

« Elle n'a pas même épargné ses membres ! » Parliamentary Purging at the National Convention between 1793 and 1795

Mette Harder

TRANSLATION **Joan Johnson**

IN **ANNALES HISTORIQUES DE LA RÉVOLUTION FRANÇAISE 2015/3 No 381** , PAGES 77 TO 105

PUBLISHER **ARMAND COLIN**

ISSN 0003-4436

ISBN 9782200929855

DOI 10.4000/ahrf.13615

Uploaded: 01/16/2016

Article available online at

<https://shs.cairn.info/journal-Annales-historiques-de-la-revolution-francaise-2015-3-page-77?lang=en>



Discover the contents of this issue, follow the journal by email, subscribe...
Scan this QR code to access the page for this issue on Cairn.info.



Electronic distribution Cairn.info for Armand Colin.

You are authorized to reproduce this article within the limits of the terms of use of Cairn.info or, where applicable, the terms and conditions of the license subscribed to by your institution. Details and conditions can be found at cairn.info/copyright.

Unless otherwise provided by law, the digital use of these resources for educational purposes is subject to authorization by the Publisher or, where applicable, by the collective management organization authorized for this purpose. This is particularly the case in France with the CFC, which is the approved organization in this area.



“ELLE N’A MÊME PAS ÉPARGNÉ SES MEMBRES!” PARLIAMENTARY PURGING AT THE NATIONAL CONVENTION BETWEEN 1793 AND 1795

Mette HARDER

There has been a recent revival in interest in parliamentary purging during the French Revolution, as represented by Michel Biard’s *La Liberté Ou La Mort: Mourir en député 1792-1795*, Marisa Linton’s work on the ‘Politicians’ Terror’ and Colin Jones’ research into 9 Thermidor.¹ When looking at the Convention’s purges, historians have, generally, tended to pay much attention to incidents occurring shortly before or during the Terror, and less to the purges of legislators after Robespierre’s fall.² If those purges are discussed, then it is almost exclusively as the results of the particular reactionary dynamic of the year III. But what about the possibility of a more direct link between the purges of Conventionnels before and after 9 Thermidor, of continuities between the successive arrests of legislators under the Terror and the Reaction? The aim of this work is to investigate these possibilities. In putting an emphasis on the complex

(1) Michel BIARD, *La Liberté où la mort: Mourir en député 1792-1795* (Paris: Tallandier, 2015); Michel BIARD, Hervé LEUWERS (ed), *Visages de la Terreur* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2014); Marisa LINTON, *Choosing Terror: Virtue, Friendship and Authenticity in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Colin JONES, “The Overthrow of Maximilien Robespierre and the “Indifference” of the People,” in *The American Historical Review* 119, No. 3 (2014): p. 689-713; Jones, “9 Thermidor: Cinderella among Revolutionary Journées,” in *French Historical Studies* 38, No. 1 (2015): p. 9-31.

(2) With the notable exception of works on the ‘last Montagnards’ by Françoise Brunel. See, for example, Françoise BRUNEL and Sylvain GOUJON, *Les Martyrs de Prairial: Textes et documents inédits* (Genève: Georg, 1992); BRUNEL, “Mélanges sur l’historiographie de la Réaction thermidorienne pour une analyse politique de l’échec de la voie jacobine,” in *AHRF* LI (1979), p. 456-474; BRUNEL, “L’épuration de la Convention nationale en l’an III,” in Michel Vovelle (Ed.), *Le Tournaient de l’an III – Réaction et Terreur blanche dans la France révolutionnaire* (Paris: CTHS, 1997), pp. 15-26.

origins of parliamentary purging in the Convention – that go far beyond Jacobin ideology – it examines contemporary justifications for the practice and analyses the experiences of victims, perpetrators, and onlookers.

Understanding that parliamentary purging in the French Revolution was not simply a result of the Terror – or a phenomenon caused chiefly by Jacobin ideology – serves several purposes. First, it shows that intolerant, anti-democratic and repressive impulses in revolutionary politics were not merely, and not simply, the “fault” of Jacobin politicians. Rather, the problem was more widespread, affecting the Revolution’s entire political cadre from 1793 onwards. After all, not just Jacobin politicians, but leading Conventionnels from all major political directions eventually embraced parliamentary purging as an integral and necessary – if painful – part of conducting the business of politics. From the trial of Marat onwards to the execution of the ‘last Montagnards’, the arrest, imprisonment and prosecution of elected politicians became a habit, encouraged by deputies on left and right, who, while politically and personally opposed, shared a common belief in the need ‘to purge once more’. As Dubois-Crancé complained to his colleagues at the Convention in Thermidor III:

What did the factions demand after 31 May? They said: *purge yourselves*, and a hundred of our colleagues were persecuted and France became covered in Bastilles and scaffolds [...]. Too long [...] oppressed by the Terror [...] you finally emerged as victors over tyranny. [...] And yet, since that time, what are you being asked for? *To purge yourselves*. A hundred other deputies were persecuted, yet one still asks you to *purge once more*. They will not stop asking [for a purge] [...] until you believe that you need one.³

Despite changing regimes, ideologies and political contexts, the practice of parliamentary purging at the Convention remained a continuous, permanent feature. Recognising this also reveals important continuities between the periods usually designated as Terror and Reaction. Rather than exceptional, the great parliamentary purges of the year II were part of enduring mechanisms and a persistent culture of violence within the revolutionary legislature that stretched into the year III and beyond. As

(3) « Que vous demandaient les factieux après le 31 mai ? Ils vous disaient : *Épurez-vous*, et cent de nos collègues ont été proscrits, et la France a été couverte de bastilles et d’échafauds [...]. Trop longtemps [...] comprimés par la terreur, vous avez enfin abattu la tyrannie [...]. Eh bien, depuis cette époque, que vous a-t-on demandé ? *de vous épurer*. Cent autres députés ont été proscrits, et l’on vous demande de vous *épurer encore*. On ne cessera de le demander avec une nouvelle fureur, tant que vous ferez de croire en avoir besoin. » Edmond-Louis-Alexis DUBOIS-CRANCÉ, *Réimpression*, Vol. 25, p. 411.

such, the practice is comparable to other cyclical forms of political violence in the Revolution, such as the reactions in the Midi, that impacted on, and disturbed, the whole revolutionary decade.⁴ Analysing similarities (in regard to the numbers of deputies arrested, for example, and to the language used to justify such arrests) and differences (concerning, notably, the number of death sentences passed against politicians, elevated in 1793-94) in parliamentary purging during the years II and III complicates our vision of revolutionary politics and violence, the ways they were connected, and how they connected, rather than separated, Terror and Reaction. As Jean-Clément Martin and Annie Jourdan have recently argued, continuities in revolutionary violence beyond the year II are evident in revolutionary action, thought, rhetoric and legislation.⁵ This study contributes to this picture by placing the lesser-known parliamentary purges of the Thermidorian Convention on a continuum with those of the Jacobin Republic and analysing their common causes and consequences.

By its very nature, the issue of parliamentary purging at the National Convention stands at the cutting edge of the issue of democracy, political representation and state failure in the French Revolution. In providing the first detailed history of all the major purges of the National Convention, this article draws attention to the considerable impact this pervasive and destructive practice had on the first French republic not just during the Terror, but throughout the mid-1790s. As a consequence of parliamentary purging, elected representatives became political prisoners, and, if they took flight, outlaws. Politicians lost colleagues and friends, and members of the public their representatives. Why did the National Convention self-destruct in so spectacular a fashion? Why did its members persecute each other, taking away rights and freedoms – sometimes under public pressure, sometimes against the public’s will – and robbing the assembly and the country of its most talented, outspoken and visionary of political leaders? Even more acute is the issue as to what degree public spirit, hopes for the republic’s future, and respect for its democracy suffered from the permanent physical and psychological assault on the Revolution’s political leaders that the purges represented. When members of the “Girondin” group died from unsanitary and inhuman conditions in prison in 1793, when Saint-Just, ‘26

(4) See, for example, Stephen Clay, “Vengeance, justice and the reactions in the Revolutionary Midi,” in *French History* 23, No. 1(2009): p. 22-46.

(5) Jean-Clément MARTIN, *Violence et Révolution: Essai sur la naissance d’un mythe national* (Paris: Seuil, 2006); Annie JOURDAN, “Les discours de la terreur à l’époque révolutionnaire (1776-1798): Etude comparative sur une notion ambiguë,” *French Historical Studies* 36, No. 1 (2013): p. 51-81.



years, handsome, spiritual, educated [...] full of promise for the future', was dragged to the scaffold in the summer of 1794, his head 'bowed, with a shameful air', when the 'last Montagnards' ended their lives using rusty kitchen knives and scissors in the following year, the sovereign nation was invariably injured in the person of one or several of its representatives.⁶ To what degree the purges of elected politicians therefore contributed to the ultimate decline of French democracy in the 1790s is a question that this article, if unable answer, would at least like to raise.

The National Convention: A mutilated assembly?

At the end of 1795, shortly before the assembly's dissolution, a pamphleteer described the National Convention's experiences and fate:

See what has until now been the price of its long and tedious works: of all its members, most of them were hit by persecution: some were taken to the scaffold, others forced to take their own lives: some you saw being thrown into dungeons, others found no other asylum than in dark and underground caves [...]. Which battalion has ever returned more mutilated from combat?⁷

More so than any other revolutionary assembly, the Convention, as Michel Biard's recent study has shown, paid a terribly high price for its political engagement. Between 1792 and 1795, 96 of its members died from non-natural causes, including assassinations, suicides and deaths while on mission.⁸ At least 232 deputies, thus almost a third of Conventionnels, fell victim to great waves of purges between 1793 and 1795 – many perished as a result of the consequences of purging: Executions, incarcerations, and deportations. According to the Conventionnel Baudot, the purges struck, above all, 'the most eloquent members of the Convention' who 'almost all died in the stormy battles of this assembly, because they were the most

(6) « Je vis Saint-Just et Dumas conduits par détachement armé et suivis de la foule. Accouplés par une corde, ils marchaient la tête baissée, l'air honteux, comme des filous pris sur le fait. C'était un spectacle pénible que celui d'un jeune homme de 26 ans, d'une figure intéressante, spirituel, instruit, d'un caractère ardent et fort, plein d'avenir, traîné à l'échafaud [...]. » Antoine-Claire THIBAudeau, *Mémoires sur la convention et le directoire*, edited by François PASCAL (Paris: SPM, 2007), p. 119.

