

THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEES OF THE
PARIS SECTIONS IN 1793 :
A MANUSCRIPT IN THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY

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THE John Rylands Library is particularly rich in materials relating to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic epoch. These materials may be divided into four main sections. Firstly, there is a foundation collection of several thousands of printed books, including many rare items and equally rare revolutionary periodicals. Secondly, by virtue of an important gift made by Lord Crawford on the occasion of the Library's semi-jubilee in 1924, the Library acquired a further collection of upwards of 15,000 proclamations, placards and broadsides relating to the history of France from the Revolution to the Commune of 1871. A third, and perhaps even more important accession was a large collection of revolutionary and anti-revolutionary tracts, deposited in 1946, and consisting of more than 15,000 brochures and pamphlets. Finally, it remains to mention a number of volumes of correspondence and various miscellaneous papers which are to be found among the French manuscripts and which have been acquired on various occasions.¹ It is amongst the last-named collection, in Rylands French MS. 110, that there occurs the 'Émargement des Membres du Comité Revolutionnaire des Sections de Paris, 1793',² which is the subject of this article.

This manuscript consists of twenty-nine sheets of paper of various sizes, of which the most common measures 477 mm. × 354 mm. Each sheet has the following heading, generally

¹ For the material referred to above, see BULLETIN OF THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY, Vol. 30 (1946-47), No. 1, p. 193, and also Moses Tyson, *Hand-list of French and Italian MSS.* (1930), reprinted from the BULLETIN, Vol. 14, No. 2. Lord Crawford's gift was more extensive than appears in the present account, since it contained material concerned with other periods. It comprised, in fact, more than 20,000 items.

² Referred to below, for the sake of brevity, as 'French 110', or in the notes as 'Fr. 110'.

printed: 'ÉTAT des Indemnités dues à chacun des Membres du Comité de la Section d' [followed by a blank for the name of the section concerned]. Below this are seven columns headed, respectively, 'Émargement'; 'Noms des Membres'; 'Époques de l'Installation de chaque membre, de la Cessation de chaque Membre'; 'Durée des fonctions'; 'Sommes dues à chacun des Membres pour la durée de leurs fonctions'; and finally, 'Observations'.

This document would seem to be a stray from the archives of the 'Administration des Domaines et Finances', that section of the municipal authority of Paris concerned, in collaboration with the treasurer, with the city's finances. Few documentary traces of the activity of this body seem to have survived, and it is probable that most of its papers were amongst the substantial collection of archives destroyed in the fire which gutted the old Hôtel de Ville in 1871, during the suppression of the Commune.¹ A few of its printed publications have, however, been preserved.² These suggest a gradual growth in the importance of the 'Administration' and in the complexity of its functions. Originally established on 13 July 1789 for the administration of public properties in the hands of the Paris municipality, it must have soon begun, as a result of the traffic in church properties confiscated by the revolution, to handle large quantities of ready money. As a result the Commune, the elected government of the capital, found it convenient to use its facilities when settling outstanding debts. When, later, in addition, the 'Administration' was charged with receiving the taxes of the Paris Département it became, in effect, a miniature exchequer with a wide competence.

Thus it was that when, on the 18 Brumaire an II (8 November 1793), the Convention decreed that the revolutionary committees of the forty-eight sections of Paris should receive for their services an emolument of five livres per day for each member, it was decided to make payment through the municipal 'Administration

¹ Such, in fact, is the opinion of the Director of the French Archives Nationaux, who has kindly answered the author's queries concerning this and other matters.

² See M. Tourneux, *Bibliographie de l'Histoire de la Ville de Paris pendant la Révolution*, Vol. III, Nos. 13514-13516, 13522, 13525, 13540, 13542.

des Domaines et Finances'. On 24 Brumaire the three administrators in charge of the department, Salmon, Lasnier and Godefroy,¹ accordingly circularized the forty-eight presidents of the sections, inviting each to submit a list of those claiming payment under the terms of the convention's decree.²

Since the last 'Compte Rendu' of the 'Administration' to which we have access covers only the period from 8 March 1792 to 25 August 1792, it has previously been impossible to judge in what manner the sections complied with this instruction. Happily, however, twenty-nine of the émargements or pay claims submitted by the sections either at this date or subsequently, are preserved in the manuscript now under consideration, Rylands French 110. These émargements are identical neither in form nor in content. Some contain claims for back-pay from March 1793; others are merely claims for a monthly instalment of the promised salary; in one case a claim is extended for two months arrears. A detailed description of the nature of each is, perhaps, best summarized in the form of a table (see p. 91).

The twenty-eight³ sections listed are drawn from all quarters of the capital and are a fairly representative selection. They may, therefore, be taken as a cross-section of the forty-eight, even though the intensely individual nature of many of the sections must exert a cautionary influence on any attempt to generalize, even from a majority.

The procedure adopted for the presentation of an émargement differed from section to section. The lists themselves carry a variety of different marks of authorization. Some bear both the seal or stamp of the General Assembly of the section and that of the revolutionary committee.⁴ Others have either the one or the other mark.⁵ Still others are without any seal or stamp whatever.⁶ While some lists are signed by the president and

¹ The three officials had been elected on 23 August at a meeting of the General Council of the Commune (*Moniteur*, 26 August 1793).

² E. Mellié, *Les Sections de Paris pendant la Révolution*, p. 210.

³ It will be noted from the table that Fr. 110 contains two émargements sent in by the Homme Armé section.

⁴ E.g. Quatre-Vingts section (Fr. 110, f. 3).

⁵ E.g. Champs Elysées, Mutius Scaevola sections (*ibid.* fos. 4, 5).

