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The Flight to Varennes and the Coming of the Terror

Timothy Tackett

The story of Louis XVI's attempted evasion from Paris on June 21, 1791 is surely one of the most dramatic events of the French Revolution. The midnight escape of the disguised royal family out a forgotten back door of the Tuileries Palace, their flight in a large lumbering carriage across Champagne and Lorraine, their capture in Varennes and their confrontation with the local town leaders in Monsieur Sauce's grocery store have provided the matter for endless imaginative recreations from Jules Michelet to Ettore Scola. Much has also been written about the effects of this episode on the transformation of attitudes toward Louis XVI and the kingship; and on the origins of republicanism in Paris as a veritable mass movement. Here I would like to offer some preliminary thoughts on possible links between the Flight to Varennes and the coming of the Terror.

The question is useful, in the first place, because it encourages us to reflect on what might be called the "middle-term" origins of the most violent phase of the Revolution. Most interpretations of the Terror have focused either on the immediate "circumstantial" factors preceding those events and threatening the Revolution's very survival—the civil wars, the foreign wars, the counterrevolution—or on longer term cultural factors said to have provided the conditions for a Terrorist turn of mind even before the Revolution began—such as the impact of Rousseau and the Enlightenment

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or the imprint of French absolutism.[1] Yet, in my view, developments occurring in the period 1790-92 during the course of the later Constituent and the Legislative Assembly are also important in the advent of the Terror—perhaps more important than usually recognized by historians.

In the second place, an examination of the Varennes affair can be particularly revealing of the origins of Terrorist policies and psychology among the political elites. Obviously—as most recent interpretations have emphasized—it is impossible to disassociate Terror from above and Terror from below, to neglect the episodes of "la violence sauvage et collective" that accompanied the Revolution from its earliest months.[2] Yet the process by which elements of the elite came to acquiesce to the use of violence and to integrate that violence into state policy, remains one of the most abiding mysteries of the whole Revolutionary era.

Obviously, the emergence of a political culture of violence among the elites was a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. In part, it entailed the development of a new technology, an institutional "structure" of repression—the Committee of General Security, surveillance committees, revolutionary tribunals, etc.—institutions designed both to intimidate and punish the enemies of the Revolution. But it also involved a revised approach to repression, an approach that set aside the "liberal" administration of justice introduced in 1789—founded on the individual, case-by-case determination of guilt or innocence—in favor of the repression or civil exclusion of whole categories of people (all emigrants, all nobles, all refractory clergymen, etc.), where culpability might be determined as much by social or professional position as personal actions. Finally, as a number of recent historians have emphasized, the phenomenon of Terror among the elites was closely linked to a very particular psychology, to a veritable obsession with plots and conspiracies, which took hold of large elements of that group. In some cases such conspiracies may have been self-consciously fabricated by individuals or groups for their own political advantage. But there is ample evidence that many members of Revolutionary elites came to believe in the ubiquity of such plots; that the Terrorists were themselves "terrorized"—at once by the

1. See, notably, Alphonse Aulard, *Histoire politique de la Révolution française* 3e édition (Paris, 1905); and Albert Mathiez, *La Révolution française*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1922). Also, François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1981); Norman Hampson, *Prelude to Terror: The Constituent Assembly and the Failure of Consensus* (Oxford, 1988); Patrice Higonnet, *Goodness beyond Virtue: Jacobins during the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).

2. Patrice Gueniffey, *La Politique de la Terreur: Essai sur la violence révolutionnaire, 1789-1794* (Paris, 2000), p. 24. Cf. Arno J. Mayer, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in The French and Russian Revolutions* (Princeton, 2000), pp. 84, 101.

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threat of real conspiracies and the amplification of those threats through their own *imaginaire*.[3]

Here I would like to argue that the crisis of June-July 1791 both prefigured and helped prepare the events of 1792-94. I am not, to be sure, the first to make such a link. Over a century ago Alphonse Aulard wrote of "une sorte de petite terreur" which followed Varennes, and Albert Mathiez, of "une véritable lois de sûreté générale [qui a] fait planner la terreur."[4] But both historians referred specifically to the actions of the leadership in Paris after the Champ de Mars Massacre. It seems to me that the question deserves more careful consideration for the whole period from June 21 through the end of the Constituent and for the actions of the political elites in the kingdom as a whole as well as in the capital.

In fact, the materials for such a study are not in short supply. The news of the king's flight on that first day of summer 1791 incited an outpouring of reports and testimonials addressed to the National Assembly by administrators, popular societies, national guardsmen and individuals from all over the country. In the month following the Flight well over seven hundred such letters were received by the Assembly's secretariat.[5] This body of material can be complemented by the archives of the Committee on Research,[6] the public speeches and private correspondence of Constituent deputies,[7] and files on the period preserved in various

3. Cf. Engels oft-cited remark to Marx in 1870: "We imagine [the period 1793-94] as the reign of those who spread terror, but, quite to the contrary, it was the reign of those who were themselves terrorized": cited in Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, p. 129. See also Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1984), pp. 39-44; and the author's "Conspiracy Obsession in a Time of Revolution: French Elites and the Origins of the Terror: 1789-1792," *American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 691-713.

4. Alphonse Aulard, *Histoire politique*, p. 157; Albert Mathiez, *La Révolution française. 1. La chute de la royauté* (Paris, 1985; 1st ed. 1922), p. 203. Cf. Gueniffey, *La Politique*, pp. 121-22.

5. A.N. C 124-131: "Lettres, adresses, pétitions, prestations de serments, mentionnés ou non dans les procès-verbaux." The series holds letters addressed to the National Assembly from approximately Nov. 1790 to Sept. 1791, grouped in alphabetical order by place of origin (sometimes by town, sometimes by department name). Included are observations from every department and virtually every moderate to large-sized town in the kingdom, as well as from a sampling of villages. These documents were first used by Paul Girault de Coursac, "L'opinion publique après Varennes," *Découverte*, no. 22 (1978): 3-28; no. 23 (1978): 3-26; no. 24 (1978): 3-28, an article attempting to prove that public opinion overwhelmingly favored Louis XVI in the weeks after Varennes. I would generally disagree with this conclusion.

6. A.N. D XXIX bis 31-38." According to D XXIX bis 37 (379), the Comité de recherches had examined by midsummer a total of 255 individual files.

7. I have primarily used the Jérôme Mavidal, Emile Laurent, et al., eds. *Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860, recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des chambres françaises. Première série (1787-1799)*, 82 vols. (Paris, 1867-1913) (hereafter, *AP*),

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departmental and municipal archives.[8] Today, relying primarily on these materials, I would like to focus on three principal themes: first, the impact of Varennes on the politics and behavior of the deputies in the Constituent Assembly before the Champ de Mars; second, the impact of that event on administrators in the provinces; and third and more briefly, the impact of Varennes, in both Paris and the provinces, on the growth of the conspiracy obsession.

The Constituent Assembly after Varennes

It would be impossible here to analyze at length the policies of the Constituent toward counterrevolutionary activities and threats to the regime. For the most part, I would agree with the recent analysis of Patrice Gueniffey, that prior to the summer of 1791 the National Assembly had carefully avoided the repressive policies later associated with the Terror.[9] Even in the most difficult moments of the summer of 1789, confronted with violence and uprisings in Paris and the sweeping unrest and anarchy of the Great Fear across the kingdom, the majority of the deputies rejected proposals for a tough military and judicial intervention against the rioters, opting rather for the *fuite en avant* of the Night of August 4-5. With the exception of Robespierre and a handful of others, they eschewed the language of the "salut public." In the wake of the October Days and the murder of a Paris baker two weeks later—only a short distance from the National Assembly's hall—the deputies passed a general decree on martial law. But the decree in question carefully limited the duration and circumstances under which martial law might be invoked and granted authority in such cases to municipal governments rather than the legislature.[10] Faced with uprisings in the Southwest in the winter of 1789-90, and with the problems of emigrants and refractory clergy in winter and spring 1791, the majority of the Constituent continued to renounce

and the manuscript and published correspondence preserved for the period: see the author's *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789-1790)* (Princeton, 1996), bibliography.

