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Freedom, and lessons from the French Revolution

By Elisa Barwick

The economic crisis must be addressed in order to restore basic human rights, civil and economic, and to prevent a descent into social chaos. There are no shortcuts. Without launching an economic recovery to benefit all citizens, any declaration of freedom or rights is mere words; or, at the hands of political saboteurs, can make the situation infinitely worse. The French Revolution (1789–99) is an example of the latter, with the intervention of British intelligence preventing an American-style revolution and precipitating a reign of terror which catalysed dictatorship.

When France signed a free trade agreement with Britain in 1786, it was already in deep financial trouble. Several wars had put it into heavy debt, including the American Revolution which France supported after having submitted in 1763 to a humiliating defeat by Britain in the Seven Years War. But instead of turning to the policies of Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Finance Minister (1661-83) to King Louis XIV, designed to turn France into an industrial nation, soon the entire "scientific aristocracy" built on the Colbert tradition was targeted for the guillotine, along with the aristocrats of birth (p. IV).

Most of the French population still lived under a feudal system, but with the American victory against the British they caught a glimpse of something better. "For the first time, thoughts of liberty, equity, and representation penetrated the minds of commoners…", wrote Harlow Giles Unger in his 2002 book, *Lafayette*. "Fiery young orators spurred them on—mostly ambitious young lawyers such as Maximilien Robespierre and **Georges-Jacques Danton**[1], commoners whose education taught them to envy those born to wealth and power. Mobs of illiterates who had never before thought of politics, let alone voiced opinions, called for the king's head, Calonne's [the finance minister's] head, anyone's head. … The mobs grew into small armies of 10,000 and 20,000 that marched to Versailles [where the King resided] to demand change." But the mob was deliberately whipped up by a British intelligence operation with reactionary and bloodthirsty rage, rather than solutions (p. III).

While the American Revolution had resulted from the young Republic's rebellious effort to introduce an economic system that would allow all citizens to progress, in explicit opposition to the British imperial framework which catered only to the elite, France was in a different situation. The "enemy" was not so clear. And the waters were muddied by a British Crown not about to let an American-style republic emerge on its doorstep. The form of Britain's imperial control shifted with the cessation of war with America, declared in the 1783 Treaty of Paris, with economic control becoming a primary pillar of a new era of imperialism. In the treaty's ratification hearing in the House of Lords, **British Prime Minister Lord Shelburne** demanded free trade as the basis for peaceful relations, uttering the cry, "Let every market be open!" Around the same time, his agent, economist Adam Smith, issued an updated version of his book *The Wealth of Nations* which also denounced French

The storming of the Tuileries Palace, 10 August 1792, by Jean Duplessis-Bertaux.

protection of industry based on the Colbert tradition as unfair to British manufacturers. Upon completion of the treaty, British ships immediately deluged American ports with cheap goods to stifle America's infant manufacturing industry. *Economic warfare* had commenced. Its model, free trade, was championed by key figures inciting revolution in France, including Swiss banker Jacques Mallet du Pan, who lobbied the French King to accept a free trade agreement with Britain, the Eden Treaty, under threat of a Swiss bank suspension of credit to France. Immediately thereafter, France, like America, was inundated with cheap British manufactures.[2]

Textiles, shipping, mining, and agriculture fell into deep depression and government budgets collapsed. By 1788 France was facing bankruptcy. Efforts at tax reform, financial cutbacks and new loans met with increased political backlash. The destruction, that year, of the grain harvest by massive hail storms—after two years of drought—was the last straw, with food shortages and 60 per cent price increases fuelling popular unrest. Foreign debt payments were suspended. Finance Minister **Jacques Necker** arranged large international loans through his banking networks in Geneva and London, putting France further at the mercy of powerful banking interests. An international banker himself, Necker was working closely with former East India Company director Thomas Walpole, an agent of Lord Shelburne. Necker, who had opposed French support for the American Revolution, now advocated fiscal reform and austerity in order that France regain the bankers' favour.

