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Clubs, Parties, Factions

Charles Walton

Reader, University of Warwick

Abstract: Historical debate over the political clubs of the French Revolution over the past two centuries has turned on the question of whether factionalism grew out of their democratic principles or from external circumstances. This chapter suggests that neither ideology nor circumstances can fully account for this radicalisation. Instead, the conditions of a 'weak state' must be addressed. When authorities were unable or unwilling to implement legislation or to respond to demands coming from society, the clubs often intervened, militating for action to be taken. Tax collection and the crisis of subsistence constituted two crucial issues that the state failed to manage. The clubs, which were divided on these issues, found themselves debating them in a context in which no legal limits on slander (another state weakness) existed. Unchecked calumny poisoned intra and inter-club relations and contributed to factionalism.

Keywords: Subsistence, Taxes, Freedom of Expression, Calumny, Honour, Terror, Free Markets

What role did political clubs play in the French Revolution? Were they engines of democratization and social justice or seedbeds of factionalism and terror? Views on the clubs have divided historians ever since the early nineteenth century. In her *Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution*, Mme de Staël demonized the most influential of clubs, the Jacobins: 'The dreadful sect of Jacobins pretended to found liberty on despotism, and from that system arose all the crimes of the Revolution.'¹ A few decades later, Jules Michelet cast the clubs in a more favourable light. He attributed their emergence across France in 1789 and 1790 to political crisis: '[They] grew out of the situation itself, from the most imperious necessity, that of public safety'. He also

¹ Staël, Anne-Louise-Germaine Necker, Baroness de, *Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution*, Duke de Broglie and Baron de Staël (eds.), 2 vols. (New York, 1818), vol. 1, 176-177.

stressed the 'genius' of the Paris Cordeliers Club for its 'popular reason' and concern for the working classes.²

Conflicting views on French revolutionary clubs persisted over the next two centuries. At the turn of the twentieth, Augustin Cochin attributed the Revolution's 'terrorist legislation' to the clubs, which he saw as growing out of the late Old Regime's 'sociétés de pensée' (salons, circles, clubs, literary associations). He echoed Alexis de Tocqueville's criticism that revolutionaries were driven to excess by their philosophical zeal, or what de Tocqueville referred to as their 'abstract literary politics', but he developed it along sociological lines: Commitments to egalitarianism and political unanimity, largely inspired by the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, led the clubs to impose a pre-manufactured 'general will' and to denounce or expel anyone who disagreed with it. This dynamic, already present in the clubs of the early Revolution, gradually seeped into revolutionary politics more generally, with calamitous consequences. Between August 1793 and August 1794, 'Rousseau's idea, direct democracy, achieves its realisation; it is the year of the Terror.'³

In the 1970s, François Furet drew heavily from de Tocqueville and Cochin in analysing Jacobinism. He saw early revolutionary commitments to democratic equality and collective sovereignty as generative of paranoia, denunciations and purges. Although Jacobin clubs initially supported constitutional monarchy and tended to limit membership to elites (membership fees were high), their high-minded principles of equality and moral regeneration unwittingly drove them towards the Terror. Cochin and Furet's critiques of the Jacobin clubs chimed with conservative and liberal views of the Revolution: Cochin was a devout Catholic, sympathised with the counterrevolution and greatly admired Hippolyte Taine, an influential conservative historian of the late nineteenth century. For his part, Furet was inspired by liberalism, especially in the vein of Madame de Staël and Benjamin Constant, whom Furet sought to resurrect in French Revolutionary historiography.

² Jules Michelet, *Histoire de la Révolution française*, 9 vols. (Paris, n.d.), vol. 2, 240, 281-282.

³ Augustin Cochin, *La Révolution et la Libre-pensée: la socialisation de la pensée-1750-1789; la socialisation de la personne – 1789-1792; la socialisation des biens – 1793-1794* (Paris, 1979), 201.

Republican and Marxist views on the revolutionary clubs were more sympathetic. After publishing several volumes of the minutes of the Paris Jacobin Club's meetings, Alphonse Aulard, writing in the 1890s, concluded that the club was not ideologically inflexible, as often claimed. The club was willing to 'bend to circumstances' and 'reflected the vicissitudes of public sentiment'. True, Jacobins may have been naive in seeking to spread republican principles across Europe, he conceded, but their zealous pedantry should not deprive them of the credit due to them for being, in politics, 'the first primary school instructors of France'.⁴ More recently, Raymonde Monnier, seeking to nuance Albert Soboul's 'class' interpretation of popular politics, argues that the clubs played a crucial role in developing 'democratic public space'. Factionalism, she argues, had less to do with class or egalitarian ideology than with tensions between Paris and the surrounding countryside over grain and general fears over subsistence.⁵

Ideology and circumstances, then, are the two principal lines of interpretation for factionalism in French Revolutionary politics. This essay will introduce an alternative thesis: namely, the weak state. The conditions generated by it radicalised the discourse and actions of the clubs. But before re-examining the sources of factionalism in the clubs, it is worth reviewing, first, the clubs' origins and the kinds that existed (they were not all Jacobin); second, what the clubs actually did and not just what they professed (actions cannot be reduced to ideas); and finally, the political context in which the political clubs evolved ('weak state' conditions, which radicalized civil society).

The Origins and Rise of Revolutionary Clubs

One of the earliest revolutionary clubs, or circles, of 1789 was the Club de Valois. Co-founded by the abbé Sieyès on 11 February 1789, the club met in the Palais-Royal under the sponsorship of the duc d'Orléans, cousin (and purported rival) of Louis XVI. It counted more than six hundred members. Many were of noble origins, robe and sword, which is ironic given that Sieyès published *What is the*

⁴ Aulard, *Le Club des Jacobins sous la monarchie*, *La Révolution française* 22: 2 (July-Dec, 1892), 122.

⁵ Albert Soboul, *The Parisian Sans-culottes and the French Revolution, 1793-94* (Oxford, 1964); Raymonde Monnier, *L'Espace public démocratique: Essai sur l'Opinion à Paris de la Révolution au Directoire* (Paris, 1994).

Third Estate? at the time of the club's founding. Members came from the haute bourgeoisie as well, and included financiers and wholesale merchants (*négociants*). Short-lived, the Club de Valois was quite contentious, and clashes escalated not infrequently into duels.⁶ Members would go on to span the political spectrum in later years, joining the Jacobins (left, centre-left), the Feuillants (constitutional monarchs who split off from the Jacobin Club) or the Club monarchique (right, centre-right).