8. I have examined dossiers in the departmental archives of those departments nearest the path of the king's flight: A.D. Aisne, Ardennes, Aube, Marne, Haute-Marne, Meurthe, Meuse, Moselle, Vosges. In addition, for the provinces I have made use of some fifty printed local studies. For Paris, in particular, see Sigismond Lacroix, ed., *Actes de la Commune de Paris pendant la Révolution. 2e Série, Tome V, 21 juin-31 juillet 1791* (Paris, 1907).

9. Gueniffey, *La Politique*, chap. IV. I would disagree, however, with Gueniffey's assertion that the "moderation" of the Constituent came primarily from the presence of nobles within that body.

10. *AP*, 9:475-76.

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proposals for general repression, and insisted on the prosecution of wrongdoers on a case-by-case basis through the regular judicial system. Thus, in February 1791 the overwhelming majority of deputies turned down a proposed law against emigrants as constituting a violation of the Rights of Man. In May 1791, ignoring the demands of some local administrators for action against refractories, the Assembly passed the so-called "law of toleration." Nonjurors were to be allowed to continue saying mass in nonparish churches, as long as they did not disturb the peace, and administrators were required to rely on the regular courts in the prosecution of individual clergymen thought to have broken the law.[11]

But the Flight of the king brought a profound reorientation in attitudes for a great many Constituent deputies. Once they had surmounted their initial shock, the members entered into a flurry of activity, passing a whole series of emergency measures designed to hold the government and kingdom together in the absence of the monarch. Among the most important such measures were those preparing the nation for war. For many representatives there could be no doubt that the king's flight would bring war[12]—a conviction that persisted well after the royal family had been stopped at Varennes and returned to Paris. It was clear that Louis had been heading for the Austrian frontier; given the family ties of the queen, most were convinced—and we know with hindsight they were correct—that secret arrangements had been negotiated with the Hapsburgs and perhaps with other foreign governments.[13] Their anxieties were accentuated, moreover, by their longstanding fears that the Great Powers might intervene militarily to halt the Revolution. They were only too well aware of the near collapse of discipline in many units of the French army and navy, deeply eroded by the spirit of democracy and self-determination; and of the uncertain loyalties of the officer class, dominated by the former nobility.[14] This near obsessive fear of invasion and war helps to explain the

11. *AP*, 11:652-58, 665-73, 676-82; 25:130, 26:636-37; Pierre de La Gorce, *Histoire religieuse de la Révolution*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1909-1924), 1:432-33.

12. See, e.g., Félix Faulcon, *Correspondance. Tome 2: 1789-91*, ed. G. Debien (Poitiers, 1953), p. 422; Michel René Maupetit, "Lettres (1789-91)," ed. Quéruau-Lamérie, *Bulletin de la Commission historique et archéologique de la Mayenne*, 2ème sér., 22 (1906): 475; Jean-François Gaultier de Biauzat, *Gaultier de Biauzat, député du Tiers état aux Etats généraux de 1789. Sa vie et sa correspondance*, ed. Francisque Mège, 2 vols. (Clermont-Ferrand, 1890), 2:374.

13. See the author's *When the King Took Flight* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), chap. 2.

14. See the author's "The Constituent Assembly in the Second Year of the French Revolution" in *Revolution, Society, and the Politics of Memory.* ed. Michael Adcock, Emily Chester and Jeremy Whiteman (Melbourne, 1996), pp. 162-69.

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various emergency and extralegal actions taken by the Assembly, some of which prefigured the polices of the Convention in 1792-94.

By the afternoon of June 21 the deputies had established an emergency war council, sitting in permanent session in offices directly adjoining the Assembly Hall. The principal military commanders in Paris were immediately summoned and asked to swear allegiance to the Constitution, the laws and the Assembly—with the word "king" now expunged from the previous oath formula. Among the key officers answering the call were general Rochambeau and lieutenant-general Mathieu Dumas, both veterans of the American Revolution. The commanders were asked to work with the ministers and the Assembly's committees to develop contingency plans to confront the threat of invasion.[15] At the same time, in order to shore up and support the regular army, all departments were asked to establish lists of local national guard members available for immediate mobilization if war should break out: "en état de porter les armes . . . pour la défense de l'Etat et le maintien de la Constitution." As best we can tell, the goal of 300,000 volunteers was quickly met, and in many regions far more than the minimum quotas rushed to sign up. A substantial number soon marched off to frontier postings in this first-generation *levée en masse*.[16]

Within days the Assembly also dispatched four groups of deputy "commissioners" on mission to inspect defense positions along the coasts and frontiers and to oversee the administration of loyalty oaths to the officer corps. Everywhere they traveled the representatives were given authority to "prendre tous les mesures qu'ils croiront propres au maintien de l'ordre public et à la sûreté de l'Etat."[17] In addition to these general and sweeping powers, the temporary proconsuls were specifically instructed to suspend or replace "suspect" military officers, where the word "suspect" included all those "qui étaient désignés par la clameur publique pour être très mal intentionnés." The deputies were well aware that such actions—based only on unverified denunciations—would contradict the principals of equal justice and "due process." But as Charles Lameth was

15. *AP*, 27:478; Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, Comte de Rochambeau, *Mémoires militaires, historiques, et politiques* (Paris, 1824), 1:380; Mathieu Dumas, *Souvenirs du lieutenant-général comte Mathieu Dumas*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1839), 1:486-87. See also Faulcon, *Correspondance*, p. 422; Maupetit, "Lettres (1789-91)," p. 475; Claude-Jean-Baptiste Geoffroy, Ms. letters of June 22 to Jean-Marie Gelin: private collection of Dr. Robert Favre; Alexis Basquiat de Mugriet, Ms letters of June 24 to the municipality of Saint-Sever: A.C. Saint-Sever, II D 31; Antoine-René-Hyacinthe Thibaudeau, *Correspondance inédite*, ed. H. Carré and Pierre Boissonnade (Paris, 1898), p. 141.

16. *AP*, 27:393-95.

17. *AP*, 27:408. For reports of *commissaires*: *AP*, 28:231, 331-16; 29:73-77, 89-91; 30:9-10.

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to say, in a speech heavy with consequence for the future: "Dans un moment de Révolution, et certes il n'y a pas un moment plus révolutionnaire que celui où nous nous trouvons, il doit y avoir des exceptions [aux règles]. Les moments de crise ne peuvent être assujettis aux formes rigoureuses qu'on se fait un devoir d'observer dans le calme." If they waited until all appropriate legal procedures had been followed, "il y aurait le temps de livrer l'état à l'ennemi." In fact, he concluded, "il vaut mieux faire une injustice, que de perdre l'Etat."[18] Robespierre and the members of the Mountain would make much the same argument in the Year II. In the heat of the crisis the comte de Crillon—who was anything but a radical and generally voted with the moderate left—even proposed the creation of a special five-man *commission extraordinaire*, a Committee of Public Safety before the letter, with full executive power to take charge of the state until the emergency was over. But in 1791, unlike 1793, the motion was rejected.[19]

In addition to preparing the nation for war, the National Assembly took steps to determine responsibility for Louis' flight. Like the National Convention fifteen months later, the Constituent entered into a lengthy debate on how to judge the behavior of a king. In the end, the deputies decided on a curious compromise between a rigorous compliance with existing laws—the path they had generally followed in the past—and the improvisation of extraordinary procedures to meet the exigencies of the situation. The investigation of the case was turned over, in theory, to the local *tribunal d'arrondissement* with jurisdiction over the Tuileries Palace, the scene of the "crime." But the deputies also made clear that the ultimate judgment would be made by the Assembly, which became for that purpose a judicial body. The Assembly also took charge of gathering depositions from the king and queen, appointing a special delegation of three deputy-jurists to fulfill this task.[20]

It is clear from the archival records that the Constituent's investigative bodies, the Committee on Research and the Committee on Reports rapidly took *de facto* control over the activities of both the tribunal and the Paris police.[21] Prior to the summer of 1791 the two committees seem to have functioned primarily as central clearing houses for the reception of complaints and reports from local administrators and individual citizens

18. *AP*, 27:423.

