

**Nicole CACHO\***

**LITTLE COMPLAINT, MUCH GRIEVANCE: THE FAILURE OF  
THE FRENCH DIRECTORY (1795-1799)**

***Puține plângeri, multă suferință: Eșecul Directoratului francez  
(1795-1799)***

**Abstract:** *A popular idea during the French Revolution was that under Maximilien Robespierre blood ran but there was bread; under the Directory, blood did not run but there was no bread. Therefore, it was agreed: blood needed to run. The Directory (1795-1799) did more damage than just failing to provide bread. Unfortunately, historians typically focus on the years up to 1794 before jumping straight to Napoleon's reign in 1800. The purpose of this thesis is to fill the knowledge gap regarding the Directory—the government ruling a year after Robespierre's execution to the year Napoleon becomes First Consul. This thesis discusses the Directory's failures to manage war, royalism, terrorism, finances and the Catholic Church.*

**Keywords:** *French Revolution, Directory, Napoleon Bonaparte, coup d'état, La Terreur*

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Based on Enlightenment beliefs, the French Revolution (1789-1799) was a revolution of excitement and rage, patriotism and violence, only to end in indifference. The revolutionaries of each provisional government promised equality and freedom from absolutism, but failed to provide them. This created a never-ending cycle of mayhem within and beyond France. Many historians assumed the largest failing government is the notorious de facto government, the *Comité de salut public* (Committee of Public Safety). On the contrary, it was an abstruse government who significantly failed the French people during the last four years of the revolution. The *Directoire* (Directory) — ruling from November 1795 to November 1799 — failed to manage royalism, terrorism, war, finance and the Church. Through its failures, the *Directoire* dragged France, as well as the world, into its vicious maw.

Before beginning the discussion, there are a few things to note. The first is that, though the article is based on a historical topic, the events are

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\* BBA, St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas, USA; e-mail: cachonicoles@yahoo.com.

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not going to be presented in chronological order. They are going to be presented based on thematic concepts. The second thing to note is the fact that France replaced the Gregorian calendar with its Republican calendar. The last thing to note is that in this article the context of *terrorism* means civil war within France.

### **An Overview on the French Revolution (1789-1799)**

The French Revolution began in 1789 but the sparks were lit long before then. Financial troubles accumulated gradually since the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). French involvement in the Seven Years' War cost it 1.3 billion livres. This amount nearly doubled when the French involved themselves in the American Revolution (1775-1783), spending more than 2.01 billion livres. These high costs created financial conflict between the monarchy and the nobility. When Louis XVI tried to implement a tax reform in the mid-1780s, it brought France into bankruptcy. The agrarian crisis of 1788-1789 left the people starving and broke. Internationally, the struggle for European hegemony outstripped France's fiscal resources. Socially, the Enlightenment values from Montesquieu and Rousseau intensified the political situation in France. These factors led to Louis XVI calling an Estates General meeting in 1789, the first since 1614. The unsuccessful progress of the Estates General led Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès to publish his infamous pamphlet *Qu'est-ce que le tiers état* (What is the Third Estate) in January 1789. Sieyès asserted the private and public activities of a functioning society were solely performed by the Third Estate, an injustice to society. He defined a nation as a "body of associates living under common laws and represented by the same legislative assembly."<sup>1</sup> With this pamphlet, Sieyès established the *Assemblée nationale* (National Assembly) out of the Third Estate, becoming one of the Fathers of the Revolution. The first two Estates — the clergy and nobility, respectively — prevented the *Assemblée nationale* from attending the meeting in June 1789. The *Assemblée nationale* brought their meeting to the tennis courts where they took the *Serment du Jeu de Paume* (Tennis Court Oath) of June 20<sup>th</sup> 1789. The members vowed not to "separate, and to reassemble whenever circumstances require, until the constitution of the kingdom is established."<sup>2</sup> This pivotal event led to a succession of essential events such as the storming of the Bastille on July 14<sup>th</sup> 1789, the writing and passing of the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen),<sup>3</sup> and the imprisonment of Louis XVI and

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<sup>1</sup> Kaplow 1971: 73.

<sup>2</sup> Doyle 2002: 49.

<sup>3</sup> This document, together with the American Declaration of Independence and the American Bill of Rights, largely inspired the United Nations' *Declaration of Human Rights* of 1948. Doyle 2002: 157-158.

his family in October 1789.<sup>4</sup> What the revolutionaries did not know was that these early events led to a path filled with violence, bloodshed and chaos. There were numerous massacres such as the Champ de Mars Massacre (July 17<sup>th</sup> 1791) and the Insurrection of August 10<sup>th</sup> 1792. There were three constitutions and seven governments. Countless people were executed, including Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, Frederic Dietrich<sup>5</sup> and Rozalia Lobomirska.<sup>6</sup> Finally, radicals came into power, notably Maximilien Robespierre.

Robespierre was the leader of the Committee of Public Safety from 1793 to 1794. He and his radical Jacobin supporters implemented the law of 22 Prairial Year II. This law — also known as the *Loi de la Grande Terreur* (Law of the Grand Terror) — made a killing machine out of the Revolutionary Tribunal.<sup>7</sup> This law gave the Revolutionary Tribunal only two options for a verdict: acquittal or death. It gave the people an active obligation to denounce conspirators and counterrevolutionaries.<sup>8</sup> This brought in an era of paranoia that was the Reign of Terror. Though most of the suspects guillotined were in fact guilty, the shift in paranoia took a turn for the worse when Robespierre executed Georges Danton, a Father of the Revolution, and Camille Desmoulins, a journalist, on the basis of what crimes they could have potentially done. In July 1794, the peak of the Terror, the number of executions pushed 796, a 600 increase from the spring of 1794.<sup>9</sup>

The Montagnards, a minority political group in the *Convention nationale* (National Convention), as well as Robespierre's fellow Jacobins feared Robespierre had gone too far. The Convention nationale arrested Robespierre and his inner circle. He was executed by guillotine on July 28<sup>th</sup> 1794. His execution began the Thermidorian Reaction of 1794-1795, the first step in establishing the Directoire.

