2

The Papers and the Journalists

Before investigating the radical press as a whole, it is necessary to deal with the individuality of each journal. Biographies of the major contributors to each paper and summaries of the history of each journal provide a necessary background to an understanding of the entire group. Ideally, it would be useful to discuss the organization for financing and printing each paper, the format of each paper, and the special events that influenced the history of each paper. Unfortunately, not much information exists about the supporting fiscal structure of the periodicals. If any business records were kept, they have not survived, and investigations of the archives of Paris have produced very little. Consequently, for this information, the historian is dependent on contemporary observations and on the internal evidence to be found in the journals. With these goals and reservations in mind, what follows is a brief historical survey of each newspaper. Although the journalists shared a commitment to Cordelier ideology and politics, they differed greatly in the virulence of their charges; and for the sake of convenience, the six papers are arranged roughly from the mildest to the most vitriolic.

Mercure National

The journal that other historians have labeled the Mercure National actually had a succession of titles that varied according to the whims of the editors and because of several mergers. Originally called the Journal d'État et du Citoyen, the newspaper was initially issued on August 13, 1789, and was published every Thursday. It was composed of sixteen
pages, whose dimensions were 4¾ by 8 inches. In October, because of popular demand for current news, the editors added a Sunday issue, but they reduced each issue to eight pages. The price for subscribers was two livres, eight sous per month in Paris, and three livres in the provinces. It is not certain whether single issues of this journal could be purchased, as there is no reference to such a possibility. The editors obviously felt that there was a large and widespread market for their paper, for they contracted with seventeen distributors, two of which were located as far away as Switzerland and England.

The *Journal d'Etat et du Citoyen* was printed in the establishment of N. H. Nyon, whose shop was located on the Left Bank, within the confines of the Cordelier district. The layout of the paper was neat and the spelling accurate—no small feat in 1789. While many articles had headlines, others were separated only by a bold line. Most articles were based on political speeches, and the debates of the National Assembly were treated in a separate, regular feature. These reports were punctuated, and sometimes dominated, by the editorial comment of Mademoiselle Louise Félicité Guinément de Kéralio, who was probably assisted in her efforts by her father, Louis Guinément de Kéralio. Other sections, which centered on foreign affairs and literary publications, were gradually added, and partisan comment did increase; but the original organization, which emphasized reporting over comment and impartiality over passion, was maintained. This emphasis on fact was amenable to the editors, who, while radical, wished more than most Cordeliers to avoid encouraging divisiveness.

Louise de Kéralio was the primary editor of this journal. Nothing is known of her financial relationship with Nyon or the amount of assistance she received from her father, but her central role is accepted. Born on August 25, 1758, she received no formal schooling but was well educated by her father. Prior to the Revolution, she had already translated a number of books and had written a biography of Queen Elizabeth of England. Detailed information is lacking, but it seems likely that her father was a minor noble. He was a chevalier de Saint-Louis and a professor of tactics in the Parisian école militaire. Like his daughter, Kéralio was interested in intellectual affairs, and he wrote on natural history. When the Revolution arrived, he had some reservations about the accompanying random violence. Nonetheless, he generally approved of the Revolution; he became a National Guard commander, later joined the army, and in December 1793 died on the northern frontier in defense of the Republic.

In late December of 1789, the Kéralios changed the name and the organization of their periodical. The biweekly *Journal d'Etat et du Citoyen* became the weekly *Mercure National ou Journal d'Etat et du Citoyen*. The sixteen pages per week expanded to seventy-two (with
slightly larger print size), and Nyon was replaced by L. Potier de Lille. The new price is unknown. At the same time, new collaborators, principally Nicolas-Jean Hugou de Bassville, Jean-Louis Carra, and François Robert were added to the staff. Probably the arrival of the latter was responsible for the unexplained change in the periodical. Robert, born in 1763 in Belgium to a family in commerce, was well educated in an atmosphere where both Jansenist nonconformism and Enlightenment ideas were prevalent. He became an avocat at Givet in France and was very active in the early part of the Revolution. Sent to Paris to report on a local fraud in August 1789, Robert sensed that his greatest opportunities for success would be in the capital. He decided to remain in Paris and, purely by coincidence, moved into the same building as the Kéralios. Romantic and political bonds grew between the new tenant and Louise, and the *Journal d'Etat et du Citoyen* was recast, with Robert a major contributor. (In 1791, the romance would culminate in marriage.) In addition to his journalistic efforts, Robert played an active role in the Cordeliers and tried, through the tutelage of his club, to unify the popular societies of Paris. In July 1791, Robert was instrumental in organizing the protest at the Champ de Mars. With the temporary collapse of the popular societies and the Cordeliers after this debacle of July 1791, Robert negotiated with Jacques Pierre Brissot in the Legislative Assembly for an ambassadorial sinecure. In 1792, a political revival by the Cordeliers and rejection by Brissot sent Robert hurrying to Danton’s side. Robert cooperated with the Dantonists in the ouster of the Girondins and allied himself closely with them, but he managed to escape their later fate. Instead of climbing the scaffold, he fell into political obscurity. He returned to private life, where he became a successful merchant and died in 1823 in Belgium.

Another newcomer was Jean-Louis Carra. He authored only a few articles for the Kéralio paper, since he also worked with Louis-Sebastien Mercier on the *Annales Patriotiques*. Born in what is now known as the department of Ain in March 1742 and educated by the Jesuits, Carra had had a varied career, ranging from an illustrious, if brief, association with the Encyclopedists to a two-year prison term. In 1789 Carra was financially bankrupt, ideologically opposed to the Old Regime, and eager to embrace revolutionary ideas. He joined the Jacobin Club and participated actively in its politics. Also, he served in the Jacobin government and became influential in the formulation of foreign policy. Despite this dedication to the Jacobins, he had earlier accepted a post in a Girondin administration; Robespierre and Marat, distrusting his connections, had him executed in October 1793.

