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Button F11

HANNAH ARENDT

On Revolution

84-151355-1



PENGUIN BOOKS (1977) [63]
NY: Viking

principle which came to light during those fateful years when the foundations were laid – not by the strength of one architect but by the combined power of the many – was the interconnected principle of mutual promise and common deliberation; and the event itself decided indeed, as Hamilton had insisted, that men 'are really capable . . . of establishing good government from reflection and choice', that they are not 'forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force'.⁸¹

CHAPTER SIX

The Revolutionary Tradition and Its Lost Treasure

Notre héritage n'est précédé d'aucun testament – RENÉ CHAR

I

If there was a single event that shattered the bonds between the New World and the countries of the old Continent, it was the French Revolution, which, in the view of its contemporaries, might never have come to pass without the glorious example on the other side of the Atlantic. It was not the fact of revolution but its disastrous course and the collapse of the French republic which eventually led to the severance of the strong spiritual and political ties between America and Europe that had prevailed all through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Thus, Condorcet's *Influence de la Révolution d'Amérique sur l'Europe*, published three years before the storming of the Bastille, was to mark, temporarily at least, the end and not the beginning of an Atlantic civilization. One is tempted to hope that the rift which occurred at the end of the eighteenth century is about to heal in the middle of the twentieth century, when it has become rather obvious that Western civilization has its last chance of survival in an Atlantic community; and among the signs to justify this hope is perhaps also the fact that since the Second World War historians have been more inclined to consider the Western world as a whole than they have been since the early nineteenth century.

Whatever the future may hold in store for us, the estrangement of the two continents after the eighteenth-century revolutions has remained a fact of great consequence. It was chiefly

during this time that the New World lost its political significance in the eyes of the leading strata in Europe, that America ceased to be the land of the free and became almost exclusively the promised land of the poor. To be sure, the attitude of Europe's upper classes toward the alleged materialism and vulgarity of the New World was an almost automatic outgrowth of the social and cultural snobbism of the rising middle classes, and as such of no great importance. What mattered was that the European revolutionary tradition in the nineteenth century did not show more than a passing interest in the American Revolution or in the development of the American republic. In conspicuous contrast to the eighteenth century, when the political thought of the *philosophes*, long before the outbreak of the American Revolution, was attuned to events and institutions in the New World, revolutionary political thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has proceeded as though there never had occurred a revolution in the New World and as though there never had been any American notions and experiences in the realm of politics and government worth thinking about.

In recent times, when revolution has become one of the most common occurrences in the political life of nearly all countries and continents, the failure to incorporate the American Revolution into the revolutionary tradition has boomeranged upon the foreign policy of the United States, which begins to pay an exorbitant price for world-wide ignorance and for native oblivion. The point is unpleasantly driven home when even revolutions in the American continent speak and act as though they knew by heart the texts of revolutions in France, in Russia, and in China, but had never heard of such a thing as an American Revolution. Less spectacular perhaps, but certainly no less real, are the consequences of the American counterpart to the world's ignorance, her own failure to remember that a revolution gave birth to the United States and that the republic was brought into existence by no 'historical necessity' and no organic development, but by a deliberate act: the foundation of freedom. Failure to remember is largely responsible for the intense fear of revolution in America, for it is precisely this

fear that attests to the world at large how right they are to think of revolution only in terms of the French Revolution. Fear of revolution has been the hidden *leitmotif* of postwar American foreign policy in its desperate attempts at stabilization of the *status quo*, with the result that American power and prestige were used and misused to support obsolete and corrupt political regimes that long since had become objects of hatred and contempt among their own citizens.

Failure to remember and, with it, failure to understand have been conspicuous whenever, in rare moments, the hostile dialogue with Soviet Russia touched upon matters of principle. When we were told that by freedom we understood free enterprise, we did very little to dispel this monstrous falsehood, and all too often we have acted as though we too believed that it was wealth and abundance which were at stake in the postwar conflict between the 'revolutionary' countries in the East and the West. Wealth and economic well-being, we have asserted, are the fruits of freedom, while we should have been the first to know that this kind of 'happiness' was the blessing of America prior to the Revolution, and that its cause was natural abundance under 'mild government', and neither political freedom nor the unchained, unbridled 'private initiative' of capitalism, which in the absence of natural wealth has led everywhere to unhappiness and mass poverty. Free enterprise, in other words, has been an unmixed blessing only in America, and it is a minor blessing compared with the truly political freedoms, such as freedom of speech and thought, of assembly and association, even under the best conditions. Economic growth may one day turn out to be a curse rather than a good, and under no conditions can it either lead into freedom or constitute a proof for its existence. A competition between America and Russia, therefore, with regard to production and standards of living, trips to the moon and scientific discoveries, may be very interesting in many respects; its outcome may even be understood as a demonstration of the stamina and gifts of the two nations involved, as well as of the value of their different social manners and customs. There is only one question this outcome, whatever

it may be, will never be able to decide, and that is which form of government is better, a tyranny or a free republic. Hence, in terms of the American Revolution, the response to the Communist bid to equal and surpass the Western countries in production of consumer goods and economic growth should have been to rejoice over the new good prospects opening up to the people of the Soviet Union and its satellites, to be relieved that at least the conquest of poverty on a world-wide scale could constitute an issue of common concern, and then to remind our opponents that serious conflicts would not rise out of the disparity between two economic systems but only out of the conflict between freedom and tyranny, between the institutions of liberty, born out of the triumphant victory of a revolution, and the various forms of domination (from Lenin's one-party dictatorship to Stalin's totalitarianism to Khrushchev's attempts at an enlightened despotism) which came in the aftermath of a revolutionary defeat.

Finally, it is perfectly true, and a sad fact indeed, that most so-called revolutions, far from achieving the *constitutio libertatis*, have not even been able to produce constitutional guarantees of civil rights and liberties, the blessings of 'limited government', and there is no question that in our dealings with other nations and their governments we shall have to keep in mind that the distance between tyranny and constitutional, limited government is as great as, perhaps greater than, the distance between limited government and freedom. But these considerations, however great their practical relevance, should be no reason for us to mistake civil rights for political freedom, or to equate these preliminaries of civilized government with the very substance of a free republic. For political freedom, generally speaking, means the right 'to be a participator in government', or it means nothing.

