

SIEYES AND THE CREATION OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY DISCOURSE

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Mon protecteur se console du grand coup qu'il a manqué. Son peu de succès ne lui fait pas autant de peine certainement qu'à moi. Si la chose eût réussi comme il l'espérait, je devenais *tout* au lieu que je ne suis *rien*...;

Je ne crois pas plus aux promesses de tous ces gens-là qu'aux prédictions de l'almanach. Mais j'ai l'air d'y croire, parce que je ne puis pas faire mieux... (Bastide, *Sieyès*, 35-36; 39).

There was nothing exceptional, in the privileged society of the Old Regime, in these protestations of the young provincial, Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès, to a father avid to see returns on his investment in the education of a brilliant son, these frustrations of an ambitious commoner dependent for advancement on the uncertainties of aristocratic patronage, this disenchantment of a cleric to whom the church offered no more than a means of satisfying « la passion d'avoir un état » (*ibid.*, 42). What was exceptional was that their author would find a moment and a language to give the experience of such frustrations a political force, to transform the individual ambition of a « nothing » to become « everything » into a collective demand for the reconstitution of social and political order, to focus social resentments through the political laser of revolution. The frontier between the privileged and the unprivileged was only one of many social cleavages that existed at the end of the Old Regime. In late 1788 and early 1789, for reasons more political than social, it became the issue upon which the very constitution of social and political order was seen to hinge. More powerfully and persuasively than any other, the abbé Sieyès articulated the inescapable necessity of deciding this issue by an act of political will – and of a political will that could only be that of the nation. All that was to follow was made possible by this definition of the revolutionary moment. It was a rhetorical act that made the ambitious abbé, still but a canon of Chartres, the first and most profound theorist of the French Revolution.

Though later events were to reveal his feebleness in spoken debate, Sieyès emerged at the end of 1788 as a master of the written word. For this disciple of Condillac, inspired by the ambition to create a rational science of politics through the creation of an exact and precise system of

signs, no target was more vulnerable to ridicule than the lexicon of privilege his early pamphlets attacked with unerring rhetorical skill, no task more pressing, in a world where « la langue a survécu à la chose » (*Qu'est-ce que...*, 194), than to reconstitute public order through the articulation of a new political language philosophically grounded in the nature of things. To read the principal pamphlets he contributed to the debate over the forms of the convocation of the Estates General — the *Essai sur les privilèges*, the *Vues sur les moyens d'exécution dont les représentants de la France pourront disposer en 1789*, and, above all, *Qu'est-ce que la Tiers-Etat?* — is to follow the creation of revolutionary discourse itself. This discourse did not take shape whole, as it were, behind the backs of the articulate French public; it emerged in the context of a generalized consciousness of political crisis, and it took on meaning in relation to the problems and possibilities of a particular political situation. Nor did it have a single univocal source. The language that gave explosive force to the events that destroyed the old order was a radical political invention, but its elements were derived from many sources. It follows from the process of bricolage by which it was created that revolutionary discourse necessarily contained tensions, inconsistencies, and ambiguities within it. Much of the subsequent political history of the French Revolution can be understood only in the light of that fact.

To understand Sieyès's part in the creation of the revolutionary discourse, it is necessary to see it in relation to the principal political discourses which the Old Regime offered to the political actors engaged in its last great crisis. Taken together, these discourses represent the disaggregation of the attributes traditionally bound together in the concept of monarchical authority and their reconceptualization as the basis of competing definitions (or attempted redefinitions) of the nature of the body politic. According to the traditional language of absolutism, as is well known, monarchical authority was characterized as the exercise of justice, according to which each receives his due in a hierarchical society of orders and Estates; justice is given effect by the royal will, which is in turn preserved from arbitrariness by reason and counsel. In the course of the political contestations of the last decades of the Old Regime, however, this cluster of attributes seems increasingly to separate into three strands of discourse, each characterized by the analytical priority it gives to one or other of the traditional terms.

The discourse of justice remains the prevailing language (though not of course the exclusive one) of the parliamentary constitutionalism that became so important in focusing the attack on ministerial despotism in the 1750s and afterwards. In this discourse, justice is opposed to will as the lawful and constituted is opposed to the arbitrary and contingent. It finds its clearest expression in arguments for a traditional constitution as old as the monarchy, a historically constituted order of things which both defines and limits royal power, and in the opposition between government conducted according to regular legal forms and that emanating from the arbitrary will of a monarch or his agents. In the great debate over representation in 1788

and 1789, the discourse of justice sustains the claims for the traditional separation of the three orders in the Estates General, and for restriction of the deputies to the binding mandates of their constituents.

