



# GLOSSARY OF FRENCH TERMS

- Ancien Régime.** The term is most commonly applied to the way of life and government in France which the 1789 Revolution destroyed.
- Armée révolutionnaire.** A citizen army of *sans-culottes* (see below), raised in various regions in the autumn of 1793 and primarily intended to ensure the grain-supply of Paris and other cities.
- Bourgeois, bourgeoisie.** A generic term more or less synonymous with urban middle classes – bankers, stock-brokers, merchants, large manufacturers, and professional men of every kind.
- Brisotins.** Followers of Jacques-Pierre Brissot, journalist and deputy for Eure-et-Loire, at the time of the Legislative Assembly. (See also *Girondins*).
- Chouans.** royalist insurgents who took their name from four brothers named Cottureau, known more often as Chouan, a corruption of *chat-huant*, screech-owl, because they imitated that bird's cry in order to recognize each other in the woods at night. Three of the four brothers were killed in battle. *Chouans* were active in La Vendée, Brittany and Normandy.
- Comités révolutionnaires, or 'revolutionary' (or 'vigilance') committees.** The local committees attached to the Sections (see below) created in April, 1793, and made responsible for police and internal security.
- Committee of General Security.** One of the two main government committees of the Year II (see below), specifically charged with responsibility for police and internal security.
- Committee of Public Safety.** The more important of the two leading government committees of the Year II. Generally responsible for the conduct of both internal and external affairs, its powers overlapped with those of the Committee of General Security in police and judicial matters.
- Commune.** Title given to the Paris local government that emerged at the City Hall (Hôtel de Ville) after the fall of the Bastille. It was to be followed by other communes in the nineteenth century.
- Cordeliers Club.** The more plebeian, and generally the more radical, of the two major clubs of the Revolution in Paris. The best-known of its leaders were (at various times) Marat, Danton, Hébert, Vincent and Ronsin.
- Dantonists.** Basically, the friends of Danton (e.g. Desmoulins, Legendre, Merlin de Thionville, Fabre d'Églantine); but, by extension, the term 'Dantonist' was also applied to the Indulgents, or opponents of the Terror (e.g. Bourdon de l'Oise, Delacroix, Thuriot), and certain business-operators (Fabre, Basire, Philippeaux), all of whom formed the opposition from the right in the factional crisis of the spring of 1793. (See also *Factions*).
- Décade.** The 10-day periods into which the Republican 30-day month was divided.
- De-christianization.** The attack on Christian clergy and religion (both Catholic and Protestant) mounted by Hébert and his supporters (see Hébertists) in the autumn of 1793. It took the form of closing churches, stripping clergy of their vestments and offices and of promoting the cult of the Goddess of Reason. The 'de-christianizers' came under government censure after Robespierre's speech denouncing them on 21 November, 1793.
- Emigrés.** Nobles, clergy and others who emigrated from France from July, 1789 onwards.
- Enragés.** extremist revolutionaries, led by Jacques Roux and Jean Vart, who became a powerful force in Paris in 1793. They were particularly antagonistic to those suspected of hoarding or speculating.
- Estates General (Etats Généraux).** The French national assembly, consisting of representatives of the three orders or estates. These estates elected their deputies and drew up their grievances separately. They also debated separately after the Estates General had assembled. The last meeting of the Estates General before 1789 was in 1614.
- Factions.** The term applied, in particular, to the two opposing factions of Dantonists (the right) and Hébertists (the left) in the political crisis that reached its climax in March-April, 1793.
- Faubourgs.** Literally 'suburbs', originally, as in Paris, lying outside the old city walls but gradually enclosed within the modern city as it grew. In the Revolution, the term is more particularly applied to the great popular 'faubourgs' of Saint-Antoine and Saint-Marcel.
- General Wills.** Rousseau's term for the collective will of the community at large.
- Girondins.** Name originally given, as an alternative to *Brisotins* (see above), to a group of left-wing deputies in the Legislative Assembly, who supported Brissot's policy of a 'revolutionary war' in the autumn and winter of 1791 and several of whom came from the south-western region of the Gironde. Later applied to a wider group, emanating from the first, who shared a more-or-less common political and social programme in opposition to that of the main body of Jacobins.
- Hébertists.** A convenient but imprecise term originally applied to the followers and associates of Jacques-René Hébert, editor of *Le Père Duchesne*. By extension, Hébertism came to be applied to all groups taking part in the left opposition to the Revolutionary Government in the autumn of 1793 and the spring of 1794. (See also *Dantonists* and 'Factions').
- Jacobins, Jacobin Club.** Name assumed by the members of the former Breton Club when they established themselves in the former Couvent des Jacobins in Paris in October, 1789. The club went through a series of transmutations – through the secession of the Feuillants (June 1791) and the successive purges of Girondins, Dantonists and Hébertists – and ended up in the summer of 1794 as the group within the original Jacobin Club who remained devoted to Robespierre. The Club was dissolved by the Thermidorians in November, 1794. (See also *Mountain*).
- Journée (or journée révolutionnaire).** A day of revolutionary struggle in which crowds, generally composed of *sans-culottes*, participated, e.g. capture of Bastille, overthrow of monarchy, expulsion of Girondin leaders from Convention.
- Levée en masse.** Law of 23 August, 1793, mobilizing the whole French nation for war.
- Livre (or franc).** In 1789, roughly equivalent to 1s. 8d. sterling. There were 20 sous to the *livre*.
- Marseillais, La.** First called the '*Chant de guerre pour l'armée du Rhin*' when published at Strasbourg, becoming known by its present title when popularized by the *Marseilles fédérés* in Paris. It was banned for a time by Napoleon and after the Restoration.
- Maximum.** There were two laws of the Maximum: that of May, 1793, imposing a limit on the price of grain only; and that of September, 1793, extending price-control to most articles of prime necessity, including labour (*maximum des salaires*).
- Mountain.** Name acquired by the Jacobin deputies for Paris, led by Robespierre, who, after their election to the National Convention in September, 1792, sat in the upper seats of the Chamber. By extension, term later applied to similarly-minded deputies from all over France.
- National Assembly.** The term is here used for each of the successive parliaments of the Revolution: Constituent Assembly (June, 1789 - September, 1791); Legislative Assembly (October, 1791 - August, 1792); National Convention (September, 1792 - October, 1795).
- National Guard, citizens' army, or militia,** originally raised by the Paris districts