### **Establishing the *Directoire* (1795-1799)**

The Thermidorian Reaction lasted from July 28<sup>th</sup> 1794 to October 26<sup>th</sup> 1795. The Thermidorian Montagnards were categorized into three groups. The first group was made of detained suspects released from prison due to the law of 22 Prairial Year II being repealed on 14 Thermidor Year II. The second group were rebels desiring to continue the Terror on royalists beyond Robespierre's extent. The third group were moderates desiring to

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<sup>4</sup> The Bourbon family was taken to Paris after more than a century of ruling from Versailles. Doyle 2002: 157-158.

<sup>5</sup> Frederic Dietrich was patron to Rouget de l'Isle, writer of France's national anthem *La Marseillaise*. Doyle 2002: 157-158.

<sup>6</sup> The death of Rozalia Lobomirska, a Polish noble, was the reason the Polish stopped supporting the French Revolution. Doyle 2002: 160.

<sup>7</sup> Andress 1999: 152-153.

<sup>8</sup> Schama 1989: 715-766.

<sup>9</sup> Matrat 1975: 6-7.

follow Danton's agenda. These groups wrangled for political power after Robespierre's fall, letting their own people essentially starve. This brought up a popular idea that under the Jacobins there was bloodshed and food; under the Thermidorians, there was no bloodshed and no food.<sup>10</sup>

The most violent of these outbreaks was the White Terror of spring and summer 1795. Reign of Terror suspects – the Royalists – had their chance at revenge on their former prosecutors. Extreme Royalists would target radical Jacobins then murder them. The public tended to turn a blind eye on blood-shedding vengeance when it came to bringing a pro-Terror Jacobin to justice.

There was a political attempt from the monarchy to regain power over France. In June 1795, the Comte de Provence, Louis XVI's brother, took the title of Louis XVIII and proclaimed himself King of France.<sup>11</sup> Louis XVIII's Verona Declaration was of "hardline royalism"<sup>12</sup>. The restoration of the king would bring back Old Regime privileges and execute anyone who voted for the king's death. This declaration did not work with the French public. Fortunes had been made supplying anti-royalist troops. A new generation of officers accustomed to the years of anti-royalist combat was rising. Church property had been seized and sold as *biens nationaux* (national property). Even land-owning peasants had a vested financial interest in the survival of the Republic. Louis XVIII did not reappear onto the political scene until 1814.

With these violent outbreaks, the Thermidorians made sure the Constitution of the Year III closed any loopholes from previous constitutions, including a provision on the Declaration of rights. The famous statement "men are born and remain free and equal in rights" is changed because of its vague meaning to "the law is the same for all men."<sup>13</sup> The Constitution of the Year III also established an extreme separation of powers within the new government body. There were three bodies of government: a bicameral legislature (the first in the ten years of the Revolution) and an executive branch. The bicameral legislature composed of a lower house – the *Conseil des Cinq-Cents* (Council of Five Hundred) – and an upper house – the *Conseil des Anciens* (Council of Ancients).<sup>14</sup> The *Conseil des Cinq-Cents* was composed of 500 men. Their function was to propose laws to the *Conseil des Anciens*. The *Conseil des Anciens* was composed of 250 men at least 40 years of age. The *Conseil des Anciens* approved or rejected the proposed laws. Both councils were subject to re-

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<sup>10</sup>Andress 1999: 152-153.

<sup>11</sup>Louis XVII, son of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, died at the age of ten in Parisian captivity. Andress 1999: 152-153.

<sup>12</sup> Andress 1999: 153.

<sup>13</sup> Andress 1999: 153.

<sup>14</sup> This setup of the legislature is quite similar to Great Britain's with the House of Commons (lower house) and the House of Lords (upper house). Also note that the Council of 500 is loosely based on the Athenian Council of 500 of Classical Greece.

election every 3 years, with one-third of each legislative body elected yearly. Electoral assemblies chose these deputies. These assemblies were made up of citizens who owned or rented property worth 100-200 days' worth of labour. Out of a pool of 1 million people, 30,000 men were chosen to be in the electoral assembly.<sup>15</sup>

The executive branch was placed in the power of five directors. The Conseil des Anciens elected these directors from shortlists proposed by the Conseil des Cinq-Cents. The directors were "formally responsible for internal and external security." The directors could not demand legislation but suggest it. In order to make its acts legal, there needed to be a majority rule among the directors. The directors appointed and controlled ministers. These ministers were not allowed to be sitting members of either council or the Directoire. This was to prevent bias and nepotism on any piece of legislation. The five directors were a "collective representation" of the role fit for a king following the 1791 Constitution, except without the power to veto. The first five directors were Paul Barras, Louis-Marie de la Revellière-Lepaux, Lazare Carnot, Jean-François Ruebell and Étienne-François Letourneur.<sup>16</sup>

All seemed fine up until the Convention nationale established the Two-Thirds Law to go with the Constitution of the Year III. The Two-Thirds Law decreed that two-thirds of the first legislative body had to be former members of the Convention nationale. This protected the vision of an unpopular government and rendered voters' power for alternative candidates useless. 315,000 members voted on the law and over one-third of the group — 19 départements (departments) and 47 Parisian arrondissements (administrative districts) — rejected it.<sup>17</sup> They believed it was an obvious anti-royalist plot. In response, the royalists led the 13 Vendémiaire Year IV coup d'état. These royalist protesters were defeated by troops led by Napoleon Bonaparte, who was sent by Paul Barras.<sup>18</sup> The Constitution was enacted on October 26<sup>th</sup> 1795, dissolving the Convention nationale and establishing the Directoire. On November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1795, the Directoire assumed power, beginning the longest four years of the French Revolution.

### **Managing Royalism**

The first order of business for the newly elected directors was to mitigate the power of the opposition by the upcoming election in 1797. Their focus was on the Royalists, categorized as "beyond Paris" and "within Paris".

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<sup>15</sup> Stewart 1951: 588-591, 610-612.

<sup>16</sup> Andress 1999: 154.

<sup>17</sup> Andress 1999: 154.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Barras and Napoleon Bonaparte actually met in 1793. Lefebvre 1964: 161.

