

**STATE AND IDEOLOGIES: CHANGING POLITICAL
STRUCTURE IN REVOLUTIONARY FRANCE, 1789 - 1794**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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Acknowledgements

To Prof. Arvind Sinha for having the faith and the confidence in me to let me do this dissertation under his guidance, inspite of my many shortcomings and next to nil knowledge in the desired area of research. For all the insights, thought provoking suggestions, extremely perspective comments and criticisms, consideration and above all for all the patience with my irregularities. To Prof. Yogesh Sharma, for the unstinting support and guidance though and through, instilling confidence in me and setting me on a new path, unexplored and exciting. I am grateful to him for his continuing mentorship.

To the staff of all the libraries; the central library in JNU, the Teen Murti Library, the library at Alliance Française de Delhi and the French Information and Resource Center.

To all my friends for their generosity, support and continuous encouragement through the course of my dissertation: Aarti, Shipra, Sanjukta for all the wonderful times spent together, for being there unconditionally through all the upheavals, personal and professional. To Bindu, Parth, Polumi, Uditi, to whom I offered little in return. To treasured friendships that have survived the fetters of time and space: Sophi, Padmini and Moyna.

To my brother, Ahmed for all the wonderful, inspiring and extremely mirthful conversations. For that shared bond, extremely strong yet unspoken, which is possible only because of a lifetime of shared experiences. To my husband, Ali for the uncritical love, appreciation and all the encouragement and support without which this work could not have been completed.

To Mamma, Papa, Omar, Naazli, Saira, Rizwan, Fuad, Ayaan and Noora for being there and making it all worthwhile in the end. To my parents for everything, for letting me go and explore and avail of all the opportunities that came my way. I would have achieved little without their unfailing love and support. To them I dedicate this piece of writing.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Hardly any other event in modern Europe has received the extent of attention of the each generation of historians as the French Revolution. So much has been written on the subject and yet many issues remain unresolved. Each generation of scholars has tried to provide its own explanation of the events accompanying the Revolution. What was the nature of the French Revolution and the extent of transformation of state and society, the issues of conflict, the political contours, the ideas of sovereignty, representation and democracy have been matters of debate. Did the revolution have an ideology or divergent ideologies, are issues that have not been resolved as yet despite voluminous writings on the subject. The present dissertation is an attempt to re-examine the above mentioned issues with the help of some primary and secondary literature that was available in India.

This dissertation is a study of the transformation of the French State structure from the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789 to the establishment of the Republic under the National Convention, in 1793-4. France during this period experienced a lot of political turmoil and instability, resulting in the changing of the administrative and state structure, congruous to the ideologies of various factions, which came to power at different points of time. This period of French history, cannot be seen in isolation, as the various events that took place during this period had their roots in the period preceding it, generally referred to as the *ancien régime* with its repercussions being felt in the subsequent era. The reasons for taking up this period for study is because it is the richest in terms of the wide array of changes that take place on the political canvas of the nation, changes as wide ranging as the overthrow of an absolute monarchist state, probably the strongest in Europe at that time to the attempts at establishment of a constitutional monarchy, setting up of a state based on a constitution and the principle of liberty, equality and fraternity and the transformation of this state into a Republic, with Robespierre at its head. The various political institutions and structures that came into being were the result of a number of factors put together, like the influence of the *Philosophes* of the period of the Enlightenment. The influence of the Enlightenment on

the French Revolution, its leaders and the public in general has been a matter of debate, with scholars arguing for it, and stating that ideas and ideological influences did play a very important role in the revolution, influencing the political and ideological conceptions of the leaders and also the French people.¹ This argument has been refuted by scholars who believe that the Enlightenment had no influence on the happenings of 1789 and that it is not the Enlightenment that made the revolution, instead it was the revolution that made the Enlightenment, as once the revolution had taken place the revolutionaries looked back to the *Philosophes* in order to legitimise their actions and make an ideological base for it. Though the nature and origins of the French Revolution has been a matter of debate, what remains universally accepted is the significance of it.

Emphasising on the significance of the Revolution, Tocqueville had stated, “There was then not one single Frenchman who was not convinced that he was not only going to change the government of France, but introduce into the world new principles of government applicable to all peoples and destined to entirely change the face of human affairsThat lasted but a moment, but I doubt that anything similar has ever happened in the life of any people”²

The various positions on the Revolution can be classified into the classical Marxist interpretation, the liberal perspective, the idealistic and romantic notions and the revisionist views, which concentrate on the politico-cultural explanation of the French Revolution. Some historians argue the Revolution marked a break from the past resulting in sweeping reforms and changes not just in the political structure but in the public sphere, the social relations, religion and all the other possible aspects. There are some scholars who argue for the aspect of continuity between the *ancien régime* and the ensuing political culture as the old ideas did not completely disappear; there was an evolution and not a complete break.

¹ Darton, Robert, ‘The Facts of Literary Life in Eighteenth Century France’, in Keith Michael Baker ed. *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol.I.(Oxford: Pergamon Press), 1994

² “il n’y avait donc pas un Français qui ne fut convaincu qu’il n’allait pas seulement s’agir de changer le gouvernement de la France, mais d’introduire dans le monde de nouveaux principes de gouvernement applicables à tout les peuples et destinés à renouveler la face entière des affaires humainesce ne fut qu’un moment; mais je doute qu’il s’en soit jamais rencontré de pareil dans la vie d’aucun peuple” (*Ancien Régime*, Vol II, p.132) quoted in Alan, Kahan, ‘Tocqueville’s Two Revolutions’, *Journal of History of Ideas*, Vol.46, No.4.(Oct-Dec.,1985),pp. 585-596.

Tocqueville's central theme is relationship between extreme democracy and despotism. According to him as according to Montesquieu, extreme egalitarianism invites despotism as it eliminates intermediary safeguards, especially the existence of the aristocracy. He and other historians, who seem to belong to his school like Francois Furet, believe that the idea of the French Revolution is in itself misleading because the revolution did relatively little of a positive nature in changing basic structures and institutions. The factors that led to instability in the old regime continued throughout the Revolution to create instability in the post revolutionary period. Modern France inherited some of the features of the old regime and according to Tocqueville, the worst features like highly centralised bureaucratic and administrative structure continued in post-revolutionary France. According to Tocqueville, and later historians like Furet, the most important influence of the revolution was ideological. The revolution gave birth to the revolutionary tradition, which led to future instability and it is this instability that he is critical of. This idea of the Revolution not really being an isolated event and a sudden break from the past has been similarly contested by Francois Furet, who sees it as a process of centralization which culminated at the time of Napoleon.³ Furet did not describe it as a liberal, bourgeois or a constitutional revolution; instead, he sees it as a process of centralization completed by the Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire. Furet rejected the Marxist economic interpretation of the revolution and ignores completely the socio economic aspects. He does not see the revolution simply as a cause and effect phenomenon or as something pre planned by the revolutionaries and moving in a particular direction as directed by them. His focus is the changing, transforming political structures, which meant a shift from an economic and sociological analysis to a politico-cultural one. Unlike the Marxist writings where the class is in the forefront and the revolution is seen a result of the class conflicts resulting in the triumph of the Bourgeoisie and the establishment of the Capitalist structure, in this particular kind of analysis the state acquired a special place. The question that is often asked is that if the revolution resulted because of the class conflicts and the grievances of a particular class and the revolution did solve these problems and brought the bourgeoisie to power thereby settling

³ Furet, François, 'Terror' in *The French Revolution: In Social and Political Perspective*, ed. Peter Jones (Arnold, 1996), Francois, Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, (Cambridge, 1981)

the question of the bourgeoisie then why did the revolution take a different direction after 1789? Why did it not take a definite character, resulting in a definite programme and a definite state structure? France remained in a state of flux until the nineteenth century, experiencing differing structures of governance and ideologies.

Recent scholars like Keith Michael Baker, Mona Ozouf and Lynn Hunt.⁴ Here politics is seen as an activity through which individuals and groups articulate and make claims, enforce and implement them and negotiate with each other. Political culture is the medium through which these activities are achieved, a set of discourses by which these claims are made and legitimised. A political vocabulary is created in order to present these views, which become legitimate by popular acceptance. Here the language employed was very important, as political authority is a matter of linguistic authority. The French Revolution is thus understood as a political phenomenon, a transformation of the political discourse. The political language began to assume a new character and became an important instrument of political and social change. The revolutionary period saw the development of a new vocabulary, which became synonymous with the changing political situation. An important aspect of this kind of rhetoric was that it was not only a part of the modernizing political elite but it evolved as an experience of an entire society. A new Republican culture and society were shaped by the ongoing political propaganda.

Now public opinion became a new determinant in politics. There was the emergence of the public sphere, with the coming up of various political societies, Masonic lodges and salons. The importance of press and political journalism has been studied in detail by Jeremy Popkin, Jack Censer and Robert Darton who have examined the literary environment of eighteenth century France.⁵ Mona Ozouf on the other hand in

⁴ Keith Michael Baker, ed. *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987),

Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) – An intellectual analysis of language and discourse.

Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984) – A cultural analysis of the Revolution and its impact, especially in rhetoric, symbols, and images.

⁵ Jeremy D. Popkin, *Revolutionary News: The Press in France, 1789-1799*, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990) – During the Revolution, the definition of the freedom of the Press was a limited one because many equated a free press with social instability. The execution of Robespierre only temporarily halted the movement toward a government controlled press, which increased during the Directory and under Napoleon.

her path breaking study of the revolutionary festivals impresses on the importance of symbols, language and rituals. Through these festivals, there was an attempt at the creation of a new political vocabulary, symbols and legitimacy. The festivals were designed to recast space and time and create a new political culture. The old principles of legitimacy were replaced by new principles by the political culture. According to Hunt the political culture provided the logic of revolutionary political action.

Social history historians explain politics in terms of class interests, cultural historians explain the revolution in the wider context of language and symbolism, yet in times of revolution political actions remained at the centre-stage, what changes is the focus of political interest. For the historians of revolutionary France, politics had retained its primacy. They agree that the key to understanding the Revolution lies in the political actions. The influence of the Enlightenment and the Enlightenment principles on the course, which the revolution took, is debatable and has been questioned by many scholars especially the Marxist historians who have a more structuralist approach to the revolution. In all of Marx's historical writings, the revolution served as a touchstone, it fostered the development of Capitalism by breaking the feudal stranglehold on production and it brought the bourgeoisie as a class to power. Thus, two inseparable elements, the development of a suitable legal structure for the development of Capitalism and a class struggle won by the bourgeoisie have characterised Marxist historical accounts of the revolution ever since. According to Alfred Soboul the revolution marked the appearance, the growth and the final triumph of the bourgeoisie.⁶ Sweeping revisions

Jeremy.D.Popkin, 'The Provincial Newspaper and Revolutionary Politics', *French Historical Studies*, vol 18, No.2.(Autumn, 1993), pp. 434 – 456., 'The Press and the French Revolution after Two Hundred Years', *French Historical Studies*, vol.16, No.3 (Spring 1990), pp.664-683.

Jeremy.D.Popkin, *The Right Wing Press in France, 1792-1800*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980) – A comprehensive analysis of the counter-revolutionary newspapers, the domestic roots of counterrevolution, and the importance of the Enlightenment tradition.

Jack Censer, *Prelude to Power, the Parisian Radical Press, 1789-1791*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976) – Deals with the role of the Press and in particular traces the evolution of ideological radicalism.

Robert Darton, 'The Facts of Literary Life in Eighteenth Century France', in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol.I, ed. Kieth Michael Baker, (Oxford: Pergamon Press), 1994 pp. 261-288.

Roche, Daniel, and Robert Darton, eds. *Revolution in Print: The Press in France, 1775-1800*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) – Studies revolutionary propaganda.

⁶ Soboul,Albert, *The French Revolution, 1789-1799, from the Storming of the Bastille to Napoleon*, trs.by Alan Forrest and Colin Jones,(New York: Random House, 1975), *The Sans-Culottes: The Popular*

in the interpretation of the revolution during the last couple of decades, calling into question the conclusions reached by the previous generation of historians, has encouraged a renewed attention to intellectual history. Socio-economic explanations of the revolution's origin and purpose, characteristic of the old paradigm have collapsed. The bourgeoisie, the central character of this analysis can no longer to be distinguished from the nobility or the aristocracy, nor is it found to be capitalist or revolutionary. A new general framework has emerged. It is focused on the realm of mentalities, of language, discourse, of words and rhetoric. The mode of production has been replaced by the mode of information and ideas. Within this structure it is argued that what was new in the French Revolution was the rhetoric of secular politics.⁷ A historian of a newer school describes the revolution as the transformation of the discursive practice of the community; a moment in which social relations are reconstituted and the discourse defining the political relations between individuals and the groups is recast radically.⁸ Chartier quotes Nietzsche when he states that there are two types of historical understandings, one what he calls as the *theological* or *rationalistic* perspective, which understands history as a teleological or nature process with one event leading to another and therefore in a way seeking the genesis of a particular event in the past. 'Effective history' on the other hand deals with events in terms of their own unique characteristics, thus rejecting the whole notion of continuity. Chartier questions that should we then not consider that "it was the Revolution that invented the Enlightenment by attempting to root its legitimacy in a corpus of texts and founding authors reconciled and united beyond their extreme differences, by their preparation of a rupture with the old world."⁹ He suggests as has been suggested by other historians that the revolutionaries brought together the *Philosophes* and gave their philosophy a radically critical function in an attempt to acquire a justification and legitimacy for their actions. Chartier gives an

Movement and Revolutionary Government, 1793-1794, trs. by Remy Inglis Hall, (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1972)

⁷ Stromberg, Ronald N, "The Philosophes and the French Revolution: Reflections on Some Recent" Research, *The History Teacher*, Vol I, No.3. (May, 1988), pp. 321-339.

⁸ Baker, Keith Michael, "On the problem of the Ideological Origins of the French Revolution", in Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan, *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives*, (Ithaca, New York, 1982), pp.203-04.

⁹ Chartier, Roger, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, tr. Lydia G. Cochrane,(Duke University Press), 1991, p.5

alternative approach, by replacing the category of intellectual origins with that of cultural origins. This according to him would solve some of the problems, because cultural institutions would be seen to have some agency of their own, rather than being just receptacles for ideas developed elsewhere. Though the unavoidability of such a teleological approach has been recognised by Chartier when he states, “no approach to a historical problem is possible outside the historiographical discourse that constructed it.”¹⁰

The revolution was not the direct product of the contestation and practices of the new politics of the Enlightenment. Yet, in the crisis of the monarchy in the late 1780s, the premises, strategies and language of that political culture furnished the making of the revolutionary discourse. The Implicit contradiction between absolutism and the politics of Enlightenment was actualised in the crisis. In this sense according to Keith Michael Baker the Revolution should not be seen as the repudiation of the Old Regime but as its creation. The Revolution did not take anything intact from the Old regime; it modified, transformed and restructured the inheritance. The nature of revolutionary change and the importance of conceptual discourse in helping it to come about are complex questions.

In terms of political structures and political discourses the Revolution did bring about new structures, new discourses and these discourses which affected the political forms and structure, were in turn rooted, however loosely, in the writings and ideologies of the *Philosophes* of the period of the Enlightenment. The political theorists of the Enlightenment are held responsible for the ideological inspiration of the French Revolution, though it is difficult to specify as to which particular theorist was responsible for which particular notion. The *Philosophes* did not agree amongst themselves on the subject of politics. In order to demonstrate this fact lets look up the idea of Sovereignty, to which all the *Philosophes* agreed to unanimously. They agreed to the idea but they do not seem to agree to how it should be understood or preserved and instituted. This will clearly show how the revolutionaries picked up the revolutionary rhetoric from the seventeenth century philosophers but constituted it in a manner that suited their political requirements. The revolutionary period saw the popularity and implementation of concepts like, liberty, sovereignty, freedom, representation and general will but to

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.7

observe how the various political factions that came to power understood these concepts and tried to institutionalise them in a manner, which gave legitimacy to their own ideology is interesting to observe.

The doctrine of the 'sovereignty of the Nation' is one of the most conspicuous innovations of the French Revolution. The political thought of the eighteenth century France can be divided into three main streams, which advocated different concepts of sovereignty. The three main streams identified are 'Enlightened Absolutism' led by Voltaire, 'Liberal Constitutionalism' led by parliamentarians like Montesquieu and 'Republicanism' led by Rousseau. Both the parliamentary and royalist schools were inspired by the English philosophy and regarded the English system of government as the true representation of liberty. Montesquieu and his philosophers drew their inspiration from Locke and what they admired in the England was the constitution established in 1689.¹¹ Voltaire and his followers looked to Francis Bacon and they admired civic religion and religious toleration in England. Voltaire wanted to establish the sovereignty of reason, assured by the progress of science and technology, the centralisation of government and the elimination of superstition. Voltaire's Enlightened Absolutism invoked the principle of Individual Sovereignty, the monopoly of *la puissance absolue*, by a prince acting a necessary instrument for the imposition of a truly progressive regime. Montesquieu wanted a balance of power between the legislative, executive and judiciary. The division and separation of power was advocated by Montesquieu as a formula to prevent any kind of Despotism. The leading exponent of Republicanism was Rousseau, who transformed the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of the King into the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of the people.¹² Rousseau's Social Contract can be seen as

¹¹ John Locke, one of the greatest figure in the history of English political thought, wrote on Universal laws, he spoke of Divine law and Natural law from which Man derived certain natural rights, such as the right to life, liberty and property. He spoke about the social contract that man made to get out of the state of nature and get into civil society. It is a political contract as it establishes a political society. It was a contract to which all men should consent because unless men agreed to majority rule, decisions could not be taken and the State could not survive. His idea of the social contract is closer to Rousseau's than to Hobbes's as both Locke and Rousseau maintained that the institution of government was not a contract and it did not remove the supreme power from the people. Locke spoke of the 'supreme power' of the people that did not get alienated inspite of the institution of government and Rousseau spoke of the 'inalienable sovereignty of the people'.

¹² Rousseau drew his republican inspiration from the city-state of Geneva where he was born. In his doctrine of 'these Republicaine', as opposed to 'these royale' and 'these nobiliaire', sovereignty is always

Rousseau's answer to Hobbes political theory in which man has to exchange his right of liberty for the rule of law because he cannot have both. Rousseau claims that men can have both liberty and the rule of law, if they set up a republic in which they rule themselves. This was possible if individual wills were consolidated into a common 'general will', thus transforming them a number of people into 'a people'.¹³

The political institutions that came into being in the course of the Revolution, took inspiration from the ideological discourses of that time but they did not borrow an implement verbatim. The institutions that emerge were as much a result of political exigencies, mentalities and ideology. The Constitutionalist politicians of the early phase of the Revolution betrayed the principles of the 'separation of powers', as they struggled to monopolise power in their own hands. The suggestion that the *Tiers-État* was uniquely representative of the nation was alien to Montesquieu's philosophy. The Jacobins of the republican phase invoked Rousseau's ideas of *la Volonté Générale* and popular sovereignty, but rejected the political structures and procedures, which Rousseau held to be necessary for their realisation.¹⁴ The regime of Napoleon I, if it had anything in common with the enlightened absolutism favoured by Voltaire, forsook the cult of science for military conquest of which Voltaire had always expressed the most profound disapproval.

Tocqueville had argued that the political theorists of the Enlightenment were responsible for the ideological inspiration of the French Revolution; if we agree to his suggestion then we can argue that in the early phase of the Revolution when politicians like Mirabeau sought to introduce a parliamentary monarchy, the guiding light was that of Montesquieu and liberal constitutionalism. In the second phase of the Revolution, (that is if we can demarcate such precise phases within the Revolution) which brought to

retained by the people themselves, while something distinct from this, which he calls the government is exercised by the officers

¹³ Cranston, Maurice, 'The Sovereignty of the Nation' in Lucas, Colin, ed., *The French Revolution and the Creation of the Modern Political Culture*, vol I, (Oxford: Pergamon Press), 1994

¹⁴ Had Rousseau lived long enough to witness the events of the 1790's, he would have accused the revolutionaries of cheating in the use they made of his doctrine. Robespierre, St. Just and other devoted readers of Rousseau among the Republican leaders claimed that the sovereignty of the nation had been conferred on the people while they, the leaders, merely exercised the government; but in fact the people of France were given no opportunity to exercise sovereignty according to the procedures laid down by Rousseau. In the French Revolution, the republican leaders never conferred sovereignty on the people, but only pretended to do so.

power men like Robespierre, Danton and Marat who abolished monarchy and replaced it with a republic, the inspiration came from Rousseau and Republicanism. The final phase of the Revolution, which witnessed the transmutation of the Republic into an Empire under Napoleon, may be seen to be based on Voltaire's programme of Enlightened Absolutism.

For the historians of Revolutionary France, politics retained its primacy in spite of the various sociological, psychological and cultural analysis and explanations coming through. Social historians may explain that politics in terms of class interest and cultural historians examine the Revolution in the wider context of language and symbolism, yet at the time of the Revolution, political actions remain centre-stage.

In order to understand the transformation of the political constitution of France from that of the Old Regime to that of Republicanism in 1794, the period that I propose to cover, we can see how various political ideas like those of the Nation, Representation and Sovereignty were transformed, reconstituted and reinterpreted by the philosophers and the political theorists of the period, leading to changes in the working political structures. The traditional logic of representation provided for sovereignty to reside in the person of the king, as a representative of the will of the people. Thus under the ancient regime it difficult to talk of a united political entity like a nation state or a common will; the state resided in the individual person of the King. The Estate General assembled at the will of the monarch in order to aid him, it did not in way represent the Nation, as an entity separate from the king. The multiplicity of orders and estates became one only in the presence of the King. The relationship between the pluralistic social order and royal sovereignty provided the logic of political order of the old regime.

In the eighteenth century the *Parlement* of Paris claimed to represent the King to the nation and the Nation to the King. Over time the idea of Parliamentary unity came to be derived not from the unity and indivisibility of the royal authority but from the unity and indivisibility of the Nation. This was a major threat to royal sovereignty, as it implied the displacement of the principle of unity from the King to the nation. This shift which occurred before the calling of the General Estates proved crucial, though all parliamentary claims became redundant as the Third Estate undermined all its claims of representing the nation.

Changes in the acceptable form of political structure can be traced much before the calling of the Estates General or the formation of the National Assembly. The theory of Social Representation put forward by Mirabeau, draws from the theory of Physiocracy. He stated that the preservation of society was possible only by the maintenance of a permanent common interest, which could be found only in the institution of property. He therefore by establishing the rights of property as fundamental for any society, subsumed the traditional rights and privileges under the law. Thus, it envisaged participation in the government on the basis of property and not privilege. This led to a new line of reasoning and public discussions as to how can the Frenchmen participate in the workings of the government.

William.H.Sewell, Jr, in this brilliant paper looks at the ideological base of the revolutionary process.¹⁵ He traces the ideological bases of the different phases of the Revolution. The revolution was a result of the ideological undermining of the Monarchical ideology by the Enlightenment ideology. The Enlightenment contradicted the ideology of the monarchical state as it insisted on the universal applicability of reason. The new Enlightenment ideas, vocabulary and metaphors were adopted by the social and economic elites of the Old Regime, who had the greatest stake in the existing system. According to him nowhere was the ideological character of the revolutionary crisis more clear than in the calling of the Estates General, the reviving of which was an ideological necessity. The calling of the Estates General can be looked at in ideological terms as 'a consultation of the national will or as an invitation to revise the social contract.'¹⁶ Looking at it in terms of ideology, the crisis of the old regime liberated the Enlightenment ideology from absolutism and made it possible to restructure the state in Enlightenment terms.

The Legislative Assembly passed a number of decrees in an attempt at centralization and standardization, which also reflected the abstract thinking of the Enlightenment. The most important decrees passed were, the August Decree, the decree abolishing nobility, the *Loi le Chapelier*, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the

¹⁵ William H. Sewell, Jr, 'Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case' in T.C.W. BLanning, ed., *The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution*, (Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp.285-313.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.296.

Civil Constitution of the Clergy. The August Decree abolished Nobility and all kinds of privileges, venality of judicial and municipal offices and 'financial privileges, whether related to persons or to land, in matters of taxation are abolished for all time'.¹⁷

The night of August fourth was a crucial turning point in the course of the Revolution politically as well as ideologically. The decree abolished not only seigneurialism but the entire privileged corporate order. The result of the decree was that 'the entire array of corporate institutions and the privileges that had fixed their place in the state had been formally annihilated. What remained was the uncluttered Enlightenment ideal of equal individual citizens governed by laws that applied to all and represented by a National Assembly that expressed their general will.'¹⁸ The destruction of privilege meant the destruction of the entire 'spirit-centered conceptual world'¹⁹ and its replacement by a new natural world of the Enlightenment. Sewell puts the ideological transformation of the state marked by the August decree, into perspective when he states, 'August fourth marked the end of one ideological dynamic - the tension between Enlightenment and corporate monarchical principles. But it also inaugurated another: the elaboration of Enlightenment metaphysical principles into a new revolutionary social and political structure.'²⁰

The political writings of Abbe Sieyes, help us understand the extent and the kind of influence the philosophes and the Enlightenment had, if any, on the Revolution and the leaders of the Revolution. For the initial stages of the Revolution, Sieyes provides a good example because he was in the thick of the Revolution, not only in terms of experience but also in terms of providing direction to it and analysing the events and political circumstances of the period. He was a political thinker more than a philosopher and thus contributed to the Revolution in tangible terms. Sieyes was thoroughly familiar with the works of the most important Enlightenment philosophers, Voltaire, Montesquieu and Rousseau. To say that he was influenced by their writings would not be the whole truth; he critically engaged with their writings and was thoroughly critical of Montesquieu. He

¹⁷ quoted in *The French Revolution Source book*, ed. John Hardman (Arnold, London, 1981)

¹⁸ Sewell.H.William, 'Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case.', in *The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution* ed. T.C.W.Blanning, (Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.297.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*p.298.

was a persistent opponent of the English model of government and its 'balance of powers', which Montesquieu considered to be the best form of government.

Rousseau's philosophy in the *Du Contract Social* offered a complete anti-thesis of the political and social order of the Old Regime. He transferred sovereignty from the person of the monarch to the body of citizens as a whole and thus, the subjects were transferred into citizens and France became a Nation. Apart from condemning the transfer of sovereignty to the person of the monarch, he also condemned the idea of representative government, which according to him was incompatible with the sovereignty of the general will. "*A l'instant qu'un peuple se donne des Représentant, il n'est plus libre, il n'est plus.*"²¹ According to him sovereignty could not be alienated or represented.

Considering Rousseau's role in the French Revolution as a whole, one can say that there was a continuous influence of Rousseau's ideas on the revolutionary movement from 1788 onwards, but different aspects of his teachings were taken up and brought to the fore at different times. What is important to note is that his philosophical ideas and text remained the same yet they were interpreted and put to use differently at different points of time. Thus the 'Rousseauism' of the early years, till 1791 was different from that of the period after 1792. Gordon .H. McNeil in his article, 'The Cult of Rousseau and the French Revolution'²², states that the cult of Rousseau had two phases, one literary and the other political. In the literary cult Rousseau was admired not for his political writings like the *Social Contract* but for his emotional novels, *Nouvelle Heloise* and *Emile*. He came to be admired for his literary skills and the cult was purely literary in nature. Many of the admirers like, Brissot, Mme. Roland, Mirabeau, Babeuf and others came to play important role in the politics of the period. When the Revolution came in 1789, the polite society soon discovered Rousseau's political treatises and the political cult of Rousseau as the author of the *Social Contract* took the place of the literary cult. According to Gordon .H. McNeil, the political cult was the result of the Revolution and that 'instead of Rousseau making the Revolution, it would seem that the Revolution made Rousseau, or

²¹ Rousseau, Jean Jacques, *Du contract social*, ed. Maurice Halbwachs (Paris, 1943), p.340, quoted in 'Representation' in *The French Revolution and the Creation of the Modern Political Culture*, ed. Keith Michael Baker ,(Oxford: Pergamon Press), 1994, p.479.

²² McNeil, H.Gordon, 'The Cult of Rousseau and the French Revolution, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 6. No.2. (April, 1945), pp.197-212.

at least his reputation as a political philosopher'.²³ Before 1789, the political cult was non-existent. Making this clear he states that the *Social Contract* had not been reprinted since 1775, and not even in 1788-89. It was only in the year 1790 that four separate editions of the *Social Contract* were published and three more in 1791. It was published thirteen times between 1792 and 1795. He calls it an impersonal mass phenomenon and a cult in which a people admired a figure even without knowing what he had written or said. To his political disciples Rousseau and his *Social Contract* were merely weapons for ideological battles. Impressing on the range of his political disciples, he states, 'Rousseau was adopted as a symbol at one time or another by all the political factions from conservative anti revolutionaries to radical democrats.'²⁴ He states that being an expression of first one faction and then another, the political cult could never develop an identity of its own, though we know that the Republic of 1793-4 came to be associated with Rousseau and his ideology of *vertu*. The Jacobins were considered to be the disciples of Rousseau, and his followers could be found in every part of the party. There was the radical Marat, who was considered to be among the few who appreciated Rousseau's *Social Contract*. Of the Dantonist moderates, Hérault de Séchelles and Camille Desmoulins were disciples. Maximilien Robespierre was the most famous disciple of them all. The Jacobin followers of Robespierre and Saint-Just, who sent the Girondins to the Guillotine in 1793-4, bitterly denounced the Philosophes and Encyclopédistes. The men of letters were looked at as traitors, atheists and materialists and enemies of virtue. Robespierre saw his enemies as "the most scheming, the cleverest", who "favour with all their power the rich egoists and the enemies of equality."²⁵ Yet they used one major Enlightenment Philosopher extensively, Rousseau, even obsessively.

This progressive radicalisation of the Revolution from 1789 to the 'Terror' of 1793-4 is one of the most familiar features of the French Revolution. The outbreak of the international war and internal social and economic difficulties are considered to be the reason for such radicalisation, an attempt to preserve the revolution. The 'Terror',

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Blum, Carol, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue: The Language of Politics in the French Revolution* (Ithaca, New York, 1986), p.186, 175.

developed inevitably out of the ideology of the revolution. According to Furet, 'the Terror was generated by a continuing dialectic between the notion of the general will and the aristocratic plot, and was implicit in revolutionary ideology from the beginning. Although the Terror developed through the 'circumstances' of the war and attending political struggles, its dynamic was essentially internal and ideological.'²⁶ Furet states that before becoming a set of repressive institutions used by the Republic to suppress their political opponents on the basis of fear, the 'Terror was a demand based on political convictions or beliefs, a characteristic feature of the mentality of revolutionary activism'.²⁷ Bringing the Marxist structuralist view and ideology together, Sewell states that, 'class struggles and the exigencies of war pushed the Revolution to ever more radical measures and the way in which struggles and exigencies were interpreted and acted upon were largely determined by the structure of revolutionary ideology.'²⁸

This period saw politics had permeated every aspect of life; this has been discussed as the creation of a new political culture. Lynn Hunt and Mona Ozouf talk of the politicisation of language, symbols and festivals as mediums of a political discourse. Related to these aspects is the growth of the Public sphere and Public opinion. In coining the term *ancien régime*, for example the French Revolution defined itself in contradiction to the old social and political order it claimed to be destroying. In this sense the very concept of the Old Regime was the creation of the Revolution itself. The kind of a politicisation of society and public sphere, in the late revolutionary period transformed into political associations and groups, similar to political parties of today, with concrete political ideologies and agendas. The clubs were then the equivalent of our present political parties; they were formed in various parts of the city; the earliest ones arose at the period of the first session of the Constituent Assembly. Their destiny reflects the entire history of the French revolution. At first the Clubs were called the "Association of Friends of the Constitution" and all the shades of the National Assembly were represented in them. The later course of the revolution made them split repeatedly.

²⁶ Francois, Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, (Cambridge, 1981) pp.61-63.

²⁷ Furet, François, 'Terror' in *The French Revolution: In Social and Political Perspective*, ed. Peter Jones (Arnold, 1996), p.451.

²⁸ Sewell, H. William, 'Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case.', in *The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution* ed. T.C.W. Blanning, (Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.302.

Jacobin Clubs with the mother club in Paris, known as the *Société des Amis de la Constitution, séante aux Jacobins à Paris*; from 21st September 1792 onwards, the *Société des Jacobins, Amis de la Liberté et l'Egalité*.

The Feuillants enthusiastically advocated a peaceful, moderate monarchy; the Girondins dreamed of a republic of wages; the left Jacobins of a sovereignty of the poorest strata of the population; the Hebertistes of a republic safeguarded by an equality of possessions; each of these factions went to the scaffold with its illusions, embracing death in a complete faith in the correctness and immortality of its ideas. Robespierre's demands were taken over by Babeuf in his Conspiracy of Equals, it was further disseminated by Buonarroti, it became a constituent part of French Socialism and the ideological basis of the revolutions of 1830, 1848 and 1871. It was critically annexed by Karl Marx; and thus Robespierre and the Jacobins are a part of the tradition of the Revolution, an element in the new world order as Marx puts it.²⁹

The period of the French revolution is characterized by public debate and discussions on various political, social and economic issues but the most burning question of the day was related to the founding of a legitimate political body. In order to grasp this question it was understood that it was necessary to return to principles elaborated by political philosophy in the period of the Enlightenment. The intellectual heritage of Montesquieu and Rousseau, of Locke and Mably had to be reexamined in the context of the new problems prompted by the 'regeneration of the French', in order to make a new start and redefine the very principles of its political existence. From the discussions and debates of that period one finds that the people instead of finding the intricate constitutional problems tiresome in nature, found them of passionate interest. There was an attempt to reduce all that was in dispute to the basic question of the recasting of power. The very legitimacy of the political regime was questioned.

The first Chapter deals with historiography, the way the concept of Revolution has been looked at and understood by various scholars. I then look at the manner in which the French revolution has been interpreted and analyzed by scholars over the years, the various theories put forth and the debates that ensued.

²⁹ *ibid*, p.30.

In the second chapter, *Ideological Currents in Pre Revolutionary Era*, I deal with the different ideologies and the various shades of ideas that emanated from the Enlightenment and other discourses. The thinkers that I propose to look at are primarily Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesquieu. They reflected on a number of subjects but I will concentrate mostly on their political writings. For example the various works of Montesquieu include *Letters persanes*, *Reflexions sur le caractere de queques princes*, *Sur la monarchie universelle en Europe*, *Considerations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et leur decadence*, *Essai sur les causes qui peuvent affecter les esprits et le caracteres*, and the most important for my topic being *L'esprit des Lois*, which is a political discourse and discusses the ideas of democracy, monarchy, aristocracy among other things.³⁰ Rousseau's writings include novels like *Nouvelle Heloise* and *Emile*, because of which Rousseau came to be admired for his literary skills.³¹ When the revolution came in 1789, Rousseau's political treatises were soon discovered and the political cult of Rousseau as the author of the *Contract social* took the place of the literary cult. Rousseau and his *Contract social* came to be used by his political disciples as weapons of ideological battles. It is the *Contract social* that I look at in order to understand the concepts of the nation, sovereignty, representation and the general will. Reference to the *Contract Social* occurs constantly in the innumerable writings of the period, as in the debates of the National Assembly. The concept was as widespread as it was vague. There was common agreement on the universality of the contractual principle as the basis of all legitimate political bodies as well as on the urgent need to put the current regime of French society in accord with it. The capital importance of the *Contract social*, inspite of its many implications and ramifications, in the formation of the political culture of the Revolution cannot be denied.

The third Chapter, *Changing State Structure and the Ideology of Modern Nation*, deals with the interface between ideology and political action. In this chapter I discuss the influence of ideology on the course of the Revolutions and the various aspects of it; the

³⁰ There are discussions on *Des Lois en général, des loi qui dérivent directement de la nature du Gouvernement, Du gouvernant républicain et des lois relatives a la démocratie, Du principe de la démocratie, Du principe de l'aristocratie, Du principe de la monarchie, Des lois relatives a la nature de l'Etat despotique, Comment les lois établissent l'égalité dans la démocratie*, discussing the difference between the nature of governments and their principles.

ideological restructuring of not only the political state structure but also socially. I have discussed the various ideological variants and ideological outcomes of the Revolution. The meanings of this new political culture varied by class, gender and region; they also left a legacy of contrasting ideologies, none of which could claim to represent the aspirations of a majority of French people. Political upheavals and divisions left a legacy of memories and conflicting ideologies which has lasted until our times: from communism to authoritarian royalism via liberal constitutionalism and social democracy. Memories of the Terror, and mass conscription were etched deep into the memories of every individual and community. French people were to remain divided about the political system best able to reconcile authority, liberty and equality. There were important questions that needed to be answered such as - How was equality to be understood: as equality before the law, of political rights, of social status, of economic well being, of the races or of the sexes? Revolutionary ideology is important to understand the course of the French Revolution. But it is important to note that the Enlightenment political ideology was itself transformed by the struggles of the Revolution resulting in the appearance of certain new ideological discourses. Discussing this William Sewell states that one of the most important ideological products of the Revolution was the idea of revolution itself. The events of 1789-1794 introduced the modern notion of Revolution to the world. 'Revolution was henceforth inseparable from the exercise of popular sovereignty.'³² It was only after 1789 that Revolutions came to be defined as not something that happened unpredictably but something that could be foreseen and planned. This kind of an understanding of a 'revolution', transformed politics not only in France but in the whole world. Now one of the concerns of the governments was to protect the state against revolution. Another discourse produced by the Revolution as discussed earlier was that of Nation and Nationalism. This was of central importance to the political theory of the Revolution from the very beginning. It has been argued that the ideological outcomes of the Revolution were even more important than its class or state building outcome.

³² Sewell.H.William, 'Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case.', in *The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution* ed. T.C.W.Blanning, (Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.310.

