

# The UNESCO COURIER



## 1789 AN IDEA THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

**IN THIS ISSUE:  
AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH**

**Mr. FRANÇOIS  
MITTERRAND**

**PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC**

# A VOYAGE TO NEW HORIZONS OF DISCOVERY

Today there are no more unexplored continents, unknown seas or mysterious islands. But while we can overcome the physical barriers to exploration, the barriers of mutual ignorance between different peoples and cultures have in many cases still not been dismantled.

A modern Ulysses can voyage to the ends of the earth. But a different kind of Odyssey now beckons—an exploration of the world's many cultural landscapes, the ways of life of its different peoples and their outlook on the world in which they live.

It is such an Odyssey that the **Unesco Courier** now proposes to you, its readers. Each month contributors of different nationalities will provide from different cultural and professional standpoints an authoritative treatment of a theme of universal interest. The compass guiding this journey through the world's cultural landscapes will be respect for the dignity of people everywhere.

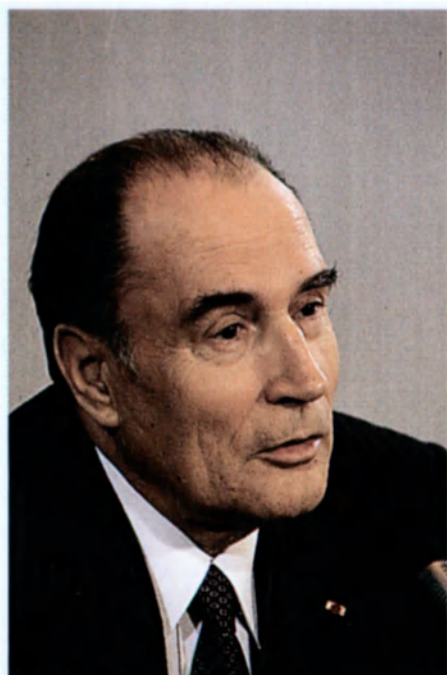
The theme of the 56-page special issue which launches the new-look **Unesco Courier** is the worldwide impact of the idea of Human Rights. As an opener we are publishing an exclusive interview with a leading figure of our time, the President of the French Republic, François Mitterrand.

Future issues will present other themes and other interviews with statesmen and women and with leading creators and thinkers. Several regular features will also be appearing in the coming months. We shall welcome all your comments, criticisms and suggestions...

BY  
JOINING  
US  
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VOYAGE  
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HELP  
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CHART  
ITS  
COURSE

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*Interview with*  
**Mr. FRANÇOIS MITTERRAND**  
 President of the French Republic



Cover: *Earth, Sun, Moon 89*,  
 a watercolour by the French painter  
 Georges Servat (1989)



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**FRANÇOIS FURET:**  
 An idea  
 and its destiny

*An exclusive interview with  
the President of the French Republic*

# François Mitterrand



*Before the institutional upheavals of 1789, France (along with the rest of Europe and North America) experienced an immense ferment of ideas, an intellectual, ethical, juridical and aesthetic revolution which paved the way for political change. Was this not a moment when secular culture came to play a crucially important role as the driving force of history? Would it not be correct to say that culture plays a role which is just as important, if not more so, than economics as a source of dynamism (or inertia) in the evolution of humanity?*

**Y**ou are right to point out that the French Revolution did not take place in a void. It was the prolongation, in political terms, of profound changes in ways of thinking, feeling and acting.

Throughout the eighteenth century there was all over Europe a vast ferment of men and ideas—think of the travels and debates of the philosophers, scholars and artists of that time—which slowly changed the way in which society regarded itself.

The social and political order was no longer perceived as an immutable effect of divine will but as a balance which was both relative (the discovery of the “new world”, and other voyages had revealed the existence of other societies organized differently) and perfectible (as the victory of the American rebels had shown).

For many people there emerged a new line of demarcation between the religious—a matter of personal conviction, the field of freedom of conscience—and the secular, of which government was to be an emanation.

This emergence of a secular culture to which you refer was not in itself hostile to religion—one of the great figures of the Revolution was the Abbé Grégoire, a priest faithful to his religion and his ministry, and a republican—but the affirmation of man’s rights and responsibilities on earth.

The evolution of the sciences played a part in this process. The progress of observation and experimentation made the world—from the secrets of nature to human relations—increasingly accessible to understanding, to rational analysis. Was this not the moment to think of rebuilding in a different way, with more reason, more justice and more liberty?

The German philosopher Fichte, who regarded the Revolution sympathetically, saw in it a proof of the superiority of man over the beaver, which always rebuilds in an identical fashion, or over the bee, which invariably arranges the cells of its hive in the same way.

The new ideas which were spreading at that time, transmitted in the salons, gazettes, and cafés, thus had a decisive influence. They not only provided the weapons of criticism but, in a society blocked by hereditary privilege and absolutism, in a sense legitimized the transition to action.

Not that there was a ready-made theory of revolution waiting to be applied when the moment came. A great deal of improvisation went on under the pressure of events.

But people did have a kind of compass of which the Rights of Man were the armature.


However, during the same period, other movements were defeated, although the aspirations of the revolutionaries of Geneva, Batavia or Brabant, of the Italian Jacobins and the Hungarian patriots, the republicans of Mainz, the Irish rebels or the Polish resistance were not much different from those of the French.

For history is not made by ideas alone. There must be a conjunction of economic, social and political conditions favourable to change. And there must always be the determination—individual and collective—of men.

In the last analysis, they alone are the driving force of history.



# ...Neither self-renunciation nor self-absorption



*There is a growing tendency to “localize” or “nationalize” culture in the sense that people speak, for example, of French, German, Chinese or Egyptian culture. Is there not a twofold danger here of encouraging compartmentalization between cultures and of centring each culture on itself, of inciting it to turn towards the past rather than the future? Of course there are many cultural homelands, each linked to a specific language and history and each bearing a specific combination of creative resources. Some are more dynamic and aggressive than others and they must all have the opportunity to express themselves fully and freely. What can be done to protect them in such a way that they are not stifled?*

I would not be inclined to agree with you that there is a general tendency for culture to be increasingly confined within local or national frontiers.

First of all because the entire history of humanity is one, often violent, sometimes peaceful, of growing contact between human cultures.

In our age, the media build many bridges, multiply influences tenfold and make time contract.

The question is whether this will lead to an enrichment of our different cultures and a more fertile dialogue between them. Or to new dissensions, new inequalities, between those who will master the world media and the rest, between those who will have access to the perpetually changing field of knowledge and the rest.

This is a paradox of modern times; we know that the wealth of the world lies in the diversity of its cultures, in the variety of sensibilities and forms of expertise; we possess fantastic means for improving mutual understanding and communication. But if we are not careful, these instruments of co-operation will become instruments of domination. And under the economic or political impulsion of the most aggressive cultures, a pernicious uniformization may come to prevail.

So what is the answer? Neither self-renunciation nor self-absorption.

Next, we must be thoroughly convinced of the importance of what is at stake: there will be no lasting economic development, no social progress, no solid democracy, no world peace without the flowering of cultures which are sure of themselves and capable of mutual enrichment.

Lastly, we must search for forms of cultural solidarity

which respect the identity of everyone, co-operate without arrogance or excessive humility in the priority areas of education, science, and culture, the keys to a freely chosen destiny.

It is in this sense that France is working, with others, for a Europe with a living culture, for the strengthening of links within the French-speaking community, and for recognition of the cultural dimension of development aid.

On a vaster scale, this is Unesco's *raison d'être* and the ambition of the decade of cultural development launched in 1988. For today even more than in 1945, the following three objectives are indissociable: we must educate, seek and create together.

Finally I would say that I do not believe in the past/present dilemma, but rather in the force of societies which know how to use their past to project themselves into the future.

The project to rebuild, under Unesco auspices, a vast new library at Alexandria is one example of what I have in mind; to create modern conditions for access to knowledge on that Mediterranean shore is simultaneously to renew links with a prestigious past and to prepare the future.

*Is there an area where all these cultural homelands are in contact, an area of universal values? Could one go so far as to say that before the Enlightenment such an area was without intellectual landmarks, that it was latent in great works of art and literature produced in many countries—but that after 1789 it found philosophical expression in the concept of a universal man, cut loose from all ethnic, confessional and social moorings?*

I am tempted to reply with an anecdote. In 1827, Goethe was delighted to discover in a Chinese novel themes close to those he had used in his epic *Hermann und Dorothea*. He noted enthusiastically that there are places—in this case books—where humanity can overcome its divisions. And as a consequence he defined a programme in the form of a concept, *Weltliteratur* [world literature], capable of transcending historic frontiers and cultural particularisms. That was his answer to your question about a possible area of universal values.

The revolutionaries of 1789 felt no doubt on this score: their message was addressed to the whole planet, the rights



## *...educate, seek and create together*

of man and the citizen were proclaimed as universal. This was said with a force that still rings in our ears, and the essential thing was, for the first time, to say it in this way.

We know that in practice things turned out somewhat differently. That liberty, armed for war, ended by assuming in Europe the form and customs of conquest, as Jaurès said. That equality for women, blacks, and the poor, was something less than true equality.

But if the French Revolution was not always faithful to its principles, it was an ideal in whose name people would fight in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in a context in which national and social questions came to assume greater and greater importance. Many peoples of Europe and Latin America, Asia and Africa, would make it their watchword against the domineering pretensions of the West.

And when in 1948, after a devastating world war, the need arose to reaffirm human rights, it was again the declaration of 1789 which inspired the universal declaration set forth at the UN. Later the universal declaration was completed by the declaration of economic and social rights which had been called for in over a century of workers' struggles. This was not aimed at the universal man cut loose from his social moorings of whom you speak; on the contrary it was concerned with people in specific situations, at work and in society.

To return to your question, I think a distinction should be made between acts which bear political fruit—1789, the Declaration of the Rights of Man—and the complex course which, especially in the history of ideas, leads to them.

First of all, the radical change of outlook which made the Revolution possible was a slow gestation which originated long before the eighteenth century, in the humanism of the Renaissance, in the coming of the spirit of comparison which shook the authority of religious revelation, in Galilean physics which heralded the Encyclopaedists, in the Wars of Religion which gave rise to the right of tolerance, in Montesquieu and La Bruyère who asserted the relativism of beliefs and customs.

Secondly, throughout the eighteenth century different sensibilities coexisted, some more universalist, others more relativist, than others, the echoes of which are found in modern critical debates on the idea of ethnocentrism, which claims to erect into dominant universal values the specific contents of a culture, and on the limits of the right to be different.

In other words, it is not so easy to define the philosophical area you describe. The recognition of new forms of determinism—economic, social and psychological—has always raised the question of what is universal in man.

But, more specifically, is it possible to act if all values are relative (to a place, a time, a given culture) and thereby cancel each other out? If racism is only one idea among others, and apartheid is the problem of South Africans alone? Can one do anything but postulate a minimum of universal values in order to pass any kind of judgement outside one's own immediate sphere and provide a basis for human solidarity?

Liberty, equality and fraternity are values which have stood up well to the wear and tear of time and have become sufficiently well acclimatized in all latitudes that people have continued to defend them. As nothing is ever definitively achieved in this field, there is a long way to go from the real to the ideal.

I will conclude with the wise definition given by Tzvetan Todorov in his latest work: "the universal is the horizon of agreement between two particulars". This dialogue, he adds, is perhaps inaccessible but it is the only worthwhile postulate.

*What about the relationship between politics and culture? Is it possible to expect from politicians, above all from world leaders, an aesthetic of community relations, of relations between man and nature, of essential forms of solidarity between all humanity? Can such an aesthetic draw inspiration from the ideal whereby each person should act as if the meaning of his or her action could be erected into a universal principle?*

I seem to remember that Kant formulated his categorical imperative in similar terms in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. He set forth three moral laws: act as if the maxim of your action were to be erected into a universal law of nature, act in such a way that you always treat humanity as an end and never as a means, act as if your maxim was to serve as a universal law for all reasonable beings.

To my mind it would be entirely beneficial if political leaders drew inspiration from these rules of conduct laid down by a philosopher who followed the events of 1789 very closely!

# *Fickle and libertarian, such is the essence of creation. This only irritates those who fear liberty.*

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An aesthetic of relationships in the community?

It is not for statesmen to define what is beautiful. But they are responsible for encouraging all that forges a link between people and strengthens the feeling of a common destiny. Art also has a part to play since it makes use of dreams, that essential commodity.

Here a striking vista which makes the city more congenial to its users; there a new museum, revealing its treasures to all; elsewhere a restored monument reminding the nation of a moment in its history; somewhere else a modern public library, beautiful and useful.

To provide amenities, to adorn, to make a significant statement—all this can be done together.

So many cities throughout the world bear the stigma of degrading forms of urbanization which display an ugly contempt for people. Other choices are possible which express a desire for a better community life for all and a rejection of *laissez-faire*, of the haphazard effects of exclusively private interests, of thoughtless conformity.

I would not claim that the link between man and nature is the same for everyone, for the inhabitant of Buenos Aires and the villager of Casamance, for the Parisian and the Baltic fisherman. Some grapple with earth or water day after day, others enjoy them as a form of recreation.

And yet the risks of exhaustion of certain natural resources are of concern to us all; the irremediable destruction of the atmosphere will spare no one; the community has to pay a price for rashly polluted seas.

Human development has been based on mastery of nature. If we forget what we owe to nature and despoil it, then we may be heading for perdition. Those who work close to nature know that an ill-treated piece of land does not yield its wealth for long.

And the city-dweller knows that by creating a garden or a park among the stones, we do more than embellish the city, we assert the continuity of a civilization, we indicate that human genius is rooted in respect for certain balances.

I have cited these examples to show that politicians, and all citizens, must be more attentive to the essential solidarities between people and between people and their environment, to preserve the vital balances not only for their own societies but for the future of the world.

Remember that when Unesco acted to save Borobudur, Venice or Mont Saint-Michel, it did so because that heritage is part of the memory of all mankind, the common heritage. What was valid for the past is even more valid for the future.

In today's world, no one will find salvation by going against others. The increasing interdependence of economies and cultures makes solidarity an obligation.

*Political institutions should encourage the flowering of cultures and the circulation of their products in the freest possible conditions. But isn't the creative artist always necessarily at odds with the politician, even when the latter is full of good intentions towards the arts? Is it not true that the artist needs to explore pathways that are anti-institutional?*

**A**bsolutely. The freedom to create is to some extent the barometer of all liberties. A society which restricts this freedom usually attaches little importance to its members. Where people are free neither in their movements nor in their words, the force of creation is weakened even if courageous works appear, condemned to a restricted diffusion.

In relation to art, the political authorities bear the responsibility you describe: they should create conditions propitious for creation and circulation.

I would also add an educational dimension, a responsibility towards young people or publics which are relatively unfamiliar with creative works. For loving also comes through learning.

And sometimes too there is an obligation to see that market forces do not reign entirely unchecked, to take, when necessary, protective measures simply to defend the freedom to create against over-encroaching cultures. The example of the audiovisual media, at a time when the number of channels and satellites is rapidly increasing, shows that it is impossible to pay too much attention to this.

The abuse of power begins with interference in content. History has too many regrettable examples of attempts to promote an official art exalting the "positive" virtues of a given régime.

One important feature of the Enlightenment was the holding of a public debate on aesthetics. Many viewpoints were expressed and some of them make us smile today—as when Diderot recommended historical portraits as a particularly revolutionary art form since they drew the attention of the public to the great defenders of its rights.... But fortunately no narrowly utilitarian conception of art prevailed.

Fickle and libertarian, such is the essence of creation. This only irritates those who fear liberty.



*What cultural project do you personally dream of? What would you like to achieve with other world leaders between now and the end of the millennium? Is it possible to imagine a cultural programme on a world scale analogous to Eureka?*

**M**ust I really tell you about my dreams?

Very well. There is one project for my country which I hold dear and that is the great library of France, the launching of which I announced last summer, on the day of our national festival.

The book and the written heritage are at the heart of our civilization. During my first mandate, France greatly developed and modernized its library network. But our Bibliothèque Nationale is too cramped in its old buildings and cannot, in spite of all efforts, adequately present its prestigious heritage or receive all those who seek access to it, in some cases after travelling from distant countries.

Whence the idea of building a great library on another site, radically new in conception, covering a vast field of knowledge, using the latest technologies of data transmission, equally concerned with the audiovisual documents of today's culture, and eventually forming part—with other French and foreign libraries—of a great network.

I intend to follow the project closely. The building must be beautiful and—why not?—the site favourable to meditation, so that everything will combine to celebrate the pleasure of discovery and study, and encourage the acquisition of knowledge.

Secondly, what would I like to achieve with other heads of state between now and the end of the millennium? There is so much to do if the world is to become less harsh to the needy, less given to destruction, more respectful of universal human rights....

One problem, however, seems to me of extreme and even frightening importance for the survival of humanity: the deterioration of the atmosphere.

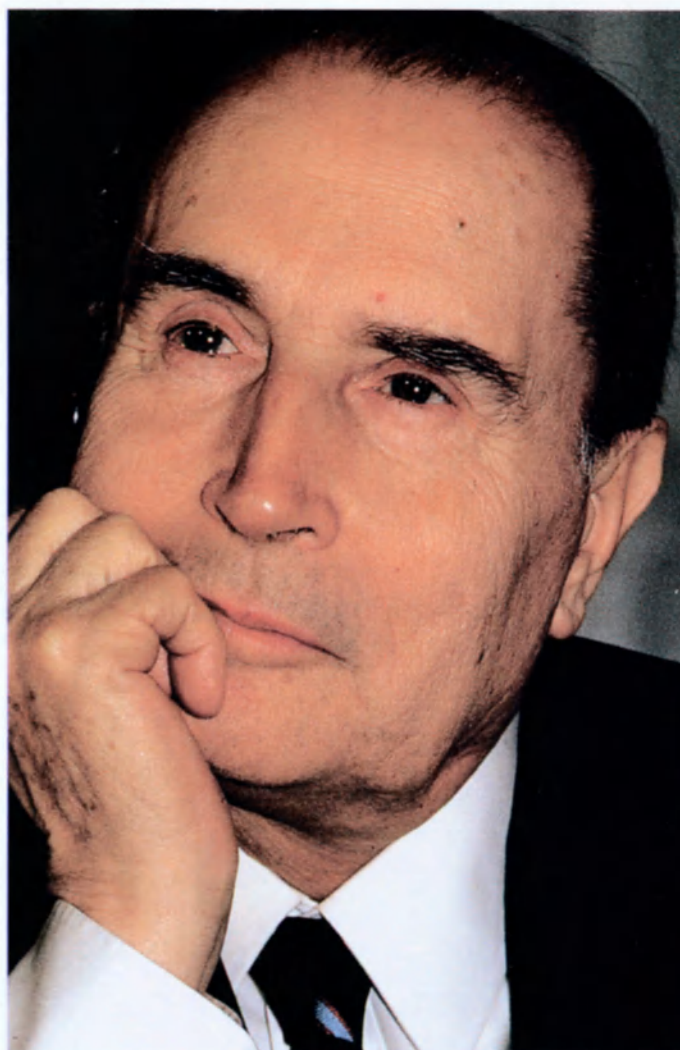
Everyone must understand that this is not just another form of pollution; it may spell the end of all life on the planet. Here everyone must join in the search for a solution.