Beyond Paris, the Directoire's priority was ending le *Guerre de Vendée* (The War in the Vendée), a Royalist and Catholic uprising in the western coastal region of Vendée. The war had been going on since March 1793. By the time the Directoire assumed power, the war was just about coming to an end. The Vendéans signed treaties with the Republican Army and stopped fighting for the most part. Those who continued were lone soldiers and Royalists fighting in the *Chouannerie*, another Royalist uprising in Western France between 1795 and 1796. Three Republican Armies were set up to stop the uprising led by Lazare Hoche, Jean Baptiste Camille de Canclaux and Jean-Baptiste Annibal Aubert du Bayet. In December 1795, the Directoire gave Hoche the ultimate authority over the army in Western France. To stop the Chouans, Hoche gave an ultimatum to the Royalist soldiers. If they were to lay down their arms, they were guaranteed amnesty and religious freedom. Many Royalist soldiers followed suit. Hoche then turned his focus on pacifying the Vendée. In February 1796, Royalist leader Jean-Nicolas Stofflet was captured and executed in Angers, France. In March 1796, the Republican Army captured and executed Royalist soldier François de Charette. The execution of these two men concluded the War in the Vendée and the Chouannerie.

Within Paris, the pragmatic Directors Lazare Carnot and François-Marie de Barthélemy realized that peace without significant concession would lead to instability. They called for a relationship with the newly elected Royalists, who won the majority of seats in the May 1797 elections. The first person on this Royalist list was French national hero Jean-Charles Pichegru, the President of the Conseil des Cinq-Cents.<sup>19</sup> However, Pichegru did not hold the same objective. Pichegru was the mastermind for the 18 Fructidor Year V coup d'état, which occurred after the Royalists won the majority in the September elections. As a result, the three directors in power nullified the election results for the May as well as the September elections. They gave the dry guillotine (exile to French Guiana) to Carnot, Barthélemy, Pichegru and 53 out of 117 deputies. Anti-Royalist deputies filled the empty seats. The Directoire ordered the military to seize all Parisian Royalist strongholds and to surround the legislative chambers for protection. It also closed down 30 newspapers. This coup, though unsuccessful, was bloodless and experienced no resistance. Propaganda denouncing Royalist machinations flourished. The people still did not give up hope. They did not show support for the Directoire. This event ended the liberal republic of the first phase of the Directoire. With an end comes a

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<sup>19</sup> Pichegru was the French general who overran Belgium and the Netherlands in the early 1790s. The National Convention gave him the title *Sauveur de la Patrie* (Savior of the Fatherland) because he subdued the *sans-culottes* of Paris during the Thermidorian Reaction. What the public did not know was that he betrayed plans of the Rhine invasion to the enemy in 1795. He was let off without punishment. Doyle 2002: 226-245.

new beginning and that new beginning was the stringent security state called the *Deuxième Directoire* (Second Directory).<sup>20</sup>

### Managing Terrorism

The most wanted terrorist for the Directoire was Gracchus Babeuf, a socialist who founded the *Tribun du Peuple* (People's Tribune), a pro-democracy newspaper. He wrote the *Equality Doctrine* in May 1796, dictating there would be no true equality until all private property and goods were abandoned and equally distributed among common ownership.<sup>21</sup> He and his group, the *Conjuration des Égaux* (Conspiracy of the Equals), frequently met in the Pantheon Club throughout 1795 and early 1796. The *Conjuration des Égaux* was largely radicalized Royalists and Jacobins. The Directoire, fearing an uprising from them, banned meetings at the Pantheon on February 26<sup>th</sup> 1796. Along with the Pantheon, four other clubs as well as a theatre were shut down by Napoleon Bonaparte's troops. The *Conjuration des Égaux* continued to meet in secret, planning for a coup d'état. Babeuf organizes an Insurrection Committee whose aim was to gather multiple political groups, the subvert Police Legion and military units to attack the Directoire on May 19<sup>th</sup> 1796. Unfortunately, the plan failed. Some sects of the Police Legion mutinied 3 weeks too early. Babeuf and his *Conjuration* were arrested on May 10<sup>th</sup> 1796. As a result, the Directoire brought on more anti-Royalist and anti-Jacobin repression, dissolved the Police Legion and dismissed Babeuf supporters who held a position in power. Babeuf and his *Conjuration des Égaux* were convicted of treason on May 27<sup>th</sup> 1797. Before the Directoire could execute the group, its members took their own lives as if giving one last rebellious act.<sup>22</sup>

By 1797, France was torn in body and soul, despite the fact it had extended its borders into Italy. The youth protested against conscription. The Vendée region continued to revolt. Belgium, a recently conquered land, rose against the French overlords. Tax collectors and municipal officers were murdered in the countryside. Hundreds of brigands terrorized merchants in the cities and provincial regions alike. No home, estate or abbey was safe from pillaging. 45 out of the 86 departments were near a complete government and moral breakdown.<sup>23</sup> There were conflicting aims that needed to be tended to from the nobles and plutocrats, the Vendéan Catholics and the Jacobin atheists. From the Babeuvian socialists to merchants demanding liberty to a starving population, the Directoire had many views to satisfy. The only view they dare not satisfy was the Jacobin one. After the Coup of 18 Fructidor, the Directoire began to focus on limiting the power of the Jacobins. Here were several ways the Directoire

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<sup>20</sup> Doyle 2002: 226-245.

<sup>21</sup> This doctrine provided the essential elements to the foundation of Communism. Stewart 1951: 656.

<sup>22</sup> Doyle 2002: 245-261.

<sup>23</sup> Doyle 2002: 245-261.

did this. The first was an out-of-sight, out-of-mind strategy. This plan's mastermind, Louis-Marie de la Révellière-Lepaux, pointed out that "man, having experienced abrupt changes, tends (...) to fall back into old ways through force of habit."<sup>24</sup> In order to prevent this, Revellière-Lepaux called for national fêtes celebrating marriage, old age, youth, Enlightenment and agriculture. He never saw his plans successfully come into action because of their high financial costs. François de Neufchâteau, another director, was much more successful in establishing fêtes and creating propaganda as Minister of the Interior. What Neufchâteau did that Revellière-Lepaux did not was establish a relationship with theatre groups. The theatre was a space for "social relations of acquaintance" and "validated shared emotions."<sup>25</sup> Money and buildings expropriated as theatre space would be offered to theatre groups if they actively participated in the fêtes.