Despite being an absolute monarchy, France had an independent streak: it had militarily supported the American Revolution, with nobles such as the Marquis de Lafayette fighting on the ground and subsequently organising for France to follow America's example and adopt a constitution that would protect the rights of the people. Necker, on the other hand, demanded France adopt the British system of parliamentary monarchy. Necker's ally and cousin to King Louis XVI, Duke of Orleans Louis-Philippe, (who later renamed himself with a "common" name, Philippe Égalité, to appeal to the mob), began importing British-trained operatives to create popular support for overturning the French state. It was the attempt by the King to dismiss Necker, on 11 July 1789, that resulted in the storming of the Bastille, after Bastille cannons fired at citizens massing in the Paris streets to

1. Names in bold are discussed further in "Shelburne and Jefferson stoke chaos in France" (p. III).

2. See Almanacs, "Lessons from history: The Affair of the Necklace", *AAS*, 28 Apr. 2021; and "The Army Corps of Engineers Tradition: A crucial national science resource", *AAS*, 24 Nov. 2021.

demand Necker's return to power (p. III).

In addition to the economic crisis, scandals and corruption (some real, some contrived[3]) slammed the Royal Family at the head of government. Anarchists began to demand an end to *all* government, and Ministers were burnt in effigy.

In a letter to Lafayette, George Washington warned him, "I do not like the situation of affairs in France. Little more irritation would be necessary to blow up the spark of discontent into a flame that might not easily be quenched. … I caution you … against running into extremes and prejudicing your cause."

Gouverneur Morris, a US Senator and now American Ambassador to France, predicted that Lafayette's efforts to introduce American-style republicanism in France would result in "Tyranny" or "Anarchy". He felt that time and education (changing the "Habits and Principles of each Individual") over several generations was required to "bring forward Slaves to the enjoyment of Liberty". Instead, the "French Nation jumped at once from a mild Monarchy to wild Anarchy and are now in Subjection to Men whom they dispise."

Lafayette forged ahead, and with the help of **Thomas Jefferson** issued a "Declaration of the Rights of Man", modelled on the US Declaration of Independence. While Lafayette's intentions were pure, Morris observed that "Liberty runs away with their discretion… They want an American Constitution with the exception of a king instead of a president, without reflecting that they have not American citizens [self-reliant pioneers, as opposed to impoverished near-serfs] to support that Constitution …" (**Box**.) He was not sure that democracy could last in France, "unless the whole people are changed".

Shelburne's team continued to stoke the mob with lies and half-truths. Wrote Unger in his history: "Lafayette's document told them [the masses] that they were born equal to priests, noblemen, and kings, and, like beasts unleashed, they interpreted liberty as license and pursuit of happiness as plunder. Pamphleteers[4] added to the frenzy with charges that the Court had conspired with the nobility to withhold grain and starve the people. The presence of troops and cavalry at every bridge and along the major streets provoked still more rumours; a 'great fear' swept across France that the nobility had hired an army of foreign brigands to wreak vengeance on farmers and shopkeepers."

After Necker's firing, the mob burned and demolished custom posts and looted shops and homes. Army regulars who refused to fire on the mob were jailed, and the mob smashed through prison gates to free them. Arms, gun powder and grain were stolen. Murdered prisoners were dragged through the streets and hung on lampposts.

Wrote Lafayette, who still held the trust of the people: "I have already saved the lives of six people about to be hanged in different sections of the city. The people are insane, drunk with power; they will not listen to me forever. As I write … eighty thousand people have surrounded the Hotel de Ville and cry out that we are lying to them, that the troops are not withdrawing, that the king must come … The minute I am gone, they lose their minds. My situation is unlike anyone else's. I reign in Paris, but I reign over an angry population aroused by evil conspirators."

As head of the Paris National Guard, Lafayette, who was pushing for a new National Assembly and American-style constitution, tried to quell the rioting—to no avail. The economic collapse worsened and with no policy to address it the mob was inconsolable. Agitators deployed from Geneva, Switzerland, many on retainers from British intelligence, incited them to arms.

By the second anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, rioters had lost any sense of who the enemy was and were slaughtering each other in the streets. Stated French writer and Shelburne asset, **Jean-Paul Marat**: "A year ago, five or six hundred heads would have been enough to render you free and happy. Today it will take ten thousand. In a few months, you will produce a miracle and chop off one hundred thousand heads."

After the King was beheaded, Lafayette, who had once been virtually the sole figure respected as a broker for the people's rights, was turned upon, and after fleeing to Austria was caught and imprisoned in a Prussian fortress for five years. ("Beethoven's Fidelio and the fight for true freedom", *AAS*, 26 February 2020.)

As Morris had correctly forecast, the chaos and bloodshed of the revolution set the stage for dictatorship, with foreign armies pouring into France, and the November 1799 coup d'état of Napoleon Bonaparte, who restored calm not with constitutional freedoms but with a steel fist.