(7) « Voyez quelle fut jusqu'ici le prix de ses longs et pénibles travaux : de tous ses membres, la plupart ont été frappés de proscription : les uns ont été conduits à l'échafaud, les autres forcés de se donner eux-mêmes la mort : ceux-ci, vous les avez vu plongés dans les cachots, ceux-là n'ont trouvé d'azyle [sic] que dans des cavernes obscures et souterraines [...]. Quel bataillon est jamais revenu plus mutilé d'un combat ? » ANON., *Les Adieux de la Convention nationale au peuple français*. Paris: De l'Imprimerie Française, [1795], p. 3-4. BNF 8- LB41- 4622.

(8) BIARD, *La Liberté où la mort*, p. 195.

visible, and consequently, the most exposed to passionate hatreds, such as Vergniaud, Guadet, Gensonné, Condorcet, Danton, Billaud-Varennes, Saint-Just, Robespierre himself and others.⁹ What were the causes of this ‘killing of deputies’?

The chronology of the Conventionnels’ arrests shows that the role of the Terror in provoking parliamentary purging was, contrary to what one might expect, rather limited. The number of purged deputies was certainly high at the beginning of the Terror, above all in June 1793 (33 deputies purged) and in October (85 deputies purged). But it also reached significant levels during the Reaction, when a total of 81 deputies were purged from the assembly, 72 between germinal and thermidor year III alone. Also notable is that the number of victims was considerably lower at the height of the Terror, with “only” four deputies arrested in germinal II and five on 9 thermidor. On the other hand, the death toll amongst deputies was extremely elevated at that time, with deputies around Danton and Robespierre receiving death sentences. The fact that the Convention’s mass-purges were clustered at the beginning (1793) and after the Terror (1795), and that parliamentary purging stretched over a period much longer than the year II, suggests, however, that purging was not only the consequences of a Jacobin ideology or linked specifically to the Terror. It therefore makes sense to look at it as a general problem that impacted on the Convention throughout its entire government, and to ask: Why did purging happen to and in this particular assembly throughout the mid-1790s?

Purges at the Convention: Common causes, rhetoric, and justifications

The desire to arrest and imprison deputies preceded the Convention. As Charles Walton recently reminded us, the National Assembly discussed and passed three-day sentences at the Abbaye against some of its own members. Their primary intent seems to have been disciplinary: To punish unruly deputies who violated codes of honour, offended or transgressed

(9) Selon le Conventionnel Baudot, les expulsions et les arrestations frappent surtout « les membres les plus éloquents de la Convention » qui ont « presque tous péri dans les luttes orageuses de cette Assemblée, parce qu’ils étaient les plus en vue et, par conséquent, les plus exposés aux passions haineuses, tels que Vergniaud, Guadet, Gensonné, Condorcet, Danton, Billaud-Varennes, Saint-Just, Robespierre même et d’autres. » Marc-Antoine BAUDOT, “Les orateurs de la Convention,” in *Notes Historiques sur la Convention Nationale, le Directoire, l’Empire et l’Exil des Votants* (Paris: D. Jouaust, 1893), p. 293.



against others, and troubled the assembly.¹⁰ The legal basis for the “grounding” of such troublemakers was shaky. The Constitution of 1791 stated that deputies could at no time be ‘investigated, accused or judged’ for ‘what they had said, written or done as part of the exercise of their functions as representatives.’¹¹ Short-term arrests also contradicted the National and Legislative Assemblies’ agenda to protect the special status of its members in French society, for example, by preventing physical and verbal assaults against them.¹² Similar contradictions continued under the Convention’s government. As R.R. Palmer once remarked, to many citizens in the first French Republic, a representative of the people was still ‘the most august being that could exist on earth.’¹³ Regarded as embodiments of the sovereign nation and commonly addressed as ‘fathers of the people’, legislators, now more than ever, commanded respect. The Convention, while insisting that its members lived modest lives, nevertheless still stressed their sacred status, and insisted that petitioners adhere to a degree of decorum when addressing them, for example, by removing their hats.¹⁴ The assembly also reacted strongly to attacks against its deputies. In 1793 several Orléans locals received death sentences for having assaulted the *Conventionnel* Léonard Bourdon in a drunken brawl.¹⁵ Two years later, the Thermidorian Convention passed the *loi de grande police*, which punished physical and verbal transgressions against legislators with deportation or death.¹⁶

On the one hand, the Convention protected its members’ special status as legislators. On the other, it willingly condoned violence against them in the form of parliamentary purging between 1793 and 1795. What explains

(10) Charles WALTON, *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution: The Culture of Calumny and the Problem of Free Speech* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 153-157; p. 216.

(11) « Les représentants de la nation sont inviolables : ils ne pourront être recherchés, accusés ni jugés en aucun temps, pour ce qu’ils auront dit, écrit ou fait dans l’exercice de leurs fonctions de représentants. » “Constitution des 3-14 Septembre 1791. SECTION V. Réunion des représentants en Assemblée nationale législative. Art. 7,” Reprinted in Jean TULARD, Jean.-François FAYARD, Alfred FIERRO, *Histoire et Dictionnaire de la Révolution française 1789-1799* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1987), p. 681.

(12) See WALTON, *Policing Public Opinion*, p. 154-157.

(13) R.R. PALMER, *Twelve Who Ruled – The Year of the Terror in the French Revolution* (Princeton, Princeton UP, 1989), p. 132.

(14) For a good example of this type of language, see, for example, Thibaudeau’s reference to the « caractère sacré du représentant du peuple » Antoine-Claire THIBAudeau, *Réimpression*, Vol. 24, p. 522. See also Jacobin Club 18 nivôse II, *Réimpression*, Vol. 19, p. 166-167; Georges COUTHON, *Réimpression*, Vol. 19, 13.

(15) See M.J. SYDENHAM, *Léonard Bourdon – The Career of a Revolutionary, 1754-1807* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999), p. 149.

(16) C.N. 1 germinal III, *Réimpression*, Vol. 24, p. 34. For further discussion of this law, see also Paul FRIEDLAND, *Political Actors – Representative Bodies and Theatricality in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 298.

this contradiction? The process towards the acceptance of parliamentary purging was gradual. The assembly’s “urge to purge” was born in the fractious winter of 1792, when it was ‘open war from the start’ between the deputies amidst memories of the September Massacres and the King’s Trial, and during the spring and summer of 1793.¹⁷ Faced with national crisis, suspicious of each other, rival groups and individuals in the assembly clashed almost daily. This initially much amused outside observers, such as the German artist who captured a *Fistfight at the National Convention*, during which wigs were torn off and punches pulled.¹⁸ As the situation at the assembly deteriorated, however, its survival and the safety of its members came under threat. By the spring of 1793, deputies’ angry interruptions made parliamentary debate almost impossible, preventing the Convention from addressing urgent military, economic and constitutional issues. There was also a troubling decline of mutual respect amongst the Conventionnels, with the assembly’s presidents frequently struggling to impose order ‘amidst these constantly recurring interruptions.’¹⁹ In the meantime, surveillance reports described that ‘good citizens groan[ed] that the members of the National Convention [lost] precious time with particular arguments [...] at a moment when the patrie [was] in the most pressing danger.’²⁰

Despite the deteriorating climate at the Convention, the possibility of a parliamentary purge existed at first only in verbal and symbolic forms. Political and personal antagonism between the deputies provoked talk of removing one’s despised colleagues from the speaker’s podium. In October 1792, the deputy Boilleau demanded that each time Marat occupied the rostrum, it be immediately ‘cleansed’ [‘purifiée’].²¹ More famously, the Montagnard Legendre, a trained butcher, shouted at his opponent Lanjuinais: ‘Come down, or I will batter you to death!’, to which the latter cheekily replied: ‘Decree first of all that I am an ox!’²²

(17) ‘In the Convention, it was open war from the start.’ Norman HAMPSON, “Robespierre and the Terror”, in Colin HAYDON; William DOYLE (Eds.), *Robespierre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 163.

(18) See J.-D. SCHUBERT, *Faustkampf des National Convents in Paris im December 1792* (s.l.n.d, Germany, 1793-1795). BNF Richelieu. Estampes et photographie. QB-1 (1792-12)–FOL. MFILM M-101769.

(19) Jean-François-Bertrand DELMAS, *Réimpression*, Vol. 16, p. 112-113.

(20) « Feuille des rapports [...] le 30 avril, l’an 2^e [...] », Rapports de police sur Paris. 1792-an II. AN AF/IV/1470.

(21) « Je demande que quand Marat parlera a cette tribune, elle soit a l’instant purifiée. » As cited in Jean-Paul MARAT, *Œuvres de J.-P. Marat (l’Ami du Peuple) Recueillies et Annotées* par A. Vermorel (Paris: Décembre-Alonnier, 1869), p. 250.

(22) See note on Lanjuinais (Jean-Denis), in Auguste KUSCINSKI, *Dictionnaire des Conventionnels* (Brueil-en-Vexin: Editions du Vexin Français, 1973), p. 369.