Even with the establishment of the fêtes and the use of theatre groups, the people did not show support for the Directoire. They knew it was an out-of-sight, out-of-mind plan to shut down Jacobin plans. Rather than falling for the smoke and mirrors, the people fought back. On May 11<sup>th</sup> 1798, the Jacobins won 106 seats in the election for Conseil des Cinq-Cents deputies. The Directoire, however, nullified these results with the law of 22 Floréal Year VI, which was enacted that same day. Neufchâteau was forced to resign as a result of this coup. Jean Baptiste Treillard replaced him. This was the third coup for the Directoire, occurring six months after the Coup of 18 Fructidor.<sup>26</sup>

After three unsuccessful coups, the people had had it. On June 18<sup>th</sup> 1799, the Jacobin won a strong minority in the Conseil des Cinq-Cents. This forced out all Directors except Paul Barras. Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès (a Father of the Revolution) was elected into the Directoire as a symbol of law and order. Other Directors elected included Louis-Jérôme Gohier, Jean-François Moulin and Roger Ducos. The Jacobin clubs reopened in Paris. All seemed to return to stability.<sup>27</sup>

This perception of stability did not even last a month. On July 12<sup>th</sup> 1799, the Directoire passed the *Law of Hostages*, a strategic move to prevent terrorism by ordering every commune to compile a roster of local citizens related to outlawed nobility and opposing political groups. For every robbery committed, the hostages were fined. For every murder of a patriot (those loyal to the Directoire) 4 hostages were deported.<sup>28</sup> The people had nowhere to hide and plot their revenge. By this point (10 years since 1789) the people were sickened by what the French Revolution had become. They considered Louis XVI's reign as "the good old days", truly believing only a king could bring France back to normal. Though they did

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<sup>24</sup> Robison 1938: 281–86.

<sup>25</sup> Parker 1990: 164.

<sup>26</sup> Doyle 2002: 261-279.

<sup>27</sup> Doyle 2002: 261-279.

<sup>28</sup> Doyle 2002: 261-279.



not care to admit, the Directors themselves were also exhausted by the Directoire and wanted the Revolution to end.

### Managing Finance

As mentioned earlier in the overview, France spent 1.3 billion livres – the national currency of France in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century – on the Seven Years' War and 2.01 billion livres on the American Revolutionary War. The effects of the French Revolution did not help either. The British blockade disrupted imports. Domestic production was saved for the armies. Because of this, items such as basic foodstuff, candles and firewood were strictly rationed. This left the black market flourishing during the mid-to-late 1790s.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, when the Directoire assumed power, France was in the middle of an ongoing financial crisis. It was just under them, the financial system drove off the cliff.

In June 1796, the *Caisse des comptes courants* was established after the 1793 liquidation of the *Caisse d'escompte*. This bank essentially mistrusted any form of speculation and promised reasonable profits. The discount rate offered was 0.5% per month – 6 times lower than the market.<sup>30</sup> In November 1797, the *Caisse d'escompte du commerce* was also established. This bank took advantage of the freedom given to traders desiring to find a home bank. To turn a bill into coinage, the bank only required 2 signatures as opposed to 3 signatures at the *Caisse des comptes courants*. The *Caisse d'escompte du commerce* had a lower interest rate at 1% as opposed to the average 3%. This bank also promised to pay the effect in 2 months or less as opposed to 4 to 6 months. This allowed merchants to receive a higher level of cash. These banks did not last long individually.<sup>31</sup> In late 1799, the Directoire proposed for a central bank called the *Banque de France*. However, with the change in government towards the end of 1799, the *Banque de France* was not established until 1800 under Napoleon's Consulate.

Considering a bank was not necessarily in existence for the first half of the Directory's rule, the latter relied on proposals and legislation to come out of the financial rut, starting with the law of 3 Messidor Year III. One of the last acts of the National Convention, this law established a sliding scale of depreciation for debts and contracts, fixing the value according to the quantity of *Assignats* (expl) in circulation at the time of signing. This failed because the law was not applied to all contracts and the treasury did not have sufficient reserves.

One of the first proposals from the Directoire came on December 6<sup>th</sup> 1795. It proposed for a "forced loan payable in specie, corn or in *Assignats* taken at [one percent] of their face value." The *Assignat* was worth less than

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<sup>29</sup> Doyle 2002: 261-279.

<sup>30</sup> Cambacérès (*Banque de France*) website – see References for link and date of retrieval.

<sup>31</sup> Bergeron 1999: 121-145.

one percent by 1796 and the lack of specie ensured the failure of this proposal. The Directory then made a small, timid attempt at deflation in the early half of 1796. The manufacturing of the Assignat was discontinued on March 21<sup>st</sup> 1796. They also made a small, not so timid attempt to increase tax revenue. Receipts for payments of forced loans were to be accepted in the form of direct tax payments.<sup>32</sup> Again, these attempts were not successful. The Assignat collapsed in 1796. By this point, 1 pound of bread cost 50 livres. Butter cost 100 livres and coffee cost 250 livres. Government officials, including the directors, were paid in grain.<sup>33</sup> A second proposal needed to come.