Hugou de Bassville was only an occasional contributor to the *Mercure National*, and his other political activities in 1790 are still unknown. He must have had “connections” in the Old Regime, for he had become an
abbot with a teaching position in Paris. In general, his life remains hidden in obscurity until 1792, when the Convention appointed him ambassador to Rome. There, in January 1793, he incited a riot by wearing the patriotic cockade and was killed in the crush.\(^\text{10}\)

The Kéralios, Robert, Carra, and Hugou de Bassville continued publication of the *Mercure National ou Journal d'Etat et du Citoyen* until early September 1790, when, for no announced reason, they merged with another journal, *Révolutions de l'Europe*, edited by Alexandre Tournon. For two weeks, the paper was called *Révolutions de l'Europe et Mercure National Réunis*. By mid-September the dominance of Robert and the Kéralios was assured, and the paper was renamed *Mercure National et Révolutions de l'Europe*.\(^\text{11}\) Its twice-weekly issues, now thirty-two pages long, carried the familiar features and editorialized reports. No price was listed. There was a succession of printers, whose work shows a sharp deterioration in quality from that of their predecessors. The occasional articles of Carra disappeared entirely, and Tournon, the new collaborator, contributed some news stories and editorials.\(^\text{12}\)

Born in Arras in 1760, Tournon had come to Paris at a tender age. All that is known of his prerevolutionary activities is that he wrote books for the instruction of children. He was engaged in the early publication of the *Révolutions de Paris*, but in a squabble with the publisher, he quit and founded the journal later absorbed by the *Mercure National*. Tournon associated closely with Danton and in 1794 was executed with the other members of this political faction.\(^\text{13}\)

The coalition with Tournon and Hugou de Bassville survived only until March 1791, when the newly wedded Roberts dissolved the moribund partnership,\(^\text{14}\) and combined with another journalist, Pierre Lebrun-Tondu. Changes included a new printer, Lefort and Company, a slightly larger page (5 by 8 inches), and a listed price, approximately five livres per month. The paper was now entitled *Mercure National ou Journal Politique de l'Europe*, and a sixteen-page edition came out daily. It had minute type, comparable in size to that employed in modern classified advertisements. The Roberts did most of the writing,\(^\text{15}\) and although Lebrun contributed some articles on foreign affairs, his role was primarily financial.

Born at Noyon in 1763, Lebrun received most of his education at Louis-le-Grand, where he lived on a scholarship provided by the king. Upon graduation, he entered the church as an abbot, but tiring of a sedentary existence, joined the army. Following this effort at an adventurous army career, Lebrun emigrated to Belgium, where he established a successful journal that specialized in foreign affairs. In 1790 he closed down his paper and gravitated to Paris, where he eventually joined the Roberts in March 1791. The three operated their periodical together until
July 5, 1791, when the partnership dissolved because Robert's financial resources were completely exhausted and the incoming revenue proved insufficient.\textsuperscript{16} Lebrun established a new paper, but his journal differed politically with the \textit{Mercure National} and represented a sharp break with that journal. Lebrun moved away from the political views of the Cordeliers and finally associated himself with the Girondins, whose fate he shared at the guillotine in December 1793.\textsuperscript{17}

There are some gaps in our knowledge of the \textit{Mercure National}—little is known of the financial backing of the paper, for example, but Robert's lack of funds in 1791 and the frequent mergers point to the editors themselves as important sources of money. These maneuvers also suggest fiscal weakness, and one suspects that the \textit{Mercure National} did not have a great circulation. It is evident, however, that the \textit{Mercure} was well printed and elegantly written, by contemporary standards. Further, the tone of criticism, although not the ideas themselves, was subdued. The polish and restraint of the \textit{Mercure National} possibly was related to the relatively refined backgrounds of its journalists. Insofar as we know, they were generally individuals who, raised in fairly stable families and well versed in the literature of the Enlightenment, embraced the Revolution, not because of previous bitter defeats, but because of their intellectual predispositions and a certain degree of calculation. They lacked the impatience, the fervor, and the militancy of the frustrated. They supported the Revolution with some restraint, could compromise more easily, and, indeed, were not as strident as their fellows.

\textit{JOURNAL UNIVERSEL}

The longest-lived of the six papers discussed here was the \textit{Journal Universel}. Begun on November 23, 1789, it was published daily, without exception, up to 30 Germinal of the Year III. Two abortive resumptions carried the paper to 14 Prairial of the same year and to a total run of 1,993 issues.\textsuperscript{18} Each day with exceptional regularity for a revolutionary journal, Pierre-Jean Audouin, apparently working alone, turned out this eight-page periodical. The print was large and the pages small (5 by 8\(\frac{1}{4}\) inches). Nonetheless, the consistency of production is the astonishing characteristic here. In mid-1790 Audouin had the size of print and the margins sharply reduced, and he practically doubled his production of words. In all five and one-half years of publication, he used only two printers, Veuve Herissant, whose shop was located on Rue Notre-Dame, and D. J. Gelé on the Rue du Fouare. Audouin maintained his own office on the Rue du Petit-Bourbon, near St. Sulpice. Herissant's establishment was on the Île-de-la-Cité, but the other two locations were very near the Corde-
lier's meeting place. The newspaper was marketed from Audouin's own office and from various bookshops, at the price of nine livres per quarter in Paris and for slightly more in the provinces. Again, it seems that single issues were not available.

Initially, Audouin planned the *Journal Universel* to be a series of featured sections that would contain new reports every day. He concentrated on news from the National Assembly, the districts, the municipality, the provinces, and foreign countries, with a miscellaneous section to include letters, the arts, and other subjects. These features were well defined by a bold heading, and they were anticipated by headlines grouped together on the first page. Over time, this organization broke down. Only the National Assembly report remained intact, while other interests were no longer covered systematically. The format changed as well, with many news items contained in a single paragraph or separated only by an extended hyphen.

