



Defending the French Revolution, 1789-93

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There is no shortage of academics and journalists trying to make the two hundredth anniversary of the Great French Revolution an orgy of so-called refutations of the Marxist interpretation of the French Revolution. The London Economist launched its new year issue with a hymn of praise to 'revisionist' historians who had, at last, laid the ghost of Marx to rest. The European edition of Newsweek treated its readers to an eight page survey of the revisionist school's critique of Marxism under the title 'The Decline of the Left?rethinking the Revolution?.'

There is more at stake here than simply the interpretation of the major historic event that shaped the world's social and political development in the nineteenth century. What the bourgeoisie want to do is to prove the case against all 'revolutions?', against revolution itself as a locomotive of history. The argument that the French Revolution was unnecessary, and that it 'skidded out of control' 1 is being used as the case against revolution per se, whatever guise it takes. Edmund Burke, the arch reactionary British opponent of the Revolution at the time, is still alive and well and inhabiting several distinguished professorial chairs on the French Revolution itself.

That such ideas are attractive to the hired scribes of the bourgeoisie is not surprising. What is more interesting is the fact that after over 150 years the relative consensus in France that the Revolution was bourgeois and progressive, that it destroyed feudalism and paved the way for capitalist development is being dismantled, so far to the right have major sections of the French intelligentsia moved. Born of a tradition that saw the Revolution as having 'ushered in a new epoch in the history of mankind',² that saw Marxism (in several particular forms) become hegemonic in French Revolutionary studies, large sections of the ex-left in France want to 'celebrate' the Revolution by turning their back on it.

What are the origins of the wave of anti-revolutionary studies of the French Revolution? Firstly, we must not underestimate the deadening hand of Stalinism in traditional French historical studies and the demise of the credibility of its analysis as Stalinism itself has suffered a dramatic political decline. The crisis of the French Communist Party (PCF) has meant the eclipse of its key historians by those looking for a safer pasture in academic life.³ Secondly if the idea of 'revolution' fired the 'generation of 68' the post-68 experience saw a dramatic increase in varieties of reformism and individualism amongst the erstwhile 'revolutionaries?'. What better than to junk the whole idea of revolution by starting with 1789 itself? The Stalinist-hardened French intelligentsia's discovery of some of the features of Stalin's Russia after 1956 served to accelerate this process. F Furet, who was a PCF member in the 1940s and 1950s, described the role of Solzhenitsyn in his road away from the Marxist analysis of the French Revolution:

'Solzhenitsyn's work has become the basic historical reference for the Soviet experience, ineluctably locating the issue of the gulag at the very core of the revolutionary endeavour. Once that happened, the Russian example was bound to turn round, like a boomerang, to strike its French 'origin'? 4

Both Revolutions, the French and the Russian, become 'systems of meticulous constraint over men's bodies and minds'.⁵ Pierre Chaunu has even claimed to have found the forerunner of the Holocaust in the terror and the putting down of the Vendée revolt. The crimes of the twentieth century are now being visited on the French Revolution itself. And those who cannot understand the crimes of the twentieth century have even less chance of understanding the French Revolution.

Writing in his 1885 preface to Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Engels argued that 'France

demolished feudalism in the Great Revolution and established the unalloyed rule of the bourgeoisie in a classical purity unequalled by any other European land.⁶ In this he was summarising the position that he and Marx developed on the French Revolution's unique place in history. That view has been echoed by French historians across generations. It was the view of Guizot and Thierry, and, more importantly, it was the view of republican and socialist historians of the twentieth century. Georges Lefebvre talked of the Revolution as ". . . the crown of a long economic and social evolution which has made the bourgeoisie the mistress of the world."⁷

Equally important for the Marxist method was the view that revolutions become necessary when the old social and political relations become a shackle on the development of the productive forces of a given society. As Marx put it in the Preface to the Critique of Political Economy:

"No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed: and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself."⁸

As a result A Soboul⁹ at the time a Stalinist Sorbonne Professor could correctly insist of the French Revolution that it could be explained, "in the last analysis by a contradiction between the relations of production and the character of the productive forces."⁹

From a Marxist standpoint no other view of the origins of the French revolutionary crisis could make sense. This is the orthodoxy that our bourgeois revisionists come to destroy. It is an orthodoxy that has defended both the historic progressiveness of the French Revolution and Marxist historical materialism. Both are under fire from the revisionists.

The revisionists' case

What are the key planks of the anti-Marxist school of Mitterrandists and Thatcherites? They have their origins in a little bit of Solzhenitsyn and a more hefty dose of a now dead, and in his life virulently conservative, professor called Albert Cobban. Way back in 1962 Cobban delivered a series of lectures in Belfast that have determined the basic themes of anti-Marxist revisionism on the French Revolution ever since. The key elements of Cobban's case that have been taken on board are the following.

Firstly, that pre-revolutionary France was not a society in which the bourgeoisie was oppressed and hampered and the nobility monopolistic and sovereign; neither was the state the organ of a land owning feudal aristocracy.

Secondly, that the Revolution was not bourgeois since it was led by the professional classes and certainly not by the industrial or commercial bourgeoisie. The latter, so the theory runs, were thoroughly integrated into pre-revolutionary society. The bourgeoisie did not prove itself in any essential way to be a revolutionary class. In fact it proved timid, cowardly and conservative leaving the work of dismantling feudalism to the peasantry themselves.

Thirdly, that peasant rebellion (along with its plebeian urban counterpart) was possessed of an anti-capitalist, rather than a purely anti-feudal, dynamic. To quote Cobban himself:

"There is at least some excuse for believing that the revolution in the French countryside was not against feudalism but against a growing commercialisation."¹⁰

Fourthly, that far from opening the road to capitalist relations of production in France, far from unleashing the forces of production from the fetters of the ancien régime, the French Revolution retarded both commerce and industry for decades to come. It did not serve as a stimulus to the development of the productive forces, but rather to their relative underdevelopment.

Fifthly, and of greatest political importance, is the intended attack on Lenin and the Russian Revolution via an attack on the French Revolution. Behind this lurks a deep hostility to the popular masses as a creative and independent force. The Marxist historiographical tradition, embodied by A Soboul and G Rudé, has tended to argue that the urban sans-

culottes 11 consciously rallied around key political demands for direct democracy and did not just show a simple concern with immediate economic issues. For the vulgar apologists of the bourgeoisie the ordinary masses can never be allowed such lofty and challenging aspirations. Cobban has criticised Rudé's *The Crowd and the French Revolution*,¹² because Rudé supposedly:

? . . . relies rather too much on the circulation of a few political slogans?and one knows how easily a crowd can be taught to chant these and how little serious political content they can have.? ¹³

It follows from this that the joint preoccupation of Marxist influenced historians with the forms of popular democracy in the revolutionary years¹⁴ and with the Jacobin dictatorship follow on more from a desire to rationalise the Soviet/Stalinist experience and less from a drive to understand the French Revolution itself. The revisionist critique of Marxism and the French Revolution is, in essence, a critique of Leninism and, by amalgam, Jacobinism. Furet has expressed it this way:

?With the men of 1793, the Leninist historian finds himself in familiar surroundings, since the Soviet experience also illustrated the necessity of dictatorship and terror. He shares with the Jacobins and Bolsheviks the belief that revolutionary action can and must change society; it is precisely this belief that Marx analysed as a classic illusion of politics.? ¹⁵

Jacobinism stands in the dock with Leninism and an academic jury has already decided to reject both in favour of Mitterrand and Thatcher.

The left in retreat

Many times in its history the working class has discovered that its one time friends have decided that they were not really Marxist after all. Perhaps more alarming for communists today is the response to the revisionist offensive of those who still consider themselves to be Marxist historians. There have been four major variants of such a response.

Firstly, the unalloyed and unreconstructed Stalinist response of historians such as C Mazauric.¹⁶ He waves the patriotic flag against what he, quite wrongly, perceives to be the ?anti-national bias? of Furet. Yet Furet's Achilles heel is not his lack of patriotism, but his attempt to deny the class struggle as the central motor of history.

The second has been, under the influence of Althusser and Poulantzas, to devise a Marxist structuralist interpretation of the French Revolution. The pioneering work in this direction came from Régine Robin¹⁷ who has argued that the pre-1789 mode of production was not simply a feudal one but one within which feudal and capitalist modes of production were combined, rather than counterposed, in a transitional mode of production on the road to capitalism. For Robin the revolutionary crisis operated at a superstructural level as a result of the crisis in the political apparatus caused by such a transition. For Robin, like all of those forged in this school, the essence of Marxism lies in the relation between the infrastructure and the superstructure. The actual struggle between classes themselves, as active agents of historic advance and progress, as conscious participants, is not an issue.

The third variety of an ostensibly Marxist historiographical tradition is that represented by G Comninel.¹⁸ Comninel claims to be a Marxist. But like so many of today's ?academic Marxists?, his Marxism extends to condemning absolutely everything Marx wrote on his own subject area while claiming to stand by the rest of the Marxist method.

New Left Comninel is convinced that the revisionist school spawned by Cobban has won the day. The revolutionaries may well have considered themselves to be bourgeois, but they were not capitalists. The Revolution was the work of a non-capitalist bourgeoisie against its capitalist aristocratic opponents. Comninel's aim is to demonstrate ?how the Revolution may be conceived to be a product of the exploitative relations of class society without being a bourgeois capitalist class revolution?. ¹⁹

While the structuralist Robin saw the self-movement of modes of production as being at the heart of the revolutionary process at the expense of the conscious class struggle itself, Comninel wants the class struggle without specific and

scientifically defined modes of production. As he puts it himself:

?There is now little doubt that the whole body of serious historical research stands in refutation of the idea that a capitalist bourgeois class was driven to overthrow a feudal aristocratic ruling class to which it was intrinsically opposed.? 20

Comninel?s desire to keep the idea of a class struggle that was not conducted between capitalists and feudalists centre stage leads him to deny that capitalism was developing within the womb of French feudalism or that there was a revolutionary capitalist class in France. Thus the history of the Revolution is a history of class struggle in which classes do battle without any relation to the developing contradictions within the mode of production. As Comninel has stated it in a disarmingly open and one-sided way: ?The notion of an emerging capitalism is opposed to historical materialism and its essential conception of history as the development of class relations.? 21 If the structuralists wanted historical materialism without class struggle Comninel wants class struggle without historical materialism!