(see *Sections*) in July, 1789.

**Noble.** Legally, a noble was a person who enjoyed privileges which belonged to all members of the second estate as in, for example, the right to carry a sword, to be tried by a special tribunal if he committed a criminal offence, to be exempt from the *Taille*, the *corvée*, etc. Families were ennobled in the following ways:

(1) by royal grant (given in return for money or other services, or because of an office which conferred nobility).

(2) by virtue of a title dating back to 1400 (*noblesse chevaleresque*) or to 1500 (*noblesse d'ancienne extraction*) for which no royal grant could be proved.

Even from the purely legal point of view, however, there were awkward cases: for example, the people who held offices conferring nobility that remained personal as distinct from hereditary until certain conditions were fulfilled (e.g., until the office had been held for twenty-five years). In 1789 nobles in this category were not allowed to vote with the order of the nobility in the elections to the Estates General.

From every point of view other than the purely legal one, the problem of what constituted the noble presented the same difficulties as did the allied problem of what constituted the *bourgeois*.

**Parlements.** The Parlements were not parliaments in the modern sense of the word since their members were not elected but bought their offices, and since their principal function was the administration of justice. In 1789, there were thirteen Parlements – the Parlements of Paris, Toulouse, Grenoble, Bordeaux, Dijon, Rouen, Aix, Rennes, Pau, Metz, Besançon, Douai and Nancy. Each was the highest court of justice in its area. Besides their judicial functions, the Parlements exercised wide powers of police and administration and acquired great political power by virtue of the fact that royal edicts did not have the force of law in any area unless registered by the Parlement concerned.

**Privilégiés.** The privileged orders, i.e. the clergy (though generally applied only to the higher clergy) and nobility, on the eve and at the beginning of the French Revolution.

**Representatives on mission.** Deputies sent to the provinces, after March, 1793, to impose the policies of the Convention and Committee of Public Safety.

**Révolution nobiliaire.** The revolt of the nobility and Parlements (higher courts of law) of 1787-8, which served as a curtain-raiser to the Revolution of 1789.

**Revolutionary Government.** The strongly centralized government, first proposed by Robespierre, Saint-Just and their associates on the Committee of Public Safety in October, 1793, and

adopted by the Convention in the law of 14th Frimaire (4 December, 1793).

**Revolutionary Tribunal.** High court of justice created in March, 1793, to try all offences against the State by new and 'revolutionary' procedures.

