A FAILURE OF ENLIGHTENED POLITICS IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION: THE SOCIÉTÉ DE 1789

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... une grande société dont l'objet serait d'approfondir, de développer, de répandre les principes d'une constitution libre, et plus généralement de chercher les moyens de perfectionner l'art social considéré dans toute son étendue.

Cette nouvelle association a pris le nom de Société de 1789.

Condorcet to M. ***, 1790

In the spring and early summer of 1790, a new and formidable political association appeared in Paris dedicated to the consolidation of the Revolutionary gains of the previous year and to the development, propagation and implementation of Enlightened social and political ideals. The Société de 1789 was founded by the marquis de Condorcet and abbé Sieyès in April 1790, and quickly attracted a large number of members from the leadership of the National Assembly, prominent intellectuals, financiers, Parisian politicians and ancien régime jurists and bureaucrats. The membership list of the club suggests that the founders had assembled a workable coalition of political and intellectual moderates in 1790, including political figures such as Bailly, La Fayette, Mirabeau, Le Chapelier, Talleyrand, Thouret and La Rochefoucauld, and intellectuals such as Lavoisier, Suard, Tracy, Cabanis and DuPont de Nemours. Its meetings were very well at-

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tended by members of the National Assembly and influential Parisians and reported in several journals, such as the *Monteuir* and the *Chronique de Paris*. By June, the *Chronique* reported that the Société 'devient chaque jour plus nombreuse et plus brillante: elle compte parmi ses membres beaucoup de députés à l'Assemblée nationale, d'hommes de lettres distingués, et de personnes qui ont donné, dans la Révolution, des preuves de patriotisme et de zèle'. The Société de 1789 was widely seen to be a breakaway faction from the Jacobin club formed to provide a moderate political base, which seemed to be in a very strong position by the summer of 1790.

The subsequent failure of the Société de 1789 to survive more than a year or to establish a workable political programme that had a direct influence on the course of events is both surprising and instructive. At the outset, the prestige and capability of the membership of the club would have led one to assume, as many did, that this group was willing and able to assume a leadership role in the Revolution. Even very hostile critics such as Prudhomme acknowledged the 'grands noms et grand talens' in the club. There is a number of reasons why the club failed in its political as well as ideological functions. It was weak, divided, unable to attract a popular following and, most importantly, not a political party, in contrast to the Jacobins. The failure of the Société is an equally important episode in understanding the relationship of the late Enlightenment to the French Revolution. The Société de 1789 was a political club organized by two leading intellectuals of the day and shared many characteristics with earlier forms of political and intellectual sociability.

Indeed, one of the characteristics that marks the Société de 1789 was the denial of its obvious political role by its founders and its constitution. The founders claimed the club would be a kind of 'Enlightenment Academy of Politics'. Condorcet suggested that it would be 'une compagnie d'amis des hommes, et, pour ainsi dire, d'agents du commerce des vérités sociales'. Direct political involvement would hurt the internationalism of the Société, since national division would generate discord and the 'spirit of sects' that arise in the political arena. Thus, the Société de 1789 ought to remain, in Condorcet's opinion, an institution 'plus philosophique encore que politique'. Several considerations contributed to this rhetorical stance. Denying political goals was certainly advantageous in the light of the general distrust of party politics. Factionalism and party organizations were frequently decried because they led to corruption and favourism,
and because they promoted particular interests over the general will. In addition, the prestige of a close identification with the Enlightenment, would add to the reputations of the individuals whom it wished to attract and place its enemies in the position of having to attack the Enlightenment as well as moderate policies. The rational politics of the Enlightenment would not have to be sullied by common political concerns. Finally, the apolitical rhetoric of the club may have come as part of a belief that the elimination of party spirit was both necessary and desirable. Condorcet’s elaborate writings on the necessity of ‘rational politics’ was echoed in the intellectual justification of the new club.

There is little doubt, however, that the Société was a political club. From its public announcement in April 1790, both the supporters and opponents of the Société thought it was a political organization. Many of the best-known members, such as La Fayette, had definite political interests in supporting the club. It is true that open political activities of the club were marginal, consisting of frequent, and lavish, patriotic dinners. Informally, however, the club served as a meeting ground for moderates, and a place to negotiate coalitions of moderates for the formation of a ministry and/or garnering control of the Assembly. The club’s meetings and speeches, as in the case of the Jacobins, focused on current events and the political debates of the Assembly. The collapse of the Société was, not surprisingly, due to the failure of the club to establish and maintain a significant political following in Paris and the provinces. For a political club that denied its political role, the Société de 1789 suffered a most political demise – failure to attract a large partisan following.

The foundation of a club or society like the Société de 1789 was not an uncommon activity in early 1790. Indeed, the years leading up to the Revolution had seen an unprecedented growth in secret, private and semi-private clubs established in the English style, which combined ‘eating, whist-playing and reading all the latest books’. As the crisis of the monarchy deepened, politics became the main focus of these clubs, as well as of the salons held by more or less fashionable hostesses, such as Madame de Condorcet. Accompanying the flood of political writing that presaged the French Revolution as well as the failure of the old institutions monitoring the press, was an even greater deluge of political talk. Not surprisingly, the forms of sociability inherited from the ancien régime continued to predominate in clubs founded during the early Revolutionary period.

* The fear of partisan spirit, Lynn Hunt argues, was one of the most important developments in French Revolutionary political discourse: L. Hunt, Politics, culture and class in the French Revolution (Los Angeles, 1984), p. 44. See M. Péronnet, Les 50 mots clefs de la Révolution française (1983) p. 210 for a discussion of the history of this idea.

Before the Revolution, the clubs were one forum where 'the aristocracy mingled with the high bourgeoisie, and social distinctions were sometimes forgotten'.

The Société de 1789 combined many of the ancien régime models of sociability: the academy, the lodge, the salon and the literary society. Its members were already linked by ties of friendship and by interlocking memberships in pre-Revolutionary associations. The formal and public nature of the Société de 1789 represents a small part of an important development in political sociability, since previous private associations had been illicit or unofficial. Since the 1760s, there had been a growing number of extra-governmental associations, including 'cercles, musées, clubs, sociétés littéraires, cabinets de lecture et . . . loges franc-maçonnnes'. Nevertheless, the 'democratic sociability' that pervaded many extra-governmental organizations during the ancien régime provided necessary experience in forming institutions where rank was of secondary importance. Equality within extra-governmental associations was not limited only to secret societies. Daniel Roche argues that, despite the official exclusion of all politics in their discussions, all of the academies of France, from the most prestigious in Paris to modest provincial institutions, provided an ideal of service civique that assumed 'l'intégration sociale des gens cultivés'. Freed of government supervision at the beginning of the Revolution – though not of the suspicions of enemies fearing plots against liberty – political clubs, circles and associations flourished. Even the most elitist of the institutions, such as the Société de 1789, adopted egalitarian rules of membership and procedure that had been learned during the ancien régime.

The origins of the Société de 1789 are not difficult to determine. The club officially constituted itself on 12 April 1790, with the circulation of a prospectus and list of founding members. The list of 416 founding members, the clearly written constitution and idealistic prospectus all suggest that the club had been meeting for some time before its public declaration. The Société de 1789 was widely believed to be an offshoot of the Société des Amis de la Constitution - the Jacobins - reflecting the first of many internal conflicts that would buffet this famous club. This is probably true, but needs to be qualified by the fact that Condorcet, one of

10 Egret, The French Prerevolution, p. 87.
13 Ibid. p. 9.
15 Règlements de la Société de 1789 . . .
the founders and most influential members of the Société de 1789, wrote that the Société – or some other club – had been meeting since October 1789.17

There is, however, little doubt that by January 1790 the club that would become the Société de 1789 was meeting regularly in the houses of prominent Parisians and, at the end of the month, at a local hôtel. Sieyès wrote the following note to M. Bancal des Issarts: 'Le Club de 1789, où vous êtes reçu, tiendra sa première assemblée générale lundi, 18, à 8 heures du soir chez M. Périer, rue Chaussée d'Antin, no. 72. Prévenez ceux vous savez être reçus.'18 What transpired in those sessions is unknown but there is evidence that the club continued to meet. In February 1790, the Actes des Apôtres listed a number of members of 1789 who had dined 'hier dimanche 14 en comité de constitution, hôtel de la Propagande, rue de Richelieu, no. 158'.19 In early April, the Apôtres printed a note from Roederer to Sieyès, under the title EFFETS PERDUS, requesting a meeting of ten founding members of the Société to discuss the judiciary 'ce soir vers neuf heures chez vous'.