Other significant warnings signs were verbal or written lists of undesirable colleagues. Camille Desmoulins spoke of ‘twenty-two members of the Convention’ whose expulsion the Paris sections should demand. In his journal, Marat targeted ‘les Rabaut, les Buzot, les Camus, les Sieyès, les Brissot, les Vergniaud, les Lasource, les Guadet, les Gensonné, les Kersaint, les Cambon, les Barbaroux, les Biroteau, les Rebecqui, barbarous and greedy schemers’.²³ Both radicals’ and moderates’ schemes for their enemies’ removal took on a more distinct shape as Marat was driven out of his house by national guardsmen and soldiers, as menacing chalk marks were left on prominent “Girondins” doors, and as sinister chants against deputies could be heard in the streets:

La tête de Marat, Robespierre et Danton,
Et de tous ceux qui les défendront,
O gué!²⁴

Late 1792 and spring 1793 also saw hardening attitudes towards the issue of parliamentary immunity, previously regarded as deputies’ inalienable right. The Convention’s decision to partially lift its members’ immunity on 1 April made possible not only Marat’s arrest and trial at the Revolutionary Tribunal – the first of an elected representative – but also provoked later calls by Parisian sections for the complete removal of ‘an inviolability that only serves to kill liberty’ and for the mass-purge – the Convention’s first – of the “Girondins” in June 1793.²⁵ Throughout the year II, the attack on parliamentary immunity, both within and outside the assembly, continued. In brumaire II, speaking in the name of the Committee of Public Safety, represented parliamentary immunity not as a right, but as the ‘privilege’ of ‘a new aristocracy’ and ‘a violation of the constitution’:

There should be no privilege. (...) Nobody is inviolable but the people and its liberty. (...) So, if nothing is inviolable except for the people and its

(23) « Il y a vingt-deux membres dans la Convention dont les sections de Paris doivent venir demander l’expulsion. » Camille Desmoulins, *Réimpression*, Vol. 16, p. 150 ; « les Rabaut, les Buzot, les Camus, les Sieyès, les Brissot, les Vergniaud, les Lasource, les Guadet, les Gensonné, les Kersaint, les Cambon, les Barbaroux, les Biroteau, les Rebecqui, intrigants barbares et cupides ». Jean-Paul MARAT, *Le Journal de la République Française*, No 40, 8 novembre 1792, in MARAT, *Œuvres*, p. 253.

(24) MARAT, *Œuvres*, 250.

(25) C.N. 1 April 1793, *Réimpression*, Vol. 16, p. 30; BIARD, *La Liberté où la mort*, p. 188-189; Address by the Bonconseil section, C.N. 8 April 1793, *Réimpression*, Vol. 16, p. 87-88.

rights, I ask you, by which right have you established this demarcation line between the representatives of the people and other citizens?²⁶

In spring 1794, a clause in the law of 22 Prairial, on which Robespierre had insisted, caused another controversy, as it seemingly deprived the Convention of its right to prevent its members from being tried by the Revolutionary Tribunal.²⁷ Later, the Thermidorian Convention, while attempting to reinstate certain safeguards for its deputies, frequently broke its own resolutions to speed up the great parliamentary purges of Prairial and Thermidor year III.

Despite its rapid dismantling of its deputies’ immunity, and growing verbal and physical violence between them in the months leading up to Marat’s accusation and the “Girondins” purge, it would be misleading to think that the Convention carried out its first purges without serious scruples. Certainly, debates surrounding Marat’s decree of accusation, passed on 12 April in reaction to incendiary writings in which he had denounced a supposed Girondin ‘cabal’ at the Convention, already showed the hallmarks of later parliamentary purges: Efforts to prevent proper parliamentary and legal procedure, most notably the preparation of a report of accusation against the deputy, the wish to dispatch the victim as quickly as possible to prison, despite his stated fears of abuse and poisoning, and a rapid escalation into demands for the purging of additional deputies.²⁸ At the same time, several deputies raised objections to Marat’s purge and the way it was being carried it out, asking the Convention to tread with care since it was about to ‘deliver a representative of the people to the blade of justice’.²⁹ ‘You are dealing with accusing a representative of the people’, warned Lecointe-Puyraveau, who was no friend of Marat and had once questioned his mental health, ‘do so with maturity, with dignity.’ The assembly had treated the former king more leniently than it now treated

(26) « Il ne doit plus exister de privilège. L’inviolabilité est détruite. Il n’y a d’inviolable que le peuple et sa liberté. (On applaudit.) Eh bien, s’il n’y a d’inviolable que le peuple et ses droits, je vous le demande, de quel droit avez-vous établi cette démarcation entre les représentants du peuple et les autres citoyens ? [...] je ne vois plus qu’une grande violation de la constitution, qu’une aristocratie nouvelle [...] » Bertrand BARÈRE, *Réimpression*, Vol. 18, p. 418-419.

(27) See John Hardman’s very detailed analysis of the law of 22 prairial. John HARDMAN, *Robespierre* (London; New York: Longman, 1999), p. 190.

(28) For Boyer-Fonfrède’s efforts to prevent a report of accusation against Marat. *Réimpression*, Vol. 16, p. 139. For proposals that Marat be sent to prison, despite his protests, see *Réimpression* Vol. 16, p. 140. For a demand that the Conventionnel Salles be purged, *Réimpression*, Vol. 16, p. 140.

(29) « Vous allez livrer un représentant du peuple au glaive de la loi; et comme dans le rapport qui vient de vous être fait, il peut se trouver des faits inexacts, je demande l’impression, l’envoi aux départements et aux armées, et l’ajournement de la discussion mercredi. » Louis-Joseph CHARLIER, *Réimpression*, Vol. 16, p. 150.



Marat, he mused.³⁰ 48 deputies refused to vote at all on Marat's fate as they considered themselves biased, having 'been habitually denounced in Marat's journals'.³¹

Just as Marat's trial posed serious ethical and legal challenges, so did the Convention's first mass-purge of 29 leading "Girondins" during the *journées* of 31 May and 2 June 1793. Some deputies, such as Robespierre on 10 April 1793, had demanded for weeks that colleagues such as Vergniaud, Gensonné and Guadet be purged and sent to the Revolutionary Tribunal.³² Others reacted shocked to petitioners' demands for the arrest of 'les Brissot, les Guadet, les Vergniaud, les Gensonné, les Buzot'.³³ To them, the circumstances of the purge – the assembly was surrounded by troops and its deputies locked inside by citizens who 'act[ed] like a machine' – represented a violation of the National Representation.³⁴ After all, the deputies were not even allowed to 'satisfy their natural needs' before voting for the arrest of their colleagues.³⁵ Several Conventionnels of different political persuasions advocated for the victims of the proposed purge: Richon by proposing their provisional arrest to safeguard them from the crowd, Barère, speaking in the name of the Committee of Public Safety, by asking them to suspend their own powers so as to avoid arrest, and La Revellière-Lépeaux by demanding to share his colleagues' imprisonment.³⁶ Others favoured the purge: One deputy argued that, if the denounced colleagues were virtuous at all, they would voluntarily quit their seats and make way for their suppléants.³⁷ Levasseur proposed to regard them as suspects, and, rather than honour their parliamentary immunity, treat them

(30) « [...] il est question de mettre en état d'accusation un représentant du peuple. Faites-le avec maturité, avec dignité. » Michel-Mathieu LECOINTE-PUYRAVEAU, *Réimpression*, Vol. 16, p. 151.

(31) « [...] comme étant habituellement dénoncés dans les journaux de Marat. » *Réimpression*, Vol. 16, p. 151.

(32) Maximilien ROBESPIERRE, *Réimpression*, Vol. 16, p. 112. See also PATRICK, *The Men of the First French Republic*, p. 296.

(33) L'HUILLIER, C.N. 31 May 1793, *Réimpression*, Vol. 16, p. 536.

(34) « [...] j'étois à Paris, et en traversant la ville, je rencontrais de mes connoissances le fusil sur l'épaule. Je leur demandoit pourquoi toute la ville étoit armées. Chacun répondoit, je n'en sais rien. Des citoyen libres qui sur l'ordre d'un henriot, s'assemblent au armes sans savoir pourquoi, qui entourent la convention, sans savoir pourquoi, et qui enfin sans savoir pourquoi, violent la représentation nationale [...]. [L]es citoyens qui agissent ainsi en machine, n'ont plus le droit de mépriser les satellites des despotes. (...) » *Nécessité de simplifier le gouvernement ; réflexions sur la journée du 31 mai ; réflexions sur Barère, Collot d'Herbois, Robespierre et les Jacobins [...]*. BHVP MS 736, Fol. 198.

(35) « [...] aucun membre de la convention ne pût sortir de l'enceinte; il n'étoit permis, chose bien humiliante, de satisfaire aux besoins de la nature, qu'en présence des satellites des factieux. » *Déclaration des députés de la Somme à leurs commettans, sur la journée du 2 juin 1793* (5 June 1793, reprinted by the Conseil-général du département de la Somme, 10 June 1793). AN F/7/4667.

(36) *Réimpression*, Vol. 16, p. 550-551.

(37) *Réimpression*, Vol. 16, p. 536.

just as one would ‘les plus simples citoyens’.³⁸ After the purge, Georges Couthon wrote to his home department that, while the Girondins had still been in the assembly, ‘the Convention was the scandal of Europe; now she is calm and great.’³⁹

As to the victims of the purge, many referred to it as a ‘sacrifice’ on their part. Isnard, agreeing to a proposal, made before the “Girondins” arrest, that they voluntarily suspend their powers, shouted that if his ‘blood’ was ‘necessary to save the *patrie*’, he would ‘carry my head to the scaffold, and, without an executioner, I will myself release the blade that will cut short my days.’⁴⁰ His colleagues Lanthenas and Fauchet made similar offers. The three deputies’ willingness to resign highlighted a key, recurring theme of parliamentary purging at the Convention: That of the purge as a form of political sacrifice. Françoise Brunel’s investigation of Montagnard deputies’ responses to being purged in the year III shows that Conventionnels from across the political spectrum were guided by notions of self-sacrifice and by the influence of a ‘Rousseauist heritage that condemned the eighteenth-century ideal legislator to being “above physical interest and the passions”’.⁴¹ This meant absolute submission to the law and following the example of the ‘famous victims of Antiquity’, who had surrendered to political arrest, exile or execution and whose representations hung as ever-present reminders in the Convention.⁴² References (by victims and perpetrators alike) to political sacrifices for the state abounded. On 2 June, however, the idea of the “Girondin” deputies voluntarily giving themselves up came under sharp criticism by their colleague Lanjuinais, who argued that no ‘sacrifices’ could be made while under constraint. On the other end of the political spectrum, Marat also rejected their offer. One had ‘to be pure in order to offer sacrifices to the *patrie*.’ Only deputies such as himself could do so: ‘it is down to me, the true martyr of liberty, to

(38) René LEVASSEUR, *Réimpression*, Vol. 16, p. 551.

