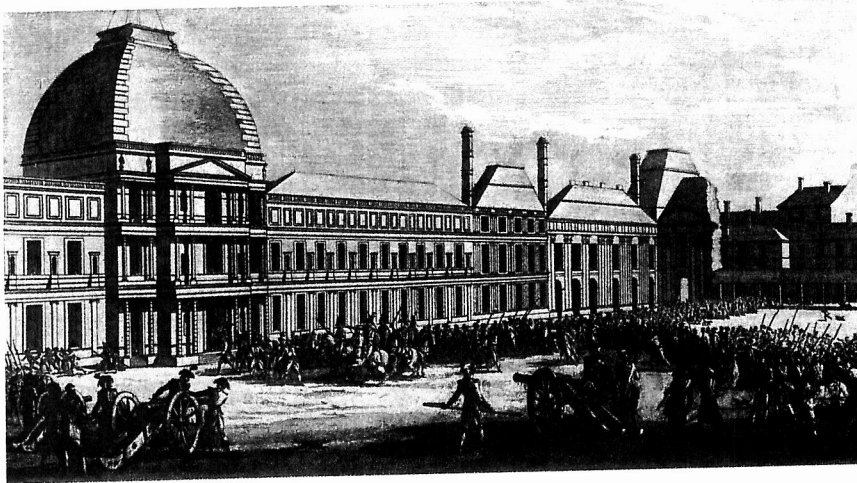


Why did violence increase to become the Terror, 1793–94?

The purge of the Girondins/*Journée* of 2 June 1793



◁ *Arrestation des députés Girondins – les Tuileries encerclées par la Garde Nationale, 2 Juin 1793*, an engraving by Pierre Berthault. Although the National Guard point their cannons at the National Convention this *journée* was in fact non violent.

The war against the First Coalition and the civil war in the Vendée were not the only wars fought in 1793. There was a third war, a political war between the Girondins and the Montagnards and if the fighting was carried out with words rather than swords then the consequences of defeat were just as deadly. The two sides had disagreed over the fate of Louis and each saw the other as conspiring against the Revolution.

The Girondins were hampered because they had promoted the war and were blamed for its failures and its negative economic impacts, most importantly a fall in the value of *assignat* which made food more expensive. The loss of colonial markets through the English naval blockade and rising unemployment in luxury trades contributed to *sans-culotte* dissatisfaction. The Paris sections called for price controls on basic commodities, a demand which the National Convention refused. Then there were disturbances in Paris in February over bread and soap prices which the National Guard brought under control. The Girondins had support in the provinces where the policies of leading Montagnards like Robespierre and Marat were viewed as too extreme but the Montagnards had support from the *sans-culottes* in Paris who saw them as realists who were willing to take the harsh measures required to protect the Revolution. The Girondins on the other hand attacked the *sans-culottes* as *buveurs de sang* (drinkers of blood).

In April the Girondins went on the offensive against the Montagnards. They blamed the February disturbances on Marat and on 12 April called for him to be impeached (charged with crimes against the state). They were successful in getting him taken before the Revolutionary Tribunal but Marat was acquitted and carried back in triumph to the National Convention by thousands of his *sans-culotte* supporters. One major consequence of the impeachment was that 8000 demonstrators surrounded the National Convention on 3 May demanding price controls on bread. Significantly the Montagnards had moved from opposing to supporting price controls. The next day a law setting a maximum price for grain and bread was passed.

■ Think about

- What determined each side's support?
- Why were these events likely to lead to political violence?

The struggle for control within the National Convention continued. Messages of support for the Girondins came from the provinces but plans for a purge of Girondin deputies by the *sans-culottes* were developing. At the Jacobin Club on 26 May Robespierre called for an insurrection against the 'corrupt deputies' of the National Convention. The Montagnards had allied themselves with the *sans-culottes*.

On 31 May the first insurrection failed but two days later the National Convention was surrounded by 100,000 National Guards demanding the arrest of 29 Girondin deputies. When the National Convention deputies tried to leave they were all physically stopped so, in order to avoid its armed overthrow, they put the matter to a vote. Although many deputies abstained, enough, including the Montagnards, voted to have the Girondins arrested (see page 106 on their trial and execution). The result was that the National Convention continued to rule, with power in the hands of the Montagnards. The price they paid was that they were dependent on the *sans-culottes* and had had to accept the use of armed force against an elected assembly.

Federalist revolts

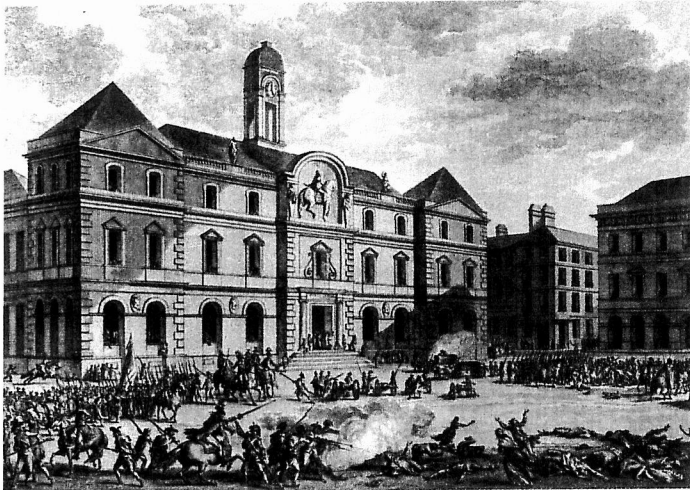
On 29 May 1793 Lyons overthrew its Jacobin rulers and in reaction to the purge of the Girondins on 2 June other cities, notably Avignon, Bordeaux, Caen, Marseilles and Toulon revolted too. Their motives were a mixture of resentment of the influence of the Paris Commune on the course of the Revolution and support for the Girondins. In time the character of these revolts changed from **federalism** to counter-revolution in Lyons and Toulon.

Although these revolts posed a potentially significant threat to the Revolution, the cities were never able to work together. They had few troops, which reflected a lack of popular support, and they were unwilling to advance far from their homes. This enabled the French army to defeat each revolt separately. Between July and October each city was taken, culminating in the capture of Lyons after a two-month siege.

In the aftermath representatives on mission were responsible for administering revolutionary justice. Robespierre noted that what was needed was, 'making a terrible example of all the criminals who have outraged liberty and spilt the blood of patriots'. An example was made of Lyons, where leading Jacobins had been guillotined by the rebels. Many of the houses of the richer rebels were destroyed and the representative on mission, Couthon, set up a popular justice court, executing 113 rebels in six weeks but that was not considered to be enough by his colleagues in the Committee. He was replaced in November by Collot d'Herbois and Joseph Fouché. They set up a revolutionary commission which sentenced 1673 people to death, and the departmental criminal court sentenced a further 213 to death.

federalism

In this context, federalism meant local areas/ departments having an influence on the course of the Revolution and having some independence in running their own affairs



△ *Mitrailades de Lyons, Commandées par Collot d'Herbois, an engraving by Pierre Berthault.*

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