Most historical accounts of the revolutionary clubs begin with the Breton Club, which formed during the Meeting of the Estates General began in early May 1789. Spearheaded by a group of third estate deputies from Brittany, the club met regularly at a café in Versailles over the summer to strategize. It folded when the National Constituent Assembly followed the king to Paris in October, but the following month several of its former members founded the *Société de la Révolution*, named after a London club which publicly sympathized with the reforms of the French Revolution. In January 1790, the club changed its name to the *Société des amis de la Constitution* and rented space in a Jacobin convent on the rue Saint Honoré, near the National Assembly hall – hence their more familiar name, the Jacobin Club. Initially liberal and selective, the club would become more democratic and republican after July 1791, when a factional split and defection of members committed to constitutional monarchy, a split sparked by dramatic events (the royal family's attempt to flee France in late June and the fusillade of patriots in July), forced the Jacobins to seek the support of commoner and poor sectors of the population.

Political clubs proliferated throughout France in 1789 and 1790. Many grew out of, or followed the traditions of, late Old Regime voluntary associations: freemasonry clubs, Mesmerist harmony societies, philanthropic societies, and reading salons. Provincial clubs often sought affiliation with the Jacobin Club in Paris, which offered benefits. Affiliation provided access to influential national deputies and to news about legislation and events taking place in the capital. It also conferred legitimacy, which was important in a legal climate in which voluntary associations were at the mercy of municipal authorities, which had

⁶ Augustin Challamel, *Les clubs contre-révolutionnaires: Cercles, Comités, Sociétés, Salons, Réunions, Restaurants et Librairies* (Paris, 1895), 32.

been given vast legal powers to maintain public order in 1789. Although the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen did not grant the right of association, a decree passed on 14 December 1789 extended this right in a limited way to active citizens, that is, males over twenty-five years of age who paid the equivalent of three days' wages of an unskilled worker in taxes and who were deemed neither bankrupt nor insolvent. The decree required club meetings to be approved by municipal authorities and to be limited to the drafting of addresses and petitions, deputations for which could not exceed ten citizens.⁷

Several municipalities tried to restrict and suppress the Jacobin clubs, especially in areas with intense opposition to the Revolution's religious policies, which the Jacobin clubs supported (expropriation of Church property and the ecclesiastical oath to the constitution that all clerics were required to swear). Seeking to strengthen local support for these reforms, the National Assembly passed a more liberal decree on 13 November 1790, extending 'the freedom to assemble peaceably and to form free societies' to all citizens, active and passive (the question of gender was not addressed). Over the next three months, the number of cities with clubs affiliated with the Paris Jacobins nearly doubled, from 213 to 427.⁸ Several cities had more than one patriotic club. Some of the newer clubs grew out of factional splits in the established ones; others out of class dynamics: Many could not afford the high membership fees of the elite clubs. In Nîmes, for example, the bourgeois patriot club charged 24 livres. The rival popular club, on the other hand, charged only 6 livres, payable in three instalments.⁹ Although tensions existed between competing local clubs in some towns and cities, in many cases, pro-revolutionary clubs managed to co-exist peacefully. Sometimes they established alliances or fused.

Provincial patriot clubs expanded dramatically in the early years of the Revolution. Although not all provincial clubs were affiliated with the Paris Jacobins, the increase in the number of cities with affiliations to the mother club

⁷ Mavidal et al. (eds.), *Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860: Recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des Chambres françaises* (Paris:, 1867) [hereafter AP], vol. 10, 567.

⁸ Kennedy, *The Jacobin Clubs in the French Revolution: The First Years*, Appendix B, 362.

⁹ Claude Mazauric, 'Jacobins/Jacobinisme' in Albert Soboul (ed.), *Dictionnaire historique de la Révolution française* (Paris, 1989), 586.

provides a general sense of growth rates: from 20 cities with affiliations in January 1790 to 921 by July 1791.¹⁰ Representatives-on-mission, sent by the National Convention into the provinces in 1793, frequently founded patriotic clubs in (mostly rural) areas where enthusiasm for the Revolution was weak and contributions to the war effort minimal or nil. In this radical phase (1793-1794), some clubs became *de facto* branches of administration. They collaborated intimately with local *comités révolutionnaires* and *comités de surveillance* and became the arms through which the representatives-on-mission imposed emergency measures.¹¹ In places where local officials were lax or inactive, the clubs might take control, with the blessing of the representative-on-mission. By the start of the Year II (September 1793), in towns that had a club, local officials were likely to be club members. In Bayeux, for example, the local club declared, after a purge of the local administration, 'Henceforth, the municipality and the club will be one-in-the-same.'¹²

After 9 September 1793, the National Convention sought to curtail sans-culotte militancy in the Paris sections by passing a decree limiting meetings to twice per week (they had been meeting *en permanence*). To sweeten this bitter pill, the Convention called for paying the poor two livres to attend each of these bi-weekly meetings, as a means of extending social assistance. Circumventing these restrictions, sectional militants founded popular societies in the fall of 1793. In the late spring and summer of 1794 (even before 9 Thermidor and the fall of the *robesspierristes*), the sectional clubs began closing, for a variety of reasons: exhaustion with factionalism, but above all, pressure and manipulation on the part of the Jacobin Club and the government (especially the Committees of General Security and of Public Safety, themselves at odds with each other). Clubs were abolished by the decree of 6 Fructidor Year III (23 August 1795), but they resurfaced clandestinely during the Directory. One finds neo-Jacobins meeting in Paris in the lead-up to the Fructidor coup of the Year V and across France in the

¹⁰ Kennedy, *The Jacobin Clubs: The Early Years*, Appendix B, 362.

¹¹ Michel Biard, *Missionnaires de la République* (Paris, 2002), esp. ch. 5.

¹² Michael L. Kennedy, *The Jacobin Clubs in the French Revolution, 1793-1795* (New York, 2000), 53-77, for quote, see 66.

months prior to the Brumaire coup of 1799, which brought Napoleon to power.¹³ Counterrevolutionary clubs re-emerged as well, most notably, the Club de Clichy in Paris.¹⁴ Napoleon's prefectures, which were established in February 1800 and given vast policing powers, stifled all significant club activity until 1814.