3. "Lessons from history: The Affair of the Necklace" covers the Affair of the Queen's necklace, an example of a contrived scandal. (Footnote 2)
4. From Shelburne's stable of agents (p. III).

Democracy cannot be compelled

This exerpt from a 1789 letter written by Gouverneur Morris draws a parallel with today's Anglo-American regime-change operations, highlighting the notion that you can't impose freedom or democracy in an instant, or from the outside.

Our American example has done them good; but like all novelties, liberty runs away with their discretion, if they have any. They want an American Constitution, with the exception of a King instead of a President, without reflecting, that they have not American citizens to support that constitution. Mankind sees distant things in a false point of light, and judge more or less favourably than they ought; this is an old observation; another, perhaps as old, but which all are not in the position to feel, is, that we try everything by the standard of preconceived notions; so that there is an impossibility almost of knowing by description a distant people or country. Whoever, therefore, desires to apply, in the practical science of government, those rules and forms which prevail and succeed in a foreign country, must fall into the same pedantry with our young scholars, just fresh from the university, who would fain bring everything to the Roman standard.

Different constitutions of government are necessary to the different societies on the face of this planet. Their difference of position is, in itself, a powerful cause, as also their manners, their habits. The scientific tailor, who should cut after Grecian or Chinese models, would not have many customers, either in London or Paris; and those who look to America for their political forms are not unlike those tailors in the island of Laputa, who, as Gulliver tells us, always take measure with a quadrant. He tells us, indeed what we should naturally expect from such a process, that the people are seldom fitted.

Shelburne and Jefferson stoke chaos in France

The following text is from Chapter 5 of Who We Are: America's Fight for Universal Progress, from Franklin to Kennedy, Volume I, *by American historian Anton Chaitkin, available from Amazon. Footnotes have been omitted or incorporated into the text.*

Lord Shelburne's roster

Lord Shelburne. Photo: Wikipedia

Lord Shelburne [William Petty, 2nd Earl of Shelburne], as *de facto* head of British intelligence, commanded a global strategic force in banking, imperial trade, espionage, and political intrigue. Shelburne assembled a team of operatives for action across the English Channel. A number of his Genevan agents had moved into Paris in 1788.

It must be kept in mind that Shelburne was in touch with the American ambassador to France, Thomas Jefferson, while this offensive was proceeding, until Jefferson left Paris in August 1789.

[English philosopher] Jeremy Bentham was the team leader. After his attack on the American Declaration of Independence, denying the existence of natural or God-given rights, Bentham had gone further, saying that individual human beings can act only in response to their own pleasure or pain. He denied any inherent right and wrong, ruling out all motivations based on higher ideas, all religion, all philosophy beyond aesthetics. Bentham's soulless man is the perfect subject for manipulation by an oligarchy.

While Bentham was in Russia in 1786-87, he had written *In Defence of Usury*, saying that government must not interfere with the right of rich men to do whatever they please with their money, and to charge whatever interest rate they can get away with. Otherwise, Bentham claimed, industrial innovations were impossible—a flagrant lie, since he was very familiar with the work of the Franklin-allied Lunar Society men, whose projects were neither funded nor motivated according to Bentham's logic.

Back from Russia, Bentham—this new type of liberal easily recognisable in today's globalist surveillance state—activated Shelburne's men in England and France, who put into motion others not directly tied to Shelburne.

In the destabilisation described here, so crucial to global history, the cast of characters included both Shelburne's agents and certain wealthy Frenchmen who were his political partners:

• **Abbé André Morellet** (1727-1819), Shelburne's main French agent, who had helped set up the British trade war against France; Jefferson's editor/translator/publisher.

• **Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, Count of Mirabeau** (1749-91), paid by Shelburne's Genevans; advocate for free trade in the campaign for the Eden Treaty; known as an admirer of the British form of government.

• **Pierre Étienne Louis Dumont** (1759-1829), Geneva-born writer, paid by Shelburne until 1791 when he began receiving £400 annually from the British government. Dumont would later become famous as the editor of the works of Jeremy Bentham.

• **Samuel Romilly** (1757-1818), British lawyer of French Huguenot origins; initiated into the circle of Étienne Dumont in Geneva in 1781; introduced to Shelburne by Mirabeau in 1784; translated into English Mirabeau's pro-free trade attack on the Society of the Cincinnati. He was later British Solicitor General (1806-07).