⁶ E.g. Fontaine de Grenelle section (*ibid.* f. 2).

secretary of the General Assembly,¹ yet others bear the signature either of the president and secretary of the revolutionary committee² or of the full complement of twelve members, signing collectively.³

Folio No.	Name of Section	Dates for which payment is claimed	Date of Authorization
15	Popincourt . . .	27 March 1793-22 October 1793	5 Frimaire An II
3	Quinze-Vingts . . .	28 March 1793-22 October 1793	5 Frimaire An II
12	Droits de l'Homme . . .	28 March 1793-21 October 1793	5 Frimaire An II
4	Champs-Élysées . . .	1 April 1793-22 October 1793 .	10 Frimaire An II
9	Homme Armé . . .	1 April 1793-22 October 1793 .	10 Frimaire An II
29	Halle au Bled . . .	1 April 1793-22 October 1793 .	10 Frimaire An II
20	République Française . . .	1 April 1793-21 October 1793 .	15 Nivôse An II
21	Amis de la Patrie . . .	8 April 1793-1 Brumaire An II	—
13	Arsenal . . .	Brumaire An II . . .	1 Frimaire An II
24	Sans-Culottes . . .	Brumaire An II . . .	2 Frimaire An II
28	Marchés . . .	Brumaire An II . . .	4 Frimaire An II
8	Temple . . .	Brumaire An II . . .	6 Frimaire An II
1	(b) Le Pelletier . . .	Brumaire An II . . .	14 Frimaire An II
2	(a) Fontaine de Grenelle . . .	Brumaire An II . . .	15 Frimaire An II
14	(a) Fraternité . . .	Brumaire An II . . .	15 Frimaire An II
19	(a) Finisterre . . .	Brumaire An II . . .	28 Frimaire An II
25	(b) Muséum . . .	Brumaire An II . . .	30 Frimaire An II
11	Indivisibilité . . .	Brumaire and Frimaire An II .	1 Nivôse An II
16	Révolutionnaire . . .	Frimaire An II . . .	29 Frimaire An II
27	Gravilliers . . .	Frimaire An II . . .	29 Frimaire An II
22	(b) Montagne . . .	Frimaire An II . . .	7 Nivôse An II
17	Invalides . . .	Nivôse An II . . .	1 Pluviôse An II
7	Faubourg du Nord . . .	Nivôse An II . . .	3 Pluviôse An II
6	Arcis . . .	Pluviôse An II . . .	1 Ventôse An II
10	Homme Armé . . .	Pluviôse An II . . .	1 Ventôse An II
23	(b) Marat . . .	Pluviôse An II . . .	2 Ventôse An II
26	Lombards . . .	Pluviôse An II . . .	2 Ventôse An II
5	Mutins Scaevola . . .	Pluviôse An II . . .	—
18	(b) Brutus . . .	Pluviôse An II . . .	—

a. This émargement gives, in addition, an account of changes in membership from the date of installation.

b. This émargement gives, in addition, details of appointment for those members for whom a claim is entered.

These bewildering individual variations may be made to approximate more closely to an intelligible system in the light of the evidence provided by an examination of the two émargements of the Homme Armé section. The claim for 1793 was formally approved by the General Assembly of the section on 10 Frimaire An II⁴ (30 Nov. 1793). On the other hand, the monthly claim

¹ Fr. 110, f. 2.

² E.g. Homme Armé section (*ibid.* f. 10).

³ E.g. Arcis section (*ibid.* f. 6).

⁴ *Ibid.* f. 9.

submitted for Pluviôse An II was simply witnessed, on the 1 Ventôse (3 Mar. 1794), by the President of the revolutionary committee.¹ In general, it is true to say that, while earlier accounts are authorized by the General Assembly concerned, later accounts are collectively submitted by the revolutionary committee, acting independently. Similarly, while the yearly accounts for 1793 were generally presented to the section for ratification, the later, monthly accounts were not. There are, however, several exceptions to these generalizations. The yearly account for the Amis de la Patrie section, for example, which covers the period from 8 April 1793 to 1 Brumaire An II (22 Oct. 1793), is signed by the committee president alone.² At the beginning of Frimaire An II several committees entered a claim for the previous month, Brumaire. While the lists submitted by the Le Pelletier,³ Fontaine de Grenelle⁴ and Marchés⁵ committees were first presented for approval to the respective sectional assemblies, the Sans-Culottes,⁶ Arsenal⁷ and Temple⁸ commissaires appear to have acted entirely on their own initiative. Nevertheless, and despite the exceptions noted, it is possible to deduce from the evidence of French 110, the gradual development of the process by which the revolutionary committees were able to throw off the control of their respective sections.

Once authorized, the émargement had to be presented at the 'Mairie', seat of the municipal administration, for the attention of the Administration des Domaines et Finances.⁹ For this purpose, in the Faubourg du Nord¹⁰ and in the Halle au Bled sections two members of the committee were delegated, and empowered to receive the sums due to the committee as a whole. That this was a general practice is suggested by the fact that the émargements of two other sections each bear, scribbled at the top of the page, the names of two commissaires, without further qualification.¹¹

¹ Fr. 110, f. 10.

² *Ibid.* f. 21.

³ *Ibid.* f. 1.

⁴ *Ibid.* f. 2.

⁵ *Ibid.* f. 28.

⁶ *Ibid.* f. 24.

⁷ *Ibid.* f. 13.

⁸ *Ibid.* f. 8.

⁹ Halle au Bled section (*ibid.* f. 29). The Headquarters of the Administration des Domaines et Finances was not in the Hôtel de Ville itself, but in the Saint-Esprit, one of the neighbouring buildings giving on to the Place de Grève.

¹⁰ Fr. 110, f. 7.

¹¹ Le Pelletier (*ibid.* f. 1), Révolutionnaire (*ibid.* f. 16).