Anti and counterrevolutionary clubs, often overlooked by historians, also emerged in the early years of the Revolution.¹⁵ Little is known about these fleeting associations, but according to Paul R. Hanson, they existed in at least thirty-five towns and cities across France, including large ones like Paris, Bordeaux, Aix-en-Provence, La Rochelle, Strasbourg and Toulouse.¹⁶ Like their radical counterparts, the royalist clubs were prone to paranoia, denunciations and violence. Though staunchly in favour of patriarchal authority, they shared with their Jacobin rivals the belief that particular interests should be subordinated to the general interest. In the preamble to its prospectus, the monarchical club in Limoges expressed its aversion to all 'private associations'. The short-lived Club des Impartiaux in 1790, and subsequently, the Club monarchique, both founded in Paris by centre-right deputies of the Constituent Assembly, mounted a relentless libel campaign against the Jacobins. Like their adversaries, the Club monarchique sought and secured provincial affiliations.

Local royalist clubs often clashed with the patriotic societies, sometimes violently. In December 1790, members of the royalist *Club des amis de la paix* in Aix-en-Provence insulted and shot members of Aix's two patriotic clubs, killing one and wounding several others in front of a royalist café (the club's meeting place) on the Cours Mirabeau. The popular clubs forced authorities to hand over two detained suspects deemed responsible for the violence. After tracking down a third (the instigator), the popular clubs hanged all three men near the site of the shootings. This was an extreme case. Still, tensions between pro and anti-

¹³ Isser Woloch, *Jacobin Legacy: The Democratic Movement under the Directory* (Princeton, 1970); Bernard Gainot, *1799, un nouveau Jacobinisme?* (Paris, 2001).

¹⁴ Challamel, *Les clubs contre-révolutionnaires*, 483-506.

¹⁵ In addition to Challamel, see Robert Griffiths, *Le Centre perdu: Malouet et les "monarchiens" dans la Révolution française* (Grenoble: 1988).

¹⁶ Paul Hanson, 'Monarchist Clubs and the Pamphlet Debate over Political Legitimacy in the Early Years of the French Revolution', *French Historical Studies* 21: 2 (Spring 1998), 301.

revolutionary clubs ran high in several towns, exacerbated by a polarized press in which royalist and patriot journalists relentlessly demonised each other.¹⁷

Social Composition and Actions

The social composition of revolutionary clubs varied greatly. Some Jacobin clubs were dominated by liberal nobles and high bourgeoisie; others, by professionals, retail merchants and artisans. The question of women's inclusion in the Jacobin clubs was much debated in the early years of the Revolution. When women were admitted, they tended to be confined to a certain area of the meeting hall and forbidden to address the club or talk to the male members. Their presence, often justified on the grounds that women needed education, sometimes caused tensions. Women forged their own clubs and circles, occasionally securing 'auxiliary' status with the local Jacobin club. Such circles proliferated in early 1791 but were generally non-political and devoted to reading newspapers and preparing revolutionary festivals. One club, the *Société des citoyennes républicaines révolutionnaires*, founded in Paris in May 1793, was notably different, professing a militant patriotism that led to street clashes with more moderate women. The Convention banned it in September, at a time when deputies were seeking to curb popular militancy more generally. A month later, on 30 October, it banned all women's clubs.¹⁸

Political clubs took up many activities. They lobbied, often for local economic interests, and electioneered. They communicated with other clubs to coordinate positions on important political matters, most notably the constitution. At a time when Church-run schools were closing (the result of expropriations), Jacobins took it as their duty to offer public instruction. Given the collapse of tax collection, the clubs often spurred citizens to make voluntary gifts and contributions to the nation. They opened 'souscriptions' for various charitable causes as well. They became so effective at charity drives that in 1793

¹⁷ Hanson, 'Monarchist Clubs', 299-324.

¹⁸ Dominique Godineau, *The Women of Paris and Their French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1998); Jean-Clément Martin, *La Révolte brisée: Femmes dans la Révolution française et l'Empire* (Paris, 2008); Olwen Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution* (Toronto, 1992).

and 1794, local administrations often conferred the management of public charity to them.

Although the creation of paper money (the *assignats*) helped the government meet expenses in the Revolution's early years, by 1793, lack of tax revenues and depreciation of the assignats led to a raft of decrees urgently calling for the collection of current taxes, arrears and forced loans. Local clubs often took the lead in collecting these sums. They also took public stances with regard to subsistence crises: initially supportive of market freedom in the grain trade, most clubs changed their minds by 1793 and 1794 and became militant about the surveillance of commodity stocks and price ceilings. The abrupt return to liberal economic policies of the Thermidorian Convention and Directory was accompanied by the abolition of the clubs (August 1795). Meanwhile, many of the club leaders of the Year II who had had played an active role in the economic 'terror' were persecuted in the Year III, by crowds but also by officials.¹⁹

Club radicalisation: ideology or 'weak-state' conditions?

How did the pro-revolutionary clubs of the French Revolution, which proclaimed to promote freedom, equality and fraternity, end up in deadly faction-fighting by the Year II? We have already noted how François Furet and his followers drew inspiration from Cochin and de Tocqueville, who saw in the clubs the seeds of authoritarianism and terror. Versions of this interpretation follow intellectual and sociological lines. According to Keith M. Baker and Mona Ozouf, Jacobin commitments to absolute collective sovereignty and moral regeneration undermined whatever liberal potential the Revolution may have had.²⁰ They argue that revolutionaries inherited from the Old Regime (and Rousseau) illiberal, absolutist conceptions of sovereignty and an aversion to pluralist

¹⁹ Stephen Clay, 'Vengeance, Justice and the Reactions in the Revolutionary Midi', *French History* 23:1 (2009), 22-46; Howard G. Brown, *Ending the French Revolution: Violence, Justice, and Repression from the Terror to Napoleon* (Charlottesville, 2006).

²⁰ Keith M. Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1990), esp. chapter 8; Mona Ozouf, 'Public Opinion' at the End of the Old Regime', *Journal of Modern History* 60, Supplement 9 (1998), S1-S21; and Ozouf, 'Public Spirit' in Furet and Ozouf (eds.), *Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 771-780.

notions of public opinion, which they took to be divisive and anarchic. Contemporaries believed that moral tutelage was needed to rein diverse opinions into a rational consensus oriented towards the general interest. Jacobins, Baker argues, were allergic to the English model of party politics, which they saw to be chaotic and destabilizing. Indeed, the term 'parti' in late eighteenth-century France was synonymous with 'faction'. Jacobins worried about the effects of all political opposition and all mediating bodies, which corrupted the 'general will'. Society was to be comprised of virtuous individual citizens and the state operating for the general good. Clusters of particular interests were thought to undermine the new order.