The fourth chapter, *Creation of a New Political Ideology – Nationalism, Popular Sovereignty and Representation* deals with the emergence of various issues like the concepts of sovereignty, representation, citizenship and the nation, the origin of these political ideas and how they were understood by the political leaders of the period. In order to elaborate on this idea and clarify my point I have very briefly contrasted the political works, of one of the most significant political thinker of the Enlightenment period, Rousseau, especially the *Contract Social*, with the political thought of Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès or Abbe Sieyès, who is considered to be the most important political thinkers of the period of the revolution. It cannot be contested and therefore there is no need to prove or trace Rousseau's influence on Sieyès. The political writers of the period knew all these works admirably well, profited from them and made them available to public opinion. Sieyès took from the *Contract Social* a question fundamental to a new political space, that of modern democracy and he provided his own answers to that question. He was an original political thinker and he gave a conceptual form to an entirely new set of problems purely political in nature, related to the invention of Democracy, an experience new in history. One of his most important writings of the period is *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-Etat? Or What is the Third Estate?* Sieyès may have worked on the same grounds that Rousseau had broken, but he did not repeat the arguments. He made free use of Rousseau's works, drawing from them concepts like that of the social contract, the idea of sovereign general will, indivisible and inalienable and more. I also discuss the emergence of the modern nation state in France. The transformation of the above ideas during the course of the revolution as reflected in the changing political structure of the state. The emergence of the idea of the Nation and Nationalism and the role of the revolution in the creation of a Modern French Nation.

The most revolutionary transformation of the French Revolution was that from Subject to citizen. The assumption that the sovereign will lay in a body politic of citizens rather than in a hierarchy of appointment speaks of an irreversible transformation of political culture. The evaporation by 1792 of the mystique of divine right monarchy was the most fundamental shift in popular understanding of power. Even the seizure of power

by Napoleon in 1799 and the restoration of monarchy in 1814 could not reverse assumptions of citizenship, even if democratic republicanism could be outlawed.³³

Collective practices in thousands of clubs, section meetings and 41,000 local councils introduced millions of people to the language and forms of popular sovereignty. The language of rights, freedom, sovereignty and equality expressed change in consciousness. Not only had the democratization of politics introduced unprecedented numbers of people to the practice of popular sovereignty. The *société populaire* of Chauny, a town of 3,000 people in the Aisne, met three to four times weekly between July 1791 and November 1794. Whether they were 'patriotic', anti-revolutionary or counter-revolutionary, all French people now lived within radically changed structures and understandings of political power and its administration.

The revolution was not only a turning point in the uniformity of State institutions, but, for the first time, the State was also understood as representing a more emotional entity, 'the nation', based on citizenship. This aspect has been dealt with in detail and a lot of authority by David Bell in his book, *The Cult of the Nation in France*.³⁴ It is for this reason that the French Revolution is often seen by historians as the seed-bed of modern Nationalism.

³³ Richard Cobb, *The police and the People: French Popular Protest 1789-1820* (Oxford, 1970), part I.

³⁴ Bell, David A, *The Cult of the Nation in France, Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800* (London: England, Harvard University Press, 2001).

Chapter II

The French Revolution: A Historical Perspective

“il n’y avait donc pas un Français qui ne fut convaincu qu’il n’allait pas seulement s’agir de changer le gouvernement de la France, mais d’introduire dans le monde de nouveaux principes de gouvernement applicables à tout les peuples et destinés à renouveler la face entière des affaires humainesce ne fut qu’un moment; mais je doute qu’il s’en soit jamais rencontré de pareil dans la vie d’aucun peuple”¹

Tocqueville had made the above statement emphasising the significance of the French Revolution, which is one of the most important periods in Modern History. The period of the revolution, the political, social, cultural, religious and economical aspects of it have been thoroughly discussed, interpreted and debated by historians for over two centuries and therefore the literature available and the diversity of opinion on the subject is incomparable.

In the following chapter on historiography I trace the changing character of the opinions on the revolution, its origins and the course that it took. The French Revolution is seen as heralding a new era, as it swept away the old order in France and replaced it with a succession of new regimes, each ultimately being unable to gain consensus and provide stability. The period was thus a period of political transformation, a restructuring of the political framework and therefore of all the values that it was based on. This transformation was not something that happened unconsciously as they were all conscious of being a part of the same great project, to regenerate France, indeed humanity in order to create a new world. This conscious transformation of the established system brings in the much debated question of the intellectual origins of the French revolution. The revolution is identified with changes in the socio- political structure such as equality before the law, the abolition of the vestiges of the feudal regime of peasant dues and services and opportunity to new social groups to exercise power and the creation of the fundamental division between the left and the right which still characterizes modern

¹ (*Ancien Regime*, vol II, p.132) quoted in Alan, Kahan, ‘Tocqueville’s Two Revolutions’, *Journal of History of Ideas*, Vol.46, No.4.(Oct-Dec.,1985),pp. 585-596.



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politics.² A revolution is therefore characterised by changes in the existing structure as Isser Woloch puts it, 'Revolutions entail avowals that fundamental changes in political institutions or social relations cannot be negotiated against the resistance of existing power structures.'³ It is related to concepts of freedom, independence and liberty. 'Revolution and the Meanings of freedom in the nineteenth Century', ed. Isser Woloch is a very interesting study on this interface between revolution and freedom. In this work he takes revolution as 'the vantage point for examining contested and alternative notions of freedom in the nineteenth century.'⁴ To the historians interested in the development of Freedom in the nineteenth century, Revolution imposes itself as a subject for at least two reasons. First, besides forging a model of civic and social transformations in France, the French Revolution and its Napoleonic sequel etched the possibilities and perils of dramatic change in European consciousness. Secondly, the remarkable confluence of revolutions that swept across the continent in 1848, with a pan European simultaneity that had no parallel until 1989, demonstrates the centrality of the Revolutionary option in the European experience, even if those revolutions did not prove to be a turning point comparable to 1789.

Theories of Revolution:

Clearly a number of diverse factors operating in a number of diverse ways cause revolutions. Different scholars, working- within different frames of reference, have simply selected those aspects which seem most important to them. Their critics view these as manifestations of revolutionary action and not as the primary motivating factors. Each explanation offers insights and in some combination may form a generally accepted theory of the causes of revolution. The synthesis, however, has not yet been developed.

The nineteenth century produced several major theories of revolutionary causation. Marx developed a socioeconomic dialectic that saw revolution as the result of the inevitable conflict between classes for the means of production. He argued that private property produces revolution. To Tocqueville revolution resulted from a demand for

² Campbell, Robert Peter, *The Origins of the French Revolution*, pg. 1.

³ Isser Woloch, ed., 'Revolution and the Meanings of Freedom in the Nineteenth Century', (Stanford University Press, California), 1996. p.2

⁴ Isser Woloch, ed., 'Revolution and the Meanings of Freedom in the Nineteenth Century', (Stanford University Press, California), 1996. p.1

accelerated social and economic progress in a society already gradually moving in these directions. In his mind, revolution was tied to increasing prosperity. Both theories remain influential. Others which stress conspiratorial causation or other monistic explanations have generally been abandoned by serious scholars.

Recent theories of revolutionary causation emphasize multiple rather than mono-causal explanations. One of the most influential interpretations is that proposed by James.S Davies, who, in effect combining the theoretical explanations of Marx and Tocqueville, argues that revolution is most likely to occur when a prolonged period of objective economic and social development is followed by a short period of sharp reversal. The idea of the possibility of progress combined with the probability of regression leads to the outbreak of revolutionary violence. Although the theory describes with some accuracy a pre- or proto revolutionary society, it fails to explain why some societies and not others experiencing similar developments follow different patterns and avoid revolutions. Attitudes and how they are formed by objective conditions obviously play a major role, but the theory does not discuss who develops these attitudes, why they and not others develop, and why specific actions are taken because of them.

A final group, which includes Rude, Gun and Wolfenstein, concerns itself primarily with the intentions of the revolutionary participants and the motivations for their actions. They employ psychological explanations and tend to see revolution primarily as a product of idealism and personality.

Many attempts have been made to differentiate between and categorize Revolutions on the basis of a wide variety of criteria. These classification systems are generally based on particular conceptualizations of revolution as primarily political, social or ideological conflicts, the definition of revolution determining the characteristics selected to differentiate between movements apparently similar in other respects.

Several recent areas of study attempt to avoid problems of typology, theoretical causation and comparative development. They argue that greater understanding is possible not by examining revolutions as a distinct class of events to be studied separately, but by placing revolution in a broader historical context. Accepting the fact that revolutions occur and that some movements are universally seen as revolutions, they depict certain individual revolutions as parts of a larger revolutionary movement or an

age of revolution, and stress the trans-national or international character of the great revolutions.

R. R. Palmer, He views the late eighteenth-century revolutions as parts of a much larger movement, originating around 1760 and lasting until 1800 or 1801 that bound together the American and French experiences with those taking place in the Low Countries, Switzerland and parts of the Holy Roman Empire. All of these, he argues, involved a contest between aristocratic forces, values, groups and institutions and their democratic counterparts.

Rejecting the contention that European conservatism arose as a reaction to the democratic forces generated by the French Revolution, he instead suggests that both aristocratic and democratic forces were on the rise after 1760 and that the revolutionary politics of the era stemmed from the clashes of these two movements.

Palmer's thesis of a world revolution has come under close scrutiny by other scholars. George Rude, for example, challenges it on the basis of important categorical differences he finds between the French Revolution and the conflicts that preceded and followed it. He argues that insurgents in other countries, following the French lead, succeeded to any extent in toppling the old regimes only because they cooperated with the invading French armies and were, in any case, too weak to survive without French military and political support. He does find indigenous revolutionary movements in Liege, Brussels and Geneva, but he questions their democratic character as well as the common nature of these and other upheavals.

Palmer himself sees the French Revolution as the central event in the international upsurge of revolution extending over America and Europe, and he does not deny the impact of the French experience on subsequent movements. He does argue, however, that the roots of many of the others often antedated events in France and he notes that certain upheavals actually predate the outbreak of French revolutionary violence. In any event, the movements, whether or not they owed their success to the Army of the Republic, shared common origins and common goals. Of primary importance in evaluating Palmer's thesis is the fact that he discusses only in passing the larger problem of revolution itself and thereby fails to establish the conceptual framework necessary to test his hypotheses.

Several recent and important works have placed the study of revolution in the larger context of the process of modernization. These seek to explain the method of transition from traditional agrarian to modern industrial society as experienced by a number of countries. And they view revolution as crucial to this process, and modernization as the most important consequence of revolutionary activity. Although the question of whether revolution leads to modernization or vice versa has not been completely answered, the relationship between the two phenomena has been successfully established. The suggestion that the type of revolutionary movement a society experiences determines the nature of its modernized political, economic and social systems seems reasonable and explains much.

The work by Moore in this area of study is exemplary. He identified four basic patterns in the modernization process, three of which involve attempts at revolution. Nations that experienced what he calls a successful bourgeois revolution, such as England and France, develop capitalism and democracy of the Western style. Those countries in which a bourgeois revolution failed, such as Japan or Germany, still developed capitalistic systems, but with much weaker democratic features. Societies in which the revolution was proletarian or peasant rather than essentially middle class in origin developed communist regimes that forced the nation into modernization, examples being Russia and China. Where no revolution has taken place, the impulse to modernize, where present, is weak. Moore does not suggest a general theory of revolution, but instead presents a number of generalizations about the process of modernization in which revolution holds the central and crucial position. In the larger historical frame, revolution becomes the deciding factor in the course of subsequent developments. Although he argues that modernization is not dependent upon revolution, Moore suggests that its achievement through other means creates far different and much weaker systems.

Huntington also examines revolution in the context of modernization and he believes that the process itself produces revolution, which in turn sweeps away obstacles to its continuation. Social and economic changes that accompany modernization, such as industrialization, urbanization, increasing education, literacy and improved communications create a rise in political consciousness, a mobilization of new groups into politics and an increase in political demands, developments with which the

traditional ruling institutions are unable to come to terms. The resulting strains on the institutional structure lead to instability, disorder and revolution if left uncorrected. Because he views revolution as an aspect of the process of modernization, Huntington argues that its outbreak is unlikely in highly traditional societies or in highly modern ones. It is also improbable in a democratic or a communistic political system since each, he suggests, has the ability to adjust to new developments and to absorb any new groups produced by them. Theda Skocpol in her book, *Social Revolutions in the modern World by Explaining Revolutions: In quest of a social-structural approach*, defines the French revolution, as she does the Chinese and the Russian revolution as 'rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures, accompanied and in part accomplished by popular revolts from below. Autocratic and partially bureaucratized monarchies in predominantly agrarian societies were transformed through state breakdowns, elite conflicts and popular revolts into more centralized, bureaucratized and mass-incorporating national states. In the case of France, the revolutionary conflicts gave rise to three distinct post revolutionary regime: a nationalist and militaristic bureaucratic state coexisting with capitalist private property. She argues that *state organizations* – and especially the administrative and coercive organizations that make up the core of all imperial and national states- should be place at the very center of all attempts to define and explain social revolutions. Social revolutions could not happen without the breakdown of the administrative and coercive powers of an old regime and their transformation in large parts was accomplished by through conflicts over the reconstitution of coercive and administrative state organizations.

Quoting Huntington, she states that the most difficult revolutions to explain are the social revolutions, in which societal political conflicts occurring in conjuncture with class upheavals from below lead to "rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths in a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership and government activities and policies" (Huntington, 1968: 264).

Most recent attempts to explain either revolutions per se, or some broader class of phenomenon explicitly conceived as subsuming revolutions, can be identified primarily with one or another of three major approaches: a) aggregate-psychological theories, which attempt to explain revolutions in terms of people's motivations for engaging in

political violence or joining oppositional movements; b) systems/value consensus theories, which attempt to explain revolutions as violent responses of ideological movements to severe disequilibrium in social systems; c) political conflict theories, which argue that conflict between governments and organized groups contending for political power must be placed in the center of attention. According to Theda, the recent social scientific theories of Revolution in fact fail to elucidate or explain revolutions. Existing theories attempt to explain the revolutions through hypotheses about the situation and states of mind of rebellious masses or the emergence of consciously revolutionary vanguards, rather than through hypotheses about patterns of institutional development in specific types of complex societies in given sorts of historical circumstances. Methodologically the difficulty lies with attempts to explain revolutions directly in terms of abstract, deductive hypotheses about human behaviour or societal process in general. She argues a major theoretical reorientation – away from social psychological and universalist-deductive modes of explanation and towards a structural and comparative- historical approach.

The first approach explains the revolutions as a result of discontent, it being the root of the Revolution. It then seeks to explicate this premise with the aid of psychological theories that link frustration to violence, aggressive behaviour against the perceived agents of frustration. Such a focus is interested in explaining the “destructiveness” of revolutions, an aspect shared with other kinds of events and not the amounts or kinds of societal change that revolutions, specifically bring about. She examines, Ted Robert Gurr’s book, *Why Men Rebel*, in which revolutions are explained merely, ‘as responses to widespread and intense relative deprivation that touches both masses and marginal elites thus creating at once both widespread participation in and deliberate organisation of violence.

While *mass discontent* is the crucial factor for explaining revolutions for frustration –aggression theorists, *systemic crisis* and, especially, *revolutionary ideology* are the key factors for systemic /value consensus theorists. She examines the book of political scientist Chalmers Johnson, *Revolutionary Change* (1996). For Johnson revolution “is a special kind of social change, one that involves the intrusion of violence into civil social relations” which normally function to restrict violence. However he considers violence

not as an emotional urge but rather as a strategy intended to accomplish change involving societal reconstruction along with destruction. Therefore, he concludes that the analysis and explanation of revolution must be done with reference to some theory of social structure. According to him crisis in a society develops whenever a society's values and environment become significantly desynchronized "the single most generalised character of the disequibrated system is that values no longer provide an acceptable symbolic definition and explanation for existence." "As a result "personal disequilibrium" is experienced and there is an increase of individual and group behaviour heretofore considered "deviant" in terms of the previous value consensus.(p.105)

According to Theda, no systems/value-consensus advocate has confronted historical materials with two straight forward questions: Are Revolutions really made by ideological movements, consisting of elites and masses committed to alternative societal values? Are there cases where ideological movements have been strong – as strong as or stronger than they have been in successful revolutions – but where no revolutions have resulted, even after a considerable time lag?

According to her, 'in no successful revolution till date has it been true that a mass – based movement sharing a revolutionary ideology has in any way made the revolution. Revolutionary ideologies and charismatic leaders have in some instances helped to cement the solidarity of radical vanguards before and during revolutionary crisis and have greatly facilitated the institution of new national patterns afterwards.'(p.107). In the French Revolution the emergence of the revolutionary crisis in 1788-1789 stimulated the articulation and widespread acceptance of the initial revolutionary ideology, rather than vice versa, as the systems/value – consensus theory would suggest.

The political conflict perspective: To explain collective violence or revolutions, aggregate – psychological and systems/value – consensus theorists alike end up focusing on discontent or disorientation and relegating institutional and organizational factors to the role of intervening variables. But writers converging on the political conflict perspective argue that instead there should be an emphasis on the role of organised group conflicts for political goals. In such an explanation, discontent re-emerges as a central explanatory factor – only with the dependant variable no longer violent behaviour but, instead, acquiescence in the support of a revolutionary elite, coalition, or organization.

There is another tension in this perspective, because emphasis is placed on organized political activity, the state becomes central. The argument is that structural transformations of state have provided the opportunities and provocations for a large proportion of violent political conflicts, that agents of the state are the most active perpetrators of violence; and that war bears a crucial relationship to revolution, both through its impact upon coercive capacities and through its effects on governmental demands upon subject populations. The state is not seen as determining by its own strength or weakness whether or not a revolutionary situation can emerge at all. Instead it is portrayed as an organization competing for popular support on more or less equal terms with one or more fully formed revolutionary organizations or blocs. Societal members can choose freely between either thus determining a revolutionary situation will develop or not.

While the political conflict perspective theorists explicitly reject the notions of discontent or disoriented or morally outraged people directly turning to revolutionary behaviour that destroys or overturns the regime or the social system, nevertheless they maintain a largely social-psychological perspective on the causes of the revolution. For they maintain the image of organised, conscious revolutionaries arising to challenge governmental organisations through appeals for social support from discontented or ideologically converted people.

According to Theda all the approaches paint a similar overall picture of the Revolution: First changes in or affecting societies, social systems, or populations give rise to grievances, social disorientation, or new groups or potentials for collective mobilisation. Then there emerges a broadly based movement, coalescing with the aid of ideology and organisation - which consciously undertakes the overthrow of the government, and perhaps the entire social order. Finally the revolutionary movement fights it out with the government and if it wins, undertakes to establish its own control, authority or programme of societal transformation. What no one ever seems to doubt is that the basic condition for the occurrence of a revolution is the emergence from society or a people of a deliberate effort, tying together leaders and followers, aimed at overthrowing the existing political order. But according to Theda the assumptions about societal order and change are internally contradictory.

According to her, “in any revolutionary crisis, differently situated and motivated groups become participants in a complex unfolding of multiple conflicts that ultimately give rise to outcomes not originally foreseen or intended by any of the groups involved.” (p.111)

In examining the nature of revolution, scholars have reached little agreement. They concur that revolutions have taken place and that a few movements, at least, have been revolutions; but beyond this they disagree on just what has taken place, how it did so, why it did so, what results it produced, and whether or not these results could or would have been achieved in any case and under other circumstances. Terminology remains a basic problem. No consensus exists as to just how to define revolution. Most definitions have been tautologies, characteristics selected because they are found in specific movements and specific movements chosen to support the definition because they manifest those characteristics. The first step for the study of revolution is developing a conceptual framework that does not simply acknowledge previous acceptance of this or that movement as a revolution.

When we look at the French Revolution in particular, we see that in recent times there have been remarkable changes in the manner in which historians are approaching the study of the French Revolution and its origins. In the most general terms the shift can be characterized as a shift from Marx to Tocqueville, from a basically social approach to the subject to a basically political one. The social interpretation started with the assumption that the Revolution marked the critical point of transition from a feudal to capitalist society; that it was a product of the long term social changes usually summed up in the notion of the rise of the bourgeoisie; and that its fundamental significance lay in the creation of a political and legal order appropriate to the needs and interests of the new dominant class. Thus the principal aim, in explaining the revolution was to derive its character as a political event from social phenomenon that were held to be more basic. This was to be achieved by tracking economic and social changes in eighteenth century French society; by identifying the latent social conflicts that found open political expression in 1789; and by reading off the subsequent political history of the revolution from the class conflicts initiated by the efforts of the bourgeoisie to throw off the remnants of a feudal regime and institute a political order that would ensure it

dominance. The year 1789, in other words, was seen as the moment of rupture; the point at which subterranean social developments that had long undermined the foundations of the Old Regime broke to the surface and swept away the entire political superstructure.

More recent studies, however, have moved in the direction of placing revolution in broader contexts. There have been revolutions as long as there have been systems against which to rebel, and the subject has interested historians and political scientists from the beginnings of their disciplines.

Both Plato and Aristotle examined the phenomenon.³ Their concepts of revolution differ strikingly from those of modern scholars, but they remain among the first in a long line that includes Polybius, Cicero, Machiavelli, Harrington, Clarendon, Hobbes and Montesquieu, all of whom examined revolutionary change at least in passing and who occasionally threw some light on its meaning before it became a central preoccupation of historiography in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Thus the studies on revolution generally fall into one of two broad categories. First are those works that are historical in the strictest sense and directed at the investigation of a specific, individual revolutionary movement, or a single aspect of a particular revolution. Generally narrative, occasionally synthetic, these works seek to outline the course of events of a revolution and to explain its development in terms of unique causal relationships.⁶ While some of these histories, such as Tocqueville's *Old Regime and the French Revolution*, do propose theoretical explanations applicable to other movements, they usually make no attempt to formulate a general theory of revolution. Tocqueville was the first to write the history of the ideology of the revolution, which implied a recourse to sources other than the government archives exploited before 1856, and consequently new difficulties of which Tocqueville was very soon conscious: "since my goal is much more to paint the movement of the feeling and ideas which successively produced the events of the Revolution than to recount the events themselves, it is much less historical documents that I need than writings in which the public mind manifested itself at each period, newspapers, pamphlets, private letters, administrative correspondence, he wrote on 6th October 1856.⁵

⁵ Tocqueville to George Cornewall Lewis quoted in 'excerpts from his correspondence', in *The Two Tocqueville*, edited and translated by R.R.Palmer. p.232

In another letter to Louis de Kergolay, he states, “You know what I am looking for in these readings is less the facts than signs of the movement of ideas and feelings. That is what I want to depict: the successive changes in the social state, the institutions, the mindset and the general outlook and behavior of the French as the Revolution proceeds. That is my subject.”⁶

In the same correspondence stating his inability to grasp the Revolution in its totality, he states, “It is a virus of a new and unknown kind. There have been violent revolutions in the world, but the character of these revolutionaries is so immoderate, violent, radical, desperate, audacious, almost insane yet powerful and effective as to have no precedents, it seems to me, in the great social agitations of the past. Where did this new race come from? Who produced it? Who made it so effective? Who perpetuates it? For we are still facing men like this, although the circumstances are different, and they have left their descendants throughout the civilized world.”⁷

For Tocqueville neither the economic fluctuations, nor individuals, nor plots held any weight. He does not make class struggle the primary cause of the Revolution. In this he breaks from the liberal tradition. According to him, 1789 was not the end of the long struggle of the third estate against the privileged, but the result of the despotic education of the nation, which made the peaceful satisfaction of the republican desire for freedom impossible.

Tocqueville notes that all revolutions have the “same mechanics, the same procedures: the middle classes heat up, excite, put in motion the lower classes, support them morally, push them further than the middle classes want to go.”⁸

In Tocqueville’s *Old Regime and the French Revolution*, we have an account of decline and fall of the Old Regime and the Nobility, the corresponding rise of a despotic, centralizing monarchy and egalitarian movements. Tocqueville’s central theme is relationship between extreme equality/democracy and despotism. According to him as according to Montesquieu extreme egalitarianism invites despotism as it eliminates

⁶ Tocqueville to Louis de Kergolay quoted in ‘excerpts from his correspondence’, in *The Two Tocqueville*, edited and translated by R.R.Palmer.p. 242

⁷ Tocqueville to Louis de Kergolay quoted in ‘excerpts from his correspondence’, in *The Two Tocqueville*, edited and translated by R.R.Palmer.p. 242

⁸ Quoted in *The Old Regime and the Revolution Vol II: Notes on the French Revolution and Napoleon*, Alexis de Toqueville, ed., Francois Furet and Francois Melonio, tr., Alan S.Kahan.

intermediary safeguards, especially the existence of the aristocracy. He and other historians, who seem to belong to his school like Francois Furet, believe that the idea of the French Revolution is in itself misleading because the revolution did relatively little of a positive nature in changing basic structures and institutions. The factors that led to instability in the old regime continued throughout the Revolution to create instability in the post revolutionary period. Modern France inherited some of the features of the old regime and according to Tocqueville, the worst features like highly centralised bureaucratic and administrative structure continued in post revolutionary France. He does not deny social tensions but he places them within a political framework. There was no class struggle and no triumph of Capitalism. Revolution led to the creation of a stronger state modelled on the same absolute monarchy that it sought to replace.

According to Tocqueville there two and not one French Revolution. The first revolution had already been accomplished before the meeting of the Estates General in 1789. The struggle between the *Parlement* and the monarchy in 1787 has revealed that, 'if the *Parlement* utilized new arguments for re-establishing their old rights, the government employed them in no less in the defence of its ancient prerogatives'.⁹ They spoke in the language of the Enlightenment and not in that of the Feudal regime. Tracing the changes that were taking place in the kind of political language used, which in itself reflected the changing mentality, he states that individual *parlements* make diverse attacks on the government's proposals, but 'if one considers the number and diversity of their attacks, they are many, if one listens to the unity of their language, they are one man.'¹⁰ The nobles did not protest about their own particular privileges but about the violation of their common political rights. The *Parlements* and the government could agree only on one thing, the establishment of provincial assemblies which, "destroyed from top to bottom the old political system of Europe and substituted with one sudden blow the democratic republic for that which had remained féodal, democracy for

⁹ "...si le Parlement se servait d'arguments nouveaux pour rétablir ses anciens droits, le gouvernement n'en employait pas de moins nouveaux pour la defence de ses antiques prérogatives" (*Ancien Regime*, Vol II, p.60) quoted in Alan, Kahan, 'Tocqueville's Two Revolutions', *Journal of History of Ideas*, Vol.46, No.4.(Oct-Dec.,1985),pp. 585-596.

¹⁰ "si l'on considère le nombre et la diversité de leur attaques, c'est une foule; si l'on écoute l'unité du langage, c'est un seul homme" (*Ancien Regime*, Vol II, p.65) Quoted *Ibid*.

aristocracy, the republic for royalty.”¹¹ The union of the Parlements meant that in spite of the multitude of institutions that seemed to divide the Nation, it was one. It was unified in its interests and ideas. Thus, a great revolution had already taken place- “cela ne prouvait pas qu’un grande révolution était proche mais qu’un grande révolution était déjà faite.”¹² This was the revolution of centralization, of interests and ideas, of language and society. The ‘second revolution’ that followed, pushed the ideas and sentiments of the French towards the total subversion of society.

The second group of works on revolution employs a theoretical rather than a historical approach. These studies tend to deal with revolution generally and through examination of selected examples seek to develop a general statement capable of explaining it’s what and why. Initially these investigations concentrated either on cause or effect, but more recent works have begun to examine other aspects of the problem: the classification of revolutions by types; the dynamics of the revolutionary process; and the long-range consequences of revolution.

The old image of political systems evolving under objective, natural controls gave way to one that saw revolution as a dramatic, sudden break with the past by which men establish new institutions for themselves.

The nineteenth century produced several major theories of revolutionary causation. Marx developed a socioeconomic dialectic that saw revolution as the result of the inevitable conflict between classes for the means of production. He argued that private property produces revolution. To Tocqueville revolution resulted from a demand for accelerated social and economic progress in a society already gradually moving in these directions. In his mind, revolution was tied to increasing prosperity. Both theories remain influential. Others which stress conspiratorial causation or other monistic explanations have generally been abandoned by serious scholars.

Talking of the historiography of the French Revolution in particular, the constant stream of books could be said to begin with English politician Edmund Burke's

¹¹ “achevait de détruire de fond on comble le vieux système politique de l’Europe et substituait tout à coup à ce qui restait féodal à la république démocratique, à l’aristocratie la démocratie, la république à la royauté” (*Ancien Regime*, Vol II. P.70) Quoted *Ibid*.

¹² Tocqueville, *Ancien Regime*, Vol II, p. 67, quoted *ibid*.

Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790). In it he established the conservative stream of opinion, wherein even the revolution of July 1789 went "too far". His book is not so much studied today as part of Revolution studies, but rather as a classic of conservative political philosophy.

A simplified description of the liberal approach to the Revolution was typically to support the achievements of the constitutional monarchy of the National Assembly but disown the later actions of radical violence like the invasion of the Tuileries and the Terror. French historians of the first half of the nineteenth century like the politician and man of letters François Guizot (1787-1874), historian François Mignet (published *Histoire de la Révolution française* in 1824), and famous philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville (*L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution*, 1856) established and wrote in this tradition.

Other French historians in the nineteenth-century in very brief include, Jules Michelet - his *Histoire de la Révolution française*, published after the Revolution of 1848 is one of the lesser works of a generally highly esteemed writer. To quote the 1911 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "in actual picturesqueness as well as in general veracity of picture, the book cannot approach Carlyle's; while as a mere chronicle of the events it is inferior to half a dozen prosaic histories older and younger than itself." More recently, though viewed still as a flawed work, it has seen renewed influence for its appraisal of the Revolution in its own terms. Michelet has, with Carlyle, disciples in several schools of modern history, whose common aim is to approach the subject matter through involvement rather than objectivity. Louis Blanc - Blanc's 13-volume *Histoire de la Révolution française* (1847–1862) displays utopian socialist views, and sympathizes with Jacobinism. Théodore Gosselin (1855-1935) Writing under the name "G. Lenotre", F.A. Aulard - Founded the *Société de l'Histoire de la Révolution* and the bimonthly review *Révolution française*. Numerous works develop his republican, bourgeois, and anticlerical view of the revolution. Hippolyte Taine - Among the more conservative of the originators of social history, his most famous work is his *Origines de la France Contemporaine* (1875-1893). Albert Sorel - diplomatic historian; *L'Europe et la Révolution française* (8 volumes, 1895–1904); introductory section of this work

translated as *Europe under the Old Regime* (1947). Edgar Quinet - Late Romantic anti-Catholic nationalist.

One of the most famous English works on the Revolution remains Thomas Carlyle's two-volume *The French Revolution, A History* (1837). It is a romantic work, both in style and viewpoint. Passionate in his concern for the poor and in his interest in the fears and hopes of revolution, he (while reasonably historically accurate) is often more concerned with conveying his impression of the hopes and aspirations of people (and his opposition to ossified ideology—"formulas" or "Isms"—as he called them) than with strict adherence to fact. The undoubted passion and intensity of the text may also be due to the famous incident where he sent the completed draft of the first volume to John Stuart Mill for comment, only for Mill's maid to accidentally burn the volume to ashes, forcing Carlyle to start from scratch.

The Marxist Interpretation:

The "Marxist" interpretation has long been the dominant paradigm in French Revolution historiography. This interpretation sees the Revolution as a moment in which the conflagration of class forces produced a dramatic transformation, encompassing changes in economics, politics, ideology and culture. Set in an analytical framework known as "social interpretation" it works from concepts related to Marxist theories of the conditions and consequences of class struggle and transitions between modes of production.¹³ From the early 1900s to the 1960s this approach dominated the interpretation and explanation of the French Revolution, seen most clearly in this century in the works of Albert Mathiez, Georges Lefebvre, Albert Soboul and George Rude. New strands of research in the 1950s began to show inconsistencies in this interpretation yet despite much criticism no satisfactory alternative emerged except Michel Vovelle's investigation of *mentalites* under the influence of the *Annales* school, but such interpretations still worked within the general framework of social interpretation and were not able to appease the criticism that the Marxist approach continued to attract.¹⁴

¹³ Jack Amariglio and Bruce Norton, "Marxist historians and the question of class in the French Revolution", *History and Theory*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (1991):37.

¹⁴ Jack R. Censer, "Commencing the Third Century of Debate", *American Historical Review*, Vol. 94, No. 5 (1989):1312.

George Lefebvre, one of the pioneers of French history, interpreted the revolution within the Marxist framework, therefore viewing the ultimate cause of the French Revolution as the rising of the Bourgeoisie. Marxism is a theory of history, which assigns a central role to the bourgeoisie as the representative, and beneficiaries of Capitalism.

According to Lefebvre, in 1789 the class of the bourgeoisie took over power in France after many years of aristocratic predominance. This was possible because of the creation of a new form of wealth, which was mobile and commercial, instead of land, which was the main form of wealth in the medieval ages. In 1789, the bourgeoisie overthrew the old aristocratic order and established a new regime, which was more representative of the new distribution of economic power. The revolution according to Lefebvre was not one unitary movement by a single class. There were four movements ultimately resulting in the triumph of the bourgeoisie and the Capitalist System. The first was the aristocratic revolt against the Monarchy, which destroyed it. It was the culmination of a century long struggle of the aristocracy against the Monarchy in order to regain their pre-eminence in the state which it had been deprived of. In order to carry out this revolt the aristocracy had to garner support from the bourgeoisie. It is at this point that the bourgeoisie took over and rose against the aristocratic demand of constituting the Estates-General as they were in 1614, this would have resulted in aristocratic predominance. That began the bourgeois revolt against the aristocracy which resulted in the establishment of the bourgeois dominated National-Assembly in June 1789. The bourgeois aim was civil equality, abolition of privileges, and payment of taxes without any discrimination, career opportunities for all based on merit and not on birth and ownership of property on equal terms. These demands stemmed from the Enlightenment, which is considered the intellectual product of the rise of the bourgeoisie.

The existence of the National Assembly was threatened by a noble inspired royal coup in July 1789, which was put down only by the intervention of the Parisian population, whose most spectacular achievement was the storming of the Bastille. This according to Lefebvre was the third revolution, of the popular classes, which sprang from the hope that the new order would solve the growing economic problems of the urban workers. The fourth revolution was triggered by the worsening of the economic situation in 1788-9, leading to the peasant revolution, a nation wide uprising against the feudal and

seigniorial dues extracted by the aristocratic landlords. This revolution according to Lefebvre was stilled by the decree of 4th August 1789, passed by the National assembly, abolishing the apparatus of Feudalism, the last mainstay of the aristocratic order. Therefore according to this perspective the revolution is seen in the context of a class struggle, the classes rising up against the existing order because of their own grievances and ultimately the triumph of one particular class. The critique of this argument is based on the premise that did such class distinctions, based on self-identification exist during the period? This argument totally undermines the class-based analysis of the revolution.

George Lefebvre's academic work, *La Revolution Francaise* can be taken as the starting point, as even if his work has been justly surpassed or criticized, historiographers of the French revolution almost always take his work as their starting point. He owes this exceptional situation to the fact that his work, taken as a whole, reflects the meeting point of a triple tradition which has shaped and dominated the historiography of the French revolution in the twentieth century.

The first of these traditions, by far the most important in French National history, and whose influence has extended beyond France, is constituted by the intellectual mythology of a Republican Party, for whom the event of 1789 represents an act of foundation. Published a day before the 1848 Revolution and fed on its passion the work of Michelet, based largely on oral tradition, powerfully contributed to the mythologization of the revolutionary spirit. As an expression of a democratic trend, this history only served to broaden, by enriching without contradicting its leading ideas, the liberal ideas, the liberal tradition inaugurated by Mignet, Thierry or Guizot since the time of the Restoration. From this perspective and according to this type of Bourgeois interpretation, the French Revolution, in short, marks the end of French History.

The second factor which helps explain the position of George Lefebvre – end of the nineteenth century, during which time he had perfected his craft, witnessed a triumph for the Republic: new critical, objective methods allowed historical science to show that it could be justified. Alphonse Aulard symbolises this change in atmosphere. Thanks to him the French revolution was becoming less a complex series of dramatic events than the progressive assertion of democratic ideas, doctoral theses review articles and other vast projects begun at his initiative ended in making the split with the ancient regime the

threshold of the beginning of contemporary France. France's republican certainties, from this point onwards, were established.

Following a century of controversies, this new beginning finally gave rise to an atmosphere of respectability, symbolized by university chairs at the Sorbonne and elsewhere. From then on, the official version of the French revolution took on the appearance of objective, scientific research that was none the less in the hands of the political regime whose ideology it legitimized.

Histoire socialiste de la Révolution française by Jean Jaures was published at the beginning of the century. Perfectly fitting in with the trends in opinion that were currently so popular with the French left. With Jaures the peasantry truly played a vital role in the French revolution as did the organization and conveyance of property and social and economic development in general. Political history is not so much forgotten as replaced in this general context. As a faithful pupil of Marx and his manifesto, the author of this *History* is revealed, moreover as a great admirer of the French Bourgeoisie at the end of the eighteenth century. He falls in the romantic and liberal tradition in viewing the class struggle from an optimistic angle. This explains his regret when confronted with terrorist acts which took place during the Revolution, and his attempts to minimize and excuse them. But above all it explains preoccupation with celebrating the conquering optimism of the revolutionary bourgeoisie.

In Marxism the general image of revolutionary process, emphasises the importance of socio-structural contradictions in generating revolutionary crisis. Marxists do not assume that all revolutions are, for theoretical purposes, the same. Instead the Marxists distinguish between "bourgeois" and "socialist" revolutions according to the which mode of production, "feudal" or "bourgeois" is being transformed, and among particular variants of each type of revolution through concrete historical analysis of the forces and relations of production and class structures of the various particular societies in which revolutions occurred. Marxists treat revolutions as intrinsically related to broader processes of large scale social change, for they argue that both the causes and consequences of revolutions are directly related to socio-economic developments.

