Jacobs

The Jacobins, also known as the Jacobin Club or the Society of the Friends of the Constitution, were the most radical group of the French Revolution and the most powerful political club in the revolutionary period. The Jacobins became a primary force behind the Reign of Terror and were associated with the more extreme elements of the revolution. At their height, they exerted extraordinary influence over revolutionary France until their fall in November 1794, when they were outlawed. The term "Jacobin" also described radicals in other European countries during the French Revolution, as well as radical French republicans during the 19th century.

Originally known as the Breton Club, the organization started as a group of delegates from Brittany meeting with others at the Estates-General in Versailles in 1789. When the Estates-General became the French National Assembly and moved to Paris, the Breton Club moved to Paris as well and renamed itself the Society of the Friends of the Constitution. The group occupied a monastery that was formerly the residence of Dominican monks. Those monks were known as Jacobins because the monastery was located on the Rue St. Jacques. Soon, the members of the Society of the Friends of the Constitution were also commonly called Jacobins. Along with the move to Paris came an important shift in political outlook. While the Breton Club tended to be conservative politically, the Jacobins took on a more radical approach to the revolution. Many of the conservative members left or were expelled.

The Jacobins established political clubs throughout France and drew much of their support from the working class of Paris. After Louis XVI was overthrown in August 1792, the Jacobins played a prominent role in guiding the revolution. Led by Maximilien Robespierre, Jacobins pushed hard for republicanism, universal suffrage, separation of church and state, popular education, and other major economic and social reforms. The Jacobins were a significant force behind the execution of the king in January 1793 and that summer's purge of the moderate republican representatives known as the Girondins.

The Jacobins became a key part of the revolutionary apparatus under the Reign of Terror and supported Robespierre in his position on the Committee of Public Safety. Jacobins watched over members of society who were under suspicion and adopted administrative roles in matters of the army and public governance. When the revolution turned on Robespierre in July 1794, it rejected the Jacobins as well. In November 1794, the Jacobin Club was outlawed.

In later periods of French history, Jacobins were "spiritual descendants" of Robespierre: republicans who opposed royalists and imperialists by revolutionary means if necessary. The revolutionary Jacobin group that emerged in altered form during the 1800s detested followers of Louis Blanc and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and denounced them as socialists (as opposed to revolutionaries).

During the revolution in France between 1870 and 1871 that led to the creation of the French Third Republic, Jacobins helped make the Paris Commune of 1871 possible. The commune, which was formed in Versailles after France suffered a humiliating defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, ended Napoleon III's rule. Jacobin leader Charles Delescluze was given credit for writing the Paris Commune's manifesto, although followers of Proudhon played a role. Delescluze died at the barricades during the Bloody Week of May 21-28, when the French Army attacked and destroyed the Paris Commune, which had then existed for 71 days.

Montagnard

Aligned with the Jacobins during the French Revolution, the Montagnards were the most radical republican group in the French National Convention. In June 1793, after the Girondins were expelled from the National Convention, the Montagnards took control of that body as well as the Committee of Public Safety, created to deal with counterrevolutionaries. They were dominant until 1794, when the Reign of Terror came to an end and many of the Montagnards were executed.
Girondins

The Girondins, also known as Brissotins after their leader Jacques-Pierre Brissot, were a group of moderate republicans in the French Legislative Assembly and its successor, the French National Convention, from 1791 to 1793 during the French Revolution.

Originally aligned with the Jacobins, another revolutionary group, the Girondins were a leading force in the early days of the Legislative Assembly. In April 1792, contending that war would unite the people of France, the group persuaded a majority of convention delegates to vote for war against Austria and Prussia. That action, however, would begin a spree of violent conflict between the Girondins, Jacobins, and other more radical factions that would culminate in the Reign of Terror.

The subsequent war with Austria and Prussia, part of the French Revolutionary Wars that raged in Europe for a decade, began to turn badly for France, and it appeared for a time that former French king Louis XVI would return to the throne. At the same time, ideological differences between the Girondins and Jacobins become irreconcilable. After Louis' attempt to escape was foiled, the Jacobins, joined by the sans-culottes (working classes of Paris), took a much more radical stance against all moderate voices in the National Convention. The radical factions of the Jacobins and the sans-culottes advocated the total abolition of the aristocracy, beginning with the execution of the king, and the creation of a society based on communal property.

The Girondins, who favored according regional autonomy to the provinces and were against the execution of Louis XVI, become the first targets of this new radical fervor. In 1793, the Jacobin-led coalition voted to expel the Girondins from the convention. After counterrevolutionary rebellions began in the Vendée region and the city of Lyon later that year, Brissot and 22 Girondins were arrested on charges of inciting the insurrection. The power of the Girondins came to a definite end on October 31, 1793, when Brissot and 30 supporters were executed by guillotine.

The Jacobin-led Committee of Public Safety would continue that bloody purification of revolutionary thought the following year, resulting in thousands of deaths. The committee ruthlessly eradicated both monarchist and radical opposition and eventually turned on itself. After that fratricidal conflict, the National Convention would ironically return to the original form of revolution favored by the Girondins.

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