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VARIETIES OF JACOBINISM

Prelude to Terror. The Constituent Assembly and the Failure of Consensus, 1789–1791. By N. Hampson. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988. Pp. 199. £30.

The Jacobin Clubs in the French Revolution. The Middle Years. By M. L. Kennedy. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988. Pp. 440. $45.

The Frozen Revolution: An Essay on Jacobinism. By F. Fehér. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. Pp. 178. £25.

Existe-t-il un fédéralisme jacobin? Etudes sur la Révolution. (111e Congrès national des Sociétés savantes. Poitiers, 1986). Edited by C. Petitfrère. Paris: Editions du C.T.H.S., 1986. Pp. 236. Fr. 114.

Idées économiques sous la Révolution, 1789–1794. Edited by J. M. Servet. Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1989. Pp. 477. Fr. 185.

Gestionnaires et profiteurs de la Révolution. By M. Brugière. Paris: Olivier Orban, 1986. Pp. 339. Fr. 150.

L'économie de la Révolution française. By F. Aftalion. Paris: Hachette (Collection Pluriel-Inédit), 1987. Pp. 393. Fr. 50.

One thing is certain regarding the Jacobins: in the bicentenary year, even celebrants of the revolution were anxious to keep them in the shadows. Only some *attardés* – the municipality of Thionville, proposing to erect a statue to the Incorruptible, or Michel Vovelle, explaining 'why we are *still* Robespierristes' – continued to defend a movement so closely related to, and contaminated by, the terror. President Mitterrand's endorsement of Carnot and Danton is itself rather risky, as has been pointed out to him. For though Mitterrand would not have condemned his predecessor, Louis XVI, to death, both his heroes did. While Danton, as everyone knows, was instrumental in establishing the revolutionary tribunal of Paris, Carnot 'organised victory' in a war of brutal exploitation in Europe.

However, even if rehabilitation is needed, this is not the forum to plead it: but the following books, often by providing vital contextual and background evidence, suggest some of the pitfalls of pronouncing too summary a verdict. Speaking more historiographically, we see the insertion of French revolutionary Jacobinism – or Jacobins – into a longer time-span than their 'dictatorship' of the Year II as raising wide-ranging issues, while their articulation within the revolution with other political, socio-economic and ideological groupings also poses difficult questions.

Professor Hampson's *Prelude to terror* confronts 'one of the great tragedies of modern times'. The constituent assembly, opening in optimistic devotion to the common good, ended in a 'failure of consensus' setting the scene for the terror. Yet in September 1791, the terror was still some two years away and, since Hampson often remarks that 'things might have happened differently', was not, despite his title, inevitable. However, his skilful but equivocal blend of narrative and analysis contrives to prepare us for the expected tragic *dénouement*.

For a start, Hampson exaggerates the initial degree of consensus. There was little animosity towards a nobility transforming itself, in most regions, into a 'gentry' and willing to give up its fiscal privileges. The bourgeoisie, here feeble and anonymous, had few serious grievances. A moderate programme of constitutional reform might therefore have 'united all wills in the task of regeneration'. Yet Hampson introduces elements of disharmony and disagreement as if they did not impinge upon, far less contradict, the atmosphere of compromise. Some threats are defused by flippancy. Others are treated more seriously – Rousseau's subversive ideology (though reviewed less virulently than in *Will and circumstance*); criticism of the church; a growing restlessness and 'a tendency to toy with radical and millenarian ideas in the 1780s'; a *parlementaire* rhetoric of republicanism which, though empty, was unsettling. Moreover, in the absence of a free press and open political debate, suspicion of other people's motives was rife, and destined to plague revolutionary politics. Discontented writers devised reckless reform plans, paradoxically displaying an optimism seen, by some, as a positive feature of 1789.

To eliminate the bourgeoisie as seriously challenging the status quo, Hampson exaggerates France's economic backwardness. However, much recent work, by François Crouzet for example, suggests that French economic growth compared reasonably favourably with Britain's until the difficulties of the 1770s and 1780s. These aggravated social tensions symptomatic of grave structural imbalances, lucidly analysed in a considerable body of economically informed literature which influenced the constituent. While rightly stressing the ambiguities of a society being transformed – with money challenging birth as a criterion of success and status – Professor Hampson's comments on socio-economic matters are disappointingly one-dimensional. No vision, enterprise, initiative – in any field – is granted to the bourgeoisie. One small point, at least suggesting the need for circumspection: does it reveal anything more than that the author shares the *préjugés* of revisionism to remark that there were no merchants in the academy of Bordeaux when Laffon de Ladebat was no less a noble for being a merchant (or *vice versa*) and when there were prominent merchants in Marseille's academy (and Bordeaux's *Musée*)?