19. *AP*, 27:363.

20. *AP*, 27:535-43.

21. The two committees were formally fused on July 18 with the single name "Committee on Reports": *AP*, 28:396.

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relating to potential counterrevolutionary activities; occasionally they proposed decrees to deal with specific problems. For the most part, the committees, as the Assembly itself, seem generally to have avoided repressive activities. Indeed, according to Pierre Caillet, the historian of the Committee on Research, the two bodies "avaient pour principal souci de faire arrêter les poursuites, suspendre les jugements, atténuer les sentences, surtout celles de mort, mus par un vague sentiment de solidarité et conscients de la cruauté des modes d'exécution encore en usage".[22]

But with the "revolution of June 21"—the phrase used by the deputies themselves in their dossiers—the two committees assumed a substantially more "activist" role. During the following weeks, they seem to have ordered the arrest of dozens of persons in Paris thought to have been associated with the king's flight. They also authorized incarcerations for individuals denounced for complicity in a whole range of other "conspiracies," some of them quite unrelated to Varennes. Many of the prisoners in question were denied any pretense of "habeas corpus," held "en secret" for weeks on end without formal indictments and apparently, in some cases, without being informed of the nature of the accusations against them. At the same time, the Committees established a whole network of undercover police spies to listen in on conversations in cabarets and other public places, reactivating a practice commonly used under the Old Regime.[23] Cochon de Lapparent, secretary of the Committee on Research, readily acknowledged that he and his colleagues often acted in violation of the law. But he justified such actions with the same logic of expediency used by Charles Lameth: "Des circonstances extraordinaires et des moments de crise, où le salut de l'état est en danger, peuvent quelque fois nécessitent les détentions illégales." "Il y a des circonstances critiques," Cochon continued. "où le salut public devient la première de toutes les loix."[24]

The complex mixture of motives and ideological positions within the Assembly is well illustrated by the renewed debate on emigrants, initiated in early July. Within days after the king's flight became known, reports began arriving in Paris of the departure of large numbers of the rural

22. Pierre Caillet, ed., *Comité des recherches de l'Assemblée nationale. 1789. Inventaire analytique de la sous-série D XXIX bis* (Paris, 1993), p. 18.

23. See, notably, A.N. D XXIX bis 31 B (dos 321), 33 (dos. 348), 34 (dos. 349-50). A small number of "spies" had been used before Varennes against a few individual nobles and reactionary clubs: Pierre Caillet, *Les Français en 1789 d'après les papiers du Comité des Recherches de l'Assemblée constituante (1789-91)* (Paris, 1991), pp. 172-73.

24. A.N. D XXIX bis 31 B (dos 321).

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nobility. In retrospect, we know that some of these nobles may simply have been fleeing to nearby towns out of fear for their own safety. Yet there is evidence of a quantum increase in overall emigration throughout the summer of 1791.[25] More than ever, patriot deputies were overcome with a sense of anger and a desire for vengeance towards these aristocrats—many of them on active duty in the military—who deserted their country just as war seemed about to take place.

Nevertheless, the Assembly had great difficulty uniting on a common policy. For the most part, the July debates pitted the members of the Jacobin group against the more moderate Constitutional Committee dominated by the Society of 1789. On July 9 the Jacobin Theodore Vernier introduced a proposal to impound the property of any citizen residing abroad who refused to return to France within a month. Significantly, the argument in favor of the measure was defended most vigorously by two future members of the Committee of Public Safety, Bertrand Barère and Pierre-Louis Prieur—the future "Prieur de la Marne." Both deputies readily admitted that the proposed decree would violate both the Constitution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. Such a step was justified, they argued, by the present emergency and the ultimate objective of saving the Revolution. For Barère, a law of this nature would be inconceivable "pour les temps de calme." But France now found herself suspended over a "précipice" with all "des ennemis du dehors" ready to start a war and "des enrôlements clandestins se faisant au dedans," conspiring to "bouleverser l'Empire." In "ces circonstances terribles, . . . la sûreté générale exige la suspension provisoire et momentanée du droit d'émigration et des mesures de police." For Prieur too, *salus populi suprema lex est*. "Il s'agit en ce moment," he argued, "de prendre une mesure propre à sauver la patrie en danger . . . de prévenir les actes des traîtres qui veulent nous attaquer." Whoever refuses to fight for the country, "n'est plus attaché à la société. Dès lors, la société ne le doit plus de protection."[26]

The opponents of the measure forcefully defended the liberal principle of subordinating all policy to the rule of law. Perhaps, argued the baron de Jessé—a strong supporter of the Club of '89—if the country were really invaded by the emigrants, one might consider such a law. But only in truly extreme situations was one justified in violating the Rights of Man, rights which are "des droits naturels, antérieurs à la société," inscribed in Nature

25. Donald Greer, *The Incidence of the Emigration during the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1951), pp. 25-26.

26. *AP*, 28:75, 82-84.

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itself. The only solution was to abide by existing laws and to work within the regular court system, to "frapper les perturbateurs du repos public, partout où ils oseront se montrer." Otherwise, liberty of movement and the sacred right of property must be preserved at all cost. In conclusion, he cited what would become the celebrated watchword of nineteenth-century liberalism: always, insofar as possible, "laissez faire et laissez passer."[27]

The concatenation of events arising out of the Varennes crisis would intensify fears not only of emigrant counterrevolutionaries, but of radicals on the left militating for the creation of a republic. The events surrounding the Massacre of the Champ de Mars have often been recounted and need not be repeated here.[28] It is worth emphasizing, nevertheless, that moderate patriot leadership in the Assembly had become increasingly uneasy with movements of popular protest in Paris—including labor movements, market riots and demands for universal male suffrage—many of which occurred in the very neighborhoods where the deputies lived and worked.[29] Beginning in the winter of 1790-91 the deputies, led by the Constitutional Committee, pushed through a series of measures intended to disarm popular radicalism, including the exclusion of poorer citizens from the national guard; restrictions on the use of petitions and posters; and the famous "Le Chapelier" law, passed only days before the king's flight. Well before June 21 moderates in the Constituent and radicals in Paris had become deeply suspicious of each other's motives.[30] With the Assembly's rejection of petitions calling for a national referendum on the

27. *AP*, 28:79-82. Cf. Briois de Beaumetz: ibid., pp. 75-77. In the end, neither side was able to win a clear majority. A tentative compromise decree tripled the taxes of the emigrants without touching their property. But the final version, passed nearly a month later, incorporated so many exceptions that the decree scarcely applicable. In any case, the whole measure was abandoned in September at the time of the general amnesty. *AP*, 29:84-89; 30:632. See also Gueniffey, *La Politique*, pp. 121-22. Gueniffey argues that "le 9 juillet 1791 [the date the decree was sent back to the committee to be rewritten] marque ainsi, sans éclat, le début de la terreur." In my view, the issue is substantially more complex.

28. Among recent studies, see David Andress, *Massacre at the Champ de Mars. Popular Dissent and Political Culture in the French Revolution* (Woodbridge, England, 2000); and the author's *When the King Took Flight*, chap. 5.