Let us now look at each of the key component parts of the revisionist claim to have demolished Marxism. And in that light we can also look at the glaringly inadequate responses of such self-avowed Marxists to the revisionist attack.

Was France feudal?

Firstly, was French society feudal prior to the 1789 Revolution, was there a feudal state in France? That France remained essentially feudal on the eve of the 1789 Revolution has been questioned by every school of revisionism. Furet has made much of the argument that modern Marxists, who maintain that the state was ultimately the creature of the feudal aristocracy, thereby repudiate the argument of the early Marx that the French pre-revolutionary state acted as an arbiter between the nobility and the bourgeoisie rather than being the property of a feudal nobility.

In fact late seventeenth century France, most notably in the form of Louis XIV?s absolutism, saw a concerted drive by the monarchy to free itself from the dictates of the aristocracy. This absolutist experiment emerged as an attempted solution to social chaos in the France of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The constant wars of religion, themselves a reaction to the early bourgeois revolutions in Britain and Holland, ensured that the French nobility could not overcome its factional strife. An arbiter was increasingly necessary. Under Louis XIV this need became more and more pressing. The nobles lost their control over the military power in the sense that local armies could not be used against the king. They lost control over much of the judicial system and state finances. Moreover, the Estates General, the assembly of ?French society? convened at the pleasure of the King was called in 1614 and not again until 1789. State intendants were established to oversee the provincial nobility. The nobility?s highest ranks were drafted into Versailles and stripped of immediate political power amidst opulent splendour.

Throughout Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries successive monarchies attempted to establish their own absolute power over and above the land owning aristocratic ruling class. That absolutism was also intended to encourage non-feudal methods of wealth production?nascent capitalism?without ceding significant power to the creators of that wealth. Thus there was a deliberate attempt from Louis XIV onwards to encourage the commercial activity of the bourgeoisie from above, through an absolutist state aspiring to play a Bonapartist role between the nobility and the developing bourgeoisie.

The failure of absolutism

In general the attempt at absolutism proved unable to balance between the forces of a declining mode of production and those of a developing one. This was particularly so in France. As the eighteenth century progressed the productivity of the feudal economy declined. The landed aristocrats were unable or unwilling to invest in agriculture and thus improve productivity. The attempts to maintain and increase the surplus for their own consumption by increasing feudal dues only served to produce famine and provoke peasant uprisings. All this led the aristocracy to seek to loosen the restrictions imposed on it by its ?own? Bonapartism, as it became more desperate.

Despite the loss of direct political power to a Court clique (which included some bourgeois figures), the nobles had

retained their stranglehold on agriculture which remained the overwhelming source of productive wealth. Thus the landed gentry continued to owe most of their incomes to fixed feudal dues. In fact the process of disintegration of feudalism, and the nobility's attempt to reverse that process, gave rise to a new profession of feudists in the late eighteenth century, whose job was precisely to revive the feudal rights where they had become obsolete in practice, and maximise yields in others.²²

Out of a population of 23 million the 250,000 legally defined French nobles had a monopoly of whatever direct political power was ceded by the Court. While the sale of titles and state offices to non-noble bourgeois was a source of revenue for the would-be absolutist state in the eighteenth century that practice was declining rather than increasing on the eve of the Revolution. It is simply not the case, as Comminel would have us believe that 'In fact no social boundary at all existed between the bourgeoisie and the nobility except for noble status itself, and that was readily acquired through the purchase of noble office.'²³

The eighteenth century was one in which the French nobility actually rolled back the apparatus of absolutism built up by Louis XIV. Between 1714 and 1789 only three ministers were not titled aristocrats. All archbishops and bishops were nobles and in 1760 officer rank in the army became dependent on proven noble descent. Louis XIV's system of royal intendants, designed to oversee the nobility on behalf of the central state, was falling into disrepair. By the 1780s fourteen of the intendants were sons of the previous intendants, i.e. the system was itself becoming a hereditary and aristocratised one.

The creation of a national market was fettered by a patchwork of local tolls and internal customs barriers that were the prerogative of the nobility. While in some areas—notably Toulouse and Burgundy—the process of the disintegration of feudal relations on the land was advanced, and while the scale of seigneurial dues varied from region to region, France remained predominantly in a fragmenting feudal system of production.

To this extent not only was the system of production a feudal one, but the parasitical beneficiary of this system of production had a monopoly of political power at a local level—through the Parlements of Nobles—and at the highest administrative, military and ideological levels of the state machine. And this ruling class, unlike any other class in French society was entirely exempt from taxation. It was not a source of revenue for the French state.

Little wonder then that on 4 August 1789 in its act of defiance the National Assembly announced that it 'destroys the feudal regime in its entirety' because that precisely is the system that the Revolution overthrew. But here our revisionists have a standard line of response to all claims to see the Revolution as a blow struck against feudalism on behalf of the bourgeoisie. It is not only taken as insufficient that those who carried out the Revolution described themselves as destroying feudalism in the name of the French nation. The very fact that they said they were doing so should make the historian suspicious. As Furet put it:

'One wonders whether after 180 years of research and interpretation, and after so many detailed studies and general analyses, it is a great intellectual achievement for a historian to share the particular image of the past that was held by the actors in the Revolution themselves, and whether it is not a rather paradoxical performance for an allegedly Marxist historiography to take its bearings from the prevailing ideological consciousness of the period it sets out to explain.'²⁵

In other words whatever the actors of the French Revolution claimed to be doing, we can presume the opposite. We can presume that revolutions are not moments of accelerating and broadening consciousness, of the dramatic demystification of past structures and practices, but rather moments of mass irrationalism and self-deception. That is the nub of Furet and the revisionists' case.

The crisis of the French monarchy

The revisionists deny the essential Marxist case that feudal relations of production had become a fetter on the development of the French productive forces. The key to their argument here is the relative stagnation of the French economy from 1789 through to the 1830s. What is the evidence?

Overall the French economy experienced a very considerable period of expansion in the mid-eighteenth century and, most importantly, growth in the areas of bourgeois economic activity. Industry grew by 60% in the century and French commerce grew fourfold. That a new dynamic system of production was developing within French feudal society is evident. So too is the fact that the feudal system was ever more a factor in creating economic crisis.

A sharp agricultural depression between 1775 and 1780 as well as massive fluctuations in grain prices showed the extent to which the system itself was not even capable of stable agricultural production and the steady supply of produce to the towns at affordable prices. Hence mounting pressure from pro-capitalist economists—the Physiocrats—to create one national market for grain free of the tolls and customs dues of French feudalism.

The mounting bankruptcy of the French exchequer in the 1780s further highlights the fact that the feudal nobility, with their privileges and exemptions, were ever more economically dysfunctional. As a result of the crisis of the late 1770s and France's embroilment in the American War of Independence after 1776 state debt increased dramatically in the 1780s. By 1788 payment of interest on that debt amounted to 50% of the French state's current expenditure. Hence there was increased pressure even in the highest ministerial circles to take decisive measures to unfetter the economy and locate new sources of revenue.

In 1786 Calonne, Controller General of Finance, announced plans aimed at abolishing internal customs barriers and instituting a land tax based on landed wealth rather than noble status. He further proposed to attack the manorial rights of the clergy by selling off church land to raise money for the exchequer. From above, Louis XVI's finance minister actually proposed decisive measures against feudalism in general and the wealth of the feudal nobility and clergy in particular as the means of solving France's crisis.

The inherent problem of any project of this nature in late eighteenth century France arose from the historical limits of French absolutism which had conceded to the nobility a monopoly of political power such that the aristocracy could veto all measures deemed to run counter to its interests. And Calonne's measures did just that. Successive finance ministers, Brienne and Necker, argued for moves in a similar direction as the logic of solving the state's crisis at the expense of feudalism became ever more unavoidable. And the logic of feudalism's social and political relations meant that throughout France the nobility rallied their ranks in the Parlements to resist every attempt to significantly erode their privileges and system. The predicament of the French monarchy was, ironically, aptly summarised by Marie Antionette in 1788 when she said "the nobility will destroy us, but it seems to me that we cannot save ourselves without it".²⁶ The matured crisis of the French monarchy was indeed a crisis of feudalism itself and of the fact that the monarchy remained, in the last analysis a creature of that very system. Yet Furet disputes even this as:

"... the thesis that has become current in Marxist historiography in the twentieth century . . . that of an aristocratic state, governing the realm to the benefit of what was formerly the feudal class, politically dispossessed but still socially dominant throughout the period of the absolute monarchy."²⁷

In an attempt to disarm Marxist critics Furet claims that the young Marx saw the state in general, and the French absolutist state in particular, as relatively autonomous from, and arbitrating between, the social forces within, civil society. He dismisses the later views of Marx, Engels and Marxists in general as being "un-Marxist" to the extent that they see states as organs of class power. On both counts Furet is wrong. That the French monarchic state remained the state of the aristocratic landlords is evident even though that same state realised that this very fact could prove its own historic undoing. That the young Marx and Engels broke with their early, and Hegelian, preoccupation with the state having raised itself above the antagonisms of civil society is underlined by Engels when he wrote:

"The state is, therefore, by no means a power forced on society from without . . . Rather it is a product of society at a certain stage of development."²⁸

And the paralysis of the pre-revolutionary monarchy underlines precisely the extent to which it was the product of France's social relations rather than the determinant of them. Furet may wish to dispute Marxist historiography and even to use the younger Marx against it. In reality history refutes Furet on the nature of the pre-revolutionary state.

Was there a bourgeois revolution?

