

Michael L. Kennedy — *The Jacobin Clubs in the French Revolution: The Middle Years*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988. Pp. xi, 440.

In the second volume of his trilogy on Jacobinism, appropriately dedicated to the archivists of France, Michael L. Kennedy continues his important portrait of the revolutionary clubs. The story of the middle years spans the period from the opening of the Legislative Assembly, on 1 October 1792 until the Parisian insurrection of 31 May-2 June 1793, which deposed the Girondins and brought the Mountain to power. Organized topically, the book discusses such significant issues as the clubs' fluctuating membership, economic policy, mobilization for war, the role of anticlericalism and the press, the fall of the monarchy, federalist sentiment and the Girondin-Montagnard schism. As in volume one, Kennedy concludes with a valuable essay on archival sources.

In a field often characterized by harsh words and partisanship, Kennedy eschews theorizing. He prefers, as he states, "to recount what happened, to present the evidence" (ix). The strength of this approach is the impartiality, thoroughness and geographical scope of the research, which utilized archival evidence from Paris and 67 departments. Emerging from this patient work is a new perspective on the relationship of Jacobins in Paris to their counterparts in the provinces. In particular, Kennedy shows that there was a core of vital provincial clubs that were relatively independent of, and sometimes even more progressive than, the Parisian "mother society" until important organizational changes in the spring of 1793.

During this period, over 1,500 clubs operated, many of them ephemerally, throughout France. As one might have predicted, the composition of the clubs became less middle-class, though leadership remained in the hands of the literate elite. According to Kennedy, "the soul of a small society was likely to be the curé" (39), a finding that raises interesting questions about the role of Catholicism as a breeding ground for revolutionary ideology. Although some clubbists were freethinkers and Deists in the spirit of Rousseau, provincial Jacobins more typically supported the constitutional clergy, used Biblical texts to support their arguments and displayed a puritanical aversion to swearing and gambling.

In terms of economic policy, a number of provincial clubs abandoned a strict *laisser-faire* viewpoint quite early on. By the autumn of 1792, clubs in Marseille, Lyon, Dijon and La Rochelle had demanded price controls and regulations on the grain trade; the Parisian club began to accept such ideas only the following spring. Kennedy suggests that some of the initial support for economically liberal policies may have been generated from reverence for the law, a political concern, rather than solely from economic interest. His evidence raises the larger issue of the meaning of economic regulation for the bourgeoisie. What concretely did economic deregulation and reregulation mean for different groups within the bourgeois elite during the revolution? Should *laisser-faire* be used as the litmus test of what constitutes "bourgeois" economic policy?

Politically, the typical Jacobin was a "hawk" who favored a revolutionary war of liberation and was prone to a belief in conspiracy theories. According to Kennedy, it was primarily the use of the royal veto that converted these law-revering constitutional monarchists into reluctant republicans. Most clubs endorsed the death penalty for the king, but were dismayed, and sometimes confused, by the factionalism tearing apart the Parisian club and Convention after the trial. The most interesting section of the book deals with the political feud between the Girondins and Montagnards.

Kennedy supplies a useful corrective to works that equate Jacobinism with the centralizing, violent ideology of the Mountain during the Terror. In the winter of 1793, the majority of Jacobin clubs still had Girondist tendencies, and many expressed an ongoing hatred for “bloodthirsty” Montagnard leaders in Paris, like Marat and Robespierre. Highly respectful of the law, these Jacobins were horrified at the September massacres and impatient at the delays in drafting a republican constitution. Kennedy traces the decline in Girondin influence to French defeat in war and a rash of tactical errors. Apparently, some Girondins even supported sending Montagnard representatives on mission to the provinces as a way to rid the capital of their political rivals. Through their propaganda and reorganization of clubs, the militant representatives helped to tip the clubbists’ political allegiance back to the Mountain and to curtail sharply earlier provincial independence. By June 1793, a minority of radicals called the shots more than ever before.

While Kennedy’s depiction of the divisions within Jacobinism in this period is fascinating, his explanation for such schism is not fully satisfying. The author attributes the feud between Girondins and Montagnards to class consciousness and dismisses François Furet’s concern with ideology and power. It may be true, as Kennedy argues, that “popular” societies open to the lower-class members tended to be pro-Montagnard, but occupational identity was not necessarily an accurate predictor of political choices. The leadership of both Girondist and Montagnard clubs remained bourgeois and, as other research on federalism has shown, some artisans also participated in anti-Montagnard sectional revolts. One problem is that Kennedy treats rhetoric as a direct reflection of socio-economic status. It may be just as likely that some Jacobin leaders, themselves bourgeois, were using a new language of class in order to pursue their own goals — whether humanitarian, political or economic. Unfortunately, one is not always sure what these goals were, or what constituted the fundamental assumptions of the Montagnard and Girondin world views. It would have been helpful had Kennedy made some of the paradoxes of the period more explicit. The Girondins are usually considered more “moderate”, but despite their professed love of the law and their denunciation of Parisian riots and massacres, this group was not completely above using violence when it served their cause. Kennedy does a good job of portraying the suspicion of many provincial clubs toward the turbulent Parisian sections and dictatorially-inclined Montagnard leaders like Marat. But why, then, were other clubs from politically autonomous regions, like Marseilles and Lille, consistently pro-Mountain? Purges by representatives on mission help to explain part of the shift of Girondist local clubs back to the Montagnard fold. Yet, some club members seem to have been persuaded by the message of these radicals. Why? The answers to such questions will probably best be pursued in explicitly comparative local studies, like that of Hubert C. Johnson on the Midi, which delve into political struggles and develop a multi-faceted typology of revolutionary leadership from the ground up. Kennedy has provided a great service to historians in his rich narration of Jacobin organization, but it will remain to others to develop an explicit interpretive framework that illuminates fully his story.

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