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The Beginning of the Interregnum: The Origins of the Fusion of the Orders, 27 June 1789

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Tel était déjà l'esprit public, même parmi les troupes; tous les mouvements se communiquaient au dehors, comme les commotions extérieures se faisaient sentir au dedans; et, dans cette réaction mutuelle et journalière, se formait l'esprit public, tantôt exagéré, dans l'assemblée, par l'influence extérieure, tantôt calmé et modifié, au dehors, par l'influence de l'assemblée; l'opinion dominante du moment ne connaissait pas encore précisément son but, ou plutôt il n'y avait point encore d'opinion dominante.¹

Voilà donc ces grands débats terminés, débats funestes & horribles, qui ont alarmé pendant deux mois le cœur de tout bon patriote; qui voyait sa patrie menacée d'un embrasement universel; mais écartons à jamais ces sinistres idées, ensevelissons-les dans les ténèbres éternelles de l'oubli; ne pensons qu'au bonheur que, nous pronostique une réunion si généralement & si ardemment désirée, du monarque & de tous les François [sic]. L'aurore du plus beau jour commence à luire pour nous; la nation respire: la raison de son flambeau divin vient d'éclairer le clergé & la noblesse; ils viennent de reconnaître enfin pour frères des hommes que l'habitude des préjugés leur faisait regarder comme des esclaves. Heureux, mille fois heureux le jour de cette réunion!²

In his speech to the assembled orders on 23 June 1789, known as the *séance royale*, Louis XVI decreed that the three orders of the Estates General meet separately. He also denied the National Assembly's claim to sovereign power that it had made on 17 June, and he denied vote by head or a single legislature. Four days later, on 27 June, he invited the three orders to "fuse," that is, to meet as a unified body. After nearly two months of deadlock, the king settled the issue of vote by head in favor of the patriots. He also completely reversed his declaration of 23 June. It was a

¹ F.-E. E. Toulangeon, *Histoire de France, depuis la révolution de 1789* (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1801), 1: 70. I would like to thank Jack Censer, Tom Kaiser and Tim Le Goff for their helpful comments. I would also like to thank Tim Tackett for his support over the years. The first night we met, at an SFHS conference in Madison in 1975, we talked endlessly about the Constituent Assembly, a habit that continues to this day. Many thanks for years of friendship.

² *Journal des Etats Généraux*, 27 June 1789.

capitulation of enormous significance, a surrender of the royal absolutism of centuries; a retreat that the journalist Galart de Montjoie acerbically claimed was the beginning of the Interregnum. Although a few historians mention the role of violence in explaining this reversal, most emphasize Louis's character.³ For many contemporaries it was the king's essential goodness and love for his subjects. For a large number of historians, it was and is Louis's weak character faced with the determination of the Third Estate to insist on vote by head. Defiance of the king's order to meet separately began early. The deputies of the Third Estate refused to disperse after the king left the *Hôtel des Menus Plaisirs* following the *séance royale*. They bravely endorsed the abbé Emmanuel Sieyès's laconic assertion that the king's speech had changed nothing. The next day, the 24th, a substantial number of curés and bishops crossed to the National Assembly and on the 26th, 47 nobles including the king's cousin, the duc d'Orléans, crossed.

Most historians explain this as a failure of the king's nerve. Georges Lefebvre, not realizing that four days is a long time in politics, leaves the impression the king surrendered to the continuing defections and to nothing else.⁴ Most of his successors agree.⁵

But the reversal was not the end. Pierre Caron and Jacques Godechot both argue that having lost the parliamentary struggle, Louis XVI and his ministers turned to a forceful solution. In effect, they decided on a desperate effort to save aristocratic absolutism. This would have required using the army to intimidate Paris and Versailles into passivity, a risk that royal credit would collapse, and a possible dissolution of the Estates General, or at least its exile to a more remote spot like Compiègne. In other words, the government probably intended to treat the Estates General as they had treated recalcitrant *parlements* in the eighteenth century. A successful outcome this time required an enormous troop build-up around Paris. For both Caron and Godechot, the proof that a coup of sorts was intended is that the orders to transfer troops from the garrison towns of the north to the Paris region went out on the 26th and 27th, dates that coincide with the parliamentary rout. The surrender of the Bastille defeated this attempt at a military backed counter-revolution.⁶

³ Marcel Dorigny, 'Séance royale du 23 juin 1789,' in *Dictionnaire historique de la Révolution française* (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 2005), 975, is an exception to the "peaceful revolution" thesis.

⁴ Georges Lefebvre, *The Coming of the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 88.

⁵ There are many examples. E.g., "irresolution" (J. M. Roberts, *The French Revolution*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 16); "weakness" (J. F. Bosher, *The French Revolution* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1989), 131); Simon Schama (*Citizens. A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1989), 366–7); David Andress (*The French Revolution and the People* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), 81); and Kenneth Margerison, *Pamphlets and Public Opinion: The Campaign for a Union of Orders in the early French Revolution* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1998), 147, give no explanation. For McPhee, the king "seemed to accept a *fait accompli*" (Peter McPhee, *Liberty or Death: The French Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 70). Israel claims it was the unreliability of royal troops (Jonathan Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas: An Intellectual History of the French Revolution from the Rights of Man to Robespierre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 57).