(39) « La Convention était, pendant leur règne, le scandale de l’Europe ; depuis elle est calme et grande [...] » Georges COUTHON, *Lettre aux membres du Conseil Général de la commune de Clermont-Ferrand*, No. CXXII, Paris, 25 June 1793, in François MÈGE (Ed.), *Correspondance de Georges Couthon* (Paris: Aug. Aubry, 1872), p. 241.

(40) « [...] je le déclare, si mon sang était nécessaire pour sauver la patrie, sans bourreau, je porterais ma tête sur l’échafaud, et moi même je ferais filer le fer fatal qui devrait trancher le cours de ma vie. [...] eh bien ! Je me suspends, moi, et je ne veux d’autre sauvegarde que celle du peuple pour qui je me suis constamment sacrifié. » Henri-Maximin ISNARD, *Réimpression*, Vol. 16, p. 553.

(41) « Comme en l’an II, les Montagnards se sont laissés enfermer dans le filet contraignant de leur constant souci de légitimité. Héritage rousseauiste qui condamne le législateur à être « au-dessus des intérêts de corps et des passions » [...] » Françoise BRUNEL, “Mélanges sur l’historiographie de la Réaction thermidorienne,” p. 471; see also p. 472-473.

(42) Claude MOSSÉ, *L’Antiquité dans la Révolution française* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1989), p. 127.



make a sacrifice [à me dévouer].’ If the Convention decreed ‘the detention of the counter-revolutionaries’, he would suspend his own powers.⁴³ In a letter to the Convention the following day, Marat reiterated this point, stating that he would resign his seat until the judgement of the accused deputies, and that, as ‘eternal martyr of liberty’, he was somewhat envious of the purged Girondins, who had been granted the ‘honour of providing an example of generous devotion to the public good.’⁴⁴ In attempting to resign, Marat seized the victims’ language of sacrifice, became a martyr of liberty in their stead, turned their sacrifice into his, and, by implication, into that of the entire Convention.

On 2 June, Marat offered to become a martyr of liberty by resigning, making the rhetorical ‘gift of his own blood’ in return for the purge of his colleagues.⁴⁵ He identified with, and misappropriated, the Girondins’ political sacrifice. Victims and perpetrators of the purge exchanged places.⁴⁶ Marat was not alone in following this trajectory. Robespierre, on 3 October, represented the Convention’s decision to purge the Girondins as an example of the assembly’s selfless ‘devotion’ to the Republic. The Convention, according to him, ‘had not even spared its own members’ for the sake of the Republic: ‘Who would doubt that the National Convention is devoted to the nation’s salvation’?⁴⁷ While parliamentary purging in the Convention was, of course, strongly linked to factional and personal hatreds in the assembly, to politicians’ desire to eliminate their enemies and silence troublemakers, it also carried symbolic importance. Those who denounced their colleagues at the assembly not only proved their own authenticity, as Marisa Linton has argued, or their ‘zeal, integrity, [and] courage’, as Rousseau had asserted, but also contributed to the nation’s salvation, according to Robespierre.⁴⁸

(43) « Il faut être pur pour offrir des sacrifices à la patrie; c’est à moi, vrai martyr de la liberté, à me dévouer. J’offre donc ma suspension du moment ou vous aurez ordonné la détention des contre-révolutionnaires [...]. » J.-P. MARAT, *Réimpression*, Vol. 16, p. 553.

(44) « [...] martyr éternel de la liberté » ; « [...] l’honneur de donner l’exemple d’un généreux dévouement au bien public. » MARAT, *Réimpression*, Vol. 16, p. 555.

(45) ‘[Marat’s] legitimacy as a popular journalist [comes] from a sacrificial sovereignty in which the gift of his own blood justifies the call for a dictatorship and a purge, justifies his terrorist discourse of denunciation and the return to an archaic form of power: the ‘devotio’ of the Roman military leader, the pact with the nether powers.’ Eric WALTER, in a discussion of Lynn Hunt, “Discourses of Patriarchalism and anti-Patriarchalism in the French Revolution”, in John RENWICK, *Language and Rhetoric of the Revolution* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), p. 48.

(46) ‘(...) Indeed, it is not enough to say that it [the victim] represents him: it is merged in him. The two personalities are fused together.’ H. HUBERT; M. MAUSS, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Functions* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1964), p. 31-32.

(47) « Quel est l’homme qui doutera que la Convention nationale se soit vouée au salut de la patrie, puisqu’elle n’a pas même épargné ses membres! » Maximilien ROBESPIERRE, *Réimpression*, Vol. 18, p. 38.

(48) LINTON, *Choosing Terror*.

The Convention’s decision to ‘not spare its own members’ was also tied to its need to deal with disgruntled public opinion in the capital. Most of the assembly’s purges occurred around periods of crisis, when the assembly faced elevated discontent, as expressed in the press, the streets, and, above all, in popular insurrections. The invasion of the Convention on 5 September 1793, for instance, prompted discussions to translate Brissot, Vergniaud and Gensonné to the Revolutionary Tribunal. And shortly after, on 3 October, Billaud-Varenne represented the assembly’s decision to try its “Girondin” colleagues as a great ‘act of justice’, comparable to the King’s trial, during which the assembly would play the role of hero on the national stage by ‘arming itself with the dagger that has to pierce the traitors’ chests’.⁴⁹ Between ventôse and germinal II, when the Cordeliers, preparing an insurrection against the Convention, accused its members of being elitist, above the people, and composed of ‘700 kings and thieves’, the purge of Danton served to demonstrate the contrary. To Robespierre, the deputies’ arrest showed that the Convention did not grant any privileges to its members, however popular. Their purge was a ‘heroic sacrifice’ and an act of ‘dolorous severity’ on the assembly’s part. Saint-Just, similarly, presented the arrest of the deputies around Danton and Camille Desmoulins as a painful sacrifice on the assembly’s part: The last example of its inflexibility against itself. He held up Danton’s punishment as proof of the Convention’s devotion to public safety and uttered the famous phrase « Il y a quelque chose de terrible dans l’amour sacré de la patrie, il est tellement exclusif qu’il immole tout sans pitié, sans frayeur, sans respect humain à l’intérêt public [...]. »⁵⁰ Similarly to Marat in June 1793, Saint-Just also believed that he, ultimately, was the real victim of the purge: ‘(...) it is up to the youngest to die and to prove his courage and his virtue’ he wrote in his private notes in relation to Danton’s trial.⁵¹ Once more, victim and perpetrator had become fused in the latter’s understanding.

Parliamentary purging continued to be associated with themes of sacrifice, heroism and regicide after Robespierre’s fall, especially as the

(49) « La Convention doit être grande, en même temps qu’elle fait un acte de justice. Il faut que le décret qu’elle va prononcer soit rendu aussi solennellement que celui qui envoya le tyran à l’échafaud. Il faut que chacun se prononce dans cette circonstance, et s’arme du poignard qui doit percer le sein des traîtres. » Jacques-Nicolas BILLAUD-VARENNE, *Réimpression*, Vol. 18, p. 37.

(50) Louis-Antoine SAINT-JUST, Rapport au nom du comité de salut public et du comité de sûreté générale sur la conjuration ourdie depuis plusieurs années par les factions criminelles [...], 11 germinal II, in Michèle DUVAL (Ed.), *Saint-Just – Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Editions Ivrea, 2003), p. 706.

(51) « [...] c’est au plus jeune de mourir et de prouver son courage et sa vertu ». SAINT-JUST, Fragments d’institutions républicaines, in Duval (Ed.), SAINT-JUST, p. 1007.



Thermidorian Convention faced popular discontent and insurrections in the spring of 1795, and resorted to mass-purges in response. In germinal III, angry citizens accused the assembly of being ‘composed of nothing but scoundrels in general, that it supported the muscadins because they all belonged to the same clique, all royalists, who wanted to starve the people, that soon there would be a coup (...)’.⁵² During the insurrection of prairial, the Convention suffered its members being called ‘tyrants’ who starved the people, physical assaults, and the murder of the deputy Féraud in the midst of the assembly. It responded with a ritual cleansing of its membership during great waves of purges between germinal and thermidor III, whose victims were othered as ‘traitors’, ‘tigers’, ‘monsters’, ‘impure’ beings, ‘drinkers of blood’ and ‘cancers’.

Similarities in the derogatory, dehumanising language used to describe purged deputies in the years II and III highlight strong continuities between the two periods. There are also similarities between the Terror and the Reaction in regard to the types of deputy that were targeted by parliamentary purging: Those who were designated as undesirable by petitioners (in Paris or the provinces) and those accused or believed to be part of some kind of conspiracy. In both periods, purging also hit those deputies who had been temporarily absent from the assembly: Danton, who had away in the countryside, Robespierre, who had been ill for several weeks, Saint-Just, who had been on mission, and, in the year III, other, lesser known deputies, such as Albitte, who, shortly before he was purged in prairial III, had withdrawn from the assembly because of a persistent ‘melancholy’ which had made him seek ‘solitude’ in his springtime garden.⁵³ In both the year II and III, purged deputies who had stayed away from the Convention became projection spaces for fears, paranoia and suspicions within the assembly and for public accusations that had been made against the Convention as a whole.