The twenty-nine lists are, unfortunately, innocent of any observation of the 'Administration', or indeed of any form of receipt. It is thus impossible to tell whether they were accepted, returned for emendation, or even rejected by the municipal officers. There is, in fact, no conclusive evidence that they were ever presented. These are some important reservations which must be made when generalizing from these illuminating documents.¹

Before discussing the fresh evidence which French 110 contributes to the history of the Revolution, it will be necessary briefly to describe the history and functions of the revolutionary committee as an institution. In June 1790 the sixty administrative districts into which Paris had been divided under the *Ancien Régime* were succeeded by a new series of forty-eight sections.² The citizens of each section were responsible for electing a civil committee ('comité civil') to fulfil the various administrative duties required of its members by the new constitutional government. Chief amongst these duties were those of police. After the overthrow of the old, arbitrary régime, with its police system centred on the Châtelet, the responsibility for maintaining law and order had devolved upon the elected Commune, assisted by the lesser divisions of the capital. Gradually the need for a specialized police committee, to assist the local constable (Commissaire de Police) began to be apparent in the sections. In particular, the stresses of a revolutionary war, and the overthrow of the throne on 10 August 1792 laid a heavy burden of repressive activity, directed against counter-revolutionary elements, on the shoulders of the already overworked sectional officers. Soon after the capture of the Tuileries, therefore, a central 'Comité de Surveillance' was set up for Paris, with subsidiary committees in each section. The sectional 'Comité de Surveillance' or 'Comité Révolutionnaire'

¹ On the back of each folio, in what appears to be a contemporary hand, there is a scribbled number. The twenty-nine numbers, apparently unrelated, range from 116 to 1100. They may well be a vestigial trace of the Administration's filing system.

² Unless otherwise stated, information is drawn from the leading authority on the Paris sections, E. Mellié, *op cit.* Ch. V. is devoted to the Revolutionary Committees.

was henceforth to be a body distinct and separate from the older 'Comité Civil'.

It was not, however, until 18 March 1793 that the Convention officially recognized the 'Comité de Surveillance' as a permanent administrative body.¹ On that date it was decreed that each of the 40,000 Communes of France, and with them the sections of the larger cities, should have its committee, to consist of twelve members, assisted by six 'adjoints'.

In the meantime, while in some sections the old committees had been permitted to lapse, in others they had recommenced their activities with even greater vigour as a result of the crisis of March 1793, due to the entry of England into the War, the defeat of Dumouriez' armies in Belgium, and the revolt of large areas in the Vendée against the imposition of conscription.

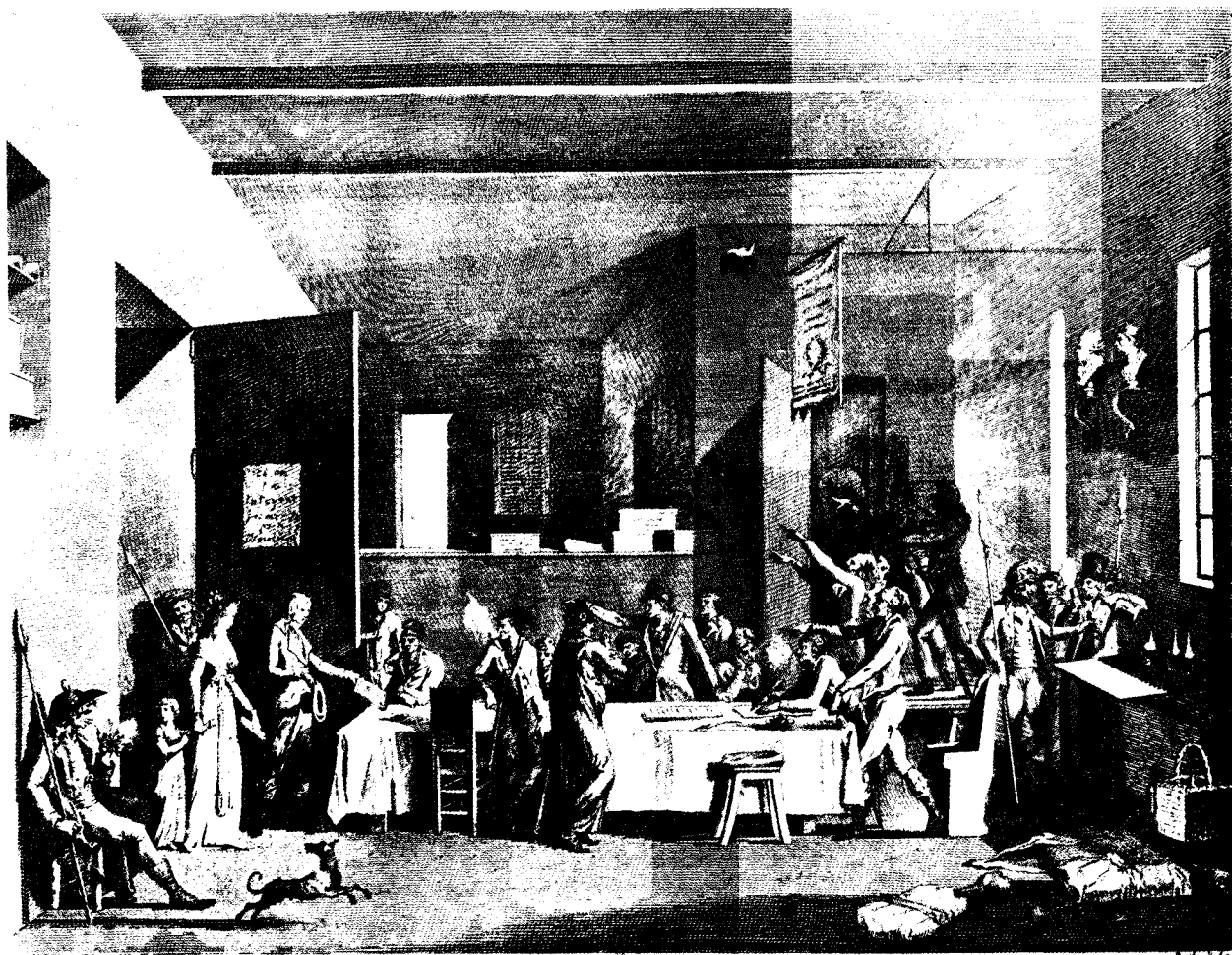
One of the more important measures adopted by the Convention to counter this crisis was the establishing, on 11 March of the 'Revolutionary Tribunal', a powerful instrument of repression for the political enemies of the revolution.

