the frontier of Languedoc and Roussillon, one Occitan-speaking family decided to mark the significance of the great year by placing a carved stone image of the Bastille as the lintel over their door. It remains there today. (Photo: Fronza Woods)

A kingdom of subjects would become a nation of citizens with sovereign rights. A land of embedded corporate privilege and provincial exemptions would instead treat its citizens as equal in the eyes of the law, with equal rights and responsibilities. These rights would extend to freedom of religion. The 'dream of freedom' was that of inclusion, an invitation to all—whatever their social, religious or linguistic background—to become citizens of the nation, enjoying freedoms limited only by the obligations to obey the law and to respect the rights of others.

French people in general, and many others outside the new nation, were inspired by these principles, but they were no more than a blueprint for the future and, in any case, the new regime faced pressing, immediate problems. The Estates-General had been summoned to resolve the kingdom's financial crisis: this crisis had not disappeared with the drafting of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. Could Louis accept that his future role would be as 'king of the French' rather than 'king of France by the grace of God'? And how could the revolutionary principles of 1789 be implemented in a large nation of linguistic diversity and poor communications, where every aspect of public life bore the imprint of the Old Regime, from the armed forces to public worship?

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The deputies of the National Assembly now set about dealing both with immediate problems and with re-shaping France. To these tasks they brought extraordinary energy. The deputies commonly spent the morning and evening in the Assembly, and every afternoon on one or more of the thirty working committees elected for two years. Their number included many noble and clerical deputies (although many nobles had withdrawn from public life in resentful opposition to the changes). The revolutionary remaking of France drew on deep reserves of commitment and expertise; but the deputies were also prone to exhaustion, apprehension, and suspicion of the motives of compatriots who did not share their zeal.[1]

[3.2] Resolving Questions of Bankruptcy and Political Power

The deputies had to address two immediate problems. The first was the nation's parlous financial situation, which immediately worsened as people in some areas now took advantage of the political instability to stop paying taxes altogether. In addition, the commitment to end tithes in the August Decree presupposed that the 140 000 priests and religious would in future be paid from public revenues. So why should tithes be paid in the meantime?

The deputies came up with three solutions. First, in November 1789 it agreed by 568 votes over 346 to nationalise church lands on the recommendation of the bishop of Autun, Talleyrand, using the argument that these lands had effectively been only 'held in trust' for the nation. The church property—6 to 8 per cent of the urban and rural wealth of France—was often of high quality. It was to be rapidly inventoried and sold by auction to the highest bidder from November 1790. This 'national property' was to be used as backing for the second solution, the issuing of *assignats*, new paper bank notes. As the new currency flooded on to the market, it was bound to be inflationary and by May 1791 the *assignat* was worth only about 75 per cent of its face value. Finally, from early 1791, the Old Regime taxation system of *tailles* and other property taxes, a maze of indirect taxes, and exemptions for privileged bodies, was replaced by a new, uniform system of taxes on land and property to be paid by all citizens.

The second immediate problem was that of political power. Louis was already referred to as 'king of the French' and enjoyed widespread popularity because of his perceived role as 'restorer of liberty', but two awkward questions remained. First, what would be the king's actual powers? This was of crucial importance, because the new system depended on his willingness to compromise and to play the role of a constitutional monarch accepting of the people's will expressed through the National Assembly. After protracted and at times angry debate—for some argued that he should be no more than a figurehead—it was resolved to grant Louis a suspensive veto, enabling him to hold up legislation for two terms of the Assembly but not on matters pertaining to taxes or the constitution now being drafted. He was also to be the head of executive power, who appointed ministers and chaired their meetings, and appointed diplomats. The Assembly's role would be to formulate and approve legislation, subject to the king's veto, to make decisions on peace and war, and to supervise ministers.

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The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen had stated that popular sovereignty would be expressed by ‘all citizens … in person or through their representatives’, but which citizens would be deemed capable of exercising the right to vote rather than having others represent their interests? Most of the deputies of the National Assembly shared the assumption that personal economic independence was crucial to the capacity to make a free political choice, and that property ownership was the best gauge of this capacity. They also assumed that male heads of families were able to vote on behalf of women and children in their households. So the Assembly made a crucial distinction between ‘active’ and ‘passive’ citizens: the former were men who paid the equivalent of three days’ work in taxes, some four million of the seven million adult men. In elections for future national assemblies, these property qualifications would be restricted further, so that ‘active’ citizens would choose electors with higher property qualifications, who would in turn choose deputies from the very wealthy.

In historical context, the suffrage was remarkably broad: some 60 per cent of adult men had the vote (in England the figure was 17 per cent). But the promise of equality in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen had been compromised. The Assembly was walking a tightrope, on the one hand limiting democracy but on the other repudiating the conservative British and American models of having an upper house of parliament to check the democratic impulse. And over all hung the question of Louis’ will and capacity to accept a role as head of a constitutional monarchy.

[3.3] Remaking Public Life

The most pressing immediate problems had been confronted, but at the same time the Assembly had to turn its attention to a root-and-branch reform of every dimension of public life according to the principles set out in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen: popular sovereignty, equality, liberty and uniformity. It was a task that was staggering in its scale.

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Map 11 *Départements of France, 1800*

The parish itself was no longer to be the smallest administration unit: instead they were to become ‘communes’, the base of a hierarchy of cantons and districts under the eighty-three new departments that were to replace the ancient provincial administrations of the kingdom. Sweeping reform to local government and administration was to be based on the core principles of rationality rather than uniformity, and popular sovereignty exercised by ‘active’ citizens. Custom was to give way to reason.

The new departments were to be small, usually no more than about 100 kilometres across, to facilitate access to their capitals, and to be uniform in their processes and policies. They were given enormous responsibilities over assessing taxes, providing education and poor relief, and in policing. The surge in demands for provincial Estates-General before 1789, expressing deep-seated assumptions about provincial identity and rights, was now thwarted by the deliberate choice of geographic features for departmental names: there was to be no administrative unit called Languedoc, for example, but rather departments named after modest rivers such as the Aude, Hérault and Gard. The deputies were concerned for national unity at a time of endemic instability, but they understood the need to translate revolutionary decrees into local languages: the Abbé Grégoire’s inquiry of 1790 would identify only fifteen departments, with three million people, as purely French speaking.