Whereas Baker and Ozouf focussed on concepts and discourse, Furet emphasized the sociological implications of commitments to Enlightenment ideals. But in borrowing from Cochin, his sociology was ultimately idea-driven. Other potential factors driving radicalization, such as circumstances and counterrevolution, were not only subordinated in Furet's model; they were presented as the necessary consequence of ideology. For Cochin and Furet, ideology created its own circumstances and intensified obsessions with 'counterrevolution'. Cochin asks, 'Is it true, as M. Aulard believes, that circumstances explain all revolutionary laws and actions? What we assert is that the very idea of revolutionary acts and laws [...] would not have arisen without the principle of direct sovereignty and the [kind of] regime that results from it: the social regime.'²¹ (The 'social regime', for Cochin, was without hierarchical authority and guided by abstract principles that equal citizens were expected to share.) Like Cochin, Furet drew a straight line from democratic sociability and principles to the pathological politics of the Year II: 'The truth is that the Terror was an integral part of revolutionary ideology, which [...] gave its own meaning to "circumstances" that were largely of its own making.'²² For Furet, ideology produced 'counterrevolution' as well. Scarcely a threat in real terms (or so he believed), 'counterrevolution' was blown out of all proportion by paranoid

²¹ Cochin, *Les sociétés de pensée et la démocratie moderne* (Paris, 1921), 82-83.

²² François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, Elborg Forster (trans.) (Cambridge, 1981 [orig. 1978]), 62.

Jacobins, for whom any deviation from the 'general will' and 'virtue' constituted an existential threat.

The persuasiveness of these arguments lies in the way they are hermetically sealed within a tight, idea-based logic of cause and effect. Ideology is seen as motivating actions, structuring them, and justifying them. The way power explains itself and the way it actually works are one and the same. The argument is thus circular and self-reinforcing: If one begins with the premise that circumstances are the epiphenomena of ideology (or what ideologically committed clubs inevitably produce), then one can dispense with judiciously weighing a broad range of factors. Put another way, if 'abstract literary politics' are all one considers, then the Revolution's tragic course will perforce appear to be the result of 'abstract literary politics'. The task of analysis is limited from the outset to tracking down the ideas most responsible for the tragedy: collective sovereignty, representation, moral regeneration, perpetual peace, natural law.

The ideological determinism implicit in the Furetian model has been challenged in recent decades. Often, though, historians simply reject the thesis and go on to tell an alternative story in which 'circumstances' or 'counterrevolution' are stressed. Political theorist Jean Cohen, however, offers a critique of the Furetian thesis that engages closely with its terms. She concedes that discourses of popular sovereignty and representation are ultimately 'fictions' and 'carry the risk that dictatorial or oligarchic elites will deploy them to legitimate their authoritarian and self-interested forms of rule', but she insists that they are 'necessary fictions'. Their 'philosophical and sociological indeterminacy', she argues, 'are precisely what permit critique, questioning, reflexivity and creativity on the institutional and theoretical levels, in the unending quest to make institutions more just, more egalitarian, more open, more responsive, more accountable, more responsible – that is, democracy itself.'²³ Democratic principles can be used in different ways, positive and negative, and therefore cannot be assumed to have only one (negative) set of implications.

²³ Jean Cohen, 'The Self-Institution of Society and Representative Government: Can the Circle be Squared?', *Thesis Eleven*, 80 (February 2005), 24.

Cohen moves us beyond ideological determinism but leaves us with an unresolved question: On what does a positive or negative deployment of democratic principles depend? Why do those principles serve as salutary checks on state power in one context but lead to exorbitant state power in another? The historian is likely to turn to circumstances for answers to this question, and indeed, the thesis of 'circumstances' has made a comeback over the past decade or so. But the defenders of this thesis often sidestep rather than confront Cochin and Furet's critique of it. Cochin and Furet insist that circumstances are sociologically *produced*. They do not emerge *sui generis*, the accidental concatenation of myriad causes. If we accept their sociological inclinations but reject their tendency to reduce sociology to ideology, we are left looking for an alternative sociological basis to explain how circumstances are produced and how they inflect, positively or negatively, the course democratic ideas ultimately take. What alternative sociological category of analysis might be useful?

I propose focusing on what Jean-Clément Martin refers to as the 'défaut d'état' – the absence or weakness of the state.²⁴ Weak-state conditions, I argue, radicalised the discourses and actions of the revolutionary clubs, which pressured officials to implement policies and decrees that those officials were either unable or unwilling to carry out. Rather than seeking the flaws (ideology) within institutions of civil society (the clubs) to explain the rise of terror and authoritarianism, we might begin with the deficiencies of the state to explain the radicalisation of civil society (and hence, the clubs). These deficiencies were many, but among the most important were the inability and/or unwillingness to regulate violence, redistribution (tax collection and public spending), subsistence, and honour.

Violence

Inability to control violence is arguably the most important of the state's deficiencies during the early years of the French Revolution, when the Old Regime's forces of public order fragmented, collapsed or merged with new forces. Louis XVI could not count on the army to put down revolt in Paris on 14

²⁴ Jean-Clément Martin, *Violence et Révolution: essai sur la naissance d'un mythe national* (Paris, 2006).

July 1789, in part because so many of his soldiers defected, joining new National Guard forces, which came into being that day. New authorities' control over the army, navy, bourgeois militias, National Guard, and, in 1793, the popular revolutionary armies (ambulatory bands of sans-culottes who enforced the economic terror in the countryside) was also tenuous. This chronic weakness put society (and, hence, the clubs) in the predicament of having to take sides, supporting or condemning various forces and their sometimes violent actions, such as the revolts and mutinies of the army and navy in Nancy and Brest in 1790. Coercion and punitive justice are not matters that easily lend themselves to pluralism in opinions. To consolidate 'legitimate' violence in the state, society must reach a relative degree of consensus on whether such violence merits support or condemnation. One of the most contentious issues dividing the Jacobins in autumn 1792 and winter 1793 was how to respond to the September massacres, when sans-culottes spontaneously stormed the prisons of Paris, executing hundreds of priests, nobles and ordinary criminals, just as foreign counterrevolutionary troops were advancing on Paris. Were the massacres 'just'? The question polarised the Jacobin Club and led to the expulsion of several moderate 'Girondin' ministers and deputies (Jacques Pierre Brissot, Jean-Marie Roland, Étienne Clavière), who condemned the massacres.

Other deficiencies of the state helped radicalise society as well: officials' inability or unwillingness to collect taxes, secure subsistence and avenge assaults on honour. These deficiencies often prompted the clubs to intervene, at first through petitioning and denunciations, but eventually, by taking over local administrative powers.