Audouin's prose was, to say the least, straightforward, simplistic, and dull. One wonders how the *Journal Universel* enjoyed such a long existence. Most of the articles were a recitation of the facts, with editorial comment injected at odd and unpredictable intervals. Audouin gave extended opinions in relatively few cases, and he, like the writers of the *Mercure National*, stated his views in a subdued tone. His opinions were those of the Cordeliers, but he lacked passion. He leveled the same charges against Lafayette as his fellow radicals did, but he did so with a respectful, even apologetic tone. Permeating the *Journal Universel* was a desire to support every move of the Cordeliers, yet without admitting the drastic differences between the radicals and their opposition. His articles exhibited a certain tolerance for the deficiencies of Cordelier foes; in fact, Audouin took public pride in his temperance.

Audouin's background does not explain his moderation, although it gives good clues to his motivations for supporting the radical movement. He was born in Paris to parents of modest circumstances on December 24, 1764, and nothing is known of his prerevolutionary life except the following police report, discovered by Robert Darnton: "Audouin: calls himself a lawyer, writes *nouvelles à la main*, peddler of forbidden books; he is connected with Prudhomme, Manuel, and other disreputable authors and bookpeddlers. He does all kinds of work; he will be a spy when one wants." In short, Audouin fits clearly into Darnton's "grub-street" society, and the Revolution must have appeared as a golden opportunity to him. He began the *Journal Universel*, was active in the National Guard, and was popular enough in Paris to be asked by the "conquerors of the Bastille" to become an honorary member of their prestigious group. He continued to agitate with the Paris radicals
throughout 1791 and 1792, and he was important in organizing the Commune's efforts on August 10. Although he abandoned some of the moderation of his journal in this period, he was hardly the most virulent of the journalists. His political activities were rewarded in September 1792, when he was elected to the Convention. The customary balance in his positions—that is, radical notions coupled with calm rhetoric—served him well at this time. He was active in Jacobin affairs and did not run afoul of Robespierre; and he was also sufficiently subdued to survive the Thermidorian Reaction. This devotion to his principles without abuse for his opponents characterized Audouin and brought him through both the Terror and the Thermidorian Reaction to a seat in the Council of Five Hundred. Under the Directory, he continued to maintain balance, condemning royalism while favoring some measure of amnesty for émigrés. His term in the council expired in May 1798, but he continued to serve in a number of government posts. Under Napoleon, Audouin's opportunities were severely restricted, and in 1808 he died in obscurity in Bayonne.23

It is difficult to explain, but not to describe, Audouin's approach. He always backed the radicals, but he avoided inflammatory attacks on their enemies. His position of minimizing differences could hardly be called opportunistic. While his caution saved his head in Thermidor, it also cost him his opportunity for an important share of political power. As a final and tangential note, the circulation for his journal must have been substantial, since Audouin, without personal wealth, was able to publish continuously for over four years.

Révolutions de France et de Brabant

Sold in a gray folder with a print affixed to the outside, the Révolutions de France et de Brabant was published weekly and customarily contained 48 pages (4½ by 7½ inches) of fairly large print. After the collapse of the revolution in Brabant, the title was abbreviated to Révolutions de France. The periodical also had another unwieldy and seldom-used title, Révolutions de France et des royaumes qui, demandant une Assemblée Nationale et aborant la cocarde, meritront une place dans les fastes de la liberté. Its price per quarter was six livres, fifteen sous, in Paris and seven livres in the provinces. Published from November 28, 1789, to July 25, 1791, the journal had a succession of printers. Evidently, these printers played a far more significant role here than in other radical newspapers. For example, the second printer, Garnery, believed the paper to be rightfully his possession, as he independently continued to publish the paper when Lucie-Camille-Simplice Desmoulins, the original journal-
ist, temporarily put down the pen. The importance of the printers in producing the *Rевolutions de France et de Brabant* is further demonstrated by the existence of a contract between Desmoulins and Jean-Jacques Laffrey, the successor to Garnery. In this contract, Laffrey promised Desmoulins and his new (and short-term) collaborator, Stanislas Freron, also editor of the *Orateur du Peuple*, 11,000 livres annually to write the journal. This arrangement, where the printer took the risks and guaranteed the journalists a very substantial income, was undoubtedly based on Desmoulin's popularity, his vivid prose, and his newspaper's high circulation, estimated at 3,000 copies per week.

The printers, for their part, did a creditable job. The *Rевolutions de France et de Brabant* came out regularly, had few technical errors, a uniform print size, and even a cumulative table of contents. Articles were clearly separated, although there were no headlines. The journal originally had three sections, one on France, one on Brabant and other nations in revolution, and a miscellaneous section for reviews, letters to the editor, and the like. However, these sections were soon abandoned, and there was no logical order to the articles. This disorganization among topics also spread to individual articles. These deficiencies were not the fault of the printers, but were caused by Desmoulins's own lack of focus. To be sure, he gave the news, but these reports served only as a springboard for personal reflections. He often wrote long articles, permitting his imagination to wander from topic to topic. Yet in Desmoulin's hands, this uncertain direction and irregular format became a strength, not a weakness. His imagination could not be bound by the typical journalistic structure and format. Desmoulins employed sarcasm, irony, analogies, and classical references—all to great effect. There is in these sheets an airy, light, enjoyable flavor laced with bitter humor that proved as devastating to opponents as the serious critiques of Audouin and Robert, and even the shrill warnings of Freron and Marat. In short, the *Rевolutions de France et de Brabant* exhibited an irrepressible gaiety that characterizes this paper and distinguishes Desmoulins, its editor, from his contemporaries.