The same principles of rationality, uniformity and popular sovereignty were applied in sweeping reforms to the ancient legal systems, characterised by exemptions, privilege, and seigneurial courts. But the reforms were also to be based on the principle of humaneness: now the accused were to appear in court within twenty-four hours, trials were to be public and by jury, and state lawyers would be provided (a sought-after role for the thousands of

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lawyers whose livelihoods disappeared with the abolition of the maze of ecclesiastical, seigneurial and royal courts). Physical mistreatment or punishments were outlawed. Following English and Dutch models of justices of the peace, the deputies moved to set up a new system of *juges de paix* which, in line with the repeated rural grievances expressed in the *cahiers*, would be accessible to all, cheap and designed to conciliate. These respected, elected local officials, who replaced the onerous, expensive and usually disadvantageous seigneurial courts, were to prove enormously popular.[2]

Law reform occasioned impassioned and brilliant debate. Robespierre and others sought to have capital punishment abolished altogether: they failed, and it was maintained for crimes such as voluntary homicide and treason, but abolished for many others, including homosexual practice. The principles of equality and humaneness were similarly brought to bear in decisions about how those guilty of capital offences were to be executed. Joseph Guillotin, a Parisian physician and deputy, proposed changes to criminal trials that would overturn centuries of spectacular, protracted and exemplary punishment: 'The same crimes will be punished by the same penalty, regardless of the rank and estate of the guilty party … The criminal will have his head severed.' Executions would be as quick and humane as possible, but would be performed in the main public square of each town as a terrifying and salutary example.[3]

The principle of popular sovereignty had been imposed for the choice of ministers of religion, but deputies hesitated to apply it when reforming the armed forces. How would the rank and file know which officers were best equipped to win battles? While the principle of making all ranks open to talent was applied to the army, officers were not to be elected. The decision caused tensions. There were serious rebellions in the fleets at Toulon in December 1789 and Brest in September 1790 and in many army garrisons, notably in Perpignan and Nancy. A rebellion in the garrison at Nancy in August 1790 was bloodily repressed by its commander Bouillé, cousin of the commander-in-chief of the army, Lafayette. About ninety mutineers were killed in the fighting and many others were punished: one broken on the wheel, twenty hanged and forty-one sent to the galleys. Bouillé was to be notorious for this '*affaire de Nancy*'.

Worried by reports of unrest in the army, the Assembly endorsed Bouillé's actions. For Elysée Loustallot of the major newspaper, the *Révolutions de Paris*, already despondent over the violence that had continued since July 1789, the news of the massacre was intolerable:

> How can I narrate with a leaden heart? How can I reflect when my feelings are torn with despair? I see them there, these corpses strewn about the streets of Nancy … Await rascals, the press that uncovers all crimes and dispels all errors will deprive you of your joy and your strength: how sweet it would be to be your last victim!

Loustallot died shortly thereafter, at just twenty-nine years of age; his funeral oration was delivered by another prominent journalist and revolutionary, Camille Desmoulins.[4]

The majority of the National Assembly also hesitated to apply the literal meaning of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen when it came to colonial legislation and

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slavery. An angry debate opposed the colonial lobby (the Club Massiac) to the Société des Amis des Noirs, which included Brissot and Grégoire. The Assembly changed nothing in its first decree on 8 March 1790. Its next response, in May 1791, granted 'active' citizen status to free blacks ('men of colour') with free parents and the necessary property, but avoided the issue of slavery itself. The colonial lobby had won, but the great breach had been made in the ideology justifying slavery: if freed 'men of colour' could be citizens, then all slaves had the potential to be.

The rights of women were advocated by individual activists such as Olympe de Gouges, Etta Palm and Théroigne de Méricourt, and the political club the Cercle Social urged the vote for women, the availability of divorce, and the abolition of inheritance laws that favoured the first-born son. The latter was legislated in March 1790, although more with the intention of breaking up large noble estates than to favour women. In 1791 Gouges published a draft social contract for marriage arrangements concerning children and property and a Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Citizeness:

> Preamble.
>
> Mothers, daughters, sisters, female representatives of the Nation, ask to be formed into a National Assembly. Considering that ignorance, forgetfulness or disdain for the rights of women are the only causes of public unhappiness and government corruption, [they] have resolved to set out in a solemn declaration the natural, inalienable and sacred rights of women, so that this declaration, constantly before all members of the social body, will remind them ceaselessly of their rights and duties, so that the power of women, and the power of men being at any moment comparable with the goal of any political institution, be better respected …[5]

At a time when the fundamental social division was between 'patriots' and those for whom the Revolution had already gone too far, Gouges' challenge found almost no support in the Assembly and little resonance outside.

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen had been silent on reform to economic regulation, but it soon became apparent that deputies assumed that the principles of free enterprise and free trade (*laissez-faire, laissez-passer*) were the economic equivalent of freedom of religion and expression. 'Liberty' was indivisible. So the Assembly ended state restrictions on the grain trade and abolished internal customs barriers, assuming that internal free trade within the borders would encourage commerce and make for a more rational movement of the nation's produce. A corollary of decisions to abolish privileged 'corporations' such as the First and Second Estates was liberty of the marketplace for labour and commodities. Economic freedom was seen to be incompatible with the continued existence of guilds (abolished by the Allarde law of March 1791) and combinations of workers or employers (made illegal by the Le Chapelier law of June 1791). Prostitutes, too, were 'freed' from the supervision of religious authorities and police, but thereby made more vulnerable as well.

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The Assembly thus operated on the basis of a distinctively ‘bourgeois’ conception of property, produce and labour as belonging to individuals, the price and ownership of which was to be negotiated publicly, in markets, and without the hindrances of excessive regulation, tolls and customs duties, or claims to special treatment. It was fundamentally different to the divergent views of peasants and nobles regarding the personal and collective rights and obligations that existed over private farmland, or of urban consumers concerning ‘just prices’ for essentials.