The first indication that this rather informal association was becoming a larger, more organized club is the appearance of the Ébauche d'un nouveau plan de société patriotique, adopté par le Club de Mil-sept-cent-quatres-vingt-neuf at the end of March 1790. The Ébauche is a sixteen-page description and proposed constitution of the new society initialled by EJS.20 The abbé Sieyès, as we have seen, had already been organizing the Société de 1789 in January 1790, and was identified as 'le président du club de 1789' by Camille Desmoulins in February 1790.21

The Ébauche placed great emphasis on the development of 'l'Art Social'. Article 1 states that22

Le but principal que la Société se propose est de développer, de défendre & de propager les principes d'une Constitution libre;

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18 Cited in C. Perroud, 'Quelques notes sur le Club de 1789', Revolution Française: Revue d'Histoire Contemporaine, 39 (1900), 257. A second, unsigned note, in Sieyès's hand, was sent to Bancal on 27 January, informing him that he (Sieyès) would be attending a meeting of 'our club' that evening: ibid. pp. 257–8.
20 Ibid. 83 (1790), 13.
21 [E.-J. Sieyès], Ébauche d'un nouveau plan de société patriotique, adopté par le Club de Mil-sept-cent-quatres-vingt-neuf (n.d.). M. Forsyth, Reason and revolution: the political thought of the abbé Sieyès (New York, 1987), makes only two references to the Société de 1789 and does not mention the Ébauche or the January notes in his discussion of the foundation of the Société (p. 28). P. Bastid, Sieyès et sa pensée (1970) only comments that 'Droz [Histoire du règne de Louis XVI] attribue son règlement à Sieyès lui-même' (p. 102) with no further comments on Sieyès's role in the establishment of the Société. A. Neton, Sieyès d'après des documents inédits (1900) places Sieyès in a purely passive role in attending the Société de 1789 (p. 126).
22 Révolutions de France et Brabant, 16 (1790), 139.
23 Sieyès, Ébauche, p. 1.
Sieyès identified *l’art social* as the human science whose goal was the improvement of mankind in political, economic and social areas. He went on to outline the organization of the club, proposing that it should have a library, dining room, a journal and a series of committees dealing with the study, development and application of *l’art social*. The committees that Sieyès envisaged for the Société de 1789 were as follows:

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The tone of the club was set by the selection and order of the sections or committees. Conspicuous by their absence were sections concerned with politics, membership, fund raising and other mundane elements that would be commonly associated with a political club or, to use modern American parlance, a political action committee. Indeed, influence as described by the *Ébauche* had little to do with the political process or the exercise of direct political influence on the representatives, but rather seems to have involved the cultivation of public opinion. Discussion of Enlightenment political ideas was the primary occupation of the club.

The size of the club was to be limited to 660 members. Sieyès argued that a club of this size was necessary: ‘Il faut beaucoup de monde pour une semblable entreprise, & pour acquérir l’étendue d’influence qu’elle exige’. The Société de 1789, from its earliest foundation, was not to be either a mass political party nor even a large-scale club, but a pressure group made up of influential, enlightened individuals. According to the *Ébauche*, membership would be tightly controlled, excluding men who were suspect in their ‘doctrine ou leurs sentiments patriotiques’ or those whose reputations, merited or not, would detract from the useful influence of the club. Sieyès was almost completely blind to the importance of mass politics that was being exhibited by the early radical clubs of the

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24 Forsyth, *Reason and revolution*, pp. 22–31
23 Sieyès, *Ébauche*, p. 5.
22 Ibid. p. 2.
27 Ibid. p. 7.
24 Ibid. p. 11.
sections and by the Jacobins, for while the Société de 1789 was large in comparison to the clubs and associations of the ancien régime, it could not, according to its constitution, mobilize mass support.

In theory, the Société de 1789 would not participate directly in the political process, for there was no institutional provision within the club for active intervention in the politics of regenerating France. The model used for the Société was a cross between the salon and the academy, and its goal was to raise the general level of political discussion in France and abroad. The club was not meant, according to Sieyès's description, to serve as a political party that would propose a platform and attempt to secure its implementation by trying to get its members elected to the legislative branch or through a pressure group (or political action committee) which would lobby members of the legislature or executive. Any impact the Société would have on the political process would be indirect, by opening public discussion of issues and enlightening the electorate and representatives. By disseminating political 'truths' the club would not be aimed at particular pieces of legislation but at the broadest formulation of l'art social, which enlightened legislators would implement in policy.

A couple of weeks after Sieyès published the Ébauche, the Société de 1789 was officially founded. Augustin Challamel gives the date of the foundation of the Société de 1789 as 12 April. The foundation of the Société de 1789 was announced by the publication of Règlements de la Société de 1789 et liste de ses membres. The general tone of the Règlements remained the same as Sieyès's Ébauche, providing a central role for the development of l'art social and the communication of Enlightened political ideas in France and internationally. Given the disjointed nature of the components of l'art social, only a common method adopted by all enlightened men could result in real progress. The global commerce of enlightened ideas, akin to the global patterns of commerce, was required for progress, by which 'nous pouvons nous rendre si supérieurs aux anciens'. Thus, it was highly desirable to 'multiplier entre les nations les échanges réciproques des connoissances humaines'.

From its constitution and early descriptions, it is clear that the Société de 1789 was modelled after ancien régime forms of sociability, particularly the academy, according to which the club was to be the meeting place of an enlightened elite. Although it admitted members who were not

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10 Challamel, Les clubs, p. 391. See, for example, Badinter, Condorcet, p. 286.
11 Règlements de la Société de 1789, pp. 4-5.
12 Ibid. p. 5.
13 Fouquieres neatly summed up the situation: 'on ne pouvait espérer fonder une Société populaire en fixant à une cotisation de cinq livres [sic] l'admission de ses membres et en s'attachant à l'étude abstraite de questions métaphysiques'. Cited in Perroud, 'Quelques notes sur le Club de 1789', p. 261.
renowned for their intellectual or academic accomplishments, the club tried to encourage such accomplishments with publications, open discussion and, echoing a typical activity of the academies, essay competitions. Similarly, the image of an international academy is suggested by the fact that foreign potentates were invited to become honorary members of the club, including Stanislaus, Washington and Franklin. In seeking the honorary membership and support of a foreign prince, the Société de 1789 continued an ancien régime tradition of scientific and literary academies seeking the patronage of men of influence. This tradition grew out of the close alliance between the academies and the monarchy during the ancien régime.

The founders of the Société de 1789 failed to organize the machinery of a political party and find ways to foster and mobilize mass support. Influenced by the belief that factions were inherently destructive and that rational, enlightened discussion was a superior alternative to political rivalries, the club was organized more as an academy than as a political party. The rhetoric of the Société, which stressed its non-partisan nature, was partially a smoke-screen to hide a real political agenda, but was also believed by many members who shared Condorcet’s vision of a rational political system where clear discussion would lead to the rule of ‘common reason’. The constitution and prospectus of 1789 made a conscious effort to connect to Enlightened political and social thought with efforts to consolidate the gains of the Revolution of 1789.

II

The founders of the Société de 1789 gave the club a broad mandate. It was to serve as a clearing house for Enlightened political and social ideas at the national and international level; monitor, if not become involved in, debates concerning the constitution and establishment of order in France; and educate France and the rest of Europe in the principles of Enlightened and representative government. Its activities were, in short, to be as wide ranging as those of its intellectual forbears, the Philosophes of the Enlightenment. The club may have failed in attaining the goals of becoming an Enlightened clearing house for Europe as a whole, but the contributors to the club’s Journal, and authors of papers published by the club, managed

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14 See, for example, the essay competition sponsored by the club announced in the Moniteur, 24 May 1790, 444.
15 Philip Mazzei: selected writings and correspondence, trans. and ed. M. Marchione (3 vols., Prato, 1983), ii. 333. These letters are translated from the original Italian by the editor. Only the first volume of the Italian edition of Mazzei’s letters, to 1789, has appeared: Lettres de Philippe Mazzei et du roi Stanislas Auguste de Pologne (Rome, 1982- ). Mazzei’s career is described in R. C. Garlick, Philip Mazzei, friend of Jefferson: his life and letters (Baltimore, Md, 1933).
to touch on a broad array of issues, from the abstract to the useful. Condorcet’s discussion on the competing interests of Paris and the provinces was followed, in the same number of the *Journal*, by Hassenfratz’s ‘Observations sur les mines’. The Société carried on the Enlightened tradition of combining the theoretical and the useful without clear distinction in much the same way as Diderot mixed philosophical and technical articles in the *Encyclopédie*. All subjects were open to scientific examination and rational analysis.

The most significant common thread in the writings of Société is the emphasis on reason in politics. Condorcet’s notion of the common or public reason was the key to his political and social theories from well before the Revolution. In his reception speech to the French Academy on 21 February 1782 he suggested that ‘en méditant sur la nature des sciences morales, on ne peut, en effet, s’empêcher de voir qu’appuyées comme les sciences physiques sur l’observation des faits, elles doivent suivre la même méthode, acquérir une langue également exacte et précise, acquérir un même degré de certitude’. He believed that reason in the form of scientific method could be applied to human activity and result in the same precision as natural science. It was towards this end that Condorcet developed a form of *mathématique sociale* which could be applied to political decision-making. The certainty of the moral sciences opened the possibility of a political organization that would harmonize rational interests in the Common Reason:

Le projet de rendre tous les hommes vertueux est chimérique: mais pourquoi ne verrait-on pas un jour les lumières, jointes au génie, créer pour les générations plus heureuses une méthode d’éducation, un système de lois qui rendraient presque inutile le courage de la vertu? Dirigé par ces institutions salutaires, l’homme n’aurait besoin que d’écouter la voix de son cœur et celle de sa raison, pour remplir par un penchant naturel les mêmes devoirs qui lui coûtent aujourd’hui des efforts et des sacrifices.