⁶ Pierre Caron, 'La tentative de contre-révolution de juin-juillet 1789,' *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 8 (1906/1907): 20–32. Jacques Godechot, *The Taking of the Bastille: July 14th, 1789* (New York: Scribner, 1970), 166.

In other words, the order to fuse was a way of buying time until the reinforcements were in place. Yet this was not necessarily the only reason for reinforcing troops around Paris. The government itself claimed constantly that the purpose of the troops was to protect regional grain markets. This might even be reasonable given their deployments in market towns like Meaux, Pontoise, Saint Denis, Etampes, and so on. Caron also printed a justification that he left without comment: the author was an early historian of the Revolution who wrote in 1792. He mentions violence in Paris, the insults made to the archbishop of Paris and the necessity to escort flour convoys in times of shortage. The purpose of the troops was to repress the “spirit of sedition which every day was becoming more alarming.”⁷ This stress on sedition is a very different interpretation from the one that claims the capitulation was a device to buy time to prepare a violent solution. There is a lot to be said for it.

As it happens, no one knows what the king’s intentions were. There is no evidence from him or his ministers. Like Caron and Godechot, we must work indirectly. A close examination of the context in which the order to fuse was made shows a fascinating complexity that goes way beyond the king’s weaknesses, the defiance of the Third Estate, or the duplicity of the ministry. The key is to examine the days between the *séance royale* and the fusion, not between the fusion and Jacques Necker’s dismissal on 11 July. Caron omitted this short period altogether, Godechot and others are seriously mistaken in what they say about it.⁸

The principal sources for this reinterpretation of the beginning of the “Interregnum” are the journals and letters of the deputies to the Estates General. Timothy Tackett pioneered the use of these documents and without his tremendous bibliography, this contribution would have been impossible. My treatment of these sources is different from Tackett’s, however. He used them to argue that the Third Estate deputies radicalized in response to their growing suspicions of the king and the aristocracy.⁹ I take this as given and use the sources to treat the deputies as witnesses. No one witness/deputy ever possessed a complete picture of the situation he saw or heard about. So, like the prosecutors of the Old Regime and the Revolution, we must piece witness statements together to construct our own *réquisitoire* or interpretation of events. Some witnesses are very unhelpful, since they limited themselves to reporting on debates alone. A few (but too few) were also very good reporters. But almost all of them were writing for a provincial audience and in that

⁷ Caron, ‘La tentative de contre-révolution de juin-juillet 1789,’ 18 n. 3.

⁸ The emphasis in these works is on Mirabeau’s defiant albeit mythological but too good to ignore refusal to leave the Assembly hall after the king departed on 23 June except at the point of a bayonet (see Armand Brette, ‘La séance royale du 23 juin 1789: ses préliminaires et ses suites d’après deux documents inédits (2): la correspondance de Barentin et le journal de l’abbé Coster,’ *Révolution française*, xxii (1892), 431–4). The Mirabeau anecdote is only part of the “Third-Estate-defiance-forces-the-king-to-capitulate” narrative. The continuing defections that sapped the king’s will are at least as important. See Jeremy D. Popkin, *A Short History of the French Revolution* (London: Routledge, 2016), 42. George Rudé, *The French Revolution* (London: Phoenix, 1996), 42.

⁹ Timothy Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789–1790)*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), *passim*.

respect, they were wary of reporting on too much violence and rumor in Paris and Versailles lest these details arouse unrest in the provinces. The deputy from Brest, Laurent François Legendre, for instance, minimized the importance of the rebellion of the French Guards and of the rioting in Versailles on 24–25 June. Broadcasting this information might inspire imitators in the provinces.¹⁰ Two noble deputies from Roussillon reported it would be “too imprudent” to detail how the Second Estate was forced to join the National Assembly.¹¹ The deputy Joseph-Marie Pellerin sent letters to his constituents in Guérande, near Nantes, and he also kept a private journal. The journal records threats of murder, hostage taking, military disobedience and much else. The letters to constituents says nothing of this. This discrepancy must have been because he did not wish to alarm his constituents.¹² Until the publication of newspapers and pamphlet press exploded a few weeks later, this limitation hampers a great deal of what we can do. In more concrete terms, we can know a great deal more about Versailles than we can about Paris in late June 1789.

Let us begin with one of Caron’s crucial points, the military build-up. We will end there, too. The military build-up began early. From the Réveillon riots in late April in Paris to late June, the government brought an additional 3–4,000 light cavalry and foreign Swiss and German regiments to the region around the capital.¹³ The troops brought to Versailles to defend the king and the assembly hall on the 23rd also never left. The Bodyguards did not return to barracks at Saint Germain. The soldiers controlled the entrances to the National Assembly hall, so much so that communication with the hall of the clergy had to be by tunnel.¹⁴ Very likely, this was an attempt to prevent more clerics from joining the National Assembly.