29. William Augustus Miles, *The Correspondence of William Augustus Miles on the French Revolution, 1789-1817*, 2 vols., ed. Charles Popham Miles (London, 1890), 1:209; William Short, letter to Thomas Jefferson in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 20, ed. Julian P. Boyd, (Princeton, 1982), p. 348.

30. Georges Michon, *Essai sur l'histoire du parti Feuillant: Adrien Duport* (Paris, 1924), chap. 8; Steven L. Kaplan, *La Fin des corporations* (Paris, 2001), pp. 546-61. Also Jack Richard Censer, *Prelude to Power. The Parisian Radical Press, 1789-1791* (Baltimore, 1976), pp. 92-123.

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future of the monarchy, and with its exoneration of the king and its readiness to reinstate him if he accepted the Constitution, some radical Parisian speakers and journalists began openly calling for popular insurrection. By mid-July, crowds of protesters daily surrounded the Manège. Despite the presence of the national guard, the representatives were unable to reach their benches without walking a gauntlet between lines of angry people shouting insults, accusing the deputies of treachery, and sometimes brandishing pikes.[31]

It was in this situation that the majority of the Constituent began exerting pressure on the Paris municipal government to take repressive action. On July 16 mayor Bailly and a number of municipal and departmental leaders were summoned before the Assembly and publicly chastised for allowing the unrest to continue, for having "fermé les yeux sur de tels désordres." They were ordered to use "tous les moyens que la Constitution vous a remis pour les réprimer, pour en connaître et faire punir les auteurs, et pour mettre la tranquillité des citoyens à l'abri de toute atteinte." The next morning, when news arrived of the murder of two men at the Champ de Mars, the Assembly brought even greater pressure to bear on Bailly to end the agitation by whatever means necessary—including the use of martial law and violence. When the mayor returned to the Assembly on July 18 and gave his official account of the Champ de Mars shootings, he was formally thanked by the Assembly.[32] Thus, it can be argued that it was in the wake of the king's flight that the Assembly first crossed the threshold of state sponsored violence.

During the following weeks, the National Assembly and its investigative committee intensified their repressive activities in Paris, focusing their attention not only on the counterrevolutionary right but on the radical left. For ten days the red flag of martial law continued to fly over the city hall, and arrests and indictments were pursued well into August. The Assembly rushed through a new antisedition law, with harsh penalties for anyone thought to have incited violence against national guardsmen or other citizens, not only through their actions or speech, but through their writings. It was the first decree of the Revolution specifically limiting freedom of the press. Moreover, the law was written to be applied retroactively, targeting actions committed both during and before the July

31. Thibaudeau, *Correspondance inédite*, p. 162; Gaultier, *Gaultier de Biauzat*, 2:386; Laurent-François Legendre, ms. letters of July 16 and 18 to electors and municipal officials in Brest: A.M. Brest, series D, non-classed; Gouvion, letter of July 15 to mayor Jean-Sylvain Bailly: B.N., Ms. Fr. 11697.

32. *AP*, 28:363-64, 372, 380, 398-401; Lacroix, *Actes de la Commune*, pp. 367, 402; Albert Mathiez, *Le Club des Cordeliers pendant la crise de Varennes* (Paris, 1910), p. 138.

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17 demonstration.[33] Once again, investigations and arrests were closely supervised by the Committee on Reports, which continued to ignore the rights of habeas corpus and "due process." Within days, as we know, a number of presses and clubs were closed and at least 200 people arrested, with the Committee especially focusing on the republican leadership.[34] Police spies became even more prevalent, and municipal agents were ordered to break into apartments throughout the city to search for suspicious individuals or documents.[35] But, as we have seen, many of the procedures used after July 17 were based on precedents already established in the days immediately following the king's flight.

The Impact of Varennes in the Provinces

In the provinces, as in Paris, news of the departure of the king and the royal family shocked and stunned virtually everyone. All the letters addressed to the Constituent Assembly during this period bear witness to the feelings of consternation, anxiety and profound sadness engendered by the event.[36] Uncertainty was particularly intense in the first days, when no one knew for sure what had happened to Louis. But even after the king's return to the capital, everyone realized the seriousness of the event, and just as in Paris, people feared that the flight might have been linked to plans for foreign invasion and internal uprisings. The war scare was especially strong in frontier and coastal regions. For the town of Mézières the Varennes affair could only have been "déterminée par les instances de la maison d'Autriche, qui dans ce cas montre la résolution la plus évidente de faire la guerre à la France." The town leaders of Dole generally agreed: "Considérons nous donc," they wrote, "dans ce moment, comme en temps de guerre et de péril imminent." And they issued detailed instructions for the mobilization of the whole society, establishing procedures by which all citizens were expected to contribute both time and money for the defense of the nation.[37] Almost as soon as they learned of the crisis, local administrators on their own initiative sent units of the

33. *AP*, 28:403.

34. Andress, *Massacre at the Champ de Mars*, pp. 207-208; Earl George Granville Leveson Gower, *The Despatches of Earl Gower, English Ambassador at Paris, from Jun 1790 to August 1792*, ed. Oscar Browning (Cambridge, 1885), p. 108.

35. E.g., A.N. D XXIX bis 36 (2), dos. 373.

36. See, e.g., Henri Baumont, *Le Département de l'Oise pendant la Révolution (1790-1795)* (Paris, 1993), p. 74; A.N. D XXIX bis 36 (1), dos. 368 (Bar-le-Duc); Marcel Bruneau, *Les Débuts de la Révolution dans les départements du Cher et de l'Indre* (Paris, 1902), pp. 160-61.

37. A.C. Mézières, BB 23, delib. of June 22; A.N. D XXIX bis 35, dos. 366 (Dole).

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national guard and the regular army to establish lines of defense and brace for invasion along the frontiers and up and down the coasts. Indeed, in at least four zones of the kingdom—the Pyrenees, the Poitou coast, the north Breton peninsula, and especially the Northeast of Lorraine, Champagne and Picardy—rumors of invasion set off chain-reaction panics not unlike those of the Great Fear of 1789.[38]

But equally as frightening was the fear of internal "enemies," a fifth column of conspirators living in their midst and perhaps linked with the Foreign Powers. Almost everywhere two groups, already widely suspected of counterrevolutionary activity before June 21, presented themselves as prime candidates for the role of local traitors: the reactionary nobility and the refractory clergy. "La disparition de la famille royale," wrote the town leaders of Vienne, "a excité dans la commune un mouvement général d'indignation contre les ennemis du bien public. L'audace des uns, l'émigration des autres, la rétractation de quelques fonctionnaires publics, tout nous présageait depuis quelques jours des trames criminelles."[39]

To be sure, in many regions local administrators did everything in their power to calm the population, to "veiller avec soin à la tranquillité publique"—as specified by the National Assembly's decree of June 21.[40] As men of substance themselves, they remembered only too clearly the chaos and disorder of the first summer of the Revolution, and they were anxious that accused "suspects" be dealt with by the courts and not by mobs. Their own directives in June and July 1791 were filled with admonishments on the need to preserve law and order. Officials in Auch, for example, urged everyone to show "une parfaite soumission aux lois. Reposez-vous, citoyens, sur vos administrateurs. Voici le moment qui doit décider si nous serons à jamais libres ou si l'anarchie nous donnera de nouvelles chaînes."[41]

But local officials were not acting in a vacuum. They had always to take into account the opinions of—and implicitly "negotiate" with—the people they were supposed to administer and whose penchant for violence was only too well known. Two groups in particular pushed local leaders toward more repressive measures in the days after June 21: the urban masses and

38. Developed and documented in the author's article, "Collective Panics in the Early French Revolution, 1789-1791," *French History* 17 (2003): 149-71.

39. A.N. C 130 (2), dos. 455 (Vienne).

40. *AP*, 27:362.