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6 This barely surviving plane tree was probably planted in the tiny village of Tamniès, north of Sarlat, to mark the first anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, in July 1790. It grows in front of the parish church, from where it was photographed. It is now probably the only living 'liberty tree' from that point of the Revolution. (Photo: Charlotte Allen)

Whatever the misgivings some had about the nature of specific reforms, the work of the National Assembly was vast in scope and energy. It laid the foundation of a new social order based on civil liberties, equality before the law, and national unity. All French citizens, whatever their social background and residence, were henceforth to be administered in the same way, judged according to a single uniform legal code, and taxed by the same obligatory proportional taxes on wealth, especially landed property. This was a key meaning of 'fraternity'.

Optimism about the nature of the changes ran deep through much of 1790, bolstered by another good harvest after that of 1789. The Assembly decided to hold a vast 'Festival of Federation' on the Champ de Mars in Paris on 14 July 1790 to celebrate the first anniversary of the storming of the Bastille. The rough ground was levelled by voluntary labour and the ceremony involving Louis XVI, Talleyrand and Lafayette drew massive crowds: some estimated that there were 300 000 people in attendance. On a much smaller scale were the celebrations that occurred in every rural and regional community, often at new 'altars of the homeland'.

Two days earlier the Assembly had passed the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, a sweeping reform of the structures of the Church that was to explode the unity apparent on the Champ de Mars on the 14th. No institution was more important than the Catholic Church, the religion of almost all citizens, whether or not they were devout. There had been consensus on the need for radical change to the Church in the *cahiers* of the Third Estate, and often in those of the First Estate itself. The Church was seen to be intolerant, inefficient and unacceptably hierarchical in the social status and wealth of its high clergy. The parish priests were held in high esteem, not least because so many of their deputies had sided with the Third Estate in 1789. Most of the deputies were devout Catholics who assumed that they had the right to reform the administrative structures of the Gallican arm of the Church, just as Louis XV had in closing hundreds of religious houses in 1768. There was no question of separating Church and state: so the change from supporting clergy through the tithe to payment by the new nation was accepted as obvious.

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Many clerical deputies, and their former First Estate fellows in general, were nervous. Few had agreed with the decision to nationalise Church property (even priests' kitchen gardens were put up for sale). Many were bothered by the Assembly's decision to accord full equality to Protestants in December 1789 and the Sephardic Jews of the southwest in January 1790 (the Ashkenazi in the east were not recognised until September 1791). Large-scale sectarian violence erupted early in 1790 in southern towns with wealthy Protestant minorities, such as Montauban and Nîmes, where wealth opened to them municipal power on top of the freedom to worship openly. Many members of the First Estate found the Assembly's decision in February 1790 to prohibit new monastic vows to be intrusive and heavy-handed.

But nothing had prepared them for the extent and method of reform in the Civil Constitution of the Clergy of 12 July 1790. Certainly, parish priests in most regions were to be better paid (1200 *livres*), and few of them regretted the lower, uniform salaries accorded to bishops and other high clergy. But the decision to allocate parishes on the basis of population meant that many 'excess' parish churches and chapels would be closed, removing many clergy from office and angering parishioners in remote locations who now had to trek to a distant parish church. In particular, the decision of the Assembly to place the choice of clergy in the hands of 'active' citizens—including non-Catholics but excluding other parishioners—created friction, and totally repudiated the assumption within the Church that clerical appointment was divinely inspired and hierarchical. In applying popular sovereignty to the choice of priests and bishops, the Assembly was assuming a model of 'citizen priests' that outraged many clergy.

[3.4] The Struggle over the Survival and Direction of the Revolution

Like every revolution, that of 1789 was characterised by the challenge of holding together the alliance that had brought down the *Ancien Régime*, in the face of a mounting opposition to the Revolution itself. What were the goals of the Revolution? And how could the Revolution be preserved against its opponents?

The nobility had lost power, wealth, and privilege, and in June 1790 even noble status was abolished. While many nobles supported the essential changes brought by the Revolution, many more had retreated into noisy opposition on their provincial estates, and a few joined with other *émigrés* gathering across the Rhine at Coblentz and Trèves. There they awaited the opportune moment to bring a chastised France to its senses. But it was the division over Church reform and the angry response of many of the clerical deputies to the passing of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy that confronted the Assembly with its greatest dilemma.

It was as if the Assembly wanted the clergy to become 'citizen priests' like mayors or public servants. Although most priests accepted the reforms in the southeast and the Paris basin, where public life had long been relatively 'secularised', they overwhelmingly rejected

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them in the west and in areas with Protestant minorities, where Catholic priests had been antagonised by the Assembly's religious pluralism.

On 27 November 1790 the Assembly decreed that, following their election in the new year, bishops and priests would have to swear an oath 'to be faithful to the nation, to the law and to the king, to maintain the Constitution decreed by the National Assembly …' All over France the oath faced parish priests with an agonising choice of conscience. The Civil Constitution had been sanctioned by the king, but did that quieten their anxiety that the oath contradicted loyalty to the Pope and long-established practice? Many priests sought to resolve the dilemma by taking a qualified oath, as had a priest in the northeastern department of Pas-de-Calais.

> To the municipality of the parish of Quesques.
>
> Declaration of the parish priest regarding the oath required by the assembly.
>
> I declare that my religion does not allow me to take an oath such as the National Assembly requires; I am happy and I even promise to watch over as well as one possibly can the faithful of this parish who are entrusted to me, to be true to the nation and the king and to observe the constitution decreed by the National Assembly and sanctioned by the king in all that is within the competence of his power, in all that belongs to him in the order of purely civil and political matters, but where the government and the laws of the Church are concerned, I recognise no superior and other legislators other than the Pope and the bishops; … my confidence in refusing the oath such as the National Assembly requires will teach you, Christians, that neither the fear of being pursued, nor this interest that we are often reproached for having at the wrong moment can make me betray my conscience and it will be, and even for you, an example to lose your possessions, your fortune, even your life if necessary, rather than to abandon your faith, your religion and offend your God …
>
> JA Baude, Parish priest of Quesques and Lottinghen.[6]

Only a handful of bishops and perhaps half the parish clergy were prepared both to stand for election on New Year's Day 1791 and to take the requisite civic oath. Thousands of others retracted when in April 1791, Pope Pius condemned the Civil Constitution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen as inimical to Christian teachings:

> Take special care lest you proffer ears to the insidious voices of this secular sect, whose voices furnish death, and avoid in this way all usurpers whether they are called archbishops, bishops or parish priests, so that there is nothing in common between you and them, especially in divine matters … with one word cling to Us: for no one can be in the Church of Christ unless he is unified with the visible head of the Church itself and is strengthened in the cathedral of Peter.[7]

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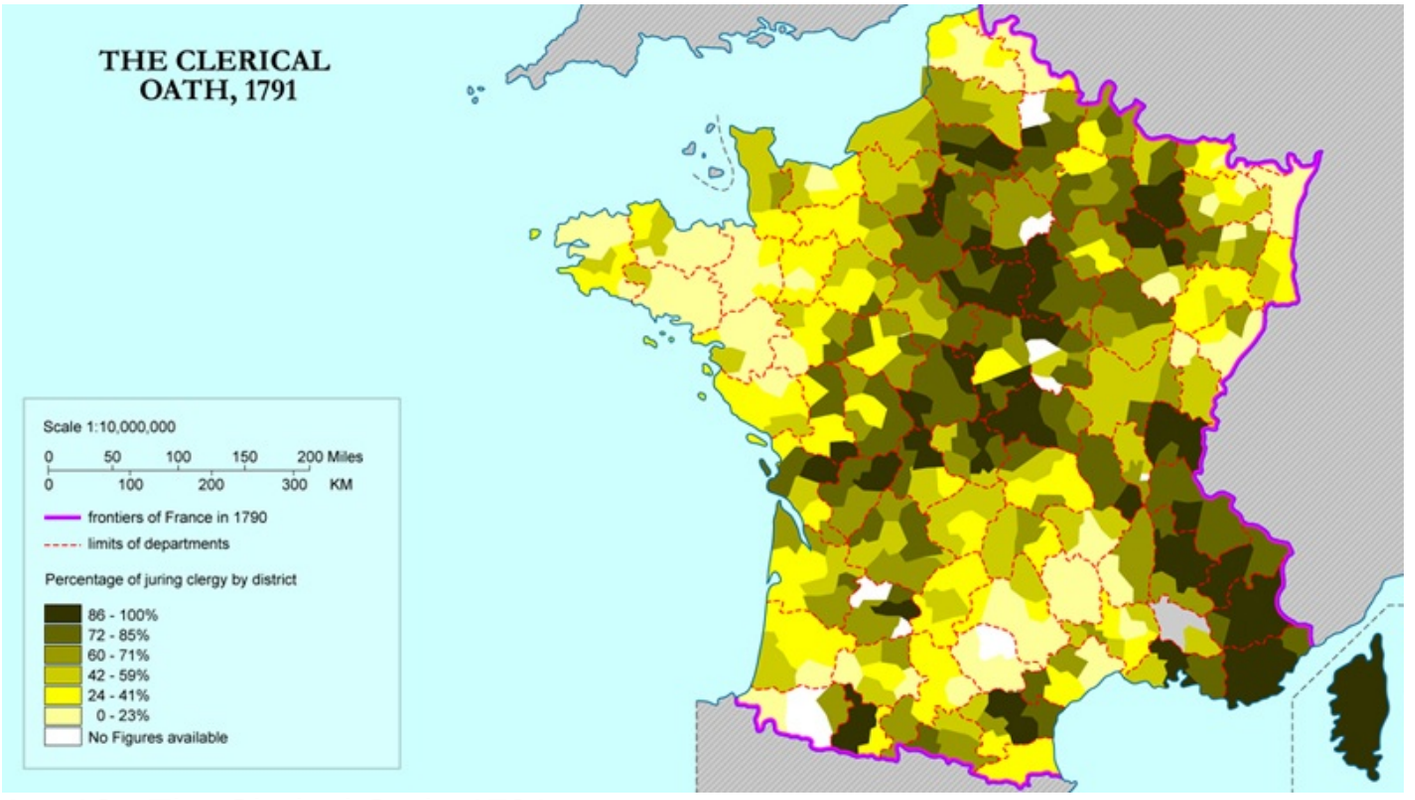

Map 12 *The Clerical Oath, 1791*

Provincial capitals bore the brunt of institutional change, including the impact of reforms to the Church. In Toulouse, the Parlement aristocracy had made up only 5 per cent of the population of 60 000 but it had controlled 44 per cent of the city's wealth. Members of the clergy were one in fifteen of the population: apart from the cathedral and basilica, there were ten parish churches and more than fifty convents and monasteries, and church property covered one-third of the town. Now this property was to be sold, the religious orders would slowly close and Toulouse would be reduced to just a departmental capital from its proud history as capital of Languedoc. In almost every case, the department capital was also the centre of the diocese, but occasionally authorities sought to defuse urban rivalries by splitting the two. At the northern end of the nation, Laon had seen off the campaign of its rival Soissons to be the capital of the new department of Aisne, thereby keeping its administrative and judicial functions, but at the price of losing the bishopric to its rival. The Festival of Federation on 14 July 1790 was a joyful occasion in the town, capped by the wedding at the altar of the homeland of a 'poor and virtuous girl' to a soldier in the National Guard. The altar thus received 'the double vow of conjugal union of these happy spouses, and the fraternal union of all citizens'. Then the Civil Constitution of the Clergy would close all but two of the twelve tiny parishes on the 'plateau' (high town) of Laon, and the collapse of the Church's wealth—it had owned 28 per cent of the region's land, and many seigneurial titles—would ravage the town as surely as it benefited substantial rural landowners.[8]

Support for the Revolution quickly splintered in Brittany and much of the west. Hundreds of 'patriots' from Brittany and Anjou gathered at Pontivy in January and February 1790 to express their unity with 'all the French', while others muttered angrily about the abolition of