The United Nations is devoting an interesting research programme to this problem. But the moment has come for decision and action.

This is why, on 11 March last, at The Hague, twenty-four countries signed an appeal urgently calling for the creation of an international authority for the environment.

As always in such a case, dogmatisms and egoisms, draped in a refusal to abandon any fragment of national sovereignty to a collective authority, are slowing the movement down. But twenty-four countries, for a start, are determined to go ahead. Others will follow as they come to realize what is really at stake.

I wish therefore—long before the end of the



millennium—to see human reason, that virtue so dear to the hearts of the men of 1789, triumph over the destructive ravages of laxity and *laissez faire*.

You mention Eureka, the programme of European technological development which now has a sister programme in the field of the audiovisual.

At the time we faced a choice. Should we wait for unanimous agreement among our partners, or should a few of us who were determined to act go ahead and leave the doors wide open for all those who might wish to join us later? We opted for the second course. Gradually the candidatures have flowed in, and not only from Europe.

Cultural co-operation at planetary level, which owes much to Unesco, can also proceed in this way: a project, a programme, the united determination of some, others who join in later. ■





1789

# AN IDEA THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

**R**ARE are the ideas that, in response to some hitherto unexpressed popular expectation, trigger a determination for change, mark a break between the past and the future, and quicken the pace of history.

Rarer still are those ideas which have crossed the frontiers of the time and place of their conception, and germinated much later in other parts of the world.

How does the great idea of 1789, that of “man as a citizen”, stand up today? Rooted in a specific culture—that of Europe—and a particular century—the age of the Enlightenment—it is now universally accepted. After, it is true, a circuitous journey which saw it by turn debated and rejected, ignored and rediscovered, tolerated by some and demanded by others, until in 1948 it inspired a Declaration of Human Rights which was adopted by the international community.

Out of this idea, diffused around the world by both French and foreign contemporaries of the 1789 Revolution—Bonaparte, Jefferson, Goethe, Miranda—arose a great hope for universal fraternity. But this hope was gradually thwarted by theories which affirmed the preeminence of the collective spirit over individual liberty. During a long period it was betrayed by the process of colonial expansion, which substituted the notion of the civilizing mission of the West for the dream of the equality of people everywhere.

*“All men are born and remain free, and have equal rights...” reads the first article of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen adopted by the Constituent Assembly between 20 and 26 August 1789. Opposite, a painting specially executed for the Unesco Courier by French artist Brigitte Salom.*

In some cases modern movements for national emancipation regarded the principle of the rights of man and of the citizen with renewed esteem, but often the concept of the revolutionary state was preferred instead. Finally, in the last decades of the twentieth century, the Declaration of 1789 has come to be seen as a fundamental guarantee of freedom for each people and a framework for understanding and cooperation between all peoples.

This issue of the *Unesco Courier* attempts to highlight some milestones on the itinerary whereby this idea born in the wildest dreams of a handful of visionaries has become part of the common heritage of humanity.



*A key to the Bastille sent to George Washington by the Marquis de Lafayette. It is today displayed at Mount Vernon, Washington's home in Virginia (USA).*

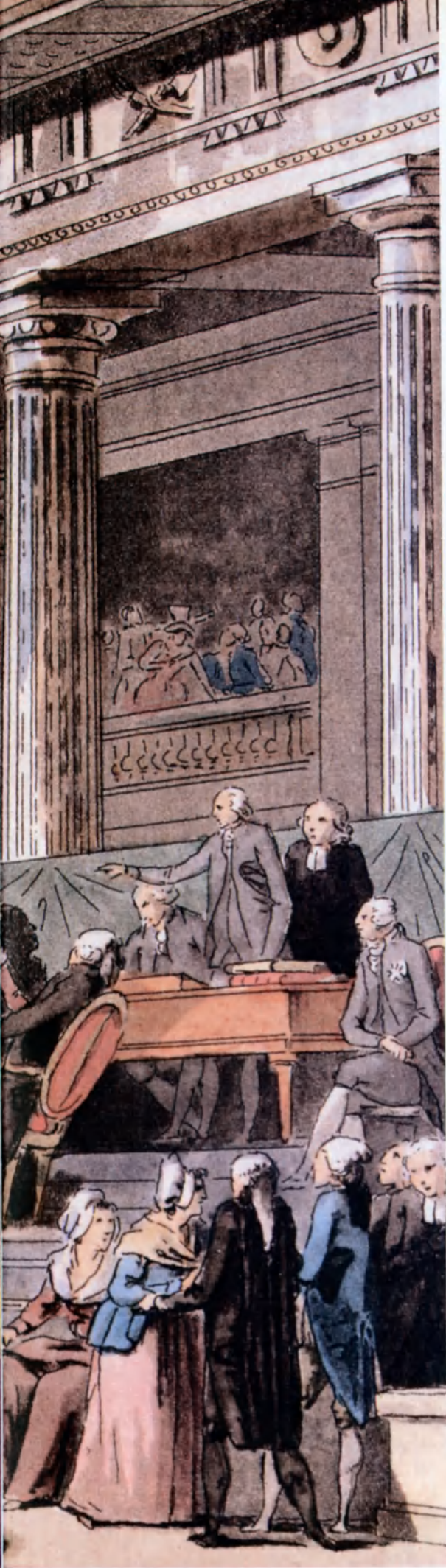
*On 6 October 1789 thousands of angry Parisian women marched on Versailles and demanded to be heard by the National Assembly. A delegation was immediately received in the hall where the Assembly was sitting, as shown in this engraving by Jean-François Janinet.*

*Though many French people departed, many foreigners arrived. They joined wholeheartedly in all our agitation; they came to embrace France. And if they had to die, they would prefer to do so rather than live elsewhere. Here, should they perish, at least they were sure of having lived.*      JULES MICHELET

*Liberty and Equality are blessings too important to be the heritage of France alone...*      THOMAS PAINE

*Either the Republic will be universal or it will not be.*      ANACHARSIS CLOOTS





1789  
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# *The Republic's citizens of honour*

BY EHSAN NARAGHI

**W**E come from Europe, we come from Asia, we come from America, we are Humanity!" Thirty-six foreigners, each wearing the costume of his country, stood at the bar of the National Assembly. According to the report of the session of 9 June 1790, it was like being "at the centre of the world". Pio the Neapolitan was there, don Pablo Olavidé the Spaniard, the Prussian Baron Trenckh, Dutch patriots and others too. Their leader and self-appointed spokesman was a young Prussian noble who called himself Anacharsis Cloots. Flanked by an Arab and an African, he addressed a silent and respectful audience. After praising the Assembly for the measures it had taken in favour of the rights of man, he demanded the honour of participating in the Fête de la Fédération! which, he felt, should not be only a French celebration, but one of all peoples. With these words, "a humanitarian exhilaration seized the deputies and, with lively applause, the Assembly received 'mankind' within its fold".

*Anacharsis Cloots:  
'The Republic will be universal'*

His real name was Jean-Baptiste du Val-de-Grâce, baron de Cloots. The son of an adviser to the King of Prussia, the possessor of a great fortune



*Anacharsis Cloots*

and an impassioned francophile, Cloots had visited England, Italy and even Morocco, before his enthusiasm for the French Revolution caused him to settle in Paris. He contributed to Parisian newspapers and donated 12,000 francs to the nation to arm soldiers in the “sacred war of men against tyrants”. Elected to the National Convention in 1792, he dreamed of creating a universal republic, a federation of all nations. As the French historian Jules Michelet stated in his *Histoire de la révolution française* (1847-1853; “History of the French Revolution”), for Cloots Paris was “the cradle and capital of the general confederation of men [where] the States General of the world will assemble.... Thus will there no longer be provinces, nor armies, nor vanquished, nor victors. People will travel from Paris to Peking as easily as from Bordeaux to Strasbourg. The Ocean, arrayed with ships, will unify its shores. Orient and Occident will embrace on the field of the Federation.<sup>2</sup> Rome was the metropolis of the world through war. Paris will be so through peace...”.

Cloots was one of the eighteen non-French personalities upon whom the Legislative Assembly, in 1792, bestowed the title of French citizen:

“Considering that the men who, by their writings and courage, have served the cause of liberty and prepared the emancipation of peoples cannot be regarded as foreigners by a nation whose wisdom and courage have made it free..., considering finally that, at a time when a national convention will determine the destinies of France and perhaps prepare those of mankind, it behooves a generous and free people to call upon its wisdom and confer the right to participate in this great act of reason upon men who, by their opinions, writings and courage, have proven so eminently worthy, the National Assembly declares the conferring of the title of French citizen upon Priestley, Paine, Bentham, Wilberforce, Clarkson, Mackintosh, David Williams, Gorani, Anacharsis Cloots, Campe, Corneille Pauw, Pestalozzi, Washington, Hamilton, Madison, Klopstock, Kosciuszko, Schiller.”

### *The example of the young American democracy*

Among these eighteen honorary citizens were four Americans: Thomas Paine, a participant in the Revolution; George Washington, first president of the United States; James Madison, fourth president; and Alexander Hamilton, Washington’s faithful companion. This was no accident. The French and American Revolutions were directly related.

The Declaration of Independence of the American rebels, proclaimed in 1776 at the height of the conflict with the British, was the symbol of courage and hope of the young nation. The Declaration, especially its preamble, appeared to the French liberal élite as a triumph of the ideals of progress, liberty and democracy. Until then,

the only European country which boasted of being a home for political freedom was Britain. (Did its constitution not provide Montesquieu with a model for the separation of powers from which the Constituent Assembly drew inspiration?) But, whereas the British empire was not looked upon favourably by the French, the new American democracy received their total admiration. It was to George Washington, through the intermediary of Thomas Paine, that the Marquis de Lafayette offered the key to the fallen Bastille.

In the eyes of the French, one man, by his knowledge, wisdom and unaffected simplicity, embodied the virtues of this new nation: Benjamin Franklin. Sent to France to represent a nation which was not yet even a state, it was his mission to mobilize and channel French aid for the American cause. According to the French historian Jean Lessay, when Franklin arrived in Paris in December 1776, he was already famous in all the capital’s learned societies and cultured circles because of his scientific work, and especially for his invention of the lightning rod, the impact of which it is hard to imagine today. He immediately drew on the considerable capital of sympathy his compatriots enjoyed in France, and established close relations with politicians and scientists. The academies, salons and clubs vied for his attention. When he died in 1790, the Constituent Assembly decreed three days’ national mourning, at the close of a vibrant tribute pronounced by Mirabeau.

### *Jefferson and Paine*

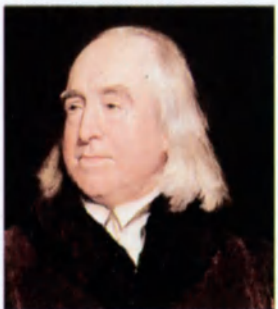
After Franklin’s mission, the United States Congress sent to France in 1785 an urbane and learned politician who had been the principal drafter of the Declaration of Independence: Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826).

The revolutionary intellectuals met often and discreetly at the home of this brilliant and hospitable ambassador. Numerous historians have detected his influence in the draft of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen presented to the Assembly on 11 July 1789 by his friend, Lafayette. Recalled by George Washington to occupy the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jefferson continued to be an ardent defender of revolutionary France. In 1792, when the French Republic was proclaimed, he obtained its recognition by the United States, long before other countries. During his entire presidency of the United States (1801-1809), his friendship for France was unfailing.

Thomas Paine was one of the pioneers of American democracy. With his political shrewdness and courage, he played a role of immense importance in Britain and the United States, as well as in France. Born in Thetford (England) in 1737, he was a labourer until the age of thirty-eight, before becoming a writer, philosopher and militant revolutionary of world renown.

Benjamin Franklin, whom Paine met in Lon-

*From top: Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, William Wilberforce, Jeremy Bentham.*



don, encouraged him to migrate to the United States, where he landed in 1774. Two years later, he published his masterpiece, *Common Sense*, which advocated the independence of the English colonies. This pamphlet, of which 200,000 copies were published (for a population of 3,500,000), made the colonists aware of the necessity of wresting their independence by force. As one of his biographers has written, "Washington was the sword of the American Revolution, Paine was the pen". *Common Sense* soon crossed the Atlantic and was an enormous success in Europe. By May 1776 it had been translated and published in France.

After the American colonies had achieved their independence, Paine returned to Europe, faithful to his motto "My country is the place where freedom does not yet exist". In 1789 in London he took up the cause of the French revolutionaries. To Edmund Burke's attack on the Revolution set forth in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Paine replied with his *Rights of Man*, hundreds of thousands of copies of which were printed in 1791.

The British government banned the book and Paine was indicted for treason. He took refuge in France, where in 1792 he was elected to the National Convention. There, assisted in the debates by other deputies who acted as his interpreters, he was, with the Marquis de Condorcet, the main drafter of the Girondin Constitution.

### From all corners of Europe...

Among the other Englishmen who were proclaimed French citizens, David Williams also helped to draw up the Constitution under the guidance of Condorcet; James Mackintosh defended the French Revolution against Burke's attacks in his *Vindiciae Gallicae* (1791), translated into French and published in Paris in 1792 under the title *Apologie de la Révolution française* ("Vindication of the French Revolution"); and William Wilberforce (1759-1833), co-founder of the Anti-Slavery Society, was, with his lawyer friend Thomas Clarkson (1761-1846), a tireless and ardent pioneer of anti-slavery legislation.

Child prodigy, Oxford graduate at eighteen, Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) was one of the greatest jurists of his time. His first book, *A Fragment on Government*, caused a sensation when it was published anonymously in 1776. Sympathetic to the French Revolution, he published four letters in the *Courier de Provence*, a newspaper founded by Mirabeau, an *Essay on Political Tactics*, and a *Draft of a Code for the Organisation of the Judicial Establishment in France*. He wrote a pamphlet for the Convention in 1793, *Emancipate your Colonies*. For a long time Bentham enjoyed greater popularity in continental Europe and in the United States than he did in his own country.



From top: Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, Tadeusz Kosciuszko, Philippe Buonarroti, Francisco de Miranda.

"All law is evil," he wrote, "because all law is a breach of liberty... Government must be mindful of two things, the evil of the offence and the evil of the law." This citizen of the universe, as he was popularly known, was straightforward, pleasant, of strict morals, and totally disinterested. It was in the *Essay on Government* (1769) by the chemist and theologian Joseph Priestley (who was elected to the National Convention but never took his seat) that Bentham found the phrase upon which his life's work was based: "the greatest happiness of the greatest number".

### Fighting for liberty

For the National Assembly, the German epic and lyric poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (1724-1803) symbolized, along with Schiller, the enthusiasm of the German intelligentsia for the Revolution. In 1788 Klopstock wrote an "Ode for the Convocation of the States General" in which he predicted the rebirth of France. In April 1792, with the aim of defending France against the European coalition, he composed a poem entitled "War of Liberty", which he sent to the Duke of Brunswick, commander-in-chief of the Prusso-Austrian army. He even sent a constitutional programme to Roland, one of the revolutionary leaders. But, like most of the foreign revolutionaries, he lost his illusions during the Reign of Terror.

The Pole, Tadeusz Kosciuszko (1746-1817), future statesman and national hero, participated as a voluntary officer in the American War of Independence (1775-1783), where he gained fame through his heroism and military skill, particularly in the planning of fortifications. He was made an honorary citizen of the United States after being promoted to brigadier-general by Washington. After his return to Poland in 1784 he fought against the Russians, and in 1793 was delegated to Paris to solicit help from revolutionary France. While there he presented a pamphlet recommending the founding of a republic in Poland, following France's example. Back in the United States in 1797, he used money from the sale of his lands, as well as his pension, to buy slaves to whom he gave their freedom.

The Italian aristocrat Philippe Michel Buonarroti (1761-1837) joined the Jacobin Club and later became a French citizen by decision of the Convention. Sent to Corsica with special powers, he was entrusted with the task of propagating revolutionary ideas there. He was arrested as a follower of Robespierre, and while in prison befriended Gracchus Babeuf with whom he became a leader in the planning of an attempt to overthrow the Directory government in 1796 known as the "Conspiracy of Equals". In 1828 he published his *Conspiration de Babeuf*, an account of this unsuccessful enterprise. During the last thirty years of his life he organized a vast network of secret societies in France and Italy, be-



From top: revolutionary emblems of the "German Jacobins"; Mary Wollstonecraft; Etta Palm, a contemporary miniature in which the ardent feminist can be seen rejecting her husband's advances.

tween which he was a tireless emissary of revolution.

### *Miranda, forerunner of Latin American independence*

Francisco de Miranda (1750-1816), another foreigner closely connected with the Revolution, played an important role in both Europe and in South America, where he fought for the independence of Venezuela and the Spanish colonies. He left the Spanish army in 1783 to fight in the American War of Independence, and then went to France where he served in the revolutionary army.

He was a notable commander of French troops during the campaign against the Austro-Prussian armies in Belgium. He then went to London where he became the leader of a group of South American rebels working for the liberation of their countries. He formed the *Gran Reunión Americana* ("Great American Union"), which counted among its members the Argentine patriot José de San Martín; Bernardo O'Higgins, future liberator of Chile; and Antonio Nariño, an early champion of Colombian independence. The enthusiasm aroused by Miranda's arrival in Caracas in 1810 was such that the "Patriotic Society", of which Simón Bolívar was a member, proclaimed the independence of Venezuela in the following year.

### *In the name of women citizens...*

All credit, finally, to the non-French women who devoted themselves to the revolutionary cause, notably the English writer Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), and the Dutchwoman, Etta Palm.

From the outset, Mary Wollstonecraft was a supporter of the Revolution, and like Paine and Priestley published a reply to Burke, her *Defence of the Rights of Man* (1790). She went to live in Paris and joined the group of British people who supported the Revolution. A pioneer feminist, she published in 1792 a book entitled *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*.

Etta Palm also intervened in the course of the French Revolution. *L'Orateur du Peuple* reports that, during a meeting of the *Cercle Social* on 26 October 1790, a speaker expatiating on "the civil and political status of women in a well constituted state", was unable to continue his speech. A woman called for silence and took the floor in the place of the exhausted orator. Without giving anyone time to interrupt her, this "foreign lady, remarkable for her imposing height, said, 'Gentlemen, could it then be possible that revolutionary society, which renders unto men their rights, has rendered Frenchmen unjust and dishonest with regard to women? ... I request, in the name of all women here present, that the orator continue.' "

At the close of the meeting, the women surrounded Etta, who urged them to unite. She



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founded a “Society of Women Friends of Truth”, a kind of charitable circle which stood up against prejudice and soon became a centre of feminist activity. Her first speech as president of the Society, addressed to the forty-eight Paris Sections, denounced the social conditions to which women were subjected. Her speeches, read during meetings in Paris and the provinces, won the approval and enthusiasm of women. She was possibly the first woman to use a vocabulary of feminism, and it is probable that her expansive personality strongly influenced Olympe de Gouges (1755-1793), author of a “Declaration of Rights of Women and the Citizen” published in 1792.

