The Impact of Trauma in the Early French Revolution

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Over the past two centuries, few of the revolutionary activists who have confronted the forces of authority in a wide variety of settings have been under any illusion as to the life-and-death nature of revolutionary struggle, in part at least because of the massive dispersal of words and images regarding the violent turn taken by events in France in the 1790s. By contrast, the lawyers, government officials, and other "establishment types" elected to represent the Third Estate in spring 1789 had little inkling, as they prepared for the opening of the Estates General, of the grave dangers and psychic traumas to which they would soon be exposed.1 While deputy letters and diary entries of late April and early May reveal a certain degree of tension about whether the three Estates would meet separately or together in what was already being called a "national assembly" in which voting would proceed "by head," there was little hint that the threat of physical force would emerge as a likely means of resolving this conflict.2 Indeed, if there was any


disquiet about possible violence, it related to concerns about popular unrest. However, rather than seeing themselves as potential victims of the repression being unleashed against Parisian and provincial rioters or as potential allies of popular political forces, even some of the most radical of the deputies praised the government for cracking down on what future Jacobin Club president Gaultier de Biauzat called the "wicked madmen" who had taken part in the Réveillon riots of late April. 3

As one good indicator of just how unprepared the more than six hundred Third Estate deputies were to envision themselves as

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potential victims of royal repression, it can be noted that only two had spent any significant portion of their lives in prison: the celebrated Mirabeau, whose stormy early life had included years of incarceration in a series of royal dungeons,\(^4\) and the Alsatian anti-Semite Hell, imprisoned for four months in the early 1780s for providing peasants with fraudulent documentation that they had paid off their debts to Jews.\(^5\) Apart from these two, I have been able to identify only three other Third Estate deputies who had been subjected to any sort of judicial or quasi-judicial punishment: the Le Mans magistrate Ménard de La Groye, briefly exiled to a nearby town in July 1788 for activities in support of parlementary opposition to the government, and two

\(^4\) See for example François Furet, "Mirabeau," in A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution, eds. Furet and Mona Ozouf, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 265: "The Comte de Mirabeau's experience of the Ancien Régime was . . . without parallel. His future colleagues in the Constituent Assembly were lawyers, judges, and magistrates. He had been a defendant, a convict, a litigant." Just as the extraordinary circumstances of Mirabeau's early life had left him uniquely at odds with pre-revolutionary society, one might wonder whether these same circumstances had rendered him uniquely equipped to thrive, or at least give the appearance of thriving, in the revolutionary maelstrom. Might the sense that Mirabeau conveyed of operating so much "within his element" amidst the uncertainties and insecurities of the Revolution, in particular those having to do with positioning oneself on the margins of the law, help explain the early prominence that he achieved within the Assembly? As Furet writes, "He lacked the legal skills of the jurists who filled the Assembly, yet he enjoyed the advantage of having been legally deprived of his rights and having endured the arbitrariness of authority. His stormy past had equipped him to face the tempest that now descended on the nation." (Ibid., 268.)

deputies who had endured brief periods of exile during the Maupeou crisis of the early 1770s.\(^6\)

While it is true that several other Third Estate deputies had been involved in parlementary protest and resistance during the Maupeou crisis and/or the pre-revolution of 1787-1788,\(^7\) none of these individuals seem to have been the target of any kind of judicial pursuit. In any case, the recurring eighteenth-century skirmishes between the parlements and the Crown were contained and almost choreographed affairs, which unfolded in accordance with tacitly understood "rules of the game" that included punishments limited to a few token arrests of ringleaders and the imposition of some brief and "gentlemanly" exiles.\(^8\) Though the substantial ratcheting-up of tension associated with the Third Estate's efforts to constitute itself as the National Assembly would bring with it the inevitable question of whether the government would treat that Assembly as a recalcitrant parlement or as a group of rebellious commoners for whom the rules of constraint pertaining to the noble parlementaires and their professional auxiliaries need not apply, such considerations were far from the minds of the representatives during the early days of the Estates General. Indeed, the vast majority was convinced, as Timothy Tackett has recently put it, that "the monarch was on their side" and that "all reforms must be accomplished under the auspices of the monarchy, in close cooperation with a king for whom they continued to show strong filial devotion."\(^9\) Thus, the recently exiled Ménard spoke for many if not most of his colleagues in anticipating the deputies following in early May the lead of the government, which "will direct our work" and "put into our


\(^7\) See Tackett, 80-2.