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Brittany's distinctive 'constitution' and privileges supposedly guaranteed under the union of Brittany and France in 1532. The reforms to the Church aggravated tensions immeasurably in a region where priests from local families had often enjoyed high salaries and prominence in tiny theocracies: forty-two of the 232 elected mayors in the department of Morbihan were priests. Furious villagers from Sarzeau marched on Vannes on 13 February 1791 on hearing the rumour that the non-juror bishop Amelot was in prison. They were encouraged by the priest of Sarzeau, who had had a salary of 2600 *livres* before the Revolution, but that was now slashed by the new national salary scale that so advantaged priests elsewhere.[9]

Just as pressing and dangerous was the question of whose Revolution this was. After all, the Revolution of 1789 had been made only with the physical support of masses of urban workers and peasants. Yet the Revolution had introduced free enterprise and free trade, had abolished associations and guilds, but had not introduced universal suffrage or abolished feudal dues outright. The attempt by the National Assembly to treat seigneurial exactions as a legal form of rent that peasants could only terminate by compensating the seigneur encountered stubborn and, at times violent, resistance. Many communities decided to take legal action to force seigneurs to submit their feudal titles for verification. This legal challenge was often connected with an illegal, second type of action, the refusal to pay feudal dues in the meantime. For example, in the four months after December 1789, peasants from 330 parishes in the southwest invaded over one hundred *châteaux* to protest against the payment of harvest dues.[10]

In restricting formal political life to 'active' citizens, the Revolution risked alienating poorer wage-earners and campaigners for women's rights—a disaffection made manifest in the democratic agitation in Paris of the Cordeliers Club, under Marat and Danton, and the Fraternal Society of Both Sexes, led by the schoolteacher Claude Dansard, which attracted up to 800 men and women to its sessions. Such clubs challenged the dominance of the 'active' citizens of the Jacobin Club, the Parisian headquarters of a national network of Societies of Friends of the Constitution, the key political grouping in the nation.

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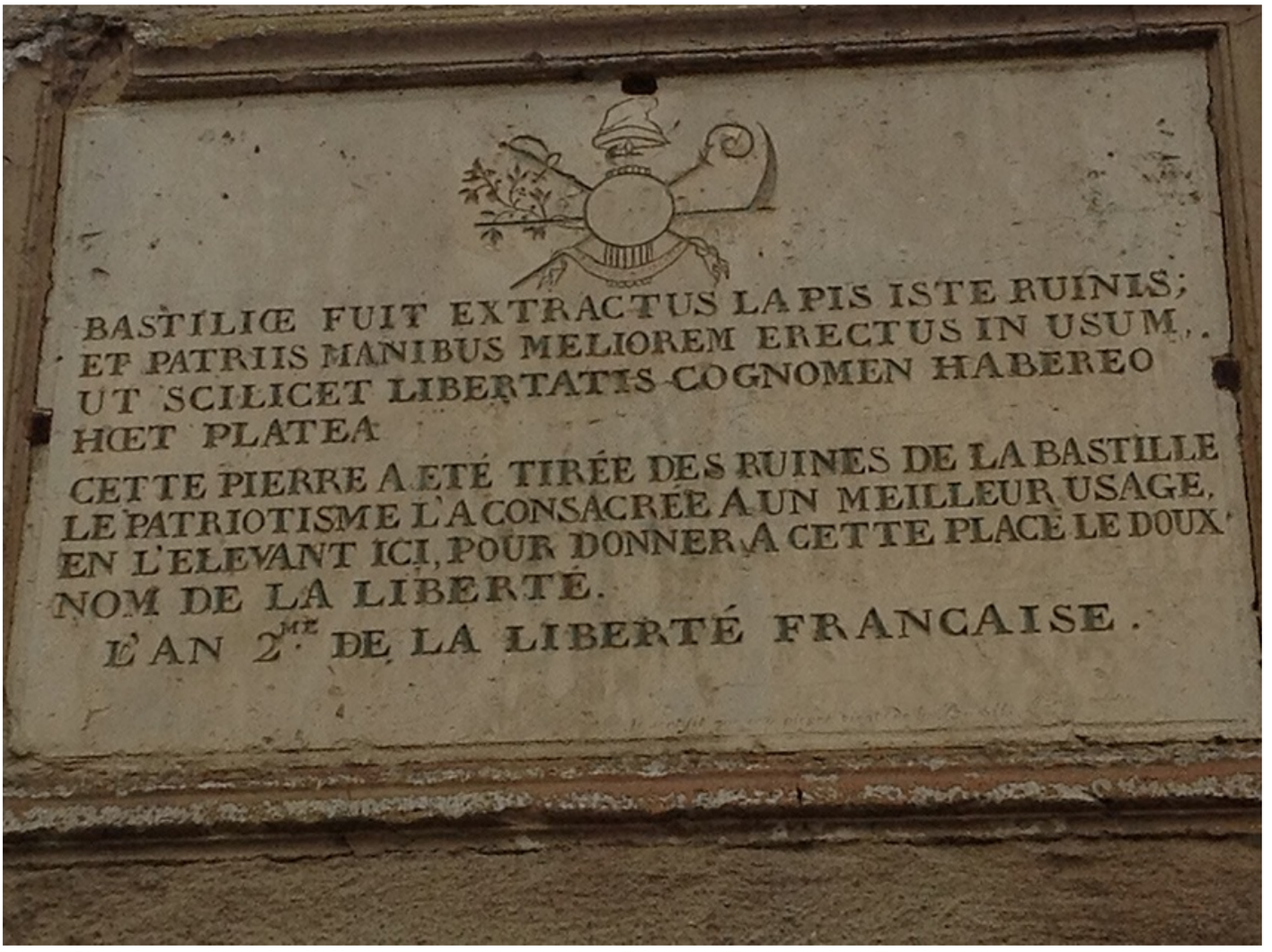

7 & 8 After the building entrepreneur Pierre-François Palloy was contracted to demolish the Bastille, he sent carvings of it made from its foundation stones to the 83 new departments. This stone was acquired in 1790 by the village of St Julien-du-Sault in Burgundy and embedded in the town gate on 'Liberty Square'. It remains there today. Palloy's certification of authenticity is just discernible along the bottom. (Photos: Peter McPhee)

Such clubs were part of a new political culture. In early 1789, there had been perhaps eighty newspapers in the whole country; over the next few years about 2000 others were launched. In Paris alone, there were 515 new newspapers in these years. Even taking account of how ephemeral many were—357 (69 per cent) had fewer than three issues—the contrast is striking with London. There, a larger city, of over one million inhabitants, had just twenty-two periodicals.[11]

In these newspapers, and in songs, plays and broadsheets, the period 1789–92 was a great age of savage satire, especially in the form of obscene attacks on political opponents. Through these mouthpieces of political expression the new citizenry expressed its views and disagreements about the changes the Revolution had wrought and the future direction it should take.