The sufficiently careful and reasonable creation of political institutions would allow the rule of reason without requiring a distinct moral character. Condorcet was concerned not merely to find the will of the greatest number of men in an assembly or a tribunal, but also to obtain results in collective decisions that were most conformable to the truth.

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16 *Journal de la Société de 1789*, 6 (10 July 1790).
17 Condorcet, ‘Discours prononcé dans l’Académie française, le jeudi 21 février 1782, à la réception de M. le marquis de Condorcet’, *Oeuvres*, i. 392.
20 Ibid. p. 35.
Power, for Condorcet, was to be a function of truth and reason, and not of majority will. 

While Condorcet might have been the most important theorist of rational politics, he was by no means isolated. Philippe-Antoine Grouvelle argued that philosophical methods of reasoning should be the model for debates in representative bodies, a notion premised on the view that a law was ‘une vérité mise en action’:\footnote{P-A. Grouvelle, ‘Sur la délégation de l’exercice du droit de la guerre et de la paix’, *Journal de la Société de 1789*, 1 (5 June 1790), 49.}

\begin{quote}
J’ai vu quelquefois des philosophes se réunir pour discuter des matières épineuses. Quelle était leur méthode? Ils commençaient par définir les mots, puis rapprochait soigneusement toutes les notions positives du sujet, pour les comparer avec la nature des choses, et ne réduisaient la question à des éléments simples, qu’après l’avoir considérée sous le double rapport des principes inviolables, et des convenances nécessaires. Si un scrupuleux amour du vrai suffit seul pour inspirer de telles précautions, dans la recherche d’une vérité spéculative, que doit-on faire lorsqu’il s’agit de poser les fondemens d’une loi, c’est-à-dire, d’une vérité mise en action.
\end{quote}

Indeed, many laws required the consideration of a ‘foyer de lumières concentrées’ since the issues under debate were at least as complex as those speculative problems that philosophers examined. Grouvelle’s opinion should not be discounted as the idle writings of a marginal figure who was not speaking for the club. He was a secretary of the club, editor with Condorcet of the *Journal*, as well as a frequent contributor. The Enlightened conception of reason informed many of the political ideas of the members of the Société de 1789. Many accepted the proposition that scientific method, properly applied to public institutions and policy, could lead to harmonious and beneficial rule.

The frequency and seeming extremity of the declarations that politics could be reduced to an exact science is surprising. The chemist and tax farmer Lavoisier, for example, opened one of his discussions of the *assignats* with the assertion that it was time to assemble the truths from the debate and draw the consequences:\footnote{A. Lavoisier, *Addition aux observations de M. Lavoisier, député suppléant du bailliage de Blois, sur la liquidation de la dette exigible ou arriérée* (n.p., n.d. [1790]), p. 2.}

\begin{quote}
Aujourd’hui que la discussion, après avoir fait étinceler la lumière de toutes parts, ne ramène plus que les mêmes arguments, il est temps de rassembler les vérités éparses & de tirer des conséquences. 
Posons d’abord les faits qui sont convenus entre tous les partis: car dans ces sortes de discussions, où chacun n’a pour objet que
de chercher la vérité, il faut marcher ensemble le plus longtemps qu’il est possible & ne se séparer qu’à la dernière extrémité.

Lavoisier’s method was to start from agreed upon facts and to assume that everyone in the debate was looking for the truth. The possibility that in a debate where so many important players could gain or lose significant amounts of money in a speculative enterprise, defending individual, regional or social interests might be a primary motivation, or that any solution would be a matter of power and influence rather than truth, does not seem to have been taken seriously by Lavoisier. Similarly, Cérutti attacked the opponents of the assignats for not being rational, even though ‘les finances en étoient la science exacte et la géométrie’ of government and politics. ‘Cette géométrie’, he wrote,43

manque à la plupart de ceux qui écrivent aujourd’hui sur les finances. Ils semblent ne produire que les romans de l’espérance ou les satyres du désespoir. C’est faute d’idées simples et précises. Je vais donc commencer par éclaircir les trois questions sur lesquelles porte la dispute, et par donner des notions exactes . . .

The role of reason in the Revolution for Cérutti seems to have been paramount. In defending the nationalization of church lands, he argued that the abuses of the clergy were the main reason for the accumulation of so much wealth, and that attempts to prevent the loss of their lands by threatening universal destruction would fail because ‘la population crédule est devenue un Peuple raisonneur’.44 Two assumptions underlay the optimism of Lavoisier and Cérutti in reaching true conclusions to such an intractable problem: that politics and government were subject to rational analysis and programmes; and that the Revolution was, to a certain extent, the creation of a rational government, led by Enlightened men and motivated by an Enlightened nation.

Cérutti greeted the new political order, in 1789, with the declaration that the French were substituting ‘enfin la raison publique aux opinions factieuses, et des idées justes à des idées fausses ou exagérées’.45 Similarly, the marquis de Casaux outlined a notion of the ‘general reason’ in his discussion of the constitution. He wrote that ‘une Loi doit toujours etre la déclaration du resultat de toutes les connoissances qu’il est possible de recueillir sur l’objet à l’égard duquel il est nécessaire de statuer’.46 Though

44 Ibid. p. 4.
46 Casaux, Simplicité de l’idée d’une constitution et de quelques autres qui s’y rapportent, applications et conséquences (1789), p. 15. Many of the ideas that Casaux presented to the
he did not, in this text, refer directly to the notion of the common or public reason, Casaux mentioned the critical importance of the accumulation of reason in legislative bodies on a number of occasions. 'Le pouvoir législatif', he declared, 'résidé essentiellement et uniquement dans la masse de lumières qui existent dans la Nation, et il n’est possible de recueillir ces lumières que dans le Conseil, composé de Représentants de tous les intérêts'. 47 Casaux asserted the connection between lumières and liberty in absolute terms: 'sans lumières point de liberté, sans liberté point de lumières, sans lumières et liberté, point de propriété, point d’Assemblée Nationale'. 48 The general pronouncements of the desirability of reasonableness in political behaviour and the foundation of political sovereignty on constructions such as the ‘public reason’ were politically loaded notions in 1790. The contrast was drawn by a number of writers between the reason required of the National Assembly and the irrationality of those who attacked the Assembly or other elite groups. The politics of reason and truth found particular application to the defence of the parties of order in 1790 and must be interpreted in that context.

Grouvelle opened his discussion of the decree of 18 June 1790 suppressing the nobility and exterior signs of nobility with the declaration that law was not merely an expression of the general will, but also must be the view of the public reason: ‘la loi ne devroit pas être seulement l’expression de la volonté générale, mais il lui convient sur-tout d’être le voeu de la raison publique. Voilà pourquoi il faut qu’une discussion étendue et solennelle lui serve comme d’une préface nécessaire.’ 49 Grouvelle went on to argue that if legislators did not deliberate carefully and rationally, they would be acting as despots, who frequently confused truth and the movement of the passions. The National Assembly had the right to form decrees, but it also had the duty to discuss, for there was no ‘proposition assez simple pour n’avoir pas besoin d’être démontrée. Une Assemblée Nationale est faite pour prouver que deux et deux font quatre, si quelqu’un le nie.’ 50 The public reason was determined in the debates of the National Assembly which, it would seem, could reach conclusions that demonstrated the truth of proposed laws. And by implication Grouvelle suggested that these demonstrations could be as clear and as simple as the proofs of deux et deux font quatre. The legislators had a further duty to disseminate these truths to the population as a whole. The interest of the people, he argued, was best served by freeing them of their prejudices, instructing them of

Société de 1789 in his Aperçu de la constitution francaise, par un homme d’Amérique, et Réponse sommaire à tout ce qu’on a écrit et écrit en France et en Angleterre pour, sur et contre cette constitution (n.d. [1790]) are found in this longer discussion.

48 Ibid. p. 24.
50 Ibid.
their interests and of the new métier of being a citizen. He posed the rhetorical question: 'Le devoir du législateur n'est-il pas de veiller sur la conservation du bon-sens national, la plus précieuse partie de la santé du corps politique?'

The representatives of the nation were not only to preserve the 'national common sense' but were supposed to serve as the purveyors of 'social truths'. Grouvelle wrote:

les représentans de la nation ne sont pas seulement les architectes de l’édifice constitutionnel, ils doivent être aussi les hérauts des vérités sociales. Le sénat, le conseil de souveraineté, est encore un aréopage, un tribunal d’opinions, qui doit flétrir les erreurs dangereuses, dénoncer les préjugés anticiviques à la conscience et à la raison de tous les citoyens.