Lucie-Camille-Simplice Desmoulins, born at Guise on March 2, 1760, was the son of a wealthy and influential officeholder in the bailliage court. From a very tender age to adulthood Camille Desmoulins evidenced two persistent and pronounced traits—a turbulent and troubled personality and a tendency to find solace in escapism. This latter tendency was nurtured by his education at Louis-le-Grand, where classical training and Enlightenment ideas fused to supply Desmoulins with an image of a better existence, of some future utopia. After leaving Louis-le-Grand in 1779, he qualified as an *avocat* at the *Parlement* of Paris. Unfortunately,
he and other lawyers agreed that he was temperamentally and physically unsuited for such work. He was too impulsive and undirected for the legal profession and he stuttered. Rejected and dejected, he drifted aimlessly in the late 1780s and hoped for something new.

Desmoulins did not have too long to wait. The Revolution brought new opportunities. He rejoiced over the calling of the Estates-General, but it was in July 1789, that his own chance arrived. Indeed, it was Desmoulins who, speaking from a café table in the Palais-Royal, roused the crowds that surged through Paris from July twelfth through the fourteenth. Solidifying his reputation was the coincidental publication of his *La France Libre*, which assailed monarchs and monarchy. His popularity assured, Desmoulins had little difficulty in finding a printer willing to support his venture in journalism, *Les Révolutions de France et de Brabant*. In this periodical, Desmoulins allied himself with the political positions taken by the Cordeliers, who, more than any other group, sought the utopia of Desmoulins's dreams. While his attacks were tempered with humor, they were nonetheless incisive and equal in effect to the more sober prose of other editors. The queen, under personal attack by Desmoulins, thought him her most formidable enemy. The authorities also did not think him humorous, and like others, Desmoulins was plagued by governmental hostility. Finally, in order to avoid the feared reaction following the massacre at the Champ de Mars, Desmoulins discontinued publishing his journal. Desmoulins had repeatedly complained of the rigors of newspaper work and even though public authorities failed to act, he decided to abandon the project entirely.

The end of the *Révolutions de France et de Brabant* signaled the beginning of Desmoulins's decline. His lack of seriousness and his sardonic humor, which had made his prose so readable and so devastating, rendered him unacceptable for responsible positions in any of the revolutionary governments. Robespierre, who understood his old classmate and had occasionally protected him, thought Desmoulins a spoiled child and surely unfit to exercise authority. The ex-publicist did occupy some minor posts and was a member of the Convention, but he was assigned no significant duties on committees or on missions. His pen, however, could still give him access to power, and when, allied with the Dantonists, he began a new paper attacking the Terror, he posed a dangerous threat to the Jacobin government. Robespierre, despite earlier personal sympathies, saw only recklessness and treason in Desmoulins's appeals. He sent Desmoulins, along with the Dantonists, to the guillotine on April 5, 1794. Unsuccessful and dissatisfied before the Revolution, Desmoulins had joined the ranks of the Cordeliers to achieve his ideals. He died without fulfilling his dreams.
The *Révolutions de Paris* was assuredly the most widely read paper in Paris and throughout France. According to Camille Desmoulins, it had 200,000 subscribers. While this figure may have been exaggerated, the number of counterfeit editions, reports of clients in Corsica, and the envy and praise of other journalists suggest the great importance of the *Révolutions de Paris*. That there was a high circulation is further supported by the financial success of the editor, Louis-Marie Prudhomme (1752–1830). Prior to the Revolution, he operated a small bindery and bookshop in Paris from which he distributed pamphlets propagating the most advanced political ideas. He suffered for his subversive publishing from much police harassment and served several brief terms in prison. When the Revolution erupted, he decided to publish a newspaper. Since his activities in the 1780s had not been lucrative, he had to contract with printers to publish his journal, but after barely five months of production, he was able to afford his own press, which he established on the same square as the paternal Cordeliers. At first Prudhomme had been allied with the neighboring quarter, St.-Augustine, but his move brought him under the protection of the Cordeliers. Guillement ran the print shop, while Vitry marketed the journal. Prudhomme continued to publish into the Year II, when the Robespierist strictures on freedom moved him to an early and voluntary retirement.

The reasons for the success of the *Révolutions de Paris* are easy to discover. The paper was arranged in a pleasing way that must have increased circulation. Initially it was organized like a diary, and each article was a record of the events of one day in the past week. Gradually, however, regular features, such as the National Assembly reports, memoirs of the Bastille, and foreign dispatches, began to emerge. Although there was no indication of the contents from the cover, all the articles were clearly separated by bold lines and sported headlines that indicated the subject. Regularly distributed each week, the periodical was uniform in size (48 pages, 4½ by 7 inches) and evenly and accurately printed. Also, attractive and interesting engravings occasionally enhanced this journal.

Adding still further to the popularity of Prudhomme’s newspaper was its factual content. No journal gave as much information as the *Révolutions de Paris*. Léonard Gallois asserted that the paper, while it maintained revolutionary principles and achieved great popularity, provided accounts sufficiently detailed for historical research. Moreover, this wide variety of news was reported in a style that must have added to the success of the journal. The reports, factually exhaustive, also included perceptive critiques. The arguments were soundly constructed and, while
ASSEMBLEE NATIONALE.

Salle du 16 Septembre.

Le comité des finances a fait son rapport par l'organe du M. de Montceurs, Venelles. Les effets de leur travail ont montré que ceux de son minis.

PLATE I.

1. Revolutions de Paris, September 26, 1789. Many journals used small type in order to include as much information as possible.
PLATE 2. Révolutions de Paris, October 10, 1789. The prints in this journal were produced irregularly and were found only occasionally by 1791.
designed to arouse support, did so by appealing to reason and conscience rather than by evoking crude societal prejudices and purely emotional impulses. The *Révolutions de Paris* attacked the same enemies as did the most virulent journals, but rather than ruthlessly denouncing or sarcastically assaulting an opponent, its journalists generally marshaled an overwhelming factual case, supported by what they considered to be universally accepted principles. The articles, though not always exciting, were not bland; these factually supported arguments had their own emotional force.