### *Hope and tragedy*

Faced with the excesses of the Terror, all these men and women experienced a period of despair. A great admirer of the Revolution, the English poet William Wordsworth (1770-1850) wrote that the Terror revealed “what man can make of man”. Disillusion reached the depths of his commitment to the Revolution and pervaded his intellectual life.

In the space of a few years, the atmosphere of universal fraternity and human solidarity, unequalled in modern times, which had reigned at the beginning of the Revolution, gave way to arbitrary rule and fear. Could Paris, capital of hope and refuge of the free from all over the world, be relentlessly pursuing those she had so warmly welcomed? What had happened? Could it be explained by the collapse of the Revolution in face of the absolutist monarchies of Europe? Or by a gradual move towards dictatorship? Or by a stroke of fate that Cloots, before mounting the scaffold, described in these terms: “Revolution, men have been thy undoing.”? How did the foreigners who rallied to the Republic live through this drama? What lessons did they learn from it?

These questions continue to haunt not only historians but all free people, not only in France, but throughout the world. ■

1. The Fête de la Fédération was a festival held on 14 July 1790 to commemorate the first anniversary of the fall of the Bastille.
2. The “field of the Federation”, now the Champ de Mars in Paris. *Editor.*

*Left, a Polish engraving celebrating French liberty*





## Thomas Paine

### *The antimonarchist who tried to save a King*

BY JEAN LESSAY

*From L'Américain de la Convention, Thomas Paine, professeur de révolutions, Perrin publishers, Paris 1987*

IT was 11 December 1792, and a trial that the Girondins were unable to delay any longer was due to open before the Convention—the trial of King Louis XVI.

The foremost and most inflexible champion of the Republic, Tom Paine did not believe in the inviolability of the sovereign. His position on this point was clear. Louis Capet—the name he was among the first to use to designate the king—was subject to the judgement of the French people.

“I think it necessary that Louis XVI be tried, not out of a spirit of vengeance, but because such a step seems to me to be just, legitimate and in conformity with wise policy. If Louis is innocent, let us give him the opportunity to prove his innocence. If he is guilty, then let the nation decide whether he is to be pardoned or punished.”

But putting the king to death might provide England, in its turn, with a pretext to declare war. Would this be in France's interest? Furthermore, execution of the king—and Paine could bear witness to this—would be badly received in America, France's foremost ally, whose help with supplies she needed at this time. Although they were confirmed Republicans, the Americans had not forgotten that Louis XVI had given them his constant support during the course of their own revolution. Would not his execution appear, in some way, as a way of punishing him for having acted thus? Whilst taking advantage of the pretext of the execution to declare war, hypocritical England would delight in seeing the French themselves become the instrument of their vengeance by killing her former enemy and the ally of her rebel colonists. Did they really want to give such pleasure to the tyrant George III?

On 15 January 1793, Paine, as a deputy to the Convention, put forward his arguments before the assembly:

“Citizen President, my hatred of and aversion to monarchy are well known. They are based on reason and on conviction, and you would have to take my life before you could eradicate them. Yet my compassion for any man in his misfortune, whether he be enemy or friend, is just as keen and sincere...”

There were, he added, grounds for abolishing capital punishment, that cruel vestige of the monarchical régime; furthermore, the Convention had been given no mandate to kill anyone. “Abolition of the death penalty has already been proposed, and I recall with great pleasure the excellent speech on this subject pronounced by Robespierre in the Constituent Assembly... Since France has been the first of all the nations in Europe to abolish royalty, let her be also the first to abolish the death penalty and to substitute for it some other punishment.”

Paine pointed out that it is impossible to eliminate monarchy simply by eliminating the king, since the execution of Charles I had not prevented Charles II from coming to the throne. He also drew attention to another point which was worth consideration. So long as Louis XVI was alive, his two brothers, the Comte de Provence and the Comte d'Artois, could not lay claim to the throne. To kill the king would be to furnish them with a pretext to give free rein to their ambitions as possible successors.

His speech ended with this twofold proposition: that the Convention should pronounce the sentence of banishment upon Louis Capet and his family, that Louis Capet should be detained in prison until the end of the war and that the sentence should come into force at that time. ■



*The Convention decrees the abolition of slavery in the French colonies on 4 February 1794. Drawing by Nicolas André Monsiau (1754-1837).*

JEAN LESSAY, a French writer specializing in the American Revolution, has published studies on Lafayette (Bordas, Paris, 1983) and Washington (J.-C. Lattès, Paris, 1985). His book on the Count of Rivarol, a royalist in the era of the French Revolution, will be published shortly.



1789  
AN IDEA  
THAT CHANGED  
THE WORLD

*The ideas and principles of the French Revolution were fully implemented on the island of San Domingo, one of the worst of all colonial societies, the anti-thesis of Enlightenment Europe. Here, in the future Republic of Haiti, came revolt, the abolition of slavery, and independence.*

# *In the Antilles, 'Liberty for all'*

BY YVES BENOT

WHEN the alarm bells of insurrection rang in Paris in July 1789, what could a plantation slave in the Antilles, in Guyana or in the Mascarene Islands know or make of these happenings in a far-off land? The question is all the more pertinent in that the victory of the people of Paris on 14 July was not achieved swiftly, with the suddenness of a thunder-clap. It was the fruit of several months of intense political activity, of waiting, of hope, of a release of tension expressed in innumerable tracts and pamphlets.

Overseas, the France of the *ancien régime* consisted of three social strata: the whites, the dominant, governing majority, numbering 75,000; the 35,000 "coloureds and free blacks"

(known as mulattos), who were theoretically free, but whose status was inferior to that of the whites; and the 750,000-strong mass of black or half-caste slaves. This population was spread out over five Caribbean islands (San Domingo, Martinique, Guadeloupe, St. Lucia and Tobago), two islands in the Indian Ocean (the Ile de France, today Mauritius, and the Ile Bourbon, today La Réunion), plus Guyana and St. Louis, the former capital of Senegal.

Among these overseas territories, both by the number of slaves and the wealth it engendered, San Domingo had the lion's share, with at least two-thirds of the slaves, half the whites and two-thirds of the half-castes. Yet San Domingo (to be

precise the French part of the island with its northern, western and southern regions, the rest belonging to Spain) attracts our particular attention because another revolution broke out and triumphed there at the same time as the Revolution in France. Reflecting the prosperity of the slave trade in the mother country, slave-ship activity in the Atlantic and Channel ports (Le Havre, Honfleur, Saint Malo, Nantes, La Rochelle and Bordeaux) did not let up: of the 3,300 slaving expeditions recorded from 1713, 420 took place between 1 January 1789 and 31 January 1793.

### *The flash-point, a false rumour*

The slaves did not wait for the sound of the cannon of the Bastille to rise in revolt. Despite the absence of books and newspapers, the memory of these heroic uprisings remains alive in the oral tradition. In San Domingo this memory goes



back to 1758 and to the maroon (runaway slave) insurgent Macandal. None of these uprisings had succeeded, it is true, but a group of maroons, the Barohucos, established themselves on the frontier between the French and Spanish possessions and by 1784, after almost a century of resistance, had obtained the recognition of the authorities. Meanwhile, desertions from work, flight to the maquis and revolts in one or another plantation never stopped.

Even before the news of the taking of the Bastille reached the islands, another false rumour was abroad—that the king had granted freedom to the slaves but the governors and the colonists were opposed to this and were keeping the news secret. One can speculate that this strange rumour originated with the convocation of the States General, the freedom of expression and publication conceded temporarily for the period of the elections and perhaps from the speeches of the Marquis de Condorcet and the activities of the Society of Friends of the Blacks. However this

may be, the rumour acted as a spur to the rising of slaves in Saint Pierre, Martinique, at the end of August 1789.

When towards the middle of September 1789 the news of the Paris revolt of July finally reached the islands, it was received with different feelings and was differently interpreted in the various circles of colonial society. For the whites, the liberty thus acquired simply meant rejection of the powers of the governors and other servants of the king and thus authorization to give free rein to their convictions and desires. Since these convictions were not the same for the planters as for the tradesmen and craftsmen of the towns, violent conflicts arose. Some proclaimed themselves to be Patriots (and later Republicans or even Jacobins), while others declared their loyalty to the king and to the *ancien régime*.

### *Patriot or royalist but still pro-slavery*

The political labels imported from France changed meaning completely, however, when used by the whites of the colonies. “Patriots” and “Royalists” were united in their common pro-slavery stance and, in San Domingo at least, in their hatred of their mulatto competitors. This was not clearly understood in Paris where the Patriots thought of the “Patriots” of the colonies as their brothers. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was of little concern to the members of this white minority who took it for granted that only they could claim the rights of citizens. Aware of the dangers of the situation, however, the whites of San Domingo hurriedly established censorship of mail coming from France and treated the mere fact of reading the Declaration to slaves or free coloureds as a serious offence.

In San Domingo, the slaves, just like the inhabitants of the popular quarters of Paris, saw in the revolutionary cockade the symbol of liberty. But here, as in Martinique and Guadeloupe, those who demanded this liberty were immediately executed in the traditional manner, being first beaten and then hanged. From 1789 to 1791, the slave population of San Domingo experienced or was subjected to conflicts between whites themselves and between whites and free coloureds, repression by the whites and the colonial militia, made up of mulattos, of sporadic attempts to achieve liberation and the silence of the French Constituent Assembly on the question of slavery.

In August 1791, there was a massive, violent uprising by the slaves of the northern plain, the richest area of the colony. Basing itself on the provisional ideology of a “King Liberator”, this insurrection upset all previously accepted elements of the situation. Despite a series of campaigns against the slave trade and, to some extent, against slavery itself, the Constituent Assembly refused to make any move against the slave sys-



*Above and left, Colonists and Punishments (1989), a diptych by the Haitian painter Edouard Duval-Carrié.*

*The Republican army of San Domingo (1988), oil on canvas by the Haitian painter Edouard Duval-Carrié. The central figure is François Dominique Toussaint, known to history as Toussaint Louverture (1743-1803). A former slave, leader of the black insurgents of San Domingo, he entered the service of the French Republic after the abolition of slavery. In 1796 he gradually achieved control of the island, expelling the Spaniards, forcing the British to withdraw, and setting forth a Constitution which made him the president for life of the first black republic in history, what is now Haiti. Arrested on the orders of Bonaparte, he was deported to France where he died in 1803.*



tem. On the contrary, by recognizing the legality of the colonial assemblies, which were dominated by the large plantation owners, and by undertaking to make no changes to “the status of individuals” (in other words, the status of the slaves) except at the request of the colonial assemblies (in other words, never), the Constituent Assembly reinforced the status quo. This, perhaps, explains why the slaves, who had at first enthusiastically adopted the symbols of the Paris revolution, made their appearance on the political scene draped in the white flag of the *ancien régime*. In fact, they were no more Royalists than the “Patriots” of the colonies were Patriots in the French sense of the word. From the very start there was no doubt at all about the revolutionary nature of the general uprising of the slaves of the northern part of the island.

### *Liberty for all*

From the famous night of 23 August 1791, the insurrectionists numbered 50,000. And the struggle continued after their leaders were tempted, in December, to accept the offer of an honourable compromise which, in the end, the whites withdrew. With covert aid from the Spanish authorities, which became overt after the outbreak of hostilities with Bourbon Spain in 1793, they held out throughout 1792. The constant objective of the black insurgent army, which was

proclaimed and then achieved by Toussaint Louverture, was “Liberty for All”. This did not mean obtaining freedom for a few slaves at the whim of their masters, or the recognition of a few groups of maroons, as had been the case in 1784. Neither did it mean the kind of conditional liberty obtained by the North American slaves who enlisted in the British army at the time of the War of Independence. The slogan “Liberty for All” meant the immediate and unconditional abolition of slavery. Thus it was these slaves, officially Royalists though they may have been, and not one or other group of whites or mulattos, rather hastily assimilated to the colonial Third Estate, who fought to make the Declaration of Rights a reality in the Tropics.

### *A step towards the abolition of slavery*

It might well have been thought that Article I of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789, “Men are born and remain free and equal in rights...”, and, more specifically, Article XVIII of the Constitution of the year I (1793), “No man can be sold or sell himself; his person is an inalienable property”, both implied freedom for all. Yet the silence of the Constituent Assembly on this was “echoed” by its successor, the Legislative Assembly (1791-1792), whose progress was limited to a concern for equality for

mulattos. For nearly a year and a half after that, the National Convention continued in this way and the voices raised in protest were ignored.

Among those who spoke out were two men, Sonthonax and Polverel, then journalists, whom the Legislative Assembly and then the Convention had sent to San Domingo as civil commissioners with extensive powers, not to abolish slavery but to supervise the application of the law of 4 April 1792 on full equality for “coloureds and free blacks” and nothing more. Of course, they also had to proclaim the Republic and then ensure the defence of the island after the beginning of the war with Britain and Spain. It required

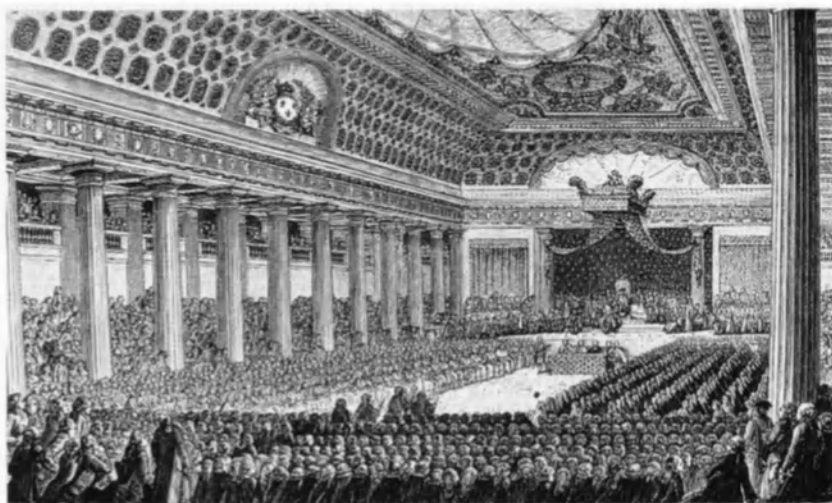
abolishing slavery merely ratified a *fait accompli* and made it applicable to all French colonies, something the Committee of Public Safety failed to do for the Indian Ocean islands or for Saint-Louis, Senegal. In any event, in San Domingo there came about a convergence between the convictions of the envoys of the Convention, as well as Governor Laveaux, and the reality of the situation created by the tenacious insurrection of the former slaves. It required this convergence with an insurrection that was not merely a distant aspect of the French Revolution, but a revolution in its own right, to convert the abstract general principles of 1789 and 1793 into the first effective abolition of the slave system.

It should, however, be emphasized that whereas in the northern region abolition seems to have been imposed by the military and political situation, this was not the case in the west and south. In these two regions the uprising was either put down, indeed crushed (at Les Cayes), or else it had no permanence. Thus, Polverel, who signed the decree of 21 September, effectively liberated a large number of town and plantation slaves who, until then, had been forced to work in servitude.

### *Toussaint Louverture rallies to the Republic*

Other circumstances arose which led Toussaint Louverture to inform General Laveaux on 6 May 1794 that he was rallying to the support of the Republic with an army of between 4,000 and 5,000 men. One of these was the policy adopted by the British, who invaded the island with the help of French *émigrés* and re-established slavery everywhere. Another was a change of policy by the Spanish who, having first backed the black insurrection as a military force, decided to align themselves with British policy. Another, perhaps, was a bluff by Sonthonax who, at the end of February 1794, took the risk of announcing the abolition of slavery by the Convention, when he could not have known of it—Laveaux and Toussaint Louverture did not receive official confirmation of the Paris decree until the beginning of July 1794. In any event, since abolition of slavery was supported only by France, Toussaint Louverture rallied to the Republic because in that way his own objective of freedom for all would be realized.

Under Toussaint Louverture, in the new kind of state that he was to build with his own hands in San Domingo, the slogan of liberty for all was to take on a new meaning, perhaps unique in history, just as the constitutional situation of the colony was unique from 1797 onwards. In that year, Toussaint Louverture, a general of the French Republic, was named Governor by Sonthonax in the name of France, a position he was to hold until 1801. In fact, from 1797 he was the only real power in the colony, the representatives of the Directory—Sonthonax, whom he sent



*The opening of the States General by Louis XVI in the great hall of the Hôtel des Menus Plaisirs at Versailles on 5 May 1789. For the first time since 1614 a King of France publicly and solemnly addressed the representatives of the nation.*

the persistence and resistance of the black insurrection to force them to go beyond the powers expressly vested in them and to act not only in conformity with the law but also in accordance with the dictates of their own consciences. Furthermore, they had to call on the slaves of the Cape and the Cape region to put down the white rebellion led by General Galbaud on 21 June 1793. Of course, the slaves who came to fight for the Republic were immediately granted their liberty; but this was still not enough.

### *Slavery effectively abolished for the first time*

On 29 August, Sonthonax finally decided to proclaim the immediate and unconditional abolition of slavery in the northern region. On 21 September, his colleague Polverel followed suit for the southern and western regions. Unlike the abolition decrees of the nineteenth century, these allowed for no form of indemnity for the slaves' former owners. This was a logical decision in view of the fact that, according to the Declaration of Rights, slavery was contrary to natural law and therefore could not be recognized in any way.

The two decrees of Sonthonax and Polverel were the first decrees declaring the abolition of slavery issued by any slave-trading European power. The famous decree of the Convention of 16 Pluviôse of the year II (4 February 1794)

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*August 1791: the beginning of the insurrection of the black slaves of San Domingo.*

packing in August 1797, Hédouville, who suffered the same fate a year later, and Roume, who stayed until 1801—no longer took any decisions. It was a de facto independence, yet formally within the framework of the French Republic, the only European power to have made the abolition of slavery part of its fundamental code of law.

But independence for whom? Clearly, the overwhelming majority of the “newly-freed”, the former slaves, benefited from it, but so too did the mulattos. It is true that Toussaint Louverture waged war against some of them between 1799 and 1800. Yet this was not a war against mulattos as such but against the attempt of the southern region to secede under the mulatto leader, General Rigaud. Before, during and after these hostilities Toussaint Louverture always hoped that the mulattos would take their proper place in the new unitary state. Independence was also on offer for those whites who were prepared to work

within the new system, whether as planters, magistrates or technicians. Thus, the first state to emerge from the revolt of a European colony was, in the widest sense of the term, a non-racial state in which flourished the equality of men of a variety of origins, traditions and cultures. Whites and a mulatto were among the chief draughtsmen of the constitution Toussaint Louverture had drawn up in 1801. It was this type of revolution, based on human fraternity, that Bonaparte set out to destroy when he came to power, just as he put an end to the Revolution in France itself.

Nevertheless, Toussaint Louverture’s original initiative, which, after his death in prison in 1803 at Fort-de-Joux in the French Jura, was to lead to the independence fought for and won by Dessalines, remains a solid illustration of how the principles of the Enlightenment and of 1789 were brought to fulfilment outside the bounds of the Old World of Europe.