Thus, the two principal functions of the National Assembly both entailed the operations of rational government. The first, the creation of a constitution, would allow decrees to be nothing more than the 'proclamation des axiomes philosophiques'. More importantly, the National Assembly would serve as protector of the public reason by disseminating enlightenment to the population. It was because the people, Grouvelle went on to claim, 'n’est point éclairé qu’il faut montrer la lumière; c’est parce qu’il n’est point sensible aux atteintes portées à ses droits et à sa dignité, que ses mandataires réclameront pour lui'.

Grouvelle suggested that reason in a collective form was central to the creation of a free government. It was, however, a strictly elitist argument in favour of maintenance of the new political arrangements, since it presupposed an enlightened elite to enact and operate rational government. Opposition to the government was categorized as charlatanisme, or irrationality. Grouvelle's emphasis on the role of reason in the political realm carried with it a strong defence of existing social distinctions.

The rhetorical uses of the Société's view of political reason are important to consider, for it is here that the tensions between representative rule of the people and the rule of an enlightened elite comes to the fore. Grouvelle isolated the tensions of the Enlightenment conception of reason in politics when he wrote that a complex proposal 'à la vérité, ne peut sortir d’une assemblée nombreuse! Car la foule juge, mais ne conçoit point. L’empire du génie est oligarchique de sa nature. Il faut compter les voix, mais peser les avis; et c’est en pareil cas, qu’un homme n’en vaut pas un autre.' The contrast between counting voices and weighing opinions, where one man was not the same as the next, formed an important subtext

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid. p. 27.
to the discussions of the Société, and provided the underpinnings of the
defence of the emerging constitution and the authority of the National
Assembly.

The politics of reason in 1790 seemed to have failed to account for the
importance of irrational forces in political behaviour, and was marred by
association with the *ancien régime*. The ideals of *l'art social* and rational
politics tended to legitimate the claims that such an elite group made to re-
tain its hold on bureaucratic, financial and cultural power. In its attempt to
continue the culture of *ancien régime* politics, the Société de 1789
developed political theories which did not correspond to the aspirations of
more radical elements in Paris. The politics of reason in 1790 were those of
the salon and drawing-room, not the meeting hall and the *section*. By dis-
counting political rhetoric and declaring political passions as simple il-
legitimate irrationality, the Société failed to confront the new political
culture of the Revolution. The failure was both intellectual and political.
The composition of the club led naturally to elitist notions of politics
which were reinforced by an intellectual tradition derived from the
Physiocratic tradition of the Enlightenment. Men like Condorcet,
Grouvelle, Du Pont and Lavoisier sincerely believed in the development of
rational government, but they also benefited from a theory which would
have left an intellectual and social elite intact. Thus, the influence of
Enlightened notions of rational government on the political theories of the
Société de 1789 was complicated by intellectual concerns as well as the
interests of groups wishing to promote their own causes. The club thus at-
tracted Enlightenment liberals as well as those who feared that the Revolu-
tion would degenerate into anarchy.

The membership of the Société de 1789 was composed, for the most part,
of wealthy and influential men, reflecting the efforts of Condorcet and
Sieyès to establish an Enlightened elite which could stabilize and con-
solidate the gains of 1789. The members were attracted to the club for a
number of reasons. Many would have been attracted by the prospectus
which stressed the original public motivations for establishing the club: the
elaboration and dissemination of Enlightened social and political ideals.
Thus, joining the club can to some extent be considered an act of support
for such ideals. The practical political focus of the Société – forming an op-
position to the Jacobins, supporting moderate efforts to restore order –
was less explicitly mentioned by the founders of the club, but would also
have proved attractive to many members. Most of the individuals who
joined the club in the spring of 1790 probably did so because they believed
that the club would provide a forum for the rational discussion of political
matters and that the Société would be a force to restore order and halt the
Revolution which they thought had accomplished most of its objectives.
The membership of the Société de 1789 was drawn from ancien régime elites, including parlementaires, members of the academies, intellectuals, financiers, soldiers, aristocrats and bureaucrats. The intellectual goals and political moderation of the Société attracted members of many of the traditional elites. The clear identification of the Enlightenment with the Revolution made by members of the club suggests that the late Enlightenment’s transformation from a movement of political opposition to a force for reform in the institutions of the monarchy continued into the Revolution. As the Enlightenment became respectable and, beginning with Turgot’s ministry, more politically active, the programmes of reform gained more influence in many circles.

The membership list published by the club in April 1790 contains 416 names. This was over 200 members fewer than the 660 members that the club could enrol and that Mazzei suggests had joined by mid-June 1790. The membership list published by the club may have been an attempt to impress upon Paris and the nation that the Société de 1789 was attracting important and influential people in large numbers. Only ten members of the 420 members were drawn from the ranks of the first estate, including Sieyès, Talleyrand and Jean-Baptiste Dumouchel, rector of the Université de Paris. There were, of course, several Protestant clergymen, including Rabaut Saint-Étienne, but these must be classified as part of the third estate. Ninety members of the Société de 1789 were former nobles or, more correctly, former members of the second estate, in 1790. Finally, 210 members of the Société de 1789 were members of the third estate, leaving 110 members unclassified.

Not surprisingly, the political activity of the membership was very high. Nearly one-fifth (eighty-two) of the membership were deputies or alternates to the National Assembly. This figure is probably low, since it was only after the publication of the membership list that the Société offered free membership to deputies of the National Assembly. Representation in the Société was not evenly distributed among the estates, for only two of the Société’s deputies to the Estates General had been elected to represent the first estate, while twenty-nine members represented the nobility and thirty-eight were from the third estate. Thus, the club drew more members


\[ \text{Règlements de la Société de 1789. Information in this section is drawn from a database containing information on each member of the club. A partial listing of the membership database is found in Appendix 4 of Olsen, 'The politics of Enlightenment', pp. 641–84. Sources used and data capture procedures are discussed on pp. 157ff and notes.} \]

\[ \text{The relatively high proportion of individuals of unidentified social category is a result of the information provided in the membership list which typically included only the last name and a general street address for the member, though the latter information was not always provided. Problems of identification are discussed in Olsen, 'The politics of Enlightenment', pp. 164–7.} \]
from deputies of the second estate, as a percentage of deputies in the National Assembly, than from either the first estate or the third. The Société attracted a large proportion of liberal aristocrats in the National Assembly, along with an important contingent of deputies elected by the third estate. This suggests that the moderates in 1790 were attempting to continue the coalition between liberal aristocrats and influential members of the third estate which had been created by the Patriotes before the Revolution.

The members of the Société de 1789 were also very active in Parisian municipal politics. Forty-nine members of the Société served as electors in Paris between 1789 and 1791, and twelve of these were elected to the Estates General. Most electors were typically local notables who were active in politics and favourably viewed by the majority of active citizens (in 1790 and 1791) in their districts. While the political role of electors changed from 1789 to 1791, our interest in the members of the Société de 1789 who were elected to the Electoral Assemblies is related to opinion in local districts concerning particular groups. The number of members of the Société de 1789 who served as Paris electors increased during the period: twenty-six future members of the club were elected in 1789, twenty-three in 1790 and thirty-nine in 1791. Eighty-eight terms as elector were filled by sixty members of the Société de 1789, suggesting that the role played by club members was due less to personal tenure than to the appeal of moderates in the wealthier districts of Paris.

As in the Estates General, liberal professions and office-holders predominated in the socio-occupational composition of the Société de 1789. There were few manufacturers or owners of manufacturing concerns in the club. Unlike the National Assembly, however, it was financiers and bankers who were by far the largest group. Forty-four can be classified very broadly as bankers, representing some of the most important banking and exchange houses in the capital, including the Vandenyver, Walckiers, Thelusson, Ravel, Mallet, Lessert, Lecouteulx, Grand, Cottin, Boyd and Ker, and Berard. There are several possible reasons for the dominance of financiers and bankers in this breakdown. First, the Société drew a large proportion of its members, except for the deputies of the National Assembly, from Paris, which was the financial centre of the nation. Further, since many of the financiers and bankers had significant amounts of money invested in government securities and paper, they would have seen the rise to power of a moderate and fiscally conservative group as an important guarantee of their interests. Many of the financiers were Genevan

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38 Olsen, 'The politics of Enlightenment', pp. 171-2 shows the strong association of electors who were also members of the Société de 1789 representing the wealthiest sections of Paris. In contrast, R. B. Rose's discussion of the Parisian districts, *The making of the sans-culottes: democratic ideas and institutions in Paris, 1789-92* (Manchester, 1983) tends to concentrate on the poorest district in the city.

and Dutch exiles who had supported the popular parties in their respective nations and continued to support moderate liberal policies in France.

The membership of the Société de 1789 was drawn from several ancien régime groups dependent on the government before the Revolution for their livelihoods and status: royal administrators, parlementaires, financiers, intellectuals (frequently members of certain academies) and nobles serving in the military. Contemporary commentators were conscious that many of the important members of the club had been influential in the government before the Revolution. Prudhomme, for example, summarized Du Pont's pre-Revolutionary career, as part of a blistering attack on the ministériels found in the Société de 1789, in a single comment: 'Dupont, vrai balai d'anti-chambre sous Turgot comme sous Brienne, sous Calonne comme sous Necker, et de plus membre du club de 1789.' Further, Prudhomme argued that the club contained many 'jeunes ci-devant seigneurs et nos gens de lettres à pension sous l'ancien régime' who were there to improve their fortunes by supporting the court against liberty.