It is difficult to determine who actually composed the pages of the *Révolutions de Paris*, since all the writers were anonymous. But if Prudhomme did not personally write the articles, he certainly influenced their style. True, there were many collaborators—Tournon, Loustallot, Fabre d'Eglantine, Chaumette, and Maréchal among others—but all of these were transients. Some stayed for a few issues, some for a year, some a little longer, but all moved on, while the *Révolutions de Paris* remained the same. The similarity in the prose of the *Révolutions de Paris* in 1789 and in 1793 indicates that no matter who wrote, Prudhomme determined the parameters in opinion, content, and diction. Nonetheless, knowledge of these contributors is important in increasing our understanding of the people who were involved in the radical press.

Prudhomme's initial collaborator in 1789 was the same Tournon who joined the Roberts in 1790. Tournon, however, severed his contacts after only a single issue. Replacing him as the chief journalist was Elisée Loustallot, who remained with the paper through sixty-four issues until his untimely death in 1790. It was in this period that the *Révolutions de Paris* climbed out of obscurity, and perhaps it was this success that encouraged Prudhomme to sustain the perspective and prose of Loustallot. It is more likely that through his experience Prudhomme knew what he wanted and would never have considered any other political positions or journalistic style.

Loustallot was born in 1771 to a family of avocats, was educated at Bordeaux, and entered journalism before the Revolution after an abortive law career in Paris. He may have been associated with Prudhomme prior to the Revolution. Contemporaries perceived Loustallot as the spirit of the popular *Révolutions de Paris*, and his death was felt to be a sharp blow to the Revolutionary cause. As I have noted, however, the journal maintained its verve under Prudhomme's guidance by his able selection of new collaborators.

Succeeding Loustallot were Maréchal, Chaumette, Fabre d'Eglantine, and possibly other lesser figures. Although Pierre-Sylvain Maréchal, the famous Babeuviste, was accepted as an avocat at the Parlement of Paris, he had chosen a literary life. Prior to the Revolution, he was best known
for his outspoken atheism. A lifelong iconoclast, Maréchal naturally turned to the Cordeliers, who agreed most with his hostility to existing authority. Thus, before joining Prudhomme in 1790, he had begun to contribute to other radical journals. He wrote extensively in the *Révolutions de Paris* and he remained on the staff for at least a year and a half.37

Playing a lesser role in the publication of this journal was Anaxagoras Chaumette. He was born in 1763 at Nivers. Though intelligent, he was probably mischievous or politically rebellious, as he was expelled from school. He studied, and then indifferently practiced, medicine in his native town. He did not go to Paris until 1790, when he hastily abandoned his original goal of concentrating on medicine and became very involved in politics—apparently he had found in politics a métier worthy of strong commitment—and joined the *Révolutions de Paris* staff. Active with the Commune and the *sans-culottes* from 1792 through 1794, Chaumette was seen as a challenge to Robespierre’s power and was executed in the Year II.38

Philippe Fabre d’Eglantine (1750–94) epitomized in most ways the members of “grub-street” society. Although he was a university professor for some time, he found this career unrewarding and turned to the theater. He acted, he wrote, he romanced—all with very little success. The Revolution was a new opportunity, and Aulard has claimed that Fabre d’Eglantine’s *Le Philinte de Molière*, written in 1790, captured perfectly the political spirit of the Cordeliers. The play enjoyed an overwhelming success. Fabre d’Eglantine played a minor role in the production of the *Révolutions de Paris*, and he devoted his main efforts to supporting Danton. He was the latter’s closest associate and, not surprisingly, died with him in 1794 on the guillotine.39

Indeed, the *Révolutions de Paris*, directed by Prudhomme to a political and financial triumph, was actually written by men who had no professional standing in 1789. They were intelligent, but, because of failure, ideological convictions, or lack of interest, they had made no mark in the liberal professions. With the exception of Chaumette, they had all, prior to the Revolution, turned to literature or journalism as an outlet for their considerable skills. Their revolutionary production contrasts the Old Regime with the revolutionary regime in an obvious way, as the latter opened opportunities unforeseen but a few months before.

*AMI DU PEUPLE*

Of the journals and journalists under consideration here, the *Ami du Peuple* and its editor, Jean-Paul Marat, are probably the best known. Begun in relative anonymity, the *Ami du Peuple* achieved fame and
notoriety during the Revolution. The *Ami du Peuple* started publication on September 2, 1789, under the name *Le Publiciste Parisien, Journal Politique, Libre et Impartiel*, but by the sixth issue, the phrase *Ami du Peuple* was prefixed to the title. Contemporaries gradually came to know the paper solely by the added expression, *Ami du Peuple*. This paper was first printed by the same establishment that initially produced the *Journal Universel*. After a short period of working with the widow of Herissant and some experimentation with other printers, the editor, Jean-Paul Marat, indicated that he was assuming responsibility for the printing and established a shop called L’Imprimerie de Marat on the Rue de l’Ancienne Comédie, a location very near the meeting place of both the Cordelier district and the club. However, at certain periods he used other Left Bank and Ile-de-la-Cité printers. Marat also gained control of the marketing of his periodical. He originally had contracted with Dufour of the Cordelier district to sell and distribute his journal, but by the spring of 1790, Marat assumed that function himself. According to Marat, Dufour had been the recipient of three-fourths of the receipts, while Marat’s share had been consumed by expenses. Needless to say, Marat was anxious to end this situation. The income must have been substantial, since Marat charged the high price of twelve livres for a three-month subscription, and was able, without other means of support, to live adequately and to publish a journal until his assassination in the summer of 1793.