\(^9\) Tackett, 120, 149.
hands the basic outlines of a reasonable legislation that will insure public happiness." Moreover, even as the Third Estate prepared to take the momentous step of declaring itself the National Assembly, a number of deputies were discussing this impending action in terms which suggest that they did not expect the monarch to object. Thus, the Flemish lawyer Bouchette wrote on 9 June that "We will address ourselves to the king so that he can permit us to constitute ourselves as the nation and join with us in working together on the great project for which he has convoked his people."\(^{10}\)

Such hopes for collaboration between the monarchy and the deputies of the Third turned out, of course, to be little more than wishful thinking. For rather than taking "their side" against the privileged orders, the king would soon threaten to employ repressive force against the newly-proclaimed National Assembly to quash its revolutionary pretensions. Moreover, though the Crown's exact plans will probably always remain obscure, it is well known that, as the crisis of late June and early July intensified, many of the deputies feared a direct military attack upon the Assembly that might well have led to a large number of casualties or, at the very least, to numerous arrests. Indeed, based on the widely-circulated reports by many representatives that plans had been made to "slaughter us," to "cut all our throats," or even "to blow us all up" by means of

mines said to have been placed under the assembly hall, standard accounts of the legendary events that launched the French Revolution have long mentioned what Michelet called the "trepidations" of the deputies that each moment "would be their last." Yet, despite the awareness of generations of French revolutionary historians of the deputies' profound fear and anxiety, these feelings have generally been treated as little more than fleeting emotions, and there has been no serious historical effort to consider their possible political ramifications. By contrast, I am seeking to establish that the traumatization experienced by many deputies as a result of their initial confrontation with Louis XVI had a far-reaching if often

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11 See "Lettres de L'official," ed. Léroux-Cesbron, La nouvelle revue rétrospective 7 (1897): 90 (letter of 17 July 1789) ("the plan to slaughter us"); Claude Gantheret, ms. letters in private collection of Françoise Misserey, Dijon, letter of 15 July 1789 ("we were all going to have our throats cut or at the very least be arrested"); and Félix Faulcon, Correspondance de Félix Faulcon, ed. G. Debien (Poitiers: Société des archives historiques de Poitou, 1953), 2:67 ("there were several barrels of powder under the hall which could blow us all up"). For similar reports, see for example Jacques Jallet, Journal inédit, ed. J. J. Brethé (Fontenay-le-Comte: P. Robuchon, 1871), 137-8; "Lettres de Grégoire de Roulhac, député aux Etats généraux (mai-aout 1789)," ed. Paul d'Hollander, Bulletin de la Société archéologique et historique du Limousin 119 (1991): 154 (letter of 18 July 1789); "Lettres inédites de Barnave," ed. M. J. de Beylié, Bulletin de l'Académie delphíne, 4th ser., 19 (1905): 291 (letter of 15 July 1789); Antoine-François Delandine, Mémorial historique des Etats-généraux (n.p., 1789), 1:129 (entry of 14 July 1789); and Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860, recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des chambres françaises. Première série (1787-1799), eds. Jérôme Mavidal and Emile Laurent (Paris: Librairie administrative de Paul Dupont, 1867-1913), 8:232 (14 July 1789 speech of abbé Grégoire).

contradictory impact upon their efforts to delineate the role that the monarch should play in the new political system that they were fashioning. More specifically, I suggest that the inconsistent but ultimately destabilizing manner in which the Assembly related to and dealt with the king bears the imprint of the oscillating pattern of denial and hypervigilant repetition that typically follows exposure to traumatic events.\textsuperscript{13}

While the subject of psychic trauma and, in particular, the notion of traumatic memory has certainly caught the attention of historians in recent years, this attention has largely focused on the impact of catastrophic or horrendous events like war, genocide, or natural disasters.\textsuperscript{14} However, as conceptualized by contemporary trauma researchers, all situations in which people perceive that their lives are in grave and imminent danger tend to produce some degree of traumatization in most individuals who are exposed to them, particularly if, as was clearly the case for most of the eminently respectable deputies of the Third and their allies in the other two estates, the individuals in question a) have


hitherto been totally unaccustomed to the kind of dangers with which they are suddenly confronted; b) are subjected to a situation in which dangers persist and indeed appear to grow more threatening over an extended period of time, in this case a period of more than three weeks between 20 June (the day of the Tennis-court oath), when the assembly hall was first surrounded by royal troops, and 14 July, when the crisis reached its breaking point; and c) are faced with perceived threats that emanate from a human source (in this case the king) in whom strong feelings of trust had previously been invested.\textsuperscript{15}

For most people exposed to such situations, the traumatic pattern of denial and hypervigilant repetition generally plays itself out as what psychiatrist Mardi Horowitz calls a short-term "normal response" to an "abnormal situation." In what is today called posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), however, the symptoms that are associated with this "normal response" and that sometimes serve as "normal ways of modulating emotional responses to serious events" continue indefinitely and, at the same time, tend to become more severe. Whereas the so-called "normal response" to traumatic exposure typically tapers off and disappears after a period of between several months and a year or so, PTSD can be construed, according to Horowitz, as a "normal response that is not properly finished."\textsuperscript{16}

Whether or not a given individual develops a PTSD-like psychiatric condition or any other form of mental disturbance that might impede what might be considered "normal functioning" would depend on some combination of the intensity or magnitude of the events to which that individual had been exposed and the particular susceptibility of the individual to


\textsuperscript{16} Horowitz, 242-3.
traumatization. Thus, for example, while the horrors of genocide or the most gruesome aspects of military combat would be likely to generate the most debilitating forms of traumatic mental disorder in a relatively high proportion of individuals in a wide range of cultures, a trauma-inducing event of lesser intensity or magnitude such as the events of June and July 1789, in which the threat of violence against the Assembly never actually materialized, would tend to spawn reactions which would be much less likely to develop into anything like full-blown PTSD.