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[3.5] The King's Flight, 20–22 June 1791

The battle over the survival and direction of the Revolution came to a head in the fifteen months after 21 June 1791, when Parisians awoke to the news that Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette and their children had fled. The flight was a succession of accidents and blunders, and they were arrested in the eastern village of Varennes during the night of 22 June (see image 20). Louis had been heading for the safety of the Marquis de Bouillé's troops and the Luxembourg border, but he intended to return. He left behind a declaration repudiating the way in which the people's 'false friends' in the Assembly had presumed to initiate reforms, particularly to the Catholic Church.

> Frenchmen, and especially you Parisians, you inhabitants of a city which the ancestors of His Majesty were pleased to call the good city of Paris, distrust the suggestions and lies of your false friends. Return to your King; he will always be your father, your best friend. What pleasure will he not take in forgetting all his personal injuries, and beholding himself again in your midst, when a constitution, freely accepted by him, shall cause our holy religion to be respected …[12]

He had not recovered from the shame he felt at having agreed to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, nor his humiliation at being physically prevented from leaving Paris to take Easter mass from a non-juring priest at his *château* at St Cloud in April 1791. He recalled that the *cahiers* had accepted the king's role; now the Society of Friends of the Constitution or Jacobins of 'active' citizens springing up across the country had assumed the power to dictate legislation.

Louis did return to Paris, but in disgrace. Along his long, miserable trip back to the capital, there were occasional threats of violence, but more commonly masses of people lined the roads to stare in disbelief, often refusing to take off their hats as a sign of contempt. News of the flight and arrest spread with extraordinary speed: the arrest on 22 June in Varennes was known in distant Quimper, in Brittany, at 7 am on 24 June.[13] Initial reactions of panic at what the events might mean for the threat of foreign invasion soon turned to anger. On the other hand, outside France, opponents of the Revolution, urged on by increased numbers of *émigré* nobles, were incensed by Louis' 'imprisonment' in Paris. His flight had unleashed a new revolutionary struggle.

[3.6] The 'Massacre on the Champ de Mars', 17 July 1791

On the first anniversary of the taking of the Bastille, on 14 July 1790, Louis had taken an oath on the Champ de Mars 'to use the power given to me by the constitutional law of the State, to maintain the Constitution as decided by the National Assembly and accepted by myself, and to enforce the laws'. Obviously, Louis had now repudiated the Revolution, both in his declaration and in his willingness to call on foreign help by fleeing to the borders. Was he a traitor? How could his word ever again be trusted? And yet ultimately the Assembly

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preferred to reinstall him on his throne, even to accept the rationalisation that he had, in some sense, left the capital against his will.

Motivating most of the deputies to retain Louis on the throne was fear: fear of war with his relatives among the crowned heads of Europe if he was deposed and, just as important, fear of instability. Wage-earners' hostility to the Le Chapelier law, which outlawed workers' associations, had been aggravated by a further slump in the purchasing power of the *assignats* in which they were paid. The anger of the 'passive' citizens and their supporters was expressed in particular through the Cordeliers Club, which organised a petition calling for Louis' abdication to be signed on the Champ de Mars, the same location where a year earlier Parisians had gathered to celebrate the anniversary of the Revolution of 1789. Calls for Louis' abdication were mixed with demands for democratic reform, even—although far less commonly—with demands for a republic.

On 15 July, the prominent deputy Antoine Barnave made a speech to the National Assembly:

> What I fear most is our vigour, our unrest; I fear the indefinite prolongation of our revolutionary fever. Any change today is fatal, every prolongation of the Revolution disastrous. I am posing the question here, for it is a question of the national interest. Are we going to end the Revolution, or are we going to start it all over again? (Repeated applause) … If the Revolution takes one more step, it can only be a dangerous one: if it is in line with liberty its first act could be the destruction of royalty, if it is in line with equality its first act could be an attack on property. (Applause) … It is time to bring the Revolution to an end … It must stop at the point where the Nation is free and all men are equal … Everyone must be made aware that it is in the common interest that the Revolution be brought to a halt …[14]

Barnave was a key figure in the colonial lobby concerned with how slave unrest was threatening commerce. Retaining Louis on the throne was for him crucial to staunching unrest both in France and in the colonies.

While members of the Jacobin Club had initially supported the petition, most now abandoned the Cordeliers, who proceeded alone. On 17 July, up to 50 000 people gathered on the Champ de Mars where, as they signed, Lafayette and the National Guard proclaimed martial law before opening fire. At least fifty of the petitioners were killed.

The 'massacre', as it became known, horrified and terrified Parisians. A great deal of blood had been spilt among those who had together made the Revolution of 1789. Most Jacobins had now split away from the more militant democrats among them, such as Robespierre, who in turn drew closer to the democrats of the Cordelier Club and the more prominent of the skilled workers. A new term was now used for militant revolutionaries, particularly, but not exclusively, if they were 'of the people': *sans-culottes*.

The revolutionary alliance of 1789 had splintered. On the one hand, a new alliance had been born, linking radical middle-class Jacobins and *sans-culottes* through a shared commitment to democracy and greater social equality. On the other, many former Jacobins,

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dubbed ‘Feuillants’, now sought above all to stabilise the Revolution and willingly accepted Louis’ reassurances as he proclaimed the Constitution, and the end of the Assembly, in September 1791. Others hoped that it meant the end of uncertainty: one noble, Lallemand de Ste Croix, celebrated the proclamation of the Constitution by flying from Paris to Provins in a hot-air balloon, scattering copies of the document as he dined on chicken legs, bread and wine.[15]

Fewer than two hundred of the 1200 or more deputies who had gathered at Versailles in May 1789 voted against the Constitution of 1791. Its provisions were an historic achievement, laying the institutional groundwork for a radically different yet coherent polity. Whatever the limitations one might highlight—the lack of explicit political and social rights for women, slaves and the poor—it created the most inclusive and participatory system in the world.