In contrast, the discourse of will becomes the central feature of thinking about the nature of public life that is couched in explicitly political, rather than in judicial/constitutional terms. In this discourse – as in the writings of Rousseau or Mably, for example, which find a major source of inspiration in the tradition of classical republicanism – will is opposed to will; liberty appears as the active expression of a general political will; despotism occurs through the exercise of any will that is individual or particular, rather than collective or general. If, in 1788 and 1789, this discourse sustains arguments for the sovereignty of the national will, it also offers serious obstacles to the theory of representation, which had been condemned by Rousseau as incompatible with the idea of the general will.

The discourse of will can in turn be distinguished from a third discourse, a discourse of reason most clearly evident, for example, in the social theory of the physiocrats and in the administrative program of the ministers of Louis XVI. In its terms, public life must be reconceptualized on the basis of reason and nature, political will must yield to enlightened understanding of the natural and essential order of societies, and the language of political will must give way to a rational discourse of the social. Thus, in contrast to the discourse of will which appealed to the model of the ancient city-states, the discourse of reason was a discourse of modernity, a discourse that emphasized the growth of civilization and the progress of civil society. At the end of the Old Regime, this discourse sustained reforming arguments for greater administrative uniformity, civil rights and fiscal equality, and the representation of social interests through the participation of property owners in the rational conduct of local government by provincial assemblies.

The elaboration, competition, and interpenetration of these three discourses defined the political culture that emerged in France in the latter part of the eighteenth century and provided the ideological elements for the creation of revolutionary discourse itself. As it is in relationship to them that one can clarify the process by which the revolutionary language took form in the writings of Sieyès. To do this, one must begin with the celebrated parliamentary declaration of 25 September 1788, whose insistence that the Estates General «soient régulièrement convoqués et composés, et ce suivant la forme observée en mil six cent quatorze» (*Arch. parl.*, 1: 389) opened the revolutionary debate proper. That declaration «which was no more than a reiteration and further specification of a clause in the Declaration of Fundamental Laws issued by the Parlement of Paris on 3 May 1788) was prompted by the desire to insist upon regular legal forms as a bulwark against arbitrary and despotic ministerial intervention in the organization and deliberations of the Estates General. It found its logic within the discourse of justice elaborated by the parlements in the course of several decades of confrontation with ministerial despotism. And its

implications for the organization of the Estates General according to the traditional forms were characteristically defended, during the political debates to which it gave rise in the last months of 1788, in a language that appealed to the legitimacy of a historically constituted order of things.

It is against such an appeal that Sieyès argued most powerfully in the *Vues sur les moyens*. Written during the summer of 1788 (doubtless in response to the royal declaration of 5 July, which called for historical researches relating to the calling of the Estates General), this pamphlet offered a bitter indictment of the « extase gothique » which led so many authors to « fouiller dans toutes les archives » in order to discover « dans de misérables traditions, tissues de déraison et de mensonges, les lois restauratrices de l'ordre public » (*Vues*, 32). Imprescriptible rights, Sieyès argued, could not depend upon chance historical discoveries in « quelques cahiers informes, écrits de la main de la servitude »; nor would the principles of the social art be revealed in « des ineptes rédactions du moyen âge » (*ibid.*, 36, 37). Powerless to contain arbitrary power, such researches could lead only to empty quarrels among the representatives of the nation.

Thus it is hardly surprising that we find little trace in *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers Etat?* of the traditional discourse of justice. Indeed the corrosion of the juridical appeal to tradition and historical precedent, which Sieyès repudiates as an already discredited language resuscitated by the privileged orders to defend their interest, is one of the most striking features of this pamphlet. For Sieyès, as for Mably, French history is the political story of oppression, usurpation, and expropriation rather than the juridical story of the evolution and continuity of legal-constitutional forms. As a result of this analysis, precedent is reduced to the intolerable right of conquest, and the only admissible appeal to history is to return to that zero point – « l'année qui a précédé la conquête » (*Qu'est-ce que...*, 128) – at which the nation is restored to its true political identity and recovers the opportunity for a new and unambiguous assertion of its political will. Sieyès introduces into revolutionary discourse a conception of political action as occurring in a new moment in time which is simultaneously a point of rupture with the past. Unlike the Machiavellian Moment described by John Pocock, which presents a challenge to stabilize the existence of the political order within and against the flow of time, the Sieyèsian Moment invites an assertion of political will that will break out of history entirely.