*Above, the Sphinx at Giza, a work by Dominique Vivant, baron Denon, a French engraver and administrator who accompanied Napoleon Bonaparte to Egypt. Right, a portrayal of Bonaparte's entry into Cairo in July 1798, by Auguste Raffet, a French painter and engraver of the first half of the 19th century.*



**MAHMOUD HUSSEIN** is the pen name of two Egyptian writers who have published several books of political sociology, most recently *Versant sud de la liberté, Essai sur l'émergence de l'individu dans le tiers monde* ("The Southern Face of Liberty, an essay on the emergence of the individual in the Third World", La Découverte, Paris, 1989).





# *The eagle and the sphinx*

*The Egyptian campaign led by Napoleon Bonaparte was meant to liberate Egypt from her overlords and establish a régime based on Enlightenment precepts. However, as a result of the clash of cultures and military failure things turned out differently. All the same, the ideas of 1789 took root in Egypt... but in unexpected ways.*

**BY MAHMOUD HUSSEIN**

**I**N March 1798 the executive Directory of the French Republic decided to despatch a military expedition to Egypt under the command of General Bonaparte.

In a paper presented in support of this plan, French Foreign Minister Talleyrand wrote: "Egypt was once a province of the Roman Republic; she must now become a province of the French Republic. The Roman conquest marked the period of this beautiful country's decadence; the French conquest will herald the era of her prosperity. The Romans seized Egypt from a line of kings renowned in the arts and sciences; the French will rescue her from the hands of the vilest tyrants who have ever existed."

The general in charge of the expedition was therefore instructed both to "cut off the isthmus of Suez and to take the necessary measures to ensure for the French Republic full control of the Red Sea" and "to improve the lot of the native inhabitants of Egypt by all the means in his power."

The army was accompanied by a *Commission des Sciences et des Arts*, a group consisting of leading figures in the sciences and the arts among whom were such famous men as the mathematician Gaspard Monge and the chemist Claude Berthollet as well as a galaxy of talented engineers, architects, biologists, chemists, writers, painters and sketch-artists. Taken as a whole, the 165 members of the Commission constituted a veritable walking encyclopaedia, a modern administration in embryo and a "centre of excellence" for the promotion of intellectual and material progress.

### *Make war on the Mamluks Respect the Egyptians*

"Here I am," wrote Monge, "transformed into an argonaut, carrying the torch of Reason in a land where for years its light has ceased to shine...." Bonaparte and his band of scholars were imbued with the notion that they were going to Egypt, not only to establish a military base as a bastion against the British, but also, and above all, to implant the ideals of 1789, by freeing the country from the medieval grip of the Mamluk Beys, reviving agriculture and commerce, establishing new industries, overcoming the scourge of endemic diseases and imposing a modern legal system....

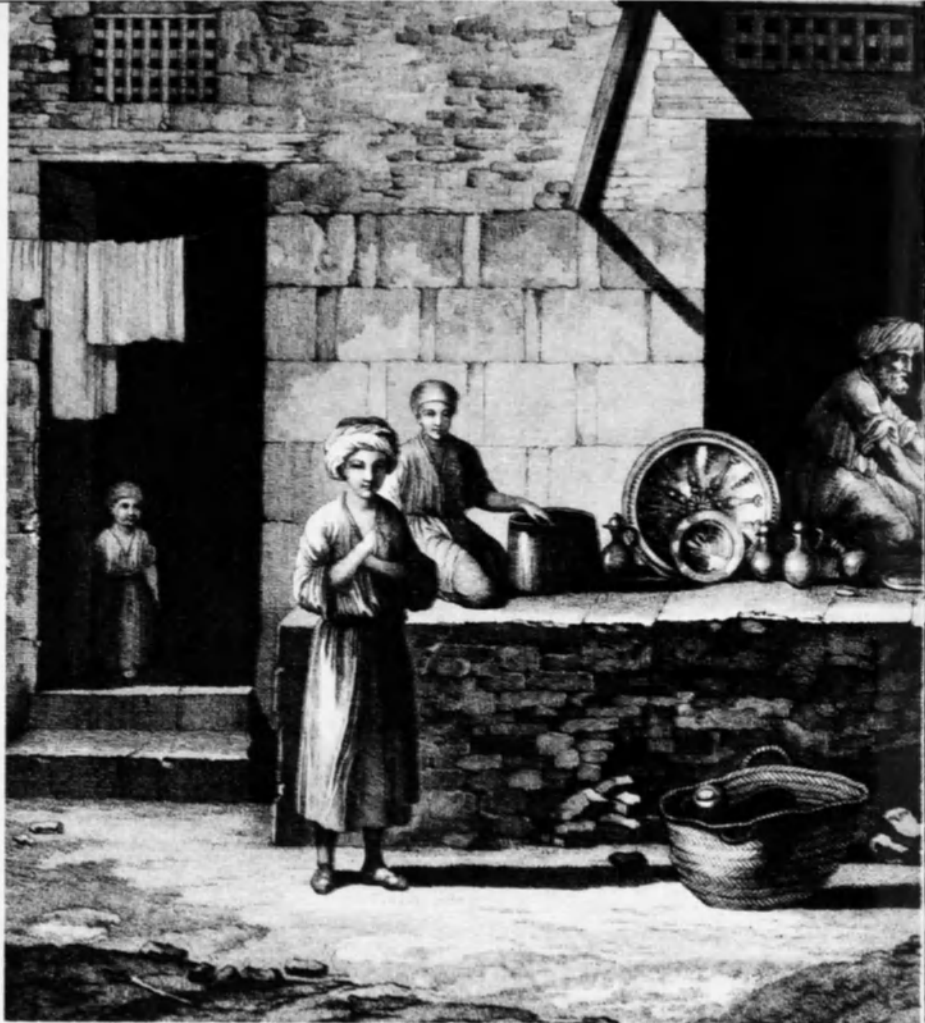
In a message to the soldiers under his command, Bonaparte explained that the objective was not to force the Egyptians into submission, but rather to gain their support by defeating their oppressors, the Mamluks. "You will find that the customs here," he told them, "are different from those in Europe; you must get used to them. The peoples amongst whom we shall find ourselves treat women differently than we do; but in every country the rapist is considered to be a monster.... Pillage enriches only a few and brings dishonour upon all of us..."

"The general officer commanding expressly forbids all Frenchmen, whether soldiers or civilians, to enter mosques or to gather at the entrances to mosques.... It is of supreme importance that each soldier pays for anything he acquires in the city and that they [the Egyptians] be neither cheated nor insulted. We must make friends of them and make war only on the Mamluks."

### *A missed rendezvous*

The Mamluks were easily vanquished. But despite this, the Egyptians on the whole did not fraternize with the French. On the contrary, they rose up in protest against the French presence, sometimes even making common cause with their local oppressors. A combination of reasons explains why this should have been so.

In the first place, despite its revolutionary motives, the French army was an army of occupation which had suddenly burst in upon a so-



cial and cultural arena totally alien to it. Furthermore, this army belonged to a country of which the collective Egyptian experience retained the most bitter memory, that of the pitiless confrontation between Christendom and Islam—the Crusades. With the exception of a minority of intellectuals, who were attracted by the secular French approach, the Egyptian people saw the French expedition as a new Crusade.

Secondly, the watchwords of liberty, equality and responsibility had too new, too disturbing a ring to minds dominated by the imperatives of custom and of the community and too strongly imbued, over the centuries, with a spirit of submission to Mamluk despotism. When Bonaparte informed leading Egyptian personalities of the creation of a Divan (Council), whose elected members would administer the country's internal affairs, their reply was that the people would only obey the orders of the Mamluks. As for equality, in a country where domestic slavery was still widespread, the concept seemed as bizarre as it was disquieting.

Finally, the measures taken by Bonaparte to rationalize the legal code and to modernize the administration were seen by many as a provocation. In Cairo, the inhabitants lived in family groups or in close-knit trade guilds, in sectors separated from one another by gates which were only open during the day. When the order was given to de-compartmentalize the city and to remove these gates, a general feeling of uneasiness and insecurity resulted. The new consolidated regulations concerning property, inheritance and

*Members of Napoleon's Egyptian expedition produced a 5-volume "Description of Egypt" illustrated with over 3,000 drawings. The "Description" covered many facets of Egyptian life, from arts and crafts and household objects to monuments, zoology and botany.*



An illustrious witness of these events, the chronicler Djabarti, relates that no sooner had the French army left than the former Ottoman and Mamluk overlords, anxious to re-establish their weakened authority over the population, began increasingly to resort to arbitrary measures and acts of cruelty. The people then began to appreciate the difference between a modern administration and despotic power and to regret the absence of laws which, though they had jolted them out of their accustomed ways, at least were universal in their application. They recalled that Bonaparte had had soldiers of his own army shot for stealing a chicken from a peasant, whereas the Mamluks did not hesitate to pillage entire villages.

Some Egyptian intellectuals started to voice the respect inspired in them by the French scholars accompanying the expedition and the admiration they had felt when hearing them explain their discoveries and inventions and, perhaps even more, listening as they spoke of life, society and progress in terms which threw open to them hitherto unsuspected intellectual perspectives.

What the Egyptians discerned in the words

*Muhammad Ali*  
(1769-1849), viceroy of  
Egypt (1804-1849).



*In this work by Auguste Raffet, Bonaparte is seen presiding over the Divan (Council) in Cairo.*

of the French was an appeal to overcome their feelings of inferiority, to take charge of their own affairs, to think not only of their duties but also of their rights, to go beyond their present misfortunes and look to the possibility of change, to a future which would be more than a constant repetition of the past. This was a summons to escape from a universe dominated by intangible, revealed truths and to enter a world open to question, to experience, to liberty, in which the mind, guided by reason, could explore an unlimited range of possibilities. The more enlightened spirits of the age began to think that only by fol-

taxation by-passed the established patriarchal hierarchies and local customs. The limit was reached when soldiers penetrated into the various sectors of the city and even into houses to impose public health precautions against the threat of plague—cleaning of streets and houses, washing of clothing and destruction of the belongings of people whose deaths were suspected of being due to plague. This was seen as a violation of the privacy of the home.

Too many changes, introduced too rapidly, overturned centuries-old values. Popular discontent, exploited by the Ottomans and the Mamluks and channelled by religious leaders, led to a succession of riots, which were bloodily suppressed. The gulf widened between the deep heart of Egypt and an army decimated by disease, its fleet destroyed by the British, which was finding its position increasingly difficult to maintain and whose only thought was to return home.

Three years after it had set out, the French expedition ended in complete military failure.

### *The revolutionary backlash*

Paradoxically, it was at this moment that revolutionary thought began to exercise a deep cultural, intellectual and political influence. Once the occupier was no longer physically present, once the brutalities of oppression were forgotten and the daily affronts that French behaviour inflicted on believers and on local traditions were a thing of the past, the revolutionary message began to spread insidiously in the minds of men.

lowing this path could Egypt be awakened from the sleep into which she had sunk for centuries and be given the opportunity to modernize and recover the prestige that had been hers in the heroic age of Saladin.

### *Muhammad Ali, enlightened despot*

Two of these intellectuals, Djabarti and 'Attar, reflected on how Egyptians could become receptive to this new way of thinking that had reached them from the other side of the Mediterranean. They came to the conclusion that the first thing to be done was to reform the educational system. This they thought could be achieved by creating a new type of school in which a rational approach based on experience would be taught, and by

sending Egyptian students to France where they could imbibe the spirit of progress.

Their plans were to be realized thanks to an unforeseen political occurrence, the seizure of power by Muhammad Ali. An Albanian by birth and head of one of the Ottoman brigades sent to regain control of Egypt at the time when the French army was preparing to leave, Muhammad Ali was quick to grasp the radical novelty of the ideas, the organization and the techniques that the French expedition had displayed and the advantages that could be drawn from them by a governor anxious to redress a country rapidly falling apart.

He began by consolidating his political authority by allying himself with the country's spiritual and intellectual leaders and then massacring the leading Mamluk chiefs. With the reins of

*Fighting the Mamluks,  
detail from a painting by  
the French painter  
Théodore Géricault.  
(1791-1824)*



power in his hands, he obtained the Ottoman sultan's recognition of his status as Governor of Egypt and then launched into an enterprise comparable in scope to that to be undertaken thirty years later by the Meiji in Japan—the modernization, enforced from the top, of a patriarchal society.

He reorganized the central structures of the state, established civil and military manufacturing plants, and set up an army. He took as models the officers and scholars of the French expedition, in all respects except one—the spirit of individual initiative. For it was not a question of strengthening private as against state enterprise, but of reinforcing the state against private feudal power.

The door was cautiously opened to Western science and technology. Scholars and European specialists were summoned to Egypt. Egyptian students were sent to Europe. Schools were created in which learning by heart and recitation gave way to experiment and reasoning.

Agriculture was reorganized and the administrative system reunified. The centralized irrigation system, left in ruins by the Mamluks, was reestablished. A transportation network was formed to link the various regions of the country to the capital and to the port of Alexandria. A new police structure was established which gave the people a sense of security they had not known for centuries.

Thus, an orderly, enlightened dictatorship replaced the previous corrupt, anarchic despotism. The hand of the state became more strongly felt in the daily life of the people, but, on the other hand, horizons began to widen and a sense of space, movement and change began to permeate a hitherto stagnant existence. For those called upon to work in the factories or to enlist in the army, the whole pattern and setting of life was revolutionized.

Under pressure from the state, the different strata of society supplied the manpower necessary for the modernization programme. From the ranks of the *ulemas* (the learned of Islam) came the intellectuals who were to learn the lessons of the West. From the artisans, and later even from among the peasantry, came the workers who were to man the state factories.

### *A great power in the making*

Muhammad Ali did not stop there. If Egypt was to become an industrial power, it was so that she could also become an Arab military power. To create an army modelled on that of Bonaparte rather than that of the Mamluks, Muhammad Ali took the bold step of introducing conscription. The peasant communities would provide the rank and file recruits; the officer corps would be recruited from among the sons of heads of the richer families.

Prompted by Muhammad Ali, the moral shake-up produced by the French expedition was bringing about a major social upheaval. Starting

from the pinnacle of power, the shock-wave of the technological characteristics that had brought about the modernization of the West was now travelling downwards through the structure of a traditional community.

In a quarter of a century, Egypt thus became a great regional power whose armies were on the advance both north and south and whose victories were beginning to galvanize the Arab peoples. Her political and military élan was to be disrupted when London and Paris joined forces to prevent the emergence, around the figure of Muhammad Ali, of a dynamic, conquering Arab nation. From then on, Egypt, like the other countries south of the Mediterranean, was condemned to economic colonization.

### *Pathways to modernity*

New pathways had to be taken if the concepts of the Enlightenment were to suffuse the minds of men. Intellectuals rather than the state became the chosen vehicle and the shackles of despotism were gradually thrown off. The spirit of progress became associated with the spirit of liberty and justice. The ideas of the Enlightenment fertilized trends of thought in which change, reform and the struggle against the arbitrary were to take on increasing importance.

Tahtawi, who towards the end of the 1820s had led the first Egyptian student mission to France, opened the way to a new, rational consideration of a modern Egypt in which all should be equal in the eyes of the law. From then on, a liberal tradition emerged upon whose roll of honour are inscribed such prestigious names as Loutfi Al Sayyed and Taha Hussein, and in the wake of which, in the aftermath of the First World War, the national Wafd party was born.

Religious thought itself came into question. To take up the challenge of the West, reformers such as Afghani and Abduh called for a "Renaissance", which, for them, meant a return to the original sources of the Holy Message and the selective integration of certain European social contributions.

The great debate on the ways and means of coming to grips with the modern world was open. It has continued, on an ever-increasing scale, right up to the present day. ■





*Sieyès, Herder, Goethe*

# *Universality and national identity*

BY ALAIN FINKIELKRAUT



*Herder and the German Romantics contested the universalist concept of the nation which France proposed to the rest of Europe in 1789 on the grounds that each people had a unique "soul". Goethe was the only thinker of his time to go beyond this contradiction between the universal and the specific when he affirmed that all cultures can aspire to universality.*

‘THE nation,” wrote the Abbé Sieyès, “is a group of associates living under a common system of laws and represented by a single legislature.”<sup>1</sup> In making use of the term “associates” he wiped out with a single stroke of the pen the traditions of a thousand years and consigned France’s national history to the waste-paper basket. The division of the people into “Three Estates” was abolished—there were no longer nobles, priests, judges, commoners or peasants, but only people enjoying the same rights and subject to the same responsibilities. With a word Sieyès pronounced the end of the hereditary system; anyone who claimed special legal status merely on the basis of ancestry was thereby excluded from the body of the nation.

Contradicting its own etymological roots, the revolutionary nation (the word “nation” comes from the Latin “nasci”, meaning “to be born”) thus uprooted individuals, redefining them in terms of their humanity rather than their birth. It was not a question of restoring a collective identity to human beings without status or social moorings; on the contrary, it was a matter of releasing them from all specific restrictive bonds and making a radical affirmation of their autonomy.

*The nation: a free  
and voluntary association*

Not only were they freed from the shackles of their ancestry but also from the spiritual power

*Between 1795 and 1799 France was governed by the Directory. Executive power was in the hands of 5 Directors elected by a “Council of Ancients”. Above, Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès (1748-1836) wearing his Director’s uniform.*

*La Liberté (1793-1794) by Nanine Vallain. Brandishing the pike and red bonnet of the sans-culottes in one hand and holding the Declaration of the Rights of Man in the other, she treads the chains of slavery underfoot.*



which had until then ruled over them. Liberated from God and from their sires, they were under the tutelage neither of heaven nor heredity. Associates and not subjects, they were, as Sieyès put it, *represented* by the same legislature. The source and legitimacy of the power to which they submitted lay in their decision to live together and to create institutions that were common to all. The exercise of that power, its limits and its nature, were defined by a pact. In short, the government was a property belonging to the whole nation and of which princes were never more than “ministers and trustees who held it in usufruct”. If a king misused the authority contractually delegated to him and treated it as private property, the nation, as Diderot had already

Goethe (centre) surrounded by German writers. From left to right: Wieland, Lessing, Klopstock, Herder and Schiller.



they were reaffirming the primordial pact from which society had sprung. They took the social contract as their authority to establish rule by assembly. The defenders of traditional ways, however, responded that there had never been such a contract; a citizen, they maintained, did not belong to his nation by virtue of the decrees of his own sovereign will. This notion was no more than a chimera.

### *Herder: universal values vs. diversity*

If the philosophers challenged the power of custom, it was because they respected abstract, timeless principles. They did not hesitate “to ride roughshod over prejudice, tradition, seniority, popular consent, authority, in a word, all that rules the minds of the masses”,<sup>3</sup> because, with Plato, they placed the Good above all that exists. To back up their assessment of the established order they referred to an absolute standard, an invariable, compelling notion of right. The counter-revolutionaries, unwilling to follow them to these heady heights, found their spokesman in the German philosopher Herder.