41. M. Brégail, "Le Gers pendant la Révolution," *Bulletin de la société d'histoire et d'archéologie du Gers* 31 (1930): 97-98. Cf. J. Millot, "La fuite à Varennes à Besançon," *Académie des sciences, belles-lettres, et arts de Besançon. Procés-verbaux et mémoires* 172 (1957): 200; and A.N. D XXIX bis 36 (1), dos. 369 (Beauvais).

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the national guards. In numerous towns news of the king's flight and his arrest in Varennes set off spontaneous outbreaks of popular violence against local nobles and clergyman.[42] Sometimes the authorities acted immediately to repress or distract such movements. The notables of Cahors were unusually creative in this respect, organizing a special "federation" ceremony to redirect popular emotions—and perhaps advancing plans already afoot for the July 14 celebration. There were marching guardsmen, bands, patriotic speeches by the Constitutional clergy, rousing renditions of "Ca ira!" and a solemn oath pronounced by all to be faithful to the nation and its laws.[43]

But for other officials, acquiescence seemed the better part of valor. Administrators in Morbihan were particularly articulate in their description of the dilemma. "La fermentation est extrême," they wrote to the minister in Paris, "ainsi que le ressentiment du peuple. Au milieu de cette agitation des esprits, il est impossible de faire entendre seule la voix de la raison. Il faut caresser les passions pour les empêcher de rompre tout frein." Failure to respond to the popular concerns could "faire perdre entièrement à l'administration cet empire d'opinion par lequel seul on peut gouverner un people libre." Following a similar philosophy, authorities in Bains launched a series of illegal searches of noble households designed to satisfy the "anxious individuals whose ardor might otherwise know no limits." In Cambrai, the city fathers agreed to seize control of the town fortifications from the aristocratic commander: "considérant que dans l'état des choses il pourrait être dangereux de fronder l'opinion publique, organe infallible du patriotisme; et qu'il importe au contraire infiniment de seconder le peuple dans les sentiments civiques dont il est enflammé."[44]

Pressure for extralegal action was also exerted by the national guards. Most guardsmen were strongly committed patriots, dedicated to the goals of the revolution. They had vowed to preserve the Constitution against all its enemies, and the experience of Varennes strengthened their suspicions of aristocrats and refractory clergymen. Several guards considered expelling all nobles from positions of leadership in their units, since "la

42. See, e.g., Félix Bouvier, *Les Vosges pendant la Révolution, 1789-1800: étude historique* (Paris, 1885), pp. 100-101; Ferdinand Gaugain, *Histoire de la Révolution dans la Mayenne*, 4 vols. (Laval, 1919-21), 2:239-40; A.N. D XXIX bis 35, dos. 361 (Argentan).

43. Eugéne Sol, *La Révolution en Quercy*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1926), 2:80-81.

44. A.N. F^7 3682^{18} (Morbihan); C. Binet, "Les répercussions de la fuite de Louis XVI en Bretagne," *Comité des travaux historiques, Bulletin historique et philologique*, (1911), p. 116; A. Pastoors, *Histoire de la ville de Cambrai pendant la Révolution, 1789-1802*, 2 vols. (Cambrai, 1908), 1:91. There were numerous other examples of popular pressure forcing officials to seize the keys to fortresses and city walls from noble officers.

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prudence et le salut de l'état exigent que l'on ne confie le commandement des troupes qu'à des personnes qui n'ont pas d'intérêt contraire à la Révolution."[45] Moreover, if they were to perform their functions properly and obtain the status they felt they deserved, these newly minted militiamen would obviously require arms and ammunition. Thus, the search for weapons which the guardsmen vigorously pursued had the advantage not only of disarming counterrevolutionaries, but of placing more weapons in patriot hands.[46] In any case, the mobilization of so many enthusiastic, young patriots engendered pressure groups anxious to perform their functions and root out enemies wherever they might be found. In many areas, in the days after June 21, the guardsmen would form the shock troops of repression in the provinces.[47]

Responding to popular pressures and adapting the National Assembly's decree to "se tenir prêts à agir pour le maintien de l'ordre public et la défense de la patrie," administrators throughout the country initiated a whole range of measures against perceived internal enemies. Thus, despite the decrees on the secrecy of letters sent through the post repeatedly proclaimed by the National Assembly,[48] local officials almost everywhere began opening and reading the mail. The council of Pont-à-Mousson carefully explained its reasoning: "Nos ennemis du dehors et de l'intérieur ne manqueraient pas de mettre tout en oeuvre pour exécuter les projets infernaux qu'ils ont conçus contre la patrie; [ainsi] dans ce moment il est peut-être prudent, sans violer les secrets de famille, d'examiner scrupuleusement les correspondances qui pourraient paraître suspectes au bureau des postes."[49] In practice, the definition of "suspect" correspondence varied from one town to another. Many officials examined all letters addressed to or from foreign countries. Elsewhere they focused on mail sent from refractory bishops, or received by any "suspect" noble or refractory clergyman. Most letters so examined were unrevealing,

45. E.g., the case of Sézanne: letter of June 23, 1791: A.D. Marne, 1 L 329. There were also a few cases of reputedly conservative guard units: e.g., one accused of "fanaticism" was disbanded in Gard at the time of Varennes: François Rouvière, *Histoire de la Révolution française dans le département du Gard, vol. 1* (Nîmes, 1887), 1:360-61.

46. See, e.g., the dispute in late June between different groups of guardsmen over arms seized from the comte de Tralong du Roumain in Côtes-du-Nord: A.N. D XXIX bis 35, dos. 365 (La Roche-Derrin).

47. See, e.g., Roger Dupuy, *La Garde nationale et les débuts de la Révolution en Ille-et-Vilaine (1789-mars 1793)* (Paris, 1972), 200-205; A.N. D XXIX bis 36 (1), dos. 367 (Landerneau); A.N. D XXIX bis 36 (1), dos. 369-70 (Rochefort).

48. *AP*, 8:273-75, 278-79; 17:695-96.

49. A.C. Pont-à-Mousson, 1 D 4, delib. of June 25.

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despite the patriots' best efforts to read conspiracy into inane family chatter. Large quantities piled up in the archives of the Assembly's Committee on Research, never delivered, and as little enlightening to the deputies in 1791 as to historians today. But occasionally the opened letters had major consequences for individuals. Thus, a seemingly innocent note from an emigrant noble to his business agent in Boiscommun—a certain Monsieur Petit—intercepted and revealed to the public, led to the near lynching of the agent and his lengthy incarceration in the town jail.[50]

Many officials also sanctioned the illegal arrest of travelers. Broadly interpreting the Assembly's June 21 interdiction against individuals crossing frontiers, administrators began stopping unknown travelers, especially those who appeared to be nobles, were dressed or spoke strangely, or seemed a bit nervous. It was clearly not the moment to leave on a trip; and the National Assembly was flooded with appeals from unfortunate people imprisoned in the midst of the crisis, sometimes for weeks on end. In Cahors guardsmen fell upon two Belgian businessmen with obvious foreign accents on their way to Italy. The town leaders justified the arrest by their fear of "une invasion prochaine des troupes étrangères": "C'est pour sauver la constitution du naufrage qu'on lui préparait que nous avons cru devoir prendre des précautions extraordinaires." The two were still in jail in the middle of August, bitterly lamenting their fate.[51]

Usually, however, provincial patriots were less worried about travelers than local inhabitants who had already aroused suspicion for their opposition to the Revolution. All over France surveillance teams of officials and national guardsmen rushed to scrutinize nearby châteaux and religious houses staffed by refractory clergymen. For the first time in many provincial towns the term "suspect" entered widely into the administrative vocabulary. But what aroused mistrust and indicated "suspect intentions"—as officials in Montpellier put it—was often far from clear.[52] In many cases suspicion seems to have arisen from specific statements made by individuals, either sometime in the past or immediately after Varennes, which classified them as "des citoyens notoirement connus par des principes opposés à ceux de la révolution"—as the town council of Soissons explained it. A women in Meaux was incarcerated for "des saillies aristocratiques," during a dinner with friends several months earlier. A curé near Verdun was arrested for publicly musing that "quand bien même le

50. A.N. D XXIX bis 35, dos. 366 (Boiscommun). See also, e.g., A.N. D XXIX bis 35, dos. 361 (Auxonne); D XXIX bis 35, dos. 362 (Bar-le-Duc, Bouzonville, and Boulogne-sur-Mer); D XXIX bis 35, dos. 365 (Longwy); D XXIX bis 38, dos. 389 (Geneva).