Hampson pre-emptively credits – or debits – any critically disposed reader with an extremely unsubtle version of marxism, a crude 'industrial and commercial bourgeoisie *versus* feudal landed nobility' thesis. This discourages informed debate. The assertion that 'there was no "industrial and commercial middle class" seething with discontent on the eve of the revolution' hardly encourages examination of the *cahiers* and pamphlets of merchants and manufacturers to see if they had serious political–economical grievances or enlightened ideas of constitutional reform (which most nobles, wedded to hierarchy and the system of orders, would find unacceptable). Hampson states that 'virtually all' prominent *constituents* 'belonged to the same class', uniting nobles and commoners and based on G. V. Taylor's 'proprietary wealth'. This extremely dubious proposition (better to abandon class terms entirely?) grounds a view of the early revolution as a clash of attitudes rather than interests. This again is dubious. Not only do interests often influence attitudes, and *vice versa*, but interests were vigorously pressed in 1789, in a 'discourse of interests' which attempted to justify some, delegitimize others.

At issue for Hampson, was a social organization based on hierarchy and birth, versus one recognizing that 'all men are created equal'. But many nobles would not recognize different types of property as equal, far less men (and on 23 June the king supported them on feudal and seignorial property and its privileges). Thus Hampson's consensus

on the inviolability of property was fragile: hence the confiscation of church property. Here appetites and interests were undoubtedly involved. There was, furthermore, precious little goodwill between the two privileged orders, and little consensus among the clerics.

Hampson treats certain key political questions briskly and brilliantly (despite suggesting that the constituent was just another parliament – merely having to repudiate the past *en bloc!*). He is less censorious than some recent French commentators. The constituent could not avoid tackling the issue of sovereignty and it was not its fault for failing to harmonize 'opposites which are as old as political theory itself'. Deputies often adjusted principles to the demands of politics. The American solution of a supreme court to judge violations of rights was impossible, given antipathy towards parliaments and plenary courts. Burke is upbraided for not following *his* principles: British bicameralism was untranslatable into the idiom of France's political traditions. Certainly those who see the constituent as an 'elective dictatorship' prefiguring the terror receive some support. Charles Lameth claimed its right, as absolute sovereign, to 'rectify public opinion if it was mistaken' while opposition to the legitimacy of opposition, and feelings of mistrust and suspicion, were a poisonous legacy of the old regime. And Hampson's judgement (oddly unconsensual) that 'throughout the revolution, the main motive for political action was fear' points towards the tragedies to follow, especially when applied to foreign policy, with war looming as the deputies dispersed.

The fascinating chapter 'The ambiguities of class conflict' starts by demolishing Barnave and Roederer as possible candidates for seeing the revolution as 'some sort of class conflict'. However Hampson here violates one of his cardinal principles: to look at the opinion of politicians as expressed contemporaneously with the events being analysed. Roederer's analysis written in 1815 is preferred to his pamphlets of 1789. Of course, like Barnave, Roederer did not preach class conflict after the third's breakthrough. But, in 1788, denying that the nobility represented a separate coherent interest (partly because it owned different types of property), he denied it a separate political role and condemned its privileges. Hitherto a champion of industrial interest, Roederer saw the revolution as an opportunity, at least partly taken by the constituent, to harmonize manufacturing, commercial and landed interests, kept artificially divided in the old system. He argued that this 'national interest' of the productive classes would benefit the lower classes and, in 1793, expressed political and theoretical opposition to the egalitarian demands of peasants and *sans-culottes* (*'prolétaires'*) which threatened, in his words, 'the accumulation of capital'.

Hampson, inconsistently, terms the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie 'two separate classes'. Certainly his informative account of debates on the East India company shows the importance of clashes of interest between sectors of the bourgeoisie, also expressed over tariff reform, the colonies, the *assignats* (on which merchants and manufacturers – often the same people – offered cogent warnings, not heeded by legislators or clubbists). Interests were, indeed, often local, though presented as national, in terms of general principles and economic theory (in which Mirabeau was not untutored). In the most useful collection of articles, *Idées économiques sous la révolution*, Pierre-Henri Goutte argues that Dupont de Nemours's interventions in the constituent were pragmatic, though of course theoretically sophisticated, while Pierre Dockes provides a very valuable introduction to the political–economic background of the debate on slavery. Moreover, since traditional moral considerations, often 'anti-wealth', were cited, sometimes sincerely, against the Indies trade in 'luxuries',

economic questions – cordoned off too rigidly by Hampson – were linked to wider 'attitudes'.

This may not amount to 'an assault on a feudal aristocracy by the united forces of the bourgeoisie' but one can cite a whole range of issues on which the constituent attended to the general interests and aspirations of Roederer's productive classes (principles of constitutionality, accountability, civil equality; the creation of a national market; the abolition of the guilds; the sale of the church lands), leaving scope for their various groupings to get on with the serious business of doing each other down. Obviously the revolution should not be reduced to an interplay of interests. Even for Marx, the constituents were not mere defenders of bourgeois interests, selfishly defined. And, at the time, interesting links were made between politics and economics, it being hoped for example that passive citizens might, via successful economic enterprise, attain political activity. Ideas of political democracy need to be related to a possible economic democracy of small but oft-repeated profits. My own research at Marseille convinces me that many political attitudes, including Jacobin ones, were bound up with struggles of 'interest'.