There seems to have been enough truth to Prudhomme's charges to make them stick. With certain important exceptions, such as Brissot and Sieyès, most of the members of the Société had been well established under the ancien régime. Indeed, the case of Du Pont, used by Prudhomme, was not unique among members of the Société de 1789. Charles-Pierre-Paul Savalette de Langes (1746–97), for example, came from a family which was at the centre of royal financial administration; and Louis-César-Alexandre Dufresne de Saint-Léon (1751–1836) worked for Savalette in the 1770s and 1780s. Thus, the charge by Prudhomme and others of a cosy relationship between ministers and members of the Société de 1789 was, like most good political invective, accurate enough to be effective, although this does not, by itself, suggest that the club was formed or financed by the ministry.

Royal administrators in the Société de 1789 ranged from the most influential to individuals who occupied minor posts. Frequently, future members of the Société entered into the government through family connections. Antoine-Léon-Anne Amelot de Chaillou (1760–1824) came from an important family involved in the Parlements and the royal bureaucracy since the time of Francis I. Personal connections were also important in gaining access to positions in the royal bureaucracy. Bertrand Dufresne

44 Révolutions de Paris, 56 (1790), 165. And he repeated the charge, a month or so later: 'Le sieur Dupont, député de Nemours, le Dupont du club ministériel de 1789, celui qui, comme on l'a dit, a circulé avec le porte-feuille de contrôleur-général en contrôleur-général' (Révolutions de Paris 61, 1790): 416.

45 Révolutions de Paris, 5 (1790), 25.

46 J. B. Bosher, French finances, 1770–1795 (1970), writes that Dufresne de Saint-Léon was 'one of the most remarkable' (p. 127) individuals of the few specialists to write concerning the state of French finances before the Revolution. Bosher describes him as one of a group of reforming officials who cannot be simply grouped with the Physiocrats or Philosophes (pp. 126–7).
(1736–1801) was placed in the banque de la Cour by de Laborde, beginning a long career in government finance helped extensively by Necker.

In addition to individuals in the direct service of the monarchy, there were a number of members of the Société de 1789 who had been indirectly attached to the royal government before the Revolution. Ten members of the club had been involved in tax farming before the Revolution, either as investors in the ferme générale, such as Lavoisier who was executed because of this connection in 1794, or as administrators of what was, for all intents and purposes, a private corporation collecting royal taxes: Jérôme Bergerot (b. 1748) and Pierre-Eloi Doazan and his son are examples.

Many members of the Société de 1789 were what Prudhomme called nos gens de lettres à pension sous l’ancien régime. The club could boast an impressive membership of Parisian writers and scientists, many of whom were members of ancien régime academies, including such well-known figures as Bailly, Chamfort, Condorcet, Lavoisier and Suard. Some fifty members of the Société de 1789 were active pre-Revolutionary intellectuals such as scientists, writers and functionaries. They were frequently connected to the high Enlightenment network of sinecures, academies and patronage positions, a socio-cultural elite characterized by Darnton as le monde. As the Enlightenment became established in the government, access to privileged positions and honours became a function of favour and influence as well as talent.

No less than thirteen members of the Société de 1789 were also members of the Academy of Sciences of Paris; thirteen were members of the Royal Society of Agriculture; six were in the Académie des Inscriptions et belles-lettres; and five were among the ‘immortals’ of the Académie française. Members of the Société de 1789 had also been in many other academies in France and abroad. David and Pajou had been admitted to the Académie de Peinture; Thouret, the brother of the four-time president of the National Assembly, had been admitted to the Medical Society of Paris; Cazaux was a corresponding member of the Royal Society in London and the Agricultural Society of Florence; Bitaubé had been admitted to the Academy of Berlin; and Broussonet, the perpetual secretary of the Royal Society of Agriculture, was also a corresponding member of the Royal Society in London. The positions held by the most prominent intellectuals of the Société de 1789 are well known: Condorcet had been employed for many years in the Mint, Lavoisier at the Salpêtrière, Lacépède at the Jardin des Plantes and Bailly at the Observatory. These members were frequently well compensated by the monarchy as well, as in the case of Chamfort, who was named secretary to Madame Elisabeth (Louis XVI’s sister) and given a pension of 2,000 livres during the 1780s. The ancien régime

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intellectuals who became members of the Société de 1789 were part of a Parisian cultural elite that had become accustomed to manoeuvre in the salons of the powerful and to make appeals to the government. As the Enlightenment became institutionalized, the most successful intellectuals, such as Condorcet and Lavoisier, themselves became patrons and protectors of younger and frequently, although not always, less talented men.

Many of the intellectuals associated with the Société de 1789 were members of the famous Masonic lodge, les Neuf Soeurs, during the years before the Revolution. Masonic ties among members went far beyond the intellectuals, however, as no fewer than thirty-seven members of the 1789 club belonged to at least one lodge. Members of the Neuf Soeurs included Bailly, Cabanis, Jean-Nicolas Démunier (a royal censor and secretary to the duc de Provence), Dufresne de Saint-Léon, Garat, Grouvelle, Lapépède, Moreau de Saint-Mery and Destutt de Tracy. Many members of the Société de 1789 belonged to several lodges during the ancien régime, reflecting a significant commitment to the Masonic movement that stretched across social boundaries. Bertrand Barrère, the lawyer and future regicide from Toulouse, belonged to the lodges Encyclopédique and Toulouse. Alexandre-François-Marie, vicomte de Beauharnois, belonged to four lodges: La Purète, Saint Sophie, Fidélité and Société Olympique. Jean-Paul Brissot, who had no claim to social position or rank, belonged to two lodges before the Revolution: La Fidélité and La Bienfaisance. While the Neuf Soeurs lodge was the most widely attended among members of the Société de 1789, other lodges provided more than one member to the club. Five members of the 1789 club were members of Olympique de la Parfaite Estime, including Charles-Louis-Victor de Broglie, La Fayette's brother-in-law, the marquis de Grammont, and the banker Lecouteulx de la Noraye. The extensive membership in Masonic lodges among members of the 1789 club does not, of course, suggest a conspiracy among members of the ancien régime elites. Rather, it suggests that Masonic democratic sociability provided yet another link among members of this elite group.

The Société de 1789 recruited its members from the financial, cultural, administrative and political elite of the early Revolution. These men were not strangers to government patronage and activity before the Revolution. They had dealt with the monarchy of the last years of the ancien régime in a wide variety of functions. Even more striking is the degree to which they shared reform ideas before the Revolution. Reforming the royal administration and applying liberal ideas before the Revolution was important to a wide number of members of the Société. This can be seen in La Rochfoucauld's Americanism, the liberalism of many of the expatriate financiers, and Pastoret's ideas of legal reform, published in 1788 when

44 L. Amiable, Une loge maçonnique d'avant 1789: les Neuf Soeurs (1897).
46 C-E. Pastoret, Des loix pénales (1788).
the procureur général of the Parlement of Paris became maître des requêtes. A liberal elite before the Revolution found, in the Société de 1789, a very similar liberal elite in the early phases of the Revolution. Although few realized it in 1790, enlightened liberals would not be able to contain the Revolution. 'Political virtue' rather than administrative merit would be the hallmark of the following years.

The actions of the Société de 1789 certainly suggest a political faction more than a philosophic circle. The most publicized and impressive activities of the club were not lectures, debates or useful works. Rather, they were dinners and harangues by moderate political leaders. The first of these was in celebration of the opening of the club's lavish quarters in the Palais Royal. On 15 May, the Moniteur carried a description of this meeting of 130 people held three days earlier. The article announced the formation of the Société de 1789 - so named to 'consacrer l'année de la révolution en France' - whose main goal was to develop, defend and propagate the principles of a free constitution and, in general, to lend its effort to the development of l'art social.