The next stage in the anti-Marxist offensive has been to attempt to refute the idea that there was a revolutionary and capitalist bourgeoisie in France and that the Revolution was their work against the feudal nobility. Cobban put the argument thus:

‘In so far as capitalist economic developments were at issue, it was a revolution not for, but against capitalism. This would, I believe, have been recognised long ago if it had not been for the influence of an unhistorical sociological theory.’²⁹

What would the revisionists have us believe the Revolution was then? For Cobban it was nothing other than primarily a political revolution, a struggle for the possession of power and over the conditions in which power was to be exercised.³⁰ Furet holds to a similar view which he once again tries to square with the early Marx. In 1844 in *The Philosophy of Right* Marx had argued that the French Revolution was ‘merely political’ and ‘partial’.³¹ But Marx by that actually meant that it was not truly ‘universally human’, i.e. that it emancipated only a part, not the whole, of French society. In fact the early Marx realised that the bourgeoisie was the beneficiary of the French Revolution. In this key respect his position never changed. His view that the French Revolution was ‘merely political’ did, however.

The view of the young Marx that the French Revolution was only ‘partial’ must be understood against the background of the evolution of his method and programme. After the Silesian weavers’ revolt of 1844 Marx began to see in the proletariat, and in the German proletariat most immediately, the force that could achieve ‘universal’ rather than the ‘partial’ emancipation of humanity. From this vantage point the French Revolution had failed to achieve what he believed the coming German revolution, and in particular the German proletariat would deliver to history. As Marx put it:

‘It must be granted that the German proletariat is the theoretician of the European proletariat just as the English proletariat is its economist and the French is its politician. It must be granted that the vocation of Germany for social revolution is as classical as its incapacity for political revolution.’³²

Seeing in the emergence of the struggle of the nascent German working class the means for liberating all of society the Marx of 1844 was already recognising the class limitations, the class partiality of the French Revolution without yet realising the historic limits imposed on revolutions in any given society by the level of its material and productive forces.

He started to grapple with this problem by 1847 although in a manner that tended to cloud and obscure the nature of the 1793-94 Jacobin period of the French Revolution. Describing this phase of the Revolution as a temporary overthrow of the political rule of the bourgeoisie he argued as a result that:

‘If therefore the proletariat overthrows the political rule of the bourgeoisie, its victory will only be temporary, only an element in the service of the bourgeois revolution itself, as in the year 1794, as long as in the course of history, in its ‘movement’, the material conditions have not yet been created which make necessary the abolition of the bourgeois mode of production and therefore also the definitive overthrow of the political rule of the bourgeoisie.’³³

Marx’s developing materialism was beginning to situate the historic limits and determinants, of ‘emancipation’ at any given stage of human development. His ‘critique’ of the French Revolution was noticeably changing and being rendered more dialectically profound.

The structuralist school of Marxism has also provided us with another argument for seeing the French Revolution as a ‘political revolution’ rather than a social revolution. Structuralists liked Marxism’s notion of modes of production as social, economic, political and ideological totalities. Marxists break down these totalities into specific layers of contradictions within and between the social, political and ideological. This job of analysis, which professors so love, is only the beginning of wisdom however. An analysis of the living dynamic of the class struggle, with the programme of competing classes struggling to resolve the objective contradictions in their favour, all this is alien to structuralism. Its

rejection of this side of history condemns structuralism for the conservative bourgeois import into Marxism that it is,

Writing in 1970, basing his work on the method of Poulantzas, Régine Robin argued in *La Société Française en 1789: Semur-en-Auxois* that the mode of production of the ancien régime was one where feudal and capitalist modes of production were conflated rather than counterposed. The form that this was expressed in was primarily the penetration of merchant capital into formerly feudal relations. A transitional hybridisation of modes of production on the way to the eventual supremacy and victory of the capitalist mode was under way.

This, however, created seismic shocks in the superstructure; the transition to capitalism that was occurring resulted in a superstructural political crisis in French society. It was the now emerging modes of production that clashed with the political superstructure rather than classes rooted in their particular roles in production, that clashed with each other. The class struggle as motor of history disappears from the structuralists' caricature of Marxism just as it did from the legal Marxist ideologues of capitalist development around Struve in Russia in the early 1900s. If the young Marx erred on the side of anachronistically judging the French Revolution as 'partial' as a means of achieving human emancipation, our structuralists see it as a trivial and subjective intrusion into history.

Comninel has his own particular method of rejecting the idea that the French Revolution was, at its very roots, a bourgeois revolution. It is a novel one. He argues that the very concept emerged from the bourgeois liberal tradition rather than having been originated by Marx himself. He attacks Marx for uncritically adopting the French bourgeoisie's early nineteenth century image of its revolutionary past. Ever since Barnave's *Introduction à la Révolution Française* (1792) the standard analysis had been one of understanding the struggle as being one for commerce and the market and against feudalism and agriculture. Since Marx did not originate such ideas, since they were perpetuated by reactionaries such as Guizot and Thierry, then surely they should be expunged from the Marxist cannon, argues Comninel.

Comninel criticises Marx and Marxists for uncritically adopting the nineteenth century bourgeoisie's own interpretation of the French Revolution as his own. He rightly points out that right back to Barnave in 1792³⁴ the standard interpretation was one that saw it as ultimately a struggle between a revolutionary commercial bourgeoisie and a conservative landed aristocracy. This idea was reiterated by Guizot and Thierry, adopted by Social Democracy in Jaurès's history of the Revolution, by radical republicanism in the works of Gulard and Mathiez, by the ardent popular front supporter Lefebvre and the Stalinist Soboul. Against this entire tradition Comninel stands with Cobban and Furet in insisting both that the French bourgeoisie were not capitalist and that they were not revolutionary.

He makes great claims for the need for Marxism to be original, innovatory and to cut itself off from bourgeois ideology. It is an irony, lost on him, that he holds up bourgeois Cobban and Furet as his riposte to Guizot and Thierry while turning his back on Marx and Engels. He holds up relative pygmies from the late twentieth century against those who remained ongoing (albeit not necessarily progressive) protagonists of the political struggles bequeathed by the Revolution to the nineteenth century.

Such 'Marxist' historians fail to understand that Marx himself felt no need to reject the view of Guizot and co that the Revolution had been a class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the feudal nobility. For him the important innovation in his thought did not lie in such a discovery. As he put it himself:

'And now as to myself, no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them. Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle and bourgeois economists, the economic anatomy of the class.'³⁵

Only when the bourgeoisie has lost its progressive historic mission and is threatened with annihilation at the hands of those it exploits, do bourgeois historians like Cobban seek to obscure the naked revolutionary class character of the bourgeoisie's early history.

The nature of the French bourgeoisie

Precisely who were the French bourgeoisie? In simple terms they were those without noble status but who possessed

sufficient property not to be engaged in manual labour. They stood between the nobility and the world of rural or urban labour and the small shopkeepers. They were from a variety of occupations. Over 50% of the bourgeoisie, strictly defined, belonged to the private professions, most notably the legal profession, including magistrates or owners of non-noble state office. Around one third were non-noble land owning rentiers. Their income was derived from small to medium plots of land which they let to peasants. The remainder were merchants who often used their commercially acquired wealth to buy state office or land.

What lay at the heart of this group was wealth that was acquired commercially and in a manner that was therefore ultimately antagonistic to the legacy of feudalism in France. The lawyers, who were to provide so many of the revolution's leaders, made their living commercially from unravelling the labyrinth of feudal laws on behalf of those who found themselves cramped and hampered by them. To this very important extent the professional and commercial bourgeoisie were inextricably bound together. While merchants and rentiers were rare amongst the actual leaders of the Revolution at most of its stages, the professional bourgeoisie voiced as its own, the programme and aspirations of the commercial bourgeoisie, as can be seen from the very nature of the legislation it enacted.

The French bourgeoisie was at a primitive stage in its development as a class that was distinctly capitalist in the sense of possessing wealth accrued from the exploitation of a class of wage labourers. But the overall direction of its activity was to establish that relationship on an ever broader scale. It existed in the wine trade heartland of Toulouse. It existed on the land that merchants purchased and farmed commercially. The French Revolution was to destroy the remaining, specifically feudal, restrictions on the establishment of such a relationship.

Much has been made, for example by Robin,³⁶ of the existence of a bourgeoisie d'ancien régime, that was relatively integrated into pre-revolutionary society and had amassed considerable wealth within that system. Robin deduces from this that France was actually in a transitional mode of production within which capitalist and feudal modes did not stand in antagonism to one another but, rather, were conflated. Robin attempts to prove that there was no bourgeoisie inherently in conflict with the feudal mode: merchant capital was happily penetrating feudal relations with little hindrance. The Revolution is to be explained and understood as merely a powerful political crisis which the entire process provoked.

It is perfectly true that there was a sizeable haute bourgeoisie who were well integrated into the life of the feudal state of pre-revolutionary France. They constituted a feudalised bourgeoisie that served to maintain, rather than challenge, existing social and political relations. Their counterparts were the layer of commercialised nobles who played a significant role in the dismantling of feudalism after 1789. Classes are never homogeneous or unanimous historical entities, and such was the degenerate nature of eighteenth century French feudalism, and its state's search for new sources of wealth, that it could accommodate a section of the bourgeoisie. In turn, such was the nature of the bourgeoisie, such was its interest in accumulating wealth rather than directly wielding power on a day to day basis, that its higher reaches in pre-revolutionary France were content to accept the patronage of an essentially feudal state.

However, while recognising the existence of such a layer within the bourgeoisie it is all the more important to recognise the existence of another bourgeoisie in pre-revolutionary France. It was the bourgeoisie of small scale industry, of independent peasants and artisans for whom feudal social and political relations were an immediate and perceived fetter on their own embryonic capitalism. As a force for capitalism, or at least against feudalism, it extended to the would-be petit bourgeoisie of France. The late eighteenth century French bourgeoisie cannot simply be measured against its modern twentieth century representatives and found wanting.