Not only was this futile, the situation in Versailles deteriorated rapidly afterwards. On the early evening of the 24th, the crowd assaulted the archbishop of Paris, whom they held responsible for the king’s intransigence. Specifically, it was said that the archbishop, cross in hand, had fallen to his knees before the king at Marly before the *séance royale* to denounce the Protestant Necker and Jean-Sylvain Bailly, president of the National Assembly and a *philosophe*. And if this were not

¹⁰ Undated letter in ‘Documents inédits. Correspondance de Legendre, député du tiers de la sénéchaussée de Brest aux Etats généraux et à l’Assemblée constituante (1789–1791),’ *Révolution française*, 39 (1900): 529.

¹¹ Letter of Coma Serra and Baryuls de Montferré, 27 June in Jean Capeille, *Histoire de la maison des chevaliers de Banyuls, barons de Nyer, marquis de Montferré, seigneurs de La Rocha, Porcinyans, Fornols, Puig, Réal, Odeillo, Leca, Millepetit (1132–1922)* (Céret: Impr.-libr.-reliure F. Casteil, 1923), 455.

¹² J.-M.Pellerin, *Correspondance inédite de J.M. Pellerin ... (5 mai 1789–29 mai 1790)* recueillie et annotée par G. Bord (Paris, 1883), letter xvi (28 June); xvii (2 July); xviii (10 July), 90–5.

¹³ Samuel F. Scott, *The Response of the Royal Army to the French Revolution: The Role and Development of the Line Army, 1787–93* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 51. Caron, ‘La tentative de contre-révolution de juin–juillet 1789,’ 12–14.

¹⁴ J. Jallet, *Journal inédit de Jallet: député aux États-généraux de 1789, précède d’une notice historique par J.J. Brethé, mémoire couronné en 1868 par l’Académie de Nantes* (Fonteney-le-Comte: P. Robuchon, 1871), 102. *Gaultier de Biauzat, député du Tiers-État aux États-Généraux de 1789: sa vie et sa correspondance* ed. par Francisque Mège. (Paris: Lechevalier, 1890), 136.

enough, he had implored the king to support the clergy and nobility lest all France be lost.¹⁵ The crowd attacked the archbishop as he was leaving the clergy's assembly hall. But thanks to his driver, he fled to his lodgings. The damage was slight: the windows on his carriage were shattered with rocks and showers of mud but bloodcurdling shouts threatened him with death.¹⁶ A rumor, probably false, circulated in Versailles that crowds had sacked the archbishop's palace in Paris and destroyed the interior.¹⁷ Hundreds of French Guards and mounted bodyguards managed to control the crowd at the price of slicing the nose off one of the young rioters.¹⁸

The assault on the archbishop began the crisis of order. The government redeployed light cavalry and some battalions of *maréchaussée* (mounted police) around the assembly hall.¹⁹ Reinforcements and redeployments were everywhere, on the rue des Chantiers where the National Assembly met; on the avenue de Paris, which protected the royal palace from an incursion from Paris; and even through assorted neighborhoods. The Parisian menace was very real. The government set up an artillery park with a dozen cannon at St. Cloud between Paris and Versailles. Rumors flew that the grain supply would be interrupted to force Paris into submission.²⁰

Paris was calm on the 23rd and 24th. But Parisians were active. At least 15,000 people gathered in the Palais Royal to hear the latest news from Versailles. No doubt the spectacular fireworks and rockets that some fired off at night and the bright torches that lit up the walls made the place even more attractive. But there was no violence until the government attempted to transfer troops to Versailles.²¹

This was the next step in the crisis of the regime. Soldiers' refusal to fight the common people, their laying down of their arms and their fraternization was only a part of this crisis, however. The 25th and 26th witnessed a series of practically simultaneous events. These included rumors: of a

¹⁵ Archives Nationales de France, AB XIX 3359, Ricord letter of 24 June.

¹⁶ Jallet, *Journal inédit de Jallet: député aux États-généraux de 1789*, 102–3. Bibliothèque Nationale de France FR 6687, Siméon-Prosper Hardy, *Mes Loisirs ou Journal d'événements tels qu'ils parviennent à ma connoissance*, 8, 24 June, p. 363.

¹⁷ Bibliothèque municipale de Versailles, Mss F 823, f.39, Joseph-Michel Pellerin, *Journal de la tenue des Etats-Généraux convoqués à Versailles pour le 27 avril 1789 par le roi Louis XVI*. Germain Bapst (ed.), *Lettres du baron de Saiffert*, *Revue de la révolution*, 7 (1886): 43. Letter of 24 June.

¹⁸ *Gazette de Leyde*, no. 53, 3 July, p. 8.

¹⁹ Jallet, *Journal inédit de Jallet: député aux États-généraux de 1789*, 103.

²⁰ Archives municipales de Lorient, BB12, letter 26, Delaville Leroux, to municipality of Lorient, 29 June, reprinted in Louis Chaumeil, *Les Journées de 89, d'après Delaville-Le-Roulx, député de Lorient aux Etats-Généraux. Juillet 89 à Lorient* (Lorient: Impr. du Nouvelliste du Morbihan, 1940), 41. BM Nantes, 60585, *Correspondance de Nantes*, p. 50, 25 June. AD Eure, 5F 6, p. 90, Pierre-Paul Nairac, député de la sénéchaussée de Bordeaux, *Journal*, entry of 24 June. Pellerin, *Journal*, f. 39v, entry of 25 June; f. 40v, 'l'avenue de Paris couverte de militaires sous les armes. La ville pleine de militaires faisant la ronde...' 26 June. *Gazette de Leyde*, livraison 53, p. 6, 3 July. *Le point du jour: ou Résultat de ce qui s'est passé la veille à l'Assemblée nationale*, VIII, 26 June, p. 51. Boullé to municipality of Pontivy, 28 June in *Revue de la Révolution*, xiv (1889), 27.