It is certainly possible, or even perhaps probable, that a small number of our deputies were sufficiently vulnerable, based on their own particular life histories and personalities, to the terrifying but ultimately less than catastrophic events of summer 1789 as to develop PTSD-like conditions. In the absence of the kind of evidence that would permit any kind of confident judgment on this issue, however, one of the operating assumptions of this article is to regard the impact of traumatization upon the political decisions that I will be discussing shortly as largely resulting from "normal responses" to the danger and stress to which the representatives were exposed. In other words, the line of argument being pursued here will not depend on any presumption of "mental illness" or "pathology" among the deputies who, at the very least, seem to have maintained the capacity to carry out their official duties on a regular basis.

Noting the original Greek meaning of "trauma" as referring to "a piercing of the skin, a breaking of the body envelope," psychoanalyst Caroline Garland has recently written that a psychic trauma can be thought of as an event which "overwhelms existing defenses against anxiety," thereby inducing a "breakdown of an established way of going about one's life, of established beliefs about the predictability of the world" or, in more mechanistic terms, a "breakdown in the
smooth running of the machinery of the mind." Traumatic stress, then, is that degree of stress which is sufficiently intense as to "overwhelm" the usual means through which stress is "processed" or "managed" by the mind, thereby generating some kind of lasting or lingering psychological impact and, in particular, some kind of lasting impact upon the way in which one thinks about and evaluates one's safety or vulnerability in the world. Hence, when one is "traumatized," stressful events from the past, or, to be more precise, memories of these events, weigh especially heavily upon one's experience and perception in the present.

With this framework in mind, let us consider how cognitive judgments regarding the possibility of a recurrence of the counter-revolutionary threat that had been posed by the king and his soldiers in summer 1789 might have been mediated or skewed by traumatic memories of the "consternation, horror, trouble, and agitation" that one deputy depicted as "reigning" in the Assembly at the height of the crisis. Might their memories of the "terrible fright," the "deepest despair," and the "incessant alarms and horrors of all kinds" that they had lived through have made it difficult for the deputies to make what might be considered informed or "realistic" assessments of new counter-revolutionary threats, leaving them prone either to exaggerate or to underestimate future dangers?

As mentioned above, individuals who have been traumatized typically follow a pattern of behavior in which denial of the trauma alternates with its re-living, a pattern that psychiatrist Judith Herman calls the "dialectic of trauma." On the one hand,
the experience of being exposed to extreme danger is so unsettling and overwhelming that it induces efforts to avoid awareness or recognition of what has happened. Reflecting an underlying psychological need "to avoid accepting the reality of vulnerability (and) lack of safety," it is as if, in the words of trauma researcher Daniel Weiss, the victims of trauma want to believe that "the stressor cannot really have happened." Yet the compulsive efforts to deny or "undo" what has happened can never be entirely successful in the face of what constitutes relentless pressure on the part of traumatic memories to intrude into conscious awareness. Moreover, in the spirit of psychoanalytic logic, it would seem reasonable to assume that the harder that one tries to repress memories the more insistent and relentless these memories become in forcing themselves to the surface, thereby producing intervals of "re-living" in which terrifying images and emotions deriving from the original traumatic situation flood into consciousness. Hence, the dialectical relationship between traumatic denial and traumatic re-living in which it might be said that the very effort to deny that one has been endangered "calls forth" new perceptions of danger.

What relevance might this model of the "dialectic of trauma" have for an analysis of Constituent Assembly decision-making? Two decisions which were of central importance in defining the Assembly's approach to dealing with Louis XVI can be fruitfully discussed in relation to each other as a single "cycle" of the "dialectic of trauma." The first was the granting on 22 September 1789 of a royal suspensive veto that could only be overturned by two successive legislatures, a decision which I believe was driven in large measure by currents of traumatic denial circulating through the Assembly. The second was the passage six weeks later of a decree excluding members of the Assembly from becoming royal ministers, a decision which effectively countermanded the potential influence over the political process that the suspensive veto might have provided and which I

21 Weiss, 16.
interpret as resulting, at least in large part, from a wave of traumatic and hypervigilant re-living sweeping through the Assembly.