Albert Soboul, in a critique of Robin³⁷ has pointed out how wrong it is to expect capitalism to be emerging primarily from the high commercial bourgeoisie. In fact Marx, in Capital Volume 3, talked of the increased dominance of commercial capital over the production process as the least revolutionary road to the transition from feudalism to capitalism. To this he counterposed what he called the really revolutionary path in which 'the producer becomes the merchant and capitalist'.³⁸

That is precisely the way to understand the transition from feudalism to capitalism in France. It was not simply the

work of the strictly defined bourgeoisie, in the ancien régime sense; the barriers to the development of the market and capitalist production were broken from below by the producers themselves, by those who were either, in strict economic terms, already petit bourgeois, or by those whose actions in 1789 were to enable them to become such. Their participation was to explain the profoundly and unprecedentedly democratic character of the French Revolution.

Comninel tries to tell us that 'the Revolution was not a capitalist transformation of society'.³⁹ But any cursory view of its effects and enactments will show all too clearly that it cleared the road for capitalist development. On 4 August, 1789 the National Assembly, in destroying the 'feudal regime in its entirety', opened the door to public office for those of non-noble status 'as long as they had sufficient wealth. It decreed the end of seigneurial rights and equality of taxation for all. It had begun to cut at the very roots of feudalism itself. The subsequent years saw the French Revolution increasingly clearing away the obstacles to the development of capitalist relations of production.

The August 1789 'Declaration of the Rights of Man' declared private property rights to be 'natural, inviolable, imprescriptible and sacred'. By October 1789 legislation was passed legalising the charging of interest on loans. In May 1790 the first measures were taken to confiscate and sell church lands. The sale of those lands was in part intended to fend off bankruptcy by underwriting a new unit of currency 'the assignat. However they also served to destroy one of the twin pillars of the system of pre-revolutionary land ownership.

By February 1791 the Revolution had declared the full liberty of the grain trade and abolished all remains of domestic tolls. In June 1791 the Le Chapelier Laws explicitly outlawed trade union type organisations against the, now fully emancipated, owners of capital:

'All assemblies consisting of or instigated by artisans, workers, journeymen and day labourers in restraint of the free exercise of the right to employ and to work on any terms mutually agreed, which belongs to all men, or to impede the police and the execution of judgements passed in this field and likewise tenders and the public allocation of different contracts, shall be deemed seditious assemblies: and as such they will be dispersed by the deposition of the public force.'⁴⁰

That the French Revolution opened the road to the capitalist mode of production is abundantly clear. Within two years of 1789 all the major feudal impediments to the market had been swept aside. That this meant immediately the expansion of capitalist industry should come as no surprise. Particularly as a result of the sale of church lands, the Revolution facilitated the purchase of land by those with capital to buy it. It created a significant new layer of large scale non-noble landowners who either leased the land as rentiers or worked it using wage labour. So too did the sale of emigré aristocratic land. It was fundamentally a revolution that emancipated the commercial bourgeoisie and its pursuit of profit in a 'free market'.

Revisionist critics of the Revolution suggest that even if commerce expanded after 1789 the Revolution can hardly be called bourgeois in circumstances where it served to retard the industrial development of France. It is true that in the early part of the nineteenth century gross output stagnated. By 1825 there was little change over the early 1790s. In part this was due to the fact that the greatest benefactors from the Revolution were the new capitalist landowners rather than industrialists. The latter were additionally hampered by the fact that the land question was not solved in the French Revolution in the English or Prussian manner with a massive clearance of the peasants from the land and the creation of a huge supply of 'free' labour for manufacturing. While the French peasants did not benefit from the sale of church lands they often did become the owners of the small plots of land they had worked; this together with continuing restrictions on the sale of land in certain areas of early post-revolutionary France did impede the concentration of land and its being put at the service of industrialisation.

Another factor revisionists ignore is that the French Revolution was subject to more than a decade of war spearheaded by reactionary Britain. Internal and external counter-revolution, which was to lead to the defeat of Napoleon and the Bourbon restoration, impeded the pace of French capitalism's development and helped put it at a severe disadvantage compared to Britain.

What of the argument that there was not a revolutionary bourgeoisie in France, but rather a political breakdown and subsequent struggle for power? This argument rests mainly on evidence about the mood of the bourgeoisie in immediately pre-revolutionary France and on the class nature of the leading revolutionaries. Having dealt with the latter argument it is necessary to turn our attention to the first.

Faced with a maturing economic crisis and the intransigence of the nobility, Louis XVI opted to convene the traditional assembly of the three orders of French feudal society, the Estates General. Each order was invited to select delegates as well as draw up grievances and demands in the form of cahiers. It is the cahiers of the non-aristocratic and non-clerical Third Estate that give an insight into the horizons of the pre-revolutionary bourgeoisie. In general the cahiers of the First and Second Estates stand by the preservation of the status quo. They tend to stress the need to maintain and even extend the power of local assemblies.

The cahiers of the Third Estate have distinctly different priorities. Nowhere do we find the call for revolution, or for a republic. But what we do find are calls for a constitutionally defined monarchy, for fiscal equality, for equal access to state appointments and, repeatedly, for the abolition of internal customs barriers and other impediments to the operation of the market. While couched in terms of loyalty to the monarch the realisation of this programme required the fundamental economic, social and political upheavals in France that were to follow and that the drafters of the cahiers were yet to see the need for.

That the bourgeoisie stumbled, or were pushed, into the Revolution also needs to be understood. Initially their hopes for reform lay in the ceding to the Third Estate of twice the representation of the other two estates. Thus they would be able to secure a majority with the liberal wing of the aristocracy and clergy. Louis XVI thwarted them by insisting that each order vote separately, thus ensuring a two to one majority for the privileged feudal orders. Louis' resistance to the claims of the Third Estate showed him to be a feudal 'Bonaparte' in the last analysis.

In defiance the Third Estate declared itself to be the National Assembly on 17 June 1789. But still its project was one of accommodation to, rather than confrontation with, the monarchy. In its majority it placed its greatest trust in the reform-minded section of the nobility represented by those such as Lafayette and Mirabeau. In turn their intention went no further than to work alongside a constitutional monarchy and an aristocratic upper chamber modelled on the British House of Lords. The king was to continue to appoint military leaders as well as all key ministers. He was to have a suspensive veto for four years. This project was baulked both from above and from below.

It was baulked from above in the sense that the monarchy never agreed to play by those rules. The French Revolution immediately internationalised itself as the thrones and nobility of Europe braced themselves to prevent its spread and to defend its class brothers and sisters in France. In June 1791 Louis attempted to escape France in order to link up with international counter-revolution.

This put an end to a distinct and definite period in the French Revolution. The Constituent Assembly, comprising representatives of the bourgeoisie and liberal aristocracy, had attempted to co-exist in a system of dual sovereignty with the old feudal regime. For this reason Trotsky was quite right to talk of the 1789-1791 years as being:

?. . . a clearly marked period of dual power, which ends with the flight of the king to Varennes, and is formally liquidated with the founding of the Republic.? 41

In the aftermath of this abortive attempt at flight, Louis officially agreed to abide by the constitution. But he continued to insist on vetoing anti-clerical legislation. As a creature of feudal privilege a reformed monarchy could not provide the means of sweeping the remains of feudalism aside. The Revolution had to move on.

The Plebeian Revolution

However, far more important was the dramatic disruption of the project from below. It was that disruption which made the French Revolution the most thoroughgoing democratic revolution that history had yet witnessed precisely because of the direct intervention of the mass of French society in finally uprooting feudalism.

The economic and political crisis of the ancien régime, symbolised in the convocation of the Estates General, coincided with mounting hardship for the urban and rural poor. The urban poor need to be understood as a distinct social entity. Those who did not wear breeches—the sans-culottes—remained predominantly pre-proletarian. They worked primarily in small workshops where the division between the master craftsmen and the those below them was a small one. In Paris, in particular, they were largely made up of independent craftsmen. In other areas dependent craftsmen, such as the Lyons silk industry, were in the process of becoming proletarianised. However, while pockets of wage-earners did exist in their ranks the sans-culottes were, in general, not defined by their involvement in wage labour.⁴² Rather they defined themselves as plebeian in opposition to the opulence and daily life style of the wealthy classes. To quote the sans-culotte Vingterrier:

‘A sans-culotte, you rogues? He is someone who always goes about on foot, who has not got the millions you would all like to have, who has no chateaux, no valets to wait on him, and who lives simply with his wife and children, if he has any, on the fourth or fifth storey. He is useful because he knows how to till a field, to forge iron, to use a saw, to roof a house, to make shoes and to spill his blood to the last drop for the safety of the Republic. And because he is a worker, you are sure not to meet his person in the Café de Chartres, nor in the gaming houses where others play and wager, nor in the National Theatre where L’Amis des Louis is performed, nor in the literary clubs where for two sous, which are so precious to him, you are offered Gorsas’s muck, with the Chronique and Patriot Français.

In the evening he goes to the assembly of his Section, not powdered and perfumed and nattily booted, in the hope of being noticed by the citizenesses in the galleries, but ready to support sound proposals with all his might and ready to pulverise those which come from the despised faction of politicians.’⁴³

This essentially petit bourgeois, yet plebeian force was to prove, time and again to be the force that ensured that the bourgeoisie itself had no road of retreat from a revolutionary conflict with feudalism and its appendages.

However, the plebeian forces arraigned against feudalism were not predominantly urban. French feudalism was ultimately broken up from below in the countryside. There was a distinct rural bourgeoisie in pre-revolutionary France. It was comprised of two key elements. The first were the fermiers, those who leased plots of land and hired labour in certain circumstances. The other being the laboureurs who had land holdings sufficient to allow them economic independence, that is a kulak class, emerging as a result of the process of commercialisation and social differentiation in late feudal agriculture.

If we look at the cahiers that emerged from the rural areas, which must have themselves been filtered by their bourgeois scribes, there is a recurring theme of anti-seigneurialism. There is also a fairly common opposition to the rentier fermiers as opposed to a generalised tolerance of the cultivators, laboureurs.⁴⁴ In the cahier from Chevannay in the Côte d’Or we see an explicit reference to the agrarian laws⁴⁵ of ancient Rome and Sparta. In the former there had been restrictions on the private exploitation of public land with the surplus being made available to the poor and landless. In the latter the state took hold of all private and public land and distributed it equally between its citizens.