While the consequences of ignorance, oblivion, and failure to remember are conspicuous and of a simple, elementary nature, the same is not true for the historical processes which brought all this about. Only recently, it has been argued again, and in a rather forceful, and sometimes even plausible manner, that it

belongs, in general, among the distinct features of an 'American frame of mind' to be unconcerned with 'philosophy' and that the Revolution, in particular, was the result not of 'bookish' learning or the Age of Enlightenment, but of the 'practical' experiences of the colonial period, which all by themselves gave birth to the republic. The thesis, ably and amply propounded by Daniel Boorstin, has its merits because it stresses adequately the great role the colonial experience came to play in the preparation of the Revolution and in the establishment of the republic, and yet it will hardly stand up under closer scrutiny.¹ A certain distrust of philosophic generalities in the Founding Fathers was, without doubt, part and parcel of their English heritage, but even a cursory acquaintance with their writings shows clearly that they were, if anything, more learned in the ways of 'ancient and modern prudence' than their colleagues in the Old World, and more likely to consult books for guidance in action. Moreover, the books they consulted were exactly the same which at the time influenced the dominant trends of European thought, and while it is true that the actual experience of being a 'participator in government' was relatively well known in America prior to the Revolution, when the European men of letters still had to search its meaning by way of building utopias or of 'ransacking ancient history', it is no less true that the contents of what, in one instance, was an actuality and, in the other, a mere dream were singularly alike. There is no getting away from the politically all-important fact that at approximately the same historical moment the time-honoured form of monarchical government was overthrown and republics were established on both sides of the Atlantic.

However, if it is indisputable that book-learning and thinking in concepts, indeed of a very high calibre, erected the framework of the American republic, it is no less true that this interest in political thought and theory dried up almost immediately after the task had been achieved.² As I indicated earlier, I think this loss of an allegedly purely theoretical interest in political issues has not been the 'genius' of American history but, on the contrary, the chief reason the American Revolution has remained sterile in terms of world politics. By the same token, I

am inclined to think that it was precisely the great amount of theoretical concern and conceptual thought lavished upon the French Revolution by Europe's thinkers and philosophers which contributed decisively to its world-wide success, despite its disastrous end. The American failure to remember can be traced back to this fateful failure of post-revolutionary thought.³ For if it is true that all thought begins with remembrance, it is also true that no remembrance remains secure unless it is condensed and distilled into a framework of conceptual notions within which it can further exercise itself. Experiences and even the stories which grow out of what men do and endure, of happenings and events, sink back into the futility inherent in the living word and the living deed unless they are talked about over and over again. What saves the affairs of mortal men from their inherent futility is nothing but this incessant talk about them, which in its turn remains futile unless certain concepts, certain guideposts for future remembrance, and even for sheer reference, arise out of it.⁴ At any rate, the result of the 'American' aversion from conceptual thought has been that the interpretation of American history, ever since Tocqueville, succumbed to theories whose roots of experience lay elsewhere, until in our own century this country has shown a deplorable inclination to succumb to and to magnify almost every fad and humbug which the disintegration not of the West but of the European political and social fabric after the First World War has brought into intellectual prominence. The strange magnification and, sometimes, distortion of a host of pseudo-scientific nonsense — particularly in the social and psychological sciences — may be due to the fact that these theories, once they had crossed the Atlantic, lost their basis of reality and with it all limitations through common sense. But the reason America has shown such ready receptivity to far-fetched ideas and grotesque notions may simply be that the human mind stands in need of concepts if it is to function at all; hence it will accept almost anything whenever its foremost task, the comprehensive understanding of reality and the coming to terms with it, is in danger of being compromised.

Obviously, what was lost through the failure of thought and remembrance was the revolutionary spirit. If we leave aside personal motives and practical goals and identify this spirit with the principles which, on both sides of the Atlantic, originally inspired the men of the revolutions, we must admit that the tradition of the French Revolution — and that is the only revolutionary tradition of any consequence — has not preserved them any better than the liberal, democratic and, in the main, outspokenly anti-revolutionary trends of political thought in America.⁵ We have mentioned these principles before and, following eighteenth-century political language, we have called them public freedom, public happiness, public spirit. What remained of them in America, after the revolutionary spirit had been forgotten, were civil liberties, the individual welfare of the greatest number, and public opinion as the greatest force ruling an egalitarian, democratic society. This transformation corresponds with great precision to the invasion of the public realm by society; it is as though the originally political principles were translated into social values. But this transformation was not possible in those countries which were affected by the French Revolution. In its school, the revolutionists learned that the early inspiring principles had been overruled by the naked forces of want and need, and they finished their apprenticeship with the firm conviction that it was precisely the Revolution which had revealed these principles for what they actually were — a heap of rubbish. To denounce this 'rubbish' as prejudices of the lower middle classes came to them all the easier as it was true indeed that society had monopolized these principles and perverted them into 'values'. Forever haunted by the desperate urgency of the 'social question', that is, by the spectre of the vast masses of the poor whom every revolution was bound to liberate, they seized invariably, and perhaps inevitably, upon the most violent events in the French Revolution, hoping against hope that violence would conquer poverty. This, to be sure, was a counsel of despair; for had they admitted that the most obvious lesson to be learned from the French Revolution was that *la terreur* as a means to achieve *le bonheur* sent revo-

lutions to their doom, they would also have had to admit that no revolution, no foundation of a new body politic, was possible where the masses were loaded down with misery.

The revolutionists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in sharp contrast to their predecessors in the eighteenth, were desperate men, and the cause of revolution, therefore, attracted more and more the desperadoes, namely, 'an unhappy species of the population . . . who, during the calm of regular government, are sunk below the level of men; but who, in the tempestuous scenes of civil violence, may emerge into the human character, and give a superiority of strength to any party with which they may associate themselves.'⁶ These words of Madison are true enough, except that we must add, if we are to apply them to the affairs of European revolutions, that this mixture of the unhappy and the worst received their chance to rise again 'into the human character' from the despair of the best, who, after the disasters of the French Revolution, must have known that all the odds were against them, and who still could not abandon the cause of revolution – partly because they were driven by compassion and a deeply and constantly frustrated sense of justice, partly because they too knew that 'it is action, not rest, which constitutes our pleasure'. In this sense, Tocqueville's dictum, 'In America men have the opinions and passions of democracy; in Europe we have still the passions and opinions of revolution',⁷ has remained valid deep into our own century. But these passions and opinions have also failed to preserve the revolutionary spirit for the simple reason that they never represented it; on the contrary, it was precisely such passions and opinions, let loose in the French Revolution, which even then suffocated its original spirit, that is, the principles of public freedom, public happiness, and public spirit which originally inspired its actors.