At least one section, that of the Croix-Rouge, drew the obvious conclusion by electing, on the 13th, a 'Comité Révolutionnaire' charged with uncovering suspects to feed the Revolutionary Tribunal.² Nevertheless, the officially recognized committees of 18 March were intended by the Convention to concern themselves specifically and solely with the exercise of a precautionary vigilance over foreigners within their purview. There was still, in the Assembly, a majority of those who feared the increasing autonomy of the sections and the power of their revolutionary leadership as much as the danger of counter-revolution. Even so, as the revolution progressed the revolutionary committees found their sphere of activity continually extended until they became, in effect, the maid-of-all-work of the revolution.³ On 25 September the Ministry of the Interior circularized the eighty-four Départements of France with a list of

¹ Cochin et Charpentier, *Les Actes du Gouvernement Révolutionnaire*, I. 163.

² G. Lefebvre, *La Révolution Française* [Les Cours de Sorbonne], vol. I, p. 323.

³ For the activities of these committees see, in addition to the work by Mellié already cited: (a) The Minutes of several committees preserved in the Archives Nationaux Série, F7, 2471-2526 and (b) J. G. Alger, *Paris 1789 to 1794*, London, 1902.



INTÉRIEUR D'UN COMITÉ RÉVOLUTIONNAIRE SOUS LE RÉGIME DE LA TERREUR.
Années 1793 et 1794, ou Années 2^e et 5^e de la République.

From an engraving in the Bibliothèque Nationale

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twenty-nine decrees whose enforcement was within the province of the commissaires.¹ That this list by no means exhausted the competence of the committees is, however, clear from a later, explanatory circular of 26 October, according to which they were to concern themselves with 'all that which bears on general security, hoarding, the food supply, requisitions, speculation in the exchange, on the suppression of the traces of monarchy and feudalism, and measures to prevent speculation in the national effects'.² The Paris commissaires supervised food queues, patrolled wine-shops and checked obscene songs. They issued passports and personal papers, received denunciations, undertook searches, made political arrests, and caught deserters for the army. After 1 May 1793 they were entrusted with the raising and equipping of an army of 12,000 men for service against the Vendée insurgents, by means of conscription, requisition, and a 'forced loan', revolutionary euphemism for a tax on the rich. Fragonard's sketch of a committee in operation,³ whilst undoubtedly something of a caricature, is nevertheless a valid historical document; the artist is known to have had dealings with the revolutionary committee of the Tuileries section on at least two occasions in 1794. On the first, in Germinal, he applied to the commissaires for a 'Certificat de Residence'. On the second, in Floréal, it was a 'Certificat de Civisme' that he required.⁴

Inevitably the picture of a revolutionary committee which has survived in the memoirs of contemporaries and the works of many subsequent historians has been that of a collection of unpleasant ruffians closely resembling Fragonard's sketch. Indeed, the 'ci-devant' victim of requisitions, taxes and arbitrary arrests suffered heavily at the hands of the commissaires. At first expected to give their services voluntarily and without reward, some at least of these officers were not beyond recouping themselves, in default of official payment, by other means. There is evidence that much of the money allocated for expenses stuck to the fingers of those who handled it. On 18 August 1793,

¹ Cochin et Charpentier, *op. cit.* pp. 163-6.

² *Ibid.* p. 314.

³ See plate.

⁴ Pierre de Nolhac, *J.-H. Fragonard*, pp. 100-101.

for example, Chemin was accused by a political opponent before the General Assembly of the Gravilliers section of falsifying the record of the equipment of the section's detachment of troops for the Vendée.¹ The committee of the Panthéon section released arrested persons on bail, a kind of legalized blackmail. Another favourite form of extortion was to permit suspects to remain under house arrest provided that they paid regular sums for their warder's keep, together with a moderate profit for the committee. When, in November 1794, after the collapse of the Jacobin régime, an investigation was undertaken into the affairs of the Luxembourg section,² it was alleged that of 67,654 francs wrung by the revolutionary committee from thirty victims only 2,855 francs had found their way into the sectional treasury.³

Nevertheless, despite this and similar accusations, it seems likely that many committees found their duties more onerous than lucrative. Thus it was not long before the 576 new 'civil servants' created by the decree of 18 March began to agitate for some recompense for their services. On 27 April their delegates met together at a central point in the Contrat-Social section in order to frame a joint petition for presentation to the Committee of Public Safety. The Convention and the Commune were both sympathetic, but it was not until 12 July that the departmental 'Comité de Surveillance' decided to support a demand for a regular salary of three livres per day⁴ for each commissaire. On the 27th this body, responsible for co-ordinating the activities of the forty-eight committees of the Capital, further suggested to the Committee of Public Safety that this indemnity should be paid out of the 'fonds secrets' with which it had been entrusted by the convention. On 7 August the governing committee accordingly placed 50,000 livres at the disposal of Pache, the Mayor of Paris, for the reimbursement of the committee-members.

It is clear, however, from the terms of the grant, that the Committee of Public Safety had not yet accepted the principal of

¹ Archives Nationales W. 20. Dossier of Jacques Roux.

² In 1793 known as the 'Mutius Scaevola' section (Fr. 110, f. 5).

³ Alger, *op. cit.* ch. V, pp. 149-94, deals with the sections and their committees.

⁴ A sum worth, in 1789, approximately 2s. 6d. and in 1793, perhaps 25 per cent. less.

a regular salary for the commissaires ; rather was the intention merely to compensate the more poverty-stricken among them for actual loss incurred in carrying out government service : ' Le Comité de Salut Public arrête que le Ministre de l'Interieur mettra à la disposition du Maire de Paris 50,000 livres pour indemniser les membres peu fortunés des Comités de Surveillance des sections pendant le présent mois, afin que leurs femmes et leurs enfants ne souffrent pas de la perte de leurs temps '.¹

It was not until 5 September, in fact, that the Convention, powerless in the face of a Paris uprising led by the Commune, acceded to the commissaires' original demand for three livres a day. By this time inflation had so reduced the value of the original demand, that representatives of the committees were soon at the bar of the Convention to petition for an increase. On 9 October these delegates declared that ' l'indemnité qui leur est accordée est insuffisante pour des sans-culottes, pères de famille, qui sont obligés d'abandonner entièrement leurs occupations pour se livrer aux importants travaux qui leur sont confiés '.² As a result of this, and similar approaches, a month later, on 18 Brumaire An II (8 Nov. 1793), the commissaires' salary was finally fixed at five livres per day. It is this sum which is claimed in the twenty-nine émargements of French 110. Curiously, no account is taken of any of the previous payments which should have been received by the revolutionary committees. Their members may well have chosen to regard the back-pay awarded them by the November decree as a ' bonus ' for 1793. Alternatively, they may not, in fact, have received any of the moneys allocated to them, as a result of bureaucratic delay in the administrative machinery.