What, then, are the principles according to which this new age is to be inaugurated? Sieyès seems, in effect, to answer this question in two quite different languages. At times, he falls back upon the resources of a rational discourse of the social, which substitutes a vision of the progress of enlightened, civil society for the arbitrariness and vicissitudes of the political past:

Surtout, ne nous décourageons pas de ne rien voir dans l'histoire qui puisse convenir à notre position. La véritable science de l'état de société ne date pas de

join. Les hommes ont construit longtemps des chaumières avant d'être en état d'élever des palais (*idem*, 175-176).

But he also resorts at critical points to the very different language of a discourse of will, according to which « la nation existe avant tout, elle est à l'origine de tout. Sa volonté est toujours légale, elle est la loi elle-même » (*idem*., 180). Sieyès' claims for the Third Estate represent a complex blend of competing social and political discourses, a blend that explains many of the ambiguities of the revolutionary language that began to take form in his writing.

It has long been known that Sieyès's thinking was shaped by an extended early confrontation with the ideas of Quesnay and the physiocrats, on the one hand, and with Adam Smith and the Scottish school on the other. Thus he frequently resorts in considering political questions to a discourse of the social in which the nature of production and wealth, the implications of the division of labor, and the reorganization of society according to the self-evident principles of a rational social art form principal themes. This is the principal idiom of the *Essai sur les privilèges* (published in November 1788) in which the arguments for social hierarchy offered by the privileged are repudiated as incompatible with the free relations of exchange in civil society (« il n'y a pas là de subordination, mais un échange continu »), true honor is shown to derive not from royal favor but from the free market of public esteem (that « monnaie morale »), and privilege is denounced as a species of begging in which « les privilégiés engloutissent et les capitaux et les personnes; et tout est voué sans retour à la stérilité privilégiée » (*Ecr. pol.*, 105, 96, 111).

This is also the language to which Sieyès appeals at the very beginning of *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers Etat?*, when he enumerates the categories of useful and productive activity upon which social life depends: in thus grounding social existence on the active encounter of human industry with physical nature, he not only excludes the privileged from the social order by the very act of definition, but in doing so he also utterly negates the cultural foundations of the Old Regime as a corporate order structured according to a logic of spiritual differentiation and hierarchization. It is the language in which he goes on to praise Calonne's proposals for provincial assemblies (in contrast to those introduced by Brienne which had retained the traditional distinction between Estates, thereby incidentally offering the abbé an important political education as a clerical deputy to the assembly of Orléanais in 1787) as attempting to institute a true national representation expressing a « real » order of relations based on property rather than a « personal » order based on status. It is the language in which he describes the long process of social development – « la révolution que le temps et la force des choses ont opérée » (*Qu'est-ce que...*, 196) – which has destroyed feudal society by fostering the growth of commerce and industry, thereby rendering the Third Estate « la réalité nationale » and the aristocracy nothing but a

shadow of its formal monstrosity (*ibid.*, 150). And it is equally the language in which he demands that the Third Estate now choose its own representatives from the « classes disponibles » within it, those who have « une sorte d'aisance » necessary to secure education and enlightenment and interest themselves in public affairs (*ibid.*, 143).

Yet at the same time as he drew upon the discourse of the social in his claims for the representation of the Third Estate, Sieyès also freed the idea of representation itself from the constraints that had been so powerfully imprinted upon it within this discourse during the last decades of the Old Regime, most notably in the campaign for the creation of provincial assemblies. Limited by physiocratic notions that landed property was the only basis for the true expression of social interests, representation was also restricted in this campaign to an administrative summons to rational participation in the conduct of local government. In repudiating the physiocratic argument for landed property as the exclusive source of wealth, as he did in his early fragments on economic theory (today in the Archives Nationales), Sieyès also undermined the argument that land alone offered a basis for the rational expression of social interests. More fundamentally, however, he also freed the practice of representation from administrative constraints by assimilating it to the basic social principle of the division of labor. A note among his papers inscribes the idea of liberty within a theory of society and social progress in which « representation » and « the division of labor » appear as interchangeable categories in what Sieyès presents as his « *ordre représentatif* »;

Se faire/laisser représenter est la seule source de la prospérité civile... Multiplier les moyens/pouvoirs de satisfaire à nos besoins; jouir plus, travailler moins, voilà l'accroissement naturel de la liberté dans l'état social. Or ce progrès de liberté suit naturellement de l'établissement du *travail représentatif* (*Ecr. pol.*, 62).