Instead of testing facts against idealist standards, Herder showed that these standards themselves were nothing more than acts with a source and a context. He replaced Goodness, Truth and Beauty in their original local setting, removing these eternal verities from their comfortable position in the heavens and bringing them down to the tiny patch of earth on which they were born. There are no absolutes, Herder declared; there are only local values and fortuitously-formed principles.

Throughout history, or at least from Plato to Voltaire, human diversity has been weighed and judged in the court of values; Herder placed all universal values in the dock and had them tried and condemned by human diversity.

It took the crushing defeat of the Prussian army by Napoleon at the battle of Jena in 1806 and the napoleonic occupation to trigger the real acceptance of these ideas. Germany, a piecemeal agglomeration of petty principalities, regained its sense of unity when faced with an all-conquering France. Glorification of the collective identity assuaged the mortification of military defeat and the degrading subjection it entailed. The nation compensated for the humiliation it was experiencing by the rapturous discovery of its culture. “Teutonomania” helped the German people to forget their country’s impotence. The universal values proclaimed by France were challenged in the name of a specific “Germanity” and poets and jurists believed it to be their mission to attest to this ancestral German spirit. The jurists vaunted traditional solutions, customs, maxims and sayings that formed the basis of Germanic law, a collective work forged by the instinctive, unvoiced spirit of the nation. The poet’s task was to defend the national genius against the infiltration

indicated in the *Encyclopédie*, was entitled to release him from his oath as though he were “a minor who had acted without full knowledge of the facts”.<sup>2</sup> In other words, power no longer originated from heaven but from below, from the earth, the people, the union of wills that constituted the collective nation.

The concept of the “nation”, therefore, burst upon the historical scene in opposition to both the privileges of the nobility and royal absolutism. The social hierarchy was based on birth and the monarchy on the divine right of kings. In place of this view of society and this conception of power, the French Revolution substituted the image of a free and voluntary association.

Herein, for the conservatives, lay the original sin, the fatal *presumption* of the revolutionaries. In coming together with the aim of establishing a constitution, they believed that

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of foreign ideas, to cleanse the German language and to replace words of Latin origin with others that were purely Germanic, to uncover the buried treasury of popular songs and, by reviving them, to recapture the fresh innocence and perfection of a folklore which sang in unison of the specific individuality of the people, untarnished by contact with outside influences.

The philosophers of the Enlightenment defined themselves as “reason’s peaceful law-makers”.<sup>4</sup> Advocates of truth and justice, they propounded the equity of ideal law against despotism and abuses. For the German Romantics everything was the reverse. Jurists and writers took as their first target the notions of universal reason and of ideal law. Their task was not to fight against prejudice and ignorance; it was to give expression to the irreducible particularity of their culture, the unique soul of the people, whose guardians they were.

### Art, the bond of universality

On 31 January 1827, Goethe, then at the height of his fame and in the evening of his life, was talking to his faithful friend Johann Peter Eckermann about a Chinese novel he was reading and which struck him as quite remarkable. Whereas he had expected the book to be overwhelmingly strange and picturesque, he had found in it affinities with his own verse epic *Hermann und Dorothea* and with the novels of the English writer Samuel Richardson. He was surprised not by the book’s exoticism, but by its lack of it. He was intrigued by the fact that this text, a lone fragment from a far-off, little-known land, was *not* a curiosity. Through this unlikely contact between himself, a patriarch of Europe, and this Chinese novel, through the strange feeling of familiarity it evoked in him, through this bond stretching across a gulf of differences, he became aware of the capacity of the mind to overstep social and historical boundaries. Rooted in a particular soil, anchored in an epoch, dated and placed, men could still escape the fatality of their specific situations. The divisions between them were not irrevocable. There were places—i.e. books—where mankind could overcome its fragmentation into a myriad of localized mental attitudes.

Dazzled by this realization, Goethe immediately drew his conclusions from it. Since literature was capable of vanquishing or transcending differences of time, race, language and culture, then literature should set to work to do so. This opportunity became for him an ideal. This utopia, this somewhere beyond time and place, became his true vocation. Only those books which went beyond questions merely of “when” and “where” were of any value.

Goethe had learned from Herder that for man, language, environment and history were not secondary attributes or ornaments added to his fundamental nature. He was very much aware that no one can be freed by decree from the par-

ticular circumstances of his or her birth. For him, the ethnic group into which a person is born is not a fortuitous aspect but a constituent element of that person’s existence. Yet Goethe, and this is the essential point, refused to make a virtue of necessity. That we were the issue of a particular tradition and were formed by being part of a particular nation was a fact to which, henceforth, no one could be blind. In no way should this be considered as a “value”. It was a reality which should be recognized but not worshipped. Breathing the same air as the other members of their tribe, born, like everyone else, into a divided world at a particular time in history, artists could not claim right away to have achieved universality. They instinctively shared the common way of seeing and judging things and their personalities were, at first, in no way different from those of the collective personality which was the source both of their initial ideas and the words in which they expressed them. Yet this was not a reason to exaggerate their rootedness in a place or a language or to raise it to the level of an absolute.

Like Herder, Goethe recognized the constraints on the mind that arose from its being rooted in a particular community. Unlike Herder, however, he called upon art not to reinforce this dependence but to transcend it. A writer’s works should go beyond the *Volksgeist* and not be the expression of it. Human culture should under no circumstances be reduced to being the sum of specific cultures. This is why Goethe called upon poets, artists and thinkers to break out of the national framework to which Herder and his followers demanded that they should confine themselves.

### Towards a world culture

In his conversation with Eckermann, Goethe remained calmly confident, maintaining that time was working towards the emergence of a world literature. Nationalist fervour was declining as the memory of the trauma of the napoleonic conquest became blurred and as political romanticism went into what seemed like an irreversible decline. Furthermore, a world economic market was coming into being which would put an end to national isolationism. Henceforth, no segment of humanity could live out its history under wraps, sheltered from the entanglements of the world economy. Once impermeable barriers were becoming porous and it seemed that it would not long be possible to exclude works of the mind from the generalized commerce in commodities.

History, as we know, was to give a more capricious turn to events... ■



*The oath on the Rütli* (1780), by the Swiss Romantic painter Johann Heinrich Fuseli (1741-1825), portrays a legendary episode in the liberation of Switzerland.

1. *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-Etat?*, P.U.F. publishers, Paris, 1982.

2. Denis Diderot. Article on “Autorité Politique” in the *Encyclopédie*.

3. Diderot. Article on “Eclecticism” in the *Encyclopédie*.

4. Sebastien Roch Nicolas Chamfort (1740?-1794), quoted in *Le sacre de l'écrivain* by Paul Bénichou. José Corti publishers, Paris, 1973.

# The republican dream

*In a famous speech delivered at Angostura in 1819 at the opening of the Congress of Venezuela, Simón Bolívar set forth the principles which underlay his political action and his loyal attachment to a republican régime based on liberty and equality guaranteed by a constitution. Extracts from this important text are given below.*

**T**HE continuation of authority in a single individual has frequently been the downfall of democratic governments. Repeated elections are essential in popular systems, because nothing is more dangerous than allowing the same citizen to remain in power over a long period of time. The people become accustomed to obeying him, and he becomes accustomed to commanding them; this is how power is usurped and tyranny takes root. The freedom of the Republic must be jealously safeguarded, and our citizens should justly fear that the same magistrate who has governed them for many years might come to rule them for ever....

## *A healthy diet of freedom*

Freedom, says Rousseau, is a most succulent dish, but one that is difficult to digest. Our frail fellow-citizens will have to build up their strength long before they are able to digest the life-giving nutrient of freedom. Will they, with their limbs stiffened from such long enchainment, their sight



*The 35-year-old Simón Bolívar is shown beside an allegorical figure of America in this painting by Pedro José Figuerola.*

eneebled by the darkness of their dungeons, and their spirit crushed by pernicious servitude, be able to stride firmly toward the august temple of freedom? Will they be able to gaze unblinkingly into its splendid rays, and inhale the pure air which surrounds it?...

Notwithstanding such painful reflections, I am overwhelmed with joy at the great steps which our republic has taken in embarking on its noble course. Imbued with purpose, inspired by love of justice, aspiring toward perfection, it has, with the separation of Venezuela from the Spanish nation, recovered its independence, its freedom, its equality and its national sovereignty. By constituting itself as a democratic republic, it has proscribed the monarchy, distinctions, nobility, exemptions, privileges; it has proclaimed human rights and endorsed freedom to act, think, speak and write. These eminently liberal measures can never be praised enough for the purity which inspired them. The first Congress of Venezuela has inscribed in the annals of our legislation, in ineradicable letters, the majesty of the

people expressed in all its dignity, with the ratification of a social act such as which will ensure the happiness of a nation....

### *The sovereign principle of equality*

Does not the *Spirit of Laws* state that these should be suited to the people making them, that only by a pure coincidence may those of one nation meet the requirements of another, that the laws should be suited to the country's physical condition, its climate, the quality of its soil, its situation, its extent and its people's way of life; that they should conform to the degree of freedom that the Constitution can tolerate, to the religion of the inhabitants, their interests, commerce, customs and traditions? This is the code which we should consult, and not that of Washington!...

Let us remember that our people are neither European nor North American; they are a compound of African and American elements, rather than an emanation of Europe, as even Spain itself is no longer entirely European because of its African blood, its institutions and character.... The citizens of Venezuela all enjoy, by virtue of the Constitution, the interpreter of nature, perfect political equality. Whereas equality may not have been a guiding principle in Athens, France and America, we ourselves should affirm it in order to remedy the distinction which apparently exists.

My opinion, legislators, is that the fundamental principle of our system depends directly and exclusively on equality being established and practised in Venezuela.... Nature creates men unequal in disposition, temperament, force and character. The laws correct this difference because they place the individual in society in such a way that education, industry, the arts, services and virtues may give him a fictitious equality, properly called political and social. It is eminently felicitous inspiration to have gathered all the classes in one state, the diversity of which has grown with the propagation of the species. By this step alone, cruel discord has been torn up by its roots. How many jealousies, rivalries and hatreds have been thus avoided!

### *The lessons of history*

We must have equality in order to reshape, so to speak, the human species, with its political opinions and public customs, into one single whole. Then, fixing our gaze on the long road that lies before us, we must devote our attention to the dangers to be avoided. History should be our guide on this journey....

And moving from antiquity to modern times we find England and France the cynosure of all the nations and providing eloquent lessons of every kind in the realm of government. The Revolution of these great peoples, like a radiant meteor, flooded the world with such a profusion



*Scene from Bolívar (1943), an opera by Darius Milhaud to a libretto by Jules Supervielle. The décor of this 1950 Paris Opera production was designed by Fernand Léger.*

of political brilliance that every thinking creature has been made aware of what man's rights and duties are and what constitute the vices and virtues of governments. Everyone today can appreciate the intrinsic value of the speculative theories of modern philosophers and legislators....

Legislators, it is fitting to recall what the eloquent Volney says in his preface to *The Ruins of Palmyra*: "To the nascent people of the Spanish Indies, to the generous leaders who guide them to freedom: may the errors and misfortunes of the ancient world teach wisdom and happiness to the new world." The lessons of experience, therefore, should not be lost; the consequences of Greece, Rome, France, England and America should instruct us in the difficult science of creating and conserving our nations with their own just, legitimate and, above all, fitting laws. We should never forget that the excellence of a government does not lie in its theories, in its form or in its mechanisms, but rather in its appropriateness to the nature and character of the nation for which it is devised. ■



*Russian poetry, from Pushkin to Osip Mandelstam, exalts the love of liberty. It thus has a natural place in the great debate opened up by the French Revolution...*

# Poetry, freedom and revolution

BY SERGEI S. AVERINTSEV



*The Moscow Kremlin at the beginning of the 19th century*



*Pushkin (3rd seated figure from left) at a literary banquet given by a bookseller*

1789  
AN IDEA  
THAT CHANGED  
THE WORLD



“Madame Svechin as a child”. Sofia Petrovna Soymonov (1782-1857), the wife of General Svechin, left Russia for France in 1816.

**F**AR from the tumult of the streets of Paris in the fateful year of 1789, lay Moscow, rather like a small country town with its steep streets glittering with golden domes and crosses. Moscow, that highly orthodox and patriarchal capital city, before the fire of 1812 still had reminders at every turn of days long before Peter the Great.

In the entrance hall of the aristocratic mansion of Piotr Alexandrovich Soymonov, innumerable candles gave off a festive glow. They were the work of the daughter of the house, a sensitive and intelligent little girl, not quite seven years old. Her father was surprised—why all these candles? She told him the reason: “In honour of the storming of the Bastille and the release of the poor prisoners!”

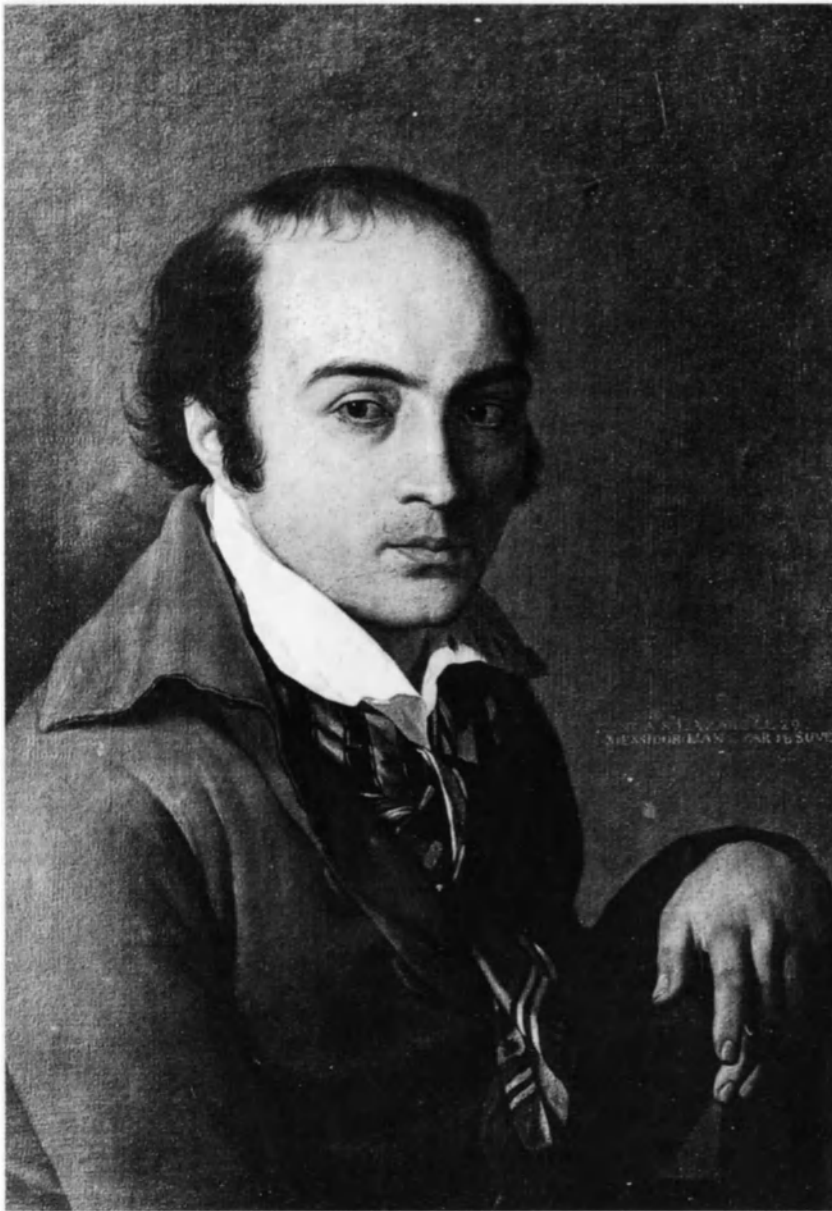
This little girl did not, however, throw in her lot with the Jacobins. Sofia Petrovna (1782-1857), whose married name was Svechin, belongs to the history of nineteenth-century Catholicism. She eventually left Russia because of her religious convictions, and for decades her Paris salon was a meeting-place for the cream of the Catholic intellectual élite: the liberals Montalembert and

Lacordaire, the Spanish traditionalist Donoso-Cortès, and many others.

With her phrase “the release of the poor prisoners” the child went straight to the point and hit on what was to be the central theme of Russian life and culture for the next two centuries. Barely a year after the storming of the Bastille, and not unconnected with the fear and panic spread by the events in France, the writer Aleksandr Radishchev was arrested because of his book *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, which, like the Revolution itself, was a radical postscript to the philosophical thought of the Enlightenment. On the road to exile, Radishchev wrote the following lines, full of black humour:

*To blaze a trail where none has trod before  
For the fiery daredevils of the written word,  
For the pure in heart, for Truth, I go in fear  
To Siberia, to prison and to chains.*

His premonition was correct. The trail was blazed for many like him, and along it marched a succession of new “daredevils of the written word”, to use his blunt, old-fashioned expression. This, too, is one of the hallmarks of Russian cul-



*This portrait of the French poet André Chénier was made in prison by Joseph-Benoît Suvée 10 days before Chénier's execution.*

ture. A century later, the journalist Vladimir Korolenko declared that at the gates of heaven every Russian writer would be asked how many years he had spent in prison for the sake of truth. And his contemporary, the literary critic Vengerov, wrote a book with an eloquent title: *The Heroic Nature of Russian Literature*. From the arrest of Radishchev to the repeated exiles of Pushkin, the conscription of Pozhelayev and the jailing of Dostoevsky, to the execution of Gumilyov and the fate of other twentieth-century writers condemned to the camps, the line runs clear and unbroken.

### *The example of André Chénier*

The Russian people saw the poet primarily as a martyr. How many Russian laments have been composed, from Pushkin to Osip Mandelstam, on the exile of Ovid? But the Roman poet was the victim of the Emperor Augustus, and his fate was less tragic than the fate of those involved in the greater tragedy arising from the tangled web

of the Revolution and the rifts caused by its intrinsic contradictions.

One poet of 200 years ago, who in the Russian poetic tradition founded by Pushkin is imbued with the martyr's special significance, is André Chénier, the great poet of revolutionary France. Chénier, the citizen-poet, was inspired by the Revolution and condemned to death by the Revolution, which sent him to the scaffold just before the end of the Terror as a last expiatory victim to be swallowed by the abyss before it closed as in the ancient legends. Such a man was André Chénier, or "Andrei" Chénier, as Pushkin called him in the fashion of the day, to be imitated by twentieth-century poets such as Osip Mandelstam and Marina Tsvetayeva. In Russianizing his name, Russian culture adopted him.

Familiarity with the work and ultimate fate of Chénier, both in France and abroad, had to wait until 1819, when the first collected edition of his poetry was published. And scarcely six years later, the year of the Decembrist uprising in Russia (1825), Pushkin wrote the long poem *André Chénier*. At the time, throughout Europe, tears were being shed over Byron's death; and yet Pushkin, for whom Byron had meant so much, neglected his memory to answer the call of Chénier, who had entered the kingdom of the dead "from the blood-stained block", "in terrible days".