²¹ *Gazette de Leyde*, livraison 54, 3 July, p. 8.

change of dynasty; of a march from Paris to Versailles to murder recalcitrant clerical and noble deputies; and finally of a mass assault on Versailles accompanied by threats to murder the king. In a very short period of time, the government appeared to be threatened from multiple sides at once. They ordered the union of the three orders as a way of defusing the threat to the regime and perhaps to the Bourbon monarchy itself.

The partial collapse of the military on 25–26 June around Paris and Versailles was fatal. As early as January, there were predictions the army was ill prepared to manage a general insurrection and that in a crisis they might take the side of the people.²² The minister Montmorin echoed this assessment on the eve of the *séance royale*.²³

Real trouble began only on the 25th when the French Guards in Paris mutinied rather than march to Versailles.²⁴ At 9a.m., two companies stationed in the Faubourg Saint-Martin and in the Faubourg du Temple in Paris defied orders, left their barracks and went drinking outside the city walls. Given the scale, this was a planned mass desertion and a bold insubordination, defying orders from their officers. Stumbling through the streets, they shouted “Vive le Roi, amis toujours le Tiers Etat en avant!”²⁵ Another version of what must be the same story has the French Guards abandoning their barracks, also on the 25th. They scattered through the streets of Paris, shouting “Vive le Roi! Vive le Tiers!” Several onlookers gave them money by the fistful, so they could drink in the cabarets of the Palais Royal and elsewhere. Not surprisingly, some got spectacularly drunk as they listened to speakers praise their patriotism before crowds of thousands in front of the Café Caveau. Officers dared not discipline them. The French Guards even disarmed some soldiers of the Swiss regiments they met on the streets. Other Swiss fraternized. Soldiers swore not to use their weapons against civilians.²⁶ On the 27th, crowds of French Guards tried vainly to recruit the veterans in the Invalides to their cause.²⁷ They also promised that if they went to Versailles, they would refuse to fire on fellow citizens.²⁸

²² J. Flammermont, ‘Le second ministère de Necker,’ *Revue historique*, xlvii (1891), 63 note.

²³ Letter to Louis XVI, 22 June in *Ibid.*, 63–4.

²⁴ *Etats-Généraux, numéro xxiv du lundi 29 juin 1789. Correspondance de Bretagne. Bulletin du clergé. Extrait d’une lettre de Messieurs les députés du clergé du diocèse de Rennes à Versailles, à leurs correspondants, en date du 23 juin 1789.* Letter of 25 June, pp. 269–70.

²⁵ Antoine Charles, marquis de Maleissye, *Mémoires d’un officier aux gardes françaises (1789–1793)* (Paris: E. Plon, Nourri, 1897), 22–3. Jallet, *Journal inédit de Jallet: député aux États-généraux de 1789*, 106.

²⁶ ‘Documents inédits. Relation des événements depuis le 6 mai jusqu’au 15 juillet 1789. Bulletins d’un agent secret,’ *Révolution française* 24 (1893): 70. Extract of undated dispatch of comte de Salmour, Minister of Saxony, in J. Gustave Flammermont, *Les correspondances des agents diplomatiques étrangers en France avant la révolution: conservées dans les archives de Berlin, Dresde, Genève, Turin, Gênes, Florence, Naples, Simancas, Lisbonne, Londres, La Haye et Vienne* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1896), 231. *Gazette d’Amsterdam*, livraison 54, 7 July, p. 8.

²⁷ ‘Bulletins d’un agent secret,’ 74–5.

²⁸ Hardy, *Mes Loisirs*, 8, 25 June, p. 365.

At Versailles, other French Guards bragged in public that if they received an order to fire on their brothers, they would shoot those who gave the order.²⁹ In Paris, following the attacks on the archbishop of Paris and the church of Notre Dame, the French Guards and Swiss refused to march. The French Guards threatened the light cavalry with retaliation if they fired on anyone. They made a similar threat to the royal bodyguards.³⁰

The rowdiness and defiance spread to other military units. A spokesman for the royal bodyguards told their commander, the duc de Guiche, that their job was not crowd control or, as he put it, it was not policing the *canaille*. When de Guiche tried to sack him, the men threatened mass resignations. The king reinstated the spokesman. The loyalty of newly-arrived Swiss regiments was doubtful. The Salis-Samade Swiss regiment garrisoned at Issy and Vaugirard threatened to dismantle their muskets if they were forced to march.³¹ Thomas Jefferson reported that even soldiers in the provinces were siding with the people against the orders of their officers.³² Entire companies of grenadiers in Paris laid down their arms, after which they were greeted enthusiastically at the Palais Royal. The king reportedly was very alarmed.³³

The soldiers quickly organized themselves for collective action. The bodyguards had clearly done so when they dictated their mission to the duc de Guiche. So did the French Guards.