Both Barrington Moore, Jr., in his *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966), and Eric. R. Wolf, in his *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (1969), extended

Marxist concepts and hypotheses to analyse revolutions in predominantly agrarian societies. They developed path breaking hypotheses about the historical and social-structural conditions that determine when and how agrarian classes, especially landlords on the one hand and peasants on the other, and peasant communities on the whole, will engage in collective action that affect the outcomes of societal political upheavals which occur when agrarian countries are subjected to the effects of capitalist developments.

The Marxist explanations downplay for theoretical purposes the very central role of the State in revolutions. In accounting for the causes of the Revolution the theoretical emphasis is always upon economic developments and class contradictions, while the capacities of political rulers, given the state organisations at hand, to cope with international pressures and , internally, with upper class political dissidence and lower class rebellions, are matters often treated descriptively, but never examined theoretically with an eye to identifying the social-structural conditions that might systematically affect such political capacities. They have missed identifying the distinctive political – institutional changes that set revolutions apart from non revolutionary patterns of National development

Thus we see that in the historiography of the revolution, till the early 1990's the debate largely focused on just one nineteenth century interpretation, the Marxist orthodoxy of a bourgeois capitalist revolution. According to Peter Robert Campbell, after the bicentenary in 1989, there has been a return to fundamental questions. There has been a change in the historiographical orientation with historical debates about the revolution and liberalism, religion, democracy, individualism and state once again being in the mainstream. The toppling of the Marxist view of a bourgeois revolution and the rise of cultural history has had a liberating effect on the study of the eighteenth century.

As I have already mentioned, this kind of an interpretation is based on an economic basis, where class interests and class antagonisms play a pivotal role. An argument opposed to such an interpretation is the one, which is based on cultural considerations, related to the field of the intellect and ideology. This calls for an analysis of the Enlightenment as an important factor initiating the revolution, influencing it at various stages, determining its course in certain ways and providing it with a legitimate ideological background.

The historians consider the French Enlightenment as the period of history that follows the end of Absolutism, with the death of Louis XIV in 1715 and precedes the French Revolution, which according to certain interpretations it provoked. The French Enlightenment was a period of ideological ferment even though it produced no great thinker like Descartes, Hobbes or Locke but was rather the second Age of Reason, when intellectuals with literary gifts used the methods of eighteenth century rationalists as instruments to fight against the traditional ideas of religion, society and culture.

Sweeping revisions in the interpretation of the revolution during the last couple of decades, calling into question the conclusions reached by the previous generation of historians, has encouraged a renewed attention to intellectual history. Socio-economic explanations of the revolution's origin and purpose, characteristic of the old paradigm have collapsed. The bourgeoisie, the central character of this analysis can no longer be distinguished from the nobility or the aristocracy, nor is it found to be capitalist or revolutionary. A new general framework has emerged. It is focused on the realm of mentalities, of language, discourse, of words and rhetoric. The mode of production has been replaced by the mode of information and ideas. Within this structure it is argued that what was new in the French Revolution was the rhetoric of secular politics.¹⁵ A historian of a newer school describes the revolution as the transformation of the discursive practice of the community; a moment in which social relations are reconstituted and the discourse defining the political relations between individuals and the groups is recast radically.¹⁶

Revisionism

The Marxists dominated the French academic scene for decades due both to their enormous and much deserved scholarly reputation and equally to their new *imaginaire*. They characterised the whole of the Revolution as a bourgeois democratic one which had swept away feudal France. This characterisation had a dual merit. It inserted the Revolution, and the society arising from it, into an evolutionary line of consecutive and progress 'mode of production' and it provided an adequate class location for each and

¹⁵ Stromberg, Ronald N, "The Philosophes and the French Revolution: Reflections on Some Recent" Research, *The History Teacher*, Vol I, No.3. (May, 1988), pp. 321-339.

¹⁶ Baker, Keith Michael, "On the problem of the Ideological Origins of the French Revolution", in Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan, *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives*, (Ithaca, New York, 1982), pp.203-04.

every political actor, institution and phase of development. All the loose ends seemed to be tied up and put in their proper context by the Marxist school.

The crucial challenge to the paradigm of the integrated and continuous revolution came from the Second World War, in the main form of two different directions: from the British and the French Revisionist historians. The pioneer of the first trend was Alfred Cobban. He was followed, as well as improved upon, overruled and revised by the works of Taylor, McManners, Forster and Doyle. French revisionism is a territory which has been occupied by Furet, either alone or in collaboration with Richet. The methodological common ground of both British and French revisionism was a perplexing dualist position. On the one hand while their challenge was addressed to the Marxist master narrative, they accepted it as at least partially relevant and have assimilated some of the key categories, such as capitalism, class, bourgeoisie and the like.

What Cobban did was to demonstrate that the empirical data gathered by historians, including “Marxist” and “Neo-Marxist” historians, had exploded the “Marxist” theory which purported to explain the Revolution. According to the orthodox theory, the Revolution is explained in the last analysis by a contradiction between the relations of production and the character of the productive forces.” Class conflict, so the theory has it, is the key to understanding the Revolution. And the essential classes are but two: bourgeoisie versus aristocracy. The *Sans Culottes*, defined as or intimated as being an incipient working class, first emerged historically because of the significance accorded them by the needs of the orthodox interpretation. The *sans culottes* furnished the revolutionary bourgeoisie the physical force necessary to overthrow the old regime. But the majority of the *sans culottes* have a certain sense of class they do not have class consciousness, not yet constituting a class. The *sans culotte* movement remains within the cadre of the Revolution, a Revolution that is and remainsan essentially bourgeois unity. The proletariat time had not yet come.

Similarly, even accepting the fact of the “autonomous revolution”, the Revolution remains a “bloc” because the peasants acted, “within the cadre of the Bourgeois revolution....The fundamental object of the peasant movement coincided with the aims of the bourgeois revolution: the destruction of the feudal relations of production...Capitalist

production had been born and had begun to develop in the framework of a still feudal property system: the framework was now broken.

Again within the cadre of the bourgeois revolution “the rivalry between the Gironde and the Mountain manifests aspects of class conflict,” progressive higher bourgeoisie against conservative lower bourgeoisie, an inevitable struggle engendered by the very nature of the Revolution.

These are some of the salient tenants of the orthodox interpretation, and Cobban proceeded against all of them. No modernized, capitalistic economic system followed in the wake of the Revolution: France did not industrialize until late in the nineteenth century and some would argue even for a later date. French commerce and industry remained parochial and regional in terms of their markets throughout the nineteenth century. And French agriculture remained mired in tradition, resistant to innovations, relatively inefficient and underproductive. The “revolutionary bourgeoisie” as a class concept, Cobban found dissolves under close analysis. What remains is a loose congeries of socially and economically disparate “middle class”. “Feudalism”, whatever it had been did not exist in eighteenth century France. What was overthrown in France in 1789 was a vestige of Feudalism – admittedly a hated and often onerous one – seigniorial rights. And it was the peasantry, not the “revolutionary bourgeoisie”, which acted first and unanswerably against what they termed as “feudalism”. In so acting, that is, without regard to and even in opposition to the desires of the Third Estate majority in the National Assembly, the peasantry cannot be subsumed “within the cadre of a bourgeoisie revolution”. Nor may the *sans culottes* be readily adapted to the needs of a class theory, for as their historians admit the term has no social, only a political, meaning.

As for the concept of the Revolution as a “bloc”, Cobban offered another arguable view, namely that “at any point the course of the Revolution could be diverted by a chance happening or an individual decision determined by a freak of personal character.”

Cobban’s own tentatively advanced hypothesis was that it was not a “rising bourgeoisie” of businessmen but rather a “declining class of officers,” together with the lawyers and other professional men, which was revolutionary.

Cobban’s main challenge to the Marxist school consists of the denial of the existence of *feodalite* in any interpretable socio-economic form other than the system of

the hated seigneurial rights which were abolished, in an inconsistent fashion, by the Revolution on 4th August 1789. he argued that even if we commit ourselves to a generalization as sweeping as 'feudalism', the Marxist alleged truth- the thesis of a 'revolutionary bourgeoisie' that had overthrown *feodalite* – is still not born out of the facts of historical research.

Also there was no revolutionary bourgeoisie in France which could have prepared for and later led, the revolution, just as there was no *feodalite*. There was no bourgeois revolution guiding France into a 'new mode of production'. The industrialization of France occurred subsequent to the revolutionary and Napoleonic periods. The revolutionary period can be regarded as having been an impediment to industrialization, or at least a factor which delayed its arrival. France remained an overwhelmingly rural society and as result of the revolution, its bourgeoisie was, far from rising was actually in decline.

In the 1960s and 1970s, "revisionists" such as Alfred Cobban and Furet himself had begun to challenge this analytical framework. Criticism increased as research began to show that no discernible "bourgeoisie" confronted and defeated a fundamentally feudal ruling class in 1789. Francois Furet's writings on the French revolution radically changed the way the Revolution was interpreted. His work represented an important break with the traditional historiography of the revolution. Beginning with *Interpreting the French Revolution* (translated from the French *Penser La Revolution Francaise*)¹⁷ he questioned traditional Marxist based interpretations and sought out the political in an effort to conceptualise the French Revolution. In doing this he drew attention to the revolutionary discourse and examined the role of language, opinion and power in transforming the Revolution. He found the model for this in the writings of the famous liberal Alexis de Tocqueville. In his lecture 'The French Revolution Revisited', given in 1980, he relates Tocqueville's idea regarding the growth of the centralised state with a sophisticated understanding of the birth of Modern democracy. In the *Old regime and the French Revolution*, Tocqueville argues that the revolution did not so much mark the overthrow of the ancient regime than the culmination of it. By abolishing feudalism, guilds, economic

¹⁷ Francois Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

regulation, and noble privilege, the revolution continued trends begun under the absolute monarchy. Once the noble privilege and institutions were gone, nothing stood between the individual citizen and the all encompassing power of the centralised state. Furet's work is concerned with showing how it came about. His later works, including *La Revolution francaise* and the *Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*¹⁸ (co-edited with Mona Ozouf), fulfilled the promise of the seminal *Interpreting the French Revolution* and provided solid historical evidence for Furet's broad conceptualisation. He suggests that by undermining the traditional social order of the Ancien regime the monarchy created a kind of 'empty space' that weakened the monarchy's sense of legitimacy. Rather suddenly the idea of 'the people', moved into this void creating a 'mobilized society' that 'disarmed the state'. The revolution is then seen as the 'torrential birth of democratic politics and ideology' in which the centralised state is refashioned with far more power and authority dreamed possible by the eighteenth century monarchs.

For Furet the revolution was no incubator of freedom, it harboured in its very essence new forms of dictatorship and political coercion that would make the Ancien Regime seem liberal. The 'proletarian King' ruled as much in the name of the French Nation as over its people. Furet calls the empire "the dictatorship of public opinion".

A former communist himself, Furet's disillusionment with the "bankruptcy" of communism eventually led him to pronounce his now famous adage: "The French Revolution Has Ended".¹⁹ In this article, he argued that the time for polemics had passed. He pointed to the parting of ways between the social interpreters' emphasis on class and their implied approval of revolutionary action (including perhaps the Terror) and the more recent non-ideological, historically accurate interpretations of Revolutionary events.²⁰ Furet did not believe that further research would lead to an improved explanation of the revolution, nor solve its current divergences.⁸ Instead, a new interpretation based on a new conceptual framework was needed. It was these convictions which led him to refute the "revolutionary catechism", that of the traditional Marxist-

¹⁸ Francois Furet, *La Revolution francaise*, 2 vols. (Paris: Histoire de France Hachette, 1988). Francois Furet and Mona Ozouf (eds.), *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989).

¹⁹ Francois Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp 1-79.

²⁰ Jack Amariglio and Bruce Norton, "Marxist historians and the question of class in the French Revolution", *History and Theory*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (1991):38.

based interpretation of the French Revolution. This rejection was most notably put forward in the first of Furet's three historiographical essays in *Interpreting the French Revolution: "The Revolutionary Catechism"*.²¹ Furet's objective here was to demonstrate why the Marxist explanation could not support a broad understanding of the Revolution. He found the traditional Marxist-based interpretations to be fundamentally flawed due to the fact that Marx and Engels left several, contradictory analyses of the Revolution, including insights which their followers never took up.²² He declared that he was not criticising Marxism, rather the kind of Marxism that penetrated the historiography of the French Revolution with Jean Jaures.²³ His principal opposition was to the idea of a "bourgeois revolution",²⁴ a notion that represented an oversimplification inherent to the tendency of modern Marxism to shape complex and contradictory events so that the Revolution stood as the great "beginning" for subsequent movements. In this way, the idea of a revolutionary break evolved around economic life and the fabric of society, resulting in the myth which declared: "before the revolution, feudalism; after, capitalism; before, the nobility; after, the bourgeoisie".²⁵ Marxist interpretations therefore tended to present a "kind of simple, linear schema of history, in which the bourgeois revolution, uniting the peasantry and urban masses behind it, achieves the breakthrough from the feudal to the capitalist mode of production".²⁶ For Furet, this "Marxist vulgate" was epitomised in such histories as Albert Soboul's *Precis de la Revolution francaise*. Soboul substituted broad sociological categories for detailed historical analysis, dividing pre-Revolutionary France into nobility, bourgeois, peasants and urban lower classes. While Furet did not challenge this on the terrain of Marxist theory, he did point to the

²¹ This article first appeared in 1971 as a response to Marxist criticism of the history of the revolution (*La Revolution francaise*) that Furet had written with Denis Richet. One of Furet's loudest critics was Albert Soboul whose work is criticised in the article.

²² Francois Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp 87. Donald Sutherland, "An Assessment of the Writings of Francois Furet", *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Fall 1990), 785.

²³ Francois Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp 13.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

inconsistency of the many fragmentations within each of these “classes”, thereby turning these notions against Soboul and others who ascribed to them.²⁷

Furet’s second main objection was based on his belief that Marxist historians had adopted the “Jacobin” ideology of key figures of the Revolution. Here he pointed to the obsession of the Bolsheviks with the Jacobin “precedent”,²⁸ believing that Marxist historiography had long searched within the French Revolution for precedents to justify the revolution and post-revolutionary period in Russia. In many Marxist interpretations, the French Revolution became a mechanism to justify the present by the past. Accounts of the French Revolution were accompanied by discourse on the 1917 Revolution which according to Furet “proliferated like a cancer” inside the historical analysis of the French Revolution to the point where its significance was all but destroyed.²⁹ For its teleological traits, Furet found this approach fundamentally flawed.

Furet extended his criticism of certain Marxist historians to all histories written in the narrative tradition and in the mode of personal identification.³⁰ Furet viewed narrative histories as an obstruction to conceptual or problem-oriented history. He asserted that because such histories reconstruct experience on a temporal basis, conceptualisation is never made explicit, thereby obstructing historians from looking at the whole. Furthermore, narrative history was misleading for its tendency to record the recollections of individuals and communities, keeping alive only a small section of the past.³¹

Furet also demanded that the mode of identification be explicitly rejected. Historians such as Jules Michelet sought to relive past events, seeing them essentially as contemporaries saw them. Furet called for a history that escaped this mode, imploring historians to “try and break the vicious circle of ... commemorative historiography”. This could only be achieved by establishing a critical distance from the subject, a “cooling off” of the type proposed by Levi-Strauss.³² Accordingly, any new interpretation of the

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 89-116.

²⁸ Francois Furet, “The Future of the Left”, trans. H.J. Kaplan, *Partisan Review*, Vol. 58 (Summer 1991): 432.

²⁹ Francois Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp 87.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

³¹ Francois Furet, *In the Workshop of History*, trans. Jonathon Mandelbaum (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1981): 55-56.

³² Francois Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp 10.

Revolution had to begin with a critique of the idea of revolution “as experienced and perceived by its actors, and transmitted by their heirs, namely the idea that it was a radical change and the origin of a new era”.³³ Again, this was an area where Furet perceived Marxist histories to fail. Only by setting a critical distance and moving away from the confines of narrative history could the past be effectively reconstructed.

This was the starting point for Furet’s own understanding of the French Revolution. Furet’s major contribution to the study of the French Revolution was to redirect history towards a path from which it has often strayed: the path by which it is linked to a reflection of politics.³⁴ An explanation of his schema first appeared in *Interpreting the French Revolution*. By establishing politics as an independent object of research he contributed to the creation of a meta-history possessed of meaning as opposed to a traditional history fragmented into small areas of specialised scholarship. Only in this way could the Revolution be presented as an understandable whole, a task at which Marxist interpretations had failed. He began by searching for signs of ideology in pre-revolutionary society and found that the beginning of the Revolution witnessed the collapse of one world and the birth of a new one, a moment where people thought themselves capable of recasting society in the image of their ideals and aspirations.

For Furet, the moment of the Revolution could only begin to be understood if one acknowledged the autonomy of ideas. Furet believed that such principles overrode or preceded institutions and social transformations proposed by Marxist interpretations. The reintroduction of ideology at the centre of the Revolution represents Furet’s first major contribution to the historiography of this area. This insertion of ideology and politics at the centre of the Revolution led Furet to expand its traditional chronology (usually 1789-1794). By examining ideology and taking the *longue duree* approach, Furet was able to locate the source of French radicalism in what preceded it. In this sense, he demanded that the historian consider the Revolution as a product of absolutism, even though it saw itself as its very antithesis. This provides an important example of Furet’s approach to a conceptualisation of the Revolution. For this approach, Furet found a model in Alexis de Tocqueville whom he considered the first historian to look behind the illusion of rupture

³³ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁴ Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. David Macey (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 90.

in 1789 and reveal the historical continuity of the Revolution. In *L'Ancien Regime et la Revolution francaise* Tocqueville asked the question: how can we explain the non-historical character of the Revolution, its rejection of the past and its abstract constructionism, by the history of what preceded it?³⁵ The answer he found was that through centralisation, the monarchy led the way in undermining corporative privileges. More importantly, he discovered that the egalitarianism of the Revolution originated under the *Ancien Regime*.³⁶

In this way he distinguished between revolution as a mode of historical action and what Furet described as "revolution as process".³⁷ Inspired by these ideas, Furet also looked for continuities between the *Ancien Regime* and the Revolution and from this was able to derive his conceptualisation of a Revolution propelled by ideas and discourse. This comparison has in turn inspired a new realm of research into the end of the *Ancien Regime* seen for example in Furet's own research into the procedures for the elections of 1789 and in Mona Ozouf's examination of "public opinion" at the end of the *Ancien Regime*.³⁸

Furet's second, and perhaps more original contribution, was his analysis of the Revolution as an ever-accelerating event whose dynamic energy could only be explained in "political, ideological or cultural terms". Here he developed a type of "revolutionary imaginary". His chief concern was to bring out the logic of this imaginary by examining the actions and discourses of its actors, the sequence of struggles between groups, and the events which historians regard as "accidents" because they disrupt the course of the Revolution.³⁹ This led him to write: *Every history of the Revolution must therefore deal not only with the impact of "circumstances" on the successive political crises but also, and above all, with the manner in which those circumstances were planned for, prepared,*

³⁵ Furet, *A Commentary*, 799.

³⁶ Michel Pertue, "La Révolution Française est-elle terminée?" *Annales Historiques de La Revolution Francaise*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (1982), 331.

³⁷ Francois Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp 102.

³⁸ Francois Furet, "The Monarchy and the Procedures for the Elections of 1789", *Journal of Modern History*, Vol 1. 60, supplement (September 1988), S58-S74. Mona Ozouf, "'Public Opinion' at the End of the Old Regime" *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 60, supplement (September 1988), S1-S21.

³⁹ Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. David Macey (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p.106.

*arranged and used in the symbolic universe of the Revolution and in the various power struggles.*⁴⁰

The relationship between language and power was therefore central to Furet's interpretation of revolution. In the French Revolution, the people became the location of power (replacing the king), yet as historian Lynn Hunt notes, "the people and their will" represented a constantly shifting reference point without any fixed institutional expression.⁴¹ As a result, revolutionary politics soon turned into a struggle for the appropriation of public opinion: to have power was to speak in the name of the people and to have the support of public opinion. The Revolution was not so much an action as a language.⁴² In the midst of the Revolution, "language was substituted for power, for it was the sole guarantee that power would belong only to the people, that is, to nobody".⁴³ With politics reduced to a linguistic struggle the revolutionary actors could no longer exercise power in the traditional sense, forced instead to compete in the arena of discourse.

Here lies Furet's interpretation of the impelling force of the Revolution. It was not class struggle that drove the Revolution, but the attempt by each successive political group "to radicalise the Revolution, by making it consistent with its discourse" so that through this struggle, "the purest form of that discourse could be brought to power".⁴⁴ Furet saw Jacobinism as the clearest expression of such a political group.

Much of *Interpreting the French Revolution* is devoted to the operation of this revolutionary discourse. In this, Furet discerned two significant instances. The first was the general will of the people and nation as a source of legitimacy. The second was conspiracy, the adversary of the Revolution which tried to divert it to benefit the particular interests of individuals.⁴⁵ These two dynamics are described by Furet as two

⁴⁰ Francois Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp 63.

⁴¹ Lynn Hunt, review of *Penser la Révolution française*, by Francois Furet. In *History and Theory*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1981), 317.

⁴² Francois Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp 178.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴⁵ Lynn Hunt, review of *Penser la Révolution française*, by Francois Furet. In *History and Theory*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1981), 317

sides of “an imaginary discourse on power”.⁴⁶ Furet believed that within this discourse, power was fundamentally displaced. Rather than being found in society or institutions, power was located in and appropriated by discourse about equality. However this raised problems of representation.

Here Furet turned to Rousseau and his work on the problem of representation. Transparency in politics and language represented an almost unattainable ideal due to the corruptive principle of representation. Rousseau believed that the people could be sovereign only if individual wills were transparent to the general will, and language could only be authentic if it was transparent.⁴⁷ For Furet, Rousseau represented the theoretical precursor of revolutionary language. Furet found that Rousseau’s plea for transparency held the key to the failure of the Revolution, stating:

[i]t is an ironic twist of history that at the very moment when the Revolution believed it was implementing Jean-Jacques’ ideas, it demonstrated, on the contrary, the validity of Rousseau’s pessimism, that is to say the infinite⁴⁸

Furet’s *La Revolution francaise* formed the realisation of the proposals of *Interpreting the French Revolution*. Again Furet’s principal concern was the legacy of a revolution that was unable to reconcile popular sovereignty or direct, transparent democracy with parliamentary representation until the Third Republic. Where *Interpreting the French Revolution* was criticised for separating the political and social spheres too rigidly, *La Revolution* moderated this tendency, resulting in what has become a definitive history.⁴⁹ Furet’s contribution has also led to a re-evaluation of the categories in which the Revolution is usually discussed. This is exemplified in the *Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*. Through its very categories and selection of topics, it questioned and supported the ideas raised by Furet in his former work, examining the contradictions of the revolution and emphasising its dual promise of liberation and constraint. Ideas and the language of the actors were again restored to a central place. Such works provide the solid historical evidence which justify Furet’s rejection of

⁴⁶ Francois Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp 54.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

⁴⁹ William Scott, “Historiographical Review: Francois Furet and democracy in France”, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (1991), 147.

previous explanations of the force of the French Revolution and support his contribution to its historiography.

Faced with the inadequacies of traditional interpretations in the historiography of the French Revolution, Francois Furet set himself the goal of conceptualising the causes and course of the Revolution. In doing this he read into the French Revolution a revolution that began before the Revolution began and ended after it had finished. In his reading of the French Revolution, the force of the Revolution came not from the material existence of class struggle, but from a powerful ideology. This manifested itself in discourses which were used to manipulate public opinion and therefore power. By his own account, Furet attempted to replace the traditional historiography of the French Revolution, “not with a new ‘canonical’ version of that history, but with an inventory of new questions”.⁵⁰ However recent writings suggest that in addition to providing questions which have set research of the Revolution on a new trajectory, Furet’s interpretation has indeed become canonical. In setting out to demolish the “orthodox” interpretation of the Revolution, Francois Furet created a new orthodoxy himself which has changed not only the way in which the French Revolution is interpreted and explained, but also the way in which we think about history.

This approach to the revolution demolishes the whole notion of the revolution because of the grievances of a particular class of people, resulting in a conflict between the classes and thus resulting in a revolutionary upheaval. The reasons for the revolution were political, ideological in nature, and not economic. The rise of the bourgeoisie or Capitalism did not require a revolution of the nature that France experienced. France through the revolution created democratic structures, which were a product of the process of democratisation, which had started much before the revolution. His focus is the changing, transforming political structures, which meant a shift from an economic and sociological analysis to a politico-cultural one. Unlike the Marxist writings where the class is in the forefront and the revolution is seen a result of the class conflicts resulting in the triumph of the Bourgeoisie and the establishment of the Capitalist structure, in this particular kind of analysis the state acquires a special place. The question that is asked is

⁵⁰Furet, *A Commentary*, p. 792.

that if the revolution resulted because of the class conflicts and the grievances of a particular class and the revolution did solve these problems and brought the Bourgeoisie to power and therefore settled the question of the Bourgeoisie then why did the revolution take a different direction after 1789? Why did it not take a definite character, resulting in a definite programme and a definite state structure? France remained in a state of flux until the nineteenth century, experiencing differing structures of governance and ideologies.

Albert Soboul, along with British historians like E.E. Thompson and George Rude, was part of a group of social historians who hoped to reconstruct the lives of ordinary workers and activists during the revolutionary era. During the 1960's, their 'history from below', approach influenced a younger generation of historians on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1967, Soboul was appointed to the Sorbonne's prestigious chair of the history of the revolution. His perspective was that the revolution was much more than a political transformation; it was also essentially social and economic. Socially it was a bourgeois revolution in the sense that political power moved from the landed aristocrats to the bourgeoisie – that is, the middle class businessmen, professionals, and civil servants who claimed to represent the nation. Economically, it was a capitalist revolution in which this new bourgeoisie transferred the source of wealth from land to more liquid forms of capital. The peasants and urban artisans began as the partners of the bourgeoisie against the nobility but by 1792 had become its victims. The bourgeoisie consolidated victory between the *Thermidorean* Reaction that followed the terror and the ascendancy of Napoleon. In this way he argues that France did not become a Democracy, because genuine political power was transferred from one group to another. (his article: 'The French Revolution in the History of the contemporary world', published in 1969.)

Colin Lucas, another prominent scholar propounding the theory of the political culture, in the introduction of the *French Revolution and Creation of the Modern Political Culture*, Vol I, states that, revolution is a process in which concept and practice encounter, merge and transform each other in often unpredictable and unstable forms of synthesis which, together add up to revolutionary political culture. His article 'Nobles,

Bourgeois, And The Origins of the French Revolution' published in 1973, was a bold attack on the Marxist view of the Revolution as characterised by a class struggle between an ascending bourgeoisie and ossified nobility. Using an array of empirical evidence, Lucas shows that by the end of the Ancien Regime, the bourgeoisie and the nobility were both part of a "homogeneous" ruling elite. He shows that by this time privileges that were once perhaps monopolized by the nobility had become shared between the two groups. Lucas finds many bourgeois commoners who were privileged from taxes, who acted a sly seigneurs on landed estates and who added the particle *de* to their name. In short he found the bourgeois everywhere whose authority overlapped with noblemen, and whose lifestyle imitated noblemen – indeed, bourgeois who were even confused by contemporaries as noblemen. He proposes what might be called a non Marxist class analyses: the political crisis from 1786-88 convinced the sector of privileged bourgeois commoners that their social pathway to full landed noble status was now being barred, and that *Ancien regime* social structure was about to become much more closed. The fear of being shut out, rather than any class consciousness or genuine class difference, is what in the end motivated them to revolt.

Another analysis of the revolution away from the predominant Marxist approach of the earlier period is the Politico Cultural approach by scholars like Keith Michael Baker, Mona Ozouf and Lynn Hunt. These scholars have put forth a very interesting analysis of the Revolution, interpreting it through a politico cultural approach. Here politics is seen as an activity through which individuals and groups articulate and make claims, enforce and implement them and negotiate with each other. Political culture is the medium through which these activities are achieved, a set of discourses by which these claims are made and legitimised. A political vocabulary is created in order to present these views, which become legitimate by popular acceptance. Here the language employed is very important, as political authority is a matter of linguistic authority. The French Revolution is thus understood as a political phenomenon, a transformation of the political discourse. The political language began to assume a new character and became an important instrument of political and social change. The revolutionary period saw the development of a new vocabulary, which became synonymous with the changing political situation. An important aspect of this kind of rhetoric was that it was not only a part of the

modernizing political elite but it evolved as an experience of an entire society. A new Republican culture and society were shaped by the ongoing political propaganda.

Keith Michael Baker in the volume on *The French Revolution and the Creation of the Modern Political Culture*, in the introduction explaining the concept of politics and political culture, states ‘ If Politics, broadly construed, is the activity through which individuals and groups in any society articulate, negotiate, implement and enforce the competing claims they make upon one another, then political culture may be understood as a set of discourses and practices characterizing that activity in any given community. Political culture comprises the definitions of the relative positions from which individuals and groups may (or may not) legitimately make claims one upon another, and therefore of the identity and boundaries of the community to which they belong (or from which they are excluded). It constitutes the meanings of the terms in which these claims are framed, the nature of the contexts to which they pertain, and the authority of the principals according to which they are made binding. It defines the institutional and extra institutional processes by means of which these claims are formulated, the strategies by which they are impressed and the contestations to which they give rise. It shapes the constitutions and powers of the agencies and procedures by which contestations are resolved, competing claims authoritatively adjudicated, and binding decisions enforced. Political Culture is a historical creation, subject to constant elaboration and development through the activities of the individuals whose purposes it defines.’ Now public opinion became a new determinant in politics. There was the emergence of the public sphere, with the coming up of various political societies, Masonic lodges and salons. The importance of press and political journalism has been studied in detail by Jeremy Popkin and Robert Darton has examined the literary environment of eighteenth century France. The interpretation of the French revolution by Keith Michael Baker and others see it as creating the superstructure for the creation of the Modern state and the modern political culture. Keith Michael Baker shows that Rousseau’s political language had perhaps the most important influence on how the deputies thought about the Declaration. The decision regarding which phrases to include or revise were not simply semantic arguments; they were choices between “competing definitions of sovereignty”. The

affirmation of Rousseauian language, therefore meant that ideas first developed in Rousseau's social contract would have a profound impact on the revolution.

Mona Ozouf on the other hand in her path breaking study of the revolutionary festivals impresses on the importance of symbols, language and rituals. Through these festivals, there was an attempt at the creation of a new political vocabulary, symbols and legitimacy. The festivals were designed to recast space and time and create a new political culture. They sought to efface the spatial reminders of the catholic religion and of monarchical and feudal authority. Festival itineraries carefully avoided the religious procession routes of the past or used new symbolic representations to overshadow them. The old principles of legitimacy were replaced by new principles by the political culture. The festivals offer a critical insight into the meaning of the French revolution; they show a society in the process of creating itself anew. The festivals inaugurated a new era because they made sacred the values of a modern, secular and liberal world. Her study of the festivals presents the most fascinating example of the working of revolutionary culture.

Mona Ozouf argues against the long held view of historians that the festivals were simply another instrument of political struggle, more spectacular than the speeches in the Convention or votes in the Jacobin Club but essentially the same in intent, for example, the radicals used the celebration of reason to fortify their position, Robespierre created the Cult of the Supreme Being in order to defeat the radicals. She traces similarities in the revolutionary festivals, calling it 'identical conceptualization'. First there were the wild festivals of 1789 and 1790, which very often were not different from riots, then the grandiose and moving festivals of Federation in July 1790 and the locally inspired festivals of 1793-94. She therefore takes a larger view of festivals and explores the links between them and more general structures of culture.

Different scholars have interpreted the French Revolution differently. The views cover a wide array of explanations and analyses of the causes and outcome of the French Revolution. The various views can be classified into the classical Marxist perspective, the liberal perspective, the idealistic and romantic views and the revisionist perspective, which concentrates on the politico cultural explanation of the French Revolution. Some historians argue for a break from the past, the revolution resulting in sweeping reforms

and changes not just in the political structure but affecting the public sphere, the social relations, religion and all the other possible aspects. The other scholars argue for the aspect of continuity between the *Ancien Regime* and the ensuing political culture as the old ideas did not completely disappear, there was an evolution and not a complete break. Tocqueville has argued for the element of continuity in his writing on the *Ancien Regime* and the Revolution. The various aspects that he talks about are – the continuation of the monarchical government, which existed for many years after the fall of the Bastille, the sub-division of property, Legal rights for government officials and the offices and agencies of central and local government.

Furet notes that if the process of centralisation had been completed by the Consulate, as Tocqueville thought, there would be no need for the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848 to come and complete it. Since centralisation could not explain the later revolutions, it being the chief revolutionary impulse falls into doubt. According to Furet, this led Tocqueville to examine the nature and effects of cultural changes, but he could not deal with them thoroughly because he did not give up his theory of centralisation.⁵¹

Such an explanation of the revolution, which places the revolution within the sphere of ideas, was also familiar at the time of the revolution. Lynn Hunt quotes from a Frenchman of that day, 'it is by words that they accomplish their ends; words did everything'. J.F. La Harpe, the eighteenth century critic said that language was the Revolution's "foremost instrument". Hunt also cites Richard Cobb who observes that *Sans-Culottism* was "more a state of mind than a social class".⁵² According to Hunt the political culture provided the logic of revolutionary political action. What comes through from these explanations is that the basis of the Revolutionary parties and tendencies was not social status or economic class but an ideology, a common vocabulary of ideas. A familiar course generally taken to explain this impact of ideas is that the writers of the *Philosophe* school, the *illumines* or the enlightened ones, who were emerging in the late 1740s reached the peak of their fame and influence in the 1760s, just in time to indoctrinate the future leaders of the revolution. Lamartine in his *Historie des Girondins* in his chapter on Voltaire and Rousseau states that "when these two men had formed their

⁵¹ Furet, Francois, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, Trans.by E.Forster, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981) pp.162-3

⁵² Hunt, Lynn. A, *Politics, Culture, and class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1984), pp. 51, 149,187

ideas, the Revolution was accomplished in the realm of the mind,” and it had to be worked out in its practicality.⁵³

This approach, which seeks to locate the Revolution within the scheme of the Enlightenment philosophers, has been criticised by various scholars who do not want to seek the origins of the revolution in the period of the Enlightenment. Roger Chartier in his book *Cultural Origins of the French Revolution* has engaged with the Enlightenment, the Revolution and the various problems which emerge with such kind of an analysis. In the section on *What is Enlightenment*, he states that the term is easy to define as long as it is “held to be a corpus of doctrines formulated by the Philosophers, diffused through all classes of the population, and articulated around several fundamental principles such as criticism of religious fanaticism, the exaltation of tolerance, confidence in observation and experimentation, critical examination of all institutions and customs, the definition of a natural morality, and a reformulation of political and social ties on the basis of the idea of liberty”.⁵⁴ He questions that how can a certain sets of facts and ideas be collected and made into the ‘origin’ of an event? Searching for an origin in this manner leads to a “sorting out process that retains, out of the innumerable realities that make up the history of an epoch, only the matrix of the future events”.⁵⁵ Another aspect of such an attempt is a “retrospective reconstruction that gives unity to thoughts and actions supposed to be “origins” but foreign to one another, heterogeneous by their nature and discontinuous in their realization.”⁵⁶

Michel Foucault, following Nietzsche has also criticised as a teleological understanding of history, i.e. one event being the cause of another, thus annulling the originality of the event by anticipating it before it happens. Chartier quotes Nietzsche when he states that there are two types of historical understandings, one what he calls as the *theological* or *rationalistic* perspective, which understands history as a teleological or nature process with one event leading to another and therefore in a way seeking the genesis of a particular event in the past. ‘Effective history’ on the other hand deals with events in terms of their own unique characteristics, thus rejecting the whole notion of

⁵³ Quoted by Stromberg, Ronald N, “The Philosophes and the French Revolution: Reflections on Some Recent” Research, *The History Teacher*, Vol I, No.3. (May, 1988), p.323

⁵⁴ Chartier, Roger, *The Cultural Origins of the French revolution* (Duke University Press, 1991), p.17.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p.4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

continuity. Chartier questions that should we then not consider that “it was the Revolution that invented the Enlightenment by attempting to root its legitimacy in a corpus of texts and founding authors reconciled and united beyond their extreme differences, by their preparation of a rupture with the old world.”⁵⁷ He suggests as has been suggested by other historians that the revolutionaries brought together the *Philosophes* and gave their philosophy a radically critical function in an attempt to acquire a justification and legitimacy for their actions. Chartier gives an alternative approach, by replacing the category of intellectual origins with that of cultural origins. This according to him would solve some of the problems, because cultural institutions would be seen to have some agency of their own, rather than being just receptacles for ideas developed elsewhere. Though the unavoidability of such a teleological approach has been recognised by Chartier when he states, “no approach to a historical problem is possible outside the historiographical discourse that constructed it.”⁵⁸

Maurice Cranston in her article, ‘The Sovereignty of the Nation’⁵⁹ argues that these three doctrine of Liberal Constitutionalism, Republicanism and Enlightened Absolutism, though part of the theory of the Enlightenment, yet there can be seen a continuation or a ‘revised formulation of political doctrines that date from the seventeenth century and even the sixteenth’

For the historians of Revolutionary France, politics has retained its primacy in spite of the various sociological, psychological and cultural analysis and explanations coming through. Social historians may explain that politics in terms of class interest and cultural historians examine the Revolution in the wider context of language and symbolism, yet at the time of the Revolution, political actions remain centre-stage. The France of the eighteenth century, a corporate society which thought of itself as in terms of guilds and provinces, privileges and liberties, had to be enlightened, re-educated as a nation that understood the concept and responsibilities of citizenship and recognised the primacy of the assembly and the rule of law. According to Fitzsimmons, this was a new concept for the French men and which had not evolved slowly and easily from the language of the

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.5.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.7.