Taxes and Redistribution

Modern states, much like authorities in non-modern societies, are redistributive. They procure resources (through taxes, tribute, loans, confiscation, plunder) and redistribute them again (through patronage, subsidies, contracts, charity, pensions, public works, subsistence and rents on public debt). While historians agree that the Revolution's most immediate cause was the Old Regime's financial crisis, this fact is often treated as a circumstantial 'spark' while other factors (class tensions, public opinion) are taken to be the combustible material for

more explosive dynamics. This view limits our ability to see how political legitimacy was bound up with the state's ability to meet redistributive demands, especially for subsistence and rents (interest payments) on public debt.

The importance of redistribution in claiming and maintaining power was evident at the very start of the Revolution. When Third Estate deputies broke away from the other two orders (the clergy and nobles) on 17 June 1789 and declared themselves to be the National Assembly, they immediately asserted their authority over redistribution, declaring the abolition of the old tax regime then authorising its temporary maintenance until they completed the creation of a new system. They also put the Old Regime's debts (those of the monarchy but also of venal tax receivers and tax farms, which had conflated public and private debts) under the assembly's safeguard and promised to maintain interest payments, or rents, which were a kind of redistribution, on capital investments in the debt. Finally, they announced that they would investigate the sources of the subsistence crisis and devise solutions. In short, the National Assembly staked its legitimacy on the promise to meet the most pressing redistributive demands in the crisis of 1789. The clubs played an active, if contentious and controversial, role in supporting, and at times, opposing the various policies adopted to deal with these demands over the next four years.

Already insufficient to meet redistributive obligations in 1787, tax collection virtually ground to a halt in the chaos of 1789.²⁵ The National Assembly's creation of a new tax regime in late 1790 and early 1791 did little to improve the situation. Faced with the spectre of default in 1789, the National Assembly opted to nationalise, then privatise through auctions, church property. The terms of this land redistribution, worked out contentiously in the National Assembly over the winter, spring and early summer of 1790, met with widespread opposition in many parts of France, especially on the part of clerics but also sectors of the population. The clubs played a crucial role in bringing about the relative success of the redistribution – success, that is, in terms of bringing land to auctions, not, as it turned out, in terms of eliminating national

²⁵ For tax collection during the French Revolution, see Eugene Nelson White, 'The French Revolution and the Politics of Government Finance, 1770-1815', *Journal of Economic History* 55: 2 (1995), 227-255.

debt. Michael L. Kennedy observes, 'For the Jacobins of the Constituent, religion was the number-one issue.'²⁶ Clubbists, he continues, were instrumental not only in protecting Protestants from bigotry but also in supporting the confiscation of Church property to pay off the national debt. They often put pressure on reluctant or resistance administrators to auction these lands. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, they also figured prominently among the buyers of these *biens nationaux*.

The breakdown of tax collection in 1789 had multiple reasons: fear and uncertainty about the future, of course, but also the imminent abolition of venal tax receiverships and tax farms, holders of which now had little motivation to enforce a moribund tax regime. Meanwhile, patriotic and popular clubs took the lead in voluntary giving to the state. Such giving pre-dated the emergence of clubs, and had already made a mark on national politics. In one of its final decrees before leaving Versailles for Paris with the royal family in early October, the National Assembly, desperate to reassure creditors, invited taxpayers to make a one-time voluntary 'patriotic contribution' of twenty-five per cent of one's annual income to the nation. The decree emphasized the voluntary nature of these contributions and forbade officials from forcing citizens to pay.²⁷ With few contributions given over the course of the following year, however, the National Assembly resorted to making the *contribution patriotique* mandatory in August 1790. The initial voluntary status of the contribution prompted the nascent clubs in many parts to transform what might have been a legal matter (paying taxes) into a litmus test of loyalty and virtue to the new regime. They spurred local citizens to pay the *contribution patriotique* over the next few years. By 1793, receiving a *certificat de civisme*, without which one might become a suspect, required proof of having paid all taxes and the *contribution patriotique* of 1789.

Indeed, at a time when local administrations proved to be incapable or unwilling to collect sufficient revenues to meet redistributive demands for social assistance, the clubs often took the initiative to organise charity. They raised

²⁶ Kennedy, *The Jacobin Clubs of the French Revolution: The First Years*, 304.

²⁷ Charles Walton, 'Between Trust and Terror: Patriotic Giving in the French Revolution', in David Andress (ed.), *Experiencing the French Revolution* (Oxford, 2013), 47-67.

money to subsidise the purchase of grain and distributed bread. In November 1792, the local club in the town of Tarascon (Bouches-du-Rhône) proposed side-stepping the municipality to organise public road works. Two months later, the club wrote a terse letter to local officials requesting the town give up its church bell, obviously to be melted down for metal to help with the war effort.²⁸

The rise in the influence and power of the clubs on the local level may well have stemmed from their ability to deal with crucial redistributive demands, especially for subsistence and war munitions, demands that local administrations were often incapable or unwilling of meeting. There is, indeed, some evidence of unwillingness on the part of officials to enforce taxes on their fellow citizens. Officials in Tours, for example, wrote to other municipalities in late 1790, after the *contribution patriotique* had been made mandatory, explaining how ‘odious’ it was to enforce this tax. They discouraged other towns from collecting it, assuring that it was not being collected in Paris and other cities in France.²⁹

Tax collection remained weak throughout the early years of the Revolution. To meet expenses, national authorities printed more assignats (which led to their depreciation). Exacerbating matters, local authorities often refused to burn the assignats used to purchase *biens nationaux* (thus taking them out of circulation, having fulfilled their function of swapping public debt for land) and applied them to meeting expenses, such as wages for local public works.³⁰ In early 1793, the National Convention passed a raft of decrees insisting on the payment of current taxes, arrears and forced loans. The clubs proved in many cases to be more zealous about enforcing these decrees than local administrations, which were often purged and replaced with club members. In Pau in February 1793, a local club announced that it would appoint its own

²⁸ Archives départementales, Bouches-du-Rhône, L 1571, Letter of 9 November 1792 by the Société des amis de la liberté et de l'égalité.

²⁹ Archives municipales de Bordeaux, G 20 ‘Contributions patriotiques’, Letter from municipal officers in Tours to those in Bordeaux, no date (but clearly from late 1790).