At the heart of the poem lies Chénier's monologue before his execution. Pushkin's voice is in total unison with that of his hero, emphasized by the fact that Pushkin quotes from his own writings in the course of the monologue. There is no serious divergence of views between the two men, as Pushkin explains briefly and eloquently in his notes on the poem. A poet, simply because he is a poet, is bound to love Liberty, and in particular that aspect of freedom which the Revolution proclaims as essential:

*I salute you, my star of light!  
I rendered glory to your celestial face  
When, like a spark, it rose, and you were born  
in the midst of the storm,  
I rendered glory to your sacred thunder  
Scourging the foul citadel,  
Scattering in cinders and shame  
The ancient, arrogant power...*

Pushkin rejoices that "arrogant power" should be held up to scorn, and welcomes resistance to "absolutism". But when the sovereign is laid low and those who have vanquished him are about to mete out his punishment, the poet, because he is a poet, can no longer see him as the sovereign and the enemy and is forced to see him as a human being. Pushkin recounts how, according to Henri de Latouche, André Chénier's first publisher, Louis XVI sent a serene and dignified letter to the National Assembly, requesting the right to appeal to the people against his death sentence. That letter, signed on the night of 17-18 January 1793, was composed by André Chénier.

## Poetry condemns the death sentence

The guillotine had already put in an appearance as the “criminal cleaver” in a profoundly subversive poem of Pushkin’s youth, entitled “Liberty”. No poet can ever freely approve a death sentence because the very soul of poetry, which is Liberty itself, cannot survive in the spiritual atmosphere generated by such sentences. Or so Pushkin fervently believed.

A century later, pleading for the pardon of several condemned prisoners, Mandelstam sent a selection of his verses to Nikolay Bukharin with the note: “Every line of these poems cries out against what you intend to do”. He thus echoes a sentiment which inspired a line of Pushkin’s poem *Exegi Monumentum*, in which Pushkin includes among his merits as a poet the fact that “He sought pardon for the fallen”. Poetry cannot breathe in the atmosphere of death sentences. To grow accustomed to it, and consequently to become one with it, is possible only for “literature” in a very limited and altogether odious sense of the term. Fundamentally, poetry condemns the act of condemnation, and at a stroke it condemns “literature”.

Later Mandelstam said: “There were two Chénier brothers. The younger, who was contemptible, belonged wholly to literature, and the elder, sentenced to death, pronounced sentence on that literature”. Thus the tradition of Russian culture remains true to itself, and the thread is unbroken from Pushkin to Mandelstam.

There have, of course, been Russian poets who have renounced Pushkin’s creed. The greatest of these apostates was Vladimir Mayakovsky, a poet whose stature is undeniable. But willingness to celebrate violence spells suicide for poetry, and is followed, as a logical consequence, by the suicide of the poet himself...

For Marina Tsvetayeva, who also inherited the mantle of Pushkin, the figure of Chénier in the years of the Civil War was an absolute paradigm:

*André Chénier has gone to the scaffold,  
And I am alive, and this is a great sin.*

We must not forget that Pushkin’s “creed” took shape against the backdrop of the French Revolution, and that it was inspired above all by the example of Chénier. A return to Pushkin meant, inescapably, a return to Chénier, whose monologue in Pushkin can be summed up as follows: the fervent love of Liberty as the ideal driving force behind the Revolution brooks no compromise, even under the threat of the Terror; but the Terror must be condemned precisely in order to safeguard that driving force.

Chénier criticized the Revolution, not from the outside, but from within. He took as his starting-point the principles of the Revolution itself, and used its own language, for he had felt joy at its advent, and never denied that joy after all his disenchantments. For Pushkin, this lent

great moral strength to Chénier’s criticism and added much weight to his example. And the entire Russian poetic tradition of the love of liberty followed Pushkin in his veneration of Chénier as the bard who sang not of Tradition, but of Liberty.

Mandelstam’s poem on the death of Commissar Linde, known to readers of *Doctor Zhivago* as Commissar Hintz, is a remarkable hymn of devotion to Chénier; but whereas in Boris Pasternak’s novel the circumstances of this death are related with a great deal of realism and not without irony tinged with sympathy, in Mandelstam they are described with a passion that is perhaps unexpected so long after Chénier’s execution:

*Through civil torment in the dreadful years,  
Aflame with noble wrath against the foe  
You stride, a citizen, fearless, free and true,  
Wherever Psyche beckons you to go.*

*And while the people, jubilant, may weave  
For other men their wreaths of laurel, now  
Russia will gladly brave the pits of hell  
To lay at last her blessings on your brow.*

## The cadence of the Revolution

Russian awareness of the French Revolution has always had a musical quality, a certain harmony. It is no mere chance that the Russian nineteenth-century work in which the subtle wrath of the citizen comes closest to the French revolutionary tradition is neither a political pamphlet, nor a philosophical treatise, but some personal memoirs in which the most direct threads run between the conflicts of the soul and the contradictions of the Revolution.

That work is *My Past and Thoughts* (1861-1867), by the journalist and political thinker Aleksandr Herzen. “Herzen, whose tumultuous political thought will always have the cadence of a Beethoven sonata”, Mandelstam said of him. This harmony alone saves the debate from being conducted in a single dimension in that it draws the contradictions together, if only fleetingly, into a persuasive unity, according to Hegel’s principle that “truth is the whole”. ■

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published works, including  
a study of early Byzantine  
poetics (1977).



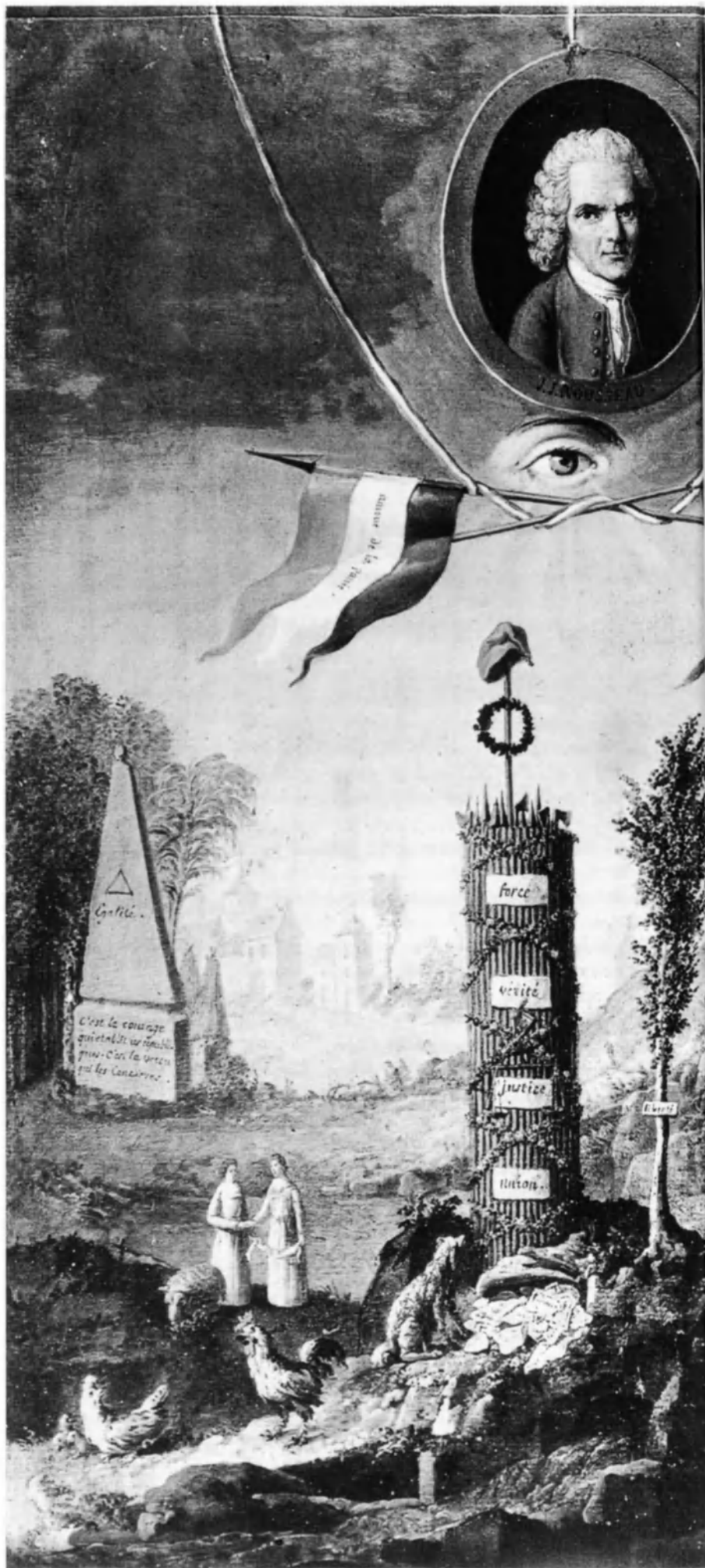
*The Russian writer  
Aleksandr Radishchev  
(1749-1802)*



The concepts of the Enlightenment were introduced into Japan in the late nineteenth century by Chomin, who made a major contribution to the Japanese democratic movement. Chomin admired the ideas of 1789, but disapproved of the “revolutionary drama”



Portrait of Chomin painted during his stay in France (1872-1874). It is superimposed on a manuscript page of his Japanese translation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract*.



Revolutionary allegory in honour of Jean-Jacques Rousseau





# Chomin: The Rousseau of the East

BY SHIN'YA IDA

THE Japanese writer, philosopher and politician Nakae Tokusuke (1847-1901), more widely referred to by his nom-de-plume, Chomin, which means “a thousand million men of the people”, is best known for his remarkable translation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Social Contract*.

In fact, he made two translations of the book: the first into the standard Japanese of the day, which he wrote on his return from France in 1874, and the second into classical Chinese, the language of scholars, which he completed between 1882 and 1883, at the height of the movement for liberty and the rights of the people. His contemporaries called him “The Rousseau of the East”, a nickname that has stuck.

## French studies

Born in 1847, at Kochi, capital of the fief of Tosa on the island of Shikoku, Chomin learned French at Nagasaki, where he was sent with a bursary, and then at Edo (now Tokyo), where he became a pupil of Murakami Eishun, the father of French studies in Japan. It seems likely that he read Monsignor Daniel’s *Abrégé chronologique de l’histoire universelle* (“Brief Chronological Outline of World History”) while studying under Murakami, who was to publish a translation of it in 1871.

The year 1868 saw the collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate and the restoration of Imperial rule, and it was during the first year of the first Meiji era (Meiji means, literally, “enlightened rule”) that Chomin was admitted to Mitsukuri Rinano’s private school. Mitsukuri was the first Japanese teacher of French to visit France, hav-



*The Emperor Napoleon III and royal visitors to the 1867 Paris Universal Exhibition. At right, the brother of the Japanese emperor.*

ing the previous year accompanied Prince Tokugawa Minbu's diplomatic mission to Paris on the occasion of the World Exhibition. It is very likely that Chomin read Victor Duruy's *Histoire de France* ("History of France") whilst at this school, since Mitsukuri quotes this work in his *Banxoku-Shinshi* ("History of Modern Times"), published in 1871. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that Chomin's interest in Rousseau and the French Revolution dates from this period.

### *Discovering the 'philosophes'*

The decisive period in Chomin's life was his stay in France in the early days of the Third Republic, when the country was still suffering from the ravages of the Franco-Prussian War and of the Commune. Selected as one of the scholars sponsored by the Japanese Government to accompany the diplomatic mission headed by Iwakura Tomomi, in December 1871, he remained in France for two years.

Little is known of his life during this period. He scarcely mentions it in his writings and references to it by his follower and biographer Kotoku Shusui are both brief and vague. "Although he was sponsored by the Ministry of Justice, my master nevertheless studied philosophy, history and literature, and I have heard that he skimmed through many history books."

Our research on articles translated and published in the *Seiri-Sadan* ("Political and Moral Science Review"), founded by Chomin and his followers, indicate that while in France he probably discovered the eighteenth-century *philosophes* (Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Mirabeau and Condorcet) and the radical political writers (Barni, Naquet, Jules Simon, Laboulaye and Vacherot). Since passages from *L'Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution Française* ("Parliamentary History of the French Revolu-

tion"), by Buchez and Roux, appear in translation in the Review, it can be assumed that this forty-volume work in octavo format was among the "many history books" that Chomin "skimmed through".

### *Rousseau reaches Japan*

On his return to Japan in June 1874, Chomin found his fellow countrymen in a state of ferment. Two former ministers, Itagaki Taisuko and Goto Shojiro, both, like Chomin, from Tosa, had just launched the *Jiku-Minken-Unao* ("Movement for Liberty and the Rights of the People"). It was at this time that Chomin translated Rousseau's *Social Contract* (*Min'yaku-Ron*), thus placing a formidable weapon in their hands. At the school of French he had established (*Furanau-Gaku-Sha*, later *Futsu-Gaku-Juku*) he gave commentaries on Rousseau in his classes and the militants of the movement, most of them young, passed the manuscript of his translation from hand to hand. "Weeping, we read the *Min'yaku-Ron* by Russo", wrote one of these young men in a poem written in Chinese; at the same time, a Prefect forbade the officials of his Department to read Rousseau.

In May 1875, Chomin was appointed secretary to the Senate and assigned to the research department. For a long time his role in this new institution remained obscure. Following examination of the *Journal* of the Senate, it is now known that he had already been appointed secretary when the drafting office of the Constitution was set up. He was, therefore, at the very heart of the team preparing the draft constitution, although in a relatively lowly capacity, since this process involved comparing the constitutions of different countries as and when they were translated into Japanese from the French jurist Edouard-Julien Laferrière's book *Constitutions d'Europe et d'Amérique* ("Constitutions of Europe and America").

At the outset, this draft constitution, completed in mid-October 1876, provided for only one legislative chamber, the Senate. How then did it come about that, by the end of the year, it included plans for the creation of a Chamber of Deputies? We do not know whether Chomin had a hand in this sudden change in state policy. However that may be, he left the Senate shortly afterwards, in January 1877.

Mention should be made of the presence in the drafting office of Kawazu Sukeyuki, who alone among Chomin's colleagues could read French. In September 1876 Kawazu began publishing his complete translation of Auguste Mignet's *Histoire de la Révolution Française* (1824; "History of the French Revolution"). Thus Rousseau and the Revolution were both involved in the drawing up of the Japanese draft constitution, which is considered to be more liberal in many respects than the Constitution eventually adopted.

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## The spirit of the French Revolution

The second (1878) and third (1880) amendments to the draft constitution were definitively rejected by the government ministers Iwakura Tomomi and Ito Hirobumi, who dismissed them scornfully as being mere “translations” or “rehashes” of European and American constitutions. Meanwhile, in April 1881, Chomin and his friends founded the daily newspaper *Toyo jiyu Shimbun* (“Liberty of the Orient”). The movement for the rights of the people was now at its zenith. In his editorials, Chomin repeatedly called for the immediate convocation of a National Assembly which, like its French revolutionary counterpart, would be empowered to draw up a constitution. He stressed the need for “rigorous reasoning” and “firmness of will”. He counselled his young readers against “inflammatory speeches” or “blind, violent action”. For him it was not a question of doing “what France had done before”, but of “seeking its spirit rather than imitating its actions”.

If the French Revolution was to be “imitated” only in its “spirit”, what other path was there to follow? Paradoxically, the one taken by the British. Since, according to Rousseau’s theories, the British monarchy was compatible with the nature of the Republic, Chomin preferred it to the French Republican system. Whilst thus advising calm and moderation, he did not fail to point out that a revolution could break out even in Japan, if the “high ups”—members of the court, ministers and nobles—persisted in exercising their authority without regard for the rights of the people.

### Japan on the brink of revolution?

In October 1881, feeling itself threatened by the rise of the popular movement, the government oligarchy took the initiative, promising, in the name of the emperor, to grant a Constitution by 1889 and establish a Diet for the year after.

In February 1882, at the time when Ito, who had been entrusted with the task of drawing up the Constitution, was about to leave on a study mission to Germany and Austria, Chomin founded his *Political and Moral Science Review*. The first issue opened with the Declaration of the Rights of Man of 1793 and in the second Chomin began the serialization of Rousseau’s *Social Contract*, both of which he had himself translated into classical Chinese.

Chomin’s *History of the Two Reigns in France before the Revolution* (*Kakumei-zen-Furansu-Nisei-Kiji*, December 1886) was published three years before the promulgation of the Imperial Constitution, the drafting of which was then approaching its final stage. In compiling this work Chomin drew mainly on histories of France by Victor Duruy and Henri Martin. But why did he stop



*Inauguration of the first  
Japanese railway line at  
Yokohama (1872) by  
Emperor Mutsuhito*

before 1789 instead of writing, as one might have expected, a history of the Revolution itself?

Chomin himself provided the explanation when he revealed a clear dichotomy in his appreciation of the French Revolution. On the one hand the Revolution was for him “an unheard-of event in the annals of history which highlighted the causes of liberty and equality and which, by transforming the situation of the European states, succeeded for the first time in basing politics on the lofty principles of philosophy”. On the other hand, he saw “from the moment of the convocation of the States General, the seeds of growing conflict between the court and the people, conflict which inflamed passions and led to extremes and excess”. Primarily a philosopher rather than a historian, he was more interested in “the causes of the Revolution” than in its actual unfolding, the ferocity of which he found unbearable.

Chomin likened the French Revolution to “a great drama” of which philosophers such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau and the rest were “the authors” and in which the great revolutionaries such as the Abbé Sieyès, Mirabeau, Vergniaud, Robespierre and Danton were “the actors”.