The lists which were submitted by the various committees under the terms of the decree of the 18 Brumaire yield much valuable information about the kind of men who gave their enthusiastic support to the revolution and constituted themselves its protagonists. The names of a total of 444 commissaires, for example, have been preserved for comparison and correlation

¹ A. Aulard, *Recueil des Actes du Comité de Salut Public*, v. 397.

² *Moniteur*, 11 October 1793.

with other sources. Inevitably, the majority of these men were more or less obscure personages, about whom little is, or can be, known. Consequently it is dangerous to make generalizations about the social content of the revolutionary committees from the sole evidence of a list of names. Those commissaires who have left their impress in contemporary documents, and about whose social position something is, therefore, known, tend to be the sprinkling of lawyers and men of substance who found their way into the committees, rather than the rank and file members. Fortunately, however, it is possible to make a balanced analysis of the membership of one committee, that of the Montagne section, for the secretary, doubtless unfamiliar with the meaning of the word 'émargement', used the column so headed, not for the signatures of the members, but for an account of their addresses and occupations.¹ Thus the committee is discovered to be almost entirely composed of petit-bourgeois. Of the ten men whose occupation is given, two are shoemakers, two engravers, and one a breeches maker. The list continues with a clock-maker, a hairdresser, and a shopkeeper² at the 'Palais Egalité' (formerly the Palais Royal). The upper-middle class is represented by a 'writer' and a 'former lawyer'. This ratio of middle-class intellectuals to petit-bourgeois 'activists' is suggested by other evidence. Only 18 per cent.³ of the 444 commissaires, for example, can be shown to have belonged to the Jacobin Club, predominantly a middle-class organization, with a relatively high subscription level. There are other indications that the majority of commissaires were 'sans-culottes': small masters or even labourers. When the sections demanded an indemnity for the committees on 27 April, they did so on the

¹ Fr. 110, f. 22.

² 'Marchand'.

³ The method used to calculate this figure is open to two important errors, which are, however, compensatory. The list of Commissaires, collated from Fr. 110, has been compared with the list of members of the Jacobins given by Aulard in the index of *La Société des Jacobins* (Paris, 1888-97), Vol. VI. On the one hand, Aulard's list, though comprehensive, is not complete. On the other, it is impossible to be sure that an identical surname represents an identical person. There are, for example, four Laurents in the list of commissaires. Any one of these may be identical with one of the three Laurents listed as members of the Jacobin club. We may, however, be concerned with seven distinct individuals.

grounds that their members were 'prèsque tous ouvriers',¹ and otherwise would not be able to spare the time and labour to fulfil their duties. The revolutionary committees drew many of their members from amongst that class which had been thrown into unemployment and poverty by the decline of the luxury trades consequent on the downfall of the court, the flight of the nobility and the austerity imposed by the revolutionary war. Writing of the Bonnet Rouge section, Prudhomme, a contemporary journalist observed in 1796: 'Le comité révolutionnaire de cette section' était composé de laquais, de savetiers, de commissionnaires, de jardiniers, d'intendants de maison'.²

The terms of the decree of 18 March 1793 specifically excluded from membership of the committees nobles and priests; the mass of wage-labourers, in an age of almost universal illiteracy amongst the lower classes, was hardly capable of handling the kind of business which the sectional committees found themselves called upon to undertake, and so it was inevitable that the committees should be staffed by men drawn predominantly from the upper and lower middle-class.

One or two of the commissaires were, relatively, quite wealthy. An extreme case is that of Hagnon, of the Finisterre section, who, the observation column reveals, enjoyed an annual pension of 2,000 livres as one-time steward of La Bisette.³ Another, Vergne, of the La Pelletier committee, received a salary of 900 livres as 'greffier' to the local Justice of the Peace.⁴ Reference is frequently made in the 'observation' column to a commissaire's private income; in addition a considerable number of committee members received salaries from the state in entirely different spheres. Perhaps the most remarkable example of this duality of functions occurs in the Amis de la Patrie section where commissaire Bellamy held the important position of Inspecteur des Postes.⁵ Some of the posts secured by commissaires were

¹ By 'ouvrier' the eighteenth-century Frenchman did not mean 'proletarian' in the modern sense, but rather the small artisan and his 'compagnons'. The apprentices were usually 'garçons'.

² *Histoire Générale des Crimes Commis pendant la Révolution*, v. 247. The passage, part of an attack on the committee, must be accepted with reserve.

³ Fr. 110, f. 19.

⁴ *Ibid.* f. 1.

⁵ *Ibid.* f. 21.

those for which they were undoubtedly well suited.¹ Thus Butin and Bernier of the République Française committee were attached to the Municipal Administration de Police,² Pons, of the Fontaine de Grenelle, was an employee of the 'Inventaire des biens des Émigrés',³ and Pillon, of the Marat section, 'Gardien du Bibliothèque des Émigrés'.⁴ Other posts may, perhaps, be more legitimately considered as 'spoils'. Thus Petit received four livres eight sous per day for his work at the 'Comptage des Assignats',⁵ Joseph was an inspector attached to the 'Vérification des souliers pour l'Armée'⁶, Massé, an employee of the 'Arbitrage des Armes',⁷ and Chebrie was attached to the 'Garde-Magasin de la Ville'.⁸

Some commissaires, like Grandmaison of the Fontaine de Grenelle section, whose income as secretary to the local J.P. was only two livres a day,⁹ and Soyer of the Finisterre section¹⁰ voluntarily renounced the salary accorded to them as members of their revolutionary committees. Many others claimed only a percentage of their due. Julien and L'Écoussé of the Popincourt committee subtracted the emolument they had received as members of the Parisian Electoral Assembly from an otherwise substantial claim.¹¹ Mallain, of the Temple committee, applied for only half his monthly salary because, it was remarked, he had a 'place' worth fifty sous a day.¹² The secretary of the Finisterre committee calculated the amount due to commissaire Rognon, in order to take into account an income of 500 livres a year, on the basis of a daily rate of three livres and fifteen sous instead of five livres.¹³ There were many cases of personal sacrifice which may be set against the general obloquy heaped upon the revolutionary commissaires by their assailants. On the other hand, the fact

¹ In all cases given immediately below commissaires have been selected who actually held two offices at the moment of authorization. The Halle au Bled section seems to have insisted on its commissaires resigning on being nominated to another government or judicial post.

