“The Terror,” 1793-1794 (Year Two)

Paris “sections” [sort of like “districts” or “precincts”] march on National Convention, demand that “terror” be made “order of the day”

The Convention does not declare “Terror” but it does:

pass Law on Suspects—anyone suspected of opposing the Republic can be jailed indefinitely

send Representatives on Mission from the Convention to the rest of France to combat counter-revolutionaries

impose General Maximum—wage-and-price limits

declare government to be “revolutionary” until peace is achieved
The Reign of Terror in 1793-1794 (the Year Two)

500,000 people (approx.) jailed in ten months

Death Sentences during the Terror
figures from D. Greer, *The Incidence of the Terror* (1935)

- Revolutionary Tribunal (Paris)  2,639
- Other criminal or revolutionary tribunals  3,124
- Military commissions (approx. 50 of them)  8,339
- Civil commissions (less than 20)  2,492
- TOTAL  16,594

Other deaths

- 10,000-12,000 deaths in prison
- 11,000-12,000 executions without trial
- 150,000? in the Vendée
“Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, or Death”

Was violence conceptually inherent in idea of “virtue” as understood by leading revolutionaries?

Or was violence necessary because of the circumstances, because it was necessary to protect “rights” from those who wanted to return to privilege?

“Would that I might die, seeing my country free and its people, happy.”

Georges Couthon, member of National Convention, guillotined July 1794 as a “terrorist.”
We wish to substitute merit for intrigue, genius for wit, truth for glamor, the charm of happiness for sensuous boredom, the greatness of man for the pettiness of the great, a people who are magnanimous, powerful, and happy, in place of a kindly, frivolous, and miserable people—which is to say, all the virtues and all the miracles of the republic in place of all the vices of the monarchy. . . .
What kind of government can realize these wonders? Only a republican, democratic government. ...

Now, what is the fundamental principle of popular or democratic government, that is to say, the essential mainspring which sustains it and makes it move? It is virtue. I speak of the public virtue which worked so many wonders in Greece and Rome and which ought to produce even more astonishing things in republican France—that virtue which is nothing other than the love of the nation and its laws. . . .

Robespierre’s speech on political morality (February 1794).
Since the soul of the Republic is virtue, equality, and since your goal is to found, to consolidate the Republic, it follows that the first rule of your political conduct ought to be to relate all your efforts to maintaining equality and developing virtue; because the first care of the legislator ought to be to fortify the principle of the government. Thus everything that tends to excite love of country, to purify morals, to elevate souls, to direct the passions of the human heart toward the public interest ought to be adopted or established by you.

If the mainspring of popular government in peacetime is virtue, amid revolution it is at the same time [both] virtue and terror: virtue, without which terror is fatal; terror, without which virtue is impotent. Terror is nothing but prompt, severe, inflexible justice; it is therefore an emanation of virtue. It is less a special principle than a consequence of the general principle of democracy applied to our country's most pressing needs.

Robespierre’s speech on political morality (February 1794).
The Supreme Being ... He it is who adorned the brow of beauty with modesty to make it more beautiful and who makes the mother’s heart beat with tenderness and joy; who bathes with delicious tears the eyes of the son pressed against his mother’s breast. He it is who silences all the passions before the sublime love of country; who has covered nature with charms, riches, and majesty. Everything that is good is his work... Evil belongs to the depraved man who oppresses his fellows or acquiesces in that oppression.

Robespierre at the Festival of the Supreme Being.
Why did the Paris sections demand that terror be put “on the agenda”?

No one will be able to stand against you. The Lord your God, as he promised you, will put the terror and fear of you on the whole land, wherever you go.

Deuteronomy 11: 24-26

Strike them with terror, Lord; let the nations know they are only mortal.

Psalms 9:20

When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers. Proverbs 21:14-16

Louis the Great (XIV), The Terror and Admiration of the Universe (1686).
The First French Republic: A War-Time Creation

war declared (April 1792)

“Brunswick Manifesto” – opposing armies announce planned invasion of France with intention of abolishing the Constitution; say that if the King is hurt, Paris will be burnt to the ground (July 1792)

Monarchy abolished (August 10, 1792)

Republic declared (September 22, 1792)

National Convention (elected by universal male suffrage) meets in Paris to:

write a constitution for the republic
govern until that constitution can be put in place
fight the war

Jacques Louis David, “design for the uniform of a Representative of the People” (1794/Year 2)
www.photo.rmn.fr
Areas of open resistance to the National Convention, 1793-1794
The Vendée: Uprising, Civil War, or Counter Revolution?

“God, the King”

200,000-250,000 “civilian” deaths (1793-1794)

begins as large scale draft resistance

massacre of Republican officials at Machecoul

ambush of General Marcé near Chantonnay

purple=support for “Royal and Catholic Army”

blue=generally supportive of the Convention

winter-autumn 1793
The Royal and Catholic Army of the Vendée

no members of the royal family

no uniforms, few weapons, little discipline

“insurgency” tactics (ambush, night attacks)