While Sieyès offers no immediate extrapolation from what he here calls « representative work » to political representation, the connection seems clearly implied; indeed, it becomes quite explicit in his other political writings, as in the speech of 2 October 1789 which justifies representative government on the grounds that the division of labor « appartient aux travaux politiques comme à tous les genres du travail productif » (*Ecr. Pol.*, 262). While the distinction between active and passive citizens is an obvious expression of this way of thinking, it is not the most important one. More fundamentally, by assimilating representation to the division of labor in this way, Sieyès liberated the idea of representation quite decisively from the constraints placed upon it in prerevolutionary social and political theory. Representation, at once a principle and a consequence of liberty, ceased to be an administrative device on the one hand, or a poor substitute for direct democracy on the other, and became an integral expression of the very principle to which civil society owed its autonomous existence. This point was made explicit in Sieyès's speech of 2 Thermidor, an III.

Tout est représentation dans l'état social. Elle se trouve partout dans l'ordre privé comme dans l'ordre public... Je dis plus, elle se confond avec l'essence même de la vie sociale (*Réimp. Moniteur*, 25: 292).

Yet if Sieyès frequently falls back upon a discourse of the social in his definition of the nation and his conception of representation, this coexists in his writings with a more explicitly political discourse that seems to owe its principal inspiration to Rousseau. Thus, to a definition of society as a productive entity satisfying the various needs and interests of its members through the application of the principle of the division of labor, *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-Etat?* adds a political definition of the nation as a unitary body of citizens exercising an inalienable common will.

Une société politique ne peut être que l'ensemble des associés. Une nation ne peut décider qu'elle ne sera pas la nation, ou qu'elle ne la sera qu'une manière; car ce seroit dire qu'elle ne l'est point de tout autre. De même une nation ne peut statuer que sa volonté commune cessera d'être sa volonté commune (*Qu'est-ce que...*, 188).

In this discourse, the nation is the ultimate political reality, upon whose identity all else depends.

This conception of the nation has several crucial implications. The first, inherent in the definition of the nation as a body of associates living under a common law, involves the status of citizenship as a relation of equality and universality, and the exclusion of the privileged as representing an *imperium in imperio* necessarily outside the political order. Thus the privileged orders are defined out of the nation according to a political logic of citizenship, according to which they cannot be equal, just as they have been excluded from it according to a social logic of productive activity, according to which they cannot be useful.

The second implication, inherent in the definition of the nation as possessing an inalienable and unitary common will, involves a repudiation of the language of an ancient constitution and a fundamental law upholding claims for the traditional organization of the Estates General. Because the will of the nations is the unitary common will of a body of citizens, it cannot be expressed through a representative body that is organized by order and Estate: « La volonté générale... ne peut pas être *une* tant que vous laisserez trois ordres et trois représentations » (*ibid.*, 198). Thus a unitary political will requires expression in a unitary representative body; indeed, in a complex modern society, it can barely be said to exist without it. This link between a unitary representation and a unitary national will – crucial to the elaboration of the revolutionary ideology – was a point upon which Sieyès (tardily elected deputy of the Third Estate of Paris, after several rebuffs from electors of his own order) was to insist throughout the debates that transformed the Estates General into a National Assembly and subsequently laid down the principles of the new constitutional order. Yet it

was also a problematic link. For if the theory and practice of representation were perfectly consistent with the social theory of the division of labor in a complex modern society, they were less clearly and immediately compatible with the political theory of a unitary and inalienable general will.

In *Le contrat social*, of course, Rousseau had decried representation as a feudal practice inconsistent with the exercise of the general will; and while he had allowed for representation in drawing up his constitution for Poland, he had also insisted that popular sovereignty be guaranteed by a *mandat impératif* binding deputies strictly to respect the explicitly stated will of their electors. Interestingly enough, this latter argument brought the theory of the general will into convergence with the traditional constitutional practice of representation of the Old Regime, according to which the binding mandate was an essentially conservative device to protect communities from arbitrary demands placed by an absolute monarch upon the deputies to the Estates General. In itself, the convergence is suggestive of the conservative social assumptions underlying Rousseau's notion of the general will, and of their incompatibility with the far more dynamic conception of society implied in Sieyès's discourse of the social. But more importantly, it reveals the problematic issue faced by revolutionary theorists in legitimating what in effect became a revolution of the deputies carried out in the name of national sovereignty. As a defense of a traditional society against arbitrariness, the binding mandate was quite incompatible with a revolutionary assertion of national sovereignty on behalf of a body of citizens exercising a unitary common will. Not surprisingly, then, its repudiation was a crucial step in the effective transformation of the Estates General into a National Assembly during the Spring of 1789, and a central element in the fusion of the concept of the general will with the theory of representation accomplished in the crucial constitutional debates that followed upon the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.