⁵⁹ In Lucas, Colin, ed., *The French Revolution and the Creation of the Modern Political Culture*, Vol I

Ancien Regime. According to him it was the work of the National assembly and especially that of the Constitutional Committee, which transformed the relative apathy of 1789, as displayed in the drawing up of the cahiers, into consensus and enthusiasm by 1791.⁶⁰ In this period, mentalities underwent a significant change. For many the central event in the process of conversion was the night on 4th August, when those who had previously guarded and protected their self interest were impelled to offer them up for the greater good of the Nation.

Robert. R. Palmer, writing on the committee of Public Safety, states that the resort to terrorist measures was because of the need for National unity in the face of foreign invasion. France was disunited within and incapable of effective resistance as long as anarchy reigned. The leaders of the Terror aimed to establish a Democracy and constantly justified their actions by reference to the welfare of the people. Stern measures against the enemies of the Revolution were necessary to make France safe for Democracy. According to him it was only in 1793 –1794 that Democracy in the form of universal suffrage and increased economic equality became part of the ideal of men in power. This raised the most important political question, that of the relationship between this kind of liberty with the Democracy of individual liberty and representative government.⁶¹

When *The French Idea of Freedom: The Old Regime and the Declaration of the Rights of 1789* (The Making of Modern freedom), a collection of eight essays by leading American historians (lectures of a conference held in 1991)⁶², was published the 'revisionist' critique of the revolution associated with the work of the French historian Francois Furet was in the ascendant. The revisionists saw the revolution as a largely unsuccessful attempt to institutionalize liberal freedoms. The revolutionaries argued Furet remained enthralled to political notions inherited from the old regime, particularly the belief that the sovereign had the right to impose limits on individual freedoms in the name of a vaguely defined public interest. In this interpretation, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789), with its repeated references to legal limits on such

⁶⁰ Fitzsimmons, Michael, *The Remaking of France: the National Assembly and Constitution of 1791*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994)

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Dale Van Kley, editor. *The French Idea of Freedom: The Old Regime and the Declaration of the Rights of 1789* (The Making of Modern freedom.) Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997

rights as freedom of expression, was less a charter of liberty than a blueprint for oppression.

Although the contributors include Keith Baker, one of Furet's principal allies in the revisionist debates of the 1980s, this collection as a whole exemplifies a trend that has already been labelled 'post-revisionist'. Dale Van Kley and his colleagues critique both the revisionist's gloomy reading of the document and their interpretation of the Old Regime as a throughgoing absolutist system. The defining charter of the French revolution emerges as a contradictory and often ambiguous reaction to unforeseen circumstances that drew on many hidden traditions embedded in the French past. The volume's most original essays are those that trace the origins of the revolution's concept of liberty to Old Regime practices. Rather than looking for the sources of 1789 in the radical counter culture of the French enlightenment, David Bien argues that privileged groups, ranging from tradesmen's guilds to holders of venal offices, honeycombed Old Regime France with thousands of mini-parliaments dedicated to defending their member's rights against arbitrary government action. Thomas Kaiser demonstrates that the redefinition of the notion of property often assumed to have occurred overnight in 1789 was anticipated in Old Regime jurisprudence; he also explains how the new formulations in the declaration perpetuated traditions from the feudal and seigniorial property law. Van Kley demonstrates that the political discourse of the revolution drew on traditions of argument that had developed during the great eighteenth century disputes between the crown and the royal courts or parlements. The patriotic pamphleteers who emerged as spokesperson for the revolution in 1788 and 1789 fused familiar royal propaganda arguments against aristocratic privilege with long standing parlementaire demands for national representation and thereby created a new synthesis capable of transcending the old regime's institutional deadlock. Whereas the focus of most of these essays is on the background of the revolution, Baker looks at the immediate circumstances surrounding the drafting of the declaration, often seen as the natural culmination of the Enlightenment thought. He sees it as a hastily drafted product of circumstances. The deputies of the National Assembly were by no means unanimously in favour of it and the difficulties they encountered led to repeated suggestions to abandon it.

As a whole these essays make a persuasive case for the existence of whole variety of old regime traditions that contributed directly to the revolutionary constitution making of 1789. Although they look backward in time more than forward, the contributions to this book nevertheless mark an important new direction in the understanding of the French Revolution.

The French Revolution changed the world. It overthrew the monarchy, destroyed the widespread privileges of a parasitic aristocracy, introduced a certain amount of democracy in parliamentary government opened careers to talented individuals, created the conditions for the generation of new wealth and a class of nouveaux riches, and then, through the twin agencies of propaganda and the revolutionary armies, proceeded to spread the innovations to the rest of Europe and the world. Even in areas where the specific accomplishments of the Revolution never took hold or were later destroyed, society would never again be the same, if only because the Revolution had now become a political fact, a threat constantly to be reckoned with. Never before had a revolution in Europe or America reached down to all strata of the population, invoked their participation and changed their lives at the ordinary commonplace level. To put it in a positive light, the French revolution was the first to raise what nineteenth century Europeans liked to call the "social question" concerning the role the "lower classes" ought to play in the community.

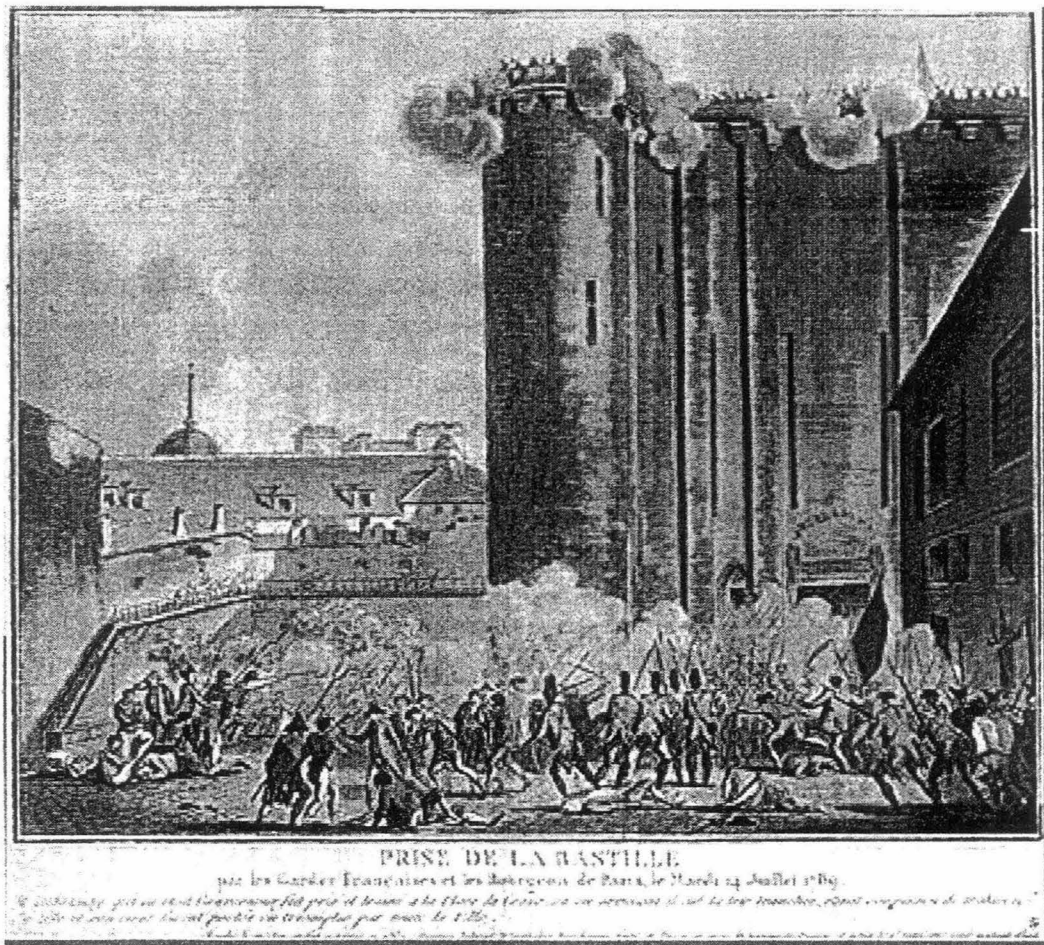
The reaction of the contemporaries to the French revolution was varied. The resistance to the monarchical order was started by the nobility as early as 1787. When the Estates General was called in 1789, numerous liberal nobles and a large part of the clergy, including bishops, joined with the Third estate to pass reform measures and to demand a constitution. The initiative passed very early to the bourgeoisie, whose spokesmen were found among a highly articulate group of lawyers and professional men. But even at the beginning the peasants who burned the feudal records and the chateaux that contained them, the shopkeepers and artisans who rioted in the cities were already playing a central role in the revolutionary process.

But this consensus was more apparent than real. If everyone – or almost everyone – agreed that some change was necessary, they were not in agreement as to the nature of

that change. Should feudal dues be destroyed outright or redeemed by cash payments? Should the *Parlements* and the provisional estates be retained or abolished? Should there be democratic suffrage, or one based on property? What should be done with the Church? Should the Monarchy be overthrown and a republic set in its place? What ought the French to do to defend the Revolution in the face of universal hostility? In other words, how revolutionary was the revolution to be?

The various political institutions and structures that came into being were the result of a number of factors put together, like the influence of the *Philosophes* of the period of the Enlightenment (the influence of the Enlightenment on the French Revolution, its leaders and the public in general has been a matter of debate, with scholars arguing for it, and stating that ideas and ideological influences did play a very important role in the revolution, influencing the political and ideological conceptions of the leaders and also the French people.⁶³ This argument has been refuted by scholars who believe that the Enlightenment had no influence on the happenings of 1789 and that it is not the Enlightenment that made the revolution, instead it was the revolution that made the Enlightenment as once the revolution had taken place the revolutionaries looked back to the *Philosophes* in order to legitimise their actions and make a ideological base for it. Though the nature and origins of the French Revolution has been a matter of debate, what remains universally accepted is the significance of it.

⁶³ Darton, Robert, 'The Facts of Literary Life in Eighteenth Century France', in Keith Michael Baker ed. *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, Vol. I



Taking of the Bastille

This color print emphasizes the populace's participation in the storming of the Bastille, showing the urban population fighting under a red banner with muskets, swords, and pikes against the royal soldiers. Stunning images such as these—as well as dramatic press reports—contributed to what has become the widespread view that the taking of the Bastille was a spontaneous, brave, and widely popular revolt against royal authority.

Chapter III

Changing State Structure and the Ideology of Modern Nation

Most of the analysts of revolutions agree that the causes of revolutions are complex. Most of them in face of such complexity employ either the hierarchical approach in which they assert the primacy of one over the other or they try to bring out the complexity through narrating the course of the revolution, recounting it in some semblance to its real complexity. There seem to be problems with both the analytical structures, as the hierarchical approach tends to emphasise on one factor, relegating the others to the background or conflating them with the chosen causal factor. Here the obvious example is the way the Marxist theories of revolution view the state simply as an expression of class power rather than as a distinctive institution with its own interests and dynamics. Marx explained that the executive branch of the modern state is but a committee for managing the affairs of the ruling class. It is thus a tool of the ruling class which it uses to defend its interests against the interests of the vast majority of society. Engel in his work, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (pp.177-78, sixth edition), states: "The State is, therefore, by no means a power forced on a society form without, just as little is it 'the reality of the ethical idea', 'the image and reality of reason', as Hegel maintains. Rather, it is a product of society in certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it has split into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel. But in order that these antagonisms, these classes with conflicting economic interests, might not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it became necessary to have power, seemingly standing above society, that would alleviate out the society by placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more from it, is the state."¹

I attempt to look at the autonomous dynamics of ideology in the case of the French revolution and see how ideology fits into the speculative unfolding of interacting processes known as the French revolution. It, instead of adding another factor leads to a

¹ Quoted in V.I.Lenin, *The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution*, 1918.

completely different conceptualisation of the French revolution. I look at the interface between the state structure and ideology, and the changing character of the state upon its interaction with varied and conflicting ideologies. Thus it becomes important to briefly touch upon the concept of the state and how it was understood through the centuries.

Jean Bodin in his *Six Livres de la République*² defined the state as '....the rightly ordered government of a number of families.....by a sovereign power'. A stable state was possible, according to him, where there existed a sovereign power, by which he meant the absolute, unconditional power to which everybody was subject. For Bodin, sovereignty was a precondition of orderly political life and the principle mark of sovereign majesty and absolute power is the right to impose laws generally on all subjects regardless of their consent. Thus, as early as sixteenth century, Jean Bodin had provided an ideological basis to the French absolutist state.

The idea of the nation and state was interrelated and even though Nationalism as an ideology emerged only after the nineteenth century, the concept of the State was a much debated topic. The nation and the state were recognized as two separate entities; for Rousseau, the boundaries of the nation were not necessarily political boundaries, or the boundaries of the state. The nation according to Rousseau preceded the state but once the state was instituted, it did much to sharpen amongst its members, their sense of being of that nation, their material pride and their patriotism.

The state, its structure, nature and purpose had been reflected upon by numerous political thinkers and the answer to these questions had generally been of two kinds. One was that the state is an organism of which men themselves are parts and which is therefore greater than they are. It is real and they are merely abstractions. The other is that it is a machine which men create for their own purposes and which is therefore no other than they are. They are real and it is merely a device. The idea of the state as an organism was hit upon by the Greeks. It was challenged at the time of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, which led to the development of the 'mechanistic' view of the state. This view was maintained throughout the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, to be rejected again by Rousseau and by the German Romantics, who stressed on the organic view as against the mechanistic doctrine.

² Jean Bodin, *Six Livres de la République*, tr.by M.J.Tooley, (Oxford, 1967).

The political thinkers can be divided into three traditions; the first being the Rational-Natural tradition. According to his state and society can be understood only if it is related to an absolute standard, which exists in nature and which is therefore, out of human control. The second is the tradition of Will and Artifice; according to this the society and state are not natural but artificial. They are creations of man and therefore it is not the reason of man but the will of man that is required to produce the state. The human will therefore have the freedom to alter society. The third is the tradition of Historical Coherence; according to this both of the other traditions are defective. Since natural laws have to be changed to suit society, it maintains that therefore the Rational-Natural tradition is neither natural nor rational. And since man's will is always limited by the will of others, it states that the second tradition lays a lot of emphasis on will and artifice. Hence, this tradition attempts to combine the earlier traditions, to fuse will and reason, as in Rousseau's 'General Will' and Hegel's 'Rational Will'. It emphasizes the importance of historical growth and denies that absolute standards exist. The state according to this tradition is not the copy of the natural world but it can be seen as natural to some extent as it is the result of an historical evolution that can be thought of as a part of nature.

It is impossible here to get into the copious discussions on state by eminent political theorists like Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, The Utilitarians-Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, who expounded on the classical theory of the State as a machine and were challenged by theorists who, dissatisfied by this theory, looked at state as an organism. The eighteenth century interest in history, the new tendency to give a general coherence to history in terms of growth and decay strengthened the need for explanations for the existence of the state and the need to obey it. So did the development of nationalism, since it is easier for men to fall down and worship a State which is not presented to them as a mere machine of their own making. The State accordingly began to be portrayed as the embodiment of the nation. The basis of the State became a naturally homogeneous people, united by common descent and community and traditions. The State-organism became the unconsciously evolved organization which maintained the unity of the nation and gave expression to its will.

The concept of state is of crucial importance in Marxist thought. The classical Marxist view is expressed in the famous formulation of Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*: 'The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.' Marx never himself attempted a systematic analysis of the state but the subject occupies an important place in many of his works, notably in his historical writings, for instance in *Class Struggles* (1850), *18th Brumaire* (1852) and *Civil War in France* (1871). Engels too deals with the state in many of his writings, for instance in *Anti-During* (1878) and in *Origins of the Family* (1894). One of Lenin's most famous pamphlet, *The State and Revolution*,³ written on the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution deals with the Marxist theory of the state, but it was only since the 1960's that the state became a major field of investigation and debate with Marxism.

In the *philosophy of Right*, Hegel had sought to present the state as the embodiment of society's general interest, as standing above particular interests, and as being therefore able to overcome the division between Civil Society and the state and the split between the individual as a private person and as a citizen. Marx rejects this claim in his *Critique* on the ground that the state, in real life, does not stand for the general interest but defends the interest of property. In the *Critique*, Marx advances a mainly political remedy for this inability of the state to defend the general interest, namely the achievement of democracy. But he soon moved on to the view that much more than this was required and that 'political emancipation' alone could not bring about 'human emancipation'. This required a much more thorough reorganization of society, of which the main feature was the abolition of private property.

This view of the state as the instrument of a ruling class, so designated by the virtue of its ownership and control of the means of production, remained fundamental throughout for Marx and Engels. Engels wrote in *Origins of the Family*, chapter. 9, 'as a rule, the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class, which, through the medium of the state, becomes also the politically dominant class, and thus acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class'. This however, leaves open the question why and how the state, as an institution separate from the economically dominant class or classes, plays this role; and the question is particularly relevant in

³ Lenin, V.I., *The State and Revolution*, 1969.

capitalist society, where the distance between the state and economic forces is usually quite marked.

Two different approaches have, in recent years, been used to provide an answer to this question. The first relies on a number of ideological and political factors: for instance, the pressures which economically dominant classes are able to exercise upon the state and in society and the ideological congruence between the classes and those who hold power in the state. The second approach emphasizes the 'structural constraints' to which the state is subject in a capitalist society, and the fact that, irrespective of the ideological and political dispositions of those who are in charge of the state, its policies must ensure the accumulation and reproduction of capital. In the first approach, the state is the state of the capitalists; in the second, it is the state of capital. However, the two approaches are not exclusive but complimentary.

The state in these perspectives, is indeed an agent of instrument, whose dynamic and impulse is provided from outside. This leaves out of account a very large part of the Marxist view of the state, as conceived by Marx and Engels, for they attributed to the state a considerable degree of autonomy. Engels noted in *Origins of the Family* that, 'by way of warring classes balance each other so nearly that the state power, as ostensible mediator, acquires, for the moment, a certain degree of independence of both.' The absolute monarchies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the regimes of Napoleon I and Napoleon III, were examples of such periods.

These formulations come very close to suggesting not only that the state enjoys a 'relative autonomy', but that it has made itself altogether independent of society, and that it rules over society as those who control the state think fit and without reference to any force in society external to state. Infact the 'Marxist theory of state', far from turning the state into an agency or instrument subordinate to external forces, see it much more as an institution in its own right, with its own interests and purposes. This however does not contradict the notion of the state as concerned to serve the purposes and interests of the dominant class or classes; what is involved, in effect, is a partnership between those who control the state, and those who own and control the means of economic activity. This is the notion which underlines the concept of State Monopoly Capitalism, which is the description used by communist writers for the advanced present day capitalism.

Classical Marxism and Leninism always stressed the coercive role of the state, almost to the exclusion of all else : the state is essentially the institution whereby a dominant and exploiting class imposes and defends its power and privileges against the class or classes it dominates and exploits. One of Gramsci's⁴ major contributions to Marxist thought is the exploration of the fact that the domination of the ruling class is not only achieved by coercion but is also elicited by consent; and Gramsci also insisted that the state played a major role in the cultural and ideological fields and in the organization of consent.

When one discusses ideology, it is important to consider it in terms of the Marxist thought, as the issue of idealism, as it was in the beginning, remains very near the centre of Marxist thought. In the beginning ideology appeared as a negative and restricted concept as according to Marx, the real problems of humanity are not mistaken ideas but real social contradictions and that the former are a consequence of the latter. Soon after Marx's death the concept of ideology began to acquire new meanings. It did not necessarily lose its critical connotation, but a tendency arose to give that aspect a secondary place. These new meanings took two main forms; namely, a conception of ideology as the totality of forms of social consciousness- which came to be expressed by the concept of 'ideological superstructure' - and the conception of ideology as the political ideas connected with the interests of a class. These new meanings ultimately displaced the original negative connotation.

The causes of this shift are complex and it was not because of any systematic reworking of the concept within Marxism. In some of the formulations of Marx and Engels, elements of a neutral connotation of ideology can be found and their writings are not exempt from ambiguities and unclear statements which point away from any of the negative connotations. Engels mentions on a few occasions the 'ideological superstructure', the 'ideological spheres' and the 'ideological domain' which makes one believe that ideology covers the totality of forms of consciousness.⁵ An important factor which contributed in the evolution towards a positive concept of ideology is the fact that the first two generations of Marxist thinkers after Marx did not have access to *The*

⁴ Gramsci, Antonio, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 1971.

⁵ Quoted in *Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. by Tom Bottommore, Laurence Harris, V.G.Kiernan, Ralph Hiliband,(Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 221.

German Ideology, which remained unpublished until the 1920's. Thus by their writings it becomes clear that the first generation of Marxists did not consider it of the essence of Marxism to defend a negative concept of ideology.

However the political struggles of the last decades of the nineteenth century, especially in Eastern Europe were the main cause of this positive evolution of the concept of ideology. Marxism focuses its attention on the need to create a theory of political practice and therefore its development became more and more related to class struggles and party organisations. In this context the political ideas of the classes in conflict acquired a new importance and needed to be theoretically accounted for. Lenin provided the solution by extending the meaning of the concept of ideology. According to him ideology was the political consciousness linked to the interests of various classes and, in particular, he focused on the opposition between bourgeois and socialist ideology. Thus, ideology became a neutral concept referring to the political consciousness of classes, including the proletarian class. Lenin's conception then helped shape new contributions to the subject ever since. Marxism, for Lukács, is 'the ideological expression of the proletariat' or 'the ideology of the embattled proletariat', indeed the most potent weapon' which has led to bourgeois 'ideological capitulation'.⁶ Lenin's approach to ideology also influenced Gramsci, according to whom ideology was 'a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life.'⁷ He broke fresh ground by analysing the role of intellectuals and ideological apparatuses like education, media etc in the production of ideology.

Althusser⁸ has presented the most influential exposition of ideology; he distinguishes a theory of ideology in general, for which the function of ideology is to secure cohesion in society, from the theory of particular ideologies, for which the former general function is overdetermined by the new function of securing the domination of one class.

⁶ Lukács, G. *History and Class Consciousness*, 1923, pp.258-9, 228, quoted in *Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. by Tom Bottommore, Laurence Harris, V.G.Kiernan, Ralph Hiliband, Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 222.

⁷ Quoted in *Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. by Tom Bottommore, Laurence Harris, V.G.Kiernan, Ralph Hiliband, Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 222.

⁸ Althusser, Louis, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus," in *Lenin and Philosophy* (London, 1971)

It has been argued that ideologies of the revolutionary leaders in no way explain or provide an explanatory blueprint for the regimes that emerge after the revolution. Theda Skocpol states that “it cannot be argued that the cognitive content of ideologies in any sense provides a predictive key to the outcomes of the Revolutions.”⁹ William .H. Sewell argues otherwise, he states that the glaring difference between the outcomes of the French and Russian revolutions, in the sense that private property was consolidated in France while in Russia it led to the abolishment of all forms of private property, cannot be explained without the role of ideology. Socialism, an ideology invented in the nineteenth century, was not available in 1789 but was well known by 1917. The leaders of the French revolution were adherents of a particular ideology in which private property was an important inalienable natural right.

I would want to point out that there has been an unsatisfactory treatment of ideology in terms of its influence on the course of the revolution. This maybe because to admit that ideologies had a strong causal impact on revolutions would give a more significant role to people’s conscious intensions than is desirable. In the writings of theorists like Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Clifford Geertz and Raymond Williams, ideology is seen in a more structuralist sense. The emphasis is shifted from the self conscious individual to relatively anonymous and impersonal operations of “ideological state apparatuses”, “epistemes”, “cultural systems” or “structures of feeling.”¹⁰ Ideology is thus conceived in structural terms. This is not to say that ideology is inaccessible to human action does not undergo transformation but that ideological action is shaped by pre-existing ideological and other realities. Recent theorists have insisted that ideology should neither be seen as a mere reflex of material class relations nor as ideas, which intellectuals hold about society. Ideologies have be to be treated in a much more complex manner than as a causal factor bringing a portion of the change brought about by revolution, ‘ideologies inform the structure of institutions, the nature of social

⁹ Skocpol. Theda, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge, 1979)

¹⁰ Althusser, Louis, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus,” in *Lenin and Philosophy* (London, 1971), pp.123-73; Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, 1970), Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973); Raymond william, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, 1977)

cooperation and conflict, and the attitudes and predispositions of the population'.¹¹ The complexity of the relationship between ideology and revolution can be brought forth by the following statement, 'all social relations are at the same time ideological relations, and all explicit ideological discourse is a form of social action.'¹²

The French Revolution saw constant ideological shift during its course- from the ideology of the Old Regime to the constantly shifting ideological base during the course of it. The ideological foundations of the French Old Regime were complex and contradictory. It was born out of disparate material arising out of various discourses in different historical eras – Catholic, feudal, constitutional and juridical elements. It can be pictured as a society which was a set of privileged corporate bodies held together by the supreme will of a semi-sacerdotal king. The three estates, the guilds, the provinces, universities, academies and religious orders were corporate bodies in the sense that each body enjoyed laws peculiar to itself – indemnities, advantages, customs and regulations- which gave it a definitive place in the state. In the Old Regime the King was concerned with the welfare of the state as a whole; he was the supreme legislator and the embodiment of the majesty and glory of the state.

His position of supremacy was legitimised on religious grounds. He ruled by 'divine right', was the representative of God and ruled by his will. Thus the royal power that welded all corporate bodies into a single state was spiritual in nature – the will of God made the King supreme in the state. This ideology was intimately related to the institutional structure of the French state. As Tocqueville observed, the Old Regime state was composed of distinct historical layers – a feudal layer dating from the early middle ages, a magisterial layer dating from the proliferation of venal office in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and a bureaucratic layer dating from the administrative centralisation of Richelieu and Louis XIV.¹³ Each of these forms superseded each other and did not abolish the earlier forms. It is important to note that even though the absolutist state and its ideology provided the king with absolute powers but these powers came at the price of the King's recognition of the privileges of pre-existing institutions.

¹¹ Sewell, H. William, 'Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case', in *The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution*, ed. T.C.W. Blanning, (The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.289

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ Tocqueville de, Alexis, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (Garden City, New York, 1955)

Although the King had the formal power to abolish privileges and create new ones, yet any indiscriminate abolition of privileges by the king would only undermine his *raison d'être* and in return jeopardise his absolute powers. Under a powerful monarch like Louis XIV, the privileges were almost residual but their retention was nonetheless necessary for the politics of the eighteenth century. Under the less effective Louis XV and Louis XVI these bodies again gained their vigour and claimed greater public functions. In the ultimate crises of 1789 the king found himself forced to call the Estates General, demonstrating that in times of crises or weakening of the royal power, the suppressed claims of the corporate bodies could burst forth and threaten the absolute supremacy of the monarchy.

It was in the context of a monarchical state whose practices were expanding beyond its own ideological foundations that the ideology of the French Enlightenment emerged. The enlightenment ideology contradicted the monarchical state in both its essentials. While the latter saw divine spirit as the ultimate source of the social order, the enlightenment ideology saw natural phenomenon and natural laws as the only legitimising factor. It also viewed society not in terms a multitude of corporate bodies with separate privileges but insisted on the universal applicability of reason to all human affairs. It therefore was a direct assault on the ideology of the French Monarchical system.

The new Enlightenment ideas, vocabulary and metaphors were adopted widely by the elites of the Old Regime who had the highest stake in the existing system. There seems to be a strong affinity between the bureaucracy and Enlightenment, with members of the royal bureaucracy adopting enlightenment ideas as it provided them a discourse in terms of which they could justify their attempts to abolish certain entrenched privileges and promote administrative uniformity. Turgot can be seen as the quintessence enlightenment bureaucrat, who in his brief term as controller general (1774-76) attempted legislative abolishment of privileges.¹⁴ It is interesting to note that in the last two decades of the Old Regime, virtually all shades of political opinion drew, to a lesser or greater extent, from the Enlightenment ideas.¹⁵

¹⁴ See Dakin, Douglas, *Turgot and the Ancient Regime in France* (London, 1939; reprint, New York, 1965)

¹⁵ See Baker, Kieth Michael, " French Political Thought at the Accession of Louis XVI", *Journal of Modern History* 50 (June 1978), pp. 279-303.

By the end of the Old Regime the French political system had no single ideology, it can be said that two contradicting ideologies coexisted. The Enlightenment ideology was elaborated largely in opposition to the monarchical ideology and it has generally been argued that the Enlightenment was a proto revolutionary force which acted as a powerful solvent of the principles of the Old Regime, but such an approach poses the problem of reading history backwards. The two contradictory ideologies existed side by side in the French state as it existed in the 1770's and 1780's. But there is no reason to believe that it weakened the state or led to its fall in any way, as there is no necessary correlation between ideological consistencies and stability of states. The elements of two ideologies could be amalgamated into a stable state like many of the European states had done in the nineteenth century. So, one cannot claim a direct correlation between the onset of the revolution and ideology, instead the Old Regime was thrown into crises by the impending bankruptcy and not by its split ideological personality. Yet the importance of ideology cannot be sidelined because once the crises had begun, ideological contradictions contributed mightily to the deepening of the crises into revolution.

The immediate trigger for the Revolution was Louis XVI's attempts to solve the government's worsening financial situation. In February 1787, his finance minister, Loménie de Brienne, convened an Assembly of Notables, a group of nobles, clergy, bourgeoisie, and bureaucrats selected in order to bypass the *parlements*. The Controller-General of Finances, Charles Alexandre de Calonne, asked this group to approve a new land tax that would, for the first time, include a tax on the property of nobles and clergy. The assembly did not approve the tax, but instead demanded that Louis XVI call the Estates-General. On 8 August 1788, the King agreed to convene the Estates-General in May of 1789. Nowhere was the ideological character of the revolutionary crises so clearly displayed as on the question of the Estates General. In 1788 the Estates General had only an ideological existence, as a functioning institution it had disappeared in 1614. The necessity of reviving the Estates General was an ideological necessity, in order to unify their resistance to the king and give it a coherent justification. But revival of such a long absent institution meant that it had to be reconstituted from scratch. There were no living memories of an Estates General and no precedents sufficiently authoritative to

determine its composition and procedures. In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that the way in which this institution was to be fleshed out became a topic of an immense and unprecedented ideological debate. The calling of the Estates was determined by the logic of disintegration of the absolutist ideological synthesis, the ensuing debate was dominated by the emergence of an Enlightenment alternative to the increasingly disjointed absolutist discourse.¹⁶ The calling of the Estates could also be interpreted in Enlightenment terms – as a consultation of the National will or as an invitation to revive the social contract.

As part of the preparations for the Estates-General, *cahiers de doléances* (books of grievances) were drawn up across France, listing the complaints of each of the orders. This process helped to generate an expectation of reform of some kind. There was growing concern, however, that the government would attempt to gerrymander an assembly to its liking. To avoid this, the *Parlement* of Paris proclaimed that the Estates-General would have to meet according to the forms observed at its last meeting. Although it would appear that the magistrates were not specifically aware of the "forms of 1614" when they made this decision, this provoked an uproar. The 1614 Estates had consisted of equal numbers of representatives of each estate, and voting had been by order, with the First Estate (the clergy), the Second Estate (the nobility), and the Third Estate (the remainder of the population) each estate receiving one vote.

Almost immediately the "Committee of Thirty", a body of liberal Parisians, began to agitate against voting by order, arguing for a doubling of the Third Estate and voting by headcount (as had already been done in various provincial assemblies, such as Grenoble). Necker agreed that the size of the Third Estate should be doubled, but the question of voting by headcount was left for the meeting of the Estates themselves. Fueled by these disputes, resentment between the elitists and the liberals began to grow.

Pamphlets and works by liberal nobles and clergy, including the comte d'Antraigues and the Abbé Sieyès, argued the importance of the Third Estate. As

¹⁶ Sewell, H. William, 'Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case', in *The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution*, ed. T.C.W. Blanning, (The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.296

Antraigues wrote, it was 'the People, and the People is the foundation of the State; it is in fact the State itself'. Sieyès' famous pamphlet *Qu'est-ce que le tiers état? (What is the Third Estate?)*, published in January 1789, took the argument a step further: "What is the Third Estate? Everything. What has it been until now in the political order? Nothing. What does it want to be? Something."¹⁷ It mounted a thorough and passionate attack on the whole system of privilege, denouncing the aristocrats as the enemies of the Nation and arguing that the Assembly of the Third Estate was in fact a fully Sovereign National Assembly. Thus, by the time the Estates General met, in May of 1789, a fundamental recasting of the state in Enlightenment terms was already in the agenda, and many of the Third Estate representatives were inclined to see their estate as the germ of a National Assembly rather than a subordinate part of an ancient corporate body.

When the Estates-General convened in Versailles on 5 May 1789, lengthy speeches by Necker and Lamoignon, the keeper of the seals, did little to give guidance to the deputies, who were sent to separate meeting places to credential their members. The question of whether voting was ultimately to be by head or by order was again put aside for the moment, but the Third Estate now demanded that credentialing itself should take place as a group. Negotiations with the other two estates to achieve this, however, were unsuccessful, as a bare majority of the clergy and a large majority of the nobility continued to support voting by order.

On 10 June 1789 Abbé Sieyès moved that the Third Estate, now meeting as the *Communes*, proceed with verification of its own powers and invite the other two estates to take part, but not to wait for them. They proceeded to do so two days later, completing the process on 17 June.¹⁸ Then they voted a measure far more radical, declaring themselves the National Assembly, an assembly not of the Estates but of 'the People'. They invited the other orders to join them, but made it clear they intended to conduct the nation's affairs with or without them.

In an attempt to keep control of the process and prevent the Assembly from convening, Louis XVI ordered the closure of the *Salle des États* where the Assembly met,

¹⁷ Furet, François, *Revolutionary France, 1770-1880*, (1992). p.45.

¹⁸ John Hall Stewart. *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*. (New York: Macmillan, 1951), p. 86.

making an excuse that the carpenters needed to prepare the hall for a royal speech in two days. Weather did not allow an outdoor meeting, so the Assembly moved their deliberations to a nearby indoor real tennis court, where they proceeded to swear the Tennis Court Oath (20 June 1789), under which they agreed not to separate until they had given France a constitution. A majority of the representatives of the clergy soon joined them, as did 47 members of the nobility. By 27 June the royal party had overtly given in, although the military began to arrive in large numbers around Paris and Versailles. Messages of support for the Assembly poured in from Paris and other French cities. On 9 July the Assembly reconstituted itself as the National Constituent Assembly

By this time, Necker had earned the enmity of many members of the French court for his support and guidance to the Third Estate. Marie Antoinette, Louis' younger brother the Comte d'Artois, and other conservative members of the king's privy council urged Louis to dismiss Necker. On 11 July, after Necker suggested that the royal family live according to a budget to conserve funds; Louis fired him, and completely reconstructed the finance ministry at the same time.

Many Parisians presumed Louis's actions to be the start of a royal coup by the conservatives and began open rebellion when they heard the news the next day. They were also afraid that arriving Royal soldiers had been summoned to shut down the National Constituent Assembly, which was meeting at Versailles, and the Assembly went into non-stop session to prevent eviction from their meeting place once again. Paris was soon consumed with riots, anarchy, and widespread looting. The mobs soon had the support of the French Guard, including arms and trained soldiers, because the royal leadership essentially abandoned the city.

On 14 July, the insurgents set their eyes on the large weapons and ammunition cache inside the Bastille fortress, which also served as a symbol of tyranny by the monarchy. After several hours of combat, the prison fell that afternoon. Governor Marquis Bernard de Launay was beaten, stabbed and decapitated; his head was placed on a pike and paraded about the city. The Bastille served as a potent symbol of everything hated under the *ancien régime*. The King and his military supporters backed down, at

least for the time being. La Fayette took up command of the National Guard at Paris. Jean-Sylvain Bailly, president of the Assembly at the time of the Tennis Court Oath, became the city's mayor under a new governmental structure known as the *commune*. Necker was recalled to power, but his triumph was short-lived. An astute financier but a less astute politician, Necker overplayed his hand by demanding and obtaining a general amnesty, losing much of the people's favour.

Nobles were not assured by this apparent reconciliation of King and people. They began to flee the country as *émigrés*, some of whom began plotting civil war within the kingdom and agitating for a European coalition against France.

By late July, insurrection and the spirit of popular sovereignty spread throughout France. In rural areas, many went beyond this: some burned title-deeds and no small number of châteaux, as part of a general agrarian insurrection known as 'la Grande Peur' (the Great Fear). In addition, plotting at Versailles and the large numbers of men on the roads of France as a result of unemployment led to wild rumours and paranoia (particularly in the rural areas) that caused widespread unrest and civil disturbances and contributed to the Great Fear.

Up to the crisis of 1789, the ideology of the Old Regime had been characterised by a twofold contradiction, which was apparently stable: between a dominant absolutist and a subordinate corporate conception of a state and a second contradiction between this absolutist synthesis and the ideology of Enlightenment. The royal bankruptcy and the ensuing crisis led to the disintegration of this complex and contradictory ideology into its elements, with each searching for self determination in the new circumstances. The crisis liberated the Enlightenment ideology from its association with absolutism and made possible an attempt to reorder the state fundamentally in Enlightenment terms. The drift of events in 1789 continued to undermine the plausibility of the absolutist synthesis, while enhancing that of the revolutionary alternative.

The third Estate's adoption of the title 'National Assembly', the Tennis Court Oath, the deflection of the nobles and clergy to the National Assembly, the fall of the

Bastille, the municipal revolutions, the spreading peasant revolts, each of these events increased the supremacy of the Enlightenment ideology over that of its rivals. But it was not until the night of August fourth that the Enlightenment ideology reigned supreme.