The Directoire's second experiment came a few days before the discontinuation of the Assignat. On March 18<sup>th</sup> 1796 Finance Minister Ramel-Nogaret issued *mandats territoriaux* (territorial mandates). This was a new form of currency to replace the Assignat and be immune from depreciation. As an incentive to use this new currency, the holder was entitled to "obtain [national property] at the fixed-valuation of twenty-two years' purchase of the annual value of 1790."<sup>34</sup> This experiment encountered many issues though. The Conseil des Cinq-Cents made the Assignat convertible into the mandates at "one-thirtieth of their nominal value." Therefore, rather than being immune from depreciation when acquiring unsold national property, the new currency was bound to collapse in the near future because of its connection to the over-valued Assignat. Also, real estate purchasers were hesitant to buy property near the French-Austrian Netherlands border since the area was a warzone. One of the most important reasons the new currency failed was because it was not easily available to the public. When the mandate was issued, the government only gave promissory notes for the old currency rather than the new currency itself. Because of these issues, Ramel-Nogaret's experiment, like its predecessors, somewhat failed. It did prevent inflation from getting out of hand. It also brought the use of metallic currency back into popularity. The mandates were withdrawn from circulation by law on February 4<sup>th</sup> 1797.<sup>35</sup>

The Directoire could not find a solution in time to save France from financial collapse. In 1797 France went bankrupt. The Directoire's response to the repudiation was simple: the law of 9 Vendémiaire Year VI, which stated one-third of the public debt be consolidated and entered on "the Grand Livre as a sacred charge."<sup>36</sup> Stockholders would be issued the remaining two-thirds of capital in the form of *bons des deux tiers mobilizes* (bearer bonds). As compensation, the Directory guaranteed these bonds would be available for the purchase of national property. This was not

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<sup>32</sup> Goodwin 1971: 98-109.

<sup>33</sup> Doyle 2002 : 261-279.

<sup>34</sup> Goodwin 1971: 98-109.

<sup>35</sup> Goodwin 1971: 98-109.

<sup>36</sup> Goodwin 1971: 98-109.

popular among the public due to the amount of income that had been destroyed in the bankruptcy.

The Directoire's shining light for financial stability came with the recasting of the tax system. The legislation rearranging direct taxation became known as *les quatre vieilles* and had four components. The first direct tax related to *contribution des patentes* (trade licenses). This was not necessarily put into place for financial reasons but more for shielding trade practices, an extreme form of protectionism. This was re-established in 1795 but not made final until October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1798. The second direct tax was the *contribution foncière* (land tax), which received immense opposition because of its English origins. This tax (enacted on November 23<sup>rd</sup> 1798)<sup>37</sup> was paid first by the landlord then ultimately by the tenant; it taxed windows and doors and it was the closest thing to an income tax. It was doubled in March 1799 and quadrupled 2 months after that. This tax was based on a proportionality in which the wealthier classes had to pay more. In order to avoid paying it, people built less doors and windows, even placing fake windows in their homes, which drastically reduced the quality of homes.<sup>38</sup> Public buildings, skylights, domes and openings for air cellars were exempted.<sup>39</sup> The third and fourth taxes were a partial *contribution mobilière et personnelle* (poll tax and moveable property tax). They were reconstructed and re-enacted on December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1798.<sup>40</sup> Direct taxation also changed in the form it was collected. In November 1798, the power to assess and collect direct taxes was removed from the local elected bodies into the hands of committee officials which worked in departments under the direct control of a commissioner from the central government. This new system did not end with the Directory but continued with the Consulate and successfully stayed in place until 1914.

The reconstruction of the tax system also affected indirect taxation. Highway tolls, gold ornaments, powder and playing cards were some of the items that received an indirect tax. These too, like the land tax, were unpopular because of their English origins. The indirect taxes did not last long.

The Directoire did find financial stability towards the final 2 years of its rule. However, the direct and indirect taxation played only a small role in this prosperity. Much of France's prosperity came from victorious military campaigns and seized church lands (which would cause much rift between the Church and the State).

## Managing the Catholic Church

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<sup>37</sup> The land tax was not repealed until 1926. Goodwin 1971: 98-109.

<sup>38</sup> Goodwin 1971: 98-109.

<sup>39</sup> Net Industries website – see References for link and date of retrieval.

<sup>40</sup> Goodwin 1971: 98-109.

For much of France's history, it was the norm for Protestants and Jews to live with restrictions while the Catholics enjoyed religious freedom. During the French Revolution, the Catholics joined its rivals under the ranks of restricted freedom. As mentioned in the overview, the Catholic Church received harsh treatment for the first 6 years of revolution. Though many religious sects were affected by the Directoire's policies, the Church had the most influence on the French public and therefore experienced the most restrictions from the government.

The writers of the Constitution of the Year III desired political normalcy. Fortunately, they were not alone. The Church, as well as the French public desired the same thing. Having learned from the mistakes of the immediate past, the writers needed to marginalize the extremists on both sides while being wary of any policies regarding the Church. Any policy that would "extirpate expression of the Christian faith (...) created martyrs and confirmed the vast majority of Catholics in their loyalty." A truce, at minimum a silent truce, needed to be made. If the Church, including the Constitutional clergy, could live peacefully with the Republic, then the Republic could try to co-exist with the Church. The decree of 3 Ventôse Year III – confirmed under Article 354 of the Constitution of the Year III – stated the Republic was "legally committed to religious neutrality." Also, the law of 11 Prairial Year III required "priests to submit to the laws of the state in order to minister in public." As long as the priests' activities were of no threat to the French Republic, the state would not coerce them.<sup>41</sup>

The Directoire's mindset of religious neutrality proved to be a challenge to all religious groups. For the first time, there was a "free market in faith" in which the public can try out any religious organization as casually as trying out different pairs of sunglasses at the department store.<sup>42</sup> This ideology, known as *voluntarism* in today's religious context, bewildered just about every priest, minister and religious figure in Europe.<sup>43</sup> For the first time in Post-Reformation Europe a state was in every aspect disinterested in the survival of a faith. If Catholicism were to dissolve in France the next day, then the faith deserved it for failing to supply and satisfy the demand of worshippers. Again, so long as Christians did not interfere with politics and respected the restrictions placed upon them, they were free to worship privately and denounce one another as much as they so desired.

Priests and worshippers were still cautious to practice their faith. Along with the law mentioned earlier regarding religion, the Edict of September 29<sup>th</sup> 1795 prohibited "all external manifestations of religion."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Aston 2000: 279-280.

<sup>42</sup> Aston 2000: 279.

<sup>43</sup> Berger 1969: 137.

<sup>44</sup> Aston 2000: 281.