No doubt socio-economic problems are less amenable than politics to Hampson's 'things could have happened otherwise'. However, once one begins re-ordering history in this way, there seems no good reason to stop: the king might have been resolutely far-sighted; the pope sensible; the left, right. And if *vraisemblance* is a test, Hampson's argument that the key decision for war 'might have gone the other way' is refuted by Michael Kennedy's description of the irresistible impetus towards belligerency.

The terror may or may not have been an 'inevitable' tragedy but Hampson challengingly (and enjoyably) confronts directly many of the issues which divided Frenchmen. Hampson's retrospective yearning for consensus, however, almost postulates a French revolution without either politics or ideology – an 'improvement' on the original which would make it (and French history as a whole) much less interesting.

The second volume of Michael Kennedy's trilogy on the Jacobin clubs covers the period from the summer of 1791 to the insurrection of 31 May–2 June 1793. Attractively written and enterprisingly researched, it provides much more than a mere 'prelude to terror'. Yet, even avoiding too reductive a reading, certain relevant points emerge. These tend to modify Augustin Cochin's description of the club network as 'a machine', the cogs obviously without initiative, and his imagery of automatic transmission (generally one-way), a picture repainted, sometimes more crudely, by several recent writers.[1]

The geographical distribution of clubs was patchy. The expansion and contraction of the network, while reflecting certain outside influences – including, realistically, that of the seasons (numerous clubs were founded each spring but clubs were at a low ebb at harvest time) – were fairly chaotic. The 'tyranny' of the mother society seems more mythic than real: its control of affiliation inefficient and its notorious correspondence committee in mothballs for months in the autumn of 1792. The club movement had no single newspaper: preferences for different journals fluctuated considerably. Factionalism, officially condemned by a Jacobinism positing – according to Ferenc Fehér – social and political homogenization, flourished. Kennedy's period opens with the

[1] Ran Halévi and Patrice Gueniffey, in their entry 'Clubs et sociétés populaires' in the *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution*, ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf (Paris, 1988), pp. 492–507, show an extremely uncritical attitude to the theses and approach of Cochin.

Jacobins at a nadir, with the Feuillant split, and finishes with the splits and reversals of allegiance linked with the patchwork of struggles between Girondin and Montagnard factions whose boundaries, unclear at Paris, were even more blurred in the provinces.

But dissensions between and within clubs may merely confirm Cochin's diagnosis of them as 'machines to manufacture consensus', since purges and manipulation by fanatical minorities often caused dissensions which, far from indicating lively debate, genuine clashes of principle, real options regarding policies, were merely fractious and invariably resulted in the victorious group finally imposing silence. Many public-spirited citizens, fleeing the bully-boys, might desert the clubs. Weakened, more creditably perhaps, by the departure of volunteers to the armies and by recruitment into the revolutionary bureaucracy, the clubs might become even easier to manipulate, their democratic pretensions reduced to a sham.

Kennedy only partly confirms this picture. Clubbists always represented a tiny minority and even this was not homogeneous. Globally, membership seems to have continued to slide slowly down the social scale. Fewer were drawn from the upper bourgeoisie (merchants and prominent lawyers for example). There were more peasants (though the more prosperous usually) and more artisans and petty tradesmen. Kennedy cites some embittered teachers (Isoard of Marseille, Fouché, Lacombe) as especially aggressive and vindictive. But the leadership was still respectably 'bourgeois'.

The *sociétés de penséee*, sometimes seen as the model for, as well as precursors of, the clubs, had allegedly been composed of men who, leaving their particular persona and interests at the door, listened only to the abstract voice of reason. However, Kennedy's earlier volume convincingly showed clubs championing collective interests, often local, which doubtless affected clubbists individually too. And though this 'crass local boosterism' declined somewhat, mainly because of the patriotic, national imperatives of war, clubs still campaigned for *lycées*, public works and handouts. This set club against club. Moreover, class consciousness split certain clubs and often, as at Aix, led to the formation of a rival club of a somewhat lower class-composition, with a more radical stance on political as on social questions. In many towns, the bourgeoisie/people split produced two *sociétés*. In certain large cities, a multiplicity of clubs existed, as at Reims, where social and political antagonisms were interwoven in the mistrustful relationship between the central *Société populaire* and the micro-clubs of the sections, illuminated for the later period (1793–4) by Jacques Bernet in the collection *Existe-t-il un fédéralisme jacobin?* At Bordeaux, a competition between a richer club (the Récollets) and a rather more modest one (the *Club national*), enlivened local politics. But this posed problems for a Paris Jacobin club which preferred the one town/one club formula, or to other powerful clubs, like Marseille's, wondering which to affiliate with. Kennedy concludes his review of such divisions: 'There is much truth in the radical-Marxist[2] view of the Revolution, that class conflict was indeed a major determinant'.