The night of August fourth was the crucial turning point of the Revolution both as a class struggle and as an ideological transformation. The National Constituent Assembly abolished feudalism, in what is known as the August Decrees, sweeping away both the seigneurial rights of the Second Estate and the tithes gathered by the First Estate. In the course of a few hours, nobles, clergy, towns, provinces, companies, and cities lost their special privileges. By decreeing the end of the seigneurial system, the National Assembly was recognising the peasants' victory over the feudal lords, attempting to satisfy the peasants and thereby win their firm adherence to the revolution. But the reforms of fourth August did more than just dismantle seigneurialism; it abolished the entire privileged corporate order. The way that this happened is significant: privileges were renounced amidst joyous weeping by those who were their beneficiaries. The clergy offered up their tithes, the representatives of the cities and provinces renounced provincial and municipal privileges. The result was that by the morning of August fifth, the entire array of privileges had been formally annihilated. What remained was the Enlightenment ideal of equal individual citizens governed by laws that applied all and represented by a National Assembly that represented their general will.

It is important to emphasize on the ideological component of the night of August fourth. This ideological concept can be seen best in the enthusiasm that swept across the National Assembly. Till late July the National Assembly was entangled in a deep ideological contradiction, thought it had embarked on the path of the regeneration of the political system in the Enlightenment terms yet it had not completely done away with the absolute monarchical regime and privileges of the corporate society which contradicted the assemblies enunciated principles. It cannot be denied that it was the exigencies of the peasants' class struggle that dictated the abolition of the seigneurial privileges but this first violation in the system of privileges led to a sweeping abolition of privileges which were by no means threatened by the peasant rebellion. Thus once forced to destroy one set of privileges, the assembly overcome by the urge to attain ideological uniformity,

destroyed them all. By doing away with privilege the Assembly was declaring the nation to be truly transformed, setting it on a firm course of reason and natural law.¹⁹

When the National Assembly destroyed the institutional arrangements of the Old Regime it so did away with the metaphysical assumptions they were based on. No longer was the social order derived from the divine will operating through the media of King, Church and religious oath. The destruction of privilege meant the destruction of the spirit centered conceptual framework from which privilege was derived and its replacement with the laws of the natural world.

The Marxist analysis has recognised the importance of the night of fourth August but it reduces it to - an outcome of the peasant revolt. As Skocpol states that Marx's 'gigantic broom' swept away the 'medieval rubbish' that had hitherto cluttered the French State.²⁰ She like the rest of the Marxist historians fails to recognise that it was a crucial turning point in two distinct revolutionary processes: a class process of peasant revolt and an ideological process of conceptual transformation. The role of August fourth in the ideological transformation of the French Revolution was very different. August fourth marked the end of one ideological dynamic - the tension between Enlightenment and monarchical principles; at the same time it inaugurated another - the elaboration of Enlightenment metaphysical principles into a new revolutionary social and political structure.²¹

The destruction of the old order on the night of fourth August was swiftly followed by the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, which set forth the metaphysical foundations of the new order - the natural and inalienable rights of man.. Sounding a refrain similar to that of the American Declaration of Independence (1776), the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen was adopted by the National Assembly on 26 August 1789. The document amalgamated a variety of Enlightenment ideas,

¹⁹ This idea has been put forth by Sewell, H. William, in 'Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case', in *The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution*, ed. T.C.W. Blanning, (The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.298

²⁰ Skocpol, Theda, *States and Social Revolutions: A comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 183-85.

²¹ Sewell, H. William, in 'Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case', in *The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution*, ed. T.C.W. Blanning, (The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.298

including those of Locke and Montesquieu. The attention to property, which was defined as 'sacred and inviolable, "rivaled that given to liberty as a 'natural" and "imprescriptible" right of man.

1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.

2. The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.

3. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. Nobody nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.

4. Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else; hence the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights. These limits can only be determined by law.

5. Law can only prohibit such actions as are hurtful to society. Nothing may be prevented which is not forbidden by law, and no one may be forced to do anything not provided for by law.

6. Law is the expression of the general will. Every citizen has a right to participate personally, or through his representative, in its formation. It must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes. All citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, are equally eligible to all dignities and to all public positions and occupations, according to their abilities, and without distinction except that of their virtues and talents.

7. No person shall be accused, arrested, or imprisoned except in the cases and according to the forms prescribed by law. Any one soliciting, transmitting, executing, or causing to be executed, any arbitrary order shall be punished. But any citizen summoned

or arrested in virtue of the law shall submit without delay, as resistance constitutes an offense.

8. The law shall provide for such punishments only as are strictly and obviously necessary....

9. As all persons are held innocent until they shall have been declared guilty, if arrest shall be deemed indispensable, all harshness not essential to the securing of the prisoner's person shall be severely repressed by law.

10. No one shall be disquieted on account of his opinions, including his religious views, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law.

11. The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may, accordingly, speak, write, and print with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law.

12. The security of the rights of man and of the citizen requires public military forces. These forces are, therefore, established for the good of all and not for the personal advantage of those to whom they shall be instructed.

13. A common contribution is essential for the maintenance of the public forces and for the cost of administration. This should be equitably distributed among all the citizens in proportion to their means.

14. All the citizens have a right to decide, either personally or by their representatives, as to the necessity of the public contribution; to grant this freely; to know to what uses it is put; and to fix the proportion, the mode of assessment and of collection and the duration of the taxes.

15. Society has the right to require of every public agent an account of his administration.

16. A society in which the observance of the law is not assured, nor the separation of powers defined, has no constitution at all.

17. Since property is an inviolable and sacred right, no one shall be deprived thereof except where public necessity, legally determined, shall clearly demand it, and then only on condition that the owner shall have been previously and equitably indemnified.

Necker, Mounier, Lally-Tollendal and others argued unsuccessfully for a senate, with members appointed by the crown on the nomination of the people. The bulk of the nobles argued for an aristocratic upper house elected by the nobles. The popular party carried the day: France would have a single, unicameral assembly. The King retained only a "suspensive veto"; he could delay the implementation of a law, but not block it absolutely. The Assembly eventually replaced the historic provinces with 83 *départements*, uniformly administered and roughly equal in area and population.

The Revolutionary ideology:

The dynamics of the revolutionary ideology changed dramatically once it became the dominant idiom of government. As long as the Enlightenment principles were viewed in opposition to the monarchical principles of the Old Regime they appeared to be uniform and consistent. But once the corporate-monarchical hegemony was done away with the internal contradictions and inconsistencies inherent in the enlightenment began to emerge. The ideology which was embraced by the National assembly and was enshrined in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen were highly ambiguous and abstract. It can be stated that the ideological dynamics of the revolution arose out of the practical elaboration of these abstract revolutionary principles. The ideological history of the French Revolution has been dealt with in detail, which will be next to impossible to elaborate on here, given the vast existing scholarship.²² In terms of the ideological dynamics of the revolution four important general features can be identified: the progressive radicalisation of the ideology from 1789-1794, the production of rival

²² Some of the general histories of the Revolution include, Albert Mathiez, *The French Revolution* (New York, 1964); George Lefebvre, *The French Revolution*, 2Vols (New York, 1964); Albert Soboul, *The French Revolution, 1787-1799*, trans. Alan Forest and Colin Jones (New York, 1975)

ideological variants and the ideological restructuring of a vast range of social life; and finally the emergence of politically crucial but unanticipated outcomes.

The progressive radicalisation of the French revolution from 1789 to the Terror is one of the most familiar features of the French revolutionary history. The dominant interpretation of this radicalisation has been the outbreak of international war, the exigencies of which – enforcing conscription, assuring supplies to the troops and maintaining discipline in the provinces – made the position of the Montagnards (the radical faction in the National Convention) stronger as they were the only ones ready to adopt extreme measures in order to save the revolution. The result was the emergence of a virtual dictatorship of the Committee of Public Safety, the stronghold of the Montagnards, with Robespierre at the head. The war crisis also fuelled radicalisation by the mobilisation of the *Sans Culottes*, whose fanatic republicanism was coloured by economic grievance against the rich. As long as the war crisis continued the *Sans Culottes*, the Mountain, and the Committee remained united. But with the victories of the French armies in the spring of 1794, this radical alliance came apart and Robespierre was abandoned by the *Sans Culottes* and executed by vote of his erstwhile collaborators in the Convention. According to this interpretation the radicalisation was the result of a particular conjuncture of class struggles and legislative struggles under the goad of war emergency.

Although the period of radicalisation was a period of tremendous ideological radicalisation, but most of the historians have treated ideology as an arm of factional struggle or the reflection of the class position of the actors. However Francois Furet has put forth a new interpretation of the ideology of the Terror that replaces the conventional class and political dynamics with an internal ideological dynamic.²³ In *Penser la Revolution Francaise*,²⁴ Furet denies the conventional explanation that the Terror was the response to the National peril,²⁵ or that class interests played a decisive role in the revolutionary struggles for power.²⁶ Instead he sees the Terror developing inevitably out

²³ Sewall, H. William, 'Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case', in *The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution*, ed. T.C.W. Blanning, (The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.300

²⁴ Furet, Francois, *Penser la Revolution Francaise* (Paris, 1978), trans. Elborg Forster, as *Interpreting the French Revolution*

²⁵ Furet, *Interpreting The French Revolution*, (Cambridge, 1981) pp.61-63

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.51

of the ideology of the Revolution. According to him the terror was generated by a continuing dialectic between the notion of the general will and the 'aristocratic plot', and was implicit in the revolutionary ideology from the very beginning. Though the Terror had developed through the 'circumstances' of war, its dynamic was essentially internal and ideological.²⁷ He insists on the collective and anonymous characteristic of this ideological dynamic and argues that Robespierre was a dominant figure in the revolution, not because of his personal characteristics or because of his unique political talents but because he succeeded in 'becoming of embodiment' of revolutionary ideology.²⁸ As Furet puts it, 'The Revolution would speak through him...he was the mouthpiece of its purest and most tragic discourse.'²⁹ Thus in Furet's analysis there is a clear shift from the talents and aspirations of the political leaders as being significant historical actors to the revolutionary ideology. The discourse of the Jacobins and the Terror was therefore not the creation of Robespierre or Saint Just or Marat but of the ideology which was operational since the summer of 1789.

This account of Furet's of the radicalisation of the Revolution is unique as it does away with revolutionary leadership, class or party seizing power and replaces it with an autonomous and absolute ideological dynamics. 'The Revolution', according to Furet 'placed the symbolic system to the center of political action'³⁰, it established 'a world where mental representatives of power governed all actions, and where a network of signs completely dominated political life.'³¹

This kind of an interpretation falls into a sort of a causal monism in which ideology broke loose from all social moorings and its dynamics dominated over social and political existence. Such an interpretation can be criticised on the grounds that an adequate explanation of the radicalisation should take into account both the class struggles and the exigencies of war. The structure of the Ideology was indeed important in determining the nature of these struggles and the way in which these exigencies were understood and acted upon.

²⁷ *Ibid*,p.63

²⁸ *Ibid*,p.56

²⁹ *Ibid*, p.59, 61.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p.51

³¹ *Ibid*,p.48

Ideological variants:

When we look at course of the revolution from 1789 to 1794, there is a clear drift towards a certain radicalisation, which can be interpreted as an outcome of a succession of sharply contrasting ideological variants. These variants were elaborated and developed by different political factions, each of which sketched out a different blueprint from a common set of revolutionary principles. The huge varieties of ideological variants, apart from the political parties of the period, also come forth in the vibrant club life of the 1790s. Those who were passionate in their commitment to one or other brand of political allegiance found an outlet for their energies in these clubs in Paris and other cities. Moderate royalists in 1789-91 had their *Club des Impartiaux*, the more counter-revolutionary of their persuasion belonged instead with Clermont-Tonnerre to the *Club des Amis de la Constitution monarchique*. In terms of ideological creativity none excelled the *Cercle Social* in the early stages of the Revolution. It functioned as a publishing house and a meeting place for many future Girondins, including Brissot, Condorcet and Roland, but did not survive their demise in mid-1793. Club membership steadily widened as noble and clerical participation collapsed in 1791-2. By 1794 there were over 6000 political clubs with varied ideological demeanour.³²

The Constitutional Monarchist, Girondin, Jacobin and *Sans Culotte* variants of revolutionary ideology, developed in opposition to each other. None of these variants were ever in a position to impose its ideological blueprint on state and society, as none of them held power firmly enough or for a sufficient period to have done so. Each variant of the revolutionary ideology can be conceptualised as a systematic transformation of existing rival variants. This process of transformation can be easily studied in the case of the ideology of the *Sans Culottes*, because of the extensive work done by Albert Soboul on this section of society.³³ The *Sans Culotte's* transformation of revolutionary ideology can be seen in their interpretation of the 'aristocracy' and the 'aristocratic plot'. In the discourse of the Constitutional Monarchists, the distinction between the aristocracy and

³² On the creation of a new political culture and patterns of political participation, see, Nigel Aston, *The French Revolution 1789-1804, Authority, Liberty and the Search for Stability*, (Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

³³ Soboul, Albert, *The Parisian Sans Culottes in the French Revolution, 1793-1794* (Oxford, 1964)

the people was above all legal and the privileges of the aristocrats distinguished them from the common people. In Girondin and Jacobin discourse, the distinction became increasingly political; the aristocrats were those who opposed the revolution and its radicalisation. The *Sans Culottes*, while accepting both of these prior notions added another nuance of their own, they brought in the class question: the aristocrats were those who were rich, who lived better than them, were concerned more about their wealth than the Republic, put on air's, wore breeches, powdered wigs and spoke in a 'distinguished' fashion.³⁴ Thus, the *Sans Culottes* redefined the aristocratic category in a way that reflected their own class resentments.

A similar transformation took place in the *Sans Culotte's* definition of the 'aristocratic plot'. The Jacobins and the Girondins attributed all political opposition to the 'aristocratic plot' but according to the *Sans Culottes*, it was also responsible for the high prices of food stuff. Aristocrats were systematically withholding food grains from the market to starve the patriotic *Sans Culottes*.³⁵ They were also opposed the policy of 'free trade', which was the economic policy of all revolutionary governments whether headed by the Constitutional Monarchists, Girondins, or Jacobins, as according to them it would mean adherence to the natural laws of political economy and would thus lead to abundance and prosperity. *Sans Culottes* opposed it an equally naturalist political economy, arguing that nature was bountiful and provided enough for the subsistence of all. If prices rose so high as to starve people, it could only be the result of speculation by the aristocrats, who hoarded grains in order to enrich themselves and starve out the true patriots. Therefore it was necessary to institute price control and enforce it by a policy of terror against speculators.

The revolutionary conception of property was also transformed by the *Sans Culottes* in order to make it fit into their conception of the economy. The Jacobins and the Girondins considered property as the absolute possession of individuals, who were free to dispose it as they saw fit. But the *Sans Culottes* saw proprietors as mere trustees of goods which in the end belonged to the people as a whole.³⁶

³⁴ Soboul, Albert, *The Parisian Sans Culottes in the French Revolution, 1793-1794* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 19-23

³⁵ *Ibid*, pp.53-68

³⁶ *Ibid*, pp.464-67

They reduced the notion of political representation almost to the vanishing point. As opposed to the Girondins, who saw the citizen's chief role as casting a vote to choose members of a representative body, who would rationally determine the general will and then enact it into a law, the *Sans Culottes* believed that the people should as a whole, unanimously express their general will. In their conception of the revolutionary ideology the *Sans Culottes* seemed suspicious of any mechanism that alienated power from the direct control of the people.

Ever since 1789, the Assembly had been in a constant state of dilemma regarding the Revolution, as to how to preserve the Revolution from its opponents and whose Revolution was it? These questions had gained immense importance in 1790 and the flight of the king and the royal family brought events to a head. . Louis XIV fled Paris on 21st June 1790 and publicly repudiated the Revolution, appealing to the people to return to the certainties of the monarchical rule. He left behind a lengthy document which publicly repudiated the direction of that the Revolution had taken. Stating the incompetence of the various political clubs that had come up in establishing the rule of law in the Nation, he states, 'From the spirit that reigns in the club, and the way in which they seize control of the new primary assemblies, what can be expected from them is apparent; and if they show signs of some tendency to go back over something, it is in order to destroy what is left of royalty, and to establish some metaphysical and philosophical government which can never be achieved in reality.'³⁷ Addressing to the people of France and especially of Paris and bawaring the of the ill effects of the Revolutionary government, he stated, 'People of France, and especially you Parisians, inhabitants of a city that the ancestors of his Majesty delighted in calling 'the good city of Paris', be wary of the suggestions and lies of your false friends; come back to your king; he will always be your father, your best friend. What pleasure will he not give have in forgetting all his personal wrongs, and to see himself once again in your midst...'³⁸

The various political factions within the Assembly split on the issue of the kind of reprimand Louis should face for betraying the Revolution and inciting people against the Assembly. The political factions and difference came to the fore with this debate and

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

there was a splitting of the Girondins from what came to be known as the Jacobins, their leader being Robespierre. Robespierreist came to be regarded as staunch followers of Rousseauan ideology and came to power in what is called the second revolution in 1792. The coming in power of the Jacobins led to the replacement of the National Assembly with the National Convention and the purge of the Girondins and other moderates and ultra leftists from the convention. The Convention established committees like the Committee of Public Safety, and passed various laws such as the Law of Suspects, which led to the complete hold of the Convention over the Nation. The Committee of Public Safety consisted of twelve important members of the Jacobins including Robespierre and the government under their leadership has widely been labelled as a totalitarian regime by historians.

The Convention had to decide what to do regarding the King, whose position was further compromised by the discovery of some of his secret correspondence with the émigrés and with members of the earlier Assemblies. The Girondins who were greatly divided on this issue gave the impression that they were defending Louis XVI. The young deputy, Saint-Just in his first major speech cut the Girondin knot by declaring that the King should not be judged at all in the legal sense but condemned out of hand as a public enemy. Robespierre took a similar approach and declared that, 'there is no case to plead here. Louis is no defendant; you are no judges; you are and can only be Statesmen.' 'If Louis can be tried Louis can be acquitted; he may be innocent until he is convicted. Indeed, he is presumed to be innocent until he is convicted. But if Louis is acquitted, if Louis can be presumed innocent, what becomes of the Revolution?'³⁹ Robespierre was probably right when he said that the hesitation of the Assembly had encouraged to open royalism in Paris. Regarding the nature of the King's punishment he was on difficult grounds because he was an opponent of death penalty but justifying death for the king he states, 'Neither exile nor prison can make his existence of no consequence to the public well-being... Louis must die because the Nation should live.'⁴⁰

On December 28th he tried to overcome the reluctance of his colleagues to shed the King's blood, 'I felt my own republican *vertu* faltering in the presence of guilt humbled

³⁹ Hampson, Norman, *The life and Opinions of Maximilien Robespierre*, (Duckworth, London, 1974), p.135.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p.136.

by the sovereign power (of the Nation). Hatred of tyrants and love of humanity have a common origin in the heart of the just man who loves his country. But, fellow citizens, the final proof of their devotion that the people's representatives owe to the nation is to sacrifice these immediate promptings of natural sensibility to the safety of a great people and of oppressed humanity. Citizens, the sensibility that sacrifices innocence to crime is a cruel sensibility; clemency that makes concessions to tyrants is barbarous.⁴¹

Robespierre devoted all his energies to securing the death penalty for Louis and warned the Jacobins that the Girondins were hoping to provoke a riot in Paris in order to discredit the capital and some of the sections campaigning for the death penalty. When the Girondins proposed consulting the electorate about the penalty, Robespierre argued that simple people could easily be misled and implicitly conceded that the election had only gone well in September because the Right had been frightened away from the polls'.⁴²

The Jacobin followers of Robespierre and Saint-Just, who sent the Girondins to the Guillotine in 1793-4, bitterly denounced the Philosophes and Encyclopédistes. The men of letters were looked at as traitors, atheists and materialists and enemies of virtue. Robespierre saw his enemies as "the most scheming, the cleverest", who "favour with all their power the rich egoists and the enemies of equality."⁴³ But the Jacobins used one major Enlightenment Philosopher extensively, Rousseau, even obsessively. Robespierre was a zealous follower of the Rousseauan ideology and yearned to establish Rousseau's Republic of Virtue. Robespierre summed up his views in a speech to the Jacobins, which amounted to the general survey of the Revolution. As he saw it the revolution history was repeating itself, with the Girondins like the Feuillants before them abandoning their former principles for the pursuit of power. 'Take away the word "Republic" and I see no change.' The Girondins were 'more criminal in their tactics than all the factions that had preceded them' and no different in their aims. They would not shrink from restoring the monarchy if it suited them and they were turning themselves into champions of social

⁴¹ *Ibid*

⁴² *Ibid*

⁴³ Blum, Carol, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue: The Language of Politics in the French Revolution* (Ithaca, New York, 1986), p.186, 175.

conservatism, 'they are the gentlemen, the right people of the republic, we are the sans-culottes, the riff-raff.'⁴⁴

Scholars have differed on whether the Jacobins really followed the philosophy of Rousseau as it actually was or did they interpret it in a way that suited them and their ideology. Alfred Cobban is of the opinion that Robespierre had very little real knowledge of the writings of Rousseau. Carol Blum in her study states that Robespierre's reading of Rousseau was "narrow, rigid, unnuanced....but nevertheless authentically faithful to a central core of the master's teachings".⁴⁵ According to Cobban, Robespierist dominance marked a point at which the Revolution broke a way from the Enlightenment, "The Revolution.....strayed away from the path of enlightened happiness to the straight and narrow road of Jacobin virtue, from the principle of representative and constitutional government to the rule of an authoritarian elite, from the *philosophes*' ideal of peace to the revolutionary crusading war and the Napoleonic dream of conquest....from the ideals of democracy and peace to a policy of dictatorship and war".⁴⁶

On 5th September, 1793, the Convention legitimised 'the Terror', a declaration to organise, systemise and accelerate the repression of the internal enemies and ensure swift punishment for the traitors. Robespierre's 'Reign of Terror' was directed in the first place against the Girondins, who wished to limit the Revolution and the Republic in the sense of the economic interests of the large scale bourgeoisie and were suspected of conspiring along with the royalist generals because they needed them to put through their definitely bourgeois republic against the common man. This was treason against the austere principles of the revolution, which was the object of Robespierre's solicitude, and their heads fell.

On 19 Vendemiaire(October 10,1793), Saint Just demanded in the name of the Committee of Public Safety, that the Convention proclaim the Government of the Republic as the revolutionary government up to the conclusion of peace. The following speech was delivered in motivation of this innovation, with which Robespierre was commissioned by the Committee of Public Safety:

⁴⁴ Hampson, Norman, *The life and Opinions of Maximilien Robespierre*, (Duckworth, London, 1974), p.131.

⁴⁵ Blum, Carol, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue: The Language of Politics in the French Revolution* (Ithaca, New York, 1986), p.277.

⁴⁶ cited in Stromberg, Roland, 'The Philosophes and the French Revolution: Reflections on Some Recent Research', *The History Teacher*, Vol.21, No.3 (May, 1988),pp.321-339

“The theory of the revolutionary government is as new as the Revolution itself, from which this government was born.....the revolutionary government, is the cause of the fear of the aristocracy, or the pretext of its calumnies.”⁴⁷ Further elaborating on the nature of the Revolutionary government he stated, ‘The goal of a constitutional government is the protection of the Republic; that of a revolutionary government is the establishment of the Republic.’⁴⁸

‘The revolutionary government will need to put forth extraordinary activity, because it is at war. It is subject to no constant law, since the circumstances under which it prevails are those of a storm, and change with every moment. This government is obliged unceasingly to disclose new sources of energy to oppose the rapidly changing face of danger.’⁴⁹

‘This government has nothing in common with anarchy or and disorder; on the contrary, its goal requires the destruction of anarchy and disorder in order to realise a dominion of law. It has nothing in common with autocracy, for it is not inspired by personal passions.’⁵⁰

This progressive radicalisation of the Revolution from 1789 to the ‘Terror’ of 1793-4 is one of the most familiar features of the French Revolution. The outbreak of the international war and internal social and economic difficulties are considered to be the reason for such radicalisation, an attempt to preserve the revolution. The exigencies of the war, enforcing conscription and ensuring supplies for the troops, gave an advantage to the Montagnards who alone were ready to adopt extreme measures in an attempt to ‘save’ the revolution. This situation saw the coming together of the *sans culottes*, the Montagnards and the Committee of Public Safety. According to this interpretation, the radicalisation of the revolution took place because of a particular conjuncture of class struggles, legislative struggles and war emergency.

‘Terror’ has also been attributed to popular revolutionary mentality. Furet states that before becoming a set of repressive institutions used by the Republic to suppress their political opponents on the basis of fear, the ‘Terror was a demand based on political convictions or beliefs, a characteristic feature of the mentality of revolutionary

⁴⁷ *ibid*, *Voices of Revolt. Speeches of Maximilien Robespierre*, p.62

⁴⁸ *ibid*

⁴⁹ *ibid*, p.63

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, pp.63-4

activism'.⁵¹ Talking about the popular revolutionary mentality Furet states that, 'just as the Revolution was the reversal whereby the people re appropriated a power previously alienated to the King and to God, the political universe that it inaugurated was populated solely by wills, so that henceforth nothing remained outside the human control. The new realm of power was occupied entirely by the people, which through its actions had reclaimed inalienable rights.'⁵² He discards the claims that the class struggles played any decisive role in the revolutionary struggle for power. The 'Terror', developed inevitably out of the ideology of the revolution. According to Furet, 'the Terror was generated by a continuing dialectic between the notion of the general will and the aristocratic plot, and was implicit in revolutionary ideology from the beginning. Although the Terror developed through the 'circumstances' of the war and attending political struggles, its dynamic was essentially internal and ideological.'⁵³

The above discussion highlights the fact that the ideology of the *Sans Culottes* was distinct from the revolutionary ideology of the other factions but it also makes it clear that even though it was different, it was constructed out of the same terminology and the same essential set of concepts: popular sovereignty, natural law, the general will, representation, virtue, property, aristocracy and the people. The ideologies of the *Sans Culottes*, the Jacobins, the Girondins and all the other factions were each transformations of one another: they were formed in the continuing dialogue and conflict of mutual struggle, shaped out of common materials by the strategic choices and interests of each faction. These varied ideologies can be seen as 'distinct but related explorations of the possibilities – and the constraints – inherent in the structures of French Revolutionary ideology'.⁵⁴ The Feuillants enthusiastically advocated a peaceful, moderate monarchy; the Girondins dreamed of a republic of wages; the left Jacobins of a sovereignty of the poorest strata of the population; the Hebertistes of a republic safeguarded by an equality of possessions; each of these factions went to the scaffold with its illusions, embracing death in a complete faith in the correctness and immortality of its ideas. Robespierre's

⁵¹ Furet, François, 'Terror' in *The French Revolution: In Social and Political Perspective*, ed. Peter Jones (Arnold, 1996), p.451.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ François, Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, (Cambridge, 1981) pp.61-63.

⁵⁴ Sewell, H. William, 'Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case', in *The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution*, ed. T.C.W. Blanning, (The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.304.

demands were taken over by Babeuf in his Conspiracy of Equals, it was further disseminated by Buonarroti, it became a constituent part of French Socialism and the ideological basis of the revolutions of 1830, 1848 and 1871. It was critically annexed by Karl Marx; and thus Robespierre and the Jacobins are a part of the tradition of the Revolution, an element in the new world order as Marx puts it.⁵⁵

Social life: Ideologically Restructured

During the revolutionary period, the whole of social life was infused with ideological significance, which led to its restructuring from top to bottom. Revolutions are termed as social when they attempt to transform the entirety of people's social lives – their work, their religious beliefs, their legal systems, their patterns of sociability and even their experience of time and space.

It can of course be stated that the collapse of the Old Regime state made reforms of many social institutions imperative. The peasant uprisings had shattered the property relations of the Old Regime, the old legal, administrative system and privileges had been dismantled by the National Assembly on the night of August fourth, which left the revolutionary legislators with no choice but to elaborate reforms for all these institutional sectors. Apart from the coming apart of the old structure, the exigencies of state consolidation and class struggles set limits to how these reforms would be structured. In spite of the above exigencies it can be demonstrated that the particular shape of the reformed institutions was largely determined by the revolutionary ideology. The revolutionaries were not content in just reforming those areas of social life which the collapse of the Old Regime had destroyed, 'their revolution recognised a new metaphysical order; wherever existing social practices were based on the old metaphysics they had to be reconstituted in new rational and natural terms'.⁵⁶ This is very clear in their reformation of those aspects of social life which had remained intact during the 1789 upheaval and the continuation of which would have posed no threat to the revolutionary ideals. Two examples of such reforms are: the adoption of the

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.30.

⁵⁶ Sewell, H. William, 'Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case', in *The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution*, ed. T.C.W. Blanning, (The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.305

revolutionary calendar and enactment of a new system of weights and measures.⁵⁷ 'Where the old systems had been arbitrary, clumsy, heterogeneous and based on the tyranny of local custom, the new system measured out the world in terms at once uniform, rational, easily manipulable, and based on immutable facts of nature.'⁵⁸

The revolutionary calendar intended to transform the people's experience of time; it established an entirely new framework for the reckoning of the passage of time, one which was based on nature, reason and virtuous republican deeds.

The revolutionaries reformed educational and scientific institutions. They eliminated earlier forms of address, substituting the universal term *citoyen* and *citoyenne* for the hierarchical terms of the Old Regime. Marriage was redefined as a purely civil contract rather than a sacrament and so were birth and death. They changed the punishment meted out to criminals, making decapitation the universal form of punishment rather than it being the privilege of the nobility. These reforms made significant contributions to the overall patterns of revolutionary outcomes and they are incomprehensible except as a result of revolutionary ideology.

Ideology also played an important role in shaping those reforms which were powerfully influenced by class struggles and struggles for consolidation of the states. One example of such a reform is the reform of the territorial administration. The provinces which varied from immense and internally differentiated territories like Languedoc or Burgundy to tiny and homogeneous ones like Foix and Aunis, the departments were drawn up to be approximately equal in size and population. The uniformity of the departments was motivated in part by the need for efficient administration and the goal of state consolidation and in part by ideological reasons. The geographical uniformity of the department reiterated the equality and uniformity of the rights of the citizens of the French nation. Moreover the departments were named according to the natural features of the territory – the High Alps, the Low Alps, the Seine, the Loire, the Moors, the North Coast, Land's End and so on.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Legislation on the metric system is reprinted in John Hall Stewart, *A documentary Survey of the French Revolution* (New York, 1951), pp.503-6, 555-60, 754-58.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, pp.137-41

The role of ideology was equally important in the National Assemblies attempt to reform the Church. On fourth August, the representative of the clergy renounced tithes and tax privileges which made reforms in the Church administration inevitable. The reforms were around the issues of finances, Church government and oaths, which drove the Church into counterrevolution.⁶⁰ The expropriation of the church lands was accepted without much protest, but the reforms of the Church government and the issue of oaths threatened to drive a wedge between the Church and the Revolution. Reforms in Church government were derived more from ideological rather than from practical political necessity. The proposal that the priests and bishops were to become public servants and were to be elected by the same method as the mayors, legislators, judges and the councilmen, posed a problem as it required the priests to be subjected to and required their obedience to a popular will, which seemed to contradict their obedience to bishops and the pope.

The issue of the oath 'went straight to the core of the metaphysical transformation of 1789. The religious vow or oath had been an essential metaphysical constituent of Old Regime society. The oaths were sworn to God and were therefore permanent; as the metaphor put it, they made an indelible impression on the soul of the swearer.⁶¹ The revolution was based the social order on reason and natural law rather than divine spirit and therefore could not tolerate oaths which claimed to establish permanent obligations or recognized an authority superior to the French Nation. In 1791, the National Assembly imposed a civic oath – a kind of public vow of adherence to the social contract – on all the priests. The civic oath stated: "I swear to be faithful to the Nation and the Law, and the King, and to maintain with all my power the constitution of the Kingdom."⁶² The problem was that it seemed to a majority of the clergy to contradict their oath to the ecclesiastical authority and ultimately to the pope. They therefore refused to take the oath and were driven into exile or into open defiance of the Revolution. One such declaration by a priest, J.A.Baude, parish priest of Quesques et Lottinghem was: '*I declare that my religion does not allow me to take an oath such as the National Assembly requires; I am*

⁶⁰ For the discussion of these reforms, see M.J.Sydenham, *The French Revolution* (New York, 1965), pp.74-78.

⁶¹ Sewell, H.William, 'Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case', in *The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution*, ed. T.C.W. Blanning, (The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.308

⁶² Stewart, John Hall, *A documentary Survey of the French Revolution* (New York, 1951), p.233.

happy and I even promise to watch over as well as one possibly can the faithful of this parish who entrusted to me, to be true to the nation and the King and to observe the Constitution decreed by the national assembly and sanctioned by the King in all that is within the competence of his power, an all that belongs to him in the order of purely civil and political matters, but where the government and laws of the Church are concerned, I recognize no superior and other legislators than the pope and the bishop.....by taking this oath I would have sworn no longer to recognize our holy father the pope and head of the Church, or the bishops as its governors, since the National Assembly wishes to attribute this right to itself alone...⁶³ The attempt to impose the civic oath was one of the greatest political disasters of the Revolution. The alienation of the clergy, whose influence was enormous especially in the rural parishes also led to the alienation of much of the rural population, which led to the famous Vendee rebellion of 1793,⁶⁴ at a time when allied monarchical forces were advancing on Paris. Thus ideology a major determinant in the Church reforms set in motion one of the major dynamics that led to political polarization, radicalization and the Terror.

Unanticipated Ideological Outcomes:

The revolutionary ideology is undoubtedly crucial in explaining the course that the revolution took, but apart from being the determinant the ideology was itself greatly transformed in the course of the revolutionary struggle. Amongst the most important outcomes were certain new ideological discourses, the most important being the idea of revolution itself. Before 1789, the meaning of the word 'revolution' in political discourse was, in the words of the *Academie Francaise*, "vicissitude or great change in fortune in the things of the world."⁶⁵ As an example of its use the dictionary gave the following sentence: "The gain or loss of a battle causes great revolutions in a state."⁶⁶ A revolution was thus a sudden change in a state and something which was a recurring fact of political life because of unforeseeable changes in circumstances and the instability of all human institutions.

⁶³ *Annales historique de la Révolution française*, 46(1974), p.289, quoted in *The French Revolution and Napoleon, A Sourcebook*, ed. Philip G.Dwyer and Peter McPhee (Routledge, 2002), pp.48-49.

⁶⁴ Tilly, Charles, *The Vendee* (Cambridge, 1964)

⁶⁵ *Le Dictionnaire de l'Academie francoise*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1694), quoted in Sewell, H.William, 'Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case', in *The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution*, ed. T.C.W. Blanning, (The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.309

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

It was the events of 1789-1794 that introduced the modern notion of revolution to the world. Revolution came to denote something more specific than change in the affairs of the state, the overthrow of one form of government by people and its replacement by another form. The change in the definition of a revolution brought it closer to an ideological explanation; it came to be closely associated with the exercise of popular sovereignty. The events of 1789, the taking of the Bastille, the removal of the King from Versailles to Paris in the 'October days', though they saw the decisive intervention of the Parisian people, were revolutions in the old sense as they were unplanned and unforeseen. But they gave rise to a concept of popular insurrection that made possible premeditated and concerted uprisings later – the revolution of August 10, 1792 that deposed the king, and the insurrection that purged the Girondins from the Convention on June 2, 1793.

Thus, after 1789, revolution became something that people did consciously and with prescience, which transformed politics not just in France but in the entire world. Now, protecting the state against revolutions became an important concern of the governments. The people became conscious bearers of revolution; this consciousness led to a change in vocabulary with nouns like '*revolutionary*' and '*revolutionist*', which did not exist before 1789, being used.

Another crucial ideological discourse produced by the French revolution was *Nationalism*. The idea of the nation was central to the political theory of the revolution from the beginning. It was originally bound up with the theory of the social contract. The nation was a body created by the social contact. Sieyès defined the nation as: 'a body of associates living under common laws and represented by the same legislature'. This emerging nationalist discourse was also based on the Enlightenment, as it defined the nation and citizenship in terms of natural substances land and blood, and it conceived of the loyalty of the national land and blood as natural. It also had no notable theorists. It was an anonymous discourse which was born out of the demands of the situation and the possibilities of the pre-existing ideologies. 'The concepts of political terror and of what Marxists eventually dubbed the 'vanguard revolutionary party' were both produced in the years 1789-1794.'⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Sewell, H. William, 'Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case', in *The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution*, ed. T.C.W. Blanning. (The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.312

Conservative political thought was as much the product of the Revolution as was Revolutionary political thought. The French Revolution was the inspiration for the theories of Edmund Burke and Jean de Maistre and for the conservative political regimes of all the European states of the Restoration era.⁶⁸ Also the French Revolution did not directly produce the 19th century ideologies known as socialism or communism, but it did provide an intellectual and social environment in which these ideologies, and their spokesmen, could flourish.

It is significant that the origins or causes of the Revolution seem a quite different matter from the Revolution itself. Tocqueville remarked long ago that there is an absolute incompatibility between the objective history of the Revolution-its 'meaning' or end result-and the meaning attributed to their own action by the revolutionaries. What actually happened during nine-tenths of the dramatic and frenetic Revolution, and all that made it immortal, was not much connected to those things that the old interpretation said it was supposed to be about. If the Revolution's purpose, stemming from its intent, was to end the society of orders and establish legal equality, representative government, free enterprise, etc., then it should have stopped on or about August 4, 1789. In that case it would scarcely have been a revolution at all, certainly not the one that electrified and tormented both itself and Europe for the next quarter of a century. The Revolution became "largely independent of the situation that preceded it." This of course was always recognized in a way. The analysis proceeded along the lines of how revolutions tend to lose their way from structural factors, ending by eating up their children in reigns of terror and in dictatorship. The more recent tendency has been to note the lack of revolutionary intent at the beginning of the Revolution: the relative conservatism of the cahiers, for example, and the non-revolutionary character of *philosophe* thought.