The Chevannay cahier called for all fermiers to be compelled to live on their holdings and proposed that all idle citizens henceforth be deported to the towns. While such explicit calls for an agrarian law were rare the overall trajectory of rural cahiers is expressed in the two most common demands which were to cut the size of seigneurial lands and to rent out monastery lands to the peasants. Catholic peasant France saw the church’s landed wealth both as an affront and as a potential answer to its land hunger. What it did insist on was that this land be rented to those who would work it, not sold to those who would then become rentiers themselves. Hence the peasants’ later anger at the manner of the sale of church lands.

The bourgeoisie of 1789 lived in a fear of the urban and rural masses that in general far outweighed their hostility to the feudal state. While they could not stop the masses solving their burning need for an end to feudal exploitation they could and did seek to limit their influence over the state. The constitution that the National Assembly drew up for October 1789 explicitly divided France into ‘active’ citizens—who were sufficiently prosperous to be declared eligible to carry arms, hold meetings, take office and vote—and the ‘passive’ majority of society who were deemed

insufficiently prosperous and hence politically unreliable to possess any of these rights. In reality it was those the 1789 bourgeoisie deemed passive who proved the most active in breaking up the feudal regime and forcing the Revolution all the way through to its eventual consolidation.

In the countryside this initially took the form of a wave of land seizures in the summer of 1789 that rendered the National Assembly's formal abolition of feudalism a ratification of existing reality in most areas. To this extent there are evident parallels with the peasant land seizures of 1917 that Soviet power was to ratify. However, the revisionists, be they of a Marxist or anti-Marxist colouration, see in this active intervention by the peasantry evidence that the notion of feudalism being overthrown by a revolutionary bourgeoisie is a myth. As revisionism's arch priest put it 'the abolition of seigneurial dues was the work of the peasantry'.⁴⁶

None of this is any problem for Marxists. It is evidently true that feudalism was broken up from below rather than simply being penetrated by, and eventually superseded by, commercial capital. But this does not mean that 'there is at least some excuse for believing that the revolution in the French countryside was not against feudalism but against a growing commercialisation'.⁴⁷

The peasant revolt was not predominantly against commercialisation, although it was most certainly against the rentiers. The French peasantry had their own, distinctly petit bourgeois, revolt against feudalism which remained an integral part of the bourgeois revolution. If Cobban and Comninel think the French peasantry were not so much anti-feudal as anti-capitalist how do they explain the obliteration of the prevailing seigneurial, i.e. feudal, obligations as a result of the land war of 1789? True, from 1789 onwards there is an important extent to which the peasantry's mobilisations and concerns remained independent from those of the rest of French society. And in 1789 the peasantry had acted very much as an independent force. However, its overall dynamic was profoundly anti-feudal.

In general the French peasantry aspired to abolish feudal dues, to systematic confiscation and land redistributions in the spirit of an egalitarian petit bourgeoisie. They wished to place but one limit on the market, namely that there were to be upper limits on property ownership, that all should have the same advantage in the market. While dynamiting feudalism they were not, however, endorsing the rentiers or their particular form of the commercialisation of agriculture. In general the fermiers experienced bitter hostility from the French peasantry.

The sale of church land highlighted this difference of interest between the peasants and the fermier layer of the rural bourgeoisie. Lefebvre's study of the peasants of Nord shows how the middle peasants gained nothing from the sale of church lands, which went mainly to capital earning bourgeois who transformed their moneyed wealth into landed wealth. In Brittany the pattern was similar. However in this region, which was to become the heartland of the Vendée revolt against the republican government, there was far more overt hostility to the bourgeoisie's dominance of the auctions for church land. In the Nord there were examples of the seizure of church lands without the prior agreement of the government's official auctioneers. In the west of Brittany an armed rebellion was undertaken after the peasants were outbid by the bourgeoisie for the sale of church land. That revolt, peasant in origin, was eventually to fall under the leadership of the monarchists and the clergy. It had its origins, however, in a revolt against rentier replacements for church land ownership. In the Vendée revolt, was expressed an opposition to a particular form of commercialism, not to commercialism in general. The revolt of the Breton chouannerie started in the west of the region where the pre-revolutionary cahiers were distinctly anti-seigneurial. Its eventual clerical leadership should be seen less as a statement of support for church lands in general, more an objection to a particular capitalist form of dominating them.⁴⁸

The peasantry did not become a dormant or unambiguously conservative force after 1789. As well as abolishing feudal dues from below the French peasants continued a wave of confiscations and re-distribution right up to 1793.⁴⁹ Those actions objectively served to unfetter market forces even though they were unfettered in a form that did not necessarily correspond with the subjective intentions of their participants. As Soboul has rightly expressed it:

'The small peasants were not able to impose on the bourgeois revolution the destruction of large scale property and the disappearance of land rent.'⁵⁰

In their turn the French bourgeoisie were deeply conscious of the need to prevent the small and middle peasants from settling the land question in their own manner. In March 1793, with only Marat raising a voice of objection, the French convention decreed the death penalty for "anyone who shall propose the agrarian law".⁵¹ So sacred was the landed property to the bourgeois leaders that they outlawed, on pain of execution, any form of agrarian law such as their much admired Montesquieu had advocated, as had Rousseau who drafted one into his plan for a Corsican constitution.

Clearly then, the peasantry did break up feudalism from below and in so doing, opened the road to the commercialisation and capitalisation of French agriculture. It did so in spite of the weak will of the nascent bourgeoisie but in a way readily reconcilable with the general interests of that class. They did so while their urban plebeian counterparts were forcing the pace of the political disarmament of French feudalism.

Urban revolt

In July 1789 bread prices were at their highest since 1709. Back in April wage earners had erupted in what was the purest expression in the years of the Revolution of a revolt of labour against capital. Wallpaper manufacturer Reveillon and powder manufacturer Herriot both made speeches lamenting their high wage bills. In response wage earners from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine in Paris hanged Reveillon's effigy and marched around the city carrying dummies of the two employers on 27 April. On the following day they broke into the Royal Glass Manufactory, which employed 500 workers, and won them to strike action. That evening they stormed and destroyed Reveillon's house. In response government troops opened fire killing unknown numbers of proletarians and its judicial apparatus publicly hanged three participants.

The historian Georges Rudé has rightly pointed out that "during the period under review, the wage earners clearly predominate and an appeal is made, however confusedly, to the wage earners as a social group".⁵² Of those killed or arrested whose occupation was recorded 58 out of 71 were wage earners. The modern class struggle was pre-figured in the Reveillon riots. But the Reveillon strikers combined their proletarian hostility to the employers with support for the Third Estate. Even the most proletarian elements of the sans-culottes saw themselves as part of this estate. A woman sentenced to death as a ringleader, but reprieved because she was pregnant, was indicted for incitement because of her cries of "To Reveillon's factory?" and "Long live the Third Estate!"⁵³

To this very important extent the distinctly proletarian component of the Parisian sans-culottes was in the vanguard of struggle against misery and hardship engendered by the crisis of French feudalism. However such was the ultimately non-proletarian character of the Parisian sans-culottes taken as a whole that from this time onwards artisan, master craftsman and proletarian would be fighting side by side in the struggles ahead, against the old order and the most conservative elements of the bourgeoisie.

On 11 and 12 July, 40 of the 54 customs barriers around Paris were destroyed. To this extent the plebeian masses of Paris entered into the fray in order to efface the last vestiges of feudalism directly from below. As they smashed the barriers down they also voiced support for the Third Estate. More importantly, on 14 July a group of sans-culottes of the seized the Bastille fortress which commanded a threatening position over Faubourg St Antoine. In storming the Bastille, an act that was to become a symbol of the French Revolution, the Parisian masses were seeking arms. And they also wanted to destroy a traditional debtor's prison to which prevailing economic circumstances were dragging them all. To that extent the storming of the Bastille marked the entry of the urban masses into France's revolutionary crisis as an independent force.

Matters did not rest there. Faced with Third Estate pressure from May to August 1789 the monarch refused to budge and insisted on maintaining his traditional prerogatives. It was not Lafayette or Mirabeau who forced him to climb down. Mirabeau himself was deeply fearful for the fate of the monarchy. As he put it himself in a letter⁵⁴ to Le Comte de la Marck "Myself, as a citizen, I tremble for royal authority which is more necessary than ever even as it stands on the brink of ruin." It was the urban, predominantly artisan masses who ultimately set the pace of the French Revolution. Urban insurrections against the old regime also took place in Rennes, Caen, Le Havre, Strasbourg and Bourdeaux at approximately the same time as the Bastille fell. From the seizure of the Bastille onwards it was the urban masses who

repeatedly blocked monarchic reaction and bourgeois backsliding by their decisive interventions. In October 1789 the women of Paris marched to Versailles and returned with the king as the virtual prisoner of the Parisian masses.

While officially consigned to passive status by 1791 the sans-culottes militants were openly defying that status by joining political clubs (when Cordeliers and Indigents started to admit "passive" citizens). More crucial was the creation of a network of plebeian democracy, the democracy of the Parisian sections. The 48 sections of revolutionary Paris had, by 1790, their own regularly meeting popular assemblies open to all citizens of the given section. In addition they had committees of recallable delegates who fought to be in permanent session with state subsidy, a demand supported by Robespierre and Marat in 1790 and 1791 respectively. It was conceded by the Jacobins in September 1793 to the extent that, on a proposal from Danton, "poor citizens" were to be entitled to an indemnity for attending section meetings.