Social questions – or *the* social question – preoccupied clubbists in this period. Kennedy discusses a trend towards blaming the rich for the Revolution's troubles, notably those connected with *subsistances*. Here conspiracy theories were particularly rife. In the autumn of 1792, pressure from the public galleries (in itself a force 'from outside') was instrumental in getting many clubs to back policies which included the abrogation of free trade and the death-penalty for hoarders; and divisions on such issues separated radical and moderate clubs in cities like Lyon and Nîmes. 'Popular

[2] The term 'radical-Marxist', refers to what some historians call the 'neo-Jacobin and Marxist' traditions of French revolutionary historiography – closely connected, no doubt, but perhaps not identical.

societies', tending to be pro-Montagnard, were by late 1792 becoming hostile to the prevailing early-Jacobin orthodoxy of economic liberalism. The *maximum* of 4 May 1793 was welcomed by most clubs: 'deregulation had not worked'. Kennedy's chapter on the monetary crisis demonstrates that one reason for these social troubles and this crisis of economic ideology was that the *assignats*, initially demanded by the clubbists, 'had not worked' either. Here there was no reversal of policy but a *fuite en avant* which features prominently in the accounts of Fehér and Aftalion as a precipitant of the terror. On the contentious question of land reform, as with *subsistances*, certain subsequent policies – the sale of *biens nationaux* in small lots or even their gift to the poor or to the families of volunteers – were the subject of insistent demands. Often it was asserted that the break-up of large estates would improve agricultural efficiency, so no economic backwardness was intended. Kennedy describes vividly the clubs' exertions for the war-effort but here also social divisiveness was apparent, with calls for forced taxes on 'the rich'. Here too clubs concerned themselves with intensely practical matters.

In peace and war, then, dissensions seem often to have resulted from real divisions of interest and opinion. They did not merely reflect some 'logic' driving to ever-increasing doctrinal purity. The clubbist, often a man of action, was no mere *homo ideologicus*. Certainly anticlericalism was a strong sentiment. Early enthusiasm for the constitutional clergy quickly evaporated. But Cambon's proposal of 13 November 1792 to abolish the state budget for public worship – 'let the priest, like the businessman, be paid by the consumer' – was decisively rejected. The Vendée discredited the whole church: this may have been tragic, some might say avoidable, but it was also rational.

Kennedy charts fluctuations in the king's popularity but Louis's determined, if stumbling, exhaustion of a considerable capital of goodwill, makes his fate seem predestined. The resultant elections to the convention perhaps show the Paris club, in conjunction with the leading provincial clubs, at its most 'machine-like'; but what emerges from *l'histoire événementielle* of subsequent months is the considerable fund of superiority which, by the spring of 1793, the 'Girondins' had squandered; for they succeeded in playing ineptly a remarkably strong hand. By the end of October 1792, according to Kennedy, it was the Jacobin club which was isolated, and the future Montagnards on the ropes. Paradoxically, perhaps, it was the 'appeal to the people' which undercut the provincial power of the Girondins. No club known to Kennedy publicly disapproved of the execution of Louis XVI. Many historians may see this unanimity as forced, but the vigour of debates throughout winter and spring makes this unlikely. Campaigns for the recall of the *appelants* aroused fierce controversy (with the Marseille club's demands twice rejected as 'federalist' by the Paris Jacobins). The network was splintered by the jousts between Girondins and Montagnards, with many clubbists bewildered, and many clubs pleading for unity in the convention. This was, of course, the last thing they got and Kennedy's book closes on the prolegomena of the federalist revolts. In the spring of 1793, clashes between clubs of different social composition 'lend credence to the contentions of radical-Marxist historians that there were social as well as political differences between the Girondins and Montagnards'. Yet party faction or social antagonism did not crush all judgement. Condorcet's proposed constitution got careful scrutiny from many clubs and if it was dismissed by Paris as 'obscure, impractical and lacking in common sense', this verdict has been re-echoed – though rarely so succinctly – by respectable historians and political philosophers. What is clearly apparent, however, is that clubs, despite their continued abhorrence of Marat, were becoming more and more integrated into the repressive

state which he demanded. Increasingly 'semi-official agents of repression', they were engaged in civil, international and (perhaps) class struggles of extreme ferocity.

Ferenc Fehér is a political philosopher sympathetic to a left-libertarian revolutionary project inspired by the experiments in direct democracy which have existed, alas too briefly, in many revolutions since 1789. He unloads upon 'Jacobinism' everything negative, authoritarian, repressive, in a revolutionary tradition leading from 1793 to Bolshevism and beyond. Jacobinism inaugurated a 'dialectic of freedom' justifying a ruthless minority enforcing its will on the majority, forcing them to be free. Neglecting earlier Jacobinism, Fehér sees the 'epochal' Jacobinism of the thirteen months before Thermidor as lying at the very threshold of 'modernity', constituting 'an unprecedented social experiment existing in its own right' [*sic*], a proto-totalitarian experiment which our experience of totalitarianism allows us to understand and compels us to condemn.