In connection with the point made above about many earlier and similar revolts, some will of course wish to protest that what they lacked and the French Revolution contained, that which made it a true revolution, was some conception of an alternative society, an intellectual or ideological element not present before or present in very

⁶⁸ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the French Revolution in France*, ed. By Conner Cruise O'Brien, (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1969) – A classic, conservative condemnation of the French Revolution.

rudimentary form. Agrarian rebellion, after all, was repetitive because it has been recognized that peasants lacked either a political program or an ideological inspiration to direct their eyes beyond immediate grievances toward basic reform or institutional change. Pre-modern mentalities did not embrace any concept of social evolution or even conceive the possibility of any different kind of social order except the vague and utopian one. The protests that emerged stemmed from complaints about violations of a pre-existing norm, of custom and tradition.

But it is far from clear that any revolutionary ideology existed in 1789, either. The connection between the Revolution and the obviously important and powerful 'intellectual revolution' that preceded it, embodied in the *philosophes*, has been called into question. In the old view the *philosophes* had doomed the Old Regime by their devastating criticisms undermining the foundations of Church, state and society, while at the same time they produced the vision of a new order based on reason, equality, and liberty, even if the lineaments of this reconstruction were admittedly a bit vague. But today there seems little agreement on this. The question is open: No general, historically important account and interpretation of Enlightenment political thought, integrating the critical and constructive aspects has as yet been written and that no direct connection between Enlightenment ideas and French Revolutionary events has ever been demonstrated.⁶⁹ Some points that emerge are that the word 'revolution' was not in the *philosophe* vocabulary; they neither expected nor welcomed the Revolution that came. An affair more of the nobility than the commoners, *philosophe* thought did not call into serious question the existing social order and preferred to work through the monarchy (Condorcet did not approve of summoning the Estates-General in 1789, the act which of course set the whole Revolution in motion). Hostile to the clergy, they wished to supplant them as a guiding clerisy. Their vision of a reformed society did not include basic social

⁶⁹ The debate on the influence of the writings and ideas of the *philosophes* has been a hugely argued topic. According to me the influence has been immense even if the execution was guided by exigencies. The debates of the *philosophes* opened up a whole new world and areas of debates and conflicts which affected the subsequent governments. If we look at Rousseau, one of the most controversial figures, we can see a continuous influence of his ideas on the course of the Revolution from 1788 onwards. To his political disciples Rousseau and his *Contract Social* were merely weapons for ideological battles. What brings out the essence of my argument is that Rousseau was adopted as a symbol at one time or another by all the political factions from conservative anti-revolutionaries to radical democrats.

change, but, rather, infusing the old forms with a new spirit. The new wine in old bottles would be Reason, based on Science, and was indeed an intoxicating brew and a new source of authority in human affairs. If so, it was not democratic, for the *philosophes* typically feared and mistrusted the populace, regarding it as ignorant, superstitious, priest-ridden. Rousseau favoured popular participation in legislature, but not in government, and Voltaire did not want even universal education let alone democracy in France. He wrote to D'Alembert that, 'nobody pretends to educate shoe-makers and servants'. As for the populace he wrote to M.de Bordes in 1768, 'they will always be silly and barbarous- witness what has happened to Lyons. They are oxen who need a yoke, a goad and fodder'.⁷⁰ That 'great divorce' between low and high culture, popular and elite, which had gone on since the Reformation and the Scientific Revolution, accelerated by the rise of printing and book publishing, intrudes itself here. The high *philosophes*, with their cult of scientific reason, their close connections to elite society, their belief in Enlightened Despotism, were far from revolutionary. Their leading motif seems to have been a passion to order, regularize, standardize, make more efficient, and to centralize power for this end, though they looked to an eventual utopia of things going of themselves without government under 'natural liberty'. This leads to the free enterprise market economy of nineteenth-century capitalism, yet it is an anachronism to consider it in such a light. There was a special world of discourse here which did indeed suffer a Foucaultian sea-change after 1800. Looking backward from the nineteenth century one can characterize much of this ideology in a certain sense as "bourgeois," but it made little appeal to the eighteenth century "bourgeoisie" and was not devised in their interest.

Norman Hampson sums up the *philosophe* outlook when he states, 'A revolution that would be far reaching, but the inevitable – and peaceful – product of social and economic forces'.⁷¹

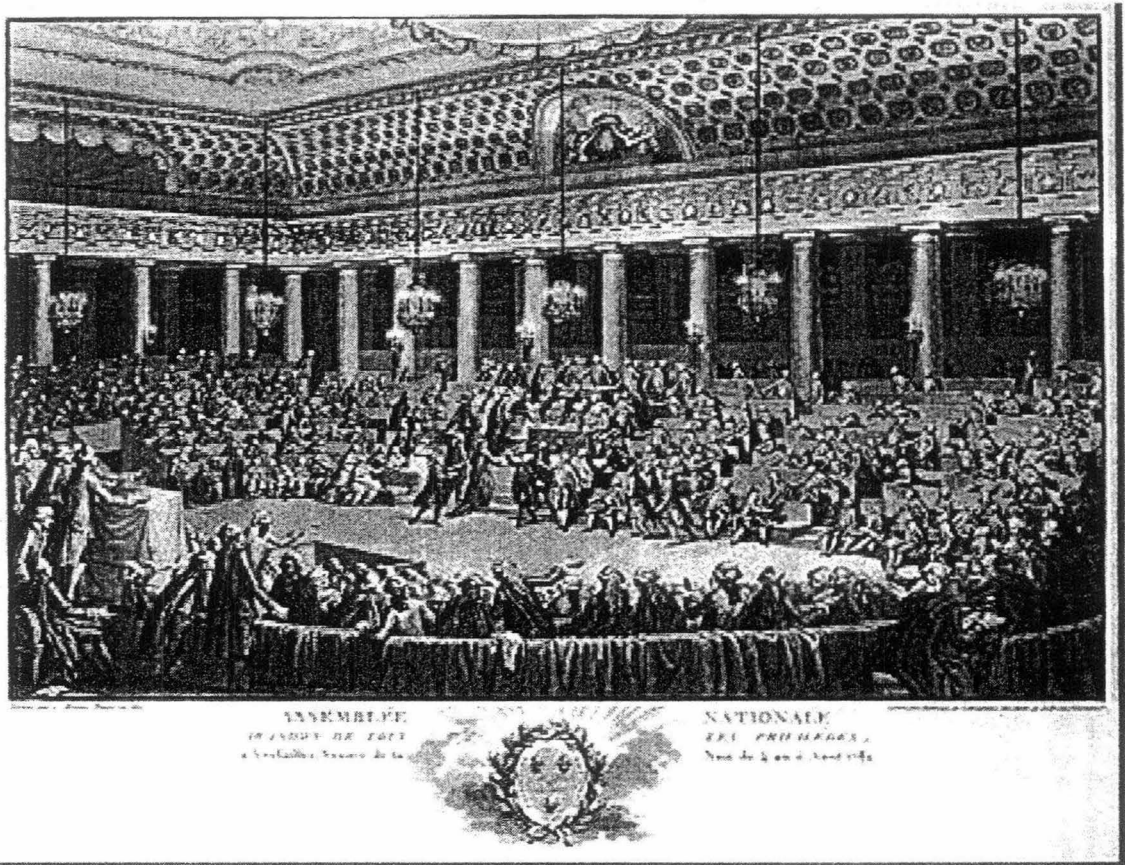
The *philosophes* came in different sizes. Tocqueville thought that for a time these intellectuals filled a vacuum of power in Old Regime France left by the degeneration of the aristocracy while the middle class was not yet ready to govern. This seems an

⁷⁰ P.A.Wadia, *The Philosophers and the French Revolution*, (Times of India Press, Bombay, 1908).

⁷¹ Quoted in Ronald .N. Stromberg, 'The Philosophes and the French Revolution: Reflections on Some Recent Research', *The History Teacher*, vol I, No.3 (May,1988), p.325.

exaggeration when we recall the failure of the Turgot ministry in 1776. But beneath this top echelon of men somewhere close to the center of power, the Turgots and Condorcets, an irregular crowd of would-be Voltaires or Rousseaus straggled over the French landscape in the later eighteenth century hoping to gain fame and fortune from their pens as the giants had done. They sometimes resorted to scandal or pornography to get it. These adventurous pseudo-intellectuals would supply much of the leadership during the Revolution in an atmosphere of anarchy and confusion, but they had little to do with its origins. As the Revolution went its own way, out of control, the ideology that came to dominate it was Jacobinism. Those who would argue that nothing really changes find in the most powerful moral force unleashed during the French Revolution an only slightly disguised Christian egalitarianism.

Clearly what changed most between 1500 and 1789 was the sheer physical factor of increased centralization with accompanying growth of a national consciousness. The State continued its relentless drive toward more and more power at the center, a kind of immanent logic of power and technology that slowly eroded the stubborn localism of the ancestral order. Greater centralization along with a diminishing of local or provincial primary loyalties (which admittedly seem still very strong right down to 1789) meant that revolution could be focused and simplified. When nationalism made a single center of politics possible, this confusion was eliminated; a revolution against the ruling oligarchy could be the same revolution as one for a stronger, more effective and uniform state. As Tocqueville understood long ago, the French Revolution itself took a long step in the direction of centralizing power and loyalties. The one word that stands out in the first days of the Revolution, of course, is "nation." In that respect, however, it was not a rejection of the Old Regime state and monarchy, but a continuation of its goals. Power marches on regardless of regimes. It is another unchanging feature.



National Assembly Relinquishes All Its Privileges

In late July 1789, as reports poured into Paris from the countryside of several thousand separate yet related peasant mobilizations, a majority of them against seigneurial property, the deputies of the National Assembly debated reforming not just the fiscal system or the constitution but the very basis of French society. In a dramatic all-night session on 4–5 August deputies stepped forward, one after another, to renounce for the good of the "nation" the particular privileges enjoyed by their town or region. By the morning, noble, clerical, and commoner deputies had proposed, debated, and approved even more systematic reform, voting to "abolish the feudal system entirely," effectively eliminating noble and clerical privilege, the fundamental principle of French society since the Middle Ages. As dramatic a gesture as this was, it was also very abstract—after all, the "feudal system" had virtually ceased to exist in France for several hundred years; thus, working out the details of this decree became a primary objective of the National Assembly for the next two years.

Chapter IV

Creation of a New Political Ideology – Nationalism, Popular Sovereignty and Representation

Of the many profound changes that the French Revolution brought about, none had broader or more enduring consequences than the change from royal to national sovereignty. The doctrine of the sovereignty of the nation is one of the most conspicuous and lasting innovations of the French Revolution. It is impossible to discuss sovereignty and how it came to be understood without delving into the issues of representation and the nation. All of these issues are interrelated, one adding meaning to another. The proclamation of national sovereignty completely transformed the ideas and practices of political sovereignty, eventually helping to create a legitimacy crisis as complex as the one it was intended to resolve. The revolutionaries failed to work out common definitions of the terms ‘national sovereignty’, ‘popular sovereignty’, or ‘the people’, and they could not agree as to how the new sovereign’s will should be represented.

The ambiguity of the term is clear from the fact that it was understood differently in the three main streams of political thought in eighteenth century France: Enlightened Absolutism, Liberal Constitutionalism and Republicanism. The leading exponent of the first was Voltaire, of the second Montesquieu and the third, Rousseau respectively. Enlightened absolutism invoked the principle of *Individual Sovereignty*, the monopoly of *la puissance absolue*, in which a single prince was seen as the necessary instrument for the imposition of a truly progressive state. Voltaire owed much to the teachings of Francis Bacon; he was thrilled by Bacon’s vision of a world in which science had banished superstition to impose the rule of reason and technology, a grand design, which could only be achieved by an efficient, centralized and all powerful sovereign.

Liberal Constitutionalism demanded a division of sovereignty between the crown and other constitutional bodies such as the *parlements*, the church and various provincial and seigneurial authorities. The division and separation of the powers was advocated by Montesquieu as a formula for preventing any one authority in the Kingdom from becoming despotic. The secret of preserving liberty, he argued, was for the constitution to

be so arranged that power checks power. While Voltaire looked to Francis Bacon, Montesquieu looked to John Locke for his political philosophy. Republicanism shared with absolutism a belief in unified sovereignty. Rousseau's contribution was to transform the doctrine of absolute sovereignty of Kings into a doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of the people. The people should participate in the sovereignty of the state. *Thèse Républicaine*, before Rousseau expounded it in 'The Social Contract', was something altogether utopian, based on a certain yearning for the glories of the ancient world. In the traditional republican theory it was not clear in what sense sovereignty can belong at the same time to the people and their officials. Rousseau clears up this uncertainty. In his formation of *Thèse Républicaine* sovereignty is always retained by the people themselves, something distinct from this, which Rousseau calls the 'government' is exercised by the officers or magistrates. In 'The Social Contract' Rousseau offers an outline of a republican constitution, which was designed to make popular sovereignty into something concrete.

In a sense 'The Social Contract' was Rousseau's answer to the political theory of Hobbes. As Hobbes had argued that men could escape the hazards of anarchy only by agreeing to transfer all their rights to a single ruler or sovereign who could use his *puissance absolue* to hold everyone in awe. An exchanged the right to liberty for the rule of law, since they could not have both. Rousseau suggested on the contrary, that men could have both liberty and law if they set up a republic in which they ruled themselves. If the man transform into a group, combing all their individual wills into a common will, they can cease to be a number of people and become 'a people'.

Despite the tremendous shift, it is hard to point exactly when the shift to national sovereignty took place. Although the idea had been receiving attention in the debates over the calling of the Estates General in the late 1780's but the support for the declaration of national sovereignty was not universal. Michael Fitzsimmons¹ observes that when the commoners' decided to declare themselves as 'National Assembly' it 'presaged the assertion of national sovereignty' but they did not actually declare the doctrine at that time and it remained possible to think of the National Assembly as an

¹ Fitzsimmons, P. Michael, *The Remaking of France: The National Assembly and the Constitution of 1791*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1994

advisory body still operating within a system of either royal sovereignty or some other kind of shared sovereignty.² As late as August 1789, when the deputies were drafting proposals for the a Declaration of Rights to precede to the new constitution, many of their drafts made no mention of national sovereignty at all and the phrase did not appear in the text eventually chosen as a basis for debate. Even Abbe Sieyès, who had argued for national sovereignty in his pamphlet, *What is the Third Estate?*, presented a draft which did not use the phrase, although some passages strongly suggested the idea.³

The adoption of the idea of national sovereignty was also something which was done hurriedly, without much thought or debate. On 20th August deliberations failed to produce a majority for the draft that the deputies had chosen and decided to vote article by article. When after a long time the deputies failed to adopt anything, most of the spectators emptied the galleries but the deputies refused to adjourn. At that point Jean-Joseph Mounier proposed a vote on three articles, one of which declared that “the source of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation.” The deputies still present approved the articles immediately, without any debate and adjourned the session. National sovereignty thus became official doctrine in France. This is not to say that the idea created no ripple because it was not considered important but part of the reason for the deputies’ willingness to approve such a monumental idea so hastily may have been that the principle seemed so obvious that it needed no discussion. It also reflected a desire to act quickly given popular unrest as well as their view that ideas in the Declaration were based on natural law, and thus needed no justification. In stating that the sovereignty resides essentially in the nation, the Assembly found a phrase that gained wide approval but at the same time it produced endless misunderstandings over the next few years. The lack of discussion on what it actually meant led to writing of a constitution, holding significantly different positions on the of ultimate source of political authority.

One major source of misunderstanding about national sovereignty concerned the definition of the nation and its means of expression and action. Was it composed of separate estates or did it include all individuals? Or did it include only the members of the

² Fitzsimmons, P. Michael, *The Remaking of France: The National Assembly and the Constitution of 1791*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.42

³ Emmanuel Sieyes, *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers Etat?*, (Paris, 1789).

Third Estate as Abbe Sieyes had written in his famous pamphlet? Was the King part of the nation or was the nation made up of everyone else other than the King as some contended? And how could the nation express its will? Through the National Assembly alone? Though the King as well? Answers to these questions slowly took shape during debates on other issues, but the lingering ambiguities hampered the entire process of writing a new constitution.

The concept of sovereignty raised difficult questions as well. For the sixteenth century theorist Jean Bodin, sovereignty had meant a necessary perpetual and unlimited power needed to create order by unifying the estates, orders and corporations. Bodin and others did recognize custom as well as divine and natural law, so in a strict sense the sovereign's authority was not unlimited, but he rejected any formal separation of powers, insisting that sovereigns are 'not to be subject in any way to the commands of others.' In his view, 'the Prince is above the law' and makes the law without needing the 'consent of anyone above, equal or beneath to him.'⁴ For Bodin and many later French theorists, the indivisibility of authority required the sovereign to be King, and sovereignty became closely associated with both monarchy and absolutism.

The deputies elected in 1789 seemed to be apprehensive of the whole concept of sovereignty, perhaps of its absolutist connotations.⁵ Although it proclaimed national sovereignty, the Declaration of Rights expressed an essentially liberal outlook that guaranteed individual rights and a separation of powers a defining trait of any constitution. Well into the Revolution many deputies adhered to this alternative to absolutist concepts of sovereignty as they perhaps understood the problems in transferring sovereignty from one man to an entire nation. Commenting on the complex state of affairs, Kieth Michael Baker asks, 'How was the direct and immediate exercise of a unitary sovereign will to be guaranteed in a vast society where direct democracy was impossible? How was the indivisibility and inalienability of the nation's sovereignty to be sustained in the face of the necessity of representation?'⁶

⁴ Bodin, Jean, *Le six Livres de la République*, 3rd ed, (Paris : Chez Jacques de Puys, 1578), tr. by M.J. Tooley, (Oxford, 1967).

⁵ According to Rousseau, '*la souveraineté est inaliénable, elle est indivisible. Car la volonté est générale, ou elle ne l'est pas ; elle est celle du corps du peuple, ou seulement d'une partie.*'

⁶ Baker, Michael. Kieth, "Sovereignty", in *Critical Dictionary*, p.852.

One response to this question was the theory that national sovereignty could only reside in the National Assembly, this being based on two premises: that deliberation among all of the nation's parts were essential to the formation of a truly national will and that the will of a majority of the nation's parts could stand for the will of the whole. Sieyes, the major architect of this theory, called France 'a unified whole' and not 'a confederation of municipalities or provinces'; consequently, 'the deputy of one district is directly chosen by his district, but indirectly he is chosen by all districts,' so 'each deputy is a representative of the entire nation.'⁷ Only after representatives from every part of France had gathered and exchanged views could one speak of a national will. The crucial implication of the doctrine of *representation* comes across when Sieyes states that the people can speak and act only through their representatives. Representation came to be closely identified with sovereignty. The idea of an indivisible sovereignty residing in a single chamber is to be seen in the context of the Third estate's campaign for a single National Assembly. The theory that sovereignty resided in the National Assembly continued to prove useful to those deputies who wanted to make the King their subordinate. The proponents of this theory had the fear of national division on their side, which helped to justify placing of all the power in the hands of a single assembly. The possibility of dividing an assembly of representatives, unlike the king, made it all the more crucial to take a firm stand against any hint of dividing power. In this view, then, the indivisibility of sovereignty demanded the indivisibility of representation, an idea that would have profound consequences through out the revolution.

The traditional logic of representation provided for sovereignty to reside in the person of the king, as a representative of the will of the people. Thus under the ancient regime it difficult to talk of a united political entity like a nation state or a common will; the state resided in the individual person of the King. The Estate General assembled at the will of the monarch in order to aid him, it did not in way represent the Nation, as an entity separate from the king. The multiplicity of orders and estates became one only in the presence of the King. The relationship between the pluralistic social order and royal sovereignty provided the logic of political order of the old regime.

⁷ *Orateurs de la Revolution Francaise*, vol I, ed. Francois Furet and Ran Halevi, (Paris : Gallimard, 1989), p.1021, quoted in Cowans, Jon, *To Speak for the People, Public Opinion and the Problem of Legitimacy in the French Revolution*,(Routledge, 2001), p.31

In the eighteenth century the *Parlement* of Paris claimed to represent the King to the nation and the Nation to the King. Over time the idea of Parliamentary unity came to be derived not from the unity and indivisibility of the royal authority but from the unity and indivisibility of the Nation. This was a major threat to royal sovereignty, as it implied the displacement of the principle of unity from the King to the nation. This shift which occurred before the calling of the General Estates proved crucial, though all parliamentary claims became redundant as the Third Estate undermined all its claims of representing the nation.

Changes in the acceptable form of political structure can be traced much before the calling of the Estates General or the formation of the National Assembly. The theory of Social Representation put forward by Mirabeau, draws from the theory of Physiocracy. He stated that the preservation of society was possible only by the maintenance of a permanent common interest, which could be found only in the institution of property. He therefore by establishing the rights of property as fundamental for any society, subsumes the traditional rights and privileges under the law. Thus, it envisaged participation in the government on the basis of property and not privilege. This led to a new line of reasoning and public discussions as to how can the Frenchmen participate in the workings of the government.

Once the sovereignty of the nation was safely located in the national Assembly, many of its members were willing to call it an unlimited power; sovereignty came to be defined as an indefinite, absolute and supreme power of the nation. By the time the deputies finished their text of the constitution in 1791, the King's chances of exercising even a share of sovereignty had basically disappeared, and the final draft described the nation's sovereignty as 'one, indivisible, inalienable, and imprescriptible.'⁸

In August 1791 during a discussion over the constitution, Robespierre, concerned about a reference to the nation transferring its sovereignty to representatives, called sovereignty inalienable but also argued that even delegation of power amounted to

⁸ *Les constitutions de la France depuis 1789*, ed. Jacques Godechot, (Paris : Garnier Flammarion, 1970), p.38, Cowans, Jon, *To Speak for the People, Public Opinion and the Problem of Legitimacy in the French Revolution*, (Routledge, 2001), p.32.

delegation of sovereignty itself.⁹ In support of his argument he quoted Rousseau that when a nation delegates its powers to representatives, the nation is no longer free. In his view, the constitution should state that powers like sovereignty can neither be alienated nor delegated; instead it should speak of only the delegation of functions. Even though the Assembly voted to call sovereignty both inalienable and imprescriptible and that the nation can delegate powers, a great deal of confusion still surrounded these terms.

In addition to the term 'national sovereignty', which created enough confusion, the term 'popular sovereignty', usually associated with the period 1792-92, began to appear frequently by the early months of the Revolution. In this period most of those who spoke of sovereignty belonging to 'the people', were simply using the term as a synonym for the nation. Sieyès held that all public powers came from the people, that is to say the nation. Colin Lucas notes, "the word 'people' was extraordinarily ambiguous because of its double meaning."¹⁰ He points out that among those who defined the people as the nation, some identified the people as the nation, some imagined it as a unified entity with a will of its own, while the King and some of his supporters continued to use the absolutist definition of the plural form to convey an image of a scattered collection of dissimilar components. Whereas many defined the people as everyone other than the King and his ministers, others applied the term only to the Third Estate. Many of those who associated the people with a specific class had the lower class in mind. During the Third Estate's debate on naming the assembly they were creating, some objected to Mirabeau's proposed phrase, 'the representatives of the people' out of the fear that it would imply that their assembly only represented the Third Estate. Those who considered

⁹ Robespierre was one of the most controversial figures of the Revolution. He has been assessed differently by various historians. According to J.M. Thompson, his greatness lies in the thoroughness with which he embodied the main ideas and experiences of the Revolution, from the enthusiastic liberalism of 1789, through the democratic aspirations of 1792 to the disciplined disillusionment of 1794. He is also seen as an austere tyrant, whose ascendancy proved anti-thesis of democracy and brought the revolution to ruin and collapse in an orgy of executions. He is also accused of dictatorship, of desiring to create a personal cult and employing terror solely for the purpose of perpetuating himself in power. A contrasting view is of him as a man of purity and integrity, who was not naturally cruel or blood thirsty but patriotism and Puritanism made him ruthless in shedding blood. He was a conscientious inquisitor, who believed in torturing the body so that he might save the soul.

¹⁰ Lucas, Colin, "The Crowd and Politics", in *The Political Culture of the French Revolution*, p.260. Lucas also pointed out that the term had both a political and a sociological meaning; see Colin Lucas, "Revolutionary Violence, the People, and the Terror," in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, ed. Keith Michael Baker, (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1994), p.64

'the people' as derogatory term did so because of the class connotations because they associated the people with violence and disorder. In his study on the National Assembly, Timothy Tackett suggests that the violence of 1789 changed many deputies' image of the people, as 'the Rousseauist conception of the Common Man as repository of goodness and truth'¹¹ and was frequently replaced, or at least strongly modified, by the image of the violent, unpredictable and dangerous classes.'¹² While some were horrified by the violence, others defended it as a necessary and just response to tyranny. Many portrayed the people in largely positive terms, carrying on the work of those *philosophes* who had recently begun to praise the lower classes and their mental capacities. The most important voice in this revaluation of the people in 1789 was Mirabeau; to those who dislike his phrase 'representatives of the people', he replied: "will you go tell your constituents that you rejected this word, the people, and that if you did not blush at it, you have nonetheless sought to avoid a term that did not seem brilliant enough to you?"¹³ Angered by the displeasure of some deputies at the reference to the people, he also said:

Yes, it is because this term, people, is not respected enough in France, because it is darkened, covered with the rust of prejudice, because it presents an idea alarming to pride and against which vanity rebels; because it is pronounced with contempt in the Chambers of the aristocrats; it is for that very reason that we must not only force ourselves to rehabilitate it, but (also) to ennoble it, to make it respectable to ministers and dear to all hearts from now on.¹⁴

¹¹ Rousseau argued that man was naturally good and overtime had moved away from nature and human nature had become corrupt. All his writings including the *Contract Social* are based on the principle that nature made man happy and good and society depraves him and makes him miserable. According to him, the natural goodness of man is lost through a process of historical transformation, which leads to personal dependence. He saw development of arts and literature resulting not in the intellectual development of the human race but as a kind of moral degeneration. Rousseau's natural theology in a way made the foundation of his political thought. He solved the problem of personal dependence by making politics an imitation of the divine, by making men dependent on laws and not on men, laws that imitate the irreversible laws of nature. See, John Scott, 'Politics as the imitation of the Divine in Rousseau's Social Contract', *Polity*, vol 26, No.3 (Spring, 1994), pp.473-501, where he puts forth the idea of Rousseau's politics being an imitation of the Divine.

¹² Tackett, Timothy, "Nobles and the Third Estate in the Revolutionary Dynamic of the National Assembly, 1789-1790," *American Historical Review* 94 (April 1989), p.279.

¹³ Quoted in, Cowans, Jon, *To Speak for the People, Public Opinion and the Problem of Legitimacy in the French Revolution*,(Routledge, 2001), p.35

¹⁴ *Ibid*

With many definitions of the people in common use, one wonders how it was understood in the various interactions both inside and outside the National Assembly. A speaker uttering the phrase 'the people' might have intended it to mean all individuals only to be interpreted as the lower classes or intending to mean the lower class and understood as the Third estate or the bourgeoisie. Consequently though many who spoke of popular sovereignty early in the Revolution were not really seeking to revise the doctrine of national sovereignty or to suggest that sovereignty belonged to the poor, the ambiguity of the term 'the people', helped concepts of sovereignty drift into new, often unintended meanings.

By the time of the October days, when a crowd from Paris invaded the National Assembly and the palace at Versailles and forced the government to relocate to Paris, it appeared that some people in referring to popular sovereignty were trying to redefine the sovereign. Robespierre in a speech in October 1789 made against disenfranchising the poor, proposed a more egalitarian concept of sovereignty, stating that sovereignty resides in the people, in all the individuals of the people, thus using people as a synonym for the nation. Thus, while the words used to describe sovereignty changed little between 1789 and 1792, yet their meaning changed significantly, moving in a more egalitarian and radical direction. So long before the *sans culottes* or their defenders starting claiming that the principle of popular sovereignty justified rule by the lower classes, others with less radical views had already made phrases such as popular sovereignty and the will of the people familiar, removing much of their shock value and facilitating the transition to a new kind of politics.

Though mostly the ambiguities surrounding the meaning of sovereignty usually went unnoticed, yet there were some objections to it and warnings about the implications of imprecise language regarding sovereignty, which eventually proved prophetic. In August 1791 *L'Ami du Roi* wrote, "One wonders what is an inalienable, imprescriptible sovereignty that one can never make use of oneself." The paper also warned that "once you have placed this simple idea in the heads of the people, that they are sovereign, you will not be able to alter it by this other idea, that they cannot exercise its functions." And it also called the new concept of sovereignty an "absurd, dangerous, (and) cruel principle that would upset the universe and would cause all crowned heads to fall on the

scaffold.”¹⁵ Similarly *L’Ami des Patriotes* noted that it was “the entire nation that alone has the right to make insurrection,” and it insisted that while some “give the name the ‘people’ to the class of citizens who agitate turbulently,” those troublemakers are “of the people but they are not the people.”¹⁶

Political and social tension were growing by 1791 and the relative calm that had prevailed after the October days came to an end with the flight of the King in June and the shooting of republican petitioners at the Champs de Mars by the National Guard’s in July. A radical republican movement based in the Paris sections then gained even greater momentum with the outbreak of war in April 1792 and the King’s decision in June to veto two controversial measures and removed three popular ministers. On 20 June 1792 some of the more radical sections of the Parisian population and members of the radical Cordeliers Club engineered a demonstration which was essentially against the King but also against the deputies that supported the King. It is interesting to note that the crowd first went to the National Assembly rather than the palace, where they demanded to parade through the hall and read a petition. A majority of the deputies of the National Assembly voted to allow the crowd into the Assembly and a spokesman of the demonstrators announced, “The French people have come today”, to “annihilate” the executive power, convinced that “one man must not influence the will of a nation of 25 million souls.” Speaking “in the name of the nation”, the spokesman declared that “the people are standing,” awaiting “a response worthy of their sovereignty.”¹⁷ It is interesting the language of the declaration, the people had the used the vocabulary of the National Assembly in putting forward their demand and asserting their sovereignty.

How did this pass to happen? The reasons for the collapse of the first revolutionary government are vast and complex. Both George Rudé and Albert Soboul in their work on the *Sans Culottes* emphasise the role of the shortage of bread resulting in food crisis, but a food crisis in France had not always resulted in a rebellion. Thus the role of new political ideas at that time has to be looked at, which both Rudé and Soboul

¹⁵ *L’Ami du Roi*, 12 August 1791, quoted in Cowans, Jon, *To Speak for the People, Public Opinion and the Problem of Legitimacy in the French Revolution*,(Routledge, 2001), p.36-37

¹⁶ *L’Ami des Patriotes*,15 January 1791, 7th May 1791, quoted in Cowans, Jon, *To Speak for the People, Public Opinion and the Problem of Legitimacy in the French Revolution*, (Routledge, 2001), p.37.

¹⁷ Quoted in Cowans, Jon, *To Speak for the People, Public Opinion and the Problem of Legitimacy in the French Revolution*,(Routledge, 2001), p.38.

do in their work. In Rudé's words : "the ideas and slogans of the revolutionary *bourgeoisie*...were beginning to take root among the *menu people* and to be turned by them to their own advantage," and "once these ideas began to permeate the common people...a new direction and purpose were given to popular unrest."¹⁸ Among these ideas none was more important than popular sovereignty, because of which the nothing could force the sovereign people to accept a position subordinate to the political leaders. The ambiguity of the term popular sovereignty also led to what happened on 20 June; though some deputies were aware of the fact that direct democracy was impossible there were some who believed that a fraction of the citizenry could indeed legitimately claim the right to speak for the people and issue commands to the nation's representatives, which is exactly what happened on 20 June. The vagueness of the term 'the people' also contributed to the crisis of the first revolutionary regime, as it became clear that the leaders had invested supreme political authority in a term whose meaning they could not control.

The ideas that the sovereign can change a country's constitution at any time was a much debated topic, with many deputies concerned about the effects of such a doctrine. In 1792 the deputies of the left, seeking to rid themselves of the King and the constitution that gave him authority, began to assert the sovereign's right to change the constitution at anytime. Voicing a common republican view, one Jacobin told the club in 1792 that 'the people cannot be despoiled of their sovereignty, and if the constitution does not lead them to happiness, they can rise up as a whole and seek a new constitution.'¹⁹

Although the 20 June demonstration failed to destroy the monarchy and the constitution, a second uprising on 10 August 1792 finished the job. Once again a crowd entered the National Assembly, addressing the crowd in the name of the sovereignty of the people, and once again the deputies of the left embraced the movement, claiming that the act was one of, the nation taking back all its sovereignty from its representatives. At this instance there were very few deputies left to protest as most of the moderate deputies had fled after being chased by the angry crowds and the King had been jailed after an

¹⁸ Rudé, George, *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959, pp.44-46; Soboul, Albert, *Les Sans-Culottes Parisiens en l'an II. Mouvement populaire et gouvernement révolutionnaire*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968), chapter 3.

¹⁹ Quoted in Cowans, Jon, *To Speak for the People, Public Opinion and the Problem of Legitimacy in the French Revolution*, (Routledge, 2001), p.40.

attack on the royal palace. Now, the deputies of the left announced elections for a National Convention which was to write a republican constitution.

The problematic nature of the new doctrine of sovereignty forced the French to confront the equally difficult issue of *representation*, and the ideas they articulated about representation, like those on sovereignty, established the basic framework within which orators made claims about public opinion. Unfortunately there were few theories or historical precedents that could guide the deputies as they fashioned a new system of representation. Absolutism was of little use, as Baker explains, the Estates General assembled only “at the will of the Monarch, and only...to give his aid and counsel on behalf of the multiplicity of corporate bodies comprising the particularistic social order of the Old Regime.”²⁰ Thus the traditional logic of representation under the Old Regime was derived from the essential relationship between royal sovereignty and particularistic social order. The King was therefore the ‘sovereign representative’ as the multiplicity of orders and estates held no unity in and of itself, apart from the unity of the royal person. As Hobbes argued in *The Leviathan* : “A multitude of men, are made one person, when they are by one man or one person, represented...for it is the unity of the representer not the unity of the represented, that maketh the person one. And it is the representer that beareth the person, and but one person: and *unity* cannot otherwise be understood in multitude...”²¹ Thus, representation from above, deputation from below: such was the traditional juridical formula of the Old Regime. The convocation of the Estates General simultaneously affirmed the unity of the nation in the presence of the King and its multiplicity as a society of orders and estates apart from him. From this perspective, there was a paradox in the fact that the development of the absolute state – which was justified theoretically in terms of the power and the responsibility of the Monarch to provide for the common good – served simultaneously to undermine the juridical conceptions of representation under the Old Regime, and with them the claims of the Monarchy itself to represent the nation as a whole. Pointing out the ambiguities of the parliamentary doctrine of representation, as it developed in the course of the eighteenth century, Baker states that the absolute monarchy, ‘by dramatically increasing its power to mobilize social resources

²⁰ Baker, Keith Michael, *Inventing the French Revolution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.226.

²¹ Quoted in Keith Michael Baker, “Representation” in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol I, ed.Keith Michael Baker,(Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1994), p.469

and coordinate the activities of communities and corporations for the common good, by eating into ancient privileges, subverting traditional forms of counsel, and substituting administrative command for the quasi-judicial practices of government by local corporate and representative bodies, the absolute monarchy began to transform a particularistic society of order and estates into a more integrated political entity: one in which the source and principle of unity seemed to inhere less directly and immediately in the person of the prince than in the integrity of the more unified political nation thereby created. By refusing to call the Estates General, the crown simultaneously encouraged the development of other claims to represent the needs and interests of this nation, and fostered the development of new conceptions of representation to justify those claims.²²

This suggests a growing incoherence afflicting the traditional theory of representation in the context of increasing tensions between the traditional juridical foundations of royal absolutism in a particularistic social order and the universalistic implications of the growth of the administrative state.

Throughout the eighteenth century the Parlement of Paris restated the argument that it 'represented' the nation to the King and the King to the nation. In 1753, the magistrate's informed the King that the court's essential function was to "*représenter à vos sujets la personne même de V.M., et de leur répondre de la justice et de l'utilité de toutes ses lois, de représenter vos sujets aux yeux de V.M., et de vous répondre de leur fidélité et de leur soumission.*"²³ During the course of the century one sees a shift in emphasis from the first part of the claim to the second. The parliamentary claim to represent the nation before the King, like the parallel claim to represent the King before the nation, had both symbolic and performative aspects. The parlement was the image of the nation before the King just as it was the image of the King before the nation. It answered to the King for the fidelity and submission of his subjects, just as it answered to the subjects for the justice and utility of the laws. As the eighteenth century progressed, the emphasis seemed to shift from the symbolic to the performative aspects of this claim.

²² Baker, Keith Michael, "Representation" in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol I, ed. Keith Michael Baker, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1994, p.472.

²³ Quoted in Keith Michael, "Representation" in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol I, ed. Keith Michael Baker, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1994, p.472

Thus, the magistrates came increasingly to emphasize their claim of representing the nation to the King more in performative terms, which was strengthened by the doctrine of the *union des classes*, which asserted the idea of parliamentary unity derived not from the principle of the unity and indivisibility of royal authority but from the principle of the unity and indivisibility of the nation. Thus, the monarchical theorists saw the idea of the *union des classes* as a threat to royal sovereignty and rightly so, as it clearly implied an ultimate displacement of the principle of unity, from the King to the nation.

