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Rachel Hammersley, *French Revolutionaries and English Republicans: The Cordeliers Club, 1790-1794*. Royal Historical Studies in History, New Series. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011 (2005). pp. xiii + 192. \$29.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN-10: 1843836467.

Review by Jeremy Popkin, University of Kentucky.

The collapse of the Marxist paradigm in French revolutionary studies some four decades ago has had many consequences. One has been the virtual eclipse of any study of the movement's ultra-leftist tendencies. Rachel Hammersley's monograph brings one such current—the Cordeliers Club, a hotbed of radicalism in the Revolution's early years—back into view, although her narrow focus on the debt owed by some of the pamphleteers associated with the club to seventeenth-century English republican thinkers keeps her from fully exploring the group's importance. From the start of the Revolution, the Cordeliers district on the left bank attracted a group of radical writers and agitators who challenged not only the policies of the National Assembly but also the effort, led by better-known figures such as Brissot and Condorcet, to create a municipal government in Paris in which power would be centralized in a city-wide council. The Cordeliers argued instead for a decentralized system in which the capital's local districts would have close control over their delegates to higher-level assemblies. Whereas Brissot and his friends claimed that representative government would solve the problem of creating republican institutions in a modern, commercial society, the Cordeliers propagandists had less interest in accommodating modern commerce than in reviving the democratic elements of the republics of ancient Athens and Rome.

Writers like Théophile Mandar and Jean Jacques Rutledge also found inspiration in the works of seventeenth-century English republican authors such as Marchamont Nedham and James Harrington. In the early years of the Revolution, the Cordeliers pamphleteers criticized the mainstream revolutionary movement for its conservatism. Mandar borrowed Nedham's emphasis on the need for frequent elections, for example, and Rutledge elaborated Harrington's ideas about the connection between property and political rights into a proposal for an "agrarian law" that would prevent excessive concentration of ownership and ensure the wide distribution of land. In the winter of 1793-1794 the "vieux Cordelier" (as he called himself), Camille Desmoulins, used passages from the English republican writer, Thomas Gordon, to denounce the dictatorship established by the Montagnards.

Hammersley is more concerned with tracing the impact of the English republican tradition than with the history of the Cordeliers club itself. Whereas Marxist historians saw the Cordeliers as an expression of the Parisian "masses," Hammersley pays no attention to the question of the group's relationship to the wider population. She notes that the relationship of Mandar and Rutledge to the English republicans was somewhat paradoxical. The Cordeliers radicals seem to have been unaware of the most democratic movements from the English revolutionary period, such as the Diggers and the Levellers. Nedham and Harrington were not the most radical figures of their own day and their Cordeliers acolytes often gave their ideas a democratic spin that was not in their original sources. During the Directory, Harrington's emphasis on the connection between property ownership and political rights made him a favorite of conservative republicans and constitutional monarchists. Post-revolutionary French republicanism took on a strongly centralizing and Jacobin coloration, and the concern for direct democracy articulated by the Cordeliers publicists has since surfaced only in dissident movements such as those of the Proudhonists, the Communards, revolutionary syndicalism, and May 1968.

Hammersley does succeed, as she claims in her conclusion, in showing that the influence of the English republican tradition in the late eighteenth century was not limited, as is often claimed, to the English-

speaking world of North America, and that the Jacobin tradition was not the only form that republicanism took in revolutionary France. One has to regret, however, that she has stuck so closely to her limited theme. Admittedly, Hammersley could hardly have anticipated the Occupy Movement protests of 2011. Still, reading the ideas of Mandar and Rutledge today, one senses that these forgotten figures have a definite contemporary relevance.

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