Someone published a pamphlet in their name – it sounded authentic because it imitated daily speech – in which it was stated, “We swear and promise the *Patrie* to disobey any order, no matter from whom it is given, which could deprive our good King of just one subject, and if there is such an order to fire on the People, in the name of the devil, we swear to throw down our arms”.³⁴ Another pamphlet implored the soldiers to disobey any order against the National Assembly.³⁵

Antoine François Bertrand de Molleville, former Intendant of Brittany, probably witnessed this fraternization. He wrote in his classic history,

²⁹ Felix-Marie Faulcon, *Correspondance de Félix Faulcon, 1789–1791*, ed. by Gabriel Debien (Poitiers: Société des archives historiques du Poitou [impr. de P. Oudin], 1953), 2: 44, journal extract, 27 June.

³⁰ Jallet, *Journal inédit de Jallet: député aux États-généraux de 1789*, 106.

³¹ Salmour dispatch, 231. Jacques-Antoine Creuzé-Latouche, *Journal des états généraux et du début de l'assemblée nationale, 18 mai – 29 juillet 1789* (Paris: Didier, 1946), 154, 25 June.

³² Letter to John Jay, 29 June in <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-15-02-0218>. Montjoie mentions mutinies in Béarn, at Metz, Verdun, Clermont and Béthune (*L'Ami du roi*, ch. xxxii, p. 118–9).

³³ Jean-Gabriel Gallot, *La vie et les oeuvres du Dr Jean-Gabriel Gallot (1744–1794)* in *Mémoires de la société des antiquaires de l'Ouest* (Poitiers: Société des antiquaires de l'Ouest, 1962), 87, 26 June.

³⁴ *Arrêté des grenadiers aux gardes-françaises* [1789]. BNF Lb³⁹ 7314.

³⁵ *Avis aux grenadiers et soldats du Tiers-Etat. Par un ancien camarade du régiment des Gardes françaises* [S.l., 1789]. Lb³⁹ 1867. Published after 25 June.

We could see French Guards and soldiers of the Swiss regiments in Paris and Versailles ... living in the greatest familiarity with the bourgeois. Groups of one and the other held each other fraternally by the arm, spread out along the promenades in cafés and restaurants where they ordered sumptuous meals [and] where the soldiers never failed to cry out, “Vive la nation! – We recognize only the nation’s orders!”³⁶

One shocked noble deputy from Provence spoke of the defection of the troops. The French Guards have declared for the Third Estate and they will fire only on nobles and clergy. Officers are no longer masters – a soldier slapped one of them. They desert their barracks and gorge themselves at public expense. At the Palais Royal they are encouraged to smash everything, and are plied with ices and liquors. The Veterans from the Invalides come and they are regaled too. One of these Veterans told the people they had nothing to fear from the soldiers, that the troops belonged to the nation which pays them, not to the king.... The Swiss formally declared [to their colonel] that they would not march. The Royal-Cravate regiment [cavalry] feels the same...³⁷

Many people thought that all this turmoil would lead to a coup d’état in favor of the duc d’Orléans. Some said there had been a motion in the Estates General to depose the king. The deputy Pierre-Paul Nairac feared there was a hidden hand working to render the people suspect to the king and to undermine his confidence in Necker. Such subterfuge aimed to persuade the king that the Third Estate intended nothing less than removing his crown. These fears, he concluded, lay behind the orders to double the guard and to bring in the light cavalry as reinforcements.³⁸ The deputy Félix Faulcon heard with his own ears someone say in broad daylight at the Palais Royal that the “evil house [*maudite race*] [of Bourbons]” be immediately eliminated (*brûler d’un coup*), “or at least the King be deposed and replaced by M. Orléans.”³⁹ The anonymous noble deputy confirmed the story of an Orleanist movement. Unbelievably, the king himself along with Necker “would pardon those who would try to depose him, the people say loudly that it is necessary to remove the crown from him that we are sure the soldiers will not budge. I have seen with my own eyes hand written placards where it is said that if the duc d’Orléans wishes to accept the crown, 60 to 70 thousand men will offer it to him.”⁴⁰

³⁶ *Histoire de la révolution de France: pendant les dernières années du règne de Louis XVI* (Paris: Giguet et cie., 1801), i, 236–7. See also *L’Ami du roi*, ch. xxxi, pp. 103–4.

³⁷ ‘Documents inédits. Correspondance d’un député de la noblesse de la Sénéchaussée de Marseille avec la marquise de Créquy, près Blaincourt, par Brienne, Champagne (13 mai–8 août 1789),’ *Revue de la Révolution*, ii (1883), 36. Letter of 26 June. See also Boullé to Municipality of Pontivy, 28 June in *Revue de la Révolution*, xiv (1889), 27.

³⁸ AD Eure, 5F 6, p. 96, Nairac, *Journal*, entry of 26 (?) June.

³⁹ Faulcon, *Correspondance*, ii, 44, journal extract, 27 June.

⁴⁰ ‘Correspondance d’un député de la noblesse de la Sénéchaussée de Marseille,’ 44. Entry of 4 July.