**Sans-culottes.** An omnibus term (literally, those who wore trousers and not knee-breeches), sometimes applied to all the poorer classes of town and countryside; but, more particularly to urban craftsmen, small shopkeepers, petty traders, journeymen, labourers and city poor. By extension, attached as a political label to the more militant revolutionaries of 1792-5 regardless of social origins.

**Sections.** The 48 units into which Paris became divided for electoral (and general political) purposes, in succession to the 60 districts created in April 1789, by a municipal law of May-June, 1790.

**Seigneurie, Seigneur.** The *seigneurie* (or, to give the nearest English equivalent, the manor) normally consisted of two different kinds of property of which the second was its distinguishing feature. In the terminology of the *Ancien Régime*, these two kinds of property were the *domaine proche* or *direct*, and the *domaine utile* or *mouvance*. The *domaine proche* or *direct* was an area of land of which the *seigneur* usually cultivated a part for his own use with paid labour and let out the rest to tenant farmers or share-croppers. The *domaine utile* or *mouvance* was an area inhibited by so-called peasant proprietors who were required to render to the *seigneur* those payments and services known as 'feudal dues'. Since the *seigneurie* had existed before the appearance of specifically feudal institutions, and also outlasted them, it is often maintained that these dues should properly be described as seigneurial and not feudal. The *seigneur* was not necessarily a noble. Long before the eighteenth century, *bourgeois* had bought *seigneuries*. Nor was the noble necessarily a *seigneur*, though if he were not, his aim was always to become one, since this title was a much prized one.

**Sociétés populaires (or sectionnaires).** General term applied to the local clubs and societies after the summer of 1791. Many were affiliated to the Jacobin Club; but, after the 'law of the 40 *sous*', many, to avoid the Parent-Club's surveillance, set up independently. In consequence, these societies came to be frowned on by the Committee of Public Safety; many were closed down after the fall of Hébert; more were closed shortly before and shortly after Thermidor; a few stragglers, however, managed to survive until the early months of 1795.

**Suspects.** Persons suspected of harbouring treasonable designs against the Revolution; term in use from August,

1792 on. Several 'suspects' were rounded up and gaoled at this time but there was no general Law of Suspects, entitling such persons to be arrested and brought before the Revolutionary Tribunal; until 5 September, 1793. It marked the official opening of the Terror and filled the prisons in the months that followed.

**Taille.** The principal direct tax paid by all commoners (*roturiers*) before the Revolution, usually levied on personal income (*taille personnelle*), more rarely on land (*taille réelle*).

**Taxation populaire.** Reduction of food prices by riot (examples here given: in the Orléanais in November-December 1792; in Paris in February, 1793).

**Terror.** Here used in two senses: 'terror' (with a small 't') as a mode of compulsion, either official or 'popular' (such as in September Massacres, 1792); and 'Terror' which generally applies to a period rather than to a method: the period September, 1793, to July, 1794, when the Jacobin (or Revolutionary) Government imposed its authority by varying means of compulsion – military, judicial and economic. Hence, also, the 'Great Terror' of June-July, 1794.

**Thermidor.** The month in the Revolutionary Calendar running from 19 July to 17 August. It applied, in particular, to the two days in Thermidor (9th and 10th) of the Year II, which saw the overthrow of Robespierre and his associates and the end of the Revolutionary Government. Hence, *Thermidorians*, i.e. Robespierre's immediate successors.

**Third Estate.** Literally, the representatives of the non-privileged of the three estates summoned to attend the Estates General. More generally, used to denote all social classes other than the aristocracy, upper clergy and wealthy magistrates.

**Tricoteuse.** A woman who sat and knitted during the sessions of the Revolutionary Tribunal and around the guillotine.

**Vendée.** A département created in 1789-90, covering the area of Poitou, south from the Bay of Bourgneuf to the mouth of the Vendée at L'Aiguillon-sur-Mer. La Vendée was the heart from 1793 to 1796 which spread northwards into Brittany.

**Virtue.** Here generally used, as by Robespierre, in the sense of civic virtue (e.g. love of country or loyalty to the Jacobin cause) rather than in that of private morality or virtuous conduct in personal relations.

**Year II.** The second year of the French Republic, i.e. from 22 September, 1793, to 21 September, 1794. Most often, as here, applied to the period of office of the great Committee of Public Safety (27 July, 1793 - 27 July, 1794).