Unfortunately Fehér's account carries a heavy load of inadequately defined philosophical concepts. There are three 'logics', of dubious epistemological and ontological status, in modernity: industrialization; capitalism as an organizing principle of economic life; and the democratic political process orientated towards freedom. These interact variously and are, somehow, constrained by modernity's two key 'value-ideas' – freedom and life, with 'equality' appearing in the revolution only to lose out. This framework is immediately skewed, however, by the extreme weakness of the industrializing logic in France. Like Hampson, but less excusably in a work advertised as placing late eighteenth-century France 'within the wider history of capitalist and industrial development', Fehér ignores recent work on French economic history which might have qualified his view that France 'abhorred' the British experience of industrialization as creating a frightful urban poverty, when, actually, French governments supported numerous efforts to emulate Britain's 'economic miracle'. That programmes to stimulate economic growth were proposed, debated and indeed partly introduced in the early years of the revolution is ignored. Fehér's contention that little effort was made to introduce either welfare measures or modern labour policies is frankly erroneous: in *Idées économiques*, Thierry Vissol provides a lucid analysis of why the very considerable efforts made in the welfare field failed, partly at least because they were subordinated to the needs of a modernizing, industrializing economy. Fehér, however, appears both to expect the urban poor to back industrial development while, more convincingly, ascribing to them traditional, reactionary and anti-industrial attitudes.

The logic of capitalism is presented reasonably clearly in terms consistent with the classic 'bourgeois revolution' thesis, though industry presumably would contribute little to 'the unrestrained accumulation of wealth'. Economic liberalism prevailed before and after a Jacobinism of the Year II which was resolutely anti-capitalist, though the extent to which this ethos was imposed upon the Jacobins by the *enragés* is, though crucial, hopelessly unclear. (The *sans-culottes* hardly appear. Pronouncements on the peasantry are misleading but few.)

Fehér repeats the dictum that the revolution made the bourgeoisie as much as the bourgeoisie made the revolution. Before 1793, a bourgeois universalism somewhat as described by Patrice Higonnet, weakened their capitalist dynamic. This concern for the needy was abandoned after Thermidor. However, Fehér never considers Marx's view that the bourgeoisie in 1789 *strengthened* their thrust by championing the general interests of all subordinate classes, against a feudalism which hindered a capitalist

expansion at least promising benefits for all. Neither Gramsci's attempts to analyse the articulation of the Jacobins with different social groups nor Claude Mazauric's examples of the bourgeoisie 'making itself' in the revolution are discussed.[3]

For Fehér, the 'political logic' was supreme throughout the revolution, indeed from 1789 to 1804, based on a common vocabulary of freedom and life, expressed in the declaration of 1789. Yet this was virtually overthrown by the *enragé* emphasis on the social question and equality, precisely in the thirteen months of Jacobin ascendancy. This, the terror, hardly affirmed freedom which, for Fehér, (as for Rousseau), enjoins respect for the individual, precluding the sacrifice of one life for the hypothetical benefit of a majority or a future generation. If 'life' also means 'existence' in the *sans-culotte* sense, this again asserts the value-idea of equality. Since freedom and life are also weakened when the advancement of the revolution becomes a 'new absolute', justifying anything, and by the 'self-accelerating economic dynamic of the *assignats*', Jacobinism loses its autonomy, hardly existing 'in its own right'.

Yet Fehér hotly defends Jacobinism from being a product, or victim, of 'circumstances', notably those of the war emergency. Few historians would now see Jacobinism only in these terms, but the impact of the war cannot be denied, even if it is difficult to assess. Certainly, in *Idées économiques*, Christian Bruschi shows that the complexity and urgency of the problems occasioned by the financial needs of the war bewildered leading Jacobins such as Robespierre, Danton and Saint-Just, never fully in control of economic and political processes which they did not really understand, proposing policies whose repercussions, though certain to hurt the rich, they did not wholly grasp. The concept of *salut public*, however classical in origin, and the erection of the revolutionary government cannot be divorced from the war situation. If, with François Furet, the war is regarded more as a result of Jacobin ideology than as productive of it, Fehér's Jacobinism (of the terror) again loses its newness. Fehér's attribution of anti-British feelings to the French is supported by quoting Robespierre from May 1793 but, since Kennedy shows the early Jacobins as remarkably pro-British, here too the war was certainly influential. Actually, French attitudes to Britain in the eighteenth century were complex. Hampson has contrasted a sympathetic Montesquieu with a hostile Rousseau but they had different 'Britains' in mind (and different attitudes to commerce, if not yet to industrialism). The war against Britain aggravated not just anti-British feelings, partly inherited from previous wars, but also 'anti-wealth' attitudes directed against the New Carthage, fed also by reaction against the too favourable attitudes embodied in the Eden treaty. Robespierre's scorn for British sham liberty, though doubtless as sinister as Fehér contends, had good Rousseauist credentials. But the Jacobin Navigation Act shows a determination to beat Britain at her own, economic, game. Autarky and austerity were lauded, variations on old themes. War aggravated economic difficulties: old, atavistic demands for price control led to the *maximum*. War increased the susceptibility of Jacobins such as Robespierre to *sans-culotte* arguments, but Kennedy has already chronicled the rise of 'the social question' in the clubs (though how many clubbists were *sans-culottes* cannot be ascertained). Internal counter-revolution, neglected by Fehér, was linked to the war. The involvement of Lyon and the rich port cities in the federalist revolts was bound to heighten Jacobin anti-bourgeois rhetoric.