Opinion continued to swell in Orléans' favor.⁴¹ The government spy at the Palais Royal reported some wanted to make him supreme commander of the armed forces; others to crown him king.⁴² Later the spy reported seeing 60–80 “scum of the people” parading about under a banner that read, “*Vive le Roi! vive M. le Duc d’Orléans! vive le tiers état!*”⁴³ Someone also plastered a handwritten placard on the walls of the Palais Royal praising the duc d’Orléans as an illustrious descendant of Henri IV and supporter of the poor.⁴⁴

By 26 June then, it was clear that while the idea of monarchy was solid, Louis XVI had lost a great deal of popularity in some quarters. As the crowd had shown as they witnessed the procession to the *séance royale*, loyalty to this particular king was conditional. Whether there was a genuine Orleanist plot to depose the king matters little; what does matter were the unsettling rumors in favor of his cousin. Finally, there were the reports of the unreliability of regular troops and even the Swiss mercenaries.

In this context of collapsing discipline and wild rumor, two Parisian bodies petitioned the National Assembly. The first was the Paris electors and the “citizens of Paris”; the second, “fifteen or sixteen young men of the Clubs of the Palais Royal,” or, according to the inimitable journalist Montjoie, “the feckless from the cafés of the Palais Royal.”⁴⁵ Neither petition was as innocent as it appeared. Both were implicitly declaring support for the National Assembly against the ministry. Both addressed the National Assembly on 26 June and both pronounced their loyalty to the National Assembly. The Electors specifically endorsed the Assembly’s declaration of 17 June that claimed sovereignty for the Third Estate.⁴⁶ This was a silent repudiation of the *séance royale* that had quashed the declaration of 17 June. Significantly, the Electors heaped praise on the duc d’Orléans

⁴¹ Unqualified praise in *Les hommages mérités, ou, L’allégresse nationale: a Monseigneur le duc d’Orléans, aux députés du Tiers-Etat, sur l’heureuse réunion des trois ordres, & au noble courage des Gardes françoises & Gardes suisses* [s.l.; sn]. Newberry FRC 27864. The Newberry catalogue identifies the author as the deputy Jean-Lambert Tallien. The BNF and British Library catalogues do not attribute authorship.

⁴² ‘Bulletins d’un agent secret,’ 70.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴⁴ *Gazette d’Amsterdam*, livraison 54, 7 July, p. 7.

⁴⁵ *Lettre et réflexions d’un citoyen: écrites de Versailles, le 27 juin 1789* [s.l.: s.n.], 9. Newberry Library FRC 4960. *L’Ami du roi*, ch. xxxi, p. 106.

⁴⁶ ‘Députation de Paris,’ in *Journal des États généraux, convoqués par Louis XVI* (Paris: Le Hodey, 1789), 1: 235. 26 June. ‘Lettre de MM. les Députés des trois Ordres de Paris,’ *ibid.*, i, 244–6. Signed *inter-alia* by Fournier l’Américain, the well-known radical and *vainqueur de la Bastille*. The version that Montjoie printed also praised the duc d’Orléans (*L’Ami du roi*, Ch. xxxi, p. 107). The two addresses are also reprinted with more signatures in *Procès-verbal de l’assemblée des communes et de l’Assemblée nationale...* (Paris: Baudouin, 1789), i, no 8, 2–6; 20–4, 26 June. The deputy Ménard de la Groye took the Electors’ petition as an unqualified endorsement of the National Assembly (*François Ménard de la Groye: député du Maine aux États généraux: correspondance (1789–1791) / publiée et annotée par Florence Mirouse; préface de Jean Favier* (Le Mans: Conseil Général de la Sarthe, 1989), 26 June, p. 52).

during the meeting that decided on the address to the Assembly.⁴⁷ No one could have failed to notice that neither address contained the usual anodyne expression of affection for the king.⁴⁸

Other proposals that were not included nonetheless demanded drastic action. One of these was to expel all “foreign” troops from Paris and replace them with a “troop” the bourgeois would form themselves.⁴⁹ The mistrust of royal troops was obvious, despite the reports of wavering loyalty. One Parisian elector expressed the same sentiment when he proposed transferring the National Assembly to the capital where it would be under more secure protection. Other proposals were to move the Estates General to Nantes. In the Assembly itself, “Robert Pierre” (Robespierre) and Antoine Barnave proposed moving elsewhere unless the military were withdrawn.⁵⁰

In addition, there were threats of massive violence. By 26 June, the Provençal noble was declaring the fermentation is incredible, I would not be surprised to see [a massacre] of the nobles and clergy. The Third Estate no longer hides it, it vaunts it. I have heard with my own ears an orator in the Palais Royal urge it. They horribly mistreat the clerics who are imprudent enough to appear there.... It appears there will be a revolution, the master of the Palais Royal [Orléans] is its head, people say it out loud.⁵¹

The rumors were never-ending. Necker himself had to declare he was neither leaving the ministry, nor was he going to be sacked. There were rumors that the country house of the archbishop of Paris at Conflans and the chateau of the prince of Condé at Chantilly had been put to the torch.⁵² It was said “the ministry was preparing to act with rigor against the deputies of the Commons such as locking them in the Bastille, or to dismiss them and retain one per province as a hostage”.⁵³ It was reported as certain that wicked people with no ascertainable motive had been destroying grain in the ground before it could be harvested. Some said three of them had been arrested at Saint-Quentin.⁵⁴ The clerical deputy Jacques Jallet reported that the government had moved up 16,000 foreign troops while the Parisians had 40,000 men “all ready [to march on Versailles?]” The

⁴⁷ *Députation patriotique à l'Assemblée nationale* ([s.l.: s.n.] 1789), Newberry Library Case FRC 2917.