Despite the level of consensus in the Assembly, the Constitution was promulgated amid thunderous rumblings of discontent. European powers threatened France over what they saw as Louis’ imprisonment, at the same time as the king’s flight had shattered his people’s faith in his attachment to them. Half the clergy—and many of their parishioners—had been alienated by the upheaval of the Church reforms. Millions of peasants were locked in an unresolved, bitter stand-off over seigneurial dues. Artisans and labourers in provincial centres had lost employment and custom with the abolition of Old Regime institutions and the sale of church property.

In the colonies, despite the promise of 1789 that people were ‘born free and equal’, civil equality had been granted only to children of freed slaves. When planters refused to contemplate even this, a slave rebellion erupted in St-Domingue in August 1791. Slaves, predominantly from the Congo, started burning plantation properties, setting sugar-cane alight and breaking the machines that pulped the cane. They attempted to seize the port of Le Cap, where the colonial Assembly was being held, before retreating into the hills; from there they deployed guerrilla tactics against squadrons of colonial troops. The key leader was Toussaint Louverture, born a slave, with an Arada father from West Africa. He had been freed over a decade before the Revolution and had indeed briefly owned a slave and managed a plantation. By October 1791 2000 whites and 10 000 slaves would be dead.[16]

Political divisions were all-pervasive, including in the theatre. In 1791 an actor in *Richard, Coeur de Lion* replaced a reference to Richard with Louis: ‘Oh, Louis, oh my king! With our love we faithfully embrace you.’ There was applause from the boxes, but shouts of ‘Down with the traitors!’ from the pit. The orchestra attempted to diffuse the tensions by playing the popular revolutionary song ‘*Ça ira*’, but only police intervention stilled the commotion. A few months later an actress provoked an on-stage scuffle with spectators by looking directly at Marie-Antoinette when she sang ‘Oh, how I love my mistress!’ There was similar friction between patrons in private boxes and those on the floor at the Comédie Italienne, following the line: ‘The people should be educated but not misled!’ Police were pelted with potatoes as they rushed onto the stage to restore order.[17]

The implementation of the Constitution was now in the hands of 745 new deputies in the

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Legislative Assembly—new because the National Assembly had accepted Robespierre's motion that, as the architects of the Constitution, its members should disqualify themselves from now ruling France under its provisions. The new Assembly was evenly divided at the outset between Jacobin followers of Jean-Pierre Brissot and those keenest to stabilise the Revolution—the 'Feuillants'—many of whom had deserted the Jacobins as they became more concerned about popular pressures to push the Revolution further.

[3.7] The Origins of the War of 20 April 1792

Despite the powerful desire of the 'Feuillants' to stabilise the Revolution under Louis XVI, within six months they almost unanimously supported the Brissotins' proposal to declare war on Austria. This was a decision that engulfed Europe in armed conflict almost continuously for twenty-three years. Like the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, it was a great turning-point in the course of the Revolution, and the Revolution now pulsed in time with the fortunes of war.

Fundamental conflict was inevitable—if war itself was not—between Old Regime Europe and a revolutionary France that had largely abolished feudalism, sold church lands, ended privilege, and introduced civil equality and popular sovereignty. The Declaration of War against Austria, on 20 April 1792, insisted that this was a defensive war:

> In accordance with the sacred principles of the Constitution, which do not permit France to take part in a war of conquest or to use her forces against the liberty of another people, the French nation is taking up arms solely in defense of its own independence.[18]

Certainly, there were specific foreign issues that rankled with the Legislative Assembly deputies. When Louis was suspended from his functions following his abortive attempt to flee in June, crowned heads had issued menacing declarations from Padua (5 July) and Pillnitz (27 August), threatening armed retribution should his safety and freedom be denied. The Elector of Trèves had refused to disperse gatherings of *émigrés* in the city. Nobles from across the Rhine with seigneurial holdings in France continued to insist that the anti-feudal legislation did not apply to them. And the unrest in St-Domingue after August 1791 was blamed on Spanish and English manoeuvring for advantage against the French colonial empire. On 9 November, the Assembly passed a sweeping law, effectively declaring the *émigrés* outlaws should they not return by the start of the new year:

> Article I. Those Frenchmen gathered beyond the kingdom's borders are, from this moment, declared to be suspected of conspiracy against the fatherland.
>
> Article II. If, on 1 January 1792, they are still gathered in the same way, they will be declared guilty of conspiracy; as such they will be prosecuted, and punished with death.[19]

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Three days later, the king used his suspensive veto to block the legislation. Suspicion mounted that the king's sincerity in proclaiming the Constitution of 1791 was questionable.

In such a situation, and with such uncertainty inside France, a range of groups came to see in war as a way to resolve uncertainty. For Jacobins such as Brissot, Vergniaud and Roland, the war would push the Revolution further on towards democracy and expose traitors. Supporters of the king, including Lafayette, hoped that a short, victorious war would restore the king's standing and enable a curtailment of revolutionary change, if not a return to the Old Regime. It was widely assumed that a war would be brief and successful, and the fifty-four armed companies of political refugees agreed, longing for revolutionary change in their own lands. For their part, intransigents such as Marie-Antoinette and *émigrés* welcomed the war as signalling an inevitable defeat of a loathed Revolution. There were only a few strong voices outside the Assembly who openly opposed a war, such as Robespierre, Danton, and Desmoulins. Whereas Brissot called for an armed crusade that would expose traitors, Robespierre insisted that 'no-one likes armed missionaries' and that France should put its own house in order before seeking to export revolution across Europe.

Brissot and his followers had argued that this would be a triumphant campaign that would purge the Revolution of traitors and indecision. Instead, it was protracted and bloody, and caused consequences in stark contrast to the rosy picture painted by the Brissotins. For the thousands of *émigrés* in Turin, Coblenz and elsewhere, the war raised the stakes and their hopes of retribution and return, bolstered by the desertion to their side of about two-thirds of the 9000 strong army officer corps by the end of 1792. Inside France, an immediate effect was to increase the pressure on non-juring clergy: were not those who persisted in refusing an oath of loyalty to the nation and its laws logically in league with the enemy slaughtering French volunteers on the frontiers? They were ordered to leave France immediately.