Long regarded by historians as a fairly straightforward compromise between those who favored an absolute veto and those who opposed any form of royal veto, the decision to grant Louis XVI a suspensive veto has, in recent years, been transformed by Keith Baker and François Furet into a prime example of how "Rousseauian-style" ideological radicalism foreclosed any possibility that the Constituent Assembly might reach an accommodation with the monarchy. For Baker, the suspensive veto, in setting up the sovereign people as arbiter between Assembly and king, was the most radical of the three available options, and in choosing it, the deputies had given force to "the ideological dynamic that was to drive subsequent revolutionary events." Indeed, in opting for the suspensive veto, the Assembly was, in Baker's words, "opting for the Terror." Similarly, Furet and Ran Halévi wrote that, rather than providing the king any independent leverage, the suspensive veto was "simply a procedure which permitted, by the intermediary of the ex-absolute monarch, this or that portion of the legislature's work to be referred back to the sovereign people." 


However neatly this view of the suspensive veto folds into the general tendency of both Furet and Baker to see the events of the early Revolution as little more than a rehearsal for the somber events that were to follow, I believe that it seriously distorts the significance and meaning of the Assembly's handling of the veto question. Without touching on some of the details that I have discussed elsewhere, let me simply note here the profound disparity between the kind of suspensive veto envisioned by the small number of "Rousseauian" deputies featured in Baker's account of the veto debates and the constitutional mechanism that was actually adopted on 21 September. Whereas Baker's handful of orthodox Rousseauians spoke in terms of some sort of popular referendum to determine whether or not a veto would be upheld – a position which had little support in the Assembly and which never had any chance of even being brought to a vote – the actual decision made by the Assembly provided that a royal veto could only be overturned if three successive legislatures passed a given law. In thereby furnishing Louis XVI with the constitutional authority to delay implementation of a piece of legislation for up to six years, the deputies had, at least in my view, handed the king a formidable instrument that could potentially have allowed him to establish himself as a major player in the legislative process and, as a result, to assume a meaningful position as constitutional monarch in reality as well as in name. That such a vision of the suspensive veto was strongly embedded in the thinking of the representatives is especially evident in the comments of Pétion who, despite a rhetorical nod to the idea of an "appeal to the people" that earned him a prominent place in Baker's analysis, argued that the king's veto power would serve as a practical bargaining chip in an ongoing political process. Asserting that the actual use of the veto would be very rare, this future Girondin stated that the monarch would first "establish

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conferences between his ministers and the legislators. He would try all means of conciliation. He would prefer to sacrifice a part of his views to obtain parallel sacrifices, and it would be only in the last resort, if no compromise were possible, that he would decide to suspend the law presented to him."

If the Assembly was indeed prepared to approve a mechanism that could provide Louis XVI with such a significant degree of leverage over the political process, what might be the psychological implications of awarding so much potential power to the very same man who only two months earlier had almost, at least in the minds of many deputies, had them killed? With this question on the table, let us consider some deputy utterances that did not find their way into Baker's account of the veto debates. "The least reflection on the matter," stated Treilhard, "reveals that the executive power can never have an interest in opposing itself to the execution of a good law." Thus, he continued, the king's veto power could only be used to alert the nation to the need to elect new representatives who would then refrain from re-passing a bad law. Moreover, he declared, "the oath that the troops swear to the nation assures us that the executive power will never be able to abuse its military authority." In the same vein, Gaultier described the suspensive veto as a mechanism that would allow the king to act as "a watchman for the nation upon the representatives of the nation" in order to prevent the implementation of laws which "appeared to be passed too precipitously and which raised fears of inconveniences." Voidel asserted that "when the people have not clearly expressed themselves, the prince, if he believes the law harmful, has, I do not say the right but the duty to warn the people." Along similar lines, Alexandre Lameth stated that a royal veto would only be employed if the king thought that a measure passed by the legislators was "contrary to the Constitution or because he did not believe that it conformed to the general will."

25 Archives parlementaires, 8:584.
26 Ibid., 9:91.
27 Ibid., 9:61, 92.
Larochefoucauld foresaw the use of the veto as "a duty for the King whenever the representatives of the people seem to have distanced themselves from the general will," while Sillery depicted the king as an "intermediary between the nation and its representatives" who, if he "believed that a law was contrary to the interests of the nation," would suspend its implementation until "it had manifested its intentions once again."\(^{28}\) Bouillé wrote,

> It is not for the particular interest of the King but for that of the Nation that those who have spoken in good faith for the suspensive veto have thought it necessary to conserve this royal prerogative. . . . Once the constitution is established, the monarch, august delegate of the nation, will be its guardian. He must prevent attacks upon it. He is the defender of the rights of the people and must denounce to it all violations of them.\(^{29}\)

Taken together, this collection of comments, all of which derive from deputies with solid patriotic credentials, does little to evoke the neutered and toothless functionary depicted by Baker and Furet as employing the veto to "regulate" a potential conflict between the people and the Assembly. Instead, like the benevolently paternal ruler who was imagined by many Third Estate deputies during the early days of the Estates General as taking their side and protecting them against the machinations of the privileged orders, the king is envisioned in these remarks as the benevolent guardian of the general will, always available if necessary, in the manner of a watchful but not overly intrusive parent, to protect and rescue the people from the inevitable errors of its own representatives. Very much in accordance with the eighteenth-century decline of traditional patriarchal conceptions of the family, such a king could be thought of, to use Lynn Hunt's terminology, as a "good father,"\(^{30}\) generally respecting the