As the century advanced the, royal propagandists continued to eliminate the ambiguities within the parliamentary theory. The edict of December 1770 accused the parlements of calling themselves, quite simply, "*les représentants de la Nation.*" The edict of 20 June 1788 offered a choice between the alternative views of the magistrates as royal officers or national representatives: "*les parlements...prétendent qu'ils forment un corps national, comme si ce n'étaient pas des officiers du roi qui composaient tous ce corps, et que les officiers du roi pussent être les représentants de la nation.*"²⁴

By the time the crown was making this argument in 1788, the issue of representation had in a sense been settled. Although they were disclaiming the idea that the magistrates were the representatives of the nation, they were in arguing so, implicitly acknowledging the principle of national representation. The issue was no longer whether the nation had to be represented, but how.

While the traditional organisation of the Estates General had assumed the identity of the nation as a multiplicity of orders and estates, made one in the presence and person of the King, the debate over the forms of convocation and deliberation to be followed in 1789 revealed how problematic that assumption had become. It implied that the principle of political identity had passed from the King to the nation itself, to a nation that should now be consulted according to forms adequate to represent its true political nature. But it required a more coherent and radical theory of relationship between representation and national political identity, to decide upon the forms required.

In order to clarify this issue, revolutionary theorists needed to answer two distinct questions. The first concerned the true nature of the nation's independent political

²⁴ *Ibid*, p476.

identity, the second, the relationship between its political identity and claims to national representation. To answer the first question, the revolutionaries followed Rousseau in dissolving the corporate order of the *ancien régime* into a multiplicity of individuals and then on the basis of the participation of individual citizens in the common sovereignty inherent in the general will, reconstituting national political existence. But this answer to the first made the second more problematic. In accepting Rousseau's political theory as a basis for claims to national political identity, the revolutionaries had also to come to terms with his rejection of the practice of representation.

“ *L'idée des Représentants est moderne : elle nous vient du Gouvernement féodale, de cet inique et absurde Gouvernement dans lequel l'espèce humaine est dégradée, et où le nom d'homme est en déshonneur*”...²⁵ so will Rousseau write in a famous passage of *Du Contrat Social* repudiating the practice of representation as being incompatible with the principle of general. It is one of the paradoxes of the French Revolution that the revolutionaries, in embracing the principle of popular sovereignty inherent in the concept of the general will, nevertheless fell back upon the practice of representation so explicitly condemned by Rousseau. Thus, it was unfortunate that one of the most influential discussions of representation at the time was Rousseau's *Contrat Social*, which denounced the evil of representation.²⁶ Therefore, those designing a new system of representation in 1789 generally had to work without much theoretical guidance or historical precedent.

Rousseau in *Le Contrat Social* dissolved the corporate society of order and estates into a society of composed of equal individuals bound together in the common status of citizenship. Thus, sovereignty was transferred from the monarch to the body of citizens as a whole. Rousseau insisted that a sovereign public person, a collective person is instantly created when each individual gives himself to all, simultaneously acting as a member of the whole to receive each of the others: *A l'instant, au lieu de la personne particulière de chaque contractant, cet acte d'association produit un corps moral et*

²⁵ Rousseau, Jean Jacques, *Du Contrat Social*, ed. Maurie Halbwachs, Paris, 1943), p.340.

²⁶ At least since the time of Daniel Mornet, historians have argued that Rousseau's influence has been overstated and that *The Social Contract* was barely known at the Revolution's outset; see Morten, *Les Origines Intellectuelles de la Revolution Francaise (1715-1787)*, (Paris: Armand Colin, 1933), see Joan McDonald, *Rousseau and the French Revolution*, (London: Althone, 1965), Timothy Tackett, "The Constituent Assembly and the Terror", in *The Terror*, p.39-54.

*collectif compose d'autant de membres que l'assemblee a de voix, lequel recoit de ce même acte son unité, son moi commun, sa vie et sa volonté.*²⁷

Thus it followed from Rousseau's definition of the Social Contract that sovereignty could neither be alienated nor represented. The logic that prohibited the transfer of sovereignty to the monarch, also condemned the modern practice of representative government: *la souveraineté ne peut être représentée pour la même raison qu'elle ne peut être aliénée, elle consiste essentiellement dans la volonté générale, et la volonté ne se représente point: elle est la même, ou elle est autre, il n'y a point de milieu.*²⁸

The Contract Social therefore offered a categorical repudiation of representation as incompatible with the sovereignty of the general will, and therefore subversive of liberty and political identity: *A l'instant qu'un peuple se donne des représentants, il n'est plus libre, il n'est plus.*²⁹

The revolutionary theory of representation as it took place in the course of the political debates of 1788 and 1789 shed much of the distrust of representation inherent in the earlier conceptions, even as it reworked and recombined many of their elements. As the deputies' misgivings about sharing power with anyone became more and more obvious, the foundations of executive power came under increasing scrutiny. The wisdom of having a hereditary monarchy in a system of national sovereignty, had received virtually no discussion in 1789. Though support for the monarchy declined with the King's escape attempt in 1791, it remained strong both in the National Assembly and throughout France and Michael Kennedy reports that even the provincial Jacobins remained mostly monarchist well into 1792.³⁰ One issue that provoked useful discussion on the King's place in the overall system of representation was the royal veto. In creating a suspensive veto, the Assembly gave the King the right to delay enactment of a bill and make an 'appeal to the people', giving citizens time to speak out before the assembly re-examined it. Deputies in support of the veto complained that one was endlessly equating

²⁷ Quoted in Keith Michael, "Representation" in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol I, ed.Keith Michael Baker, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1994, p.478

²⁸ *ibid*

²⁹ *ibid*

³⁰ Kennedy. Michael L., *The Jacobin Clubs: The Middle Years*,(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pg.239, 244.

the National assembly with the nation while veto's opponents continued to see the National Assembly as the nation assembled and Sieyès maintained that the people or the nation could have only one voice, that of the National Assembly. Debate on the veto had raised the crucial question of whether the King was a representative of the nation. One monarchist claimed that the King necessarily represents the nation by virtue of exercising functions for it, an argument which said nothing of his right to exercise those functions. Robespierre replied that carrying out functions merely made the King a 'functionary' and an agent of the National Assembly. A Jacobin deputy Jean-Paul Rabaut Saint-Etienne said, if a representative 'is not revocable he is not a representative.'³¹ Though the constitution ended up calling both the legislators and Kings representatives, the source of royal authority remained unclear and the problem of the King's role in the new system of representation continued to plague the first revolutionary regime.

By late 1789, *Revolutions de Paris*, which reflected the thinking of the more militant members of the Paris sections, rejected the idea of the National will existing only in the National Assembly, writing that 'the will of the representatives can be in opposition to the will of the nation.'³² It also insisted that unless 'mandataries' were 'revocable at will', the people would have no alternative to insurrection as a means of controlling them.³³ Also by late 1789, Jean-Paul Marat was proclaiming the people's unlimited power over their representatives, writing in his paper, *Le Publiciste Parisien*, that the representative's powers 'are in the hands of their constituents, always masters who can revoke them at will.'³⁴

After the King's escape attempt and capture, these sections grew even bolder, demanding a republic and questioning the Assembly's authority as well. A group gathered on the Champs de Mars in July 1791 signed a petition stating that 'as members of the sovereign people', they were asserting their 'right to express their will to enlighten

³¹ Quoted in Cowans, Jon, *To Speak for the People, Public Opinion and the Problem of Legitimacy in the French Revolution*, Routledge, 2001, p.40.

³² *Revolution de Paris*, 6 December 1789, quoted in Cowans, Jon, *To Speak for the People, Public Opinion and the Problem of Legitimacy in the French Revolution*, Routledge, 2001, p.50

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Le Publiciste Parisien* 3 (14 September 1789), in Jean-Paul Marat, *Oeuvres politiques, 1789-1793*, vol I, ed. Jacques de Cock and Charlotte Goetz. (Brussels : Pole Nord, 1989), p.131.

and guide their mandataries.’³⁵ The war in April 1792 and the deepening food crisis gave an impetus to this movement and the 20 June uprising demanded a republic, stating that the nation ‘has the incontestable right to approve or reject the laws that its representatives impose on it, since it is the sole sovereign.’³⁶ Though such claims met opposition by some in the National Assembly, but we see that there was no unanimity in the Assembly on the issue. In spring 1792, Robespierre, writing in his newspaper, *Le Défenseur de la Constitution*, attacked the whole idea of representation, arguing that if the people delegate their authority to ‘a small number of individuals,’ then ‘it is only a fiction that the law is the expression of the general will.’³⁷ Thus, representatives facing insurrections often made arguments legitimating the crowd’s actions and undermining their own authority; by August 1792 that authority was collapsing.

As the political crisis deepened, the call for a ‘national convention’ proliferated, which reflected not only the lack of the present Assembly’s legitimacy but also the legitimacy of representation itself. So though calling of national convention did help resolve the crisis of 1792, the problem of representation remained far from settled.

Nowhere is the idea of representation and the resulting transformation of the concept of sovereignty and more clearly evident than in the thinking of Abbe Sieyès. He was an original political thinker and his interaction with Rousseau’s work and departure from it brings out the debate around the question of sovereignty and representation prevailing at that point in time. He drew upon the language of social representation, but freed it from the physiocratic constraints by repudiating the physiocratic argument for landed property as the exclusive source of wealth and the only basis of rational expression of social interests. This coexisted in his writings with a more explicitly political discourse that owed its principle inspiration to Rousseau. He made free use of Rousseau’s works, drawing from them, the concept of the Social Contract, the idea of the sovereign general will, indivisible and inalienable and more. Thus, to a sociological definition of society as a productive entity satisfying the various needs and interests of its

³⁵ The petition appears in John Hall Stewart ed., *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, New York: MacMillan, 1951, pp.218-19

³⁶ Quoted in Cowans, Jon, *To Speak for the People, Public Opinion and the Problem of Legitimacy in the French Revolution*, Routledge, 2001, p.50

³⁷ Maxmillian Robespierre, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol 4, ed. Gustave Laurent, (Paris : Société des Etudes Robespierre), 1939, p.145.

members through the application of the principle of the division of labour, *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers Etat?* added a political definition of the nation as a unitary body of citizens exercising an inalienable common will. In his discourse on the nation, the nation was the ultimate political reality, upon whose identity and will, all else depended: *Une société politique ne peut être que l'ensemble des associés. Une nation ne peut décider qu'elle ne sera pas la nation, ou qu'elle ne le sera qu'une manière, car ce seroit dire qu'elle ne l'est point de tout autre. De même une nation ne peut statuer que sa volonté commune cessera d'être sa volonté commune.*³⁸ This conception of the nation had several crucial implications. The first, inherent in the definition of the nation as a body of associates living under a common law, involved the status of citizenship as a relation of inequality and universality and the exclusion of privilege. Thus, the privileged orders were defined out of the nation according to a political logic of citizenship, according to which they could not be equal, just as they had been excluded from it according to a social logic of productive activity, according to which they could not be useful. The second was the link between unitary representation and a unitary national will, upon which Sieyès insisted throughout the debates that transformed the Estates General into the National Assembly and subsequently laid down the principles of the new constitutional order.

His writings reflected on how could one envision democracy as the affirmation of both individual liberties and the sovereignty of the nation? And it is on this terrain that he challenged Rousseau's work. He advanced two principles as inseparable, the first was the inalienable sovereignty of the general will, second the exercise of that will by representatives of the nation. It is here that he differed from the *Contract Social*, which firmly condemned the representative system. According to the *Contract Social*, although 'the conditions of the society ought to be regulated solely by those who come together to form it,' the system of legislation must first be elaborated by a legislator, a mythic figure in the mold of Moses and Lycurgus, and only then be submitted for popular acceptance. Such a procedure was necessary because 'the people always wills the good, but of itself it by no means always sees it. The general will is always in the right, but the judgement which guides it is not always enlightened. The legislator thus exercised a special function

³⁸Emmanuel Sieyès, *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers Etat?*, (Paris, 1789).

that was neither magistrature nor sovereignty.³⁹ For Sieyès, all these tasks were united into one authority in the assembly that exercised the constituent power. The representatives of the nation were enlightened, and the Assembly was where they reflected and deliberated. Sieyès argued that representative government was far more than an unavoidable alternative to democracy imposed by the overbearing law of numbers; it was a natural cause of the division of labour in modern society. It also provided the most effective instrument for the political application of the enlightenment. Occupied with their daily labour, the great majority of men could only be regarded as *des machines de travail* and therefore it was in their interests to confer active exercise of the right to participate in legislation upon those whom greater leisure, education and enlightenment had rendered '*bien lus capables qu'eux-mêmes de connoître l'intérêt général, et d'interpréter a cet égard leur propre volonté.*'⁴⁰ Thus according to Sieyès the uneducated multitude chose representatives who were much more capable than themselves of knowing the general interest and thus interpreting their own will.

In this way, Sieyès disengaged the idea of a unitary general will from the communal dream of direct democracy and reconciled it with the practice of representation in a populous modern society. By deriving the practice of representation from the principle of the division of labour and the need for the rational representation of social interests, and combining these elements of the social theory of representation with a modified version of sovereignty of the general will, he gave an entirely new meaning to the conception of 'representative sovereignty', first introduced by Hobbes. Rejecting both Rousseau and Montesquieu on the idea of liberty, Sieyès stated that, 'modern European peoples bear little resemblance to ancient peoples. We are busily concerned with commerce, agriculture, manufacturing, etc. The desire for wealth seems to make all the states of Europe vast workshops: People think much more of consumption than of happiness. Thus political systems today are exclusively founded on labour.'⁴¹

³⁹ Baczko, Bronislaw, "The Social Contract of the French: Sieyès and Rousseau", in *Journal of Modern History* 60, September, (The University of Chicago, 1988).

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.489

⁴¹ Sieyès, Joseph Emmanuel, *Dire de l'abbé Sieyès sur la question du veto royal, a la séance du 7 septembre 1789*, (Versailles, 1789), p.13, quoted in Baczko, Bronislaw, "The Social Contract of the French: Sieyès and Rousseau", in *Journal of Modern History* 60, September, 1988, (The University of Chicago), p.120.

Considering the relationship between political unity and 'representative sovereignty', Hobbes had offered three possibilities: 'the difference of commonwealths consisteth in the difference of the sovereign, or the person representative of all and every multitude. And because the sovereignty is either in one man, or in an assembly of more than one, and into that assembly either every man hath right to enter, or not everyone...there can be but three kinds of commonwealth. For the representatives must needs be one man, or more: and if more, then it is the assembly of all, or but of a part.'⁴² The traditional logic of representation under the old regime opted for the first of the possibilities by locating sovereignty in the person of an absolute monarch. Rousseau opted for the second by insisting that it could be found only in the body of the citizens as a whole. Sieyès⁴³ opted for the third, stating that a modern complex society could become one only in the collective person of its representatives. "The man who revealed the true principles of representative government to the world"⁴⁴ as Mirabeau called Sieyès, was one of the few who linked political tactics to a theoretical system and general theory of power. To succeed, revolutions greatly need such doctrines to rationalize and integrate the diverse and confused passions and motivations that propel them.

Thus, just as the revolutionary leaders' interpretations of national sovereignty laid the foundations for the upheavals of 1792, so did their ideas and rhetoric about representation. The attempt to fit a hereditary monarch into a representative system based on national sovereignty was bound to encounter major problems and the King did eventually become the target of public outrage which destroyed his regime. As for their authority as representatives, the deputies did offer some justification, but their ideas on property ownership and political rights seemed to contradict with core revolutionary principles. By relying more on the claims of the impossibility of assembling the nation than on positive arguments for a division of labour and a delegation of authority to those more qualified to judge complex legal, political and economic problems, they left themselves vulnerable to refutations by those who saw national elections as a proof that

⁴² *Ibid*, p.490.

⁴³ Sieyès broke with what was perhaps the most characteristic trend of Enlightenment thought, the trend of naturalism or the attempt to understand man through nature. According to him, man was a self-willed agency, whose very essence was to distinguish himself from nature and use it for his own means. Sieyès reflections were at once the product of the Enlightenment and a move beyond it.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Baczkó, Bronisław, "The Social Contract of the French: Sieyès and Rousseau", in *Journal of Modern History* 60, September, (The University of Chicago, 1988), p.118.

the nation could indeed assemble. Moreover the deputies constantly undermined their case by claiming the nation's theoretical powers over its representatives. Thus by declaring both the nations' theoretical powers over its representatives and its inability to exercise those powers, the deputies created a sharp divergence between theory and practice, leading to disappointment and dissatisfaction with the country's formal political institutions. The weakness of the revolution's formal institutional structures and the severe questioning to which they were subjected placed a greater weight on informal modes of representation, bringing the politics of public opinion to the center of revolutionary power struggle. Francois Furet noted this problem, arguing that a crisis of confidence in France's formal representative institutions led to 'rule by opinion' and legitimation by public opinion essential but references to public opinion encountered too much skepticism and confusion to play a major role in the legitimation of authority.

Summarizing the issue of representation one can say that on one hand, theorists such as Montesquieu had taught the revolutionaries to favour a separation and balance of powers, but the ideas about indivisible sovereignty and representation noted above also led many to resist granting any real authority to an independent executive endowed with a popular mandate equal to the legislature's. One indication of the problem was the persistent confusion over whether the executive was a representative of the people or simply a functionary or an agent of the legislature. As pointed out, if the executive was not a representative, then there would be no real separation and balance of powers, leaving parliament as the only branch that could claim to represent the people. Yet if the executive was a representative of the people, then why were the people not allowed to elect it? The Revolution never resolved this problem, and the executive remained a major focal point for political discontent and a persistent obstacle to ending the Revolution.

Nationalism:

The French invoked a number of new forms of collective authority much before the Revolution, such as *l'opinion publique*, *l'esprit public* and *la voix publique*, terms which evoked an abstract phenomenon independent of any individuals perception, much like truth and reason. These concepts had a shared goal of creating a new political legitimacy based on collective rather than personal authority. Another term used in

challenges to absolutism was 'the nation'. They posed no inherent threat to absolutism, whose theorists had often used it to refer to the collection of groups and communities over whom Kings ruled, but many by the time of the Revolution construed the terms in ways threatening to absolutism. Proponents of *thèse nobiliaire*, for example, offered elaborate historical arguments about the Franks and their noble descendents constituting a sovereign French nation long before Kings sought to rule over them. Also, as Francois Furet and Mona Ozouf explain, many who used the term in the eighteenth century considered a kingdom 'an ensemble of subjects', and a nation, 'a collectivity of citizens', insisting that the idea of a nation 'includes the idea of rights'.⁴⁵ And whereas absolutists portrayed the nation as a passive collection of dissimilar elements brought together only by the unifying authority of the King, others conceived of the nation as an already unified entity whose consent was essential to the ramification of laws and even to King's right to rule.⁴⁶

The idea of the nation thus appeared in various versions, as some emphasised its internal division into estates, corporations, and provinces, whereas others downplayed those divisions and saw it more or less unified under the leadership of one group, such as the parlements or the nobility. The parlements themselves were never actually a unified entity, but their members often spoke in the name of the nation, rhetorically erasing the divisions that helped justify an absolute sovereign.⁴⁷ Though they envisioned the nation as composed of separate estates and corporations, the parliamentary magistrates, writes David Bell, "contributed to the creation of a self-conscious national community" demanding the right to consent to laws and voice its will.⁴⁸ Also tending to portray the nation as having a single will or opinion were those who associated the term with public opinion. Necker for example, did distinguish between public opinion, which he felt existed only in some countries, and "the national spirit", which could exist under despots, but in arguing that "it is only public opinion...that ensures the nation a kind of influence, in giving it the power to reward or punish through praise or contempt," he suggested both

⁴⁵ Furet, Francois and Ozouf, Mona, 'Deux légitimations Historiques de la Société Française au Dix-Huitième Siècle: Mably et Boulainvilliers, *Annales ESC* 34 (May-June 1979), p.438.

⁴⁶ See Furet, *Interpreting*, pp.32-36.

⁴⁷ On the parlements and their notion of national sovereignty, see Roger Bickart, *Les parlements et la notion de la souverainete nationale au XVIII siecle* (Paris : F.Alcan, 1932).

⁴⁸ Bell, David. A, "The 'Public Sphere', the State, and the World of Law in Eighteenth Century France," *French Historical Studies* 17 (fall 1992), p.923.

that public opinion was the opinion of the nation and that a nation could have a single will.⁴⁹

During the *ancien régime*, there had not been any congruence between the national and political identities of France: the state was equated with absolute dynastic rule, which often disregarded-and, indeed, transcended- the ethnic divisions among the population of France. Moreover, there were elements that united this diverse population: the myth of a descent from common ancestors, the Gauls and adherence to a common Roman Catholic religion.

During the French Revolution, this congruence became a centerpiece of Jacobin ideology. Whereas earlier, Frenchness had derived, ascriptively, from Gallo-Roman ancestry, it now derived, functionally, from a voluntary commitment to common political values and a common fate. In the words of Ernest Renan, in his classic lecture "*Qu'est-ce qu'une nation*":

A nation is a sentiment, a spiritual principle which ... is based on two things: One is in the present, the other in the past; one is the common possession of a rich inheritance of memories, and the other, a common consent, a desire to live together, and the will to help the heritage that each individual has received prevail [in the future]. The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long history of efforts, sacrifices, and devotions. The cult of ancestors has made us what we are. A heroic past, great men ... common glories, a common wish to do things together-these are the conditions of being a people.⁵⁰

However, it is a matter of controversy whether this statement articulates a genuinely held ideal type in terms of which the French nation would eventually be fashioned or whether it was part of a myth "carefully constructed . . . to mask the divisions and mutual hatreds that have existed-divisions of class, religion, province, wealth, city and country, and ideology".⁵¹ Most observers agree with this view, though they would express it in more moderate language. Thus Pierre Nora suggests: The

⁴⁹ Necker, Jacques, "De l'administration des finances de la France," in *Œuvres complètes*, vol.4, ed. Auguste Louis de Stael-Holstein, (Darmstadt, Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1970), p.21, 53.

⁵⁰ Renan, Ernest, *Oeuvres Complètes*, (Paris: Calmann-Levy. 1947), p 903-904

⁵¹ Rudorff, R, *The Myth of France*, (New York, Coward McCann, 1970), p. 205.

construction of a collective memory appeared to be a matter of priority . . . a counterweight to the mosaic of [different] ways of living and dying . . . [and] the obligation to fit local memories into a common fund of a national culture and to make of all [inhabitants] children of 1789. . . . The school, military service, electoral rituals . . . and the republican conquest of the state [occurred together] with the conquest of a society that transformed the republic into something more than a regime . . . almost into a moral civilization.⁵² During and after the Revolution of 1789, membership in the French national community meant being the heirs of the people of the Enlightenment, the makers of revolution, and the promoters of the rights of man. For those who identified with the revolution, "France was, above all, democracy [and] the Republic"⁵³; it embodied a universal idea, because the democratic republic was manifested in the Hexagon better than anywhere else. This was not an ethnocentric definition of the nation, such as that used by Germans in regard to their nation, but rather a socio-centric one, because it was associated with a noble vocation: the (political) instruction of mankind rather than the domination of other peoples.⁵⁴

The ambiguities in Renan's eloquent statement—that is, the evocation of the importance of voluntarism (contract) and determinism (the importance of ascription and inheritance)—have been reflected in France's approach to the acquisition of citizenship. According to the typical French view, citizenship is a Greek idea, basing itself specifically on the political power of the state, whereas nationality is hereditary, or so it was, historically. But since the Revolution, the nation has been a matter not of heredity but of political and cultural identities, loyalties, rights, and duties. The nation was defined, created, or recreated by the state, which meant that sub-nations and sub-national identities were deprived of political legitimacy and integrated into the nation-state. The nation, thus redefined, was to be composed, not of communities, but of individuals. This view was embodied in the Jacobin logic of Abbe Gregoire, Clermont-Tonnerre⁵⁵, and Jules Ferry,

⁵² Nora, P., "De la République à la Nation," *In Les Lieux de la mémoire*, (P. Nora, ed.) vol. I: *La République*, (1984): 652.

⁵³ Dumont, L., "Sur l'idéologie politique française: Une perspective comparative." *Le Debat*, 1990, p. 129, 137.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 144.

⁵⁵ During a debate in the National Assembly in 1789 on the Jews in France, Stanislas de Clermont-Tonnerre argued that "Jews must be denied everything as a nation and granted everything as individuals", Philippe, B,

which led to the delegitimation not only of ethnic communities but also of intermediate groups of all kinds: political, economic, geographic, cultural, linguistic, and religious. The members of the nation were henceforth undifferentiated.

A legal reflection of this approach to the nation was the emphasis on *jus soli*, rather than *jus sanguinis*, that is, birth and residence in France, and adherence to republican principles, rather than descent from French ancestors, in the granting of French nationality. During the revolution-as, indeed, thereafter-there were variant approaches to French nationality that combined elements of both *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis*. Thus, according to the Girondist constitution of 1793, anybody who was born in the country and lived there for at least a year was French; and according to the Montagnard constitution of the same year, a foreign-born person was regarded as French if he lived in France for at least a year, possessed property in France, or worked there.⁵⁶ Another criterion of entitlement to citizenship, which goes beyond *jus soli*, is service to the country. This criterion was invoked by Abbe Gregoire when he argued in favor of granting citizenship to Jews: 'Eventually they sailed on the same ships, marched into battle under the same banners, and tilled the soil like those of their chosen land. This is the basis on which it can be determined whether they can be incorporated into the general society. . . .'⁵⁷ Indeed, the very origin of the French nation-state is associated with the creation of an army of citizen conscripts, which in the Battle of Valmy in 1792 fought not for the king but for the fatherland and the republic.

Unlike the United States, France has not distinguished between nationality (membership in a social community) and citizenship (a status entitling the holder to the rights and duties conferred by the state). But like the United States, the France of the revolution stressed the holding of appropriate political values- republicanism-as the essential criterion of membership in the national community. Under this interpretation, so the Jacobin revolutionaries argued, people of adjacent lands could join France if they subscribed to the tenets of French republicanism. At the same time, however, France 'one

Etre juif dans la societe francaise: Du Moyen Age a nos jours. (Paris: Editions Montalba., 1979), pp 142-143.

⁵⁶ Lochak, D, *Comment peut-on etre Francais? Apres-Demain*, 286. (1986), p 16.

⁵⁷ Grégoire, Abbe, "Motion en faveur des Juifs." in *Two Rebel Priests of the French Revolution.* (tr. and with an intro. by R.L. Carol), (San Francisco: R & E Research Associates, 1975),p.29.

and indivisible' could not be dismembered if the general will were to be falsified in that country by the creation of a monarchy, and French republicans were to want to join a neighboring country that had become a republic! The reason for that position was that the 'general will' had already crystallized in France better than it could have done elsewhere, that is, had been permanently incorporated into the consciousness of the French nation. This inconsistent interpretation made it possible for the Jacobins to justify French conquest of neighboring lands, but not the reverse.⁵⁸ The idea that monarchist attitudes were incompatible with membership in the French national community had to be 'frozen' with the Empire and the subsequent installation of non-republican regimes, for no one argued that under those regimes the French nation had ceased to exist.

During the Revolution of 1789, membership in the French nation, 'one and indivisible,' meant sharing the ideology of a progressive universalism, because it was in France that the Declaration of the Rights of Man was proclaimed, and it also meant sharing the French language in which these ideas were thought to be best expressed. That is a major reason why the idea of the French nation (and national belongingness) was defined in terms of a uniform language. For Renan, neither a common race nor a common language was necessary to form a nation; in his opinion, France had long ceased to be 'Gallic,' but that did not bother him, because 'the noblest countries [were] those in which the blood was most mixed.' Similarly, Renan recognized that language and nation were not coterminous, that 'in man there is something superior to language [and] that is the will to live together'.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, with the onset of the Third Republic, the obligatory use of the French language and the systematic suppression of ethnic minority languages came to be considered a necessary means for creating a French nation.⁶⁰

One could characterize the aim of the revolutionaries from Sieyès and Mirabeau to Robespierre and Saint-Just as the transformation of the *sujets* into *citoyens*. Rather than passive subjects of an absolute monarch, the French were to become active participants in the public life of the Nation. From the beginning of the revolution and more prominently after the overthrow of the monarchy and the foundation of the republic,

⁵⁸ Talmon, J.L., *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, (New York: Praeger, 1960).

⁵⁹ Renan, Ernest, *Oeuvres Complètes*, (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1947), pp 896, 899.

⁶⁰ Weber, E., *Peasants into Frenchmen*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976) pp.95-99

citoyen became a central symbol of the Revolution. *Cette personne publique...prenoit autrefois le nom de cite, et prend maintenant celui de république ou de corps politique, lequel est appelle par ses membres Etat quand il est passif, Souverain quand il est actif, Puissance en le comparant a ses semblables. A l'égard des associes ils prennent collectivement le nom de peuple et s'appellent en particulier Citoyens comme participants a l'autorité souveraine, et sujets comme soumis aux lois de l'Etat.*⁶¹ This passage from Rousseau's *Du Contract Social* specified the core definition of the term *citoyen* in eighteenth century discourse. As compared to '*sujet*', which implied subjection not only to the laws of the state but also to the person of the monarch, '*citoyen*' implied an active participation in public affairs, and above all an active participation in the formulation of laws.

Abbe Sieyes in *Reconnaissance et exposition raisonne des droits de l'homme et du Citoyen*, presented to the committee on July 20 and 21 distinguished between active and passive rights and from it followed a distinction between active and passive citizens.

*Tous les habitants d'un pays doivent y jouir des droits de citoyen passif: tous ont droit a la protection de leur personne, de leur propriété, de leur liberté, et; mais tous n'ont pas droit a prendre une part active dans la formation des pouvoirs publics; tous ne sont pas citoyens actifs. Les femmes, du moins dans l'état actuel, les enfants, les estrangers, ceux, encore, qui ne contribueroient en rein a fournir l'établissement public, ne doivent point influencer activement sur la chose publique. Tous peuvent jouir des avantages de la société, mais ceux la seuls qui contribuent a l'établissement public, sont comme les vrais actionnaires de la grande entreprise social. Eux seuls sont les véritables citoyens actifs, les véritables membres de l'association.*⁶² To an active citizen Sieyes enlists four criteria: one must be male, adult, French national and must make some contribution to public expenses, that is, must pay tax.

⁶¹ Jean- Jacques Rousseau, "Du Contract social", in *Oeuvres completes* (Bibliotheque de la Pleiade: Paris, 1964), 3: 361-2.

⁶² Published as *Préliminaire de la constitution: Reconnaissance et exposition raisonnée des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*. Par M. l'Abbe Sieyes (Versailles, July 1789). Quoted in 'Le citoyen/la citoyenne: Activity, Passivity, and the revolutionary Concept of Citizenship' by William H. Sewell, Jr, p. 107 in *The French revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol II, ed, Colin Lucas, (Pergamon Press, U.K., 1988).

Before the eighteenth century the very idea of nation-building, a central component of Nationalism did not exist. During this period French intellectuals and leading political figures came to see perfect national building as a critical priority, and so sought ways to endow all French people with a common language, laws, customs and values. The period thus gave rise to the first large scale nationalist program in history. The revolutionaries hoped that patriotism and national sentiment would replace religion as the new binding force in public life. Yet paradoxically the example of cultural remodelling they followed in their Nation building quest was that of the Catholic Church, in its ambitious Counter Reformation efforts to evangelize the peasantry. In the new era the population would be bound together not in single Church but in a single French Nation.

No matter how urgently it invoked the past, Nationalism had something inescapably paradoxical about it. It made political claims which took the nation's existence wholly for granted, yet it proposed programs which treated the nation as something yet unbuilt.

In one sense the French began to think like Nationalists over a very short period of time: immediately before and during the French Revolution of 1789, less than the space of a single generation. Yet the transformation cannot be understood without setting it in a deeper context: it represented the culmination of a process that had begun a century earlier. In the decades around 1700, two intimately related concepts gained a political salience and centrality they had previously lacked. These were the concepts of the nation itself, and that of the *patrie*, or fatherland. Both referred to the entity known as France, but the first signified above all a group of people sharing certain important, binding qualities, while the second was used in the sense of a territory commanding a person's emotional attachment and ultimately political loyalty. Their political and cultural importance only increased over the course of the eighteenth century, and by its end they both come to possess a talismanic power. A cult of the nation has come into being.

This pre revolutionary change was intellectually violent, involving anxious and heated debates over the nature and condition of the French nation and *Patrie*. But it was not intellectually unproductive, for the violence ultimately brought about the conditions for the invention of nationalism itself in the revolutionary period. Over the course of the

century, thanks to the anxieties the debate generated, a widespread conviction arose that a true nation and a true *patrie* did not yet exist in France. From this conviction, in turn, emerged the sense that these entities needed, desperately, to be constructed.

According to Bell, Nationalism in France arose simultaneously out of, and in opposition to, Christian systems of belief. The rise of the concept of nation and *patrie* initially took place as Europeans came to perceive a radical separation between God and the world, searched for ways to discern and maintain terrestrial order in the face of God's absence, and struggled to relegate religion to a newly defined private sphere of human endeavour, separate from politics. It was only when the French ceased to see themselves as part of a great hierarchy uniting heaven and earth, the two linked by an apostolic church and divinely ordained King, that they could start to see themselves as equal members of a distinct, uniform, and sovereign nation.

The French cannot claim any particular credit for inventing Nationalism. French Nationalism emerged as a part of a general religious and cultural transformation that reached across Europe, from powerful monarchies like Great Britain to peripheral areas like Greece and Corsica. But France was distinguished by the self consciousness with which the issues were discussed, the unusually strong emphasis on the political will as the foundation stone, as opposed to language or blood or history and the amazing suddenness and strength with which a coherent nationalistic program crystallized during the French Revolution.

There was an assumption that long went unchallenged among social scientists and social historians that nationalism only emerged hand in hand with an industrial, capitalist "modernity". It is also partly because nationalist and patriotic passions flared up so intensely during the French Revolution that scholars have had difficulty believing they had meaningful roots in the *ancient regime*, still less religious roots. It has often seemed that these passions must have sprung forth fully grown in 1789 from the revolutionary process itself. As Giacomo Casanova, usually a keen observer of human impulses wrote in 1797: "this people has become a worshipper of its *patrie*, without ever having known, before the revolution, what a *patrie* was, or even the word itself."⁶³

⁶³ Quoted in David bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), p.9

Now, social scientists have begun to question the necessary association between nationalism and industrial capitalism. On the other hand historians of France have set to work exploring the richness and dynamism of Pre revolutionary political culture, showing that revolutionary ideologies had origins that went well beyond the circles of the *philosophes* and amounted to more than the simple reflections of changing social conditions. Thanks to recent studies which include, Kieth Michael baker, *Inventing the French Revolution*, Roger Chartier, *The cultural origins of the French Revolution*, it has become both necessary and possible to trace the great eighteenth century ferment around the concepts of *nation* and *patrie*.

The words, *nation* and *patrie* were in common usage much before the eighteenth century. But before the seventeenth century the French did not write treatises about the meanings of the words or debate these meanings in political pamphlets. They did not speak of either entity as an authority superior to the King or even as clearly distinct from him. In 1710s and 1720's *nation* and *patrie* both began to appear more frequently in many other sorts of texts.

In 1743, in a turning point of sorts, a little known priest and magistrate from Dijon named Francois Ignace d'Espiard de la Borde published a remarkable and unjustly ignored book entitled *Essais sur le génie et le caractère des nations* (Essays on the genius and Character of Nations)⁶⁴. Within a decade more famous figures had begun to examine the same issues. In 1748, Montesquieu made what he called the 'the general spirit of the nations', central to his masterpiece, *L'esprit des lois*, a few years after that Voltaire published his vast comparative history of nations, whose full title read, *Histoire général et essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations*.⁶⁵

Rousseau meanwhile was developing his idea that only a people whose souls had a "national physiognomy" formed by "national institutions" could resist the lure of vain precepts and the fate of blending into a vapid European sameness. Rousseau who has a key place in the development of the idea of the nation as a political construction,

⁶⁴ Ignace d'Espiard de la Borde, *Essais sur le génie et le caractère des nations, divisé en six livres*, 3 vols. (Brussels, 1743) cited in David Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France : inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), p.10.

⁶⁵ Montesquieu, *The spirit of the Laws*, trans. and ed., Anne M. choler, Basia Carolyn Miller and Harold Samuel Stone, (Cambridge, 1989) eg, 310 (section entitled "How careful one must be not to change the general spirit of a nation"); Voltaire, *Essai sur l'histoire général et sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations*. (Paris, 1756)

pondered, more deeply than any other eighteenth century thinker, the connections between national and religious sentiments. Already in 1754 the Marquis d'Argenson wrote in his journal that 'the words *nation* and *state* have never been used as often as they are today.'⁶⁶

Voluminous writings likewise celebrated and attempted to stimulate love of the French patrie. In the decades after 1750 it seemed as if the French were gorging themselves on things patriotic. They made patriotic addresses and proposed the foundation of patriotic orders, staged patriotic festivals and even ate what one lawyer in the heady autumn of 1788, called "properly patriotic suppers".⁶⁷

Under Louis XVI, the crown commissioned paintings and sculptures specifically to stimulate patriotic sentiments.

Two relatively crude but nonetheless large scale measurements confirm the growing importance of the concepts of nation and patrie over the last century of the old regime. The catalogue of the French National Library lists no fewer than 895 French language works published between 1700 and 1789, with the words, "nation" or "national" in their title, and another 277 with the words "patrie", 'patriote', or "patriotique" or "patriotisme", as opposed to 105 and 16 before 1700. The largest database of French writings similarly reveals a more than fourfold increase in the frequency with which French authors used the words "nation" and "patrie" over the course of the century.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Cited in David bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), p.11.

⁶⁷ Cited in David bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001.p. 11, Jacques Godard to Cortot, Nov 7, 1788, in Archives Departmentales de la Cote d'Or, E 642.