51. A.N. D XXIX bis 35, dos. 364 and 367 (Cahors).

52. Rouvière, *Histoire de la Révolution*, 1:367-69.

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roi aurait réussi à s'évader, il n'y aurait pas eu grand mal."—words taken entirely out of context, according to the "suspect" in question. Two refractory priests were nearly hanged by an angry crowd in Vendôme for insulting a pro-Revolutionary clergyman. Unfortunately, officials in Brest were unable to save a military officer named de Patrys from popular revenge for his mocking depiction of a Revolutionary ceremony with "obscene graffiti" on the walls of a cabaret. Soon after news of the king's disappearance arrived, he was murdered and his head paraded on a pike.[53] Overall, however, extreme violence of this kind was rare. Only four individuals—all nobles—are known to have been killed in the wake of the king's flight.[54]

Elsewhere, individuals attracted suspicion because of known links to emigrants or because they had expressed a desire to leave France. Thus, a young man named Boubert was tracked down and arrested near Neufchâtel after having asked a relative for money to finance his emigration.[55] More common, no doubt, were the fears aroused by reputed secret gatherings of nobles and clergymen in local châteaux. Reports of hidden "conciliabules aristocratiques" in Saint-Denis prompted district authorities to search a nobleman's home at two in the morning. The seigneur claimed that the visitors in question had come only to celebrate Pentecost, and in fact the inspection turned up neither arms nor mysterious strangers. A similar search of a château near Chaumont-en-Vexin—where a noble family was surprised in the midst of a game of whist—turned up nine antiquated hunting guns and a souvenir pike from the battle of Fontenoy, all duly confiscated for the nation's arsenals.[56]

In most instances repression practiced by local leaders and guardsmen was pursued on a case-by-case basis, targeting specific "suspect" individuals. But in certain instances the authorities, fearful of real plots or succumbing to popular pressures, gave orders to search or arrest without trial whole categories of persons. Here the status of suspect arose not from

53. A.D. Aisnes, L 604 (minutes of Soissons, June 24); A.N. D XXIX bis 36 (1), dos. 367 (Meaux); A.D. Meuse, L 386 (District Verdun on curé of Brabant-sur-Meuse); Louis-Philippe, *Mémorial des pensées et actions du duc de Chartres . . . écrit par lui-même en 1790 et 1791* (Paris, 1830), pp. 43-47; Philippe Henwood and Edmond Monange, *Brest: Un port en Révolution, 1789-1799* (N.p., 1989), p. 102.

54. The other nobles murdered—in addition to de Patrys—were Guillin du Montet, seigneur of Poleymieux near Lyon; the comte de Tralong (see below); and the comte de Dampierre near Sainte-Menehould.

55. A.N. D XXIX bis 36 (2), dos. 375 (Neufchâtel). Cf. D XXIX BIS 33, dos. 344 (Neuf-Brisack).

56. A.N. D XXIX bis 35, dos. 363 (Saint-Denis); and D XXIX bis 36 (2), dos. 373 (Saint-Cyr-sur-Char). Cf. the inspection of a château near Fuligny: A.D. Aube, L 315.

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any act purportedly committed, but from the fact of belonging to a specific social or political group. The most obvious targets for such collective indictments were nonjuring clergymen. In regions struggling with large numbers of refractories, local patriots were immensely impatient with the National Assembly's decrees on "freedom of religion" and toleration for refractories who stayed out of trouble. Was not the very refusal to take an oath an affront to the Constitution and a threat to the nation? Liberals might push "freedom of opinion"—as citizens in Chalonne argued—but "Quelle opinion, Grand Dieu! que celle qui nous présente le fanatisme, le bras fumant de carnage, qui n'offre à ses partisans que des villes incendiées [et] un royaume dévasté." In some regions, repression of refractories was sweeping indeed, unlike anything previously pursued in the Revolution. As soon as they heard the news, officials in Nantes ordered the immediate arrest of any priest suspected of counterrevolutionary activities and the deportation from the department of all other refractories. District leaders in Landerneau did much the same, arguing that such clergymen "sont tous, sans exception, des ennemis de l'état," and that they were threatening a return to the Wars of Religion.[57] Similar measures were taken, illegally arresting or deporting hundreds of nonjuring priests, in at least nine departments throughout the country.[58]

A second target of blanket repression was the nobility. In the departments of Cher and Indre, where refractories were relatively rare and not generally perceived as a danger, the news of Varennes brought widespread fears that aristocrats in the region were organizing counterrevolutionary activities. Several districts sent out guardsmen systematically to disarm every château. The town of Bourges went even further, ordering all resident nobles to remain in town and guarding the city gates to ensure that none slipped out, "pour empêcher . . . la réunion de tous ceux qui ont professé hautement des principes contraires au voeu général."[59] For the most part such policies were pursued peacefully, with guardsmen specifically instructed to act "sans violence et par des démarches honnêtes et prudentes."[60]

57. Binet, "Les répercussions," pp. 106-107; A.N. C 125 (2) (Chalonne); A.N. D XXIX bis 36 (1), dos. 367 (Landerneau). Cf. D XXIX bis 35, dos. 361 (Argentan).

58. In Haut-Rhin, Bas-Rhin, Bouches-du-Rhône, Hérault, Seine-Inférieure, Ille-et-Vilaine, Côtes-du-Nord, Loire-Inférieure, et Morbihan: Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture* (Princeton, 1986), pp. 276-79; A.D. Gironde, 12 L 13 (July 2).

59. Bruneau, *Les Débuts,* pp. 161-63.

60. Maurice Wahl, *Les premières années de la Révolution à Lyon, 1788-1792* (Paris, 1894), pp. 385-86.

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Nowhere, however, was the collective repression of nobles and priests more vigorous, and at times violent, than in Brittany. Here officials found themselves plagued not only with one of the highest proportions of refractory clergymen in the country, but with longstanding tensions between nobles and commoners greatly aggravated by provincial politics on the eve of the Revolution. With news of the king's flight, and encouraged by local administrators, Breton national guardsmen from the towns launched a veritable terror in the countryside, harassing suspect nobles and clergy, searching for arms and occasionally destroying châteaux.[61] In the Côtes-du-Nord authorities gave local administrators virtual free rein to pursue all members of the two suspect groups: "Nos ennemis," they wrote "font les derniers efforts. La haine, le fanatisme vont s'agiter en tous sens, et il n'est point de mesure que nous ne devions prendre pour en prévenir les effets." Following these orders, guardsmen began systematically breaking into every manor house to "oter aux ennemis de la constitution tous les moyens qu'ils pouvaient employer pour en renverser l'édifice."[62] Leaders in Morbihan went further and ordered the seizure of the property of all nobles who had emigrated—anticipating Vernier's proposal in the National Assembly. Since the Constituent's June 21 decree had forbidden the carrying of money or precious metals across frontiers, it seemed only just to impound the profits of absentee nobles. "Les événements qui viennent de se passer," they wrote, "ne laissant aucun doute sur les projets hostiles des émigrés, la prudence ne permet pas de laisser à leur disposition des fonds qu'il employeraient à l'exécution perverse de ses dessins."[63]