The Société de 1789 was, from its inception, certainly the party of order. Mazzei frequently expressed his feelings that the maintenance of good order and peace was both urgently needed and difficult to obtain. For example, he wrote to Stanislaus on 10 September 1790 that 'the pains taken by good citizens to maintain peace and order are inexpressible! They are as edifying as the intrigues of the two rival parties are detestable, each of them out to find what it wants in universal disorder.' The club itself stood for the maintenance of law and order. André Chenier published an essay entitled 'Avis au Peuple Français sur ses véritables ennemis' in the Journal de la Société de 1789 and as a separate pamphlet, in which he argued that the 'heat' and passion created by the just and legitimate insurrection threatened to destroy the entire Revolution. All Frenchmen wanted to carry the flag, display their patriotism and have a say in the creation of the new regime. Agitation and demonstration would benefit the public good by exciting 'une sorte d'émulation patriotique'. But such agitation, if taken too far, would become the soil in which political hatred and factionalism could take root. If we perceive, Chenier commented, when describing the symptoms of political factionalism,

67 Challamel describes the location in Les clubs, p. 415.
68 Moniteur, 15 May 1790, 368.
69 Philip Mazzei: selected writings, ii. 421.
71 Ibid. pp. 4–5.
les accusations graves, les imputations atroces se multiplier au hasard; si l'on voit sur-tout un faux esprit, de faux principes fermenter sourdement, et presque avec suite dans la plus nombreuse classe de citoyens; si l'on voit enfin aux mêmes instans, dans tous les coins de l'empire, des insurrections illégitimes, amenées de la même manière, fondées sur les mêmes méprises, soutenues par les mêmes sophismes; si l'on voit paroître souvent et en armes, et dans des occasions semblables, cette dernière classe du peuple, qui ne connoissant rien, n'ayant rien, ne prenant intérêt à rien, ne sait que se vendre à qui veut la payer, alors ces symptômes doivent paroître effrayans.

This kind of social upheaval, though Chenier did not distinguish between political and social unrest, posed a grave danger to the public good, because it weakened the nation in a pointless anarchy and rendered the legislators less effective. Finally, with such disorder, it was more difficult to identify and isolate real public enemies. The unrest in France was based on false principles, but Chenier went on to ascribe a social component to these false principles, for the lower orders of society were not sufficiently educated or enlightened to reason properly or to deduce the true principles of the Revolution. He wrote,72

à qui la pauvreté et une vie toute employée aux travaux du corps, n'ont pas permis de perfectionner leur entendement par ces longues réflexions, par cet apprentissage de la raison, par cette éducation de l'esprit, qui seule enseigne aux hommes à rappeler à des principes certains et simples toutes les actions de la vie humaine.

According to Chenier, the solution was simply to educate the people about the true principles of the Revolution: 'qu'il n'est de bonheur, de bien-être, de contentement sur la terre, sans amour de l'ordre et de la justice, sans obéissance aux loix, sans le respect pour les propriétés'.73 His fear of social disorder and the threat to property was well rooted in the social ideology of the Enlightenment, since the Philosophes never trusted the 'people' to respect either reason or property.74 The Lockean imperative of property as a guarantor of political rationality and interest was certainly one of the informing principles in Chenier's essay. Clearly, order for Chenier and the Société de 1789 meant the preservation of existing social and economic distinctions, where property-owners would continue to control the political institutions.

The concerns of the Société de 1789 were not, as suggested by Chenier's essay, purely abstract discussions of the threats to the Revolution. In

72 Ibid.
73 Ibid. p. 50.
September 1790, the Société took a strong and unpopular public stand concerning the repression of the mutiny of the garrison at Nancy by General Bouillé. The club expressed its gratitude and congratulations to the department of the Meurthe, the municipality of Nancy, the national militia and the troops of the line, whose ‘fidélité courageuse a rétabli la paix et les loix dans la ville de Nancy’. The first pages of the communiqué were a blistering attack on the mutineers and on all seditious groups who counselled attacks on legitimate powers. These implacable and perverse enemies of the people had completely destroyed legal power by defaming all public officials, and rendered the representatives in the National Assembly suspect by forcing them to employ ‘une rigueur nécessaire’. Could the mutineers be considered Frenchmen, since they had broken the ‘pacte social’ that bound the nation together? No, the Société declared, and the punishment of the ‘enfans paricides, c’est le devoir sacré des vrais et fidèles enfans de la patrie’. The Société congratulated the victors at Nancy, by pointing out that they had not only done their duty, but also pointed the way to the continued preservation of the nation, suggesting that the Société approved of the use of force to crush all rebellions. The Société declared that habitual hostility to authority would result in anarchy. Thus, the restoration of order at Nancy was placed in the centre of a broader struggle to halt what the members of the Société de 1789 saw as the threat of anarchy. Properly regulated by the constitution and the law, power was no longer inextricably linked to arbitrary action as it had been under the ancien régime. Rather, the exercise of legitimate power opened up the possibility of illegitimate revolts, a process which the Société de 1789 felt was defined by the constitution. The club defended law and order by linking them to the process of drafting the constitution and to the individuals who were so engaged. Clearly, the Société de 1789 wanted to confine the Revolution to the gains which were then being drafted into the constitution; these would define the law and limits of the legitimate use of power. While the constitution was being drafted, the National Assembly was the sole possessor of legitimate authority.

There was, however, a surprising lack of agreement on many of the issues being addressed by the club. Mazzei identified this as the central cause of its political impotence. The Italian resigned from the governing committee of the Société de 1789 on 27 September 1790, although he remained a member during the next year, because he was dissatisfied with the progress of the club. Mazzei wrote that he had joined to promote the
common good: 'But when inactivity, lack of energy and even union render talents and uprightness itself useless, a man made the way I am needs to wash his hands of it.' On 29 November 1790, he again pointed out to Stanislaus that the talent and character of the members of the Société de 1789 were certainly impressive, 'enough... if there had been courage to make use of them and union... to destroy forces much superior to those wicked extremists of the two parties could have mustered.' Mazzei's stinging indictment was accurate.

The leadership of the Société was split on both ideological and personal grounds. Although the club was committed to the preservation of the constitutional monarchy under Louis XVI and the ratification of such a constitution, many members were certainly not loyal to the Crown. Condorcet's ambiguous position concerning the monarchy in 1790 is a good case in point. In his most developed constitutional work, *Essai sur la constitution et les fonctions des assemblées provinciales* (1788), the king was given no noticeable role in the constitutional organization, and was, in fact, very rarely mentioned. Even when the *Philosophe* did mention the monarch in this treatise, it was always in a purely passive role. Condorcet would write in September 1792 that he had decried the absurdity and dangers of monarchy since July 1791, but he went on to assert that a republican could preserve monarchy until its treachery was clearly seen or until it could be eliminated without upheaval. Condorcet's adherence to constitutional monarchy was questionable in 1790. He was willing to preserve the monarchy, but would have preferred, it would seem, a republic. Condorcet's ambivalence on a matter of such fundamental importance to the policies of the club he helped to create must be contrasted with the very strong pro-monarchical stances adopted by many other members of the Société. Bailly, La Rochefoucauld and La Fayette all remained staunch constitutional monarchists. Thus, the leaders and founders of the Société de 1789 did not agree even on issues as vital as the role of the monarch in France, hardly a good basis for an effective political pressure group.

By design, the club was made up of men of money, position and influence. They were actively trying to 'restore order' in a situation where political radicals and the lower classes were appropriating power to themselves. However, the authorities, and more particularly, certain ministers, created

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79 *Philip Mazzei: selected writings*, ii. 448.
80 Ibid. ii. 469.
81 Condorcet, 'Essai sur la constitution et les fonctions des assemblées provinciales' (1788), *Oeuvres*, viii. 129.
82 Letter to the *Chronique de Paris*, 5 Sept. 1792.
problems for moderates, since their actions and intentions were already suspect. In this context, Fillipo Mazzei wrote on 17 September 1790 to Stanislaus that the Société was heavily involved in defending the policies of the current ministry, a dangerous course which could alienate popular opinion. A month later, Mazzei expressed his belief that the Société de 1789 had indeed struck a poor alliance with a ministry that was either stupid or treasonous. Mazzei felt that, in any event, the Société de 1789 was caught in a shrinking middle position between the Enrages and those ‘idiots of aristocrats’.

Our Club, besides lacking energy and activity, never was wary enough. The minister’s conduct was no better and among the reasons for regret there is a very grave one against M. de la Luzerne who was unpardonably remiss in the Brest matter. Those idiots of aristocrats, for their part, miss no chance to show that they wish a counterrevolution and that they hope for it. Their pieces of imprudence are huge and numberless ... It is nothing to wonder at, therefore, if the extreme Enrages are winning since all the others are conspiring in their favour. I cannot get over it.

The problem, Mazzei argued, was not that there was resistance to restoring order in Paris and the provinces, but that every effort to halt the Revolution was identified with counter-revolution by the extremists; and supporters of the Crown, by their counter-revolutionary sympathies, gave ample reason for fear.

This was, of course, the consistent complaint of many of the centrist groups formed during the Revolution. The defence of order, which the Société de 1789 wanted to promote, as we shall see, was quickly used by radicals to attack the club. Mazzei, a shrewd observer of events, saw that the suspected complicity of the ministry in a potential reaction made the identification of the Société de 1789 with the conservatives all the more persuasive and dangerous. But other than decrying conservatives for their shortsightedness and unproductive intransigence, there was little the Société de 1789 could do, in Mazzei’s opinion, to preserve the centre.

The Société de 1789 attracted a number of formidable opponents on both poles of political opinion, none of whom was more vitriolic than Marat. Returning to France in May 1790, after having spent several months hiding from French authorities in England for his attacks on Necker, Marat continued his political agitation. On 14 July 1790, he published the Infernal projet des ennemis de la Révolution in pamphlet form, then reprinted it in L’Ami du Peuple two days later. In this diatribe, Marat intimated that

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Philip Mazzei: selected writings, ii. 426-7.