⁶⁸ French National Library Catalogue, available at catalogue.bnf.fr. The following list, drawn from the ARTFL database (humanities.uchicago.edu/ARTFL), gives the frequency, per 100,000 words:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Nation</i>	<i>Patrie</i>
1690-1709	4.7	4.8
1710-1729	10.0	18.5
1730-1749	20.8	12.0
1750-1769	22.2	13.2
1770-1789	22.5	18.8

In addition, the use of the term "national" went from 0 in 1710-29, to 1.0 per 100,000 in 1730-49, to 1.3 in 1750-69, and 3.8 in 1770-89. "Patriote" and "Patriotique", often used interchangeably, went from 0 in 1730-49 to 0.4 in 1750-69, and 1.5 in 1770-89.

Cited in *The Cult of the Nation in France: inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), p.226.

By the late 1780's the words had come to possess awesome symbolic power and taken their place as central organizing concepts of French Political Culture. For a significant part of the French population, the nation now represented the source of all legitimate authority, to the extent that they were willing, in its name to overthrow a political system which had lasted for centuries and which was ordained, its apologists insisted, by God himself. It is no accident that if the first battle of the revolution was won on 14th July 1789, the first great challenge to the old order had come earlier, on June 17th, when the commoner deputies of the Estates general unilaterally declared themselves as National Assembly, which declared the source of all sovereignty resides with the nation. Its successor the Legislative assembly would decree in 1792 that "in all commune an altar to the patrie shall be erected, on which shall be engraved the Declaration of Rights, along with the inscription, 'the citizen is born, lives and dies for the patrie.'" ⁶⁹ It was a rare speech, newspaper, pamphlet or book published in the years after 1789 that did not invoke the icons of the nation or the patrie.

On December 21, 1789 in the meeting of the National Convention in Paris, Jean-Paul Rabaut de Saint-Etienne spoke on the subject of education. His project on education gives an insight on the programme of nationalism and what it entailed. He spoke about creating a new people, 'we must make a new French people' and to do this he demands an 'infallible means of transmitting, constantly and immediately to all the French at once, the same uniform ideas.'⁷⁰ When he spoke of education, he actually meant indoctrination, reshaping the French people in a single generation which demanded a second revolution, '*une révolution dans les têtes et dans les coeurs, comme elle s'est faite dans les conditions et dans le gouvernement*' - revolution in heads and hearts parallel to the one already accomplished in government and society. It had to use every available means: 'the sense, the imagination, memory, reasoning, all the faculties that man possesses.' In practice it entailed subjecting the French to a long list of obligatory civic functions, including physical exercises, parades, festivals, 'morality lessons', the reading and memorising of key political texts and the singing of patriotic songs. Rabaut stressed that

⁶⁹ Declarations of the Rights of Man, art III.s

⁷⁰ Quoted in David bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), p.2

education should be 'likeable, seductive and entrancing.'⁷¹ His words, published under the title *project of National Education* became the official policy of the French state.

Rabaut's speech, a conscious program of nation building and patriotic instruction, marked a historical moment at which it became possible to speak of nationalism in France. In this sense more than a sentiment, nationalism was a political program which had as its goal not merely to praise, defend or strengthen the nation but to actively construct one. Thus, until the eighteenth century age of revolutions, the idea of actively constructing a nation through political action lay beyond the mental horizons of Western Europeans. In European usage nations were facts of nature: they signify basic divisions of the human species, not products of human will. Programs, like the one sketched out by Rabaut, which deserve the name of 'nationalist', arose only in the eighteenth century. It is this which makes nationalism, if not national sentiment, a truly modern phenomenon.

The first widely held misconception is that French Nationalism has solely political origins. Ironically, this misconception is cast in two, mutually opposing forms: that nationalism arose at the hands of the French state, continuously since the middle ages; conversely that it arose in opposition to the state. Thus on one hand Pierre Nora has written eloquently that "other countries may owe the sinews of their cohesion and the secret of their togetherness to economics, religion, language, social or ethnic community or to culture itself; France owed them to the voluntary and continuous action of the state."⁷² On the other hand sociologist Liah Greenfeld⁷³ and certain other historians have located the origins of French Nationalism in a purported early eighteenth century effort by frustrated nobles to present themselves as true leaders of a "nation" which predated and took precedence over the monarchy.

David Bell rightly points out that any interpretation that reduces nationalism to a political strategy and to a series of claims about political sovereignty is fundamentally mistaken. He states that in the eighteenth century the idea of sovereignty embodied in a single man was challenged and ultimately prevailed over by the idea of sovereignty as embodied in the whole nation. Opponents of sovereignty deployed 'the nation' as the rallying cry both before and after the revolution. But he questions the notion that the

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Nora, in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, pt.III, I, 29.

⁷³ Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, 89-188.

strategic development of the concept and its deployment alone made the French able to recognize the 'nation' as sovereign concept, earlier the opponents of monarchy had not employed the concept of the nation, then the question that needs to be taken into consideration is that what was so different about the eighteenth century. In answering this question he wants to make a shift from the proponents of political approach and recognize the fact that the concept of the nation was used in different discursive arenas and not just in constitutional politics. His emphasis is on exploring the evolving religious and cultural background against which the concepts could acquire a new radical meaning. He treats the concepts of the nation and patrie as highly contested and divided and not as something which can be understood as single and stable.

What distinguishes the language of modern nationalism from earlier languages of national sentiment is precisely the conscious perception that nations are not there already but must be formed or completed through concerted political action. Even those nationalists who insist on the essential, natural distinctiveness of their particular nation, grounded in the people's common blood or the physical terrain, nonetheless also invariably define that nation as in some sense unfinished. Action is still urgently required to purge it of impurities (usually ethnic), to reattach unjustly severed portions of it, or to revive and reawaken essential national qualities that have been forgotten, abandoned, or stolen. To achieve these goals requires the full capacities of the modern state: to design and enforce citizenship requirements, to repress or even expel national minorities, to annex unjustly alienated national territories, to supply a proper civic education, and to provide inhabitants of different regions with common loyalties, traditions, beliefs, and even a common language. On this level, there is little difference between supposed "civic" and "ethnic" forms of nationalism. (Indeed, recent work has convincingly argued that this facile, familiar distinction obscures more than it illuminates.)

The idea of the nation as a construction therefore long antedates the current academic tendency to treat everything as a construction. Those modern scholars who have triumphantly exposed the artificial nature of modern nations, as if nationalism were some great confidence game, have generally failed to realize that the very existence of nation-building programs amounts to at least a partial recognition of this artificiality by nationalists themselves. If the nation did exist in a complete and satisfactory form,

nationalist politics would be redundant. Yet in this recognition lies the great irony of modern nationalism: for at the same time nationalists admit this idea of the nation emerged with particular strength and clarity in eighteenth century France. It did not emerge in France alone: the eighteenth century saw the development of sentiments and movements that deserve the name "nationalist" throughout Europe, from powerful monarchies such as Great Britain to peripheral areas such as Greece and Corsica. But France was distinguished by the self-consciousness with which the issues were discussed, the unusually strong emphasis on political doctrine as the foundation stone of the nation (as opposed to language or blood or history), and the amazing suddenness and strength with which a coherent nationalist program crystallized during the French Revolution.

The eighteenth-century authors most often used "nation" to mean a community that satisfied two loose conditions. First, it grouped together people who had enough in common-whether language, customs, beliefs, traditions, or some combination of these-to allow them to be considered a homogeneous collective. Second, it had some sort of recognized political existence. A "people" most often only met the first of these conditions, while the concept of *patrie*, in the eighteenth century, more often had a more purely political sense, referring to the political unit to which a person felt ultimate loyalty. This concept of the nation was radically destabilized at the end of the Old Regime, leading to what can fairly be described as the birth of nationalism in France.

Explaining this rise is beyond the scope of this dissertation but it is important to note that the concept of the nation took on particular salience in two very different arenas. One was the arena of traditional institutional politics, in which various opponents of the royal ministry-particularly the parlements sought to justify their opposition by symbolically placing the figure of the "nation" vis-à-vis, or even above, the crown. Before 1770, their claims remained very limited in comparison with later, revolutionary ones, for they did not assert that "the nation" had any right to change France's ancient constitution, or its hierarchical, corporate social order, much less grant it any clear right of resistance against tyranny, or ground such a right in natural law or a social contract. While they used the phrase "the rights of the nation," they generally meant not natural rights but positive ones, defined by French law and history. The rights in question belonged not to the nation as a whole but to the modern French institutions that had

inherited the authority of the nation's supposed original assemblies, those famous gatherings of the triumphant Franks in their thousands, on the Champ de Mars next to conquered Roman Lutèce. The actual political changes they demanded consisted essentially of a shift in power from the crown to its traditional, corporate, institutional rivals. In short, they conceived of the "nation" as an essentially juridical entity, and their writings fit squarely into a constitutionalist tradition that stretched back to the sixteenth century.

The second arena was international. While the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-14) appeared to French commentators principally as a war of royal houses, the Seven Years' War (1756-63) struck them as a war of nations. As a contributor to Elie FrGron's newspaper *L'annde littdraire* concisely wrote: "There are wars in which the nation only takes an interest because of its submission to the Prince; this war is of a different nature; it is the English nation which, by unanimous agreement, has attacked our nation to deprive us of something which belongs to each of us."⁷⁴ Both curiosity and international competition prompted the growth of a substantial literature devoted to what we would now call the comparative study of national character, much of which had as its not-so-subtle purpose the defense of the French character and the denigration of the English.

Thanks to these developments, by 1770, the "nation," whether defined by reference to its historical rights or to its "character," had become a central organizing category in French political culture and cultural politics. It was incessantly referred to, deferred to, and treated as the fundamental ground on which other forms of human relations were built. In the last two decades of the Old Regime, the concept would grow more important still. But at the same time, it would be radically challenged and destabilized.

Going even further, as Keith Baker has shown, a few particularly radical jurists started infusing the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Social Contract into the mainstream of French political discussion, thereby sweeping away any notion that inflexible legal and historical constraints bound the French nation to a particular form of government. In 1775, the young Parisian barrister Jacques-Claude Martin de Mariveaux published *L'ami des*

⁷⁴ "Projet patriotique," in *Annie littiraire* (1756), 8: 43.)

lois, which rehearsed the familiar potted histories of the Franks and their successors but then went far beyond them. 'Man is born free,' declared Martin vigorously, if not originally, and added for good measure that 'the French Nation has a social contract,' which gave it the right to choose whatever form of government it wished, without reference to any original foundation.⁷⁵ The same year, the Bordeaux barrister Guillaume-Joseph Saige published his influential, *Rousseauian Catechisme du citoyen*, which argued the point even more explicitly: 'For there is nothing essential in the political body but the social contract and the exercise of the general will; apart from that, everything is absolutely contingent and depends, for its form as for its existence, on the supreme will of the nation.'⁷⁶ In these writings, the idea of the nation as the fundamental ground of human existence, the ultimate framework for all social and political action, an idea that had only become thinkable in the early eighteenth century, now found active, powerful political expression.

The concepts of the "nation" and the *patrie* had emerged as the principal symbolic sources of political legitimacy in France, and they still held this position when the final crisis of the Old Regime began ten years later, with the slide of the French state toward bankruptcy. Yet, in the so-called "pre-revolution" of 1787-1789, an increasing number of the self-proclaimed "patriotic" writers no longer invoked the authority of *patrie* and "nation" merely in the hopes of altering the balance of power among existing institutions. With the state collapsing, they now did so in order to justify the wholesale transformation of the political system. And in the great blooming of political debate that preceded the final convocation of the Estates General in 1789, they led the way in abandoning the appeal to French history altogether and fully endorsed Saige's claim that everything depended on the supreme will of the nation.

Most important in this regard, of course, was Emmanuel Sieyès's brilliant pamphlet, 'What Is the Third Estate?', which argued that only the deputies to the commoners' Third Estate were the true representatives of the French nation. It was this

⁷⁵ Jacques-Claude Martin de Mariveaux, *L'ami des lois ou les vrais principes de la législation française* (n.p., 1775), 6, 25 quoted in Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, (Cambridge, 1990), p. 143.

⁷⁶ Guillaume-Joseph Saige, *Le Catéchisme du Citoyen*, quoted in Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, (Cambridge, 1990), p. 143.

work that set the stage for the first great act of the revolution, namely the Third Estate's inauguration of the title "National Assembly," at Sieyès's instigation, on June 17, 1789.⁷⁷

Thus in the eighteenth century, the French came increasingly to see themselves not as a kingdom that took shape solely through the person of the king, nor as a part of a greater Christian commonwealth, but as a freestanding, autonomous nation. The concept became central to French political culture and cultural politics, to the extent that the founding acts and documents of the French revolutionary state invoked the sovereignty of the nation as the highest political principle. And yet, at the very same historical moment, the identity of the French nation was called into radical doubt. The juridical, historical narratives that had defined it were rejected, and the national character that two generations of writers had sketched out in such detail and contrasted favourably to the English variety was condemned as corrupt and unsuitable. Therefore, even as the concept of the nation became, symbolically, the foundation stone of the French polity, it was declared not even truly to exist, or, at the very least, to stand in urgent need of reconstruction.

The meaning of nationalism was therefore changing from a fact of nature to a product of political will. During the course of the revolution the most radical revolutionaries became convinced that for the revolution to fulfil its promise, a nation had to be built where none had existed previously. Particularly under the Terror, in 1793-94, plans proliferated for re-educating the French, providing them with what we now call a common national culture, and also making French the single, universal language of the Republic. As the Jacobin republic was engaged in fighting against external and internal enemies, not to mention the economic collapse, it had few resources available to carry out nation building at such a large scale and most of the programs did not come to fruition. Nevertheless they prefigured the extensive and ambitious nation building programs undertaken by later French Regimes, particularly the Third Republic of 1871-1940 and have served as a model for other countries as well.

⁷⁷ Emmanuel Sieyès, *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers Etat?* (Paris, 1789). On Sieyès and his influence, see most recently William H. Sewell, Jr., *A Rhetoric of Bourgeois Revolution: The Abbe Sieyès and "What Is the Third Estate?"* (Durham, N.C., 1994).

Le patriotisme ⁷⁸

Passion des Héros, amour de la Patrie,
Sentiment producteur de toutes les vertus,
Juste et louable Idolâtrie,
Aux coeurs lâches & corrompus
Tes doux transports sont inconnus

Pour toi le Fanatisme et zèle légitime;
Tu fais des Nations la force & le bonheur,
Il est beau d'être ta victime,
Souffrir pour toi l'injure est le plus grand honneur.
Romains, l'Univers vous révère,
Lorsque de la Patrie amateurs forcenés,
Pour elle vous vous condamnez
A porter fièrement le joug le plus sévère.
L'excès de cet amour est votre unique Loi;
Ce seul attrait vous unit, vous sépare,
Tout étranger est pour vous un barbare,

A cette ardeur patriotique
Tout cède... mais bien-tôt un luxe corrupteur
Use l'activité de ce puissant Moteur.
Rome touche au moment critique,
Où l'esprit de parti, l'intérêt personnel,
Vont chez elle établir leur manège cruel.
La Discorde les fuit. Les Complots, les Cabales
Partagent le Sénat en factions rivales.
Les emplois sont livrés à la vénalité,

⁷⁸ This short, anonymous poem, from 1767, is discussed in David Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France*, on page 66. It is a striking example of the shifts which laid the groundwork for the emergence of French Revolutionary patriotism. It is fervently royalist, identifying the king with the *patrie*, and in this sense fits into the program of "royal patriotism" that took shape in the 1750's and 1760's (*Cult of the Nation*, pp. 63-68). Its long description, on pages 6-7, of the famous 14th-century incident of the "bourgeois of Calais," was an obvious piece of homage to one of the most important examples of royal patriotism, Pierre Buiette de Belloy's fabulously successful stage play *Le siège de Calais* (1765). Yet the monarch that the poem glorifies is a monarch who treats his subjects as citizens. Thus the author recalls, on pages 7-8, the example of Louis XIV, who addressed open letters to the French people in 1709, when France was facing catastrophe during the War of the Spanish Succession (see *Cult of the Nation*, p. 90). And in general, the poem displays contempt for luxury and corruption, and an admiration for patriotic self-sacrifice, that is typical of classical republican thought (see *Cult of the Nation*, pp. 125-8). Particularly striking is the violence of the poem: the vaunting of patriotic "fanaticism" and "excess" and the identification of lack of enthusiasm for the *patrie* with treason. Stripped of its references to the monarchy, the poem could easily have been reprinted as republican propaganda under the First Republic, in the manner of the texts from the Seven Years War which Rouget de Lisle incorporated into the *Marseillaise* (see *Cult of the Nation*, p. 80).

The poem can be found in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, under the *cote* (call number) Ye 29660.

Le crime au sein des Loix trouve l'impunité.
Ciel! quelle affreuse décadence!
Tous les Romains, esclaves ou tyrans,
Voyant avec indifférence—
De leur prospérité les beaux jours expirans;
Contre eux-mêmes saisis d'une inhumaine rage,
A s'entredéchirer ils mettent leur courage.
le beau nom de Patrie est un vain nom pour eux,
Et le plus scélérat devient le plus heureux.
Vous aurez désormais un Maître,
Peuple fait pour tout dominer.
Le sort n'a plus à vous promettre
Que des fers pour vous enchaîner,
Des barbares pour vous soumettre,
Des monstres pour vous gouverner.
Craignez de ce destin toute ignominie,
Esclaves du vil intérêt,
Pour qui l'Amour de la Patrie
Est un sentiment sans attrait.

Toute Société languit, se décompose,
Dès qu'on desserre ce lien.
La chute des États n'a jamais d'autre cause
Que le relâchement de l'esprit Citoyen.
Il régna parmi nous ce vrai Patriotisme,
Il fut long-tems la vertu des François,
Il produisit leur héroïsme,
Ils lui doivent leur gloire & leurs plus beaux succès.
Quand du fier Edouard l'ambition outrée,
A notre Loi la plus sacrée
Osant à son gré déroger,
Voulut, à la France éplorée,
Imposer un joug étranger;
On vit tous les François, Citoyens intrépides,
Rompre de ce vassal les intrigues perfides,
Pour la Patrie armés, pour elle pleins de fois,
S'immoler au desir d'en maintenir la Loi.
Henri renouvelant cette injuste querelle,
D'un imbécile Roi surprend le vain appui,
Met dans ses intérêts la marâtre Isabelle

Le Dauphin, par Arrêt, est déclaré rebelle,
L'Anglois obtient sa place, il croit le trône à lui...
Ah! pour combler l'horreur de ces jours de souffrance,
Il commet en vain des excès.
Qu'il ne se flatte point d'assujettir la France;
Pour la sauver il reste des François.
Dans un effort commun leur force réunie,
Du superbe Lancastre abbat la tyrannie.
Il suit, loin de nos bords honteusement chassé,

Et Charles sur son trône est enfin replacé.
Dans des tems plus voisins, lorsque l'Europe entière,
Ivre de ses succès, fière de nos malheurs,
Veut sur nous durement, par une haine altière,
Entasser douleurs sur douleurs;
LOUIS parle à son Peuple, il lui montre l'abîme
Où l'on veut le précipiter.
Le François est ému, son ardeur se ranime,
A l'Europe liguée il ose résister.

De son coeur abbatu la fougue renaissante
Tient ces nouveaux Titans embarrassés, surpris;
Confond leurs aveugles mépris,
Et la Patrie est triomphante.
François, que l'esprit citoyen
Soit toujours l'ornement de votre caractère.
S'il vient à s'affoiblir, si jamais il s'altère,
François qui fûtes tout, vous ne serez plus rien.
Les vices destructeurs d'une vertu si belle,
Hélas! n'ont que trop fait parmi vous de progrès.
Chaque jour les accroît, chaque jour renouvelle
Mes craintes, mes justes regrets.
L'honneur est sans crédit, la probité chancelle;
L'or usurpe les droits du mérite et du zèle;
Sur vos moeurs, sur votre raison,
Le luxe a versé son poison.
Une triste Philosophie,
Des principes reçus orgueilleuse ennemie,

Vous donne, avec autorité,
Le Plaisir pour Divinité,
L'Univers entier pour Patrie,
Et pour suprême Loi la personnalité.
A ces maximes scélérates
Vous soumettez-vous sans rougir?
Verrons-nous vos ames ingrates
D'après elle, penser, agir?
En estime, en amour, la France & ses rivales,
Auront-elles chez vous des mesures égales?
Ferez-vous mêmes vœux pour sa gloire & la leur?
Loin d'estimer à leur valeur
Vos richesses nationales,
Marquerez-vous d'un air léger
Un stupide engouement pour tout fruit étranger?...
O! vous, qui de la France ennemis domestiques,
Dans ses Lois, dans ses Arts trouvez tant à blâmer;
Allez hors de son sein apprendre à l'estimer.

Allez, & que vos yeux critiques

Observent les Peuples divers.
Parcourez, voyez l'Univers,
Vous reviendrez François & François fanatiques.
Vous sur qui la Patrie a conservé ses droits
Dnot le coeur Citoyen est sensible à sa voix;
François digne de l'être, à vous seuls mon estime
Consacre avec transport un encens légitime.
Enfans de la Patrie, ah! que vous m'enchantez,
Dans ses moindres périls quand je vois vos allarmes,
Lorsque dans ses revers, dans ses prospérités,
La joie ou la douleur vous font verser des larmes!
Que j'applaudis à vos généreux soins,
Lorsqu'une volonté sincère
Vous retranche du nécessaire,
Pour subvenir à ses besoins!
Allez au plus beau des spectacles,
Des Héros de Calais nobles imitateurs.

Voyez leur fermeté vaincre tous les obstacles,
Et se faire admirer de leurs persécuteurs.
Votre coeur est serré, votre ame est attendri,
Lorsqu'un ordre inhumain les condamne à la mort.
Ils s'immolent pour la Patrie,
Enviez leur gloire & leur sort.
Puisse à jamais leur vertu magnanime,
Inculquer aux François cette grande leçon;
Qu'il faut pour la Patrie une chaleur sublime,
Un amour qui soit passion;
Que l'indifférence est un crime,
La tiédeur une trahison.
Non, François, pous vos Rois, de votre idolâtrie,
La raison ne peut murmurer.
Ils sont Pères de la Patrie,
Pouvez-vous les trop honorer?
Jouissez de leur bienfaisance,
De leur joug chantez la douceur;
Sur votre amour ils fondent leur puissance,
Sur leur pouvoir fondez votre bonheur.

Tous les François, LOUIS, se réunissent,
Pour célébrer votre coeur généreux.
Vous les aimez, ils vous chérissent;
Vous êtes grand, ils sont heureux.
Vivez, puissez-vous toujours être
Digne Maître de tels Sujets.
Vous, François, soyez à jamais
Les dignes Sujets d'un tel Maître.

Chapter V

Concluding Remarks

Revolutions with their stunning panorama of violence and change are an endless source of fascination and debates. Over the past centuries almost every country in the world has been touched by Revolutions, either in their own country or through neighbouring countries that have spread their influence abroad. The number of individuals – some of them famous, most of them faceless and unknown – who have participated in the revolutions reaches to millions.

Revolutions change everything or they at least seem to. They create new states, produce new institutions of government, rearrange holdings of land and wealth, change the basis of social status, and transform the dominant ideology of a society. Yet it is not for nothing that we have the French phrase – *‘Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose’*, the more the things change the more they remain the same.

From 1500 to 1789, elite and popular revolts occurred throughout the world, some of them even leading to change in rulers. But none of these revolts ever challenged the old Renaissance view that a ‘revolution’ was a circular shift in power among the various groups contending for power in a single society, which could shift again or be revised. Even the American revolution of 1776, in which Britain’s colonies transformed themselves into the United States, was primarily a contest between colonists who were seeking independence from British taxation, law, and religious constraints and the British authorities. But in 1789 the history of revolutions entered a new phase.

Until 1789 in Europe and until much later in the rest of the world, the idea of a radical change was frightening. Tradition was the only sound foundation for political and social conduct. The process of centralization from the sixteenth century strengthened absolutism in France and by the early eighteenth century the French Monarchy under Louis XIV became the model of centralized absolutism based on feudal social structures. In the eighteenth century the Europeans began to doubt the superiority of the ancient and traditional wisdom. The new empirical and analytical philosophy challenged the veracity of the Bible and the other classical texts of Greek astronomy, physics and chemistry. Essayists such as John Locke, Baron de Montesquieu and Jean Jacques Rousseau, were

seeking new principles for guiding political systems and human behaviour. It is in the French revolution of 1789 that we find revolution taking on a whole new meaning, as a radical attack on all older institutions in the name of creating a entirely new and better society.

The French Revolution brought about a complete destruction of the feudal order and its state apparatus. The Nation Assembly and later Napoleon worked very hard and systematically to recast the *ancien régime* into a modern Nation State. Attempts were made to transform institutions, legislation, administration, justice, bureaucracy, education, finances and even religion. A complete secularisation of the state structure took place with the disestablishment of the church. The French revolution not only established new principles of politics and democracy which continued to influence the European mind subsequently, it provided a new vocabulary of revolutionary action, with terms like sovereignty, representation, nationalism, civil society and citizen taking on a completely new meaning and place in the revolutionary state structure. The revolutionary doctrines of liberty, equality and fraternity continue to hold a special place even today in democratic societies the world over.

In the present dissertation I have attempted to establish a relationship between the ideology of the Enlightenment and that of the Revolution and the impact of such a relationship on the political state structure. The third estate formed it self into the National Assembly on 17th June, 1789, calling themselves the true representatives of the people. They decided to draw up a constitution for France and bring about legal equality. In this way they reflected the Enlightenment ideas of popular sovereignty in place of a despotic government. The Revolution was not yet led by any well formed party or group which imparted effective unity to the revolutionary struggle. The people in the forefront were the liberal bourgeoisie of professional men like lawyers, doctors, writers, notaries and office holders, familiar with the ideas of classical liberalism and enlightenment, as formulated by philosophers and economists. The presence of philosophers with their new ideas and vocabulary probably made the difference between a mere replacement of one regime and the inauguration of a new order. The revolution was rooted in the political culture that took shape in the last years of the Old regime, as an implicit contradiction, between absolutism and the politics of the Enlightenment, resulting in crisis. How the

absolute monarchy saw itself, its relation to the society within which it functioned seemed to be in glaring contradiction to the progressive principles of the new political culture. This new culture furnished the basis of a revolutionary discourse and raised the issue of legitimacy. The resolution passed on 17 June 1789 by the third estate to constitute itself into the National Assembly was the most revolutionary act. It implied a fresh set of principles of legitimacy for the revolutionaries. It was Sieyès who stressed the importance of the Third estate. Sieyès proposed two revolutionary thèses: the identification of the nation entirely with the third estate and the claim that the Nation alone had the power to give a constitution to France.¹ Between May and August 1789 the entire *ancien régime* was destroyed.

When the National assembly after abolishing the feudal privileges set about framing the constitution it became the Constituent Assembly. The decrees of 4th and 11th August abolished all personal privileges, serfdom and the tithe and created free and equal justice and freedom for employment for all. Thus, a new legal society had been established in France. Two debates of the Constituent assembly were crucial from the point of view of the principles of legitimacy. Those were the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the subject of sovereignty. Liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression were made some of the basic rights. The subjects of the French ruler were made into the citizens of the French Nation. The Declaration of the Rights of Man brought about a radical conception of society, and organized the new public authorities to protect these rights by way of a written constitution based on revolutionary doctrines.

The second debate concerned the question of the nature and attribute of sovereignty. The issue of 'sovereign' proved to be extraordinarily difficult. The destruction of the society based on orders and privileges raised the new issue of representation. The leaders realized that it was nearly impossible to reconcile the sovereignty of the Nation with the direct exercise of its rights by all the members of the nation. It was Sieyès who tried to provide a reasonable solution to the problem of the

¹ I have discussed the relationship between the political theorists of the period of the revolution and the Enlightenment thinkers and the influence, if any, of the latter on the former. A relationship between Abbe Sieyès, one of the most impressive political theorists of the period and Rousseau is easy to establish as Sieyès draws heavily from *The Social Contract*. But it is important and interesting to note that even though he picks up ideas from Rousseau's discussions, he does not always agree with their treatment. A clear example of which is his disagreement on the idea of representation as expounded upon by Rousseau.

exercise of sovereignty between the need for new institutions and the claims of democracy. The unicameral assembly became the only place where the general will of the citizens could appear. It is argued by some writers that such definitions led to a new kind of absolutism of the National assembly in place of the monarchy. In the following year, a fundamental conflict developed between the popular and parliamentary concepts of democracy, each claiming indivisible sovereignty. Thus, the ideas of sovereignty and representation as developed during the course of the Revolution could not be satisfactorily be resolved and they opened up new areas of debates and conflicts, which affected the subsequent governments. This instability in the conception of these important ideas gave rise to various revolutions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the 1848 Revolution usurping power in the name of the people and then the establishment of monarchy, with the king declaring himself the sovereign. Thus, there was a constant shift from Republican forms of government to Monarchical forms, with the instability coming to an end only by 1870.

The signing of the Declaration of Rights of Man despite being at the beginning of the French Revolution was of extreme significance. France's new constitution was revolutionary in France. It gave French men rights and freedoms with the slogan "*liberté, égalité, fraternité*" epitomizing the intent of the document. Many other social changes followed. Feudalism was abolished during the Revolution and would never return to France. The pre-revolution society disappeared as well. It was no longer assembled by layers, with each layer possessing different rights and freedoms. Occupations were opened to all applicants allowing the most ambitious and successful to rise and putting no emphasis on class. The Revolution also provided us with the most influential model of popular insurrection against the Monarchy. Both the Russian Revolution and Tiananmen Square protests have been inspired by the French Revolution.

The most influential effect of the French Revolution was the shift from Absolute Monarchy to Republicanism. This not only reduced the power of a single individual but transferred the power to the citizens. France was the largest European nation to convert to Republicanism at that time. The revolution played a monumental role in establishing the precedents of such democratic systems as elections, representative government, and

constitutions. The constitution of 1791 made significant changes to the political system of France. It limited the power of the monarch and created a federal governmental system complete with three branches. The first republic of France was established in 1792 existing until the military dictatorship of Napoleon in 1804. Despite France returning to a military dictatorship after the Revolution a democratic seed had been planted within the hearts of the Frenchman.

One can say that the manner of social transformation was much more significant than the magnitude. The violence of the Revolutionary movement tore apart the structure of the society, leaving the country bitterly divided on political, social, religious and economic policies and virtually ungovernable. These tensions and hostilities are perpetuated in French history up to the present day. There were divisions concerning the political organization of state between the Monarchists and the Republicans and what was more at stake was less a type of government than a conception of society. The religious legacy of the revolution was also important as it brought to the fore the tremulous relationship between a sovereign state and the international Church, a problem which Napoleon's Concordat could not solve either. The religious issue haunted the government throughout the nineteenth century and led to the formation of the Christian Democratic Party.

It is interesting to note that the number of pre-revolutionary writers who discussed public opinion, the political rights of the people and the universality of rational capacities, were not trying to create democracy in France, but these discourses eventually influenced each other and began to blend together even before 1789. For example, the critique of privilege central to the rhetoric of public opinion and the egalitarian sociability of the public sphere threatened the parlements' elitist assertions about the nation. Similarly the assertion of the presence of reason in all individuals called into question the idea of consulting the common people in matters of state and made it a little more imaginable, while Rousseau's idea of valuing virtue and will instead of birth or reason also helped prepare France for its future towards democracy.

This is not to argue that the Revolution was preordained or that the Enlightenment caused the Revolution in some simple way, but the instability of these discourses and their tendency to merge with each other support Furet's contention that the *materials* of the revolutionary consciousness to come existed in France in the 1770's or 1780's. Thus, these slowly converging ideas and discourses of public opinion, the general will, the people, and the nation helped make the events of the revolutionary decade possible.

The significance and enormity of the French Revolution makes it important to very briefly place it in the global context before any sort of conclusion is reached. The effects of the French Revolution were and are not only felt by the nation of France but by almost every nation in the modern world. Be it through the birth of nationalism, the Napoleonic Code, the spread of democracy, The Declaration of the Rights of Man, or the subordinate changes in culture, the effects of it are immense in proportion. Despite lasting only twelve years, the effects can be seen through history in the over two years following this influential period of time. Effects of the Revolution range from as refined as the spread of the metric system to as paramount as the shift from absolutism to republicanism. Given the lasting cultural, political, and social effects I deem that the French Revolution was successful. The world never reverted back to the state it was before the Revolution.

The effects of the French Revolution can be displayed in the category of culture as well. The French Revolutionary government adopted the use of the metric system, and the use spread to other countries. Now only three countries: the U.S.A., Myanmar, and Liberia do not use the current metric system (SI, or System Internationale). During the French Revolution, the French national flag changed from the fleur de lis to the tricolour. This change has affected many other national and ethnic flags, most notably the Acadian flag. A more significant effect of the French Revolution was the spread of French culture by Napoleon through the Great French War. Napoleon would appropriate all of Western European culture as French. This can be seen primarily in fashion as well customs. The Great French War allowed the spread of French fashion throughout Europe. French fashion has a profound effect on the runway even in a modern sense. The world of contemporary fashion is ruled mostly by French (mostly Parisian) clothiers including:

Louis Vuitton, Chanel, Dior, Hermes, and Yves Saint-Laurent. Also during the Revolution citizens began dressing more modestly. Men and women began cutting hair closer to their scalps, and some wealthy men began wearing beggar clothing, while women wore fashions which imitated the thin gowns of the ancient Pagan Greeks. Human customs changed dramatically: men no longer raised their hats to ladies, obscene graffiti appeared everywhere on walls and with the reformed calendar (10 days), men began shaving more infrequently.

An important precursor to the spread of perpetual effects of the French Revolution was both the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, also known aptly as The Great French War, which lasted longer than the Revolution itself (1792-1815). The Revolutionary Wars were fought between the French Revolutionary Government and the Austrian government; however they were not so inclusive. The nations of Great Britain, Prussia, Spain, the Russian Empire, and Sardinia were all included in the massive bloodshed. The French Revolution was not only at stake, the European balance-of-power was being threatened, a threat they did not want to succumb to. The French Revolution allowed the French army to promote based on sheer talent and merit. An alteration that allowed a common army cadet, Napoleon Bonaparte, to rise to the rank of General because of his ambition and military genius; which consequently would have him lead the wars that bore his name. Leading the French army through extensive campaigns, he expanded the French Empire to its peak in 1810, reaching from Spain to Poland. The Great French War allowed the effects of the French Revolution to spread throughout Europe

In response to French Revolution and the subsequent Great French War, The Congress of Vienna was held. It was a conference between European powers, chaired by Prince Metternich of Austria; it lasted 10 months from September 1st, 1814 to June 9th, 1815 concerning the European balance of power returning Europe to its pre-French Revolution boundaries. It successfully made a vast array of territorial changes and abolished slavery. The most significant change being the unification of 39 German States into a Confederation. It gave the continent of Europe political stability avoiding a general war nearly 100 years.

A more profound social and political effect of the French Revolution was the birth of Nationalism, not only in France but in many neighbouring countries. The Revolution aligned with the Declaration of Rights of Man in harbouring a fervour that France belonged to its people, not Louis XVI. The people started taking great pride in their country, language, heritage and history. No longer were disputes or wars “between king and king; they became increasingly struggles between nation and nation. The opposition to the French bred nationalism in the other countries of Europe. Both the Italian and German states began unification movements following Napoleon's occupation. Ethnic groups within Empires began to view independence as an answer. No longer was a nation represented by a single person a monarch, but by every citizen living within its boundaries.

The French Revolution marked the beginning of prodigious changes that would affect world history. Despite the revolution occurring internally in France and only lasting twelve years (1787-1799), the lasting effects would be felt worldwide, with direct repercussions reaching from areas as far as North America to the Dutch East Indies. Despite some of the Revolution's consequences being short-lived, it is obvious that after viewing the cultural, social, and political effects of the French Revolution it should be regarded as successful.

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[Internet Modern History Sourcebook](#).

Ça Ira!¹

Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,
Le peuple en ce jour sans cesse repète:
Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,
Malgré les mutins tout réussira!

Nos ennemis confus en restent là,
et nous allons chanter Alleluya!
Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,

Quand Boileau jadis du clergé parla
Comme un prophète, il a prédit cela,
En chantant ma chansonnette,
Avec plaisir on dira:
Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,

Malgré les mutins tout réussira.
Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,

Pierrot et Margot chantent à la guinguette,
Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,

Réjouissons-nous, le bon temps viendra.
Le peuple français jadis "a quia"
L'aristocratie dit: "Mea culpa."
Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,

Le clergé regrette le bien qu'il a.
Par justice la nation l'aura,
Par le prudent LaFayette
Tout trouble s'apaisera,
Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,

Malgré les mutins tout réussira.
Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,

Petits comme grands sont soldats
dans l'âme
Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,

Pendant la guerre aucun ne trahira.
Avec cœur tout bon Français combattra,
S'il voit du louche, hardiment

¹ This was one of the most popular songs of the Revolution. It literally means, 'All will go (well)!', but the meaning inherent is, 'we will win!'. Especially interesting to note is the attitude towards the aristocracy and the clergy. Source: [Internet Modern History Sourcebook](#)

il parlera.

Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,

Lafayette dit: "Vienne qui voudra."

Le patriotisme leur répondra
Sans craindre ni feu ni flamme,
Les Français toujours vaincront,
Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,

Malgré les mutins tout réussira.

Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,

Les aristocrates à la lanterne!

Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,

Les aristocrates, on les pendra!

Le despotisme expirera,
La liberté triomphera,
Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,

Nous n'avions plus ni nobles, ni prêtres,

Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,
L'égalité partout régnera.

L'esclave autrichien le suivra,

Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,

Et leur infernale clique

Au diable s'envolera.