Fehér scorns attempts to find a class-equivalent for Jacobinism. He is scathing about Crane Brinton's sociological approach and Daniel Guérin's suggestion that the Jacobins represented the 'middling' ranks of the bourgeoisie. Yet local studies suggest

[3] Claude Mazauric, *Jacobinisme et révolution* (Paris, 1984).

that this is indeed the stratum activated in Jacobinism, fiercely anti-noble, anti-clerical, but also, in the port cities, hostile to the 'aristocracy of opulence' of the *haute bourgeoisie*. Their attitudes to 'excessive wealth', often acquired via privilege, monopoly, favouritism, were not necessarily anti-capitalist, quite the reverse. Here too distinctions need to be made. But characterizing Jacobinism as simply anti-industrialist, anti-bourgeois, anti-capitalist, deprives it of any distinct profile, sociological or otherwise, for these are primarily, for Fehér, *enragé* traits.

Fehér rejects Marx's suggestion that Jacobinism merely served the bourgeoisie in a desperate situation, to be discarded when, thanks to its efforts, things improved. But perhaps speaking particularly schematically here, we may argue that the Jacobins did render 'the bourgeoisie' a service by absorbing the shocks of Roederer's *prolétaires*, by an unstable mixture of concern and repression, harnessing 'popular' energies in a war directed against enemies they partly held in common. Certainly this bourgeoisie, fragmented, was fairly notional. Many 'local bourgeoisies' were implicated in the federalist revolts. Yet many bourgeois federalists, ex-Jacobins who hated Marat, would have fought the anti-bourgeois *Vendéens*. Jacobin tribunals condemned the most '*égoïste*' of the *bourgeois* for refusing sacrifices for a war which, for Roederer, did defend the bourgeois gains of 1789–91, if by uncomfortably proletarian (or plebeian) means. With victory, argued Roederer, safely, in 1795, Jacobinism was no longer needed.

Anti-bourgeois attitudes pre-dated war and terror. Eighteenth-century economic growth disturbed many, made them resentful, arousing what Hampson considers the curious belief that the impoverishment of some derived from the *enrichissement* of others. The terror saw an outpouring of anti-rich vindictiveness – yet also spawned *nouveaux riches*. Perhaps Fehér unwisely dismisses Marx's insight that the rhetoric of antique austerity was partly directed to curbing the appetites unleashed by the bourgeois triumph of 1789. Both Brugière and Aftalion testify to the voracity of such appetites. Fehér's discussion of ideological delusion might have prompted him to ask whether, besides speculation and profiteering, capitalism or even industrialism were not pursuing, mole-like, their logics beneath the level of rhetoric, 'logics' even advanced by certain policies of the Jacobins, consolidating and developing those of the constituent.

However, the nature of capitalism needs elucidation.[4] There was no high road down which one clearly-defined class could progress towards a capitalist future. Few groups, few persons, and indeed few texts, were, in this period of flux and turmoil, either unambiguously pro- or anti-capitalist. But many texts, however obliquely and whatever their idiom, grappled with questions related to economic modernity. Even Barère's speech of 4 *ventôse* II on the *maximum*, cited by Fehér as an anti-capitalist tirade (p. 136), claimed that the new *tableau* would spread economic knowledge, freeing political economy from academic sophistry by indicating to what we would call small businessmen the 'kind of production and manufacturing that has to be encouraged, the type of industry that has to be introduced or disseminated' (etc.). Jacobins debated whether middle-sized farms were more efficient than vast estates. Many 'sans-culottes' might be classed as capitalists or even industrialists. Conversely, many theorists of 'communism' were Jacobins rather than *enragés* or *sans-culottes*, if these three categories can be separated.

Fehér sees the *maximum* as 'the economic model for, and basis of, an anti-capitalist revolution within the body of the revolutions'. Such a decisive, indeed dogmatic, judgement goes against the burden of several of the essays in *Idées économiques*, and some

[4] Some thoughts are offered on this topic in W. Scott, 'Commerce, capitalism and the political culture of the French revolution', forthcoming in the journal *History of European Ideas*.

of Fehér's own formulations, by greatly exaggerating the intentional and coherent aspects of revolutionary decision-making. The *maximum* has already been diagnosed as made inevitable by the uncontrollable dynamic of the *assignats*. These helped to bring the war, over-rode the will of many Jacobins to curb their issue, led to the elimination of the Girondins, here portrayed as the most determined of all defenders of *laissez-faire* – they 'chose Greek–Roman death on behalf of an undisturbed stock-market'. Yet, after all this, Fehér the philosopher denies that the *assignats* determined 'the social actions of any social actor with any degree of "necessity"', in order that he might re-affirm 'the primacy of the political', whose fragility we have already noted.