With administrators encouraging repression and tensions raised to explosive levels by the invasion panic of late June, Brittany would be the scene of several particularly violent incidents. In the region east of Rennes the news of Varennes sent some three thousand citizen militiamen into the villages looking for refractories. Frustrated at not finding a particular nobleman who had supported the refractory clergy, the guardsmen burned down the individual's castle, and soon several other châteaux in the area went up in flames. With word of the king's flight a detachment of 100 guardsmen was dispatched to the château of Le Préclos near Vannes, where a group of suspicious nobles were said to have gathered. Arriving at 4 in the morning and awakening the residents with drums and musket fire, the patriot militia carried away eighteen men in carts, their hands tied

61. Dupuy, *La Garde nationale*, pp. 200-205; Binet, "Les répercussions," pp. 116-117.

62. Binet, "Les répercussions," p. 118; A.N. D XXIX bis 35, dos. 365 (La Roche-Derrien).

63. Ibid.; F^7 3682^{18} (Morbihan).

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behind their backs, to be interred in a local citadel as "des prisonniers de guerre." Leaders in La Roche-Derrien near Brittany's northern coast also set out to disarm all the "former privileged" in their region. Apparently no one resisted until guardsmen arrived at the château of Tralong, where the irascible count Du Roumain greeted them with shots from a seventeenth-century blunderbuss and a "Breton Billy," an antiquated device which fired stones. It was only after several citizens had been wounded and another unit of guardsmen had been called in, that the patriots finally stormed the castle, killing Du Roumain in the process.[64]

As the crisis of June and July calmed, department officials in Quimper took the district of Landerneau to task for its massive arrests of nobles and refractories, individuals "auxquels on ne peut reprocher d'autre délit que celui d'être soupçonnés d'avoir des opinions anti-Constitutionnelles, mais qui ne les ont jamais manifestés de manière à troubler l'ordre." Such activities were not only against the law and the rights of man, but they could further inflame the situation: "exciter le trouble, effrayer ou inquiéter les personnes, menacer les propriétés, serait d'autant plus coupable que par là serait compromise et la liberté et la Constitution."[65] The district directors vigorously defended their actions. The circumstances of the crisis and the fundamental goal of saving the Revolution, justified the measures taken. "Le sang était au moment de couler," they declared. "Il n'y avait qu'un parti à prendre, celui d'arracher nos ennemis à la mort ou au crime." Refractories and nobles were simply too dangerous to be trusted, even those—perhaps especially those—who hid behind "le masque hypocrite du patriotism." In the end, the directors remained entirely unrepentant for what they had done: "Nous avons à la fois servi l'humanité et la constitution, en écartant ceux qui provoquaient le trouble et le désordre." "Nous les dénonçons hautement et nous ne cesserons de les poursuivre que lorsque le feu sacré, que nous conservons dans notre sein, aura purifié et épuré toute la surface de l'empire française.[66]

The debate between Landerneau and Brest was emblematic of the quandaries encountered everywhere in the face of the crisis of the king's flight. Administrative elites found themselves forced to negotiate a delicate balance between principle and expediency, between the rule of law and the needs of "public safety," between individual liberty and community defense, between preserving the rights of man and preserving the state. In

64. Dupuy, *La Garde nationale*, pp. 201-205; Binet, "Les répercussions," pp. 116-17; A.N. D XXIX bis 36 (1), dos. 369 (dist. Rochefort); F[7] 3682[18] (Morbihan); and D XXIX bis 35, dos. 365 (La Roche-Derrien).

65. A.N. F[7] 3682[18] (Morbihan); and D XXIX bis 36 (1), dos. 367 (Quimper).

66. A.N. D XXIX bis 36 (1), dos. 367 (Landerneau).

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their groping efforts to confront these dilemmas, many provincial leaders, like many Constituent leaders, wandered into the byways of repressive actions—guilt by association, guilt by unproved suspicion, lengthy imprisonment without due process—that were clear harbingers of the Terror.

The Growth of the Conspiracy Obsession

The Flight to Varennes seems also to have contributed significantly to the rapid expansion of conspiracy fears among the Revolutionary elites. As I have argued elsewhere, there is reason to believe that at the beginning of the Revolution most elements of the Constituent leadership resisted the "paranoid style" of explanation for events. This mode of interpretation was almost absent in the brochures written by future deputies on the eve of the Estates General and in the speeches and correspondence of May/June 1789. While fears of pervasive plots did emerge after June 1789, they seemed to flourish above all among that group of deputies associated with the radical Jacobins. Otherwise, through the spring of 1791 such fears appeared to be largely episodic and closely related to the proven existence of real conspiracies. Most deputies at the center and moderate left of the Assembly were by no means continuously obsessed with conspiracies, and they were frequently quite critical of the paranoid style—especially after the panic atmosphere of the summer of 1789 had dissipated.[67]

But the Varennes Affair played a major role in convincing large numbers of even moderate patriots—both in Paris and in the provinces—of the ubiquity of plots and conspiracies as an imminent and pervasive threat to the Revolution. As the tribunals and Assembly committees pursued their investigations, interviewing dozens of witnesses and reading secret documents intercepted by the Revolutionaries, evidence emerged for the reality of a sophisticated conspiracy involving not only the royal household, but numerous members of the emigrants and the upper echelons of the military. The evidence also demonstrated beyond a doubt the self-conscious deception and betrayal of the king himself.

Revelations about the king's double dealing, in particular, produced a veritable loss of innocence among large numbers of the political elite. There is ample testimony that through the spring of 1791 Louis XVI had continued to retain strong support among the elites and the masses, both in Paris and the provinces. Thus, when Louis came down with a severe cold in March of that year, hundreds of municipal councils and Jacobin

67. See the author's "Conspiracy Obsession," pp. 700-707.

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clubs organized solemn masses for his recovery, and virtually every town in France held a thanksgiving celebration after learning of his return to good health. The royal palace and the National Assembly were flooded with messages of concern: may God save "l'idole de la nation!" (Bourges); "l'Eternel, qui préside aux destinées des empire n'a pas voulu nous priver de notre plus ferme appui, de l'ancre de notre bonheur. . . . Nos temples ne retentissent aujourd'hui que d'actions de grâces." (Laval); "Enfants adoptifs du grand Henri, notre attachement aux princes du sang des Bourbons, dignes d'un si grand nom, désormais si cher à la France, ne se démentira jamais." (Belley).[68]

It was in this context that Louis' flight and, above all, his repudiation of his previous solemn oaths of allegiance to the Constitution, aroused such deep feelings of suspicion and distrust. Though a few of the more frenetic and unreliable Parisian newspapers had predicted a flight, most deputies had dismissed the predictions as so much paranoid ranting. "Auparavant," wrote the Quercy deputy Antoine Durand, "je l'aurais cru incapable de manquer à sa parole et de trahir la confiance qu'il a su inspirer." But as Vernier reasoned, "La fuite du roi nous a réveillé aux complots très répandus de nos ennemis." Rewbell concluded much the same: for two years the Assembly had believed that most of the purported projects of counterrevolution were "chimériques," but now they had discovered "le fil," the proof "qui n'était que trop réel".[69] The case of Marc-Antoine Vadier is worth repeating. Only a few weeks before, the grim Jacobin and future leader of the Committee of General Security had written self-confidently to his constituency, denying all the rumors of the king's impending flight. Now he felt not only betrayed, but humiliated and foolish at having allowed himself to have been so deceived. He thundered against "ce roi parjure et fugitif, ce roi qui déserte lâchement son poste pour paralyser le gouvernement, pour nous livrer à toutes les horreurs de la guerre civile et de l'anarchie." And like many others, Vadier must have sworn never again

68. Bruneau, *Les Débuts* ,p. 164; Gaugain, *Histoire de la Révolution,* p. 239; Eugène Dubois, *Histoire de la Révolution dans l'Ain. Tome I. La Constituante (1789-1791)* (Bourg-en-Bresse, 1931), p. 330. Thanksgiving ceremonies for Louis' recovery are mentioned in virtually every local monograph of the period.