Abstractly and superficially speaking, it seems easy enough to pin down the chief difficulty in arriving at a plausible definition of the revolutionary spirit without having to rely exclusively, as we did before, on a terminology which was coined prior to the revolutions. To the extent that the greatest event in every revolution is the act of foundation, the spirit of revolution contains

two elements which to us seem irreconcilable and even contradictory. The act of founding the new body politic, of devising the new form of government involves the grave concern with the stability and durability of the new structure; the experience, on the other hand, which those who are engaged in this grave business are bound to have is the exhilarating awareness of the human capacity of beginning, the high spirits which have always attended the birth of something new on earth. Perhaps the very fact that these two elements, the concern with stability and the spirit of the new, have become opposites in political thought and terminology – the one being identified as conservatism and the other being claimed as the monopoly of progressive liberalism – must be recognized to be among the symptoms of our loss. Nothing, after all, compromises the understanding of political issues and their meaningful debate today more seriously than the automatic thought-reactions conditioned by the beaten paths of ideologies which all were born in the wake and aftermath of revolution. For it is by no means irrelevant that our political vocabulary either dates back to classical, Roman and Greek, antiquity, or can be traced unequivocally to the revolutions of the eighteenth century. In other words, to the extent that our political terminology is modern at all, it is revolutionary in origin. And the chief characteristic of this modern, revolutionary vocabulary seems to be that it always talks in pairs of opposites – the right and the left, reactionary and progressive, conservatism and liberalism, to mention a few at random. How ingrained this habit of thought has become with the rise of the revolutions may best be seen when we watch the development of new meaning given to old terms, such as democracy and aristocracy; for the notion of democrats *versus* aristocrats did not exist prior to the revolutions. To be sure, these opposites have their origin, and ultimately their justification, in the revolutionary experience as a whole, but the point of the matter is that in the act of foundation they were not mutually exclusive opposites but two sides of the same event, and it was only after the revolutions had come to their end, in success or defeat, that they parted company, solidified into ideologies, and began to oppose each other. Terminologically speaking, the effort to recapture the lost

spirit of revolution must, to a certain extent, consist in the attempt at thinking together and combining meaningfully what our present vocabulary presents to us in terms of opposition and contradiction. For this purpose, it may be well to turn our attention once more to the public spirit which, as we saw, antedated the revolutions and bore its first theoretical fruition in James Harrington and Montesquieu rather than in Locke and Rousseau. While it is true that the revolutionary spirit was born in the revolutions and not before, we shall not search in vain for those great exercises in political thought, practically coeval with the modern age, through which men prepared themselves for an event whose true magnitude they hardly could foresee. And this spirit of the modern age, interestingly and significantly enough, was preoccupied, from the beginning, with the stability and durability of a purely secular, worldly realm – which means, among other things, that its political expression stood in flagrant contradiction to the scientific, philosophic, and even artistic utterances of the age, all of which were much more concerned with novelty as such than with anything else. In other words, the political spirit of modernity was born when men were no longer satisfied that empires would rise and fall in sempiternal change; it is as though men wished to establish a world which could be trusted to last forever, precisely because they knew how novel everything was that their age attempted to do.

Hence, the republican form of government recommended itself to the pre-revolutionary political thinkers not because of its egalitarian character (the confusing and confused equation of republican with democratic government dates from the nineteenth century) but because of its promise of great durability. This also explains the surprisingly great respect the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries showed for Sparta and Venice, two republics which even to the limited historical knowledge of the time had not much more to recommend themselves than that they were thought to have been the most stable and lasting governments in recorded history. Hence, also, the curious predilection the men of the revolutions showed for 'senates', a word they bestowed upon institutions which had nothing in common with the Roman or even the Venetian model but

which they loved because it suggested to their minds an unequalled stability resting on authority.⁸ Even the well-known arguments of the Founding Fathers against democratic government hardly ever mention its egalitarian character; the objection to it was that ancient history and theory had proved the 'turbulent' nature of democracy, its instability – democracies 'have in general been as short in their lives as violent in their death'⁹ – and the fickleness of its citizens, their lack of public spirit, their inclination to be swayed by public opinion and mass sentiments. Hence, 'nothing but a permanent body can check the imprudence of democracy'.¹⁰

Democracy, then, to the eighteenth century still a form of government, and neither an ideology nor an indication of class preference, was abhorred because public opinion was held to rule where the public spirit ought to prevail, and the sigh of this perversion was the unanimity of the citizenry: for 'when men exert their reason coolly and freely on a variety of distinct questions, they inevitably fall into different opinions on some of them. When they are governed by a common passion, their opinions, if they are so to be called, will be the same.'¹¹ This text is remarkable in several respects. To be sure, its simplicity is somewhat deceptive in that it is due to an 'enlightened', in fact rather mechanical, opposition of reason and passion which does not enlighten us very much on the great subject of the human capabilities, although it has the great practical merit of bypassing the faculty of the will – the trickiest and the most dangerous of modern concepts and misconceptions.¹² But this does not concern us here; in our context it is of greater importance that these sentences hint at least at the decisive incompatibility between the rule of a unanimously held 'public opinion' and freedom of opinion, for the truth of the matter is that no formation of opinion is ever possible where all opinions have become the same. Since no one is capable of forming his own opinion without the benefit of a multitude of opinions held by others, the rule of public opinion endangers even the opinion of those few who may have the strength not to share it. This is one of the reasons for the curiously sterile negativism of all opinions which oppose a popularly acclaimed tyranny. It is not

only, and perhaps not even primarily, because of the overwhelming power of the many that the voice of the few loses all strength and all plausibility under such circumstances; public opinion, by virtue of its unanimity, provokes a unanimous opposition and thus kills true opinions everywhere. This is the reason why the Founding Fathers tended to equate rule based on public opinion with tyranny; democracy in this sense was to them but a newfangled form of despotism. Hence, their abhorrence of democracy did not spring so much from the old fear of licence or the possibility of factional strife as from their apprehension of the basic instability of a government devoid of public spirit and swayed by unanimous 'passions'.

The institution originally designed to guard against rule by public opinion or democracy was the Senate. Unlike judicial control, currently understood to be 'the unique contribution of America to the science of government',¹³ the novelty and uniqueness of the American Senate has proved more difficult to identify – partly because it was not recognized that the ancient name was a misnomer (see p. 199), partly because an upper chamber was automatically equated with the House of Lords in the government of England. The political decline of the House of Lords in English government during the last century, the inevitable result of the growth of social equality, should be proof enough that such an institution could never have made sense in a country without a hereditary aristocracy, or in a republic which insisted on 'absolute prohibition of titles of nobility'.¹⁴ And it was indeed no imitation of English government but their very original insights into the role of opinion in government which inspired the founders to add to the lower house, in which the 'multiplicity of interests' was represented, an upper chamber, entirely devoted to the representation of opinion on which ultimately 'all governments rest'.¹⁵ Both multiplicity of interests and diversity of opinions were accounted among the characteristics of 'free government'; their public representation constituted a republic as distinguished from a democracy, where 'a small number of citizens . . . assemble and administer the government in person'. But representative government, according to the men of the revolution, was much more than a tech-

nical device for government among large populations; limitation to a small and chosen body of citizens was to serve as the great purifier of both interest and opinion, to guard 'against the confusion of a multitude'.