Politically, the Jacobin mentality was largely influenced by a crisis of the late enlightenment, in which hopes of progress and perfectibility seemed dashed by a cruel reality. This predisposed 'the future Jacobin actor' to extraordinary measures to force a recalcitrant and degraded majority to be free (and virtuous, and poor...), thus giving a free rein to a vindictiveness easily directed against the rich and fortunate. Robespierre, in his proposed declaration of rights of 24 April 1793, ominously pronounced it the duty of the rich to ensure the well-being of the poor and designated certain types of property as illicit and immoral, certain categories of people as uncivic. This armed the state with power to mould civil society, thus swamping the liberal, democratic elements also in the project. Here was the birth of 'one of the most fateful principles of modern politics: the dialectics of freedom' – a theoretically anti-modern feature coming to sinister fruition only in this century. Married to 'an endless capacity of compassion for the poor', this redemptive mission, since its goal was praiseworthy, justified every atrocity, especially against the rich. Thus Jacobinism could not promote class formation. It aimed at a homogenized society, though not for absolute social equality. This the *enragés* (or *sans-culottes*?) demanded. Unfortunately, Fehér's pronouncements on the sectionary movement and its relationship to Jacobinism and the terror are extremely incoherent and contradictory.

Fehér concludes, probably realistically, that material shortage is not conducive to democracy, certainly not to the direct democracy of the labouring classes, dehumanized by famine. But what is clear is that, however reluctantly (and Fehér's judgement vacillates on this), the Jacobins regarded the social question as absolutely central: but they bequeathed the task of solving it to future revolutions. Unlike Arendt, Fehér does not think the Jacobins could have ignored the social question but he deplores that it was given priority over freedom, which for him must be the main concern of revolutionaries.

Fehér raises challenging issues. But he risks obscuring the historical Jacobins under his rather clumsily fabricated concept of Jacobinism. The *divisions* among the Jacobins were important, and relevant to their downfall. For example, three articles in the collection on Jacobin federalism analyse attempts to establish regional networks of *sociétés populaires* in the autumn and winter of 1793. Partly to eradicate the remnants of 'Girondin' federalism, advocating radical policies on *subsistances*, but also pressing for a 'sans-culottization' of the war, they were understandably viewed with distrust by a revolutionary government for which any manifestation of independence, especially at the periphery, was ominous. Jacques Guilhaumou traces links between the Hebertists of Paris and the Jacobins of Marseille, enough at least to confirm the worst suspicions of the increasingly absolutist and centralist Montagnards. This is still a murky area. Ambiguities of terminology indicate not only divisions but also sub-divisions in 'Jacobinism'.

Jacobin diversity is perhaps more surprising than their divisions. So Fehér's final

question, 'was Jacobinism proto-socialist?', while crude, is also intriguing, precisely because of the very varied economic ideas of the Jacobins. Charles-Albert Michalet, in *Idées économiques*, shows the intricacies (or incoherence) of Saint-Just's thought, oft-quoted *laissez-faire* pronouncements contrasting with fundamentally anti-capitalist values. Other Jacobins advocated draconian schemes for the '*partage égal*' of land, sometimes bizarrely combined with free-enterprise industry and *machinisme*. Yet others outlined communitarian projects marrying popular capitalism and socialism in ways prefiguring certain nineteenth-century experiments, all of which mixed the creative and the repressive, the modern and the reactionary. In a footnote, Fehér commends a 'dialectical' approach. It is a pity that he does not practise this in the body of his text.

Michel Brugière, however, is very conscious of different 'levels' of history. In seeking out those who profited from the revolution, even in the terror, Brugière descends into a milieu somewhat removed from the 'dictatorship over needs' or the republic of virtue. And, in a splendidly caustic opening, he accuses many families, of impeccable Catholic and right-wing credentials, of condemning the revolution while enjoying comfortably and complacently, the profits their forefathers made therein. One can understand how respectable bourgeois, and their historians, find it hard to recognize, still less acknowledge, the terrorism of their ancestors.

Here too, questions of periodization and continuity are important, as are unintended consequences. The continuity of certain families, clans, clientèles, serving the state's finances, was impressive throughout Brugière's period (from the end of the old regime to the consulate) but derived from a bureaucratic expansion negating the '*moins d' Etat*' desired by the constituent. Brugière explores the linkages between public office and the 'private' worlds of the merchant, banker, industrialist, speculator, operating in interlinked networks, sometimes regionally based but often with international ramifications. John Bosher has analysed the structure of office, and H. Lüthy and Louis Bergeron already allow entry into some of Brugière's *circuits*; but here power and profit are linked even more intimately with the economy, as for instance in the section '*indiennage et géopolitique*'. Fehér's 'command economy' seems coherent, even grandiose, but sterile, compared with the waste, confusion, but also profusion and proliferation uncovered by Brugière. Certainly this does not rule out Fehér's 'proto-totalitarianism' but, at the heart of '*l'économie nationalisée*' there were few 'proto-socialists' – though there lurked some Jacobins, and even some 'sans-culottes', in humbler posts.