The sections co-existed with a new Paris municipal government—the Commune—formed by the "active" citizens in July 1789 as a replacement for the old aristocratic parliament. On 9 August 1792 that municipal body was replaced by an insurrectional commune made up of delegates from the Parisian sections. This new plebeian commune ordered a march on the Tuileries Palace for the next day setting fire to it and killing 600 of its Swiss guard defenders. The Parisian masses were now the dominant force in the

Jacobinism against the masses

It would be wrong, however, to conflate Jacobinism with sans-culottism. Hearing news of a food riot in Paris Robespierre, the leading Jacobin, expressed all his essential bourgeois priggish disdain for the day to day concerns of the masses in his response "When the people rise up, can it not be for a cause worthy of them? Do they have to concern themselves with groceries all the time?" 63 Similarly Marat, a pro-Jacobin most ardent in his attempt to win a popular audience through his paper *L'Ami du Peuple*, could talk of the masses in his 1774 essay "Chains of Slavery" in the following terms:

"What can be expected from these unfortunates? . . . The measures they take are ill-conceived, and above all they are incapable of secrecy. In the heat of resentment or the transports of despair, the people threaten, reveal their plans, and thus give their enemies time to counter them." 64

Marat was a consistent advocate of revolutionary violence as the only means for overthrowing the old oppressors:

"It is utter folly to expect that men who for ten centuries have been in a position to reprove us, loot us, oppress us with impunity, will accept with good grace to be no more than our equals." 65

Yet his disdain for the masses led him to believe that there was a need for:

". . . some daring man to put himself at the head of the malcontents and raise them against the oppressor, some great person who can tame rebellious minds, some wise man to direct the decision of a wavering and unruly multitude." 66

In September 1789 Marat proposed the creation of precisely such a revolutionary tribunal. And this notion of the tribunal of the people stood in stark contrast to the democracy of the sections. In 1792 the section of the Cité declared in a resolution on popular sovereignty that "any man who claims it is vested in him will be regarded as a tyrant, a usurper of public liberty, deserving death". 67

However the overall tendency of Jacobinism, in practice if not necessarily in theory, was set against the organisation of the sans-culottes. In September 1793, on the recommendation of Danton, the Convention limited the number of section meetings to two a week in what was their first attempt to clamp down on section democracy. The Paris Commune was also deprived of its right to send commissioners to the provinces on its behalf.

In a law of December 1793 all constituted bodies were forbidden to communicate through general assemblies. Robespierre drafted an intended decree that gives full flavour of the plan to establish complete Jacobin hegemony:

1. That in order to maintain the unity of the Republic, there should be no new societies except those affiliated to the society of the Friends of Liberty and Equality [i.e. the Jacobins].

2. That in order to preserve unity in each large city, there should not be formed any new societies except in connection with the first society affiliated to that of Paris, and forming as it were a section of it.? 68

In support of such demands Couthon argued:

?Division is harmful and unity of opinion cannot be broken without great danger. If you are to preserve all these societies . . . public opinion will be prodigiously divided . . . and the operation of the government will be impeded.? 69

Yet the lessons are not learned by the Stalinist and popular frontist Professor Soboul. He claims such measures helped prepare the road to Thermidor through ?the division of the revolutionary forces?,⁷⁰ rather than recognising the fundamental antagonism that existed between even the most radical wing of the bourgeoisie and the urban masses. The Jacobin drive against the sections was a drive to end dual sovereignty in the French Republic.

This was symbolised by the arrest of the most prominent egalitarian sans-culotte leader, Jacques Roux, in September 1793. Roux was a leader of the enragé wing of the sans-culottes. Their criticism of the 1793 Constitution centred on the fact that it did not concede the economic egalitarian limits on property that the Parisian masses demanded. The Manifesto of the Enragés, presented to the Convention by Roux in June 1793 asked of the new Consitution:

?Does it proscribe speculation? No. Have you declared the death penalty for hoarders? No. Have you determined in what consists freedom of commerce? Have you prohibited the sale of metallic currency? No. Very well, we declare before you that you have not done everything for the welfare of the people.? 71

Of necessity the capitalist nature of the Jacobins set them on a collision course with the anti-commercial egalitarianism expressed by the enragés and their deep hostility to the speculators, merchants and stock-jobbers. As Roux taunted the Jacobins:

?Had you but climbed from the third to the ninth floor of the houses of this revolutionary city you would have been touched by the tears and groans of a vast populace without bread and clothes, reduced to this state of distress and misfortune by speculation and hoarding because the laws have dealt cruelly with the poor, because they have been made by the rich and for the rich.? 72

While his programme was a utopian one, in a manner continued by varieties of petit bourgeois radicalism in nineteenth century France, he was right to see that the Jacobins remained ultimately tied to a system where law served the interests of the emancipated beneficiaries of trade and commerce. A further issue of sharp conflict between the sections and the Jacobins concerned the question of de-Christianisation. In October 1793 the Paris Commune closed the churches of the city and demanded the spread of that movement elsewhere as a means of finally rooting out the remnants of the old regime and potential traitors. In this they were particularly influenced by a prominent pamphleteer, atheist and commune member, Jacques Hebert, and a radical group of atheists around him?the Hebertists. The theist Robespierre in conjunction with Danton set his sights on preventing any such tendency. In March 1794 the Hebertists were arrested and Hebert himself summarily guillotined. Roux escaped the guillotine through suicide, but now the terror was being used as an instrument against the leaders of plebeian Paris.

The preparation of Thermidor

Sharply at odds with the popular base that had done so much to push them to power, and suspended above the Convention that had granted them revolutionary powers, the twelve figures of the Committee of Public Safety themselves began to fragment politically over the direction to be taken. This fragmentation was, ironically, further exacerbated by the very success of the Jacobins in resolving elements of the revolutionary crisis they had been entrusted with extraordinary powers to combat. Lyons was recaptured for the Republic by October 1793 and the Vendée was put down. Equally importantly by early 1794 the revolutionary armies of France had defeated Austria in

the low countries and begun to invade Spain. The very real threat of invasion and defeat which had accompanied the formation to the Committee of Public Safety had now receded.

The principal poles in the factional argument were represented by Danton and Robespierre. Danton wished to relax the Jacobin dictatorship over the convention by making an opening to the non-Jacobin right in it, evidencing the receding threat to the Revolution and the danger of being engulfed by sans-culottism as the only alternative to an attempt to heal the political wounds of the French bourgeoisie. For the Robespierrists the watchword remained vigilance and they were opposed to any significant relaxation of the centralised dictatorship and terror apparatus. In April 1794, using Danton's evident financial misdemeanors, the Robespierre faction tried and later guillotined the Danton group. In May the, now Robespierrist, Committee of Public Safety started to dissolve the popular committees of Paris and provide a theist counter to atheist Paris' closure of the churches in the form of June's festival of the Supreme Being, and attempted to introduce worship of the Supreme Being.

The French bourgeoisie's Convention representatives had accepted the power of its most radical faction for particular conjunctural reasons. That decision reflected both the depth of the revolution's crisis at the hands of the Gironde and the developing power and leverage of the Parisian masses in particular, within that crisis. Hence the need to temporarily accept the extraordinary powers of the Committee of Public Safety and its initial concessions to the democratic egalitarianism of the sans-culottes. But in doing so it accepted a dictatorship over itself which at times proved particularly painful. Political opponents of the Jacobins within the bourgeoisie and eventually within their own camp were subject to terror. The law of 22 Prairial (10 June 1794) gave the Jacobin dictatorship arbitrary powers of arrest and execution. Taxation for the war effort, raised progressively, hit the pockets of the rich. So too did the proposed confiscation of the land of those rich deemed 'suspect' by the Jacobins.

If this was the price of staying the hand of armed counter-revolution on the one hand and sans-culottes egalitarianism on the other then, in late 1793 and early 1794, it was a price the political representatives of the bourgeoisie would have to pay. In truth they had no alternative except to do so. However, there came a moment when that price no longer needed to be paid. The war threat was no more and the sans-culottes were now either cowed by, or in sullen opposition to, the Jacobin dictatorship that many had initially looked to as their own.

Hence on 27 July, in the month of Thermidor the Convention, as a result of a behind the scenes conspiracy, abruptly put an end to the Jacobin dictatorship and executed Robespierre himself on the following day. In the subsequent months new committees staffed by merchants and professionals replaced the Committee of Public Safety's vigilance committees. The Paris Commune itself was abolished. While the terror was officially halted, an unofficial white terror was directed against Jacobins and sans-culottes as gangs of prosperous youth 'the jeunesse dorée' ransacked plebeian districts in search of revolutionists.

By October 1794 the maximum laws had been amended and by the end of 1794 they were virtually abolished with the subsequent full restoration of the freedom of the grain trade. Real wages fell back to their extremely low 1789 level as a result of inflation and price rises.

It says much about the eventual social isolation of the Jacobin regime that attempts to rally the sans-culottes to defend the Robespierrists at the time of Thermidor were an abject failure. The Jacobins had served the bourgeoisie well by demobilising the masses. They were repaid on the guillotine as the French bourgeoisie steered the Revolution the Jacobins had saved for them back on the course of the democracy for a prosperous few that they had aimed at from the start.

Did the revolution skid out of control?