Priests could not wear clerical dress in public. Statues and crosses once seen by the general public were also banned. Bell-ringing from churches was forbidden. Finally, service times were required to be registered at the town hall. The law of 3 Brumaire Year IV did not help the religious community either, re-establishing legislation passed in 1792-93 against refractory priests.<sup>45</sup> This law denied amnesty to all refractory priests and “gave émigré priests recently returned to France 15 days to leave [the country] or face execution.”<sup>46</sup> These contradictions in legislation before and during the early years of the Directoire’s rule illustrated the divide between anti-clerical members and those in favour of the clergy.

The silent truce did not last long. After the coup d’état of 18 Fructidor, the Directoire launched campaigns minimizing the oppositions’ power, including the Church’s. Anti-religious legislation brought up to the Directors offered “substantial encouragement both to anti-clericalism and to advocates of toleration.”<sup>47</sup> These legislations caused Church lands to be sold off more quickly and grand abbeys such as Cluny to be demolished. In one department of the Nord, approximately 425 parish churches and 60 chapels were sold off.<sup>48</sup> The pieces of legislation also gave rise to alternative religions, such as *Theophilanthropy* – the “crankiest religious manifestation of the late 1790s.”<sup>49</sup> Theophilanthropy, organized by Thomas Paine and other disciples of Rousseau and Robespierre, had several components. It recognized natural laws, claimed God as the “Father of the Universe,” emphasized one’s duty to the other as well as to the *patrie*.<sup>50</sup> It did not gain popularity until the 18 Fructidor Year V coup d’état when anti-clerical directors such as La Révellière-Lepaux became patrons to the religious organization. However, once the Jacobins showed their support for the religion, the directors found it best to stop supporting this alternative religion. They found the Jacobin support as dangerous to the current state of order. Plus, Theophilanthropy made little impact outside of Paris due to the religion being based on “abstracted ideas, without [colour] or emotional inspiration.”<sup>51</sup> This only attracted a small minority as opposed to attracting a large scale popular devotion like Catholicism.

Since Theophilanthropy did not work, the Directoire sought out to eliminate religion altogether and focused on culturally changing the people’s view on religion with national fêtes. Note this is the same plan the Directoire used to distract the public from creating Jacobin uprisings. With the same plan came the same result. The people could not get into the spirit

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<sup>45</sup> Refractory priests were those who refused to take the oath of loyalty to the constitution. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* website – see References for link and date of retrieval.

<sup>46</sup> Suratteau 1991: 82.

<sup>47</sup> Ackroyd 1995: 81.

<sup>48</sup> Lefebvre 1924: 161.

<sup>49</sup> Aston 2000: 281.

<sup>50</sup> Lyons 1975: 111.

<sup>51</sup> Lyons 1975: 111.

of the holiday. Some considered these state-mandated holidays as “anniversaries for private mourning rather than public celebration.”<sup>52</sup> These fêtes created a gender divide in many regions of France, namely Paris and eastern France, which were largely secularized areas. The men found these republican fêtes as more masculine forms of sociability. The women, on the other hand, remained loyal to Christianity. They felt the family and community values expressed by the Church were more genuine.

The Directoire grew frustrated by its inefficient plans to control the Church. It took education of the young away from the nuns so there would be no “supernatural ideas” in teaching. In 1797-1798, over 1,448 priests were deported from France and 8,235 priests were deported from Belgium. Still, people renewed their faith in the Church by praying for sanity and order. There was nothing else the Directoire could do within French borders to minimize the Church’s power on its people. Therefore, the Directoire took it up with the seat of Catholicism: Rome.<sup>53</sup> On February 10<sup>th</sup> 1798, General Louis Berthier entered the city of Rome with his troops. Five days later, he proclaimed Rome as the Roman Republic. He gave Pope Pius VI one last chance to recognize the French Republic by taking the “Liberty-Equality” oath the French priests took. Pope Pius VI refused. As a result, Berthier arrested him on February 20<sup>th</sup> 1798. Pope Pius VI was transported from Rome to Siena, then to Florence where he stayed until March 1799. From there he was moved to Parma, Piacenza, Turin before crossing the Alps to Briançon in April 1799. By this point, the pope was seriously ill, suffering from a seizure which left his legs paralyzed during the transport. Despite the illness, he was moved from Briançon to Grenoble and finally to Valence. Throughout his time in France, the Pope received unexpected comfort from the French public. This showed that even taking away the leader of Catholicism could not stop the French people from holding on to their faith. On August 29<sup>th</sup> 1799, Pope Pius VI died in imprisonment in a citadel of Valence.<sup>54</sup> Pope Pius VII took his seat in power, continuing to provide hope and stability for those in France.

The French public felt indifferent to the Revolution. In fact, they were exhausted by the Revolution’s toll on them. All they wanted was stability and normalcy. The Church provided that for them. Sundays were still holy days and religious holidays were still celebrated — although the latter in secret — in the confines of the Church. The people refused to switch to the *décadi* (expl). The Directoire, though never fully admitting it, knew the obvious point: unity could only be achieved when “citizenship was married up to Christianity.”<sup>55</sup> Yet, their greed and thirst for complete control blinded them from taking action for a more peaceful Republic. Then

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<sup>52</sup> Aston 2000: 291.

<sup>53</sup> Durant and Durant 1975: 129-134.

<sup>54</sup> Florida International University website – see References for link and date of retrieval.

<sup>55</sup> Aston 2000: 295.

again, as will be discussed in the next section, conflict and war brought in profits. Peace only brought financial ruin.

### **Managing War**

The Directoire was completely dependent on the French Republican Army. The military provided financial capital through territory acquisitions and stopped uprisings within France. Though the military played a major role in keeping the Directoire in power, their reliability was constantly called into question. For one thing, there were military generals such as Napoleon Bonaparte forming secret treaties with the enemy. For another thing, there were domestic military units who were hungry, bored and broke.