Yet how could the actors have staged “the great drama” written by the authors? Only with the backing of “public opinion, without which the undertaking would have had no future and would have ended up crushed by the mighty power of the court”. The final message that Chomin leaves with us is surely this: addressing his words “to those who foster a high ambition within the nation” he reminds them of the vital necessity of “forming public opinion”. This is the key to everything. ■



1789  
AN IDEA  
THAT CHANGED  
THE WORLD

# China: *rethinking the Revolution*

BY ZHILIAN ZHANG

*Reform or revolution? This was the dilemma faced by Chinese élites in the nineteenth century. The example of the French Revolution was at the core of their debates.*



*Guangxu, emperor of China (1875-1908). Influenced by the reformer Kang Youwei, he wished to modernize the country but the Empress Dowager Cixi (Tz'u-hsi) soon put a stop to his plans.*

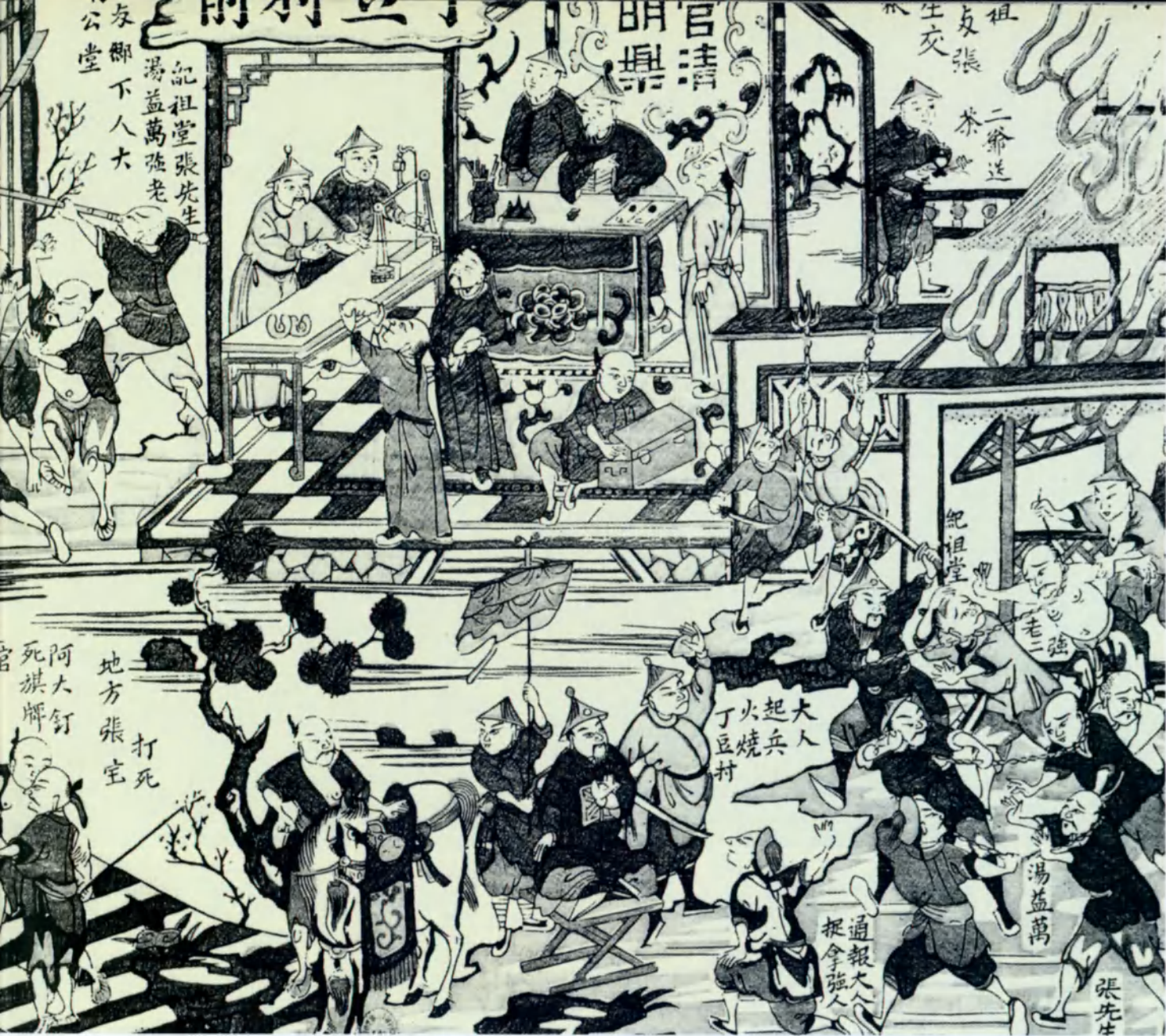


**I**N China, the influence of the French Revolution was not immediately felt, and it was only a century later that the ideals of 1789 were explicitly voiced.

There were geographical as well as sociological reasons for this time-lag. In the days of sailing ships, a despatch took at least eight months to reach Peking from London. Lord Macartney, head of the first official British mission to China, left Portsmouth in September 1792, and did not reach Peking until August 1793.

The imperial court where he was received had already heard of the events in France, and rumours of the upheaval caused by the Revolution made anything new subject to suspicion. At the height of its power and prosperity, China had no need to think of change. The country had a stable social structure, with no bourgeoisie, no ideological contention, no political opposition. If the peasants were unhappy, they were not yet organized. In China, the time was not ripe for reform, still less for revolution.

During the nineteenth century pressure for social and political change began to mount.



Peasant unrest (from the White Lotus uprisings in the 1790s, to the Taiping insurrection of 1850-1864), foreign aggression (from the First Opium War with Britain of 1839-1842 to the French expeditions of the 1880s), economic decline and widespread corruption, continuous population growth—all these factors sapped the foundations of the Middle Empire. The crisis became acute on the eve of the twentieth century following defeat at the hands of Japan.

Such were the conditions in which Chinese élites began to study the French Revolution in the hope of finding solutions to their own problems.

### *Monarchs who lose the people's confidence*

The first significant commentary inspired by the French Revolution was written by the reformer Wang Tao (1828-1897). In his *Compendium on France* he wrote: "Does the calamitous violence of republican government always lead to such excesses? When the rebel parties, in their cruel fury,

do not shrink from committing regicide, where are a country's laws? What has happened to the rulers of nature? It is as if Heaven and Earth had been reversed and the world was upside down... In all of history surely there has been no rebellion worse than this. And yet, at the origin of these calamities, we find the inability [of the monarch] to conciliate the masses and win the confidence of his subjects. Presuming upon their high position, these monarchs fail to identify with popular fortunes. And mounting resentment is enough to bring about the demise of royalty... Such being the case, can rulers do as they please and behave irresponsibly?"

Wang Tao condemned the rebels but held the king responsible for the calamity because he had alienated himself from the people. This was a lesson that rulers should draw from the Revolution.

### *The stirrings of reform*

The tide for radical change rose higher in the 1890s and a generation of reformers emerged, with Kang Youwei (1858-1927) and Liang Qichao

*Peasant rising in a Chinese village (print dating from around 1895)*

(1873-1929) in the forefront. Kang won the confidence of the Emperor Guangxu (but not that of the Empress Dowager), and dreamt of reforming the Empire "from the top". True to the classical Chinese tradition of using the past to serve current policies, he was nevertheless an innovator in that he used the history of a foreign country to convince the emperor and the court.

In the preface to his *Account of the French Revolution*, dedicated to Guangxu, Kang unconditionally condemned the excesses of this "bloody revolt": "There has never been anything more disastrous than the atrocities of modern revolution." His censure of Louis XVI was no less se-



From left to right: Kang Youwei; Madame Roland; Liang Qichao

chy be established before the rebellious people took matters into their own hands and imposed radical changes from below.

Kang's contemporary Liang Qichao was one of the first writers to introduce the ideas of the Enlightenment to the Chinese. In his *Life of Madame Roland*, he called the Revolution "the Mother of European Civilization"; but he repeatedly cited the alleged final words of his heroine on the scaffold: "Oh, Liberty, what crimes are committed in thy name!" He rejected oppression and revolution in the same breath. He was an advocate of "destruction without bloodshed". He warned the conservatives in high places that to



vere: "Divine right is not granted permanently. Only by virtuous means can you keep it; otherwise, it will be taken from you. Louis XVI's promise to grant a constitution did not come from his own initiative but was given under pressure. His hesitation and oscillation, his initial recourse to arms and later disbandment of his guards, and finally his appeal to foreign intervention and flight to Varennes, stirred up the indignation of the people to such an extent that he was sent to the guillotine and scorned by the world."

Kang felt that popular feelings should be calmed rather than excited, because the populace, once aroused to action, is like a rock rolling down a steep hill; nothing can halt its course. "It may have been possible for a single person to tyrannize an ignorant mass. But once the people realize that the world is made for all and not just for a few, they envy the rich and strive for power and prestige."

Kang conceded that all modern constitutional governments originated in the French Revolution: "In spite of its aberrations and tyrannical violence, it was aided by the trend of the times and the spirit of the people. Like a huge storm sweeping over and transforming the great earth, it was indeed something frightening. As there has not been anything as grandiose in the annals of political change, it may also serve as an example."

According to Kang Youwei, the obvious lesson was that a reform programme should be launched from above and a constitutional monar-

chism would lead to a new outbreak of the Terror. At the same time, he made clear to the "pushers in low places" that if they unleashed the passions of the masses, the result would be a blood bath and anarchy, as in France.

The reforms proposed by Kang and his followers, although mild, were not accepted by those in power. Six reformers were decapitated. Kang was obliged to flee to Hong Kong, while Liang sought refuge in Japan. The attempt at change was nipped in the bud.

### *Bloodshed, the price of liberty*

A reaction was bound to assert itself from the revolutionary camp. Not only in China, but also in Japan where many radicals took shelter following the failure of the reforms. A torrent of pamphlets and political papers imbued with the ideas of 1789 appeared. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the French Revolution became the model for the struggle against feudal oppression.

A radical interpretation of the French Revolution emerged from the writings of the revolutionists. Rebutting the counter-revolutionary ideas of Kang Youwei, they stressed the necessity of propagating in China ideas of Enlightenment and revolution. They exalted the spirit of sacrifice and recourse to violence. They appealed to men and parties to unite. For the first time, the names of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau,

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*The Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908) in 1903, at centre of photo*

Turgot, Helvétius, Sieyès and Fourier were on the lips of Confucian scholars. Journals published commentaries on the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. Several versions of the *Marseillaise* were circulated.

Criticizing as ridiculous the notion of “destruction without bloodshed”, the revolutionists upheld, on the contrary, that the success of the revolution depended on violence and sacrifice. Ready to give their lives, they vowed “to sacrifice themselves for the rights of the people and to buy liberty with bloodshed”. Was that not how despotism had been abolished and natural rights restored in France? A staunch revolutionist from Hunan exclaimed: “Have you not known the affairs in France, the homeland of the *Social Contract*, the battlefield of freedom? All was accomplished through violence. The Revolution of 1789 was indeed tragic and violent; those of 1830 and 1848 were no less so. The guillotined head of the King was paraded through the streets of Paris, while the throngs of people cried out *Vive la liberté!* Thrice have they driven away their king, fourteen times have they changed their constitution—always with much bloodshed. Yet France has become a strong nation.”

But how was the unity of the revolutionary movement and its leaders to be preserved? The Chinese revolutionists expressed great admiration for the Jacobin Club which appeared to them as a “driving force of the Revolution”. But they noticed with regret that political and personal rivalries between Girondins and Montagnards, then

between Dantonists and Robespierrists, finally led to the downfall of democracy. A revolutionary patriot, Liu Yazhi, drew an analogy between the disputes of leaders in the French Revolution and the quarrels of leaders in the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, as a warning to his comrades.

Thus the long debate on the virtues and crimes of the French Revolution gradually reinforced the conviction of those who believed that China needed revolution, not piecemeal change.

### *A great ‘social laboratory’*

A new generation of revolutionary leaders came to the forefront. Many of them discovered their calling while listening to accounts of the storming of the Bastille. In June 1920, a twenty-two-year-old Chinese youth wrote these lines for a classmate who was leaving to study in France:

*On your return, you will  
Hoist the Flag of Liberty  
Sing the Song of Independence  
Fight for the Rights of Women  
And seek for Equality  
In the great social laboratory.*

The author’s name was Zhou Enlai. ■



# The spirit of '89

BY TAHAR BEN JELLOUN

IS it possible to dispense with revolution and its violence, its terror and its achievements? Is it normal to think that human rights and democracy bear the stamp of a time and locality specific to one social and historical setting? Is it logical thus to deny them their principal quality, their universality? How is it possible to import consumer goods, cultural debris and weapons from Europe and at the same time to refuse to import principles that are as important as flour or sugar? There are those who accuse Europe, which wants to generalize respect for human rights and the establishment of democratic political systems, of wanting "to perpetuate colonial domination"!

What was revolutionary in the achievements of 1789 was their universal aspect. The human condition may vary from continent to continent, but there is everywhere and at all times a need for these same rights. The abolition of slavery was not a minor affair of concern to a few wretched serfs. It concerned the whole of humanity, without exception.

We on the sidelines—"inhabitants of the suburbs of history... the uninvited guests who have come in through the servants' entrance of the West, intruders who come to watch the spectacle of modernity just as the lights are about to go out. Always late, we were born when history was already running out..." (Octavio Paz)—look with envious, ambitious eyes at the memory of others, trying to cleanse the history of the Revolution of its faults, its injustices and its ugliness. Of the past two centuries of French history we wish to remember only the painstaking work and the patient advance of the rights inscribed on the collective mentality of man, whether he be from here or elsewhere, and with all his differences and similarities.

Yet the road travelled by human rights has been stained with the blood of European wars and of colonial brutality and then by the humiliation of man through the violation of his cultural and religious values. It is as though, to fashion and consolidate itself, Republican France had to pass through a phase of barbarism. We remain attached to principles. We cultivate the historical memory, short though it may be, with its baser moments expunged, so that respect for mankind may become a right with which no government will be able to compromise. This right should be inscribed on the very heart of the body politic by the force of its universality.

If this is achieved, perhaps children will no longer be victims of famine, drought, disease, work or prostitution. Perhaps men and women will no longer have to suffer the humiliations of poverty or be held hostage to fanaticism and intolerance which like to make people believe they can provide answers to serious problems.

For all of this "our thirst for consolation can never be slaked" (Stig Dagerman), nor our desire for coherence satisfied. We want to cry out: "stop selling arms while at the same time celebrating human rights and the bicentenary of the Revolution! Be consistent: the prosperity of some cannot be built on the misery of others! Crimes are being committed while you sing the praises of democracy."

1789 is a memory that belongs to the universal heritage; it is inscribed in all of us. We are born with this memory, that is, with the hope of liberation. Many die without ever having known it. ■

*La Batalla* ("The Battle"), oil on canvas by the contemporary Argentine painter Ana Eckell



TAHAR BEN JELLOUN, Moroccan writer and journalist, was awarded the Goncourt Prize in 1987 for his novel *La nuit sacrée*, an English translation of which is scheduled for publication later this year by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.









1789

AN IDEA  
THAT CHANGED  
THE WORLD

# *An idea and its destiny*

BY FRANÇOIS FURET

*The French Revolution proclaimed the principles of liberty and equality as universally valid, but the application of these abstract notions in different societies has inevitably led to tensions and compromises. Today, 200 years later, these issues are more topical than ever. In this interview with the Unesco Courier, the noted French historian François Furet, whose work has opened up new perspectives on the Revolution, examines the concept of the universality of man and his rights in the world context.*

**T**HE French Revolution was an attempt to legislate in the name of universality. Its aim was the emancipation not only of the French but of all mankind. To this extent it was an event that was not merely of national but also of international scope, not simply a political but also a philosophical revolution.

One of the ambiguities of the revolutionaries' ambition to emancipate humanity springs from the fact that their vision of the world was very eurocentric. When the French spoke of the universal, they meant by that the bulk of Europe together with the European appendix consisting of the newly-independent former British colonies of America. This was the extent of their horizon.

The whole of the nineteenth century continued to be marked by eurocentrism, even for men like Marx, who spoke of the universe whilst thinking of Europe. Between Britain, Germany and France everything was covered. Even within Europe it was better not to go too far south or too far east so as not to mar the concept of universality. There can, then, be no doubt about it, the French Revolution legislated in the name of European man.

### *Ambitions bordering on folly*

There is, however, another sense in which the notion of the universal must be understood: its abstraction. There is nothing tangible about universality; it is an abstraction just as universal man is abstract man. The Revolution declared that man had no reason to enter into society unless that society guaranteed him the autonomy, the liberty and the rights which were his before he entered into the social contract. In other words, for the Revolution, the essence of man is his liberty, his autonomy and the fact of his acceptance only of laws imposed by himself. Society must guarantee to each individual all the rights that are his by virtue of his status as a man. This is an extraordinary ideal, completely general and therefore entirely abstract.

Thus these rights are formal, abstract and deduced as it were from the natural state of man. The ambitions of the Revolution, as we can see, bordered on folly, since they were in contradiction with the true state of society and of man. Therein, in large part, lies its tragedy: in the enormous contradiction between the universal rights it proclaimed as being inherent in the status of man and the actual state of society with its poor and its rich, its dominators and its dominated.

### *Equality: dream or reality?*

Born of the Revolution, modern democracy has, over the past two centuries, been marked by the permanent tension engendered by the affirmation of abstract, universal rights and the experience of the reality of rights imperfectly achieved. Take, for example, the notion of equality. This too, naturally, is an abstract notion, since people are



not equal: both nature and society only turn out individuals who are unequal, whereas the ambition of society is to produce individuals who are equal. Are they not equal as citizens?

Absolute political and social equality implies absolute despotism. The only hypothetical situation in which people could be strictly equal would be one in which a single person is placed over all the others to force them to maintain their equal status. Not a very enviable situation! Liberty always produces inequality. This is why, more and more, we are obliged to see the state as a compensatory mechanism for the correction of certain inequalities. It seems to me that the hallmark of a free society is the maintenance of the difficult, uncertain balance between the growth of the state and the liberty of the individual.

In the past 200 years there has not been one example, not even among the most liberal societies, of a diminishing state. Look, for example, at the United States, France, or the United Kingdom. All these states are growing. Why? In the name of equality, because each time that a new right is given to a section of the citizenry, a new state organism has to be created to guarantee that



*La République (1794), earthenware statuette by Joseph Chinard. With her right hand, the figure unveils a tablet inscribed *Droits de l'homme* ("Rights of Man").*

PREVIOUS DOUBLE PAGE

*"The Storming of the Bastille". 18th-century French school*



*Planting a "tree of liberty" to the accompaniment of the local band, in the presence of the mayor and members of the National Guard. Gouache, 18th-century French school*

right. The advance of equality is necessarily linked to growth of state mechanisms, with all that this entails in the way of contradictions between the area of state intervention and the area left free to individual initiative.

### *The rights of the citizen or civil war?*

As the world became more universal, particularly through the processes first of colonization and then of decolonization, the constituent tension of the French Revolution, between the formal and the real, the universal and the particular, again came to the surface. The democratic movement can be identified with the struggle to reduce these tensions. Is the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen anything other than a declaration of a permanent state of civil war whose purpose is to allow people to become what they are not—that is to say equals? The dynamic of democratic societies has consisted essentially of the progressive integration of those excluded from equality. And each action in this direction is the cause of new tensions.

*Les femmes des trois ordres ("Women of the Three Orders"), a revolutionary print showing a peasant woman burdened with a nun and an aristocrat.*





1. *Indian women demonstrating for their country's independence, around 1930. In the centre, hands linked in front of her, is the wife of Mahatma Gandhi*
2. *Members of the Kuomintang ("National People's Party") of China, founded by Sun Yat-sen, in the Paris workshop of sculptor Paul Landowski, around 1930. Landowski's statue of Sun Yat-sen was erected at Nanking.*
3. *Sad Zaghlul (1857-1927), founder of the Wafd national party in Egypt, speaking around 1920 at a Cairo demonstration calling for the withdrawal of British troops.*
4. *Procession in Moscow on the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution of 1917*
5. *Troops of the revolutionary leaders Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata ride into Mexico City, December 1914.*



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In the France of 1848, for example, the problem of the right to work was raised and the question was asked as to whether property was a right and, if so, how far it was compatible with equality. These are very real contradictions. Property is clearly a right since without it man is marked out to become a victim of the state. But if property is too unevenly distributed it creates such great social inequality that it eliminates, for very many, all hope of exercising that right. Here we have a clear example of the contradictions resulting from the Declaration of 1789.