Much has been made, to use Furet's phrase, of the Revolution 'skidding out of control' (dérapiage).⁷³ In this account Jacobinism is to be explained as a moment of irrationality when the revolutionary process became ungovernable. Furet describes the interpretation of himself and his collaborator Richet when he says that they view,

? . . the Jacobin and terrorist phase as the period of greatest discrepancy between civil society and the historical process and point out that this discrepancy was due to ideology.? 74

The relative autonomy of the Jacobin state is the work of an ideology, according to Furet. But, as we have already had occasion to see, there is more to Furet's account than a criticism of one phase of the French Revolution per se. He talks of how:

? . . its permanent tendency to skid out of control and to contradict its own social nature marks the revolutionary process as an autonomous political and ideological movement that must be interpreted and analysed as such.? 75

The notion of *dérapiage* necessarily presumes that the common people must, of themselves, have no legitimate or progressive role to play in history. This presumption is recognised by Comninel to his credit and is the key area where he finds himself at odds with the Furet criticism of the French Revolution. As we have seen there was a profound coherence and consistency, albeit of a utopian character, to the aims and objects of the *sans-culottes*. Very far from the Jacobin period being explicable as some kind of expression of a metaphysical autonomous 'revolution' it is explicable as the outcome of the conjuncture of class forces at a given moment in a revolutionary crisis. As Trotsky so aptly put it, as if envisaging Furet's very words:

'Jacobinism is not a supra-social 'revolutionary' category but a historical product. Jacobinism is the highest moment reached by the tension of revolutionary energy during the periods of the self-emancipation of bourgeois society. It is the maximum radicalism which can be produced by bourgeois society.' 76

It represents the product of the highly combustible mixture of an internationalised class struggle, an ever more factionally divided bourgeoisie and the direct and increasingly confident intervention of egalitarian plebeian democracy into events. Such was the disparate nature of the parallelogram of class forces that gave rise to Jacobinism that by its manner of birth it was bound to have a tendency for increased autonomy from the major class forces. In turn, it tried to stabilise its rule in that situation through terror. The very ease with which the bourgeoisie's representatives organised its overthrow is proof of how isolated it had become from key sections of French civil society in a remarkably short period of time.

It must be admitted that there have been ambiguities in the classic Marxist tradition's interpretation of the French Revolution in its Jacobin and terror phase. In *On the Jewish Question* Marx saw the terror as an attempt by 'political life . . . to suppress its presupposition, civil society?'. But this is the early Marx who still worked with a Hegelianised dialectic, seeing history as a conflict between the state on the one hand and civil society on the other, rather than seeing the state as a product of class divided civil society. The same view is advanced in *The Holy Family* in a judgement on Napoleon Bonaparte:

'Napoleon was the last stand of revolutionary terror against bourgeois society?which the Revolution had also proclaimed and against its policy . . . Napoleon still regarded the state as its own end, and bourgeois society as a provider of funds, a subordinate forbidden any will of its own. He carried the terror to its conclusion by replacing the permanent revolution with permanent war.' 77

As we have seen Jacobinism was not simply a mechanism of terror 'against bourgeois society?', it was a means for its defence as well. However in *The Holy Family* Marx also comes to understand whose interests were ultimately served by the Revolution; the interest of the bourgeoisie

? . . was so powerful that it was victorious over the pen of Marat, the guillotine of the terror, the sword of Napoleon, as well as the crucifix and blue blood of the Bourbons.? 78

In *The German Ideology* Marx continues the development of the idea of the terror having a class basis:

'The terror in France could thus by its mighty hammer blows only serve to spirit away, as it were, the ruins of feudalism from French soil. The timidly considerate bourgeoisie would not have accomplished this in decades.' 79

Here Marx quite correctly grasped the role the terror played against feudal counter-revolution and bourgeois prevaricators. By 1848 Marx rendered his position even clearer:

‘The whole French terror was nothing but a plebeian manner of settling accounts with the enemies of the bourgeoisie, with absolutism, feudalism and Philistinism.’ 80

In both of these passages Marx stresses the plebeian character of the terror in a way that suggests that the bourgeoisie had it foisted on them. In fact, the Jacobins were revolutionary precisely because they recognised the need for terror and consciously harnessed the action of the masses to pursue it. Only briefly did it threaten to get out of Jacobin control.

It was only later in the nineteenth century that the debate on Jacobinism and the terror re-opened in the revolutionary movement in a meaningful way. By 1870 Engels himself was being very dismissive of the terror whose ‘mighty hammer blows’ Marx had eulogised. In a letter to Marx he wrote:

‘To a large extent the terror was nothing more than useless cruelty, perpetrated by frightened people who were trying to reassure themselves by it. I am convinced that the Reign of Terror anno 1793 must be imputed almost exclusively to overwrought bourgeois playing the role of patriots, to Philistine petit bourgeois who were messing their pants with fright, and to the dregs of the people, who made the terror their business.’ 81

There is no evidence however that this was ever intended as a scientific explanation of the terror, or of an intention to revise the earlier position of Marx.

Attitudes to Jacobinism divided both the pre-Marxist Narodnik movement and early Russian Marxism. Within nineteenth century Russian radicalism those committed to conspiratorial methods, for example Zaichnevski, openly styled themselves as Jacobins. They did so despite the fact that, probably unbeknown to them, the Jacobin clubs prior to their ascendancy to power were extremely loose and open organisations. Their meetings were open, they had no organisational apparatus to speak of and most members failed to see themselves in any way as members of a party. Those Russian radicals most committed to work ‘amongst the people’, Larov in particular, styled themselves quite explicitly as anti-Jacobin.

This polarity was replicated in the ranks of Russian Marxism. At the time of the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic and Workers Party in 1903 Trotsky castigated Lenin as a Robespierre who ‘transformed the modest party council into an all-powerful Committee of Public Safety’. 82 Paraphrasing Marx on Napoleon III he argued that Lenin differed from Robespierre ‘as a vulgar farce differs from a historical tragedy’. 83 Trotsky, in *Our Political Tasks*, talks of the relation of Jacobinism to Marxism as being ‘Two worlds, two doctrines, two tactics, two mentalities, separated by an abyss’, 84 and rather more pithily:

‘[The Jacobins] were utopians; we aspire to express objective tendencies. They were idealists from head to foot. They were rationalists; we are dialecticians. They believed in the saving force of a supra-class truth before which everyone should kneel. We believe only in the saving force of the revolutionary proletariat . . . Their method was to guillotine the slightest deviations; ours is to overcome differences ideologically and politically. They cut off heads; we enlighten them with class consciousness.’ 85

Perhaps Trotsky tends to overestimate the scale of Jacobin terrorism. There were 17,000 official executions in four months. Many were members of bourgeois factions in the fratricidal war that gripped the French bourgeoisie. 86 Trotsky also forgot that while there was indeed much utopianism on display in the Jacobin year, Robespierre and St Just possessed an icy realism in defence of the bourgeois revolution against utopian sans-culotte egalitarianism. It was, in all probability, that sense of the realism, of disciplined organisation as a means of advancing and defending the Revolution that led Lenin to be far more fulsome in his praise of the legacy of Jacobinism. As he put it in *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*:

‘A Jacobin firmly committed to organising a proletariat that has become conscious of its class interest is precisely what a revolutionary Social Democrat is.’ 87

And it has been a standard refrain of social democrats and conservatives alike, and one repeated by Furet, that Lenin was a Jacobin rather than an authentic Marxist. There has, in its turn, been a tendency for the radical republican tradition to conflate Jacobinism and Leninism. The radical republican and non-Marxist professor Mathiez, put it this way:

‘Jacobinism and Bolshevism are dictatorships of the same kind; both are born of civil and foreign war, both are class dictatorships, both use the same means—terror, requisitioning, and control of prices—and both ultimately pursue the same goal, namely the transformation of society, that is, not just Russian or French, but society in general.’ 88

It is an identification between traditions that excited Cobban and excites Furet. And it is one that we should not run away from. The Jacobins were resolute class warriors who wanted to defend France’s bourgeois revolution at all costs. In doing so they veered between radical democracy and terroristic dictatorship, buffeted as they were by the international and national class struggle.

Their determination to stand firm for the interests of their class must be respected by the modern proletariat. So too should their understanding, best expressed by Marat, of the need for revolutionary violence against the privileged remnants of the old order in any class society convulsed by a revolution of the oppressed and exploited. In all that we stand with the Jacobins against those who would not take the French Republic all the way through to national and international victory. But we must recognise that they took that stance under the pressure of the masses. As Trotsky later remarked, convinced of the need for terror, it was the ‘French Revolution of the eighteenth century, which attained its titanic dimensions under the pressure of the masses.’ 89

And it is to those plebeian masses with their notions of direct democracy, of egalitarianism and of the right to work that we should look to the embryo of socialism, of a plebeian democracy that could only be realised by the proletariat in power and making direct inroads into the power of property and commerce. Those same plebeian masses, at that particular point in history, were not able to impose their own political programme on the French bourgeoisie. To an important extent they were used as its footsoldiers. Neither was the development of the productive forces sufficient to allow of a non-capitalist outcome to the destruction of feudalism in France. However, it was from the tradition of egalitarianism and direct democracy that they served to initiate that modern socialism was to emerge.

On all counts Marxism need not concede one inch to the revisionists. France from 1789 to 1794 experienced a mighty and continuous social revolution that removed for ever the dominance of feudalism from her soil. The would-be absolutist state was replaced by a republic and the nobility’s grip on state power was broken. The development of trade and commerce was unleashed by the breaking of the economic fetters that feudalism placed in its way. The Revolution destroyed feudalism as a social, economic and political regime.

That Revolution constituted a bourgeois revolution. It did so both in the objective sense of its ultimate beneficiaries proving to be the bourgeoisie, and in the subjective sense that its leadership remained tied to a bourgeois programme and were part of its social milieu, be they constitutional monarchists, Girondins or Jacobins.

The most intense and explosive phase of the Revolution did not mark its ‘getting out of control’ because of any inherent logic within the process of revolution as such. Rather, it marked that moment when the most radical and decisive wing of the bourgeoisie—the Jacobins—spurred on by the masses, acted to save the Revolution from counter-revolution. The alternative was precisely the Revolution slipping out of the control of the bourgeoisie and back into the hands of national and international reaction. In this it does share much in common, albeit on a different class footing, with the ruthless and decisive measures that Bolshevism took to defend the victory of Soviet workers’ power in 1917.

Finally, the Revolution proved absolutely necessary as a means of sweeping away feudalism and absolutism. All attempts at compromise with the old regime, of looking for a reformist package to diminish its authority, proved utopian. And it was the popular masses, not the leadership of the bourgeoisie, who were the first to realise this and the first to act on it. Theirs was the energy that made this Revolution possible and made it the Revolution of all progressive classes of the French nation against feudalism.