Brugière insists on the priority of war needs. They were basically satisfied – by any means, however dubious. For public purposes, private interests were both exploited and exploiters. Victory virtually forced Robespierre on 8 thermidor to attack the malpractices of the treasury and its chief the Montagnard (Jacobin?) Cambon, malpractices to which he had perforce turned a blind eye during the emergency. Victory also, bringing the likelihood of scrutiny, forced those threatened by Robespierre to attack pre-emptively. During the terror, the treasury functioned largely independently of 'politics', providing a lucrative berth for administrators linked with old regime finance. The world, or underworld, of money had its casualties – capriciously inflicted – and its brilliant successes but, for most, survival was the basic object of the game. A law to themselves, with numerous strategies against political interference, with a wealth of resources making them indispensable, expanding in number and increasingly entrenched, their operations facilitated by the levelling destructiveness of a revolution which had put the French at their mercy, the financial bureaucrats managed a tentacular empire where probity and equity were hardly patron saints.

If they tried themselves to remain in the shadows, Bruguière accuses posterity of prolonging their obscurity, hidden hands carefully ensuring that revealing documents have not entered the public domain. The blindness of historians of the republican (Jacobin?) tradition, dazzled by political personalities and ideological conflicts, seeing the revolution as a new and purifying beginning, combines with right-wing disapproving discretion to deter investigation. Hence the story of these *manieurs d'argent* has remained the 'shameful secret' of revolutionary historiography. Brugière admits that he has lifted the lid only slightly. But his prosopographical detective work has revealed many unsuspected *liaisons*, often *dangereuses*, generally *louches*. His view of this 'black hole', '*c'est dans ce silence opaque et complexe que les transitions s'effectuent en douceur, que les permanences, peu à peu, deviennent indiscutables*', merits reflection.

Like Brugière, Florin Aftalion tends to relegate Fehér's Jacobinism to less than epochal significance. Influenced by neo-liberal economists von Hayek and Friedman, Aftalion serenely affirms that '*la théorie économique peut parfaitement expliquer pourquoi la Révolution française, entreprise pour mettre fin à la "tyrannie" et établir une société de droit, a dégénéré en spoliations, Terreur et dictature*'. As an economist, Aftalion derides politicians, especially democratic ones, for they always take easy, short-term decisions to satisfy their rather stupid constituents. Like Fehér, he sees the *assignats* as an initially easy substitute for new taxes. The vast expansion of the money supply inevitably produced an economic shambles, involving both economic and political terror. The *maximum*, an 'answer' to the resultant inflation, created famines and their accompanying disorders.

As with Fehér, it is Aftalion's perspective, rather than any new information (though he also prints useful documents) which is interesting. Especially striking are his excuses for the failure of precursors of neo-liberalism: Turgot freed the grain trade at a moment, August 1774, '*politiquement mal choisi*' since the 1774 harvest was bad and dearth was blamed on his policy. The poor, who suffered from this crisis, were incapable of understanding that, in the long term, Turgot's policy would have benefited them. Their myopia – and that of the poor in the revolution – prevented them from seeing that hoarders and speculators, by buying when prices were low and selling when high, moderated disruptive fluctuations.

Given its over-investment in politics, the revolution was bound to be economically disastrous. Yet Aftalion attributes to politicians more positive power than they had: to enforce tax payment in 1789 was surely beyond their power. Certainly their illusory view that the people would willingly pay taxes, now 'equal', added to their discomfiture, while the *assignats* probably delayed tax reform and prevented a necessary strengthening of the executive power. As many economic practitioners and theorists had warned, the poorer classes and the towns were the worst victims of a paper money designed to favour 'the people'. Many Montagnards suspended their inner belief in liberal economic principles and backed the *maximum*. Thereafter, Aftalion's critique of political–economic dictatorship is merciless – not without much justification – but the 'indescribable chaos' unfortunately prevents him from costing, for example, France's war effort. Carnot's encouragement of the systematic pillage of conquered lands, the proliferation of incompetent bureaucrats, and the devastation of *biens nationaux* were signs not just of chaos but of a regime of '*corruption généralisée*'.

Two separate points, relying on a rudimentary monetarism, are bound to be controversial: the abolition of the *maximum* did not materially contribute to the popular distress of 1795; the fluctuation of the *assignats* depended on purely economic factors, rather than on counter-revolutionary activities or a lack of confidence in the revolution. The fact that the latter point is contradicted by Aftalion himself suggests that monetarism is not sufficient as an explanatory force.

Ferenc Fehér provides the most determined attempt to '*penser le jacobinisme*', but only to exorcise it. The other works help us to understand more fully the problems faced by the Jacobins and the nature of their attempts to overcome them. Whether they persuade us to celebrate their efforts in 1993 or not, they may help to ensure that the indispensable commemoration will be reasonably well informed. By then, of course, our attitudes are likely to be heavily influenced by the course of the revolutions set in motion, with such high hopes of peace and democracy, in eastern Europe in 1989.

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