Ibid. ii. 448-9.

Ibid. ii. 414-15.
the Société de 1789 was the centre of a vast political conspiracy to place political control of France in the hands of the enemies of the nation.16

C'était aux Jacobins que se préparaient les discussions et souvent les décrets de l'Assemblée nationale. Par une suite de sordes menées des ennemis de la Révolution, toutes les affaires se sont portées au club de 1789. C'est là où se prépare le travail de la cour et de l'Assemblée, mais les membres de ce club ne sont pas tous initiés; c'est dans un comité secret que se traitent les grandes affaires, c'est là qu'on a résolu de changer totalement l'administration, changement qu'on vient d'annoncer dans quelques feuilles du jour, pour y préparer les esprits.

Judging by Marat's description of who would be appointed to important positions in this new administration, it seems that he believed that many of the most prominent members of the Société de 1789 were members of this secret committee. Like most good political invective, Marat's charge of a 'secret committee' was not entirely inaccurate. Mazzei mentions some kind of separate reunion permitted by the Société made up of members who broke away from the Jacobins during the summer: 'since there were about 30 who were also members of the National Assembly, our Society allowed them to meet by themselves in our rooms if they thought it advisable'.17 What was discussed in these separate meetings is unknown, but Marat was certainly willing to speculate that those present were planning to form a new ministry.18 Marat identified the Société de 1789 not with enlightened philosophizing, but with the most partisan of political activities, a secret conspiracy to promote the favoured members of that institution into the ministry.

The opponents of the Société de 1789 did not hesitate to attack the club for its stand on the Nancy affair. In Révolutions de France et Brabant Desmoulins, certainly no supporter of the club earlier in the summer, viciously attacked in the club for its congratulatory message to the municipality of Nancy: 'on sait que le Club de 89 reçut avec des cris de joie la nouvelle du massacre de Nanci, de 3000 Français, qui suppliaient, ce sont les termes du procès verbal de Castella et de Vigier, d'entendre leurs propositions de soumission'.19 Desmoulins expressed outrage at being named one of the écrivains sanguinaires20 by the moderates of the Société, and declared that their support for the violent repression at Nancy revealed them as the 'men of blood'. He drove this point home to his readers by

17 Philip Mazzei: selected writings, ii. 414.
18 Marat, 'Infernal projet', p. 197.
19 Révolutions de France et Brabant, 43 (1790), 187.
20 Ibid. 41 (1790), 81.
suggesting that the soldiers executed at Nancy had been hanged for not shooting patriots, like the readers of *Révolutions*: 'Danserons-nous comme les modérés, les modérateurs de 89, autour de cette roue, de ces 28 potences, pour des soldats dont le véritable crime peut-être fut, aux yeux de leurs officiers, d'avoir dit les premiers, au Champs de Mars, qu'ils ne feroient point feu sur NOUS?'

The principal suspicion, however, was that the club was home for a number of former aristocrats and wealthy individuals. Prudhomme declared in *Révolutions de Paris* that 'les intrigans, les ambitieux d'argent ou de pouvoir se saisirent d'un Club de 1789, qui existait déjà obscurement, et y attirèrent plusieurs membres de celui des Jacobins, en leur persuadant qu'ils n'y avoient pas assez d'influence, ou que ce Club était vendu au parti d'Orléans'. Many had joined the Société de 1789 for financial gain: 'Rien n'est plus simple: cette voie mènera à la fortune.' Furthermore, the *Révolutions de Paris* declared that the Société de 1789 was influenced by the court and the ministers of Louis XVI. Calling the club a *clapier ministériel*, the journal went on to declare 'guerre éternelle aux vils esclaves de la Cour, aux ambitieux et aux faux patriotes!' Early on, the rumours circulated in Paris that the Société was secretly receiving money from one or more ministers in order to pay the rent on the Palais royal quarters and other expenses.

Robespierre argued that the aristocrats of the Société de 1789 speculated on the Revolution in France rather than opting for the reaction at Koblenz. This, he suggested, was as dangerous as the external enemies, but more inscrutable and harder to detect. The radical attacks homed in on the Société's most vulnerable points: the elite composition of the club and the perception that it supported counter-revolutionary measures which would halt the extent of the Revolution.

The presence of a large number of bankers led to other, seemingly well-founded, charges. Desmoulins suggested that the fiscal policies supported by many of the members of the Société de 1789 were an attempt to profit from the Revolution. Club members opposed issuing small *assignats*, Camille argued, because they wanted to profit from the nationalized property of the clergy.

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1. Ibid. 43 (1790), 189.
2. *Révolutions de Paris*, 5 (1790), 20. This appears in a five-page denunciation of the club titled *Le Club de 1789*.
3. Ibid. p. 23.
4. *L'Ami des Patriotes*, 2 (4 Dec. 1790), 43 reports that the 'miserable libelle, intitulé Compte rendu par M. Dubois de Crancé' charged that the ministers were paying for the expensive dinners the club held. *Révolutions de Paris*, 5 (1790), 21, arguing that the club was founded as a plot by the ministry, suggests that the rent of 24,000 livres would have required that all members pay for membership, 'si la bourse ministérielle ne subvenoit avec des assignats aux frais de cet établissement'. I have not been able to locate *Compte rendu par M. Dubois de Crancé*.
Il est écrit sur la porte de 89, que *les petits poissons seront toujours mangés par les gros*, et que les avantages, ainsi que l'autorité du gouvernement, doivent aller *de bas en haut*. C'est pourquoi 89 ne veut pas entendre parler des petits assignats. De quel droit, dit Dupont, l'ami du peuple, de quel droit des hommes qui ne sont pas citoyens actifs, veulent-ils jouir d'un papier national, profiter de la vente des biens du clergé, et avoir aussi leurs assignats?

Underlying this chain, however, was the further charge that many of the members of the Société de 1789 were actively promoting the establishment of a bank from which they would profit:

> On doute que les meilleurs raisons du monde fassent passer les petits assignats, parce que 89 n'en veut point, et Brissot nous révèle pourquoi 89 ne veut point des petits assignats. C'est que M. Beaumetz, Chapelier, l'évêque d'Autun etc, etc, sont intéressés dans cette caisse patriotique qui depuis quelques jours inonde le public de son prospectus.

In fact, the charge that many members of the Société de 1789 had direct financial interest in the operation of a national bank was not so very far from the truth, for many of the club's members stood to benefit from Necker's original plan to establish the *Caisse d'Escompte* as a national bank in Paris. The conversion of the *Caisse d'Escompte* into a kind of national bank would have guaranteed the profits of stockholders and administrators, a number of whom became members of the Société de 1789. A case in point is Jean-Jacques Lecouteulx du Molay who was 'l'un des principaux banquiers de Paris' and had been an administrator of the *Caisse d'Escompte* from 1778. Similarly, Jean-Baptiste Vandenyver was on the administrative council of the *Caisse* from 1789 to 1792, and his eldest son had been involved from 1778. Given the instability of contemporary fiscal arrangements, it is not surprising that a number of papers read to the Société de 1789 concerned the organization of state finances. This intense interest in the financial affairs of the government was due, in large part, to the direct interest which many of the members had in the details of the organization of the nation's fiscal affairs. Indeed, there may have been a concerted effort by a number of bankers and financiers to influence the most important members of the Société de 1789 to support measures in which they had direct financial interest.

The liberal and pro-American sympathies of notable members of the Société were also used against the club by conservative critics. In June 1790, there appeared an anonymous pamphlet carrying the title

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97 Ibid. p. 488.
Denonciation à toutes les puissances de l'Europe d'un plan de conjuration contre sa tranquillité générale. Par une association formée à Paris sous le nom de club de la propagande. The anonymous author wildly denounced an American-based 'conspiracy' to destabilize Europe. We have seen, the author declared,\(^{100}\)

le spectre pâle et maigre de l'insurrection, sortant d'une terre ingrate, & du milieu d'enfans rebelles & patricides, croître & s'élever en un colosse fastueux, qui posant un de ses pieds sur l'hémisphere qui l'enfanta, essaya de l'autre de franchir l'Océan, pour porter ses ravages sur celui-ci.

By preaching equality and liberty, it was said that the Americans believed that they could increase their population and strength at the expense of the European powers; this was 'le projet de soumettre l'ancien au nouveau monde'.\(^{101}\) Already this conspiracy had destroyed France and, by implication, upset the balance of power in Europe. The author argued that pro-American propaganda had tricked the people:\(^{102}\)

Les monstres! Ils ont égaré le peuple par deux mots qui l'ont toujours rendu la dupe des fourbes = égalité, & désobéissance = l'un, ils le lui ont présenté comme un droit naturel; l'autre, comme un moyen légitime d'y rentrer. = Il ne connoit pas, ce malheureux peuple, le pouvoir magique de ces deux mots, qui ont couvert la terre de crimes & de sang.