Parliamentary purges always had deep roots in factional and political conflicts within the assembly. But by punishing the few, the Convention also sought to deal with its own demons and to revive its tarnished image as

(52) « Convention nationale. Comité de Sureté générale. Section de la Police de Paris. Du 20 Germinal l’an trois [...]. Interrogation of Etienne Fournier agé de vingt-six ans et demi; charpentier. A lui demandé pourquoi et à quelle intention il s’étoit permis vers la fin de Ventôse les propos les plus injurieux contre la Convention nationale en disant: qu’elle n’étoit composée que de coquins en générale, qu’elle soutenoit les muscadins parce qu’ils étoient tous de la même clique, tous royalists, qui vouloient affamer le peuple, que sous peu il y auroit un coup [...] » AN F/7/4711.

(53) Antoine-Louis ALBITTE, *Albitte L’Ainé, Représentant du Peuple, A Qui Il Appartiendra* (Paris, le 2 Prairial, an 3^e de la République, 1795). BNF 4-LB41-1823. Accessed through Gallica.bnf.fr, ark:/12148/bpt6k6309089g

National Representation. The purge of prairial II represented the highpoint of a political logic that regarded the use of political violence against representatives of the people as the ultimate means to bolster the assembly’s public standing. The Thermidorian reactionary Henri Larivière thus hoped that the purge of his colleagues « c’est nous reproduire, c’est nous donner une nouvelle vie, c’est nous rendre impérissable [...] »⁵⁴ Sometimes it seemed that it did not even matter who was being purged. During purging frenzies at the assembly, names of victims were being called out in random order, contested, erased, and added once more. Deputies at the Convention knew each other well enough to cause personal conflict between them, but, in some cases, they did not know each other sufficiently to remember each other’s names correctly – this led to the “wrong” names being put on lists and decrees during purging. Sometimes a single deputy standing up to denounce or defend another could change his colleague’s fate. In prairial, a purging momentum developed so rapidly at the traumatised assembly, that several deputies were unaware that their arrest had been decreed. They had left the evening session momentarily to have dinner with a few colleagues and learnt from a National Guard that ‘fifteen representatives have been condemned to immediate death’ – information which also turned out to be false.⁵⁵

Deputies’ reactions to purges: From submission to suicide

How did purged deputies react to the difficult circumstances they found themselves in? Many responded passively to decrees of arrest and accusation, and even to death sentences. The *Conventionnel* Faye, for instance, when learning of his decree of arrest from a colleague at the Quay Voltaire in August 1793, immediately surrendered to the authorities: ‘Knowing no reproach in the conduct or principles that he had always shown as legislator, [knowing only] submission to the law [...]’⁵⁶ When guards came to seize the *Conventionnel* Garilhe in Germinal II, he similarly gave himself up, declaring that he was ‘too faithful an observer of the law, to not, especially given his quality as Legislator, rush to obey the authorities’.⁵⁷

(54) Henri LARIVIÈRE, *Réimpression*, Vol. 24, p. 570.

(55) ALBITTE, Albitte L’Ainé.

(56) « [...] il ne connoissoit que l’obéissance aux loix, il s’en empressé de se rendre chez lui [...] » « L’an mil-sept cent quatre vingt treize [...] le jeudi vingt deux aout, dix heures du matin, en exécution du décret rendu le jour d’hier par la Convention Nationale [...] nous Jean Jacques fantin, Juge de paix de la section des Thuilleries [...] » AN BB/3/30.

(57) « [...] A quoi le dit Privas Garilhe nous a repondu etre trop fidel observateur des Loix pour en sa qualité de Legislateur ne pas s’empresser d’obéir aux autorités constituées, et de suite nous

In April 1794, Gomaire insisted in a proud letter to the authorities that he had ‘never abandoned his post whatever happened’.⁵⁸ When facing not only arrest and imprisonment, but execution, Saint-Just was one of many *Conventionnels* who demonstrated stoicism, by acting according to his assertion that he ‘despise[d] the dust that composed him’ and going silently to his death.⁵⁹ There were, of course, many counterexamples to Saint-Just’s attitude. His enemy Camille Desmoulins famously struggled against the executioner in germinal II, and many other deputies tried to address the public from the scaffold and explain or justify themselves.

Suicide attempts were also common amongst purged deputies, especially Montagnards, though the trend began with several Girondins’ attempts on their own lives while on the run or on trial in 1793 and 1794.⁶⁰ When faced with deputies who were expiring from self-inflicted wounds, the Convention tended to insist that the dying still be put to death publicly. In Prairial an III, the Conventionnel Soubrany, after stabbing himself fatally, was dragged to the scaffold, despite his pleads to ‘let me die’. In Thermidor, Robespierre, Robespierre jeune and Couthon were made ‘fit for punishment’ despite serious injuries. The Convention often insisted on deputies’ executions as the final steps in a process of political revival through purging.

While submission to the law and political sacrifice were important rhetorical themes surrounding parliamentary purging, flight was a natural and frequent response to being purged. Amongst the Girondins whose arrest was decreed on 2 June 1793, twelve immediately fled the capital or went into hiding within city boundaries; eight others, put under house arrest by the authorities, also escaped.⁶¹ By 28 July 1793, 19 purged Girondins were fugitives, by 3 October, their number had climbed to 21.⁶² One of

ayant fait l’ouverture des commodes, tables, armoires et malle étant dans le seul appartement qu’il occupe [...]. Guellard. » Garilhe député. L’an deuxième de la République française le vingt-quatre Germinal, onze heures du matin, AN BB/3/30.

(58) « [...] jamais je ne quittai mon poste quel que part qu’il fut: j’ai été mis en arrestation, le deux juin. J’y suis resté tant que la Convention juge convenable: j’étoit bien innocent. » *Lettre de Gomaire député à la Convention Nationale au Citoyen Gohier Ministre de la Justice, au sujet de son arrestation, il lui demande aussi que son nom soit rayé de la liste des députés qui se sont enfuit*, 8 avril 1794 ou 19 germinal an 2. AN D/III/349-350.

(59) « Je méprise la poussière qui me compose et qui vous parle. On pourrait la persécuter et faire mourir cette poussière, mais je défie qu’on m’arrache la vie indépendante que je me suis donnée dans les siècles et dans les cieux. » SAINT-JUST, *Fragments d’Institutions Républicaines*, in DUVAL (Ed.), *Saint-Just*, p. 986.

(60) BIARD, *La Liberté Ou La Mort*.

(61) Claude PERROUD, *La Proscription des Girondins (1793-1795)* (Toulouse ; Paris: Edouard Privat; Félix Alcan, 1917), p. 42-43.

(62) PERROUD, *La Proscription*, p. 81, n.2

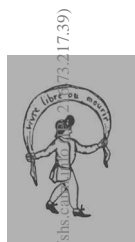
the fugitives was Kervélégan, who, while under house arrest, assured his guards that he had no intention of escaping – ‘foi de député’. Then he ran.⁶³ In 1793 and 1794, police faced extreme difficulties in preventing deputies’ escapes – partly because guards and police still tended to tread somewhat carefully around purged representatives of the people and partly because republican administration was simply not prepared for a mass-purge of high-profile politicians. Despite numerous lists of prisoners being hastily drawn up, police also lost sight of several deputies incarcerated in the capital’s prisons. By comparison, in the year III, the administration of deputies’ arrests and imprisonment functioned much better. The Commission for Civil Administration, Police and Tribunals⁶⁴ prepared new lists of purged deputies after germinal, prairial and thermidor III and prevented most escapes, with the exception of cases such as Maignet, Vadier, Baudot and Barère. Some deputies still went into short-term hiding in the hope that the decree against them was a misunderstanding or that the Convention would change its mind.⁶⁵ Overall, the enhanced efficiency of the Thermidorian administration in preventing purged deputies’ escapes in the year III shows the gradual normalisation of parliamentary purging – a process which had, by then, become a regular part of political life.

Whether they surrendered or were captured, if taken before a court, some purged Conventionnels found subtle ways of undermining the political and judicial processes that underpinned parliamentary purging. While in the dock at the Revolutionary Tribunal in October 1793, the *Conventionnel* Jean-François Ducos merged notes and observations about the accusations made against him and his colleagues with a series of subversive doodles ridiculing his accusers and capturing the strained faces of those who shared the courtroom with him. He analysed the mechanisms of the political trial he was subjected to, noting, for example, that ‘There are two ways to falsely incriminate; first, to state against an accused a fact that is not true or to accuse him of a fact that is not a crime.’ Some of his notes were straightforward statements of defence: he had ‘never in his life been at Rolland’s’, had not frequented the Club des Marseillais led by Buzot and Barbaroux, and he ‘never saw his colleagues at theirs or at mine’. He also made practical proposals for contesting the notion that the Girondins had

(63) B. Dumesnil, Copie de la lettre Ecrite par Le Lieutenant-Colonel Commandant la Gendarmerie Nationale près les Tribunaux et à la Garde des Prisons de Paris aux Citoyens Membres Composant le directoire du Département du Finistere, Paris le 22 aout l’an 2eme. AN BB/3/30.

(64) La Commission de l’Administration Civile, Police et Tribunaux.

(65) ALBITTE, Albitte L’Ainé.



constituted a faction: ‘one should look at our vote[s] on all questions so as to judge if we formed a coalition’.⁶⁶ Ducos’ notes are one of the few pieces of evidence regarding French revolutionary politicians’ emotional and mental state while living the experience of a show trial. While many of his drawings exaggerated the features of prosecutors, jurors or members of the audience to comical effect, others showed the anxious, tired, sometimes angry faces of individuals in distress. Ducos’ own comments reflected the emotional rollercoaster of the trial: ‘I have no need to reclaim [my] liberty of opinion’, he once scribbled, silenced, in all other ways, by the proceedings.