³⁰ For example, see the explanation of district administrators in Tarascon, who feared insurrection if wages for public works were not paid by using assignats that were supposed to be burned: Archives départementales des Bouches-du-Rhône, L 1513, ‘Délibérations et arrêtées Directoire du district de Tarascon’, 2 January 1793.

commissioners to knock on the doors of all citizens ‘and to note the names of all those who give [for the war effort] and how much they give, as well as [the names] of those who refuse to give’, which must have struck many citizens as menacing.³¹ Although historians tend to focus on the executions of the Terror, many of those arrested were simply fleeced and sometimes (though not always) released. The arrest registers of the comité révolutionnaire in Nantes 1793, full of radicalised clubbists, contain indications of ‘dons patriotiques’ and release dates in the margins.³² In short, the state’s failure to manage fiscal redistribution – tax collection and public spending – created an opening for more determined forces in society, notably the clubs, to take the initiative, bullying citizens into paying and pressuring, and even purging, local administrations to ensure payments were made.

Visible or invisible hands? The problem of subsistence.

Subsistence was the other important redistributive demand that national deputies committed themselves to meeting on the day they seized power (17 June 1789). What role did the clubs play in dealing with the bread question? At first, they supported the liberal economic policies of the National Assembly.³³ Although deputies initially seemed to lean towards interventionist measures between late June and mid August, by the end of August, when they were completing the final articles of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, they opted for ‘hands-off’ policies instead, in tune with the most ‘advanced’ economic thinking of the era. On 29 August 1789, they passed a decree criminalising market interventions, be they by crowds or local authorities. Violations were to be treated as lèse-nation, a kind of treason or sedition, for which special jurisdictions were to be established. While many local administrations wrote to the Constituent Assembly to complain about the decree and request its abrogation, Jacobin clubs over the next year largely supported it,

³¹ Jean Annat, *Les sociétés populaires* [Pau, Nay, Saint-Jean-de-Luz, Lescar, Orthez] (Pau, 1940), 207.

³² Archives départementales de Loire-Atlantique, L 1322, ‘Comité révolutionnaire de Nantes’.

³³ Kennedy, *The Jacobin Clubs of the French Revolution: The First Years*, 124; his *The Jacobin Clubs of the French Revolution: The Middle Years* (Princeton, 1998), 65-79; and his *The Jacobin Clubs of the French Revolution: 1793-1795*, 111-129.

believing that the self-regulating market was the most efficient and equitable means of distributing grain throughout France. To the degree that market forces were not yet perfect, clubs were willing to organise charity. In Paris, it appears that the Club monarchique took the lead in distributing bread to the masses well before the Jacobins. In 1790 and 1791, the Jacobins repeatedly denounced the *monarchiens* in the National Assembly for not playing fair, for seeking to bribe the population to support counterrevolution.³⁴ If that was the aim of the monarchists, their efforts largely failed. The journalist Jean-Baptiste Gorsas captured the cynicism of the situation in recounting a verbal exchange in the faubourg of Saint Marceau. When a national guardsman reproached a friend for accepting such hand-outs, the friend replied, 'Oh well, I may have eaten monarchist bread, but when it comes out it is patriot crap!'³⁵

Throughout the Revolution, the question of aid for subsistence often took the form of a debate over loans or subsidies. Contemporaries were well-aware the difference between the two. Whereas subsidies drew state resources away from the payment of rents on public debt, loans offered the possibility of turning a subsistence crisis into a source of more rents (interest on the loan). Both solutions might resolve the crisis in the short term, but loans ran the risk of indebting bakers, who would eventually have to raise the price of bread. One of the earliest political causes taken up by radicals in the Cordeliers District of Paris, which would eventually become a club when the city was carved up into sections, concerned this very issue. It appears that in early July 1789, Jacques Necker, first minister of finances, promised subsidies to Jacques Rutledge, a negotiator hired by the bakers of Paris. When the Commune of Paris offered the bakers loans in October 1789, Rutledge encouraged them to opt for the subsidies of Necker instead. The Commune was outraged by this and charged Rutledge with *lèse-nation*.³⁶ Necker denied having made such promises to Rutledge (though traces of a meeting to this end can be found in the National Assembly

³⁴ Challamel, *Les clubs contre-révolutionnaires*, 164. See also *Réponse de M. Malouet à la dénonciation du club de la constitution monarchique, par. M. Barnave* in Archives nationales de France, AD XVIIIc, no. 12.

³⁵ Hanson, 'Monarchist Clubs', 313.

³⁶ For details on this affair, see A. Tuetey, *Répertoire général des sources manuscrites de l'histoire de Paris pendant la Révolution française* (Paris: Imprimerie nouvelle, 1890), entries 1177-1204.

minutes for early July).³⁷ Journalists associated with the Cordelier District, Camille Desmoulins and Jean-Paul Marat, publicized the affair widely, condemning the Commune and Necker while vigorously supporting the imprisoned Rutledge (he would be released), presenting him as a martyr. Rutledge would go on to become a radical figure in the Cordelier Club over the next three years.

The transition among Jacobin clubs from supporting the self-regulation of grain markets to supporting government regulation and official price ceilings in 1793 provoked much debate and controversy. Many clubs were indecisive about which course of action to support. The club in Pau, for example, repeatedly flip-flopped on the issue in 1793, taking bold stances each time. On 17 May, members petitioned the department to enforce the 4 May decree placing a maximum price on bread. When the department failed to respond, the club sent a deputation in early June. It is not clear what happened in the meeting with departmental officials, but by July, the club was touting the virtues of the free market. Members even discussed sending a deputation to the National Convention to request the abrogation of the maximum. By October, however, they had changed their minds yet again (the National Convention had passed a more robust law regarding the 'maximum' in late September) and were pressuring the municipality to enforce price-ceilings on commodities that had not yet been regulated. They repeated the demand in February 1794.³⁸

The subsistence question divided the Paris Jacobin Club, which was increasingly influenced by the social agendas of the Cordeliers Club and popular subsistence demands. Although most Jacobins subscribed to liberal economic principles, when Jean-Marie Roland, a Jacobin, began enforcing free grain markets as minister of the interior in 1792, his adversaries in the club (Robespierre, Marat) exploited the unpopularity of his liberal policies.³⁹ Tensions in Paris over how the government should regulate food commodities –

³⁷ AP, vol. 8, 207, 'Extrait du registre', 6 July 1789.

³⁸ Annat, *Les sociétés populaires*, 197-198.

³⁹ For the political tensions over Roland's economic policies, see Charles Walton, 'Les graines de la discorde: Print, Public Spirit and Free-market Politics in the French Revolution', in Charles Walton (ed.), *Into Print: Limits and Legacies of the Enlightenment. Essays in Honor of Robert Darnton* (University Park, 2011), 158-174.

or if it should regulate them – soon exacerbated those in the provinces. While Roland sent repeated instructions to the local administrations and clubs to take the lead in educating the masses about the benefits of the free market, the Jacobin Club denounced Roland's policies in its regular correspondence with its affiliates.