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 8:572, 585, 600.


autonomy of his children and only intervening on those occasions when they had somehow lost sight of their own interests. Seen in this light, the establishment of the suspensive veto would appear to go hand in hand with a conception of a monarch playing a limited yet significant role within a working constitutional system. Though Baker and Furet imply that the revolutionaries could only conceive of the king as either all-powerful or as a titled nonentity, this interpretation of the suspensive veto suggests that the cultural and intellectual effacement of royal absolutism and familial patriarchalism which preceded the Revolution was not necessarily inconsistent with the development of an emotionally grounded and culturally resonant ideological attachment to a non-absolutist version of monarchy.

Such an optimistic conclusion about the possibility of the suspensive veto serving as the centerpiece of a viable constitutional monarchy ignores the traumatization to which the deputies had been so recently subjected, however. The early fantasy that the king would support the Third Estate against the privileged orders may well be an indication that royal propagandists had had more success in promoting the idea of the monarch as a source of benevolent protection than one might think from reading much recent work on the "desacralization of the monarchy." Nonetheless, what is perhaps most remarkable

31 For the efforts of royal propagandists to "resacralize the monarchy" by forging an image of the monarch that, in keeping with eighteenth-century cultural trends, relied on the theme of the "mutual love of king and subjects," see David A. Bell, The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism 1680-1800 (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 2001), 67. A number of recent historians have noted these efforts but described them as unsuccessful and indeed counter-productive. Thus, for example, Mark Ledbury argues that attempts to create a "domestication of majesty" ultimately fed into a wider process of "desacralization" by contributing to "an erosion of aura." ("The Contested Image: Stage, Canvas, and the Origins of the French Revolution," in Origins of the French Revolution, ed. Campbell, 206-7.) See also Thomas Kaiser, "Louis le Bien-Aimé and the Rhetoric of the Royal Body," in From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France, eds. Sara Melzer and Kathryn Norberg (Berkeley:

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about the resolution of the veto issue is the extent to which this image of the king seems to have survived despite his manifest failure in June and July to take steps to protect the nation and its representatives from those who had hatched what one deputy called "the abominable plot which contemplated France's destruction." Given Louis XVI's recent performance as, at the very least, the dupe of the nation's enemies, the persistent expression of the belief that he would use whatever powers he had to act on behalf of the nation would seem to suggest a level of wishful thinking which can perhaps only be explained as a manifestation of deputy efforts to deny or "undo" the terrifying emotions they had recently experienced. In contrast to the relatively naïve fantasies of royal protection that were prevalent during the early days of the Estates General, the idea that the king would act as a "good father" in the use of his veto power would seem to fly directly in the face of bitter personal experience that would have been difficult to ignore without the deployment of powerful mechanisms of psychological repression and denial.

University of California Press, 1998), 131-61; Jeffrey Merrick, "Politics on Pedestals: Royal Monuments in Eighteenth-Century France," French History 5 (1991): 234-64; Roger Chartier, The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution, trans. Lydia Cochran (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 111-35; and Hunt, 17-52. One wonders, however, whether the tendency to ascribe failure to royal propagandists reflects a propensity among historians to operate under the spell of Furet's idea of the pre-revolutionary monarchy as a "mere shadow" and, as a result, to devote a perhaps inordinate amount of energy to the search for cultural and discursive explanations of the ideological nullity that it had supposedly acquired by 1789. (See Furet, Interpreting the French Revolution, trans. Elborg Forster [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981], 46.) For a good example of the pervasive influence of the recent historical tendency to stress the pre-revolutionary ideological and cultural weakness of the monarchy, see Paul Friedland, Political Actors: Representative Bodies and Theatricality in the Age of the French Revolution (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 96: "It was almost as if, from the moment that the Estates-General was resurrected in the postabsolutist world, the body of the king – the head of the ancient mystical and political body of the nation – was already expendable."

Conforming to Weiss' observation that acting as if "the stressor cannot really have happened" helps trauma victims to avoid accepting the frightening implications of living in a world that no longer feels safe, the fantasy that the king would function as a "good father" in his use of the veto would have allowed many of the deputies to avoid full awareness of the pain and disillusion that would have accompanied the recognition that this cherished figure had actually behaved more like an abusive parent. By clinging to an idealized vision of a monarch who was a source of protection rather than danger, these eminently respectable deputies could also cling, in some measure, to the sense of the world as a generally safe and comfortable place that they had carried with them to Versailles. Yet, however intently these deputies may have attempted to deny the frightening experience they had undergone by returning to the familiarity of a world which, in fact, was gone forever, they would still, as victims of traumatization, remain subject to the dialectical antithesis of denial that seems to follow inexorably in its wake, that is to say, to the intrusive reappearance of memories of what had happened to them. But if the state of emotional denial that was instrumental in leading many deputies to embrace the suspensive veto were itself inherently unstable and transient, how could the ongoing political support for a working accommodation with the monarchy that would be required for the veto to operate in the way imagined by Pétion possibly be sustained? Is it any wonder, then, that the Assembly would soon take action that would insure that the suspensive veto became a virtual political dead letter almost from the very moment of its inception?