When the Directoire assumed power, France was in the middle of the War of the First Coalition. Allies fighting against France included Great Britain and Austria. The plan for the French Army was for General Jean-Baptiste Jourdan, General Jean-Victor Marie Moreau (both of which were on the Rhine) and General Napoleon Bonaparte (who was in Italy) to meet up in Tyrol before marching onto Vienna. However, the plan never followed suit. Jourdan advanced across the Rhine and into the German states. He reached as far as Amberg before Archduke Charles, Duke of Teschen forced him to retreat back across the Rhine. Moreau reached Bavaria to the edge of Tyrol in late September 1796. Bonaparte did not reach Tyrol until February 1797 due to his successful sieges across Italy. During these sieges, he defeated the armies of Sardinia and Austria at the Battle of Montenotte. He then forced a Peace on Sardinia on King Victor Amadeus III of Piedmont-Sardinia. This peace had Sardinia recognize the French Republic and ceded the original Duchy of Savoy as well as the County of Nice to France. Sardinia abandoned the War of the First Coalition as a result of this treaty.<sup>56</sup> Around the same time, there was a new French invasion of the Germanic States that Moreau joined, dissolving the plan.

The Directoire's international conflicts did not stay within Europe. In 1796, the Directoire ordered for the seizure of American merchant ships. This was a revenge plot against the United States for not siding with France throughout the French Revolution and for signing Jay's Treaty with Great Britain. In response, President John Adams dispatched three American diplomats to negotiate peace with France.<sup>57</sup> When the 3 arrived in Paris, Talleyrand, the Foreign Minister, refused to meet with them, sending intermediaries instead. These intermediaries known as X, Y and Z would allow the Americans to meet Talleyrand if certain conditions were met. The first condition was that the United States had to give a low-interest loan of 32 million florins to the Directors. On top of the 32 million florins, Talleyrand demanded a private *douceur* for himself totalling £50,000. This

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<sup>56</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica* website – see References for link and date of retrieval.

<sup>57</sup> They were Elbridge Gerry, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney and John Marshall.

was both a stall tactic and gain of personal wealth for Talleyrand. He desired to improve his status within the Directoire by stopping the attacks on the U.S. ships before meeting with the Americans. However, as the French grew more powerful through their military victories, Talleyrand changed the loan terms and threatened that if the Americans did not comply, the French would invade the United States. This *XYZ Affair* led to the Quasi War, which was fought entirely on sea. The Americans did not take the bluff. John Adams requested the navy to be reformed so attacks on France could occur. A final treaty did not surface until 1800 between John Adams and Napoleon Bonaparte.

By far the most successful French general was Napoleon Bonaparte. He was victorious in achieving peace negotiations with the Holy Roman Empire and Austria to end the War of the First Coalition. On April 18<sup>th</sup> 1797, the Treaty of Leoben was signed between the French Republic and the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>58</sup> In this treaty, there were 9 public articles and 11 secret articles. In the public articles, the Holy Roman Empire (HRE) ceded the Austrian Netherlands (Belgium) to the French Republic. In the secret articles, the HRE ceded Lombardy in exchange for the eastern half of the Republic of Venice. Even with the personal losses to the Habsburg family, this treaty preserved the integrity of the Holy Roman Empire. The Directoire, on the other hand, was not pleased with Napoleon's diplomacy; it wanted full control of the Republic of Venice. Napoleon did what he felt was right to bring peace while enriching his political resume.

The Peace of Leoben led to the Treaty of Campo Formio of October 18<sup>th</sup> 1797. This treaty ended the War of the First Coalition between Austria and France. In the public articles, this treaty brought out the Second Congress of Rastatt, which met in December of 1797 to rearrange the map of the Germanic States. Compensation was ordered for the German princes that lost land to France.<sup>59</sup> In the secret articles, Austria promised to work with France to certain ends while also extending French borders to the Rhine.<sup>60</sup> The peace between these two nations did not even last 6 months. On March 12<sup>th</sup> 1798 France declared war on Austria, beginning the War of the Second Coalition.

Though Austria posed a threat to France, France's true rival was Great Britain. In the spring of 1798, Great Britain could not successfully fight off the French Republican Army. Not because the French were talented and skilful, but because the British were too focused on the United Irish Rebellion. This gave the perfect opportunity for France's greatest asset, Napoleon Bonaparte, to complete the grandest military mission the world had seen: India. To get to India, Bonaparte's plan was to travel

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<sup>58</sup> Bonaparte signed on behalf of the Directory. General Maximilian von Merveldt and the Marquis of Gallo signed on behalf of Emperor Francis II. Durant and Durant 1975: 97-105.

<sup>59</sup> Durant and Durant 1975: 97-105.

<sup>60</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica* website – see References for link and date of retrieval.



through the Mediterranean, keep the Ionian peninsula within French hands and conquer the Ottoman Empire to get to Egypt. From Egypt, France would travel through the Middle East before getting to India, Great Britain's crown jewel colony. If France were to conquer it, then Great Britain would be dethroned as the top global power. With this logic, stated in Talleyrand's *On the Conquest of Egypt* report, the Directors were happy to send Bonaparte away. His amphibious expedition was cheap and effective. Plus, Bonaparte was a general with political ambitions so the farther away he was, the safer the Directors felt from any overthrow.<sup>61</sup> The Egyptian Campaign did not go as planned, a common theme in this article. Bonaparte captured Malta as well as the city of Alexandria. His troops also defeated the Mameluke Army at the Battle of the Pyramids in July 1799. Once Bonaparte's troops entered Cairo, things went south. The British, who were waiting on the French to attack from the English Channel to help the Irish rebels, realized the French were indeed in Egypt. British Royal Navy Officer Horatio Nelson — who was in the Mediterranean Sea at the same time as Bonaparte — was ordered to go to Egypt to defeat Bonaparte's troops. Nelson's navy destroyed the French at the Battle of Nile on August 1<sup>st</sup> 1798. This re-established British supremacy in the Mediterranean, leaving Bonaparte trapped in Egypt for 15 months and France's satellites wide open.<sup>62</sup>

Despite the loss of Egypt, France was thriving during the War of the Second Coalition, also called War of the Crippling Coalition. Allies within the Second Coalition were fighting with one another. Russia and Austria could not get along. Prussia was neutral. The German princes were loyal to the French. The Directoire thrived off this invincibility and lived off war. It kept the armies out of France as justification to abuse the Constitution of the Year III for its own greed. However, its failure to manage war was ironically from its invincibility: it kept the military out, giving them autonomous power. Because of this, the Directoire's downfall came from its best general.