• **Étienne Clavière** (1735-93), Genevan-born financier; moved to England in 1782, joined with Étienne Dumont promoting Shelburne's scheme for the insertion of a colony of Protestant Genevans in majority-Catholic Ireland; dropped that project and, along with other Anglo-Swiss operatives, moved to France in 1788.

• **Francois d'Ivernois** (1757-1842), Genevan merchant, anti-French politician; a leader of Shelburne's operatives; paid by the British government for the anti-French offensive from 1789 until 1814.

• **Jacques-Antoine du Roveray** (1747-1814), lawyer, Attorney General of Geneva in 1779, a leader of the Shelburne-managed group of anti-French Genevan exiles; paid annually by the British government on the authority of King George III.

• **Jean-Paul Marat** (1743-93), born in Neuchatel to Genevan parents; lived in England 1765-76 as a political operative and physician, and in France as physician to the royal family and aristocracy; worked on Shelburne's New Geneva project with Dumont and Clavière.

• **Jacques Necker** (1732-1804), Geneva-born international banker; became rich in London speculating on imperial ventures in India and Caribbean slave plantations; Shelburne political partner; anti-American Minister of Finance in France 1777-81, he blamed French bankruptcy not on the British free trade treaty and subsequent trade war, but on King Louis XVI's military alliance with America, and on the French royal family's wasteful personal spending; fired by King Louis XVI; the King, under pressure from Swiss-led bankers, reinstalled him as Finance Minister in 1788.

• **Camille Desmoulins** (1760–94), a failed French lawyer afflicted with a stammer, taken under Mirabeau's sponsorship in the spring of 1789, and shaped as a revolutionary writer on the Bentham-Dumont propaganda project.

British political interventions to blow up France

The British offensive that anarchised and blew up the French Revolution featured a series of political interventions at points of crisis in France. Their pivot was the Count de Mirabeau and British operatives swarming around him. France was simultaneously buffeted by austerity and credit withdrawal engineered by Jacques Necker and other Anglo-Swiss-French bankers such as Isaac Panchaud (1737-89), and Jean-Frederic Perregaux (1744-1808).

In the spring of 1789, in the Estates General (conference of the various orders and ranks of the population) convoked by the French regime, Mirabeau led the faction opposing [French intellectual and politician Jean Sylvain] Bailly and Lafayette. Samuel Romilly in England and Abbé Morellet in France arranged that Bentham would compose, and Dumont would translate, the speeches that Mirabeau would recite; Étienne Clavière furnished Mirabeau's writings on finance.

Mirabeau took a conference spectator, Camille Desmoulins, into the writing of his propaganda publication. Desmoulins was paid and trained politically in this British covert-operations endeavour.

Camille Desmoulins became famous a few weeks after entering Mirabeau's employ. On 11 July 1789, the exasperated King Louis XVI again fired Finance Minister Jacques Necker. The next day, Desmoulins jumped up on a table at a café full of dissidents and told the crowd of Necker's dismissal. He warned them that a massacre of reformers was intended, took pistols out of his coat, shouted "To Arms!" and led them out to street riots that spread throughout Paris. Soon some in the mob carried a wax bust of Necker. The rioters looted

weapons from an armory and stormed the Bastille prison on 14 July—the first bloody act of the French Revolution. The King backed down and rehired Necker on 16 July.

Necker was soon proposing an income tax as the supposed cure for national bankruptcy. It was enacted with the support of Mirabeau, who told the National Assembly they must rush into action and show no mercy to those whom the taxation might ruin.

In December 1790, Mirabeau was elected president of the populist Jacobin Club, which was becoming a sort of laboratory for the cultivation of violent extremism; Camille Desmoulins was one of its members at that time.

At the beginning of 1791, Desmoulins began living in the same house with his old college friend Georges Danton, who was head of the radical Cordeliers Club. Desmoulins firmly attached himself to Danton and was henceforth at his side all the way through the ensuing national mayhem, the butchery, and the terror. Jean-Paul Marat, one of Shelburne's Genevans, was then also a leader of the Cordeliers Club, along with Danton and Desmoulins. Marat, under threat of arrest for his attack on the French regime, had been forced to return to London for a time the previous year.

On 16 July 1791, Desmoulins led a crowd to the Paris city government, petitioning for the overthrow of King Louis XVI. The next day, soldiers commanded by Lafayette fired on a crowd demonstrating for the Desmoulins petition. Warrants were issued for Danton and Desmoulins. Danton, eluding arrest, fled to England for a few weeks.