Traces of purged deputies’ armed resistance to the authorities also exist. Discovered in Bordeaux in Brumaire II, the fugitive “Girondin” Biroteau was ‘arrested at the corner of the street Saint-Remy, by a volunteer’. In response, he tried to ‘blow out the brains’ of his captor with ‘a pistol that he had carefully concealed.’⁶⁷ In the same year, Bertrand de L’Hodiesnière, having learnt that he was to be taken to prison, took an epee and pistols and threatened to go to extremes. Some purged deputies did their best to resist once they were in the hands of police and prison authorities. In the year III, Duhem, Choudieu, and Chasles, faced with a transfer order from the Château de Ham to Sedan, ‘positively refused’ to obey. The officer in charge addressed ‘the citizen Duhem with the decency due to a prisoner’: ‘I wanted to make him understand that it would be painful for me to employ rigorous means (...).’ At this moment, he found himself surrounded by ‘10 or 12 prisoners’ who complained about oppression and arbitrariness and called for resistance. ‘Chales in particular said to me that those who executed such orders were as culpable as those who gave them, and that one day he would drag me to the scaffold and applaud while seeing my head fall.’ When Choudieu informed the officer curtly that he would only leave under the force of bayonets, the latter saw no other option but to subdue the deputy-prisoners.⁶⁸

(66) A.N. W 292/B. Affaire des Girondins. 3e partie.

(67) Arrêté à Bordeaux en Brumaire an II, Biroteau s’échappe de nouveau et quand ‘il a été [encore] arrêté au coin de la rue Saint Remy, par un volontaire’, il essaye à lui « brûler la cervelle avec un pistolet qu’il avoit soigneusement caché. » See *Procès-verbal d’arrestation de Biroteau [sic] et de Girey-Dupré, Extrait des minutes du Secrétariat de la Commission Militaire séante à Bordeaux*, A.N. AD/II/108 [Collection Rondonneau]; see also: *Les représentants du peuple, délégués dans le département de la Gironde, à la Convention nationale. Bordeaux, le troisième jour du deuxième mois, signé Isabeau et Tallien, Réimpression*, Vol. 18, p. 283; and for further information on this incident: *Réimpression*, Vol. 18, p. 324; *Réimpression*, Vol. 18 p. 661.

(68) « au Citoyen Duhem avec la décence due à un prisonnier, je voulus lui faire entendre qu’il serait douloureux pour moi d’employer des moyens de Rigueur (...). Au même instant, je fus entouré de 10 a 12 prisonniers qui tous criaient à l’oppression à l’arbitraire et à la resistance ; Chales

The impact of parliamentary purging on the Convention and the republic

The immense suffering that the Convention’s purges caused its members throughout the mid-1790s strongly connects the years II and III. If a *Conventionnel* was not executed as a result of being purged, his most likely fate was long-term house arrest or imprisonment. The detention of large numbers of representatives of the people profoundly marked the history of the Convention. The details of the arrest and imprisonment of eminent *Conventionnels* such as the “Girondin” core group in the summer of 1793, Danton and Camille Desmoulins in the spring of 1794, or Robespierre and his friends in thermidor are well known. Incidents concerning more minor deputies, and especially those that occurred in the Thermidorian Reaction, have received less attention.⁶⁹ While there is ample literature on prisons, the prison population and police practices during the French Revolution, there has also been no overall analysis of these *Conventionnels’* very specific experiences of imprisonment between 1793 and 1795.⁷⁰

House arrest was often the first stop for deputies who had been purged from the assembly. Ribéreau, a Girondin who was under house arrest during 1793 and 1794, recalled the associated hardships:

On 3 October 1793 I was put under arrest with more than 70 of my colleagues [...] the fact that I stayed almost without energy and ability to move for six months afterwards did not prevent the Revolutionary Committee of the Tuileries section from surrounding me with two guards.

particulièrement me dit que ceux qui executaient de pareils ordres etaient aussy coupables que ceux qui les donnaient, et qu’un jour il me trainerait à l’Echaffaud et applaudirait en voyant tomber ma tête. [...] Choudieu termina pour dire quil ne sortirait que par la force des Bayonnettes. Désesperé de voir mes intentions si mal reçues je me retirai et ordonnait au commandant d’exécuter votre arrêté. [...] » Paris le 21 floréal 3^{ème} année Républicaine. L’adjudant général Margason. AN F7/4443, pl.5.

(69) With the exception of BRUNEL, “L’épuration de la Convention nationale en l’an III”, p. 15-26; BRUNEL, “Les derniers Montagnards et l’unité révolutionnaire,” in Albert SOBOUL (Ed.), *Actes du Colloque Girondins et Montagnards* (Paris: Société des Etudes Robespierriistes, 1980), p. 297-316; Gilbert Romme, *actes du colloque de Riom (19-20 mai 1995)*, AHRF 304 (April-June 1996); Ewa LAJER-BURCHARTH, *Necklines: the art of Jacques-Louis David after the Terror* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 1999). See also Edgar QUINET, *La Révolution* (Paris: Librairie Belin, 1987), p. 603-64; Jules CLARETIE, *Les derniers Montagnards, histoire de l’insurrection de prairial an III* (Paris: Librairie internationale Lacroix et Verboeckhoven, 1867).

(70) See for example: J.G. PETIT; C. FARGERON; M. PIERRE, *Histoire des prisons en France: 1789-2000* (Toulouse: Privat, 2002); Olivier BLANC, *La dernière lettre – prisons et condamnés de la Révolution 1793-1794* (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1984); BLANC, *La corruption sous la Terreur – 1792-1794* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1992), J.C. VIMONT, *La prison politique en France – Genèse d’un mode d’incarcération spécifique XVIIIe-XXe siècles* (Paris: Anthropos-Economica, 1993); F. LENORMAND, *La pension Belhomme: une prison de luxe sous la Terreur* (Paris: Fayard, 2002); LENORMAND, *Douze tyrans minuscules: les policiers de Paris sous la terreur* (Paris: Fayard, c2003).



[...] life soon became a burden. My wife died of sorrow and misery at the end of the month of Germinal, one of our children followed suit immediately. My room was transformed into a dungeon by rigorous orders, I stayed only on my pallet, from which all communications were forbidden me [...].⁷¹

Other Conventionnels, by contrast, took house arrest in their stride, even turning it to their advantage. Collot d'Herbois, a former member of the Committee of Public Safety, purged from the Convention in early 1795, paced his apartment as if it were a cage and frightened his guards with aggressive offers of wine, bread and cheese, which they felt they could not refuse for fear of 'insulting the National Representation.' '(...) Collot is the one who seems to inspire the most disquietude', a police report stated, 'as he himself seems more nervous than the others, and because of the situation of his apartment, which is on the first floor and above a terrace, offering a real possibility of escape (...).'⁷² The two officers, locked in with the former representative on mission, taking offence at their polite efforts to refuse his hospitality, and all the while eying the window with nervous energy, were clearly in an uncomfortable position. Their predicament ended only when Collot was summarily deported to French Guyana in Germinal III, where he died in 1796.

Many purged deputies feared prison above anything else. And for good reason. Once behind bars, the detained politicians faced challenging conditions about which they bitterly complained to the Convention. Imprisoned at La Force in 1793 and 1794, a group of Girondins found that their legal status as deputies was being denied them and that they were subjected to humiliating nightly searches during which personal possession, including their deputies' cards and uniforms, were taken.⁷³ Imprisoned

(71) « Paris 29 Vendémiaire l'an 3 (...). Citoyen Président. Le 3 Octobre 1793 (v.S) j'ai été mis en état d'arrestation avec plus de 70 autres de mes collègues [...] et quoique pendant plus de six mois après j'aye resté presque sans force et sans mouvement, cela n'a pas empêché que le Comité révolutionnaire de la Section des Tuileries m'ai entouré de deux gardiens dont la taxe hors de toute mesure a dévoré mon indemnité ma seule et unique ressource ; la vie ne tarda pas à devenir pour moi un fardeau, mon épouse périt de chagrin et de misère sur la fin du mois Germinal, un de nos enfans la suivit immédiatement. Ma chambre fit par des ordres rigoureux transformé en un cachot, je n'habitois que mon grabat où toutes les communications me furent interdites, mes souffrances y ont été [nourries] et Prolongées ; j'ai manqué des soins nécessaires à une longue et dangereuse maladie [...] Ribereau. » AN C/323, Dossier 1381, pièce XIII.

(72) Committee of General Security, *Représentants du peuple en état d'arrestation*, 15 ventôse III. AN F/7/4443, Pl. 2. See also Michel BIARD, *Collot d'Herbois – Légendes noires et Révolution* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1995), p. 189.

(73) Les députés détenus à la Maison d'arrêt des Benedictins anglois à leurs collègues des Comités de Salut Public & de Sûreté générale, 12 Thermidor II. AN F/7/4444, pl. 3.

Conventionnels such as Ricord, held at the Quatre-Nations during the Thermidorian Reaction, perceived the taking of their deputy’s uniform or sash as a serious slight against their status as representatives of the people. ‘By which right was such an action taken?’, he asked. ‘Which decree authorises it?...to strip me of my sash! That sash, which indicated the path of victory at the armies! That sash, stained by the enemy’s blood, showing the use that I made of it! – taken from me!’⁷⁴ Stripping the *Conventionnels* of their special status as representatives of the people was precisely the intention of some prison guards and administrators. ‘(...) I can dispose of you as I can of the other inmates’, a police administrator told a group of deputies held at the Maison d’arrêt des Benedictins anglais in 1793, ‘(...) I forgot a long time ago that you were ever deputies’. When several deputies asked permission to obtain vinegar sirup, an administrator told the imprisoned legislators: ‘If the law does not forbid it, I forbid it’.⁷⁵ Some guards wanted to reform the high-profile prisoners: ‘They have to be revolutionised’ – ‘il faut révolutionner’, one said in regard to the deputies.⁷⁶ Administrators’ desires to ‘revolutionise’ their charges were not only humiliating for individual deputies, but also openly called into question the Convention’s orders that its purged members be treated with respect due to their office.

Representations such as paintings of the “Girondins” last banquet or Hubert Robert’s drawing of Camille Desmoulins in his cell at the Luxembourg have in some sense romanticised the imprisonment of the people’s representatives under the Convention.⁷⁷ Ewa Lajer-Burcharth

(74) « De quel droit s’est-on permis une pareille action ? quel décret l’autorise ? [...] me dépouiller de mon écharpe ! cette écharpe, qui aux armées indiquoit la route de la victoire ! cette écharpe, où le sang ennemi dont elle fut teinte, atteste l’usage que j’en ai fait ! & on me l’enlève ! » Ricord, *Représentant du Peuple, A la Convention Nationale* (Paris: Imprimerie d’Hacquart, 2 Vendémiaire IV). AN AD/XVIII/c/254.