The *Ami du Peuple* was scheduled to be a daily journal of eight pages (5 by 8½ inches in size), but this schedule was not often fulfilled. Intermittently, there would appear two, four, or even eight extra pages. There were other periods when Marat’s radical opinions brought him under attack and forced a temporary cancellation of the paper. There was, in fact, always a degree of uncertainty of production; in many weeks only six of the announced seven issues were produced. Such unreliability also characterized the printing of the paper. Spelling and grammatical errors were legion, the quality and even the color of the newsprint varied, and the size of the print changed between pages. Furthermore, although the front page contained a series of headlines, Marat was forced on several occasions to explain apologetically that there was no room for the corresponding article. In many instances, neither an article nor an apology appeared. This disorder was compounded because different topics were usually not separated, although occasionally thin lines were used to divide coverage. In sum, the subscriber to the *Ami du Peuple* would not have been at all surprised to find, delivered to his door, a sixteen-page journal, printed several days late, littered with mistakes, and published on pastel blue paper.

Despite its haphazard arrangement, the *Ami du Peuple* was written with a certain vigor that surpassed its competitors. Irony, wit, and
devastating criticism filled each issue. There is, in these old pages, a flavor of sinister exaggeration that captivates the modern reader like the hyperbole of Edgar Allen Poe. Coexisting uneasily with Marat’s constant vituperation were serious and perceptive critiques of individuals, institutions, and legislation of the day. Marat often hammered out complex refutations and proposals in the Ami du Peuple. In short, the prose was a mixture of vigorous writing and incisive criticism, and the latter usually capsized under the flood of enthusiasm. The aggressiveness of the Ami du Peuple made Marat the most assertive defender of the radical cause from 1789 to 1791. The reasons why he championed the Cordeliers positions are not difficult to discover.

Jean-Paul Marat was born in Boudry, Neuchâtel (Switzerland) on May 24, 1743. He was raised in moderate circumstances; his father was both a language teacher and a cloth designer. Through his own efforts Marat was well-educated, and he attempted to climb the social ladder as best he could. His endeavors took him to England, where he received a medical degree that was of somewhat questionable value. Nonetheless, he developed a fairly successful practice in London. As an avocation, he began to write political tracts. While some historians have claimed that Marat had developed a revolutionary political philosophy during his stay in London, his American biographer, Louis Gottschalk, has insisted, I believe correctly, that Marat’s political conceptions were diffuse before 1789. Some of Marat’s ideas did presage the Revolution, while others were common values of the Old Regime. His rejection, personal disappointments, and the resulting fundamental distrust of Old Regime society, exemplified by the Académie, led Marat to the radicals. With the Revolution under way, this same paranoia exaggerated the image and dimensions of his new enemies, the “aristocratie,” and led him to oppose in the most extreme manner those who would challenge the validity of the radical position.
Initially Marat had a minor role in the political history of the Revolution. He was voted an elector to choose national assemblymen from Paris and may have played some small part in the Paris Revolution of July 1789. But soon, the caustic attacks of the *Ami du Peuple* against the Châtelet (and ultimately against all public officials) won him the attention of both the extreme left and the Parisian authorities. His character assassinations caused the Paris Municipality to warn Marat that such ardor would not be tolerated. In January 1790, his continued assaults on public officials and institutions brought recriminations and legal action against him. The Cordeliers had also noticed Marat and offered him their protection. They were able to deter the National Guard troops sent by the municipality to apprehend Marat, and the journalist made good his escape from Paris, fleeing to London. Three months later he returned under the safeguard of the Cordeliers, and resumed his scurrilous attacks. The municipality and later the Legislative Assembly repeatedly tried to arrest Marat, but all attempts failed. Through the *Ami du Peuple*, Marat continued from 1790 to 1792 to assail all his enemies. Because of official hostility, he had to work clandestinely and had to restrict his political role to the publication of his journal. However, after August 10, with the Feuillants defeated and with the radicals greatly strengthened, Marat emerged from the confines of the Cordeliers to play a part in the Convention. He was elected as a delegate to the Convention, and there his characteristic diatribes inflamed the differences between his supporters, the Mountain, and his opposition, the Girondins. Marat was one of the leaders of the assault on the Girondins, and he did all he could to smear them as traitors. After the triumph of his party in May 1793, Marat maintained his pursuit of all those groups and factions whom he conceived to be counterrevolutionaries. His activities were, however, considerably reduced by an eruption of a chronic skin disease that was complicated by a lung disorder. By midsummer his illness had become so grave that he was forced to remain continuously immersed in water. Despite this affliction, he continued to pursue both real and imagined enemies through his journal. It was in his bathtub that Charlotte Corday found Marat and stabbed him to death on July 13, 1793.46

Marat’s personal popularity and the long existence and many imitations of his newspaper attest to the popularity and circulation of the *Ami du Peuple*. Perhaps, the journal was successful because Marat’s paranoia struck a corresponding chord in the French people. The terror and panic exemplified in the Great Fear reveal a sort of national susceptibility to this neurosis. Such speculation must go unsubstantiated here, but the triumphs of Marat, and the radicals as well may be partially founded on a widely experienced paranoia.
L'ORATEUR
DU PEUPLE;
PAR MARTEL.

Qu'aux secours de la France se récolte un

Rois, serres; attenôts, simples, pêtres l'oeille.

N°. XXXI.

L'Orateur du Peuple aux juges du tribunal

des Minimes, devait prononcer aujourd'hui

dans la cause du brave Sansier contre Des-

matins et la Fayeze.

Bataillons de jugeurs commandés pour investir

le tribunal.

Arrestations de ciytons dans le jardins des

Luxembour.

Décret qui condamne à être pendu sous peine

à la perrute, ou prenant les armes con-

tr'elle.

Nouvelles de Géret.