In the summer of 1793, after the passage of the first maximum law of 4 May 1793, the new Jacobin minister of the interior, Dominique-Joseph Garat, discreetly circulated translated copies of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* among his itinerant agents, instructing them to draw on its wisdom in drafting observation reports.⁴⁰ In the midst of the sans-culotte ascendancy of 1793, it was wise not to tout free-market principles publicly. Still, those principles were shaping government views and objectives. Once the Jacobin Club and government committees managed to curtail the influence of the radical movement in the spring and summer of 1794, however, economic liberal policies started making a comeback (the lifting of the maximum, then of all regulation concerning subsistence in 1795), which angered and disillusioned many Jacobin supporters of the sectional clubs.

How do controversies over subsistence support the 'défaut d'état' thesis? The absence of state, I have argued, stemmed not only from the inability but also from *the unwillingness* of officials to meet certain redistributive demands. Although the bread crisis is usually treated as an 'economic' issue by historians, for contemporaries it was profoundly political. The liberal economic commitments of early revolutionaries weakened the bonds between society and the state and radicalised redistributive demands by trying to de-politicise them. Economic liberals sought to redirect demands for bread to the self-regulating market, a space beyond politics and administration. The clubs, however, were the only mediating bodies left on the political scene after the (Jacobin-inspired) abolition of the guilds, corporations, chambers of commerce and government regulatory bureaus in 1791. Deprived of alternative institutions for their expression (and even collective petitions were banned in 1791), economic

⁴⁰ Archives nationales de France, F^{1a} 551, dossier 'Franqueville', in Walton, 'Les graines de la discorde'. 170.

demands worked their way into the clubs, which increasingly militated for the re-regulation of the economy, and especially subsistence.

Arguably, then, if the Jacobin clubs can be faulted for being naive and utopian about anything, it was their early faith in the myth of the self-regulating market. In his *The Great Transformation*, Karl Polanyi argues that attempts to create a society based on self-regulating markets has been historically destabilizing.⁴¹ Although he does not seek to explain the French Revolution, his model is useful for understanding the passions and tensions to which debates over political economy gave rise at that time. Analysing the efforts to realise the self-regulating markets in other periods of modern history, he concludes that the greater the efforts are to remove economic demands from the sphere of politics (and economic liberals during the Revolution tried to do so by criminalising interventions in grain markets and abolishing socio-economic mediating bodies), the more likely it is that those demands will storm back into politics with a vengeance. The form those frustrated demands take depends on the circumstances, but he believes that it is likely to be illiberal. The clubs of the French Revolution clearly served as the conduits in this process, which Polanyi refers to as a 'double movement': liberalisation produces political frustration, which produces radical demands for re-regulation. Clearly, the 'défaut d'état' in regulating subsistence between 1789 and 1793 – the effort to replace moral economy with political economy – contributed to dividing and radicalising the clubs.

Free speech and the culture of calumny and honour

The Revolution's 'weak-state' conditions extended not only over problems of violence, taxes and markets. It also extended over the problem of free expression. Revolutionaries struggled to reconcile this freedom, proclaimed in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of August 1789, with the protection of honour. In demanding the freedom of the press throughout France on the eve of the Meeting of the Estates General, most French *cahiers de doléances* (formal demands for reforms drafted by the three orders throughout

⁴¹ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: the political and economic origins of our time* (Beacon Hill, 1957 [orig. 1944]).

France) also called for the punishment of abusive expression, such as insults, libel and calumny.⁴² The advent of free speech hardly altered people's concern for honour, which was central to social life. Honour had important social, political and economic implications. Access to patronage, credit, marriage opportunities, offices and jobs all depended on honour. The inability to maintain it or avenge slanderous and calumnious assaults on it could have dire repercussions.⁴³

Maintaining honour was always a challenge in the Old Regime, but the breakdown of policing institutions in 1789, competing views on how to deal with calumny, and the advent of civil equality (which disrupted hierarchical patterns of esteem and deference) greatly complicated matters. As political participation in the new regime expanded, honour became all the more important. For calumniated representatives and officials, the honour of their constituents was often seen to be at stake, and the failure of authorities to avenge calumnious attacks was taken to be a sign of weakness. Thomas Paine, theorist of 'the rights of man' and deputy to the French National Convention in spring 1793, believed that calumny was one of the greatest threats to the new regime. In a letter to Georges-Jacques Danton in May 1793, just weeks before the purge of the Girondins (whom sans-culottes militants denounced as calumniators of Paris), Paine explained: 'The departments did not send their deputies to Paris to be insulted, and every insult shown to them is an insult to the departments that elected and sent them.'⁴⁴

A central paradox of the Revolution, then, was its simultaneous commitment to the freedom of expression and its obsessions with punishing calumniators. Weak-state conditions deprived individuals and groups who believed themselves to be slandered of the means to seek redress. Between 1789

⁴² This section is drawn from Charles Walton, *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution: The Culture of Calumny and the Problem of Free Speech* (New York, 2009).

⁴³ There are many studies of honour in the Old Regime. See especially, David Garrioch, *Neighborhood and Community in Paris, 1740-1790* (Cambridge, 1986). For its importance for access to credit, see Clare Haru Crowston, *Credit, Fashion, Sex: Economies of Regard in Old Regime France* (Durham, NC, 2013).

⁴⁴ For sans-culotte denunciations of the Girondins as calumniators, see Archives nationales, F⁷ 4432, cited in [Louis] Mortimer-Ternaux, *Histoire de la terreur*, 3rd edition (Paris, 1869), 7: 310, n. 1.

and 1791, censorship was abolished, the old courts broke down and new courts were not yet functional. Although the National Assembly recognized the high speech crime of 'lèse-nation' (the nationalised version of 'lèse-majesté') as early as July 1789 and had created a police committee to investigate such crimes, they failed to define the actual nature of such speech crimes clearly, and this absence in the legislation generated a climate of political frustration. Jacques Brissot, a leading journalist and (in the early stages of the Revolution) radical leader, summed up the matter concisely in an issue of his *Patriote français* in 1790: 'To punish calumny without violating the freedom of the press is the most difficult problem to resolve in politics.'⁴⁵

To be sure, the culture of calumny poisoned revolutionary politics on all levels, but the clubs were central in spreading it and in spreading obsessions with it. With their networks and armies of writers and journalists, they calumniated relentlessly yet were indefatigable in denouncing calumny. They orchestrated elaborate libel campaigns (although, so, too, did the monarchy, the Church and various factions and committees of the National Assembly), even as they sent a constant stream of denunciations of *lèse-nation* speech crimes to the Constituent Assembly's police committee, the *comité des recherches*, insisting on punishment. Clubbists hardly needed to understand the fine points of Rousseau's 'general will' to denounce 'enemies of the Revolution'. The Old Regime had bequeathed a rich legacy of calumniating. It did not, however, bequeath the legal and institutional mechanisms for dealing with such offenses. Civil equality rendered the laws and institutions that had regulated honour in a hierarchical world irrelevant. Yet, honour remained important and attacks on it, which had always been a means of pursuing social and political competition, were still considered egregious offences.