Interest and opinion are entirely different political phenomena. Politically, interests are relevant only as group interests, and for the purification of such group interests it seems to suffice that they are represented in such a way that their partial character is safeguarded under all conditions, even under the condition that the interest of one group happens to be the interest of the majority. Opinions, on the contrary, never belong to groups but exclusively to individuals, who 'exert their reason coolly and freely', and no multitude, be it the multitude of a part or of the whole society, will ever be capable of forming an opinion. Opinions will rise wherever men communicate freely with one another and have the right to make their views public; but these views in their endless variety seem to stand also in need of purification and representation, and it was originally the particular function of the Senate to be the 'medium' through which all public views must pass.¹⁶ Even though opinions are formed by individuals and must remain, as it were, their property, no single individual – neither the wise man of the philosophers nor the divinely informed reason, common to all men, of the Enlightenment – can ever be equal to the task of sifting opinions, of passing them through the sieve of an intelligence which will separate the arbitrary and the merely idiosyncratic, and thus purify them into public views. For 'the reason of man, like man himself, is timid and cautious when left alone, and acquires firmness and confidence in proportion to the number with which it is associated'.¹⁷ Since opinions are formed and tested in a process of exchange of opinion against opinion, their differences can be mediated only by passing them through the medium of a body of men, chosen for the purpose; these men, taken by themselves, are not wise, and yet their common purpose is wisdom – wisdom under the conditions of the fallibility and frailty of the human mind.

Historically speaking, opinion – its relevance for the political realm in general and its role in government in particular – was

discovered in the very event and course of revolution. This, of course, is not surprising. That all authority in the last analysis rests on opinion is never more forcefully demonstrated than when, suddenly and unexpectedly, a universal refusal to obey initiates what then turns into a revolution. To be sure, this moment – perhaps the most dramatic moment in history – opens the doors wide to demagogues of all sorts and colours, but what else does even revolutionary demagoguery testify if not to the necessity of all regimes, old and new, ‘to rest on opinion’? Unlike human reason, human power is not only ‘timid and cautious when left alone’, it is simply non-existent unless it can rely on others; the most powerful king and the least scrupulous of all tyrants are helpless if no one obeys them, that is, supports them through obedience; for, in politics, obedience and support are the same. Opinion was discovered by both the French and the American Revolutions, but only the latter – and this shows once more the high rank of its political creativity – knew how to build a lasting institution for the formation of public views into the very structure of the republic. What the alternative was, we know only too well from the course of the French Revolution and of those that followed it. In all these instances, the chaos of unrepresented and unpurified opinions, because there existed no medium to pass them through, crystallized into a variety of conflicting mass sentiments under the pressure of emergency, waiting for a ‘strong man’ to mould them into a unanimous ‘public opinion’, which spelled death to all opinions. In actual fact, the alternative was the plebiscite, the only institution which corresponds closely to the unbridled rule of public opinion; and just as public opinion is the death of opinions, the plebiscite puts an end to the citizen’s right to vote, to choose and to control their government.

In novelty and uniqueness, the institution of the Senate equals the discovery of judicial control as represented in the institution of Supreme Courts. Theoretically, it only remains to note that in these two acquisitions of revolution – a lasting institution for opinion and a lasting institution for judgement – the Founding Fathers transcended their own conceptual framework, which, of course, antedated the Revolution; they thus responded to the

enlarged horizon of experiences which the event itself had opened up to them. For the three pivotal concepts on which the century’s pre-revolutionary thought had turned, and which theoretically still dominated the revolutionary debates, were power, passion, and reason: the power of government was supposed to control the passion of social interests and to be controlled, in its turn, by individual reason. In this scheme, opinion and judgement obviously belong among the faculties of reason, but the point of the matter is that these two, politically most important, rational faculties had been almost entirely neglected by the tradition of political as well as philosophic thought. Obviously it was no theoretical or philosophical interest that made the men of the Revolution aware of the importance of these faculties; they might have remembered dimly the severe blows which first Parmenides and then Plato had dealt to the reputation of opinion, which, ever since, has been understood as the opposite of truth, but they certainly did not try consciously to reassert the rank and dignity of opinion in the hierarchy of human rational abilities. The same is true with respect to judgement, where we would have to turn to Kant’s philosophy, rather than to the men of the revolutions, if we wished to learn something about its essential character and amazing range in the realm of human affairs. What enabled the Founding Fathers to transcend the narrow and tradition-bound framework of their general concepts was the urgent desire to assure stability to their new creation, and to stabilize every factor of political life into a ‘lasting institution’.

Nothing perhaps indicates more clearly that the revolutions brought to light the new, secular, and worldly yearnings of the modern age than this all-pervasive preoccupation with permanence, with a ‘perpetual state’ which, as the colonists never tired of repeating, should be secure for their ‘posterity’. It would be quite erroneous to mistake these claims for the later bourgeois desire to provide for the future of one’s children and grandchildren. What lay behind them was the deeply felt desire for an Eternal City on earth, plus the conviction that ‘a Commonwealth rightly ordered, may for any internal causes be as im-

mortal or long-lived as the World'.¹⁸ And this conviction was so un-Christian, so basically alien to the religious spirit of the whole period which separates the end of antiquity from the modern age, that we must go back to Cicero to find anything similar in emphasis and outlook. For the Paulinian notion that 'the wages of sin is death' echoed only for the individual what Cicero had stated as a law ruling communities – *Civitatibus autem mors ipsa poena est, quae videtur a poena singulos vindicare; debet enim constituta sic esse civitas ut aeterna sit.*¹⁹ ('Since a political body must be so constituted that it might be eternal, death is for communities the punishment [of their wrongdoing], the same death which seems to nullify punishment for individuals.') Politically, the outstanding characteristic of the Christian era had been that this ancient view of world and man – of mortal men moving in an everlasting or potentially everlasting world – was reversed: men in possession of an everlasting life moved in an ever-changing world whose ultimate fate was death; and the outstanding characteristic of the modern age was that it turned once more to antiquity to find a precedent for its own new preoccupation with the future of the man-made world on earth. Obviously the secularity of the world and the worldliness of men in any given age can best be measured by the extent to which preoccupation with the future of the world takes precedence in men's minds over preoccupation with their own ultimate destiny in a hereafter. Hence, it was a sign of the new age's secularity when even very religious people desired not only a government which would leave them free to work out their individual salvation but wished 'to establish a government . . . more agreeable to the dignity of human nature, . . . and to transmit such a government down to their posterity with the means of securing and preserving it forever'.²⁰ This, at any rate, was the deepest motive which John Adams ascribed to the Puritans, and the extent to which he might have been right is the extent to which even the Puritans were no longer mere pilgrims on earth but 'Pilgrim Fathers' – founders of colonies with their stakes and claims not in the hereafter but in this world of mortal men.

