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Micah Alpaugh, *Non-violence and the French Revolution : Political Demonstrations in Paris, 1787-1795*. Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2015.viii + 292 pp. Tables, notes, bibliography, and index. €93.57 £58.50 \$82.67 U.S. (cl). ISBN 078-1-10708279-3.

Review by D.M.G. Sutherland, University of Maryland, College Park.

François Furet claimed that the Terror was implicit in the principles of 1789. Simon Schama argued that the very events of the first year of Revolution made its further bloody course irreversible. Together, Furet and Schama restored the issue of violence to the top of the agenda for historians of the French Revolution. Historians more sympathetic to the Revolution accept that violence was part of the Revolution, of course, but they argue it was a product of circumstances, not a consequence of principles. Micah Alpaugh takes a third approach, one that is entirely different and original.

When Furet and Schama spoke of violence, they had Paris and the Terror in mind. Those who disagreed with them responded by reiterating the classic “thesis of circumstances”: revolutionaries used or profited from violence only in order to stave off threats to the Revolution itself. The best example of this approach can be read in Pierre Caron’s splendid study of the September Massacres of 1792 in Paris. Caron argued that it was fear of slaughter from its prisons and aristocrats in hidden tunnels and by ruthless Prussian invaders that provoked the Parisian crowds to cut down perhaps 1,400 people, including priests, women and teenagers, in a pre-emptive invasion of the prisons lasting five horrific days.

Micah Alpaugh says very little about the September Massacres and, from his point of view, with good reason. Instead, the aim of his book is to place what he admits were violent episodes of the Paris Revolution in a new and bold context. In his own words:

“Recourse to bloodshed formed only a rare and desperate portion of Parisian protester programs, which commonly focused instead on avoiding physical harm and developing fraternal, conciliatory, and collaborative relationships with the elites they attempted to influence. . . . Instead of a movement based primarily on violent exclusion and retaliation, most Parisian protests focused on emerging practices of non-violence: developing alternatives to physical violence, while attempting to find occasions for cooperation” (p. 204).

A monumental scholarly apparatus undergirds this argument. Alpaugh carried out research in 137 archives and libraries in France and abroad, in scores of newspapers, and he produces an impressive bibliography of pamphlets, posters, and secondary works. The result is a notable compilation, printed as an Appendix, of every demonstration, procession, riot, and insurrection the author could find in Paris from 1787 to 1795. This list shows quite easily that the vast majority of political events during the Revolution in Paris were not violent; fewer than 10 percent can be so described. Henceforth, our descriptions and interpretations of Parisian crowd action will have to be considerably more nuanced.

They will need to be nuanced in another way as well. Alpaugh’s book has an interesting discussion of the continuance of Catholic festivals and processions even into the Terror. Just one week after the Festival of

the Supreme Being, supposed to inaugurate a new republican religion of morality, Catholics celebrated Pentecost Sunday with customary pomp and processions. Moreover, Alpaugh has added to the mix the activities of the Muscadins, the draft-dodging youth groups who mobbed Jacobins and sans-culottes before and after the Terror. All this makes movements in Paris more diverse than is usually appreciated.

Yet, the few lines Alpaugh does devote to the September Massacres, or to any of the other atrocities of the period, are disturbing. He justifies this on the grounds that they were not typical of the disturbances of the period. That is true enough, if one is to give equal weight to each discrete mass event in the period, but some events were more important than others, and many of these were sickeningly violent. Treating the September Massacres as an outlier is controversial to say the least.

Another example—there are others—of Alpaugh’s omniscient and impassive positioning would be his judgment on the execution of the deputy Féraud on 1 Prairial An III (20 May 1795). The mob decapitated him on the floor of the Convention and took turns waving his head at the end of a pole and then a bayonet before the horrified legislators. The killers then took the head outside the hall where the Convention sat, parading it through the Place du Carousel and some nearby streets before returning to the assembly. Alpaugh says nothing about these gory details but asserts that, “Six years into the Revolution, one fatality seemed a thin pretense to discredit an entire movement” (p. 174). This is Alpaugh speaking, not the legislators threatened with the severed head, with further threats of murder, and the crowd’s shouted demands that they set the clock back to the time of Robespierre and the Terror. [1] A murder is not a simple fatality, an unfortunate accident. Murder, indeed violence in general, radically changes the nature of mass action and transforms its agenda.