⁴⁸ Jallet, *Journal inédit de Jallet: député aux États-généraux de 1789*, 105.

⁴⁹ ‘Bulletins d’un agent secret,’ 75, 27 June.

⁵⁰ *Récit de ce qui s’est passé à l’assemblée des électeurs de la ville de Paris, tenue le 25 juin 1789 dans une salle de l’hôtel dit du Musée, rue Dauphine*, (Paris: s.n., 1789), 11. Newberry Library, Case FRC 18620. *Correspondance de MM. les députés des communes de la province d’Anjou avec leurs commettans relativement aux États généraux tenans à Versailles en 1789*, 1, no 12, 234.

⁵¹ ‘Correspondance d’un député de la noblesse de la Sénéchaussée de Marseille,’ 35. Entry of 26 June.

⁵² Boullé to municipality of Pontivy, 26 June, *Revue de la Révolution*, xiii (1888): 75.

⁵³ Pellerin, *Journal*, f. 40v, entry of 25 June. Identical rumor reported in ‘Suite du Journal des États-Généraux. Séance du jeudi 25 juin 1789,’ in *Gaultier de Biauzat, député du Tiers-État aux États-Généraux de 1789*, 141.

⁵⁴ Hardy, *Mes Loisirs*, 8, 27 June, p. 367. His source was *Mercure historique et politique de Bruxelles*, 17 June, pp. 182–3.

government in turn placed men along the Paris–Versailles road ready to fire their pistols as a signal if any disorder occurred.⁵⁵

Charles Élie, the marquis de Ferrières, was convinced of an impending massacre too and that the duc d'Orléans was behind it. The Palais Royal spoke of it openly, he said. “Our houses are marked for this murder and my door was marked with a ‘P’ in black [for “proscribed”]. This butchery was supposed to happen during the night of Friday and Saturday [26th-27th]. In reality, all Versailles was complicit.” “The court expected to be overwhelmed any instant by forty thousand brigands from Paris”. The king’s brother, the comte d’Artois, Ferrières continued, told the Chamber of Nobility that the “forty thousand Parisians were expected to come that night [the 27th] to burn the chateau, massacre the majority of the nobility [that is, that faction that refused to join the Third Estate]. The king can count on the loyalty of none of his troops. Panic and consternation dazed the chateau...” Fear of domination and massacre persuaded the king to order the fusion of the orders.⁵⁶

Years later, the marquis de Clermont-Gallerande recalled that the people, frustrated with the obstinacy of the first two orders, spoke of them as victims they could immolate at will. “Already, the houses most of the deputies the first two orders occupied in Versailles were marked with the seal of vengeance when the king, in order to prevent it, made it known he wanted to see them unite with the rest of the nation.”⁵⁷

The Duke of Dorset, the British Ambassador, agreed that the threat of violence prompted the king to order the fusion of the orders. The nobility’s determination collapsed when “the king’s personal safety was actually endangered”; when popular agitation had become “very alarming”; and when some of the “Military joined in the popular cry, and the French Guards had even been wrought upon to bind themselves by oath not to support the king under the present circumstances.” Finally, the populace had “now became quite ungovernable at Versailles, as well as at Paris, insomuch that the king and the Royal Family were no longer secure from outrage even in the Palace” (perhaps a reference to crowd swarming on to the palace grounds at dusk on the 23rd).⁵⁸

The Royal Council thus faced a rapidly deteriorating situation on the evening of the 26th: the defection of the French Guards, normally the principal force for public order in Paris and Versailles; defiance from other regiments and even scattered reports of disturbances from provincial regiments; talk of deposing the king and replacing him with the duc d'Orléans; threats to kill the recalcitrant clergy and nobility in the Estates General; threats to the king’s life; and a march from Paris to Versailles to impose these demands.

⁵⁵ Jallet, *Journal inédit de Jallet: député aux États-généraux de 1789*, 106. J.-A., Creuzé-Latouche, *Journal des Etats-Généraux et du début de l'Assemblée Nationale: 18 mai – 29 juillet 1789* (Paris: Henri Didier, 1946), 154, 24 June.

⁵⁶ Charles-Élie Ferrières, *Correspondance Inédite (1789, 1790, 1791)* (Paris: A. Colin, 1932), 75–7.

⁵⁷ Charles Georges Clermont-Gallerande, *Mémoires particuliers pour servir à l'histoire de la Révolution qui s'est opérée en France en 1789* (Paris: J.G. Dentu, 1826), 1: 99.

⁵⁸ *Despatches from Paris, 1784–1790* / selected and ed. from the Foreign office correspondence by Oscar Browning (London: Offices of the Society, 1909–1910), 2: 225–6.