What was true for modern, pre-revolutionary political thought

and for the founders of the colonies became even truer for the revolutions and the Founding Fathers. It was the modern 'pre-occupation with the perpetual state', so evident in Harrington's writings,²¹ which caused Adams to call 'divine' the new political science which dealt with 'institutions that last for many generations', and it was in Robespierre's 'Death is the beginning of immortality' that the specifically modern emphasis on politics, evidenced in the revolutions, found its briefest and most grandiose definition. On a less exalted but certainly not less significant level, we find preoccupation with permanence and stability running like a red thread through the constitutional debates, with Hamilton and Jefferson standing at two opposite poles which still belong together – Hamilton holding that constitutions 'must necessarily be permanent and [that] they cannot calculate for the possible change of things',²² and Jefferson, though no less concerned with the 'solid basis for a free, durable and well-administered republic', firmly convinced that 'nothing is unchangeable but the inherent and unalienable rights of man' because they are not the work of man but of his Creator.²³ Thus, the whole discussion of the distribution and balance of power, the central issue of the constitutional debates, was still partly conducted in terms of the age-old notion of a mixed form of government which, combining the monarchic, the aristocratic, and the democratic elements in the same body politic, would be capable of arresting the cycle of sempiternal change, the rise and fall of empires, and establish an immortal city.

Popular and learned opinion are agreed that the two absolutely new institutional devices of the American republic, the Senate and the Supreme Court, represent the most 'conservative' factors in the body politic, and no doubt they are right. The question is only whether that which made for stability and answered so well the early modern preoccupation with permanence was enough to preserve the spirit which had become manifest during the Revolution itself. Obviously this was not the case.

The failure of post-revolutionary thought to remember the revolutionary spirit and to understand it conceptually was preceded by the failure of the revolution to provide it with a lasting institution. The revolution, unless it ended in the disaster of terror, had come to an end with the establishment of a republic which, according to the men of the revolutions, was 'the only form of government which is not eternally at open or secret war with the rights of mankind'.²⁴ But in this republic, as it presently turned out, there was no space reserved, no room left for the exercise of precisely those qualities which had been instrumental in building it. And this was clearly no mere oversight, as though those who knew so well how to provide for power of the commonwealth and the liberties of its citizens, for judgement and opinion, for interests and rights, had simply forgotten what actually they cherished above everything else, the potentialities of action and the proud privilege of being beginners of something altogether new. Certainly, they did not want to deny this privilege to their successors, but they also could not very well wish to deny their own work, although Jefferson, more concerned with this perplexity than anybody else, almost went to this extremity. The perplexity was very simple and, stated in logical terms, it seemed unsolvable: if foundation was the aim and the end of revolution, then the revolutionary spirit was not merely the spirit of beginning something new but of starting something permanent and enduring; a lasting institution, embodying this spirit and encouraging it to new achievements, would be self-defeating. From which it unfortunately seems to follow that nothing threatens the very achievements of revolution more dangerously and more acutely than the spirit which has brought them about. Should freedom in its most exalted sense as freedom to act be the price to be paid for foundation? This perplexity, namely, that the principle of public freedom and public happiness without which no revolution would ever have come to pass should remain the privilege of the generation of the founders, has not only produced

Robespierre's bewildered and desperate theories about the distinction between revolutionary and constitutional government which we mentioned earlier, but has haunted all revolutionary thinking ever since.

On the American scene, no one has perceived this seemingly inevitable flaw in the structure of the republic with greater clarity and more passionate preoccupation than Jefferson. His occasional, and sometimes violent, antagonism against the Constitution and particularly against those who 'look at constitutions with sanctimonious reverence, and deem them like the ark of the covenant, too sacred to be touched',²⁵ was motivated by a feeling of outrage about the injustice that only his generation should have it in their power 'to begin the world over again'; for him, as for Paine, it was plain 'vanity and presumption [to govern] beyond the grave'; it was, moreover, the 'most ridiculous and insolent of all tyrannies'.²⁶ When he said, 'We have not yet so far perfected our constitutions as to venture to make them unchangeable', he added at once, clearly in fear of such possible perfection, 'Can they be made unchangeable? I think not'; for, in conclusion: 'Nothing is unchangeable but the inherent and unalienable rights of man', among which he counted the rights to rebellion and revolution.²⁷ When the news of Shay's rebellion in Massachusetts reached him while he was in Paris, he was not in the least alarmed, although he conceded that its motives were 'founded in ignorance', but greeted it with enthusiasm: 'God forbid we should ever be twenty years without such a rebellion.' The very fact that the people had taken it upon themselves to rise and act was enough for him, regardless of the rights or wrongs of their case. For 'the tree of liberty must be refreshed, from time to time, with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure.'²⁸