² Fr. 110, f. 20.

³ *Ibid.* f. 2.

⁴ *Ibid.* f. 23.

⁵ *Ibid.* f. 2, Fontaine de Grenelle section.

⁶ *Ibid.* f. 20, République Française section.

⁷ *Ibid.* f. 15, Popincourt section.

⁸ *Ibid.* f. 13, Arsenal section.

⁹ *Ibid.* f. 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* f. 19.

¹¹ *Ibid.* f. 15.

¹² *Ibid.* f. 8.

¹³ *Ibid.* f. 19.

that the salaries of commissaires less unselfish were also frequently entered in the 'observation' column by the secretary responsible for the preparation of the émargement suggests that such sacrifices were not always entirely voluntary, but merely anticipated a means test which the administrateurs were expected to apply.

Once the commissaires had become salaried state servants, with increasingly heavy duties to perform, duality of function could not long be tolerated. On 22 Frimaire (12 Dec. 1793) the mayor, Pache, complaining of this growing tendency to plurality among office-holders, invited members to opt for one post or the other, in order to be able to give more time to the particular post chosen. Nevertheless, the lists at our disposal suggest that, at least in 1793, a fair proportion of revolutionary commissaires were bound to the revolutionary régime by their tenancy of other remunerative public offices.

It is probable that the most significant fresh evidence which a study of French 110 will add to our present knowledge of the French Revolution will concern not the actual composition of the Paris revolutionary committees, but the changes which affected that composition during the most important period of their existence. Sixteen émargements, the accounts of a quarter of the committees, yield a summarized account of replacements for 1793, complete to the date of presentation. In no case did the original committee of twelve survive the period intact. Changes in membership were, of course, frequently due to miscellaneous causes, without any general application. Thus, on 9 June, three members of the Halle au Bled committee resigned in order to take up membership of the newly-formed Departmental Committee of Public Safety.¹ At the date of authorization, Desfieux of the Le Pelletier,² and Nicole of the Finisterre section³ were both unable to fulfil their duties, have been recently arrested, while Desfieux' colleague Tachereau was laconically marked down as 'en fuite depuis le 12 frimaire'. At least eight commissaires resigned their posts in the course of the year to join the regular army, or the army of the Vendée. There were, inevitably, many

¹ Fr. 110, f. 29.

² *Ibid.* f. 1.

³ *Ibid.* f. 19.

others who left the revolutionary committees for personal and more prosaic reasons. It is, nevertheless, possible to discern, in the changing composition of many committees, a coherent pattern, and to differentiate between the incidental and the fundamental. The history of the Droits de l'Homme committee, though something of an extreme case, will serve to illustrate the nature of a fundamental, as opposed to an incidental change, in this context.¹ Ten out of its twelve members were replaced on 20 April 1793; eight of the committee thus reconstituted were again replaced a month later. Of the committee as it stood on 21 October, five were May nominees, but seven had been appointed in September or October. An analysis of the other 'émargements' which cover the period concerned, such as that contained in the following table, suggests that the sequence of events in the Droits de l'Homme section, though exaggerated, was typical rather than extraordinary.

TABLE TO SUMMARIZE THE COMPOSITION OF THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEES OF 16 SECTIONS IN EARLY FRIMAIRE AN II (NOV.-DEC. 1793)

<i>Section</i>	<i>Dates upon which the complement of members appointed</i>		
	<i>27 March-8 April</i>	<i>8 April-1 Sept.</i>	<i>After 1 Sept.</i>
Le Pelletier . . .	—	—	12
Fontaine de Grenelle	4	2	6
Quinze-Vingts . .	4	4	3
Champs Elysées . .	4	8	—
Homme Armé . . .	3	—	9
Droits de l'Homme .	—	5	7
Fraternité . . .	2	—	10
Popincourt . . .	—	—	12
Brutus	3	—	9
Finisterre	4	1	6
République Française	5	4	3
Amis de la Patrie .	7	—	5
Montagne	—	6	6
Marat	—	—	12
Muséum	6	3	3
Halle au Bléd . .	—	5	7
Totals	42	38	110

¹Fr. 110, f. 12.

From 18 March to 5 September the installation of the revolutionary commissaires was, in theory at least, entirely and solely the concern of the General Assembly of the section.¹ Thus political feuds in the section might be reflected in appointments to the revolutionary committee. The political history of this period was dominated by the struggle between the Girondins and the Jacobins which reached its climax in a successful pro-Jacobin revolt of the sections on 31 May and 2 June. May was a month of fierce struggle for control of the sections, and, in particular, of the sectional committees. The replacement, on 20 May, of eight commissaires of the Droits de l'Homme section and that, on the 22nd, of seven of the members of the République Française committee² would seem to be a manifestation of this smouldering battle. It is fairly safe to deduce that these events mark the capturing of the revolutionary committees by the insurrectionary faction. On the 26th the Ministry of the Interior, supporting the Girondin campaign to reverse the Jacobin victory in the sections, issued a circular ordering the renewal of all the 'Comités de Surveillance des Étrangers' and observing that the adoption of the style 'Comité Révolutionnaire' was an illegal usurpation.³ There is, however, no evidence that this attempt to destroy the militancy of the committees and to restrict their activities was ever taken seriously by the sections. The reaction which followed the revolutionary 'Journées' is more complicated. In the case of the Champs Elysées section it seems probable that the five commissaires replaced on the 11 and 13 June were Girondin supporters.⁴ On the other hand, two of the Droits de l'Homme commissaires⁵ and three of their colleagues from the Brutus committee⁶ may well have been 'retired' on 5 and 6 June for over-zealous conduct in carrying out arrests and searches. It is known, from other sources, that the Mail section dismissed members of its revolutionary

¹ Methods of election may have differed with the section : on 18 April 1793 the Contrat Social section arrived at the somewhat puzzling decision that members of the 'Comité de Surveillance' should, like all other sectional officers, submit to the censorial scrutiny of the General Assembly (Archives of the Seine Département, D 134-140).