The expectation that the French armies would be bolstered by volunteers further radicalised the Revolution: how could the right to vote be refused to 'passive' citizens willing to die to protect the Revolution? Most directly, the declaration of war and the subsequent defeats exposed the disloyalty of the king a year after he had sought to flee to the enemy, now interpreted as proof of his complicity with his wife's nephew, the emperor of Austria.

Ever since 1789, Louis, now thirty-eight years old, had struggled with the intractable question of how the scale and intricacies of absolutist splendour could be reconciled with the more mundane and circumscribed expectations of constitutional monarchy. Contact between deputies and members of his court only accentuated discord. One indignant deputy reported back to the Assembly in February 1792 that 'we were received in an antechamber where one of those men with epaulettes and gold braid mocked us with the most condescending and insulting of smiles'. Louis had been placed in a desperate personal and regal conflict between his upbringing as the 'Most Christian King and eldest son of the Church' and the Revolution's determination to make the Church the servant of its people. After Louis' ignominious return from Varennes, his court continued to use periods of ostentatious mourning for deceased European rulers and their families to express disapproval of the Revolution. Since 1789, the court had been in mourning for 374 days, three times the yearly

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average beforehand. Even though monarchs were expected to lament each other's losses, the decision to mourn the deaths of Leopold II of Austria (1 March) and then, after the declaration of war on Austria, his wife Marie Louisa (15 May), was profoundly shocking.[20]

The first five months of the war were an almost unbroken series of defeats and retreats for French armies wracked by instability of personnel and the desertion or indecision of noble officers. On 11 July the Assembly was forced to declare publicly to the nation that 'the homeland is in danger' and appealed for total support in a spirit of self-sacrifice:

> Your constitution rests on the principles of eternal justice; a league of kings has been formed in order to destroy it, their battalions are advancing, they are numerous, subjected to rigorous discipline, and trained long ago in the art of war. Do you not feel a noble ardour arousing your courage! Would you allow foreign hordes to spread like a destroying torrent over your countryside! That they ravage our harvest! … Make haste, citizens, save liberty and avenge your glory. The National Assembly declares that the homeland is in danger … soon, consolidating, through a glorious peace, the basis of your government, you will finally gather all the fruits of the revolution, and you will have prepared, through your happiness, that of posterity.[21]

Women activists, disappointed at the attenuated nature of change the Revolution had brought to their civic status but committed to its defense, responded with demands that they become soldier-citizens. In the rousing words of one of them, Théroigne de Méricourt:

> Frenchwomen … let us raise ourselves to the height of our destinies; let us break our chains; at last the time is ripe for Women to emerge from their shameful nullity, where the ignorance, pride and injustice of men had kept them enslaved for so long a time; let us return to those times when our Mothers, the Gauls and the proud Germans, debated in the public Assemblies, fought side by side with their husbands and repulsed the enemies of Liberty![22]

But while a few women disguised themselves as men and joined the armies, there was never any support for arming women, just as there was little for enfranchising them.

[3.8] The Second Revolution, 10 August 1792

In late July 1792, Parisians learnt of a terrifying manifesto issued by the Duke of Brunswick, commander of the Prussian armies advancing through eastern France:

> Their said Majesties further declare, on their faith and word as Emperor [of Austria] and King [of Prussia], that if the Palace of the Tuileries is entered by force or attacked, if the least violence, the least outrage be done Their Majesties, the King, Queen, and the Royal Family, if their security, preservation and liberty be not provided for immediately, they will exact an exemplary and ever-memorable vengeance thereon by delivering the city of Paris to military punishment and total

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destruction, and the rebels who are guilty of outrages to the punishments they deserve.[23]

The response of Parisians was a mixture of rage and fear. One response was that forty-seven of the forty-eight 'sections' (neighbourhoods) of Paris formed a 'revolutionary commune' and companies of 20 000 armed and paid *sans-culottes*. They were joined by volunteers from the provinces (*fédérés*) on their way to the front. Many of the *fédérés* were from Marseille, and arrived in the capital singing the 'Battle song of the Rhine army' ('*La Marseillaise*'), composed by an army officer, Rouget de l'Isle:

Arise, children of the Fatherland,
The day of glory has arrived!
Against us tyranny's bloodied banner is raised *(repeat)*
Do you hear across the countryside
The roar of those ferocious soldiers?
They are coming here into your midst
To slaughter your sons and wives!
To arms, citizens, form your battalions,
Let's march, let's march!
May a tainted blood
Drench our furrows!

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9 The siege of the Tuileries palace and overthrow of the monarchy on 10 August 1792, as depicted by Jean-Louis Prieur in his 'Tableaux historiques' series. (Author's collection)

On 10 August, these armed forces took the Tuileries palace at the cost of the lives of about 300 *sans-culottes* and ninety *fédérés* (see map 9). The 600 Swiss mercenaries defending the royal family would also lose their lives, many in reprisal killings once the Tuileries had been taken.

The explosive mixture of armed patriotism and loathing of the royal family was captured in perhaps the most popular of songs in these months, 'La Carmagnole', referring to the failure of Louis' powers of veto:

Madame veto had promised
To strangle Paris
But her attempt failed
Thanks to our gunners.

Let's dance the Carmagnole
Long live its sound

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Let's dance the Carmagnole
Long live the sound of cannon.

Antoinette had decided
To make us fall on our arses
But her blows failed
She has broken her nose

We'll always remember
The *sans-culottes* of the suburbs
Let's drink to their health
Long live these brave lads.

On 10 August Louis was forced to seek protection by fleeing to the Assembly. This time it would not be forgiving. But the question remained of what should now be done with him? He had no successor: his brothers Artois and Provence were already *émigrés* and the *dauphin* still a small boy. And how should the Revolution respond to the bloody promise of the Duke of Brunswick now that it was due for his 'exemplary and ever-memorable vengeance?'

Chapter 3: Reform, Conflict, and a Second Revolution, 1789–1792

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