Jurés donnés par le peuple, voici le mo-

vant de justifier sa continuation, voici le mo-

tome VI. 11h

A PARIS, de l'imprimerie Patriotique,
sœur du Commerce.

PLATE 3. Orateur du Peuple, 1791 (exact date not known). The print size of this journal was larger than that of the other radical papers.
Last of the six papers to begin production, the Orateur du Peuple was initially issued on May 22, 1790. The journal was planned to have a daily eight-page edition, whose dimensions were 4¼ by 7¼ inches, and whose cost was 36 livres annually. The print of the journal was large and uniform from page to page. Headlines, listed on the front, reliably announced the subjects within. But the different editions of the paper were not dated, and even in the text, dates were deliberately omitted. Further, like the Ami du Peuple, the Orateur du Peuple was peppered with spelling and grammatical errors; articles were not separated from each other except by an occasional new paragraph; and, finally, the paper was not published as regularly as announced. In sum, the similarities with the Ami du Peuple, coupled with the lack of a date on each issue, made the Orateur du Peuple appear more as a hastily produced pamphlet than as a conscientiously published newspaper.

The content of the articles reinforces this impression that the Orateur du Peuple is more a pamphlet than a newspaper. There was comparatively little interest taken in the events of the day. To be sure, there was some analysis of specific actions, but the tendency was to harangue the public on a succession of general topics—the aristocrats, wars, patriots, and the like. Indeed, dominating this journal was a monotonous obsession with the schemes of the counterrevolutionaries and with the failure of the “patriots” to crush the opposition.

The tenor of these warnings contributes further to the impression that the Orateur du Peuple was much like a pamphlet. There were very few impartial accounts. Its journalist, Stanislas Fréron, knew little reserve, and his repeated denunciations were issued with extraordinary vigor and with a dramatic flair far removed from any mundane news reporting. Indeed, every event, regardless of its gravity, was greeted by Fréron with the same ferocious histrionic reaction. He assailed his enemies with a vengeance that today bores the reader by its constant repetition. But, during the early 1790s, Fréron’s dramatic, if not very news-oriented, appeals were popular, as the long existence of the paper (May 1790 to November 1792) and his personal popularity clearly show.

Stanislas Fréron was born on the Left Bank of Paris in 1754. Of the men considered here, his background was the most prestigious and financially secure. His father, Elie Fréron, was the editor of the Année Littéraire, which for quite some time yielded a very substantial income. While the funds from his father’s journal provided Fréron with a fine boyhood home and a good education (eight years at Louis-le-Grand), the paper was also the source of many problems. The Année Littéraire was objectionable to both philosophes and government alike, and these two
groups found ample opportunity to attack, abuse, and even arrest the elder Fréron. The young boy, of course, sided with his father. After the death of Elie in 1780, Stanislas took over the journal and continued his struggle with the intellectual and governmental establishments. Embattled on all sides, he was even attacked by his stepmother for his editorial policy. Through court action, she eventually (in 1783) gained control of the paper by paying him only a small pension. All these problems were intensified for the young man by his unstable personality, which saw success as pure bliss and failure as final doom. Fréron, assaulted all his early life by influential segments of society and then stripped of his inheritance, fell into deep despair. Understandably, his misfortunes led him to a life of debauchery and idleness. The Revolution and the radical cause surely appeared as welcome opportunities for personal vindication over past enemies.

Fréron was an active participant in the storming of the Bastille, but street violence was not to be the preferred role of the past editor of the *Année Littéraire*. He wanted to return to journalism, but earlier he had agreed with his stepmother, in exchange for an increase in his pension, not to publish a competitive journal. At first, he was content with writing anonymous articles, but his penury and his desire to assert his own personal policy encouraged him to establish a new periodical. To avoid the penalties for violating a contract, Fréron searched for someone to be nominal head of the paper. Promising fame and money, Fréron persuaded an unwitting acquaintance, Marcel Enfantin, to pose as the editor and to deal with printers and clientele. At first there was difficulty in finding a printer, for the acid pen of Fréron was too dangerous or too objectionable for most. At wit’s end, he enlisted his brother-in-law, Jean François La Poype, who successfully engaged a Monsieur Laurens, whose shop was a few blocks from the Cordeliers. Fréron, once his popularity was ensured, abandoned all secrecy. He easily secured a printer and, like many other journalists, frequently changed from one to another. His longest agreement, between 1790 and 1791, was with Madame Colombe, who printed his journal along with the *Ami du Peuple* for about a year.

The *Orateur du Peuple* soon attracted the attention of both friend and foe. Fréron was encouraged by Marat and came to regard the *Ami du Peuple* as his model. Also, he signed a contract with Camille Desmoulins to write one-half of the *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*. Eventually, Fréron moved his residence to the quartier of the Cordeliers. Like his compatriots, Fréron disturbed the authorities in both the National Assembly and the municipality. His encounters with the law were too numerous to be cited here, but Fréron’s troubled relationship with the government can be shown by his decision to flee Paris after the Champ de Mars incident. Experience had taught him that he would be a target for
arrest. The anticipated repression never materialized, and Fréron briefly returned to his periodical before abandoning it to a friend, Labenette, at the beginning of the Legislative Assembly.

The political alliances established between 1789 and 1791 led Fréron to participate first in the insurrections of the summer of 1792, and, later, to assist as a member of the Convention in the implementation of the Terror. His role en mission was a particularly brutal one, and at Toulon he was responsible for a major massacre. These experiences and the execution of his close friends, Danton and Desmoulins, soured Fréron on Robespierre's government. Beginning with Robespierre, his disaffection spread to the entire Jacobin movement, and finally Fréron embraced, and then led, the reactionary jeunesse dorée in October 1795. His subsequent political career is difficult to trace, but during the Directory and after the turn of the century, he clearly became more moderate. As an agent of the Directory and an associate of the Bonapartes, he reversed his previous extremism and worked to reduce divisions in France. Nonetheless, this political turncoat paid dearly for his shifts in ideology. Fréron found himself abandoned by both old and new colleagues as he aged and his personal power waned. He died in disgrace and obscurity in Saint-Domingue in 1802. 