² Fr. 110, f. 20.

⁴ Fr. 110, f. 4.

³ Cochin et Charpentier, *op. cit.* p. 163.

⁵ *Ibid.* f. 12.

⁶ *Ibid.* f. 18.

committee for similar reasons on the 8th. A secret agent of the Minister of the Interior, reporting on a session of the Commune Council four days later remarked : ' La section du Mail est venu porter une adresse pour inviter le conseil à ratifier, à sanctionner ses précédents arrêtés relativement aux changements qu'elle avait fait dans son Comité Révolutionnaire, au désarmement des citoyens designés sous le nom vague de suspects, et demand la mise en liberté de tous ceux qui ont été mis en état d'arrestation sur de simples soupçons'.¹ Though this reaction had its counterpart in other sections, it did not result in a universal or important reconstitution of the committees such as that which took place in the months September, October and November of 1793. In these three months, as a glance at the table will show, a number of committees were completely re-made, while in others a majority of new commissaires was appointed, so that eleven out of sixteen may be said to have become, in effect, new committees, and only one remained completely intact.

Sometimes this process was sudden and complete. As a result of changes brought about on 24 September and 15 October, the committee of the Popincourt section, which had remained in office substantially intact since 27 March, was renewed in its entirety.² Generally, however, a nucleus of old members was left undisturbed, possibly to act as guide to the newly appointed and inexperienced commissaires.

In order to discover the reasons for such wholesale changes we must first consider the political situation in the capital. During the summer of 1793 the sections had become powerful enough to challenge the authority, not only of the Convention but also of the Paris Commune. In particular, during the month of August, they had been stimulated by a severe food crisis to attack the Commune's leaders, Pache, Chaumette and Hébert, and to organize a dangerous agitation against the municipal authorities, culminating eventually in the uprising of 5 September. In the meantime, however, the politicians of the Hôtel de Ville, cleverly capturing the popular movement, set out to use the threatened insurrection for their own ends: the establishment of the

¹ A. Schmidt, *Tableaux de la Revolution Française*, ii. 26.

² Fr. 110, f. 15.

domination of the Commune and the ' Jacobin Left ' over the Convention. To consolidate their position the Commune clique found it necessary to destroy the independence of the democratic sections. Measures to this effect were not difficult to extort from the Convention, whose members had long feared the power of the sections, and with good reason. On 5 September, at the height of the insurrection, two important decrees were proposed. By the first, which was not promulgated until the 9th, the meetings of the forty-eight General Assemblies were restricted to two *a week*. By the second, the General Council of the Commune was given the power to review all elections to the revolutionary committees, and even to make provisional appointments. The censurate was to be a powerful weapon in the hands of the Commune. It must not be assumed that the General Council had previously remained strictly aloof from the affairs of the sections in this respect ; when, on 6 May, the Pont Neuf section had replaced its revolutionary committee, the Hôtel de Ville had intervened in favour of the dismissed commissaires and secured their reinstatement by force majeure.¹

Similarly, when, on 23 August, Truchon of the Gravilliers section had complained to the General Council against the decision of the section, instigated by Jacques Roux, to replace both civil and revolutionary committees the Commune had again intervened to restore the dismissed commissaires.² Now, both might and right were on the side of the Commune, and the evidence of French 110 would seem to suggest that its leaders were not loth to seize the opportunity of filling the committees with their own creatures.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the Hôtel de Ville was remarkably slow in taking advantage of the victory of 5 September. The precise terms of the Convention's decree had laid down that ' Il sera présenté dans le jour par les Comités de Salut Public de Paris la liste de leurs membres au Conseil Général de la Commune qui est autorisée de les épurer et d'en nommer des autres provisoirement '. In the course of the day the General Council did, in fact, write to each committee for a return of

¹ Schmidt, *op. cit.* i. 193.

² *Moniteur*, 24 August 1793.

members, to be accompanied by notes on each individual. It was also decided that the councillors representing the sections concerned should supplement such notes with personal observations.¹ But it was the 17 September before the Administration de Police was requested to hand over the list to the Commune,² and not until the 21st was a date fixed for the intended 'purification'.³ The first date selected, 24 September, having proved to be unsatisfactory for some reason, the formal convocation of the committees was further postponed.⁴ On the 26th it was decided that the purge should begin at 5 o'clock on Monday, 30 September.⁵ On the 30th, therefore, the review of the membership of the revolutionary committees commenced,⁶ although at least one secretary, Daubigny of the Tuileries section, refused to attend, or to furnish the Commune with any information.⁷ The process seems to have lasted more than a week, for it was still incomplete on 8 October. According to the evidence of French 110 several sections underwent more or less slight changes in this period. Two members of the République Française committee⁸ and one member of the Droits de l'Homme⁹ were replaced on 1 October. Four new members were appointed to the Marat section committee,¹⁰ and two to the Halle au Bled on the 2nd,¹¹ while the Montagne committee suffered the replacement of four commissaires on the 3rd.¹² These figures represent but a minute proportion of the 110 commissaires replaced between the beginning of September and the end of December. We must, therefore, seek outside this period of formal purgation for evidence of the Commune's intervention in the affairs of the sections and of the revolutionary committees. It is disappointing to find that so many changes of membership are merely noted without comment. Indeed, the only direct evidence of the Commune's

¹ *Moniteur*, 8 September 1793.

² *Ibid.* 20 September 1793.

³ *Ibid.* 24 September 1793.

⁴ *Ibid.* 27 September 1793.

⁵ *Ibid.* 29 September 1793.

⁶ *Ibid.* 2 October 1793.