### **Napoleon and 18 Brumaire**

As mentioned earlier, Sieyès was the symbol of law order. With him as Director, the French government would find peace and stability. Things did not exactly turn out that way. Sieyès was itching for a new government and a new Constitution when 1799 came round. To start a new government, though, one needed a new face for the new government. Sieyès' original choice had been General Barthélemy Catherine Joubert, but he was killed in combat at the Battle of Novi earlier that same year. The next best choice was none other than General Napoleon Bonaparte. Bonaparte had the perfect combination of intellect, vision and willpower. Plus, Bonaparte was

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<sup>61</sup> Durant and Durant 1975: 108-114.

<sup>62</sup> Blanning 1997: 173-205.

returning from his expedition in Egypt as a crowd favourite.<sup>63</sup> Bonaparte arrives in Paris on October 16<sup>th</sup> 1799. The only thing on his mind, according to the Durants, was fixing his and Joséphine's marriage as well as seeing Hortense.<sup>64</sup> Overthrowing the Directoire — the government Bonaparte dreamed of becoming part of when he turned 40 — was never the plan until he gave a seminar of his scientific expedition in Egypt at the French Institute (*Institut de France*). At the seminar, Sieyès approached Bonaparte, told Bonaparte the plan, and after some haggling Bonaparte agreed to it. Bonaparte and Sieyès held secret negotiations with the Left and the Right at Bonaparte's home. Bonaparte promised the Jacobins he would preserve the republic and defend the interests of the masses. Roger Ducos, another Director, and Talleyrand swore their loyalty to him. Bonaparte was fully supported by the Council of Ancients, partly because they feared for a Jacobin revival. Select members from the Council of 500 supported him, primarily due to his brother, Lucien Bonaparte's role as president of the Council. Bonaparte was one with the people and without; he distanced himself from the army to increase his reputation as a politician but not to the point of abandoning his military career entirely.

On November 9<sup>th</sup> 1799, the Council of Ancients used its constitutional powers to order itself and the Council of 500 to transfer the assemblies to the suburb of St. Cloud by the next day. Bonaparte was appointed Commander of the Paris garrison and was sent to the Tuileries to take the oath of service. He told his army he wanted a "Republic based on liberty, equality and the sacred principles of national representation."<sup>65</sup> As the two Councils met, there was much protest calling for an end to dictatorship. Bonaparte grew impatient and gave an incoherent address to the Council of Ancients calling for equality and liberty. This thoughtless move nearly cost him the plan. Deputies began to question Bonaparte's credibility. Again, Bonaparte grew outraged, calling the Directoire a failure full of hypocrites. He also accused Barras and Moulin of being conspirators of an alleged Jacobin plot. His career nearly saw the end when his evidence faltered and his army lost trust in him. To revive his status, Lucien gave to the army a speech full of half-fibs and passionate ethos on his brother's plan to save them all. Both the supporting members of the Council of 500 and the French Army swore their loyalty to Bonaparte. The army stormed the Council of 500's meeting place (*Orangerie*) and gave the resistant members a "healing purge."<sup>66</sup> The Council of Ancients, who was not hurt in the purge, dissolved the Directoire on November 10<sup>th</sup> 1799. They set up 3

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<sup>63</sup> Word had not yet reached the public that Napoleon actually lost to the British in Egypt. Durant and Durant 1975: 114-123.

<sup>64</sup> Hortense was Joséphine's daughter from her first marriage. Hortense married Napoleon's brother, Louis Bonaparte, in 1802. Durant and Durant 1975: 119-124.

<sup>65</sup> This was stolen from a Jacobin in Grenoble, but it still won military support. Vandal 1897: 274.

<sup>66</sup> Durant and Durant 1975: 119-124.

provisional Consuls — Bonaparte, Sieyès and Ducos — to form what would notoriously be known as the *Consulate*.

### **Why Did the Directoire Fail?**

The Directoire failed because they could not manage the Royalists, terrorism, France's financial troubles, the Wars of the Coalition and the Church all at once. Rather than focusing on the country and doing what is right in a democratic fashion, the Directors let their greed get in the way. They were primarily not supposed to have this much power, but after the Coup of 18 Fructidor they abused the Constitution to get what they so desired. They jumped back in time to the days of Louis XVI and his noble court.

Because of their greed, France went into bankruptcy in 1797. The Church flourished in the late 1790s. The royalists planned two (unsuccessful) coup d'états. There was constant civil war within French borders. The Catholics fought with the Jacobin atheists who fought with the Royalists who fought alongside the brigands who fought with the merchants who fought with the Directors who fought with just about everyone. There was no control in the provinces. Obvious opportunities for peace were intentionally dismissed to keep the military out. Not because of the profits gained through conquest, but a general like Napoleon Bonaparte would come in and take over the country, which did happen.

There were a few accomplishments made by the Directoire. The successful direct taxation system lasted until 1914. In the aggregate, the power of the Catholic Church via secularization had been reduced. This had not been done in Europe since the Reformation Era. Important figures like Napoleon Bonaparte came onto the scene. However, these few accomplishments cannot live up to the error of the Directoire's ways, especially the biggest mistake they committed when they assumed power.

The Directoire failed most of all in providing what Albert Goodwin states as the "first condition of effective rule": the security of individual freedom and order at home.<sup>67</sup> As learned through different revolutions throughout history — American, French, Russian, etc — if individual freedom is not secured, then it is easier for a tyrant to come in and abuse the public's rights, freedoms and political voices.

The Directors' greed and thirst for power not only proved their failure, but the failure of the French Revolution as a whole. Rather than being a linear revolution like the American Revolution (1765-1783), the French Revolution was a spiral revolution. With each new round of tyranny toward the black hole was a more dangerous, more power-hungry government. The sparks of 1789 were unrecognizable by the time the Revolution hit the black hole of November 10<sup>th</sup> 1799.

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<sup>67</sup> Goodwin 1982: 218-231.

In a larger context, the Directoire's 4-year rule truly puts into question what the true aim of the French Revolution was. According to Tocqueville, it was to rid the country of feudalism. It also puts into question whether or not that true aim would have occurred with or without France and if without France, then with whom and when?

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