To this denunciation the author appended a slightly annotated copy of the first ten pages of Siéyès's Ébauche d'un nouveau plan de Société patriotique under the title Plan de la société prétendue patriotique, qui s'est formée à Paris, sous le nom de Club de la Propagande. The author of this denunciation of an American 'conspiracy' implicated the Société de 1789 as one of the associations through which this dangerous ideology would be propagated.

The Société de 1789 was thus attacked by radicals and conservatives, with the most devastating comments coming from writers such as Robespierre, Marat, Prudhomme and Desmoulins. They attacked the club for its elite composition, its support for conservative measures, association with financiers who stood to benefit from the disorder of Revolutionary finances, and the number of members connected with the ancien régime bureaucracy. The waves of critical commentary by popular writers were highly effective. By the late autumn of 1790, the club was discredited among many deputies in the National Assembly and in popular opinion.

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\(^{99}\) Anonymous, bearing the imprint Au congrès des souverains, 1790.

\(^{100}\) Ibid. p. 2.

\(^{101}\) Ibid. p. 4.

\(^{102}\) Ibid. pp. 15-16.
On 4 December 1790, *L'Ami des Patriotes* carried a long discussion of the failure of 1789 club. The anonymous author expressed surprise that the club had missed so many opportunities to exercise influence and gave a perceptive account of its failings. The significance of this 'post mortem' is that it appeared in a journal edited by Adrien Duquesnoy, with the cooperation of François-Emmanuel Toulongeon, both of whom were members of the Société, suggesting that it represented an analysis of the failure of the club by certain of its most influential members.

The author argued that the Société de 1789 had been well attended by deputies soon after its foundation, but that by late 1790 the club attracted very few members of the National Assembly to its discussions. Thus a decline occurred despite the great advantages which the Société had over all of the other clubs, including 'une très-grande indépendance, une liberté illimitée d'opinion; chacun y pense à sa manière, & nul commande la pensée de son voisin'. This freedom attracted many among 'les hommes le plus éclairés' of the capital and foreign visitors to Paris as well as individuals distinguished by birth and status, but the club became unpopular in spite of the fact that 'elle compte parmi ses membres les hommes qui ont dicté le plus de décrets à l'assemblée'.

The article identified many reasons for the decline of the Société de 1789. The club publicly announced its establishment 'pour lutter contre les aristocrates & les factieux' but had never attacked conservatives with nearly the vigour with which it had attacked the radicals. The author complained that 'ils ont fait le décret sur la paix & la guerre; . . . ils ont formé l'opinion publique sur l'affaire de Nancy; mais à des intrigues actives & soutenues, ils n'ont ordinairement opposé que des plaintes et des regrets'. Even more damaging was the club's failure to act with resolution: they never demonstrated real character in difficult circumstances. The club had little influence and did not deserve any because 'elle s'est constamment conduite avec foiblesse & gaucherie pour attaquer des ennemis qui ont de l'audace & de l'adresse . . . il faut qu'elle veuille avec fierté & fermeté pour produire de bons effets'. Furthermore, the selection of members was too limited and the club admitted too many individuals 'connus par leurs principes peu populaires, & par leurs liaisons avec les ministres anciens'. Wealthy men had been selected, in part to maintain the club in its lavish surroundings. Even in these times of turmoil, the

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103 Other individuals involved in *L'Ami des Patriotes* who did not want to be mentioned probably included Sieyès, Dufresne de Saint-Léon and Carpentier, again, all members of the club. It is possible that the article was written by Toulongeon, 'qui lui [Duquesnoy] avait fourni deux *Essais sur les clubs* . . . ' See M. Tourneux, *Bibliographie de l'histoire de Paris pendant la Révolution française* (5 vols., 1894), ii. 603.


105 Ibid. p. 45.

106 Ibid. p. 44.
author continued, the discussions avoided practical politics: nearly all the discussions 'roulent sur des questions métaphysiques'. Finally, the organization of the club itself was called into question:

Il est certain que la composition même de cette société est la cause principale pour laquelle on ne la fréquente pas. Il est difficile d'imaginer qu'on fondera jamais une société populaire, quand il faudra payer cinq louis pour y être admis, quand ses séances se tiendront dans un local très-bien décoré, quand on y gardera des formes de politesse à charge dans tous les temps & dans tous les lieux, mais sur-tout dans un temps de révolution, dans un club de révolution.

The old forms of sociability could no longer coexist in the new political culture, a point which the editor of L'Ami made again several months later. Commenting on the differences between the Jacobins and the 1789 club, he wrote: 'les jacobins font un parti; quelle que soit l'opinion qu'on doit concevoir de plusieurs membres de 1789, il est au moins certain que la société ne fait pas un parti, & que pourvu qu'on y professe l'amour de la liberté & le respect pour les lois, on y est bien venu'. Underlying the author’s commentary was his surprise and consternation that the most enlightened and influential members of the Parisian and French elite proved to be unable to establish an effective opposition to the Jacobins or to make a significant impact on the political alignments in 1790.

The comments in L'Ami des Patriotes in December 1790 suggest that some members of the Société de 1789 were aware of the club’s most important failings. These ranged from the failure of the leadership properly to exploit the club’s strengths to the suggestion that the old forms of political organization were simply inadequate to the new realities of the Revolution. The article suggested that the club was still capable of being useful to the patriots' cause, but this was probably unrealistic, given the stinging indictment of the failures of the Société de 1789. Moreover, the editors of L'Ami des Patriotes had to establish their own journal to express the moderate patriot opinion which they accused the Société of failing to propagate. Observers such as Camille Desmoulins, who believed at one point that the success of many members of the Société de 1789 in the municipal and departmental administration was a sign of its influence, confirmed the sentiment expressed in L'Ami des Patriotes that the club was finished. Révolutions de Paris declared in late November 1790 that 'les véritables patriotes sauront empêcher que le Club de 89 ne renaissa de ses cendres'.

A rump of the Société de 1789 survived into the summer of 1791 when it joined with the Feuillants after witnessing the defection of both of its

107 Ibid. p. 41.
109 Révolutions de Paris, 54 (1790), 62.
founders, Condorcet and Sieyès, back to the Jacobins in early 1791. The papers published by the club ceased to appear in February 1791 and there is little documentation concerning the club from the winter of 1791 until its dissolution. The funeral procession of Mirabeau, for example, was the occasion of a public appearance of the club, but there were few such instances. Mazzei suggests that the club continued to meet through the summer of 1791, reporting to Stanislaus of events that occurred outside of the club on 17 July 1791. By the spring of 1791, however, the club ceased to exercise an impact on Parisian opinion and withered away without significant notice.

The failure of the Société de 1789 was not merely political, however, but came from the basic assumptions concerning liberal politics that can be found in the organization of the club. The Société de 1789 was patterned after the institutions of the ancien régime, such as the academies, to which many members of the club had belonged. The membership of the Société de 1789 was blind to the development of mass politics. The presentation of scholarly discussion papers to a small, elite group of influential individuals was an essential mechanism of reform during the ancien régime, but was ill adapted to the new Revolution. Grouvelle's view that in complicated matters, weighing of opinions rather than counting votes would result in better decisions underlies the constitution of the Société de 1789. It was this adherence to old forms of political discourse and political sociability which prevented the Société from recognizing and responding to the political culture being developed in the Jacobin clubs and in the sections of Paris. Indeed, the emphasis placed by the club on the role of reason in politics legitimated the existence of elite groups who would lead the political process.

The membership of the club had considerable experience in the government of the ancien régime. Indeed, this experience was not limited to the bureaucrats, lawyers and financiers who made up a substantial portion of the membership of the club. Rather, many of the intellectuals in the Société de 1789, such as Du Pont de Nemours, Condorcet and Lavoisier, had extensive experience in government. The typical assertion that the Enlightenment was an abstract and impractical movement was not true of the generation of Philosophes and their protégés who took control of the academies and the bureaucracy. The expertise of late Enlightenment intellectuals was a potential asset for a reforming monarchy. Furthermore, a large proportion of the members of the Société de 1789 had experience dealing with the government, in the financial services supporting the Crown, the judiciary, and even the military. The politics they learned, however, was that of the bureaucracy and corridors of influence. Condorcet's positions in the Academy and the Mint, for example, were a

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110 See Moniteur, 6 Apr. 1791, 42.
111 Philip Mazzei: selected writings, ii. 602.
consequence of the patronage of famous and powerful men – Turgot and d'Alembert in his case – who lobbied other influential men in the bureaucracy and cultural institutions. The very success of some Enlightenment figures, from Turgot's administration onwards, in infiltrating the monarchy of the ancien régime contributed to their failure in the Revolution: they proved to be unable to adapt rapidly enough to the new political culture developed in the Jacobins and the Parisian sections. If it can be said that the intellectuals of the 1789 club were adept in bureaucratic politics, it comes as no surprise that the financiers and lawyers who joined the Société were even more comfortable in dealing with the monarchy before the Revolution. As men who exercised influence and power within many of the arenas of royal government, the members of the Société de 1789 learned to their cost that the nature of politics had changed dramatically with the formation of the National Assembly and the creation of political clubs in Paris.