Any conclusions about the general characteristics of the newspapers—their format, their financing, their content, their editors, and their rhetorical style—must at first glance stress their differences. Some of their characteristics may be reduced to tabular form and are summarized in table 2.1. From this table one can see that there was divergence in the formats of the journals. Also, some were dailies, others weeklies—the Mercure National existed at different times as a daily and as a weekly. Marat and Fréron were virulent in their attacks; Audouin and Robert wrote in a subdued manner. Keralio was a minor noble and a career soldier; Carra spent time in jail. But these differences, though important, were not as significant as the similarities of the six newspapers and their journalists.

In appearance, the journals were not very different. They all had about the same dimensions, and all published approximately the same number of sheets—50 to 70—per week. Differences in print size were responsible for some minor variations in the quantity of news. While some of the papers had more separation between topics than others, these divisions were rudimentary. Headlines, columns, and tables of contents were sparingly and somewhat irregularly employed. Each issue was unlike the last in that regular feature articles were few. Finally, all these papers were
### TABLE 2.1

A Profile of the Six Newspapers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Title</th>
<th>Frequency of Appearance, per Week</th>
<th>Cost per Mo. in Paris</th>
<th>Average Number of Pages per Week</th>
<th>Size of Pages in Inches</th>
<th>General Rhetorical Tone</th>
<th>Principal Editors</th>
<th>Occupational Training</th>
<th>Occupation in 1785</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal d'Etat et du Citoyen</td>
<td>1 (later 2)</td>
<td>2 Livres 8 Sous</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4 3/4 x 8</td>
<td>Restrained</td>
<td>Louise de Kéralio</td>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>Military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercure National ou Journal d'Etat et du Citoyen</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>4 3/4 x 8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Louise de Kéralio</td>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>Military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercure National et Révolutions de l'Europe</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>4 3/4 x 8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Louise de Kéralio</td>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>Military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercure National ou Journal Politique de l'Europe</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5 Livres</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>5 x 8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Alexandre Tournon</td>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>Writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal Universel</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3 Livres</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>5 x 8 1/4</td>
<td>Dull, straightforward</td>
<td>Pierre-Jean Andouin</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Révolutions de France et de Brabant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 Livres 5 Sous</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>4 3/4 x 7 1/4</td>
<td>Spirited, assertive</td>
<td>Camille Desmoulins</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Révolutions de Paris</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 Livres (later 56)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>4 3/4 x 7</td>
<td>Reasoned, aggressive</td>
<td>Louis-Marie Prudhomme</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Bookdealer, printer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Alexandre Tournon</td>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Elisée Loustallot</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pierre-Sylvain Maréchal</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Anaxagoras Chaumette</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Professor</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fabre d'Églantine</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ami du Peuple</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4 Livres</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>5 x 8 1/2</td>
<td>Vitriolic, powerful</td>
<td>Jean-Paul Marat</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Scientist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orateur du Peuple</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3 Livres</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>4 3/4 x 7 1/4</td>
<td>Vitriolic, repetitive</td>
<td>Stanislas Fréron</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
expensive, about 36 livres per annum. This seemingly exorbitant price, about one-fifth of the yearly income of most artisans, is less significant when one considers that most of the audience were not home subscribers, but listeners at public readings, where many shared the expense.

Unfortunately, our knowledge of the financial structures of these journals is limited; but the available information indicates considerable variance among journals. Robert and his associates probably relied chiefly on their own fortunes; Desmoulins contracted with a printer. Nonetheless, commonly, efforts were made to establish regular financial and marketing arrangements. Journalists contracted for extended periods with the same printer; they seemed to have taken some measures to ensure effective marketing of their journals. Prudhomme probably purchased his own presses, not only to achieve maximum profits but also to have a reliable business organization. For the most part, these formal structures were crude; still they represented a remarkable improvement over those of the pamphleteers.

Further, all the journalists reported news; all editorialized extravagantly by modern standards. All could write dispassionate prose; they were all capable of using emotion to attack opponents and lionize allies. The balance between news and opinion, between calm and bombast, varied from paper to paper; but none lacked any of these qualities.

Finally, the journalists shared some important characteristics in their backgrounds. All were well-educated and most were members of some liberal profession. Moreover, there was nothing in their pasts that would have encouraged them to act against the Revolution of 1789. None had wealth or position that was seriously jeopardized by the liquidation of the Old Regime. Further, they had been influenced by Enlightenment thought and wished to transform their hopes for human improvement into reality. Many had found the Revolution attractive because, like the men of "grub-street," they had felt either real or imagined rejection by the establishment. They were anxious to vindicate themselves. Indeed, with the exception of the contributors to the Mercure National, all these editors had experienced setbacks in their chosen careers. These factors help explain why these men joined the radicals, but they are certainly not conclusive. Individual personality traits, an especially severe career setback, or a combination of these and other unnamed factors also played a part in forming these radicals. Marat was activated by a need for martyrdom; Desmoulins by a special penchant for utopian idealism. Surely chance events of 1789 to 1791 were important in determining the philosophies of these individuals. In fact, the educational and early career frustrations of these journalists cannot alone explain their precise political position.
Nonetheless, we cannot discount their biographical experiences in our search for those things that moved these men to radical politics and to support for popular sovereignty. It is significant that they all were highly educated in the tradition of the Enlightenment, that none had a stake in Old Regime society, and that most were frustrated in their careers. The repetition of these common points in their backgrounds underlines these factors as very important ones in explaining their involvement with the Cordeliers.