(75) « [...] nos collègues agés ou valétudinaires ne purent pas même obtenir du sirop de vinaigre malgré l’excessive chaleur dont nous étions accablés. Sur l’observation que les détenus firent à l’administrateur que la loi n’en deffendoit pas l’entrée, il répondit « Si la loi ne le deffend pas, je le deffends, moi. » *Les députés détenus à la Maison d’arrêt des Benedictins anglais à leurs collègues des Comités de Salut Public & de Sûreté générale*, 12 Thermidor II. AN F/7/4444, pl. 3.

(76) « [...] Une partie de nos lits & effets ne nous parvint que trois à quatre jours apres notre arrivé. On nous donna pour motif de ce retard la fatigue des chevaux, tout fut visité à l’entrée. On saisit à notre collègue de la marre un compas à rouler les cheveux & une paire de ciseaux époinés, d’après l’ordre de l’administrateur qui se trouvoit en ce moment au guichet & qui voyant l’incertitude de celui qui faisoit la visite lui dit : « fais ton devoir révolutionnairement. » Sur l’observation de notre collègue que le compas n’étoit point un arme dangereuse l’administrateur quitta le guichet en disant au gardien il faut révolutionner [sic]. » *Les députés détenus à la Maison d’arrêt des Benedictins anglais à leurs collègues des Comités de Salut Public & de Sûreté générale*, 12 Thermidor II. AN F/7/4444, pl. 3.

(77) For references to these paintings, see J. de CAYEUX; C. BOULOT, *Hubert Robert* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1989), p. 289.



has already challenged this picture by drawing attention to the physical deterioration of imprisoned *Montagnards* as captured by David during his prison sentences in the year III.⁷⁸ Prison conditions for deputies were difficult, and damaging to health and morale. Countless letters written by imprisoned members of the Thermidorian Convention after the great purges of prairial III tell of humidity and lack of food in prisons that were often isolated fortresses in the provinces. Ruamps, L. Vasseur (de la Sarthe) and Maribon-Montaut wrote to the Convention from the citadel of Besançon, complaining that they had not received their deputies' allowances and could not procure themselves enough food to subsist. 'We have cleared and sown vegetables on a parcel of land next to our room, but we are not at liberty to go to it', they wrote, 'we are forbidden all correspondence with our families [...] why so much severity towards men who worked for the same aim as you and which you are about to achieve – the consolidation of the Republic?'⁷⁹ The deputies' hardship in the year III was in many cases closely connected to the governmental and administrative disorganisation and indecision in regard to high-profile detainees, giving free reign to abuses and neglect.⁸⁰

Parliamentary purging damaged not only its most immediate victims, however, but also the Convention, who decreed their arrests, and the fragile democracy at whose centre it stood. In three years, the Convention purged over 230 – not quite reaching, but approaching one third – of its members. This string of mass-purges represented a significant attack on the National Representation: on its physical integrity, its stability, but also its public image. In sharp contrast to the steady disappearance of large numbers of *Conventionnels* stood, of course, the relative continuity and gradual de-politicization of administrative, police and military personnel in charge

(78) LAJER-BURCHARTH, *Necklines*, p. 88-118.

(79) « Copie de la Lettre des Représentans du Peuple Ruamps, Le Vasseur (de la Sarthe) [sic] et Maribon-Montaut Représentans du peuple détenus à la Citadelle de Bezancons, datée du 19 Thermidor an 3ème de la République [...]. Aux Représentans du Peuple composant le Comité de Salut Public. Citoyens Collègues. Depuis un mois nous avons écrit trois fois au Comité de Sûreté générale pour l'inviter à nous faire passer notre indemnité. Trois mois nous sont dus. Nous n'avons plus de quoi fournir à notre nourriture: nous en devons une partie toujours au Secret, nous ne pouvons communiquer avec nos familles pour faire venir des fonds. Nous avons défriché et serré des légumes dans un coin de terre attenant notre chambre, nous n'avons pas la liberté d'y aller, toute correspondance avec nos familles nous étant interdite, nous ne pouvons prendre des Engagemens pour faire payer nos impositions [...]: pourquoi tant de Rigueur envers des hommes qui tendoient au même but que vous êtes sur le point d'atteindre, l'affermissement de la République ? (...) Signé L. Vasseur (de la Sarthe), Ruamps, L. Maribon (dit Montaut). Pour copie conforme. » AN F/7/4443, pl. 10.

(80) See J.-C. VIMONT, *La prison politique en France – Genèse d'un moded'incarcération spécifique XVIIIe – XXe siècles* (Paris: Anthropos-Economica, 1993), p. 44.

of arresting the representatives of the people.⁸¹ Over time, reports on public spirit began to indicate that the regular purges of deputies were no longer seen as salutary measures but as indications of chronic political instability. A surveillance report in the aftermath of the purges of prairial III, for instance, described the public’s general dissatisfaction with the Convention and added: ‘the current purges of the Convention are the subject of ridicule’.⁸² Parliamentary purges caused much anxiety amongst citizens, who, at times, believed that its elected representatives were abandoning their posts. In germinal III, a ‘group of citizens, armed with pikes and sabres’, ‘opposed the departure of representatives of the people put under arrest, because, it was said, deputies were fleeing from Paris through all its gates [...]’.⁸³ That relentless parliamentary purging fed into impressions of political instability was not lost on the Convention’s members. Already in June 1793, Robespierre noted that debates over his expelled Girondin colleagues diminished the assembly’s public image: ‘It seems to me’, he said, ‘that we are far too preoccupied with these miserable individuals’.⁸⁴ A similar note of caution was struck later by Thibaudeau. The proposed transfer of several arrested Montagnards to the Château de Ham in germinal III made, according to him, a public affair out of the assembly’s internal business: ‘I think that the Convention should not have ordered the transfer of our colleagues outside Paris. The arrest warrant that you have pronounced against them is but a measure of internal discipline’.⁸⁵

The frequent arrests of representatives of the people also seemed to negatively affect public perceptions of the *Conventionnels* as elected officials. The Convention’s labelling of its purged members as ‘monsters’

(81) A process noted by C.H. Church, who describes the ‘expansion’, ‘autonomy’ and ‘relative a-politicization forced on the bureaucracy by factional struggles’. C.H. CHURCH, *Revolution and Red Tape, The French Ministerial Bureaucracy 1770-1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 99.

(82) « Chailly – que les plaintes se reiterent [sic] tous les jours, et qu’on tourne en ridicule l’épuration actuelle de la Convention. » Commission de Police administrative de Paris, *Rapport de Surveillance générale*, Paris, 25 thermidor III. AN F/1cIII/SEINE/16.

(83) « Massard. Une foule de citoyens, armés de piques et de sabres, s’est opposée au départ des représentants du peuple mis en arrestation, parce que, disait-on, les députés fuyaient de Paris par toutes les barrières [...] » Rapport du 14 germinal. Surveillance, as cited in Alphonse AULARD, *Paris pendant la réaction thermidorienne et sous le Directoire – recueil de documents pour l’histoire de l’esprit public à Paris* (Paris: L. Cerf [etc.], 1898), Vol.1, p. 632-633.

(84) « Il me semble que nous nous occupons beaucoup trop de ces misérables individus. Je sais bien qu’ils voudraient que la république ne pensât qu’à eux seuls ; mais la république ne s’occupe que de la liberté. (...) » Maximilien ROBESPIERRE, *Réimpression*, Vol. 16, p. 748.

(85) « Je pense que la Convention n’aurait pas dû ordonner la translation de nos collègues hors de Paris. L’arrestation que vous avez prononcée contre eux n’est qu’une mesure de discipline intérieure. Antoine-Claire THIBAudeau, *Réimpression*, Vol. 24, p. 121.



and ‘tigers’ put the legislators ‘outside the human race’⁸⁶ and gave the public permission to treat them as such. In frimaire III, before the Thermidorian Convention had officially accused Collot d’Herbois and several other former members of government, several angry individuals ‘entered the courtyard of Collot d’Herbois’ house and (...) uttered menaces and shouts provoking murder’ against the elected representative. The Committee of General Security had to order the military to secure the *Conventionnel*’s residence.⁸⁷ When Collot d’Herbois’, Billaud-Varenne’s and Barère’s deportation was decreed after the insurrection of 12 germinal, Parisians halted their coaches at Place de la Révolution. An angry crowd surrounded them for over half an hour, during which a lieutenant had a violent scuffle with several citizens who were trying to shoot Barère at point-blank range. Angry enquiries by the government as to why the Gendarmerie had not prevented the incident did not stop further attacks along the road.⁸⁸ At Orléans, Collot’s life was saved only by his guard’s generous actions, who sheltered him from stone throws with his own body.⁸⁹

When members of the public took justice against purged deputies into their own hands, this had serious implications for the safety of the Convention as a whole. This was evident during the insurrection of Prairial III, when several *Conventionnels* were subjected to citizen arrests. On 2 Prairial, the *Conventionnel* Dugenne was ‘arrested’ by several citizens, who took his sabre and swordstick and dragged him to the section of Montreuil. On the same day, a woman ‘arrested’ the representative of the people Bernard (de Seine-et-Marne) and took him to the Gravilliers section where he was maltreated by a citizen. A similar fate befell Boursault after having tried to address a group of bystanders who, ‘not content with his discourse, ran after him to arrest him.’ The deputy ‘escaped from under their hands by making himself room with a sabre’ and took shelter at the Committee of General Security.⁹⁰ It is, of course, difficult to tell to what

(86) « [...] comme si le décret qui venait de les frapper les avait mis hors l’espèce humaine. » Georges LENÔTRE, *Paris révolutionnaire* (Paris: Librairie Académique Didier; Perrin et Cie, 1903), p. 109-110.