These last sentences, written two years before the outbreak of the French Revolution and in this form without parallel in Jefferson's later writings,²⁹ may give us a clue to the fallacy which was bound to becloud the whole issue of action in the thinking of the men of the revolutions. It was in the nature of their experiences to see the phenomenon of action exclusively in the image of tearing down and building up. Although they

had known public freedom and public happiness, in dream or in reality, prior to the revolution, the impact of revolutionary experience had overruled all notions of a freedom which was not preceded by liberation, which did not derive its pathos from the act of liberation. By the same token, to the extent that they had a positive notion of freedom which would transcend the idea of a successful liberation from tyrants and from necessity, this notion was identified with the act of foundation, that is, the framing of a constitution. Jefferson, therefore, when he had learned his lesson from the catastrophes of the French Revolution, where the violence of liberation had frustrated all attempts at founding a secure space for freedom, shifted from his earlier identification of action with rebellion and tearing down to an identification with founding anew and building up. He thus proposed to provide in the Constitution itself 'for its revision at stated periods' which would roughly correspond to the periods of the coming and going of generations. His justification, that each new generation has 'a right to choose for itself the form of government it believes most promotive of its own happiness', sounds too fantastic (especially if one considers the then prevailing tables of mortality, according to which there was 'a new majority' every nineteen years) to be taken seriously; it is, moreover, rather unlikely that Jefferson, of all people, should have granted the coming generations the right to establish non-republican forms of government. What was uppermost in his mind was no real change of form of government, not even a constitutional provision to hand on the Constitution 'with periodical repairs, from generation to generation, to the end of time'; it was rather the somewhat awkward attempt at securing for each generation the 'right to depute representatives to a convention', to find ways and means for the opinions of the whole people to be 'fairly, fully, and peaceably expressed, discussed, and decided by the common reason of the society'.³⁰ In other words, what he wished to provide for was an exact repetition of the whole process of action which had accompanied the course of the Revolution, and while in his earlier writings he saw this action primarily in terms of liberation, in terms of the violence that had preceded and followed the Declaration of

Independence, he later was much more concerned with the constitution-making and the establishment of a new government, that is, with those activities which by themselves constituted the space of freedom.

No doubt only great perplexity and real calamity can explain that Jefferson – so conscious of his common sense and so famous for his practical turn of mind – should have proposed these schemes of recurring revolutions. Even in their least extreme form, recommended as the remedy against 'the endless circle of oppression, rebellion, reformation', they would either have thrown the whole body politic out of gear periodically or, more likely, have debased the act of foundation to a mere routine performance, in which case even the memory of what he most ardently wished to save – 'to the end of time, if anything human can so long endure' – would have been lost. But the reason Jefferson, throughout his long life, was carried away by such impracticabilities was that he knew, however dimly, that the Revolution, while it had given freedom to the people, had failed to provide a space where this freedom could be exercised. Only the representatives of the people, not the people themselves, had an opportunity to engage in those activities of 'expressing, discussing, and deciding' which in a positive sense are the activities of freedom. And since the state and federal governments, the proudest results of revolution, through sheer weight of their proper business were bound to overshadow in political importance the townships and their meeting halls – until what Emerson still considered to be 'the unit of the Republic' and 'the school of the people' in political matters had withered away³¹ – one might even come to the conclusion that there was less opportunity for the exercise of public freedom and the enjoyment of public happiness in the republic of the United States than there had existed in the colonies of British America. Lewis Mumford recently pointed out how the political importance of the township was never grasped by the founders, and that the failure to incorporate it into either the federal or the state constitutions was 'one of the tragic oversights of post-revolutionary political development'. Only Jefferson among the founders had a clear premonition of this tragedy, for his greatest fear was

indeed lest 'the abstract political system of democracy lacked concrete organs'.³²

The failure of the founders to incorporate the township and the town-hall meeting into the Constitution, or rather their failure to find ways and means to transform them under radically changed circumstances, was understandable enough. Their chief attention was directed toward the most troublesome of all their immediate problems, the question of representation, and this to such an extent that they came to define republics, as distinguished from democracies, in terms of representative government. Obviously direct democracy would not do, if only because 'the room will not hold all' (as John Selden, more than a hundred years earlier, had described the chief cause for the birth of Parliament). These were indeed the terms in which the principle of representation was still discussed at Philadelphia; representation was meant to be a mere substitute for direct political action through the people themselves, and the representatives they elected were supposed to act according to instructions received from their electors, and not to transact business in accordance with their own opinions as they might be formed in the process.³³ However, the founders, as distinguished from the elected representatives in colonial times, must have been the first to know how far removed this theory was from reality. 'With regard to the sentiments of the people', James Wilson, at the time of the convention, 'conceived it difficult to know precisely what they are', and Madison knew very well that 'no member of the convention could say what the opinions of his constituents were at this time; much less could he say what they would think if possessed of the information and lights possessed by the members here'.³⁴ Hence, they could hear with approval, though perhaps not entirely without misgivings, when Benjamin Rush proposed the new and dangerous doctrine that although 'all power is derived from the people, they possess it only on the days of their elections. After this it is the property of their rulers.'³⁵

These few quotations may show as in a nutshell that the whole question of representation, one of the crucial and most troublesome issues of modern politics ever since the revolutions,

actually implies no less than a decision on the very dignity of the political realm itself. The traditional alternative between representation as a mere substitute for direct action of the people and representation as a popularly controlled rule of the people's representatives over the people constitutes one of those dilemmas which permit of no solution. If the elected representatives are so bound by instructions that they gather together only to discharge the will of their masters, they may still have a choice of regarding themselves as either glorified messenger boys or hired experts who, like lawyers, are specialists in representing the interests of their clients. But in both instances the assumption is, of course, that the electorate's business is more urgent and more important than theirs; they are the paid agents of people who, for whatever reasons, are not able, or do not wish, to attend to public business. If, on the contrary, the representatives are understood to become for a limited time the appointed rulers of those who elected them - with rotation in office, there is of course no representative government strictly speaking - representation means that the voters surrender their own power, albeit voluntarily, and that the old adage, 'All power resides in the people,' is true only for the day of election. In the first instance, government has degenerated into mere administration, the public realm has vanished; there is no space either for seeing and being seen in action, John Adams' *spectemur agendo*, or for discussion and decision, Jefferson's pride of being 'a participator in government'; political matters are those that are dictated by necessity to be decided by experts, but not open to opinions and genuine choice; hence, there is no need for Madison's 'medium of a chosen body of citizens' through which opinions must pass and be purified into public views. In the second instance, somewhat closer to realities, the age-old distinction between ruler and ruled which the Revolution had set out to abolish through the establishment of a republic has asserted itself again; once more, the people are not admitted to the public realm, once more the business of government has become the privilege of the few, who alone may 'exercise [their] virtuous dispositions' (as Jefferson still called men's political talents). The result is that the people must either sink into

'lethargy, the forerunner of death to the public liberty', or 'preserve the spirit of resistance' to whatever government they have elected, since the only power they retain is 'the reserve power of revolution'.³⁶

For these evils there was no remedy, since rotation in office, so highly valued by the founders and so carefully elaborated by them, could hardly do more than prevent the governing few from constituting themselves as a separate group with vested interests of their own. Rotation could never provide everybody, or even a sizeable portion of the population, with the chance to become temporarily 'a participator in government'. Had this evil been restricted to the people at large, it would have been bad enough in view of the fact that the whole issue of republican versus kingly or aristocratic government turned about rights of equal admission to the public, political realm; and yet, one suspects, the founders should have found it easy enough to console themselves with the thought that the Revolution had opened the political realm at least to those whose inclination for 'virtuous disposition' was strong, whose passion for distinction was ardent enough to embark upon the extraordinary hazards of a political career. Jefferson, however, refused to be consoled. He feared an 'elective despotism' as bad as, or worse than, the tyranny they had risen against: 'If once [our people] become inattentive to the public affairs, you and I, and Congress and Assemblies, Judges and Governors, shall all become wolves.'³⁷ And while it is true that historical developments in the United States have hardly borne out this fear, it is also true that this is almost exclusively due to the founders' 'political science' in establishing a government in which the divisions of powers have constituted through checks and balances their own control. What eventually saved the United States from the dangers which Jefferson feared was the machinery of government; but this machinery could not save the people from lethargy and inattention to public business, since the Constitution itself provided a public space only for the representatives of the people, and not for the people themselves.