This action was the passage on 7 November of what Lamartine called the "fatal decree" excluding deputies from entering the royal government, a decision that can be seen as dialectically linked in a twofold sense to the granting of the suspensive veto. First, in a psychological sense, the traumatic

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33 See Moniteur, 4 Apr. 1835, as cited in Barbara Luttrell, Mirabeau (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), 184.
denial that was instrumental in producing the suspensive veto "called forth" the traumatic re-living that played a large role in driving the representatives to build a "firewall" between themselves and the "executive power." Second, in a political sense, the building of this firewall seriously damaged any possibility for the development of the kind of cooperative or even polite relations between the Assembly and the monarchy that would have been necessary for the king's veto power to function effectively.

Now at first glance the reference to the construction of a "firewall" between the legislative and executive branches of government would seem to resonate well with J. K. Wright's recent analysis of the deputies as being heavily influenced by a "pure" or "republican" version of the doctrine of separation of powers. Moreover, the "principle" of separation of power was certainly invoked on the floor of the Assembly as justification for passage of this measure. A brief glimpse, however, at how the Assembly had previously handled some matters in which the same principle might just as easily have been invoked will quickly call into question any temptation to view "republican" ideology as the driving factor in its enactment.

For one thing, the granting of a substantial role in the legislative process to the king through the use of the suspensive veto would seem more compatible with what Wright calls a "mixed" or "balanced" regime, one in which legislative and executive powers tend to overlap and intermingle with each other, than with a "pure" version of separation of powers. Moreover, with specific reference to relations between the Assembly and the ministry, three deputies had, in fact, been named as ministers on 4 August as part of a new government

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installed in the aftermath of the July crisis. As far as I can find, no objection to the idea of choosing deputies as ministers was voiced at that time. On the contrary, the Assembly voted unanimously to thank Louis for these appointments and for "the touching promise of constant and amicable harmony" that they signaled.\textsuperscript{35}

Apparently seeing these appointments as a potential entering wedge for the development of a British-style system of parliamentary government and, of course, for the realization of his own ministerial ambitions, Mirabeau, regarded by many historians as the deputy best-equipped and best-positioned to become the lynchpin of a viable accommodation between the representatives and the Crown,\textsuperscript{36} soon began a campaign advocating that ministers maintain an everyday presence in the Assembly.\textsuperscript{37} Tabled in September, Mirabeau's motion that ministers be provided what he called a "consultative voice" was brought up again on 6 November, by which time it had become entangled with post-October Days negotiations concerning a new round of governmental restructuring and, in particular, with the imminent likelihood that Mirabeau himself would obtain a prominent position within the ministry.\textsuperscript{38}

Indeed, Mirabeau's motion for a "consultative voice" for ministers received a good deal of support from across the Assembly's political spectrum on 6 November with influential orators like the Breton Club leader Le Chapelier and the Monarchien Clermont-Tonnerre being among those speaking in its favor and with two preliminary procedural votes seeming to

\textsuperscript{35} Archives parlementaires, 8:341, 399.
\textsuperscript{37} For the early stages of this campaign, see L. G. Wickham Legg, ed., Select Documents Illustrative of the History of the French Revolution (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), 130-1; and Archives parlementaires, 9: 212.
\textsuperscript{38} These negotiations can be followed most easily in Louis Gottschalk and Margaret Maddox, Lafayette in the French Revolution: From the October Days Through the Federation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 26-41, 70-89.
indicate a fairly even division of opinion. A hint, however, of the rapid and decisive shift in sentiment that would soon occur surfaced on that same day when, without any apparent indication that such a motion was about to occupy the representatives' attention or any significant degree of public discussion of the idea, the Breton physician Blin announced his intention to propose that deputies be barred from the ministry. On the next day, the influential Breton law professor Lanjuinais took the lead in promoting Blin's proposal. Stating that the principle of separation of powers demanded opposition to any mingling of legislative and executive authority – though he seems to have put aside strict adherence to this principle during his earlier advocacy of the suspensive veto – Lanjuinais declared that the presence of the ministers "would expose them to become the playthings of ambitious men, if there are any of them in this Assembly." "If an eloquent genius can take control of the Assembly when he is the equal of all of its members," he went on, "what could he not do if he joined eloquence to the authority of a minister?" In contrast to the close division of the previous day, Mirabeau's proposal for a consultative voice was then voted down almost unanimously. Shortly thereafter, with the Assembly "impatient to come to a vote" and with Mirabeau himself the

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39 See *Archives parlementaires*, 9:711-4. Two voice votes on tabling Mirabeau's motion taken on this day are termed "inconclusive" here.