In the year of the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution, the tasks of Marxists include, of course, the defence of our interpretation of this great historic event as well as of historical materialism in general. As the bourgeoisie has become a reactionary class in the imperialist epoch it seeks to forget or misrepresent its own revolutionary history. As Trotsky noted early in this epoch:

‘Jacobinism is now a term of reproach on the lips of all liberal wiseacres. Bourgeois hatred of revolution, its hatred towards the masses, hatred of the forces and grandeur of the history that is made in the streets, is concentrated in one cry of indignation and fear?Jacobinism! We the world army of communism, have long made our historical reckoning of Jacobinism . . .

But we defend Jacobinism against the attacks, the calumny and the stupid vituperations of anaemic, phlegmatic liberalism. The bourgeoisie has shamefully betrayed all the traditions of its historical youth, and its present hirelings dishonour the graves of its ancestors and scoff at the ashes of its ideals. The proletariat has taken the honour of the revolutionary past of the bourgeoisie under its protection. The proletariat, however radically it may have in practice broken with the revolutionary traditions of the bourgeoisie, nevertheless preserves them, as a sacred heritage of great passions, heroism and initiative, and its heart beats in sympathy with the speeches and acts of the Jacobin Convention.’
90

In contradistinction to this, the French bourgeoisie this August will ‘celebrate’ the event by a tight-rope walker edging his way from the Trocadero to the second floor of the Eiffel Tower to hand the Mayor of Paris, Jaques Chirac, a copy of the ‘Declaration of the Rights of Man’!

But we must go further than appropriate this revolutionary heritage. Our tasks also include a relentless argument to show that the resolution within the contradictions of the capitalist society that the French Revolution bequeathed us can only be solved by another great revolution. Two hundred years ago the bourgeoisie united all progressive classes and forged the modern nation. For that reason modern Stalinism takes the lead in the current celebrations, beating the patriotic drum.

Today this is totally reactionary. Already by 1871 the crushing of the proletarian revolt in the Paris Commune proved that the march of the bourgeoisie and the working class could no longer proceed along the same path. As Lenin remarked years later:

‘Profound changes had taken place since the Great Revolution, class antagonisms had sharpened and whereas at that time the struggle against the whole of European reaction united the entire revolutionary nation, now the proletariat could no longer combine its interest with the interests of other classes hostile to it.’ 91

While there was a unity of interests in 1789-93 between the bourgeois and plebeian forces there was never an identity of interests. Stalinism presents the Revolution as though there was an identity and that the ‘popular revolt’ of 1789 bequeathed the French nation a heritage that has reappeared time and again as in the Popular Front of the 1930s. But 150 years separated the two events, years that witnessed the treachery of the European bourgeoisie in its own revolutions of 1848; years that witnessed the massacre of the Paris Communards by bourgeois reactionaries. Moreover, the Russian Revolution, the resort to fascism to crush the working class, the sacrifice of millions of workers in two imperialist world wars—all these events in the twentieth century have only served to underline every one of Lenin’s words. Patriotism is now a weapon in the hands of the reactionary bourgeoisie to dull the class consciousness of the working class and we spurn its poisonous presence in these celebrations.

The coming proletarian revolution must be one which, to paraphrase Marx, will not be partial in that it emancipates only a minority of society to allow them to become exploiters. It must be universal in that it frees all of society from exploitation. That can only be the work of the international proletarian revolution, learning the lessons of, and building on the experience of, the class struggles that shaped the French Revolution.

Endnotes

- 1 F Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge 1981) p129. First published as *Penser la Révolution Française* (Paris 1978)
- 2 V I Lenin, *Collected Works Vol 21* (Moscow 1965) p299
- 3 Most importantly we refer to the decline in the prestige of A Soboul and C Mazauric
- 4 F Furet, *op cit*, p12
- 5 *Ibid*
- 6 K Marx and F Engels, *Selected Works* (London 1968) p95
- 7 G Lefebvre, *Études sur la Révolution française* (Paris 1954) p248
- 8 K Marx and F Engels, *op cit*, p183
- 9 A Soboul, *Précis d'histoire de Révolution Française* (Paris 1962) p8
- 10 A Cobban, *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* (London 1968) p52
- 11 Literally, the term means 'without breeches' and was used to describe the urban plebeian mass of artisans and workers in the Revolution.
- 12 G Rudé, *The Crowd and the French Revolution* (Oxford 1959) This book was dedicated to G Lefebvre
- 13 A Cobban , *op cit*, p127
- 14 See, for example the work of D Guérin, *Class Struggle in the First French Republic: Bourgeois and Bras Nus 1793-95* (London 1977)
- 15 F Furet, *Marx and the French Revolution* (Chicago1988) p96
- 16 See his critique of F Furet and D Richet's 'La Révolution Française' (Paris 1965-66) in C Mazauric, *Sur la Révolution Française* (Paris 1970)
- 17 R Robin, *La Société française en 1789: Semur-en-Auxois.* (Paris 1970)
- 18 G C Comninel, *Rethinking the French Revolution* (London 1987)
- 19 *Ibid*, pp179-180
- 20 *Ibid*, p18
- 21 *Ibid*, p182
- 22 It is an irony of history that this was the profession of Gracchus Babeuf who was to lead the communist conspiracy of equals in 1796
- 23 *Ibid*, p181
- 24 The seigneurs were the feudal 'lords of the manor', nobles who extracted ground rent and surplus product from the French peasantry.
- 25 F Furet, *op cit*, p91
- 26 Quoted in N Hampson, *A Social History of the French Revolution* (Toronto 1966) p124
- 27 F Furet *Marx and the French Revolution* , *op cit*, p95
- 28 F Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, *op cit*, p586
- 29 A Cobban,*op cit*, p172
- 30 *Ibid*, p162
- 31 Quoted in F Furet, *op cit*, p5
- 32 Marx, 'The Philosophy of Right' in K Marx: *Early Writings* (ed Q Hoare, New York 1975) p415-6
- 33 Quoted in F Furet, *op cit*, p173
- 34 Barnave's *A la Révolution française* was written in 1792 but not published until 1843.
- 35 Letter from Marx to J Weydemeyer, 5 March 1852 in Marx, Engels, Lenin, *On Historical Materialism* (Moscow 1976) p284
- 36 R Robin, *op cit*
- 37 A Soboul, 'Du féodalisme au capitalisme: la Révolution française et la problématique des voies de passages' in *La Pensée* No196
- 38 K Marx, *Capital*, Vol 3 (Moscow 1959) p334
- 39 G C Comninel, *op cit*, p49
- 40 Quoted in J Hardman, 'The French Revolution: the Fall of the Ancien Régime to the Thermidorian Reaction?', *Documents in Modern History* (London 1981) p113

- 41 L Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, Vol 1(London 1965) p205
- 42 D Guérin, *op cit*
- 43 Quoted in M Sonenscher, 'The sans-culottes of the Year II: rethinking the language of labour in revolutionary France?', *Social History* Vol 8 No 3 (October 1984)
- 44 See D Hunt, 'Peasant politics in the French Revolution?', *Social History* Vol 9 No3 (October 1985)
- 45 See R B Rose 'The Red Scare of the 1790s; the French Revolution and the 'Agrarian Law'', *Past and Present* No 103 (May 1984)
- 46 A Cobban, *op cit*, p53
- 47 *Ibid*, p52
- 48 See P Bois, *Paysans de l'Ouest* and T J A Le Goff and D M G Sutherland, 'The Social Origins of Counter-revolution in Western France?', *Past and Present* No 99 (May 1983)
- 49 The Soviet historian A Ado has shown that the wave of seizures continued after 1789 rather than ceasing at this point. See *The peasant movement during the French Revolution* (Moscow1971)
- 50 A Soboul, *Comprendre la Révolution* (Paris 1981) p312
- 51 Quoted in R B Rose in *Past and Present*, *op cit*
- 52 G Rudé, *op cit*, p39
- 53 *Ibid*
- 54 A de Bacourt (ed), *Correspondance entre le Comte de Mirabeau et le Comte de la Marck*, Vol 1 (Paris 1851) Quoted in J Hardman, *op cit*, pp238-9
- 55 L Trotsky, *op cit*, p205
- 56 Quoted in A Soboul, *The Parisian Sans-Culottes and the French Revolution, 1793-4*
- 57 *Ibid*
- 58 L Trotsky, 'Results and Prospects' in *Permanent Revolution* (New York 1970) p53
- 59 F Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* , *op cit*, p118
- 60 Quoted in D Guérin, *op cit*, p58
- 61 Quoted in J Hardman, *op cit*, p169
- 62 *Ibid*, p180
- 63 Quoted in A Soboul, 'Some Problems of the Revolutionary State, 1789-96?', *Past and Present* No 65 (November 1974)
- 64 P Marat, 'Chains of Slavery?', *L'Ami de Peuple*, 30 July 1790
- 65 Quoted in A Soboul, *op cit*
- 66 *Ibid*
- 67 *Ibid*
- 68 Quoted in A Soboul, *Some Problems of the Revolutionary State*
- 69 *Ibid*
- 70 *Ibid*
- 71 *Ibid*, 172
- 72 *Ibid*, p174 The aristocracy lived on the first two floors and other classes above
- 73 F Furet, *op cit*, p129
- 74 *Ibid*
- 75 *Ibid*, p130
- 76 L Trotsky, 'Jacobinism and Social Democracy?', *Our Political Tasks* (London n.d.)
- 77 Quoted in F Furet, *Marx and the French Revolution* , *op cit*, p139
- 78 Quoted in *ibid*, p24
- 79 *Ibid*
- 80 K Marx, from *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, 1848, quoted by Lenin in *Collected Works*, Vol 9 (Moscow 1965) pp58-9
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85 Ibid, p122

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87 V Lenin, One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, in Selected Works Vol 1 (Moscow 1970) p420

88 A Mathiez, Le Bolchévisme et le Jacobinisme (Paris 1920) pp3-4

89 L Trotsky, Terrorism and Communism (Ann Arbor 1961) p7

90 L Trotsky, Permanent Revolution (op cit) p54

91 V I Lenin, Lessons of the Paris Commune in Collected Works Vol 13 (London 1965) pp475-76

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