Calumny, unchecked by a weak state, poisoned relations between and within clubs. No sooner had the *Société de la Révolution* (the future Jacobin Club) formed in November 1789 than it became the target of calumnious attacks. Royalists spread the rumour that Jacobins were holding nocturnal meetings to

⁴⁵ Jacques Pierre Brissot, *Le Patriote français* (Paris), 10 August 1790.

plan a regicide.⁴⁶ Apparently, these rumours worried Jacobins enough that they chose to publicize their meetings. (They did not, however, open their meetings to the public until October 1791.) By mid 1790, the Jacobins and *Monarchiens* repeatedly denounced each other's 'calumny' in the National Assembly. Legislation regulating slander was proposed on several occasions that year but was voted down by narrow margins or repealed shortly after its passage.

As calumny spiralled, the Revolution radicalised. Politics became a kind of pressure cooker in which outrage and accumulated grudges fuelled factionalism, at first between Jacobins and royalists, subsequently among Jacobins themselves. In a pamphlet entitled *Discourse on the influence of calumny on the Revolution* of October 1792, Robespierre denounced Roland's propaganda bureau for spreading calumnies against the club, from which he (Roland) would soon be expelled. 'What will you say', the Incorruptible asked his readers, 'when I demonstrate that there now exists a coalition of virtuous patriots [ironic reference to Roland], of austere republicans who are perfecting the criminal policies of Lafayette [who had defected to Austria] and his allies?'⁴⁷ He predicted that prisons would soon be filled with true patriots, like himself, under the government of the tyrannical Girondin ministers. For their part, Brissot, Roland and their allies had been slandering the *robepierristes* since the spring, when Robespierre opposed their (successful) efforts to persuade the National Assembly to declare war against Austria. During that time, Brissot insinuated in a published speech to the National Assembly that Robespierre was in the pay of the monarchy. Moreover, one of the titles that Roland's propaganda bureau spread to the provincial clubs in the fall was entitled, 'To Maximilien Robespierre and to his royalists'.

To be sure, the clubs were not the only political forces in the early Revolution to be obsessed with calumny. So, too, was the monarchy. Majesty demanded esteem and deference, but the proliferation of calumny after the collapse of censorship and the freeing of the presses deprived the king of the respect he believed was due to him. It may well have contributed to his attempt

⁴⁶ F. A. Aulard, 'Le Club des Jacobins sous la monarchie', *La Révolution française* 22: 2 (1892), 111.

⁴⁷ *Discours de Maximilien Robespierre sur l'influence de la calomnie sur la Révolution* (Paris, 28 October 1792), 17.

to flee France. On the eve of his attempted flight, he imprudently left a note in the Tuileries Palace, deploring 'the thousands of calumniating newspapers and pamphlets' of rebels who 'labour to present the monarchy under the most false and odious colours.' Upon his return, he enumerated reasons for trying to flee, among them, 'the insults that have gone unpunished.'⁴⁸ Yet, the monarchy was hardly an innocent bystander. The seizure of the king's private papers after his fall in August 1792 revealed evidence of his use of the civil list to pay for libels against revolutionaries.

During the Terror, the Convention finally enacted legislation against calumny. By that time, obsessions with it and accumulated grudges had reached a point that made moderate solutions unlikely. The Law of Suspects (17 September 1793) targeted those who 'by their conduct, relations, words, or writings show themselves to be the partisans of tyranny and federalism and the enemies of freedom.' The Law of 22 Prairial Year II (10 June 1794), passed just as the Terror was ratcheting up for its final lethal phase, went still further. It imposed death on anyone found guilty of 'disparaging the National Convention and the republican government', 'calumniating patriotism', 'spreading false news', 'misleading public opinion', 'corrupting the public conscience' and 'impairing the energy and purity of revolutionary and republican principles.'⁴⁹ The ex-noble and revolutionary writer Louis-François Ferrières Sauveboeuf defended these measures: 'No law would dare circumscribe the freedom of the press; it is an arm that belongs to all citizens; but is it not necessary to punish those who use this arm to assassinate others, in so far as an honest man puts his reputation before his life?'⁵⁰

Conclusion

Clearly circumstances mattered in factionalising the clubs of the French Revolution. The flight of the king in 1791 and the war in 1792 polarised the

⁴⁸ John Hall Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution* (New York, 1951) and Timothy Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* (Cambridge Mass., 2003), 41-45.

⁴⁹ *Moniteur*, 20: 264, 24 Prairial, Year II (June 12, 1794), 697.

⁵⁰ Ferrières Sauveboeuf, *Réflexions politiques sur le gouvernement révolutionnaire, la liberté de la presse et les élections par le peuple dans les circonstances actuelles* (Paris [1793-1794]), 4.

Jacobin Club in Paris, and the factionalism produced there spread to the provincial clubs, exacerbating tensions there. Controversial issues and events were all the more divisive for the clubs in that they were debated in a context in which virtually no legal limits on speech existed – limits that an honour-based society widely expected and repeatedly demanded ever since the *cahiers de doléances* were drafted in the spring of 1789. Legislators were unable or unwilling to implement these desired limits, until, that is, the situation had radicalised to the boiling point in 1793.

The absence, or weakness, of the state complicated efforts to meet other demands coming from society as well. The failure to collect taxes while guaranteeing rent payments on investments in public debt created conditions that led to dramatic measures: the expropriations of church property and the imprudent creation of paper money. The clubs supported these measures and militated for their enforcement, but when the measures proved to be insufficient and the collection of taxes became imperative, the clubs again took the lead, albeit brutally and chaotically.

Yet, even as the clubs gained influence and power on the local level, they remained divided amongst themselves over crucial issues: should they support constitutional monarchy or a republic? Should they support war or peace? Should they educate society about the benefits of the free market or should they militate for the re-regulation of the economy? These were complicated and contentious issues. In a context of rampant, unchecked calumny and heightened obsessions with honour, they became explosive.

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