69. Vernier, ms. letter of July 4 to the municipality of Lons-le-Saunier: copy in A.C. Bletterans, (non-classé) dossier, "Lettres de Vernier"; Durand, ms. letter of June 26 to the municipality of Cahors: A.M. Cahors, unclassed box of letters from Revolutionary deputies, held in B.M. Cahors; *AP*, 28:77-78. Cf Legendre, ms. letter of July 8: A.M. Brest, series D, non-classed.

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to be lulled asleep by appearances and duped by the mask of patriotism, never again to let down his suspicions.[70]

In the end the Assembly would vote to reinstate the king, as long as Louis agreed to accept the Constitution. In their efforts to explain their decision, most deputies gave a whole range of reasons. It was essential to follow the law; the king had technically committed no crime; the king was, in any case, immune to prosecution; the trial or deposing of him would cause internal uprisings and foreign war; a regency in the name of the five-year-old Dauphin would bring uncertainty and disruption; a republic would never work in a large country like France.[71] Significantly, two deputies opposed a trial of the king because they were convinced of his guilt: "Accuser un roi, ce n'est pas un badinage, car nous pensons que tout roi accusé doit perdre la tête."[72] If there was one theme which seemed particularly widespread, and which was never mentioned in the published debates, it was the deputies' fear of having to scrap a Constitution on which they had invested so much time and energy.[73] In any case, the members of the "Triumvirate," who imagined they had made a secret deal with the royal couple, guaranteeing their support for the Constitution, were able to convince the rump of deputies still attending the sessions that the king had been psychologically "abducted" (no one pretended he had been physically abducted); that he had now changed his ways and would cooperate.[74]

And yet a great many representatives in their personal correspondence expressed deep disillusion, even bitterness, and pessimism for the future. Whatever their final vote, all had been deeply unsettled by Varennes and could not but be impressed by Pétion's analysis: "Combien de fois Louis XVI a-t-il juré amour et fidélité à la Constitution! . . . . C'était donc pour endormir la nation française dans une fausse sécurité, et la tromper plus

70. *AP*, 28:258; Gaston Arnaud, *Histoire de la Révolution dans le département de l'Ariège, 1789-1795* (Toulouse, 1904), p. 241.

71. See, e.g., Gaultier, *Gaultier de Biauzat*, 2:381-82; Basquiat, letters of July 9 and 10; Thibaudeau, *Correspondance inédite*, pp. 161-62; Dubois, *Histoire de la Révolution*, pp. 373-75; Maupetit, "Lettres (1789-91)," pp. 480-82; Jean-Pierre Roger, "Lettres du constituant Roger," ed. R. Rumeau, *Revolution française* 43 (1902): 75-76.

72. Arriveur in Dubois, *Histoire de la Révolution*, p. 373; Faulcon, *Correspondance*, pp. 443-44.

73. Faulcon, *Correspondance*, pp. 443-44; also Claude Gantheret, undated letter of July 1791: ms. letters to Pierre Leflaive: private collection of Françoise Misserey, Dijon. Cf. Durand, letter of July 17.

74. See esp. the speech by Muguet de Nantou: *AP*, 28:231-42. On the secret negotiations with the queen and king, see Philippe Sagnac, "Marie Antoinette et Barnave d'après leur correspondance secrète," *Revolution française* 88 (1935): 207-41.

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facilement." Gantheret admitted that he was unable to forget such words. Even if the king signed the constitution, how could a man who had already broken three or four oaths ever again be trusted? Durand confessed having a "sentiment de terreur" when he thought of the decision being made. Faulcon could not help wondering whether or not "le roi a fait encore un faux serment en jurant ce qu'il se propose de ne pas tenir." The sardonic abbé Lindet confided his disgust with the whole affair to his younger brother, the future member of the Committee of Public Safety: "Le roi a juré la Constitution. Il tiendra de son serment tel compte qui lui plaira." "On veut un roi: il faut prendre un imbécile, un automate, un fourbe, un parjure, que le peuple méprisera [et] sous le nom duquel des fripons régneront."[75]

From this point on the deputies not only spoke more often of conspiracies, but they became increasingly preoccupied with the "grand conspiracy," where all threats were viewed as part of a monolithic master plan directed from a single source. This trend would be even more in evidence under the Legislative Assembly, where the conspiracy obsession, and particularly the fear of a grand conspiracy, would become a common theme in the rhetoric of both moderates and radicals.[76]

Conclusion

In a number of respects, then, the experience of Varennes would serve as a precedent, a veritable dress rehearsal for the period 1792-94. As we have seen, almost immediately after news of the king's flight, the National Assembly placed itself on a war footing, calling up several hundred thousand national guardsmen for integration into the regular army, and sending out deputies on mission to the provinces with sweeping powers to organize the frontier defenses and take charge of "public order and state security." At the same time, two key committees in the Assembly rapidly metamorphosed themselves into a proto-Committee of General Security, assuming substantial extralegal powers for investigations and arrests. And the Assembly transformed itself into a judicial body to judge the culpability of the king, as well as other key figures involved in the conspiracy. In the process, both in Paris and the provinces administrators often did not hesitate to ignore or suspend specific laws or the "rights of man" only recently decreed by the Constituent. The secrecy of the mail was violated

75. *AP*, 28:245; Gantheret, undated, July 1791; Durand, letter of July 17; Faulcon, *Correspondance*, p. 455; Thomas Lindet, *Correspondance de Thomas Lindet pendant la Constituante et la Législative (1789-92)*, ed. Amand Montier (Paris, 1899), pp. 297-98, 318.

76. Tackett, "Conspiracy Obsession," pp. 707-708.

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everywhere; unknown travelers and local citizens—especially nobles and refractory priests—were arrested on mere suspicion and held for weeks without indictment or trial; and in some areas a variety of repressive actions was taken against whole categories of individuals, without consideration of the specific acts they might have committed. Following the Massacre of the Champ de Mars, extralegal repression was intensified in Paris, and freedom of the press was extensively curtailed.

To be sure, we must take care not to overstate the comparison. In spite of the intense fears of invasion and uprising that followed Varennes, actual war and the experience of invasion would not come so soon. And this indeed was the great difference between 1791 and 1792-94: the fear of war is clearly not the same as war itself. Once it became evident that the Great Powers would not act, the deputies quickly put an end to the state of emergency. By late August the combined Committees on Research and Reports had halted their extralegal repressive activities and began pressuring local administrators to do likewise. The representatives on mission remained in the provinces only a few weeks. The Constituent never created a body similar to the Committee of Public Safety—despite the motion to this effect by the comte de Crillon. Indeed, the general amnesty of September 1791 rapidly liberated those incarcerated for both counterrevolutionary and republican "conspiracies."[77] Finally, the National Assembly, unlike the Convention, would exonerate the king for all his actions—much to the displeasure of a substantial minority in both Paris and the provinces. In this manner, the majority of the deputies returned to their policy, already well developed before Varennes, of bringing the Revolution to an end.

Nevertheless, the actions of the National Assembly in the summer of 1791 signaled a sharp departure from the general respect for the rule of law and the avoidance of arbitrary decisions that had previously characterized the policies of that body. Indeed, for much of the patriot political elite it was the "Revolution of June 21"—and not the Revolution of 1789—which could be said to have marked a "prelude to Terror."[78]

77. The measure was first formally proposed by the king himself, but it was probably first conceived by elements of the Assembly in conjunction with the pro-Revolutionary ministers: *AP*, 30:621, 632-33, 646; Sagnac, "Marie Antoinette et Barnave," p. 223.

78. See, notably, Hampson, *Prelude to Terror*.

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