On 10 August 1792, an armed mob led by Danton and Desmoulins attacked the Tuileries Palace and murdered the King's guards. The national regime fell apart, and in a new French revolutionary government (the National Convention), Danton was the Justice Minister and Camille Desmoulins was his Secretary General. Étienne Clavière (Shelburne's ghost writer for Mirabeau on financial topics) was made Finance Minister.

Jean-Paul Marat now became famous by leading the "September Massacres" (2-7 September 1792), inciting national guardsmen and others to murder over a thousand jail prisoners including priests, political dissidents, and aristocrats. Marat went on to promote the wholesale murder of the "enemies of the people" as a revolutionary principle.

In the National Convention, Danton, Desmoulins, and Marat pressed for the execution of King Louis XVI, who was tried and beheaded in January 1793. Britain immediately broke diplomatic relations, and France descended further into terror, chaos, war, and counterrevolution.

The British hand in these events did not create the French Revolution, but helped to drive it over a cliff. Along the way, those who had aided the American Revolution and who sought to uplift mankind—Franklin's friends—were swept aside. The Paris astronomer-mayor Jean-Sylvain Bailly and chemist Antoine Lavoisier were beheaded; General Lafayette fled arrest and was imprisoned abroad; Beaumarchais was exiled.

Jean-Louis Giraud Soulavie, one of Franklin's scientific collaborators, exposed the British role in a historical account (*Historical and Political Memoirs of the Reign of Lewis XVI*) published a decade after the King's execution.

Soulavie described in detail the role of exiles from Geneva, covert agents whom Britain paid to destroy the French government—without Britain itself being blamed.

Shelburne as Jefferson's schoolmaster

Decades later, when describing the treasonous intrigues of pro-British Americans associated with the 1814 Hartford Convention in Connecticut, Thomas Jefferson wrote about the French Revolution in the same vein as had Soulavie:

"[The] foreigner gained time to anarchise by gold the government he could not overthrow by arms, to crush in their own councils the genuine republicans, by the fraternal embraces of exaggerated and hired pretenders, and to turn the machine of Jacobinism from the change, to the destruction, of order…. [The] British ministers … are playing the same game for disorganisation here [in the USA] which they played in [France]. The Marats, the Dantons & Robespierres of Massachusetts are in the same pay, under the same orders, and making the same efforts to anarchise us, as their prototypes in France were."

But his retrospective analysis does not mention Jefferson's own relationship to Shelburne and company—the covert British fist in France.

Jefferson had been introduced to Francois d'Ivernois, a manager of Shelburne's Swiss agents, in 1785, had worked on his book with Morellet for two years, and had been in close contact with Shelburne's son Lord Wycombe early in 1788.

In June 1788, Lord Shelburne's private secretary introduced Jefferson to [University of Edinburgh professor and authorised Adam Smith biographer] Dugald Stewart, then in an early stage of his career as an advisor and confidante to the central figures in the British imperial oligarchy and British Intelligence.

Jefferson began an intensive conference with Stewart that continued through the summer of 1788. As Jefferson wrote in his old age, "I became immediately intimate with Stuart [*sic*], calling mutually on each other and almost daily, during [his] stay in Paris, which was of some months…. Stuart is a great man, and among the most honest living."

These daily conferences with the leading British teacher of imperial economics were preparing Jefferson to go back home and fight against the founders' program for American industrialisation. As these Jefferson-Stewart sessions began in June 1788, delegates in Jefferson's state of Virginia were meeting to ratify the US Constitution. By the end of that summer, Jacques Necker had returned to power, and Shelburne's Genevan team began setting up operations in France.

Dugald Stewart was back in Paris during the fateful next summer, 1789. He and Jefferson left France at about the same time, not long after the storming of the Bastille began the ruin of the French-American alliance.

Jefferson was elated at the actions of the French street mobs, and denigrated the widespread belief that the British were organising the insurrection to destroy France:

"I [do not] believe that so great a fermentation ever produced so little injury in any other place. I have been thro' it daily, have observed the mobs with my own eyes in order to be satisfied of their objects, and declare to you that I saw so plainly the legitimacy of them, that I have slept in my house as quietly thro' the whole as I ever did in the most peaceable moments…. I will agree to be stoned as a false prophet if all does not end well in this country…. It is rumoured & believed in Paris that the English have fomented with money the tumults of this place, & that they are arming to attack France. I have never seen any reason to believe either of these rumours."