It may seem strange that only Jefferson among the men of

the American Revolution ever asked himself the obvious question of how to preserve the revolutionary spirit once the revolution had come to an end, but the explanation for this lack of awareness does not lie in that they themselves were no revolutionaries. On the contrary, the trouble was that they took this spirit for granted, because it was a spirit which had been formed and nourished throughout the colonial period. Since, moreover, the people remained in undisturbed possession of those institutions which had been the breeding grounds of the revolution, they could hardly become aware of the fateful failure of the Constitution to incorporate and duly constitute, found anew, the original sources of their power and public happiness. It was precisely because of the enormous weight of the Constitution and of the experiences in founding a new body politic that the failure to incorporate the townships and the town-hall meetings, the original springs of all political activity in the country, amounted to a death sentence for them. Paradoxical as it may sound, it was in fact under the impact of the Revolution that the revolutionary spirit in America began to wither away, and it was the Constitution itself, this greatest achievement of the American people, which eventually cheated them of their proudest possession.

In order to arrive at a more precise understanding of these matters, and also to gauge correctly the extraordinary wisdom of Jefferson's forgotten proposals, we must turn our attention once more to the course of the French Revolution, where the exact opposite took place. What for the American people had been a pre-revolutionary experience and hence seemed not to stand in need of formal recognition and foundation was in France the unexpected and largely spontaneous outcome of the Revolution itself. The famous forty-eight sections of the Parisian Commune had their origin in the lack of duly constituted popular bodies to elect representatives and to send delegates to the National Assembly. These sections, however, constituted themselves immediately as self-governing bodies, and they elected from their midst no delegates to the National Assembly, but formed the revolutionary municipal council, the Commune of Paris, which was to play such a decisive role in the course of the

Revolution. Moreover, side by side with these municipal bodies, and without being influenced by them, we find a great number of spontaneously formed clubs and societies – the *sociétés populaires* – whose origin cannot be traced at all to the task of representation, of sending duly accredited delegates to the National Assembly, but whose sole aims were, in the words of Robespierre, ‘to instruct, to enlighten their fellow citizens on the true principles of the constitution, and to spread a light without which the constitution will not be able to survive’; for the survival of the constitution depended upon ‘the public spirit’, which, in its turn, existed only in ‘assemblies where the citizens [could] occupy themselves in common with these [public] matters, with the dearest interests of their fatherland’. To Robespierre, speaking in September 1791 before the National Assembly, to prevent the delegates from curtailing the political power of clubs and societies, this public spirit was identical with the revolutionary spirit. For the assumption of the Assembly then was that the Revolution had come to its end, that the societies which the Revolution had brought forward were no longer needed, that ‘it was time to break the instrument which had served so well’. Not that Robespierre denied this assumption, although he added he did not quite understand what the Assembly wanted to affirm with it: for if they assumed, as he himself did, that the end of revolution was ‘the conquest and the conservation of freedom’, then, he insisted, the clubs and societies were the only places in the country where this freedom could actually show itself and be exercised by the citizens. Hence, they were the true ‘pillars of the constitution’, not merely because from their midst had come ‘a very great number of men who once will replace us’, but also because they constituted the very ‘foundations of freedom’; whoever interfered with their meeting was guilty of ‘attacking freedom’, and among the crimes against the Revolution, ‘the greatest was the persecution of the societies’.³⁸ However, no sooner had Robespierre risen to power and become the political head of the new revolutionary government – which happened in the summer of 1793, a matter of weeks, not even of months, after he had uttered some of the comments which I have just quoted – than

he reversed his position completely. Now it was he who fought relentlessly against what he chose to name ‘the so-called popular societies’ and invoked against them ‘the great popular Society of the whole French people’, one and indivisible. The latter, alas, in contrast to the small popular societies of artisans or neighbours, could never be assembled in one place, since no ‘room would hold all’; it could exist only in the form of representation, in a Chamber of Deputies who assumedly held in their hands the centralized, indivisible power of the French nation.³⁹ The only exception he now was ready to make was in favour of the Jacobins, and this not merely because their club belonged to his own party but, even more importantly, because it never had been a ‘popular’ club or society; it had developed in 1789 out of the original meeting of the States-General, and it had been a club for deputies ever since.

That this conflict between government and the people, between those who were in power and those who had helped them into it, between the representatives and the represented, turned into the old conflict between rulers and ruled and was essentially a struggle for power is true and obvious enough to stand in no need of further demonstration. Robespierre himself, before he became head of government, used to denounce ‘the conspiracy of the deputies of the people against the people’ and the ‘independence of its representatives’ from those they represented, which he equated with oppression.⁴⁰ Such accusations, to be sure, came rather naturally to Rousseau’s disciples, who did not believe in representation to begin with – ‘a people that is represented is not free, because the will cannot be represented’;⁴¹ but since Rousseau’s teachings demanded the *union sacrée*, the elimination of all differences and distinctions, including the difference between people and government, the argument, theoretically, could as well be used the other way round. And when Robespierre had reversed himself and had turned against the societies, he could have appealed again to Rousseau and could have said with Couthon that so long as the societies existed ‘there could be no unified opinion’.⁴² Actually Robespierre needed no great theories but only a realistic evaluation of the course of the Revolution to come to the conclusion

that the Assembly hardly had any share in its more important events and transactions, and that the revolutionary government had been under the pressure of the Parisian sections and societies to an extent which no government and no form of government could withstand. One glance at the numerous petitions and addresses of these years (which now have been published for the first time)⁴³ is indeed enough to realize the predicament of the revolutionary government. They were told to remember that 'only the poor had helped them', and that the poor now wished 'to begin to earn the fruits' of their labours; that it was 'always the fault of the legislator' if the poor man's 'flesh showed the colour of want and misery' and his soul 'walked without energy and without virtue'; that it was time to demonstrate to the people how the constitution 'would make them actually happy, for it is not enough to tell them that their happiness approaches'. In short, the people, organized outside the National Assembly in its own political societies, informed its representatives that 'the republic must assure each individual the means of subsistence', that the primary task of the lawgivers was to legislate misery out of existence.