⁷ The Commissaires de Police, the officers of the 'Force Armée' and the elective Paris Justices underwent a purge at the same time. Significantly, of the twenty-four J.P.s, only twelve survived the Commune's scrutiny (*Moniteur*, 9 Oct. 1793).

⁸ Fr. 110, f. 20.

⁹ *Ibid.* f. 12.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* f. 23.

¹¹ *Ibid.* f. 29.

¹² *Ibid.* f. 22.

use of the 'scrutin épuratoire' is provided by the émargement of the Marchés committee, whose secretary remarks that on 11 Brumaire (1 Nov. 1793) commissaire Lafosse was rejected by the Commune, to be replaced by Michel on the following day.¹ The list for the Sans-Culottes section, however, contains the following note: 'Ces 5 membres ont été nommé [sic] par le Conseil Général de la Commune' in reference to a minority group of commissaires.²

From a study of French 110 alone it is impossible to decide whether this procedure of direct nomination was general, or whether it merely represented an isolated instance. There is, however, a certain amount of evidence to be found elsewhere with a bearing on this question. On 4 October, according to Mellié's account, the General Council rejected the names of ten commissaires from a list of twelve supplied by the Gravilliers section. The section was not disposed to submit passively to such arbitrary conduct, and determined to fight the decision of the Commune in what may well have been a test case. On 20 October the General Assembly therefore requested the Commune to authorize a special session so that the citizens could elect their own revolutionary committee. The request was refused; the Commune remaining adamant, the section had no further redress.

The supremacy of the Commune was to be short-lived. The attack on the democratic organization of the sections proved to be but the first step towards the setting up of a dictatorship of the Montagnard and Robespierriest minority within the Convention. As early as 17 September, when the revolutionary committees were charged with the administration of the notorious 'Law of the Suspects', it was decided that they should henceforth correspond directly with the Conventional Committee of General Security. The Commune thus lost its status as intermediary, and the leaders of the Hôtel de Ville soon found to their dismay that the committees were escaping from their control. On 27 Brumaire (17 Nov. 1793) Pache, the Mayor, circularized the forty-eight committee presidents to suggest that they consult him

¹ Fr. 110, f. 28.

² *Ibid.* f. 24.

on all matters with which the Conventional Committee was not concerned. A fortnight later, in stronger vein, Chaumette, Procureur of the Commune, requested that the committees should communicate with the General Council concerning all matters of police or security, matters which were, in fact, within the province of the Committee of General Security. On 14 Frimaire (4 Dec. 1793) the Convention retaliated by passing Billaud-Varennes' decree threatening ten years in irons for any authority which dared to intervene between the Convention and the revolutionary committees. During the same session, the two Conventional Committees of Public Safety and General Security were empowered to purge and appoint to all constituted authorities within the Republic. The Commune could now be purified in the same way as the Gravilliers committee.

The manuscript at present under discussion gives little indication as to how far the composition of the revolutionary committees was affected by the law of 14 Frimaire. The émargement of the Brutus committee reveals the fact that its membership remained intact from 6 Brumaire (27 Oct. 1793) up to the end of Pluviôse An II (end of Feb. 1794).

From the beginning of Frimaire to the end of Pluviôse An II, a similar period, the revolutionary committee of the Homme Armée section did, in fact, lose three members by replacement, but no comment enlightens us as to the reasons for these changes, or the methods by which they were adopted. There were, incidentally, on 1 Ventôse, still two original members of the committee to claim their emolument.¹

Mellié suggests that a method of recruitment commonly adopted at this period was for the committee collectively to co-opt new members, and to submit their names for approval to the General Council of the Commune. Such a procedure seems probable in view of the growing independence of the committees already observed in the matter of the authorization of accounts; only on comparatively rare occasions, such as the 'purification' of the Marat section after the abortive Hébertist 'putsch' of

¹ Fr. 110, ff. 9, 10.

Ventôse, would the Committee of Public Safety directly intervene in the affairs of a sectional committee. Such a crude exercise of power was hardly necessary when the committee had the power to purge the Commune itself. Moreover, as state servants, the commissaires now had a considerable vested interest in the Jacobin Régime, their paymaster and protector.

As 1794 progressed, Robespierre and his party came more and more to rely on the 40,000 revolutionary committees of France for the successful working of the revolutionary government. It was thus inevitable that they should incur a large measure of the hatred and hostility which its enemies felt for the régime. The Parisian committees did not long survive the overthrow of Robespierre. A Conventional decree of 7 Fructidor An II (24 Aug. 1794) replaced them by twelve new Arrondissement committees, thus striking a shrewd blow at the old, sectional loyalties. In Prairial An III even these committees lost the title 'revolutionary', to disappear irrevocably in Brumaire An IV.

During the period known as the 'Thermidorian Reaction' and especially after the unsuccessful 'Jacobin' revolt of Prairial An III, many of the former commissaires suffered persecution and imprisonment at the hands of their victorious enemies until, finally, in Vendémiaire An IV (on 16 Oct. 1795) the Convention was forced to intervene to protect them against further legal attack and imprisonment.

Many of the old committees had wisely taken certain precautions to avoid being brought to book for real or exaggerated misdeeds. On 11 Brumaire An III (1 Nov. 1794), for example, the members of the Bonnet Rouge committee appeared before the Criminal Tribunal of Paris, charged with having abstracted incriminating matter from the papers of the committee prior to handing them over to the new authority.¹ Almost immediately after the fall of Robespierre there had been an anxious scramble on the part of the servants of the régime to cover up their traces. The lists contained in French 110, which would surely have provided a fruitful and fascinating object of study for the police of the Thermidorian Convention, the Directory, or even the

¹ A. Soboul, 'Les Papiers des Sections', ap. *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française*, N.S., xxii (1950), 97.

Consulate, may conceivably have been removed from their rightful place by an amicably disposed official, not to re-emerge again into the full light of day until the nineteenth century was well advanced. This, it must be admitted, is mere surmise, for we do not know how the twenty-nine émargements found their way into the collection of the Earl of Crawford, from which, in 1930, they passed into the keeping of a Manchester Library.