Indeed, if violence was not the central feature of crowd action, what was? For Alpaugh, the point of a demonstration or even an insurrection was to initiate a process in which ultimate goals were secondary to negotiation, conciliation, solidarity, and unity. A successful demonstration achieved harmony between demonstrators and legislators. Thus, “Parisian activists looked to develop ... inclusive relationships with local and national elites [A]cross the Revolution, explicit or implicit negotiation between demonstrators and authorities typically played a more important role than brute force” (p. 17). For example, the execution of Louis XVI “cemented closer relationship between legislators and popular radicals” (p. 135).

Some readers might raise their eyebrows at this, or even at the entire technique by which the author sustains these assertions. One reason is a problem of definition. A negotiation usually involves a compromise achieved over a period of time. Compromise does not ordinarily result when street demonstrators bring weapons, even artillery, to the “negotiating” table. Nor does it arise from blood curdling threats directed at the opposing party.

The assertion that demonstrations and insurrections were negotiations is troubling in another way. The execution of Louis XVI may possibly have cemented relations with some legislators, but overall, it was very divisive. The vote to subject the king’s fate to a referendum provoked outraged demands to recall or later purge the Girondin deputies who had voted to save the king. By the end of the year, many of these deputies had been executed, another nail in the coffin of revolutionary democracy.

The impact of threats themselves must be taken in to account. A threat can be a form of violence that transforms the nature of mass action. Eliminating threats from the interpretation of violent acts can lead to a misreading of the evidence. For example, the royal family abandoned Versailles in October 1789, not because the departure was negotiated, as Alpaugh says (p. 74), but because the king had no choice. On their way to Versailles, the women marchers from Paris had threatened to eviscerate or hang the Queen. The King’s defenders had vanished. The Flanders regiment and the Versailles National Guard had defected to the Parisians. The Royal Bodyguards were either in flight or were prisoners, and, of course, when the crowd chopped off the heads of two royal bodyguards and invaded the Queen’s bedroom, they

put the royal family's lives at risk. Who could know whether the threats to murder would be carried out or not? Louis XVI henceforth considered himself a prisoner, his every royal act from then on the result of coercion. Even his natural supporters among conservatives now viewed him as a coward and discounted him as a politician, assuming he would perish in short order. Louis had lost, and badly. Negotiations do not result in the utter humiliation of one of the parties.

Alpaugh's most contentious argument is that the revolutionary *journées* did not begin with violent intent, that violence was a byproduct of authorities' attempts to push back, and that violence did little or nothing to further the demands of rioters. Once radicals began to talk about violence after 1789, however, their theories were skewed towards violence and lack of compromise. As Alpaugh recognizes, the radicals never developed a theory of non-violent resistance. Their theories of direct democracy justified violent action if circumstances required. When their representatives betrayed their mandates, the people reclaimed their primordial sovereignty. Such a concept meant that relations with authority mostly tended to the confrontational. Once the people had risen, they expected authority to yield ground. A petition from the Faubourg Saint Antoine in 1792, for example, asserted the right of the people to take "this sword and avenge with a single blow the law outraged, to punish guilty parties and the gutless custodians of this same law." [2] The relationship between people and their representatives was less a negotiation among equals than it was a demand for submission. Alpaugh quite rightly laments the eclipse of crowd studies in the French Revolution. This important and controversial book will do much to reignite the debate. It deserves to be read as widely as possible.

NOTES

[1] Kåre D Tønnesson, *La défaite des Sans-culottes, mouvement populaire et réaction bourgeoise en l'an III*. ([Oslo]: Presses Universitaires d'Oslo; Paris: Librairie R. Clavreuil, 1959), 270.

[2] *AP*, xlv, 417 session of 20 June 1792.

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