The council met on the night of the 26th. The king; his two brothers, Provence, and Artois; other princes of the blood (excluding, no doubt, Orléans); and some ministers, including Necker, were present. Necker urged a fusion of the orders to save the monarchy and the king's life. Then at 2 a.m. word came from the *lieutenant général de police* that if the order to fuse was not forthcoming, 30,000 men would march from Paris to Versailles. This decided the king. He informed the presidents of the clergy and nobility in the morning that there was everything to fear. Paris "was inclined to revolt, the provinces would not delay to rise up, that it was well known the troops, even the foreign troops, were refusing to serve. In this extreme case, opinion has to be calmed down and to succeed with this, the reunion of the orders had become indispensable."⁵⁹

The clergy went along but the nobility was more difficult to convince. The duc de Liancourt, a liberal, urged his colleagues to end the separation which "threatened the state with the greatest misfortunes."⁶⁰ Nonetheless, a minority of the nobles was defiant. It took a letter from the comte d'Artois claiming Louis's life was in danger to persuade them.⁶¹ It contained the phrase, "Les jours du roi sont en danger." Even so, some nobles resisted. One of their leaders, the *parlementary* magistrate Jacques Antoine Marie de Cazalès, argued that saving the monarchy was more important than saving the king, but this willingness to sacrifice Louis, while it became a staple of royalist thinking later, made little impact this time.⁶²

According to some writing afterwards, the order to fuse avoided a very dangerous calamity. The deputy Joseph Delaville Le Roulx, from Lorient, asserted the military build-up could have resulted in a *coup d'autorité* which would have placed France on the edge of ruin "and the aristocrats in the greatest danger" – a reference, no doubt, to the earlier threats of massacre.⁶³ The clerical deputies of Rennes observed that without this "*heureuse révolution*," France was on the edge of a precipice, there were legitimate fears that force would crush the nation under despotism. Forty thousand had been ordered to march to Paris but they refused and the project had to be abandoned.⁶⁴

"Never was a revolution more complete and more swift, more peaceful, and accomplished at fewer costs," exclaimed the deputy Boullé in summarizing the fusion of orders on 27 June.⁶⁵ A hundred

⁵⁹ BM Versailles, Mss. F 823, f.43v, Pellerin, *Journal*, 27 June.

⁶⁰ *Gazette de Leyde*, livraison 55, 10 July, p. 3.

⁶¹ Guy Marie Sallier, *Annales françaises, Mai 1789 – Mai 1790* (Paris: Chez Leriche, 1832), 1: 79–86.

⁶² *Précis exact de ce qui s'est passé à Versailles: depuis neuf heures du matin, jusqu'à deux heures après midi; du 27 juin [1789]*. Newberry Library FRC 6988 is a straightforward account of events on 27 June.

⁶³ AM Lorient, BB12, letter number 26, to municipality of Lorient, 29 June, reprinted in Chaumeil, *Les Journées de 89, d'après Delaville-Le-Roulx*, 42.

⁶⁴ *Correspondance de Bretagne. Bulletins du clergé*, 1 July, 184.

⁶⁵ Letter of 28 June, p. 26. See also Jean-Sylvain Bailly, *Mémoires de Bailly* (Paris: Baudouin frères, 1821), 254.

and eighty years later, Georges Lefebvre agreed. This was a “legal, peaceful” revolution.⁶⁶ Given the turbulence following the *séance royale*, such assertions are no longer convincing. The very circumstances of the fusion meant that the threat or fear of violence had achieved the patriots’ goal of vote by head. It also meant that this violence, imagined as it was at this time, was not defensive, a response to a threat, as traditional historiography would have it. Moreover, the circumstances of the fusion meant that the constructive reforms of the Constituent Assembly would face a bitter opposition, one that felt its quiescence had been extorted.⁶⁷ National regeneration would not be by consensus. After this, consensus was not necessary. The experience of the four days between the *séance royale* and the fusion had shown that radicals had learned that the threat of force brought results. Reliance on the threat of violence also made the Third Estate dependent on the Palais Royal.

The troop build-up continued after 27 June, of course, and everyone knows the result. But an examination of what happened in late June shows how risky the adventure was when the king dismissed Necker on 11 July. Not just the French Guards, but other troops, including the bodyguards, the Swiss, light cavalry and infantry were potentially unreliable. The political actors outside the cloisters of power, outside the assembly halls and palaces, had also shown themselves to be extremely quick to respond to provocations and rumor. They were equally quick to demand punishment and retaliation. As the realm of high politics crumbled, as life in general became more and more uncertain, fear for the future fueled the wildest rumors, of a change of dynasty, of a slaughter of prelates and nobles, of regicide, and of invasion and destruction.

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⁶⁶ Georges Lefebvre. *The French Revolution, Vol. 1*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 114.

⁶⁷ See the abbé Maury’s remark to this effect in his no. clxxxviii, ‘Mémoire sur la réponse que le Roi doit faire à l’Assemblée nationale, lorsqu’elle lui présentera la nouvelle Constitution,’ in *(Troisième) Recueil. Pièces imprimées d’après le texte de la Convention nationale du 5 décembre 1792..., déposées à la Commission extraordinaire des Douze établie pour le dépouillement des papiers trouvés dans l’armoire de fer...* (Paris: de l’Impr. nationale, 1793), 307.