During the early debates over binding mandate, in July 1789, Sieyès consistently argued that no further action on this issue was necessary because the question had already been decided by the creation of a National Assembly on 17 June 1789 – an act which, in declaring the representative body of the nation « une et indivisible » (following the script set forth in *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-Etat?*), had claimed for that body alone the right « d'interpréter et de présenter la volonté générale de la nation » (*Arch. parl.*, 8: 127). But he made his thinking on this point more explicit during the constitutional debates of early September 1789, when the argument for the royal veto (also justified as a device permitting an appeal to the general will of the nation against the particular will of its representative body) was added to that of the binding mandate to threaten the claims of the National Assembly to express the national will. Elected « immédiatement » by his bailliage but « médiatement » by « la totalité des bailliages », Sieyès argued in his speech of 7 September, « tout député est représentant de la nation entière » (*Ecr. pol.*, 232-3). Because the will of his immediate electors is necessarily a

particular will in relation to that of the nation as a whole, an **individual** deputy can never be bound by that particular will in his capacity as representative of the nation. Nor can a decision of the representative body, once assembled, be subject to an appeal to the general will, which in a populous nation could only take the form of a vote by primary assemblies that would « déchirer la France en une infinité de petites démocraties, qui ne s'uniroient ensuite que par les liens d'une confédération générale » (*ibid.*, 234). Thus reversing the Rousseauian opposition between representation and the general will, Sieyès insisted that national sovereignty could find expression in France only in the unity of the representative body: « le peuple ne peut parler, ne peut agir que par ses représentants » (*ibid.*, 238).

Parler: agir. Yet another repudiation of Rousseau was implied in these words. For the theory of the general will required that each individual in an assembly of citizens think his own thoughts, free of the partial interests that might emerge in the process of communication with others; hence the formula of the *Discours sur l'économie politique* – « autre chose sera la délibération publique, et autre chose la volonté générale ». Nothing was more foreign to the thinking of Sieyès than this formula. According to his general theory of the division of labor, representation was justified on the grounds that it permitted the majority of men (who were nothing more than « des machines de travail » occupied with their daily labor) to confer active exercise of their right to participate in legislation upon the minority whom leisure, education, and enlightenment rendered « bien plus capables qu'eux-mêmes de connoître l'intérêt général, et d'interpréter à cet égard leur propre volonté » (*ibid.*, 236). But representatives chosen for their enlightenment could not make enlightened decisions unless they were free to deliberate in a manner unconstrained by the prior wills of those who had elected them. Thus slipping again from the discourse of will to the discourse of reason, Sieyès found in the latter yet another argument against the binding mandate.

Quand on se réunit, c'est pour délibérer, c'est pour connoître les avis les uns des autres, pour profiter des lumières réciproques, pour confronter les volontés particulières, pour les modifier, pour les concilier, enfin pour obtenir un résultat commun à la pluralité... Il est donc incontestable que les députés sont à l'Assemblée nationale, non pas pour y annoncer le voeu déjà formé de leurs commettants directs, mais pour y délibérer et y voter librement d'après leur avis *actuel*, éclairé de toutes les lumières que l'assemblée peut fournir à chacun (*ibid.*, 238).

In this way, Sieyès disengaged the ideal of a unitary general will from the communal dream of direct democracy and reconciled it with the practice of representation as an expression of the division of labor in a populous modern society. At the same time, he freed the concept of representation from the restrictions placed upon it in prerevolutionary thinking (both within the discourse of the social and within the discourse of will) thereby locating the exercise of the sovereign general will not in the dispersed primary assemblies of the nation but in the representative body which alone

constituted the nation a whole. While the resulting conception of « representative sovereignty » was an ingenious invention, however, it was far from a stable one: in the course of the Revolution, the language of the general will constantly subverted the language of representation. The failure of the Constitution of 1791, which gave institutional form to the ambiguous synthesis between representation and national sovereignty effected by the national assembly in 1789, was a clear symptom of the instability of that synthesis; the emergence of the Terror the overwhelming expression of its collapse.