(87) « Convention nationale. Comité de Sureté [sic] Générale. Du 9 frimaire l’an trois de la République. AN F/7/4443.

(88) « Paris le 16 Germinal l’an 3^e de la républic [sic] française. Hamel, lieutenant de la 29^eme division de Gendarmerie aux Citoyens Membres composant le Comité de Sûreté Générale. AN F/7/4444, Pl.1.

(89) For details of the deportation of Collot d’Herbois and his colleagues: AN F/7/4651.

(90) « Le citoyen Dugenne, député du département du Cher, a été arrêté hier sur les six heures du soir, près le Pont-Neuf, par plusieurs citoyens des sections de Montreuil, Quinze-Vingt et Bagnolet. [...] » Rapport du 3 Prairial. Surveillance, as cited in AULARD, *Paris pendant la réaction thermidorienne et sous le Directoire*, vol.1, p. 737-738.

extent the Convention’s frequent purges contributed to the public’s lack of regard for its individual members. But parliamentary purging, surely, is part of the complex story of declining respect for representatives of the people and the assembly as a whole, especially in the year III. Purging interacted with the already volatile relationship between the Convention and the public, and contributed to the overall diminishment of regard for democratic institutions and its representatives in the 1790s.

As especially the Parisian public, as one contemporary put it, became ‘used to seeing its representatives disappear’,⁹¹ the fate of representative democracy itself seemed to hang in the balance. Prisons such as the Quatre-Nations, which became a holding pen for purged deputies in the year III and which was situated opposite the Tuileries where the Convention held its sessions, arguably became alternative, “shadow” legislatures whenever parliamentary purging reached a climax. Groups of imprisoned and free legislators faced each other from across the river, their situations subject to rapid political change. That frequent parliamentary purging put the future of representative democracy itself at stake was pointed out, not least, by the victims of the purges themselves. Bernard (de Saintes), imprisoned at the Quatre-Nations in the year III, wrote a public address to the Convention, in which he denounced purging as downright illegal:

I read and reread the Constitution that the people has just accepted and which you order every day to be executed; nowhere have I seen authorisation for the vexations that I suffer; on the contrary it prohibits it. It does not allow a representative of the people to be persecuted for what he has said or written in exercising his functions; [...] it does not allow that he is arrested without a decree of accusation; [...] it finally states that he should be free until he is accused [...].

If the Convention wanted to ensure that its laws were respected, Bernard added, it needed to ‘religiously observe’ the law that ‘guaranteed the National Representation’ by protecting representatives of the people from arbitrary imprisonment. To ‘violate’ this particular law meant ‘to open the door to the violation of all’.⁹² For Bernard, the twin issues of

(91) « [...] La mort des 61 députés n’étoit demandés que pour accoutumer le peuple à voire des Représentants disparaître de ce monde, et y comprendre ceux des deux Comités à qui on en vouloit bien plus. [...] » Letter from a prison informant in the year II, used against Montmoro during the trial of the Hébertistes. AN W/76, Pl. 3.

(92) « J’ai lu & relu la Constitution que le peuple vient d’accepter & dont vous ordonnez chaque jour l’exécution ; je n’ai vu nulle part qu’elle autorise les vexations que j’éprouve, au contraire elle les prohibe. Elle ne veut pas qu’un représentant du peuple soit recherché pour ce qu’il aura fait ou



parliamentary immunity and purging stood at the very heart of the new democracy – on them hinged its survival. Ricord, a *Conventionnel* also held at the Quatre-Nations during the Thermidorian Reaction, was even more outspoken:

I am not surprised that once the majesty of the people has been violated in the person of one of its representatives in such a way, the others dare not raise their voices to fight this assault, which suggests the establishment of tyranny.⁹³

To Ricord, chronic parliamentary purging at the assembly had, in fact, already caused the destruction of representative democracy. His fears were echoed by Jeanne Marguerite Nicole Ricard, mother of the *Conventionnel* Goujon, who had been arrested and sentenced to death after the great purge of prairial III.⁹⁴ She asked: '[...] is there still a guarantee for the national representation? Is there a single member who can sleep in peace, seeing himself constantly exposed to the risk of being arrested, accused, without any means of defence...what guarantees the national representation? [...] Will she be totally destroyed?'⁹⁵

Conclusion

'We have all been somewhat in prison. This has happened to you, to me, to everybody. [...]. Our fathers led the way (...),' wrote Philarète Chasles,

écrit dans l'exercice de ses fonctions ; elle ne permet l'accusation que pour fait de dilapidation ou de trahison ; elle ne veut pas qu'il soit arrêté sans un décret d'accusation ; elle ne veut pas qu'il soit accusé sans un rapport préalable & sans être entendu ; elle veut enfin qu'il soit libre jusqu'au moment de son accusation prononcée d'après les formes qu'elle prescrit [...]. Il me semble que si une loi doit être religieusement observée, c'est sur-tout celle oncqui détermine la garantie de la représentation nationale ; violer celle-là c'est ouvrir la porte à la violation de toutes, c'est attendre directement à la souveraineté du peuple exercée pas [sic] ses représentans. » *Bernard de Saintes, Représentant du Peuple, A la Convention Nationale* (Paris: Imprimerie d'Hacquart, 9 vendémiaire IV). AN AD/XVIII/c/253.

(93) « Je ne m'étonne pas qu'une fois la majesté du Peuple ainsi violée, dans l'un de ses représentans, nulle voix ne s'élève parmi les autres pour oser combattre cet attentat, qui suppose la tyrannie établie. » *Ricord, Représentant du Peuple, A la Convention Nationale* (Paris: Imprimerie Hacquart, 2 vendémiaire IV). AN AD/XVIII/c/254.

(94) For details on Jeanne Marguerite Nicole Ricard, and on Goujon more generally, see BRUNEL; GOUJON, *Les Martyrs de Prairial*, p. 453, fn 3.

(95) « [...] est-il encore une garantie pour la représentation nationale ? Est-il un seul de ses membre [sic] qui puisse reposer en paix, en se voyant sans cesse exposé à être arrêté, accusé, sans aucun moyen de défense...que deviendra la garantie de la représentation nationale ? ne sera-t-elle pas plus exposée mille fois qu'aux temps de la plus grande rigueur ? Ne sera-t-elle pas totalement détruite ? et sans la garantie, que deviendra la représentation nationale ? que deviendra la liberté ? » RICARD, veuve GOUJON, *Réflexions adressées à la Convention nationale sur la question de savoir si elle doit laisser juger par la commission militaire les représentans du peuple, arrêtés le premier Prairial*. AN AD/XVIII/c/255.

son of the Conventionnel, in his memoirs.⁹⁶ He evoked his father’s purge and incarceration in 1795, which, to him, formed part of a whole series of political imprisonments that had marred France’s political landscape: those of ‘1793, of 1815, and of 1848’.⁹⁷ His father’s time behind bars was deeply embedded in his son’s memories: ‘I was a child when the name of Ham sounded in my ear; it was the terror and the amusement of our evenings. I knew its dark stones, its ramparts, its winding staircases and its imposing platforms, as if I had built them. [...] I can see from here the room in which my father lived. [...]’.⁹⁸

The Convention’s parliamentary purges of the 1790s were not easily forgotten – not just amongst the deputies who had been immediately affected, but also amongst their families and friends, many of whom fought for compensation, rehabilitation and posthumous justice in the years following the initial arrests. The purges left the surviving ex-Conventionnels – who still argued about them in memoirs they wrote in exile after 1815-1816 – with a traumatic, painful legacy that played heavily into the memory and historiography of the Revolution. But they also impacted on second generations, who associated France’s republican heritage, which they had inherited, with their fathers’ suffering. Thus to Philarète Chasles, it seemed as if he himself had ‘built’ his father’s prison at Ham. The Conventionnels’ fate was closely linked to that of the republic, and it was difficult, in the minds of contemporaries, to disassociate the experience of democracy and revolution from the sacrifices made by the revolutionary generation.

The phenomenon of parliamentary purging, as this article has illustrated, was not limited to the Terror, and the successive purges of deputies at the Convention in the years II and III were not only the consequences of the specific Jacobin politics of this period. As the Convention saw a persistent attack on its legislators’ rights, purging became a habit that affected hundreds of its deputies from all political directions over a prolonged period of time. In this way, parliamentary purging became not only key to a destructive political culture that decimated the Revolution’s political and intellectual leadership, but also impacted

(96) « Nous avons tous été quelque peu en prison. Cela nous est arrivé, a vous, a moi, a tout le monde. C’est chose vulgaire que cette gloire. Nos pères nous ont ouvert la route (...). » PHILARÈTE CHASLES, *Mémoires* (deuxième édition, Paris: G. Charpentier, 1876), Vol. 1, p. 67.

(97) « [...] récits de 1793, de 1815, et de 1848, ou les fantômes du château de Ham, de Vincennes et de la Bastille » CHASLES, *Mémoires*, Vol. 1, p. 67.

(98) « Pour moi, j’étais bien enfant quand le nom de Ham retentissait a mon oreille ; c’était la terreur et l’amusement de nos soirées. Je connais ses pierres noires, ses remparts, ses escaliers tortueux et ses plates-formes dominatrices, comme si je les avais bâtis. Je sais la profondeur des fossés ; je vois d’ici la chambre que mon père habitait. » CHASLES, *Mémoires*, Vol. 1, p. 67-69.



heavily on parliamentary practices and freedoms and, ultimately, on the nature and survival of revolutionary democracy itself. This article has highlighted the centrality of this form of parliamentary violence to the history of representative democracy in the Revolution, while also reflecting on its complex causes, the lived experience of parliamentary purging from the perspectives of victims, perpetrators and onlookers, and its long-term, damaging impact on representative democracy in revolutionary France.

Mette HARDER

Mette Harder (L'Université d'Etat de New York – Oneonta)

Mette.Harder@oneonta.edu