40 The only trace of dissatisfaction with the idea of deputies becoming ministers that I have been able to find is in the radical newspaper *Révolutions de Paris*, which stated in early October that "we do not fear to say that it is the aristocracy who has advised the king to choose the new ministry from within the National Assembly." (*Révolutions de Paris*, 6 Sept.-3 Oct. 1789, 6.)

41 *Archives parlementaires*, 9:712-3.

42 *Archives parlementaires*, 9:716; and *Point du jour*, 8 Nov. 1789, 4:83. Also see the version of Lanjuinais' speech in *Journal des États-généraux*, 7 Nov. 1789, 5:399: "An eloquent genius leads you on and subjugates you. What could he not do if he became a minister?" For Lanjuinais' comments on the suspensive veto, see *Archives parlementaires*, 8:588-9.
only speaker voicing opposition, Blin's motion to exclude deputies from the ministry was quickly adopted.43

In seeking to explain this sudden turn of events, it is tempting to emphasize the extent to which the edict of 7 November might have been a particular judgment rendered against a particular individual with a well-established reputation for deviousness and corruptibility. Indeed, there can be little doubt that the supporters of the incumbent ministry who seem to have orchestrated the passage of this measure were able to tap into an enormous residue of fear and suspicion of Mirabeau that was largely rooted in what Lameth called the "lack of confidence which his character inspired."44 Despite the uniqueness of Mirabeau's particular case, what might be thought of as the Assembly's instinctive recoil from him at the very moment at which power was apparently about to come his way was actually not so far removed from the Assembly's reaction to other deputies, including Lameth himself, who would seek to exercise parliamentary leadership in the months to come. For, as Tim Tackett has written, the deputies were "frequently wary of the pretensions of individuals to assume preponderant roles," manifesting, in the words of Chaussinand-Nogaret, "distrust of

43 See Archives parlementaires, 9:718; Révolutions de Paris, 7-14 Nov. 1789, 42; and Patriote français, 8 Nov. 1789, 2. The only other speaker besides Mirabeau who seems to have tried to argue against Blin's motion was the liberal noble Castellane, who, according to the Journal des Etats-généraux, was shouted down. Commenting approvingly on the silencing of Castellane, the journalist Le Hodey wrote that "an opinion so absolutely contrary to the will of the Assembly is rarely a wise one." (Journal des Etats-généraux, 7 Nov. 1789, 5:403.)

44 Alexandre Lameth, Histoire de l'Assemblée constituante (Paris: Moutardier, 1828), 1:241. For the role played by the incumbent ministry, especially by the Keeper of the Seals Champion de Cicé, in the passage of the 7 Nov. edict, see François-Dominique de Reynaud, comte de Montlosier, Mémoires de M. le comte de Montlosier (Paris: Dufey, 1830), 1:338-9; and Gilbert du Motier, marquis de Lafayette, Mémoires, correspondance, et manuscrits du général Lafayette (Brussels: Hauman, 1838), 4:154. Ironically, the Monarchien cleric de Cicé was one of the three deputies who had been named as ministers on 4 Aug.
all men who began to become ascendant.45 As a reflection of important currents of late eighteenth-century political thought on both sides of the Atlantic, this general fear of leadership and of power that was so characteristic of the Constituent Assembly would seem, at least at first glance, rather similar to the cast of mind that produced the Federalist papers and the American Constitution. But in the cauldron of the French Revolution and, in particular, through the prism of the traumatic stress produced during the original revolutionary crisis, this "defensive liberalism," as it might be called, metastasized into something quite different.

What might Mirabeau do, cried Lanjuinais, if the control that this "eloquent genius" already exercised in the Assembly was joined to ministerial power? What might Lameth and his friends Barnave and Duport do if allowed to add governmental authority to their influence in the Assembly, insinuated Robespierre a year and half later when he spearheaded a successful move to reaffirm and extend the reach of the edict of 7 November?46 What, indeed, might any deputy trying to exercise leadership within the Assembly do if allowed to combine that leadership with executive power? In moving through this group of questions, we can begin to understand the visceral fear and emotional panic that seem to have led to the sudden passage of a decree that, in its deepest psychological sense, was designed to sever all connection between the king and any parliamentary leader who seemed capable, at least at such a moment of hypervigilant panic, of delivering a compliant Assembly into the clutches of the king. For in alluding to the unspoken and inconceivable