Sieyès himself, no less than others, had laid the basis for the subversion of principles of constitutionality in the name of the general will that was implied in the Terror. For it was a fundamental implication of the political definition of the nation offered in *Qu'est-ce que la Tiers Etat?* that its sovereignty exists independent of all constitutional forms: « de quelque manière qu'une nation veuille, il suffit qu'elle veuille; toutes les formes sont bonnes, et sa volonté est toujours la loi suprême... une nation est indépendante de toute forme » (*Qu'est-ce que...*, 183). Against the arguments of the privileged in favor of a fundamental law and an ancient constitution, Sieyès was obliged to maintain that there can be no constitutional arrangements not directly and immediately dependent upon the inalienable general will of the nation:

La volonté nationale, au contraire, n'a besoin que de sa réalité pour être toujours légale, elle est l'origine de toute légalité. Non seulement la nation n'est pas soumise à une constitution, mais elle ne *peut* pas être, elle ne *doit* pas être, ce qui équivaut encore à dire qu'elle ne l'est pas (*ibid.*, 182).

The consequences of this argument are immense. For in repudiating claims for a traditional constitution, Sieyès had also undermined the capacity of any constitutional arrangement to withstand the subversive effects of the principle of national sovereignty.

How then to save constitutionalism and representative government from subversion in the name of general will? This, in effect, was the problem faced by the Thermidorians in drawing up the Constitution of the Year III. And, although for personal reasons he remained aloof from the committee charged to write that constitution, it was also the problem that Sieyès (having survived the Terror to return to the Convention after the fall of Robespierre) addressed in his most important speech of this period, on 2 Thermidor of that year. To resolve it, Sieyès now sought to give clear priority to a rational discourse of the social over the discourse of political will.

Malheur aux hommes, malheur aux peuples qui croient savoir ce qu'ils veulent, quand ils ne font que vouloir! Vouloir est la chose la plus aisée... Reiterating his conviction that « tout est représentation dans l'état social »,

he argued that just as in civil society an individual was freer the more others worked for him, so in politics it was « une erreur grandement préjudi-

cialable » to maintain that « le peuple ne doit déléguer de pouvoirs que ceux qu'il ne peut exercer lui même » (*Réimp. Moniteur*, 25: 292).

Danger lay not in the delegation of powers, but in their concentration in a single body—whether in a single representative body, or in the nation as a whole. To avoid the former, it was necessary to divide political functions precisely among a number of bodies in a way that would ensure « l'unité d'action » without risking « l'action unique ». The dispersion of powers upon which Sieyès now insisted not only divided legislative and executive functions; it separated the responsibility for proposing laws from that of deciding upon them, thereby preventing any exercise of « des volontés spontanées » by a representative assembly. Furthermore, to safeguard against any infringement upon this division of powers, Sieyès argued that it should be overseen by a special jury with authority to decide on charges of constitutional violation.

But it was not enough to prevent the concentration of power in a representative body acting in the name of national sovereignty. It was also necessary, Sieyès now insisted, to repudiate an exaggerated notion of national sovereignty itself, a notion which had been infected by the royal superstition of absolute and unlimited power and sustained by mistaken (but clearly Rousseauian) conceptions of the social contract. In creating political society, individuals neither transferred all their rights to the community, nor conferred upon it the sum of their individual powers. On the contrary, they retained their rights and placed in common only as little power as was necessary to maintain them.

La souveraineté du peuple n'est point illimitée, et bien des systèmes prônés, honorés, y compris celui auquel on se persuade encore d'avoir les plus grandes obligations, ne paraîtront plus que des conceptions monacales, de mauvais plans de *ré-totale*, plutôt que de république, également funestes à la liberté, et ruineux de la chose publique comme de la chose privée (*ibid.*, 297).

Like Benjamin Constant, who also reverted to a discourse of the social as the basis for a new political liberalism, Sieyès now saw the Terror as the logical fruit of Rousseauian arguments.

If the Constitution of the Year III did not precisely follow the details of Sieyès's proposals, it expressed a shared impulse to safeguard representative government while containing the implications of the theory of national sovereignty. One knows with what results. In the circumstances of the Directory, as it proved increasingly difficult to preserve « l'unité d'action » without « l'action unique », the recent advocate of a jury to safeguard the constitution soon found himself participating in the *coups d'état* of 18 Fructidor, 22 Floréal, and 30 Prairial, and presiding over the transfer of power to Napoleon Bonaparte on 18 Brumaire. It is one of the great ironies of the French Revolution that the theorist whose script opened the revolutionary drama also brought it to a close.