This tension, which was the vehicle of all that constitutes the historic value of the Revolution, ended up by spawning criticism of the Revolution. A current of thought developed which rejected the ideology of rights as being abstract, false and merely a cover for an iniquitous society and a mask for bourgeois individualism.

In 1917, a revolution broke out in Russia which aimed to go beyond these contradictions. Basing itself on a critique of the rights of man, its objective was to replace the abstract by the tangible and formal democracy by the dictatorship of the proletariat. It wanted to resolve the problem of inequality by abolishing the law of the market-place and the liberty of the individual.

### *A strange but necessary compromise*

Thirty years later, the world found itself in a curious situation. At the end of the Second World War, the two conflicting concepts of 1789 and 1917 were obliged to come to terms with one another.

Among the victors in the war were lined up, on one side the democracies of Western Europe and America, more than ever attached to the concept of human rights after the victory over nazism, and on the other the Soviet Union, which had been created on the basis of the opposite postulate. And the two sides were obliged to come to an understanding.

Together they had just established the United Nations system and they had to find some common ground. This was to be the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed in 1948. The Declaration was the outcome of an odd but necessary compromise, largely negotiated by the French jurist René Cassin on one side and the Soviet diplomat and lawyer Andrey Vyshinsky on the other. The result was a reflec-

tion of their dialogue—a balancing game between two opposing conceptions. It was, nevertheless, based on a humanistic and democratic ideal, since the United Nations was founded on the negation of nazism, that is to say on the notions of law and liberty.

In order to achieve an agreement, the Western jurists had to agree to the introduction of so-called “real” rights. The Declaration of 1948 contains, for example, the notion of the right to a minimum necessary for life. It was, indeed, an extremely difficult notion to make a reality in the poorest countries, and the inclusion of the right to an adequate standard of living as a human right only served to underline the precarious nature of these rights.

At the prompting of the Soviet camp there was also a great debate on whether or not the right to property should be excluded from human rights. This was clearly not possible from the standpoint of the Western powers. Finally, the Universal Declaration of 1948 bears the stamp of the contradictions that hovered over its birth. Its text was meant both to prescribe norms and to be concrete, to be both universal and specific. But the more specific definitions you include in the notion of universality, the more you reduce its scope. Four decades have gone by since the Declaration was proclaimed, but the debate goes on and continues to develop over the contradictory ideas that are woven into it.

### *‘We must think of ourselves as free and equal’*

For example, there is the great argument as to whether liberty and equality are fact or fiction. It is true that people are free and equal to the extent that they are no longer subjugated or reduced to slavery. They are free in body and mind and free to follow their personal interests and to come to agreements between themselves. On the other hand, this liberty and equality are limited, indeed compromised, in so far as they conceal social, cultural and individual inequalities and situations in which one class is exploited by another.

In this sense it can clearly be seen that there is something false in the notions of liberty and equality. But from there two conclusions are open to us. It can be said—and this is my personal position—that it is true that we are not all free and equal, but we have to think of ourselves in society as being both free and equal. And the fact that we are obliged to think in this way changes the fabric of the social world and creates that tension of which I have spoken and that dynamic that is inherent in democracy.

On the other hand, we can come to the Marxist conclusion that, since liberty and equality are no more than lies, we must go beyond them, abolish the system that is based on them and bring about a society radically different from that of 1789. Since modern democracy is merely a bourgeois dictatorship in disguise, we should



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replace the power of the bourgeoisie by the power of the proletariat. In this way, since the proletariat is not an exploiting class, we shall free society and mankind of all exploitation.

### *The emergence of the individual*

What seems to me to be inaccurate in this view of things is the equation of modern democracy with the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. This is not historically true. The French society of 1789 was neither very bourgeois nor really capitalist. The point that I have made in my books is precisely that the French Revolution cannot be considered merely as the rise of the bourgeoisie. The Revolution marks, above all, the emergence of modern individualism, a process much more all-embracing than the emergence of a class, since it transforms the entire social fabric in which the bourgeoisie is but one element, even if, little by little, this element is beginning to dominate the rest.

Evidence that individualism is not simply a bourgeois quality comes from those countries that have eliminated the bourgeois economic dictatorship and where the demand for individual liberty continues to exist. In the Marxist societies of today, the notions of human rights, of the market-place and of formal democracy are returning to favour. In other words, the concept of basing society on the rights of the individual, far from being a bourgeois lie, is a genuinely universal notion which fulfils a universal hope. There will never be true equality between all people, but the idea of equality will always be there on the horizon. That is what we have to live with. That is what makes things happen.

The controversy between formal democracy and class dictatorship is, however, far from being over, if only, perhaps, because the message of the class struggle has got across better than that of democracy in many non-European societies. For historical reasons, criticism of rights has been more successfully propagated than the concept of rights. The concept of rights was taken with them by the colonizers and imposed by the gun. The rights were those of the victors and it was natural that they should be seen by the vanquished as a cover for their domination.

In many non-European countries it might be said that there was a spontaneous upsurge of Marxism in the twentieth century, because the Marxist critique was, if one can put it that way, inscribed on the very experience of the peoples of those countries. Or rather, the non-universality of rights was inscribed on their flesh. The colonists brought with them both the concept of rights and the critique of that concept. To the peoples they colonized, the critique seemed the better founded of the two, since it coincided more directly with the reality they were living through and offered a possible justification for the violence of their resistance.

I am, of course, talking in terms of general tendencies. In terms of what actually happened things were not so clear-cut. At the time of the colonial shock these societies were essentially pre-individualistic—the individual was still closely attached to family, tribe and community. But the colonists introduced the individualist view of the world. As a result one world was superimposed on another, one tied in to traditional links of solidarity, the other turned towards the ideology of modern democracy, one society dominated by the tribal chiefs and village headmen, the other, superimposed, spreading the word of universal suffrage.

From all this was to emerge the Revolutionary Institutional Party in Mexico, the Wafd national party in Egypt, the Kuomintang in China, and the Congress Party in India. These were liberal options whose practical achievements remained limited, which is why this phase was overtaken by another dominated by the ideology of the class struggle and revolution. Recently, however, there seems to have been a swing back to the idea of rights and democracy.

### *The democratic dynamic, a dynamic of conflict*

In those places where it had been thought possible to draw a line through the rights of the modern individual, an often tragic economic situation has arisen. The pre-capitalist structures were broken down, but since they have not been replaced by capitalist market structures, dramatic difficulties have been experienced. Sometimes it has not even been possible to provide enough food for the inhabitants of the towns, or even for the peoples of the rural areas. The productivity of labour has been destroyed and, as Marx rightly pointed out, the productivity of labour, the capacity to create wealth, is one of the sanctions of history. Without these attributes and without taking into consideration man's relationship with nature there can be no history.

People are beginning to become aware that there is no such thing as an historical short cut. After the communal society we have to go through the stage of the individualistic society. We have to come to terms with its tensions. We have to accept that modern societies are conflictual societies, and live with the fact that the democratic dynamic is a dynamic of conflict.

Beyond a certain point, that raises the question of the governability of modern societies. French society, to take one example, is not easy to govern. As soon as a new tension arises, everyone takes to the streets. That is what liberty is and modern society has to learn to live with it. This is, perhaps, one of the biggest hurdles to be overcome in any society—not to cling to certainties, but to accept uncertainties, the unforeseen and the risks the future holds.



*“Rouget de Lisle singing the Marseillaise for the first time.” Painting by Isidore Pils, 1849. Rouget de Lisle, an Engineer captain, composed the words and music of what later became the French national anthem while in Strasbourg in 1792.*





## The price of freedom

What conclusions, therefore, can we come to about the fate of the ideas of the Revolution after 200 years? Its basic ideas seem to be gaining ground, yet the difficulties they face if they are to be put fully into practice are immense.

In the Western societies in which these ideas have long been accepted, a number of negative aspects are starting to appear. It is true that these are countries in which it has become pleasant to live, because they have found an acceptable balance of sorts between the liberty of the individual and action by the state. But this balance has been achieved at a very high price. People are losing interest in community affairs and are less and less involved in public affairs and the problems of others. There is less and less solidarity. All this is very negative. People seem to be looking after their own interests and this leaves a great void and a general feeling that something is lacking in life.

Elsewhere in the world, individual aspirations concerning liberty and the concept of human rights are making a strong come-back and are advancing on all sides. Yet how are these countries going to escape the dilemmas specific to communal societies and find answers to the problems of the productivity of labour? These are questions that still await reply.

I should like to conclude by expressing the hope that the celebration this year of the bicentenary of the French Revolution will be a great learning experience and will cause people everywhere to become aware of the real issues and tensions related to this event. May it help, despite all the differences and all the contradictions that exist in the world today, to advance the idea of the universality of humanity and of human rights. ■



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## GLOSSARY

**Ancien régime:** the political and social system of France before the Revolution of 1789.

**Estates General,** also called **States General:** the representative assembly of the 3 Estates or orders of the realm: the clergy, the nobility, and the Third Estate, which represented the majority of the people. The Estates General met on 5 May 1789. The deputies of the Third Estate led in the formation of the **National Assembly**, signalling the end of representation based on the 3 traditional orders. On 9 July 1789 the National Assembly proclaimed itself the **Constituent Assembly**, after it had claimed the right to produce a constitution for France. The **Legislative Assembly** was the Parliament which sat from October 1791 to September 1792, when it was replaced by the **National Convention**, which governed until October 1795. Among the first acts of the Convention were the formal abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of the Republic (September 1792). The **Directory** was the régime that replaced the National Convention (1795-1799).

**Committee of Public Safety:** government body that gained virtual dictatorial control over France during the Reign of Terror (September 1793-July 1794).

**Dantonists:** followers of the revolutionary leader Georges Danton (1759-1794).

**Girondins:** moderate republicans, many of them from the Gironde *département*, overthrown in 1793.

**Jacobins:** members of a radical political club founded during the Revolution. Closely associated with Robespierre during the Terror, the Jacobin Club was closed in 1794. It took its name from its meeting place in a former convent of the Dominicans, who were known in Paris as Jacobins.

**Montagnards ("Mountain Men"):** radical deputies in the National Convention who controlled the government during the climax of the Revolution in 1793-1794. So called because they sat on the higher benches of the Assembly.

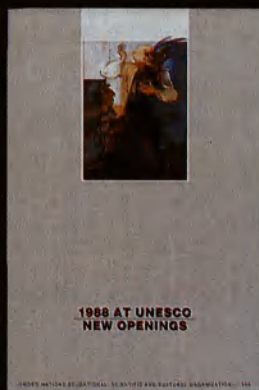
**Robespierrists:** followers of Maximilien Robespierre (1758-1794), the Jacobin leader who came to dominate the Committee of Public Safety.

**Sans-culottes ("without knee breeches"):** term originally given to the ill-clad volunteers of the Revolutionary army; later applied generally to the ultra-democrats of the Revolution.

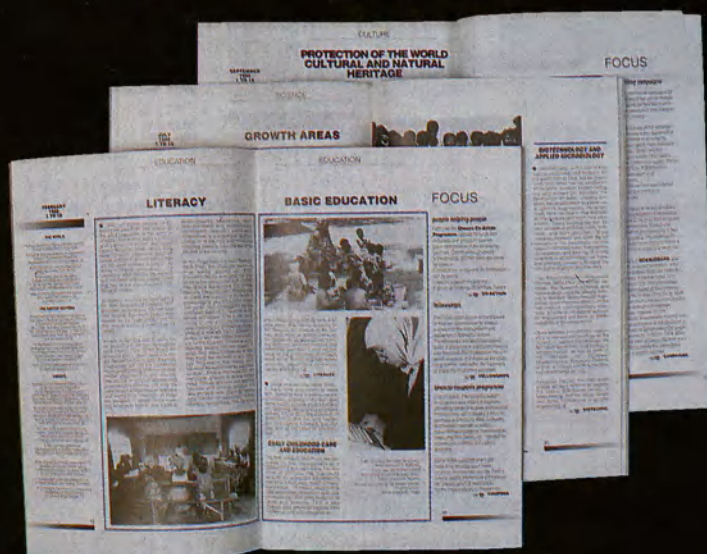
**Sections:** the 48 divisions into which Paris was organized for administrative purposes in 1790.

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Décrétées par la Convention Nationale en 1793  
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Le peuple français, convaincu que l'oubli et le mépris des droits naturels de l'homme, sont les seules causes des malheurs du monde, a reconnu et exposé dans sa déclaration solennelle ces droits sacrés et inaliénables, afin que tous les citoyens, pouvant concourir sous cette bannière au Gouvernement avec le but de toute institution sociale, ne se laissent jamais opprimer et avilir par la tyrannie; afin que le peuple ait toujours devant les yeux les bases de la liberté et de son bonheur, le magistrat la règle de ses devoirs, le législateur l'objet de sa mission.

Ilu considérant, il proclame en présence de l'Être suprême, la déclaration suivante des droits de l'homme et du citoyen.

## ARTICLE PREMIER.

Le but de la société est le bonheur commun.  
Le Gouvernement est institué pour garantir à l'homme la jouissance de ses droits naturels et imprescriptibles.

### II.

Ces droits sont l'égalité, la liberté, la sûreté, la propriété.

### III.

Tous les hommes sont égaux par la nature et devant la loi.

### IV.

La loi est l'expression libre et solennelle de la volonté générale; elle est la même pour tous, soit qu'elle punisse, soit qu'elle récompense; elle ne peut ordonner que ce qui est juste et utile à la société; elle ne peut défendre que ce qui lui est nuisible.

### V.

Tous les citoyens sont également admissibles aux emplois publics. Les peuples libres ne concourent d'autres motifs de préférence dans leurs élections que les vertus et les talents.

### VI.

La liberté est le pouvoir qui appartient à l'homme de faire tout ce qui ne nuit pas aux droits d'autrui; elle a pour principe la justice; pour règle la loi; pour sanction la punition; elle ne peut être limitée que dans la mesure nécessaire à la sûreté de la société.

### VII.

Le droit de manifester sa pensée et ses opinions, soit par la voie de la presse, soit de toute autre manière, le droit de s'assembler paisiblement, le libre exercice des cultes ne peuvent être interdits.

La nécessité d'assurer ces droits suppose ou la présence ou le pouvoir révolté du despote.

### VIII.

La sûreté consiste dans la protection accordée par la société à chacun de ses membres pour la conservation de la personne, de ses droits et de ses propriétés.

### IX.

La loi doit protéger la liberté publique et individuelle contre l'oppression de ceux qui gouvernent.

### X.

Nul ne doit être arrêté, arrêté, ni détenu que dans les cas déterminés par la loi, et selon les formes qu'elle a prescrites. Tout citoyen appelé ou saisi par l'autorité de la loi doit obéir à l'instant; il se rend coupable par la résistance.

### XI.

Tout acte exercé contre un homme hors des cas et dans les formes que la loi détermine est arbitraire et tyrannique; celui contre lequel on voudrait le révoquer par la violence a le droit de le repousser par la force.

### XII.

Ceux qui sollicitent, exercent, ou font exercer des fonctions arbitraires, sont coupables et doivent être punis.

### XIII.

Tout homme étant présumé innocent jusqu'à ce qu'il ait été déclaré coupable, s'il est jugé indispensable de l'arrêter, toute rigueur qui ne serait pas nécessaire pour s'assurer de sa personne, doit être sévèrement réprimée par la loi.

### XIV.

Nul ne doit être jugé ni puni, qu'après avoir été entendu ou légalement appelé et qu'en vertu d'une loi promulguée antérieurement au délit. La loi qui punirait les délits commis avant qu'elle eût existé, serait une tyrannie; l'effet rétroactif donné à la loi ferait un crime.

### XV.

La loi ne doit déroger que des peines théoriquement et évidemment utiles; les peines doivent être proportionnées au délit et utiles à la société.

### XVI.

Le droit de propriété est celui qui appartient à tout citoyen de jouir et de disposer à son gré de ses biens, de ses revenus, du fruit de son travail et de son industrie.

### XVII.

Nul genre de travail, de culture, de commerce ne peut être interdit à l'industrie des citoyens.

### XVIII.

Tout homme peut engager ses services, lui-même; mais il ne peut se vendre ni être vendu. Sa personne n'est pas une propriété aliénable. La loi ne reconnaît point de servitude; il ne peut exister qu'un engagement de soins, et de reconnaissance entre l'homme qui travaille et celui qui l'emploie.

### XIX.

Nul ne peut être privé de la moindre portion de sa propriété sans son consentement, si ce n'est lorsque la nécessité publique, légalement constatée l'exige, et sous la condition d'une juste et préalable indemnité.

### XX.

Nul contribution ne peut être établie que pour l'utilité générale. Tous les citoyens ont droit de concourir à l'établissement des contributions, de surveiller l'emploi, et de s'en faire rendre compte.

### XXI.

Les secours publics sont une dette sacrée. La société doit la subsistance aux citoyens malheureux, soit en leur procurant du travail, soit en assurant les moyens d'exister à ceux qui sont hors d'état de travailler.

### XXII.

L'instruction est le besoin de tous. La société doit favoriser de tout son pouvoir les progrès de la raison publique, et mettre l'instruction à la portée de tous les citoyens.

### XXIII.

La garantie sociale consiste dans l'assurance de tous pour assurer à chacun la jouissance et la conservation de ses droits; cette garantie repose sur la souveraineté nationale.

### XXIV.

Elle ne peut exister, si les limites des fonctions publiques ne sont pas clairement déterminées par la loi, et si la responsabilité de tous les fonctionnaires n'est assurée.

### XXV.

La Souveraineté réside dans le peuple. Elle est une et indivisible, imprescriptible et inaliénable.

### XXVI.

Aucune portion du peuple ne peut exercer la puissance du peuple entier; mais chaque section du souverain assemblée, doit pour le droit d'exercer sa volonté avec une entière liberté.

### XXVII.

Que tout individu qui usurperait la souveraineté soit à l'instant mis à mort par les hommes libres.

### XXVIII.

Un peuple a toujours le droit de réformer et de changer sa constitution. Une constitution ne peut subsister à ses lois les garanties futures.

### XXIX.

Chaque citoyen a un droit égal de concourir à la formation de la loi, et à la nomination de ses mandataires ou de ses agents.

### XXX.

Les fonctions publiques sont électives; elles ne peuvent être considérées comme des distinctions ni comme des récompenses, mais comme des devoirs.

### XXXI.

Les délits des mandataires du peuple et de ses agents ne doivent jamais être impunis. Nul n'a le droit de se prévaloir plus inaliénable que les autres citoyens.

### XXXII.

Le droit de présenter des pétitions aux députés de l'autorité publique ne peut, en aucun cas, être interdit, suspendu ni limité.

### XXXIII.

La résistance à l'oppression est la conséquence des autres droits de l'homme. Il y a oppression contre le corps social, lorsqu'un seul de ses membres est opprimé. Il y a oppression contre chaque membre lorsque le corps social est opprimé.

### XXXIV.

Quand le Gouvernement viole les droits du peuple, l'insurrection est pour le peuple, et pour chaque portion du peuple le plus sacré des droits et le plus indispensable des devoirs.