45 Tackett, 226; and Chaussinand-Nogaret, 18.

46 On 7 Apr. 1791 Robespierre successfully proposed that the ban on members of the Assembly becoming ministers remain in effect until four years after the end of the Assembly session, a move that was clearly aimed at the Barnave/Duport/Lameth "triumvirate." (See *Archives parlementaires*, 24:621-3; Georges Michon, *Essai sur l'histoire du parti feuillant: Adrien Duport* [Paris: Payot, 1924], 313-8; J. J. Chevallier, *Barnave ou les deux faces de la Révolution* [Paris: Payot, 1936], 234; and Ran Halévi, "Feuillants," in *Critical Dictionary*, 347.)
horrors that might transpire if parliamentary genius were to operate in tandem with royal authority, Lanjuinais had found a theme that resonated powerfully with the most terrible nightmares of those deputies who had been desperately trying to dissociate psychologically from the inner shock that they had experienced during the previous summer. Seen in this light, the passage of the edict of 7 November appears as the product of a sudden breakdown of the mechanisms of denial and avoidance that had seemingly remained largely in place since the traumatic events of June and July. With the terror and helplessness that they had felt as they waited in their meeting hall for an attack by the king's soldiers suddenly called to mind, the vigilance displayed by the deputies on that day probably had far more to do with traumatic memories of what had happened to them in the past than with any kind of realistic appraisal of what Mirabeau or any other deputy/minister might actually do in the future.47

If the granting of the suspensive veto was a key mechanism through which the deputies expressed their lingering accommodationist longings for closeness to the king as "good father," the policy of excluding Assembly members from the ministry reflected a very different emotional state. These longings for closeness might be said to have been swept away by the activation of a deep-seated urge among the representatives to defend themselves against a parental figure who had betrayed them during the original revolutionary crisis. But if emotional reactions to a traumatic crisis are transitory in the sense that phases of denial and intrusion tend to oscillate in a manner that would lead us to expect the periodic fluctuation among our deputies between positive and negative feeling towards the king, the political impact of the emotional reaction that produced the edict of 7 November may not have been as fleeting. In setting in

47 Philip Bromberg describes the stance of trauma victims at such intrusive moments as "vigilantly waiting for the proverbial other shoe to drop, so as to never be caught unprepared when it does hit." ("Something Wicked This Way Comes: Trauma, Dissociation, and Conflict – The Space Where Psychoanalysis, Cognitive Science, and Neuroscience Overlap," Psychoanalytic Psychology 20:3 (2003): 560.)
place a policy that would foreclose the most immediately obvious structural arrangement through which a working relationship between the Assembly and the Crown might have been established, this measure might well have played a significant role in counteracting the accommodationist intentions embodied in the granting of the suspensive veto.

Now there was certainly no inherent reason why the edict barring deputies from becoming ministers would necessarily have prevented the king from being integrated into the new political system in a manner comparable to that envisioned by Pétion. While a deputy/minister would clearly be particularly well positioned to serve as an effective conduit in maintaining open lines of communication and access between the Assembly and the Crown, these links could obviously have been maintained, at least theoretically, in many other ways. Psychologically speaking, however, the edict of 7 November may well have done far more than merely rule out one particular structural arrangement for mediation between the king and the deputies. Rather, in reflecting a visceral urge among the deputies to avoid all contact with the king, this measure served to call into question the legitimacy of all forms of dealing with the monarch, including any kind of negotiations in which the possibility of a veto might have been used as a bargaining chip. In thereby isolating and, in effect, quarantining the monarch as a source of political contamination, the 7 November edict helped to insure that, rather than being used as a chip in an ongoing bargaining process, the threat of a veto could only be deployed as a weapon of outright political warfare against a declared political enemy. Thus, with Louis XVI reluctant to declare outright political war on the Constituent Assembly, he would never in fact publicly declare his opposition to any of its edicts. And of course when the veto was finally unfurled against the Legislative Assembly in November 1791, its very use constituted a more or less formal declaration of the political warfare that would eventually result in the fall of the monarchy.

Arriving at Versailles in spring 1789 with a much higher level of emotional and ideological commitment to the monarchy
than one would think from reading many recent historians, most of the deputies of the Third and their clerical and noble allies anticipated that they would be working closely with Louis XVI in a collaborative effort to regenerate France. Shaken and traumatized by the terrifying situation that they lived through between 20 June and 14 July, many of these deputies would intermittently seek to avoid conscious awareness of what had happened to them by clinging to the psychological security of their pre-revolutionary loyalty to the monarchy. As a result, they would be intermittently disposed to formulate policies like that of the suspensive veto that might, under other circumstances, have helped effectuate a workable accommodation with the Crown. But the deputies who had voted for the suspensive veto in a desperate effort to forget what Louis had done to them were not emotionally prepared to see their lingering accommodationist inclinations realized in a functioning political system. The traumatic memories of recent events would inevitably exact their toll, and it is therefore not surprising that the Assembly would be driven to take actions such as the edict of 7 November that would seriously undermine its own accommodationist leanings. Might a different outcome have been possible if the emotional dynamic that was set in motion during the summer of 1789 had somehow been avoided?