There is, however, another side to this matter, and Robespierre had not been wrong when he had greeted in the societies the first manifestation of freedom and public spirit. Side by side with these violent demands for a 'happiness' which is indeed a prerequisite of freedom but which, unfortunately, no political action can deliver, we find an altogether different spirit and altogether different definitions of the societies' tasks. In the by-laws of one of the Parisian sections we hear, for instance, how the people organized themselves into a society - with president and vice-president, four secretaries, eight censors, a treasurer, and an archivist; with regular meetings, three in every ten days; with rotation in office, once a month for the president; how they defined its main task: 'The society will deal with everything that concerns freedom, equality, unity, indivisibility of the republic; [its members] will mutually enlighten themselves and they will especially inform themselves on the respect due to the laws and decrees which are promulgated'; how they intended to keep order in their discussion: if a speaker digresses or gets

tiresome, the audience will stand up. From another section we hear of a speech 'on the development of the republican principles which ought to animate the popular societies', delivered by one of the citizens and printed by order of the members. There were societies which adopted among their by-laws an explicit prohibition 'ever to intrude upon or to try to influence the General Assembly', and these, obviously, regarded it as their main, if not their sole task to discuss all matters pertaining to public affairs, to talk about them and to exchange opinions without necessarily arriving at propositions, petitions, addresses, and the like. It seems to be no accident that it is precisely from one of these societies which had foresworn direct pressure upon the Assembly that we hear the most eloquent and the most moving praise of the institution as such: 'Citizens, the word "popular society" has become a sublime word . . . If the right to gather together in a society could be abolished or even altered, freedom would be but a vain name, equality would be a chimera, and the republic would have lost its most solid stronghold . . . The immortal Constitution which we have just accepted . . . grants all Frenchmen the right to assemble in popular societies.'⁴⁴

Saint-Just - writing at about the same time that Robespierre still defended the rights of the societies against the Assembly - had in mind these new promising organs of the republic, rather than the pressure groups of the Sans-Culottes, when he stated: 'The districts of Paris constituted a democracy which would have changed everything if, instead of becoming the prey of factions, they would have conducted themselves according to their own proper spirit. The district of the Cordeliers, which had become the most independent one, was also the most persecuted one' - since it was in opposition to and contradicted the projects of those who happened to be in power.⁴⁵ But Saint-Just, no less than Robespierre, once he had come into power, reversed himself and turned against the societies. In accordance with the policy of the Jacobin government which successfully transformed the sections into organs of government and into instruments of terror, he asked in a letter to the popular society of Strasbourg to give him 'their opinion on the patriotism and the republican virtues of each of the members in the administration' of their

province. Left without answer, he proceeded to arrest the whole administrative corps, whereupon he received a vigorous letter of protest from the not yet defunct popular society. In his answer he gave the stereotyped explanation that he had dealt with a 'conspiracy'; obviously he had no use any longer for popular societies unless they spied for the government.⁴⁶ And the immediate consequence of this turning about was, naturally enough, that he now insisted: 'The freedom of the people is in its private life; don't disturb it. Let the government be a force only in order to protect this state of simplicity against force itself.'⁴⁷ These words indeed spell out the death sentence for all organs of the people, and they express in rare unequivocality the end of all hopes for the Revolution.

No doubt the Parisian Commune, its sections, and the popular societies which had spread all over France during the Revolution constituted the mighty pressure groups of the poor, the 'diamond point' of urgent necessity 'that nothing could withstand' (Lord Acton); but they also contained the germs, the first feeble beginnings, of a new type of political organization, of a system which would permit the people to become Jefferson's 'participators in government'. Because of these two aspects, and even though the former by far outweighed the latter, the conflict between the communal movement and the revolutionary government is open to a twofold interpretation. It is, on one hand, the conflict between the street and the body politic, between those who 'acted for the elevation of no one but for the abasement of all',⁴⁸ and those whom the waves of the revolution had elevated so high in hope and aspiration that they could exclaim with Saint-Just, 'The world has been empty since the Romans, their memory is now our only prophecy of freedom,' or could state with Robespierre, 'Death is the beginning of immortality.' It is, on the other hand, the conflict between the people and a mercilessly centralized power apparatus which, under the pretence of representing the sovereignty of the nation, actually deprived the people of their power and hence had to persecute all those spontaneous feeble power organs which the revolution had brought into existence.

In our context, it is primarily the latter aspect of the conflict

which must interest us, and it is therefore of no small importance to note that the societies, in distinction from the clubs, and especially from the Jacobin club, were in principle non-partisan, and that they 'openly aimed at the establishment of a new federalism'.⁴⁹ Robespierre and the Jacobin government, because they hated the very notion of a separation and division of powers, had to emasculate the societies as well as the sections of the Commune; under the condition of centralization of power, the societies, each a small power structure of its own, and the self-government of the Communes were clearly a danger for the centralized state power.

Schematically speaking, the conflict between the Jacobin government and the revolutionary societies was fought over three different issues: the first issue was the fight of the republic for its survival against the pressure of Sans-Culottism, that is, the fight for public freedom against overwhelming odds of private misery. The second issue was the fight of the Jacobin faction for absolute power against the public spirit of the societies; theoretically, this was the fight for a unified public opinion, a 'general will', against the public spirit, the diversity inherent in freedom of thought and speech; practically, it was the power struggle of party and party interest against *la chose publique*, the common weal. The third issue was the fight of the government's monopoly of power against the federal principle with its separation and division of power, that is, the fight of the nation-state against the first beginnings of a true republic. The clash on all three issues revealed a profound rift between the men who had made the Revolution and had risen to the public realm through it, and the people's own notions of what revolution should and could do. To be sure, foremost among the revolutionary notions of the people themselves was happiness, that *bonheur* of which Saint-Just rightly said that it was a new word in Europe; and it must be admitted that, in this respect, the people defeated very rapidly the older, pre-revolutionary motives of their leaders, which they neither understood nor shared. We have seen before how 'of all ideas and sentiments which prepared the Revolution, the notion and the taste of public liberty, strictly speaking, have been the first ones to disappear' (Tocqueville),