

## Evolving Loyalties: A Provincial Printer in Revolutionary Bordeaux

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Article abstract

The author examines the career of Simon Lacourt, a Bordeaux printer who was guillotined during the French Revolution, and explores the ways in which printers' milieu and patrons determined their printing choices. Lacourt -- the last in a long line of King's printers in Bordeaux -- was one of the most privileged and connected printers in the reign of Louis XVI when he made the move into revolutionary printing and became a newspaper printer and the official printer for the Department of the Gironde. His printing business prospered until the summer of 1793 when he became the official printer of the *commission populaire*, the body that led the federalist revolt in Bordeaux, a fateful decision dictated by his social, familial and political milieu and one that left him vulnerable after the revolt failed. During his trial he was accused of trying to destroy his country and his fate raises questions about printer responsibility during the Revolution.

## EVOLVING LOYALTIES: A Provincial Printer in Revolutionary Bordeaux<sup>1</sup>

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ABSTRACT

The author examines the career of Simon Lacourt, a Bordeaux printer who was guillotined during the French Revolution, and explores the ways in which printers' milieu and patrons determined their printing choices. Lacourt -- the last in a long line of King's printers in Bordeaux -- was one of the most privileged and connected printers in the reign of Louis XVI when he made the move into revolutionary printing and became a newspaper printer and the official printer for the Department of the Gironde. His printing business prospered until the summer of 1793 when he became the official printer of the *commission populaire*, the body that led the federalist revolt in Bordeaux, a fateful decision dictated by his social, familial and political milieu and one that left him vulnerable after the revolt failed. During his trial he was accused of trying to destroy his country and his fate raises questions about printer responsibility during the Revolution.

RÉSUMÉ

L'auteure se penche sur la carrière de Simon Lacourt, imprimeur bordelais qui fut guillotiné pendant la Révolution française. Elle s'intéresse surtout au rôle joué par le milieu social dans la vie professionnelle des imprimeurs et dans leur production comme telle. Lacourt, dernier d'une longue lignée d'imprimeurs royaux de Bordeaux, fut l'un des imprimeurs les plus privilégiés du règne de Louis XVI. Il sut cependant s'adapter au nouvel ordre politique, devenant l'imprimeur officiel du département de la Gironde. Il fut très actif jusqu'à l'été 1793, moment où il se fit imprimeur de la commission populaire, organe officiel de la révolte fédéraliste à Bordeaux. Cette décision, influencée par son milieu social, familial et politique, fut lourde de conséquences. Rendu très vulnérable après l'échec du soulèvement, Lacourt fut accusé, durant son procès, d'avoir voulu « assassiner sa patrie ». Son sort soulève des questions à propos des enjeux auxquels durent faire face les imprimeurs durant la Révolution.

Printers are educated in the belief that when men differ in opinion, both sides ought equally to have the advantage of being heard by the public; and that when truth and error have fair play, the former is always an overmatch for the latter. Hence they cheerfully serve all contending writers that pay them well, without regarding on which side they are of the question in dispute . . . Being thus continually employed in serving both parties, printers naturally acquire a vast unconcernedness as to the right or wrong opinions contained in what they print; regarding it only as the matter of their daily labor. They print things full of spleen and animosity, with the utmost calmness and indifference, and without the least ill-will to the persons reflected on, who nevertheless unjustly think the printer as much as their enemy as the author, and join both together in their resentment.

Benjamin Franklin, *An Apology for Printers*, 1731

The emergence of the field of the History of the Book transformed our understanding of texts and encouraged us to pay attention to the circumstances of their production. Yet, while it is well known that the early years of the French Revolution saw a massive increase in newspapers, pamphlets and printed ephemera, we know remarkably little about the printers who produced these items, especially in the provincial towns of France (Barbier, 1988; 1989, Barbier, Jolly and Juratic, 1988; Hesse, 1991; Mellot, Queval and Sarrazin, 1993). This article attempts to contribute to this subject by examining one French provincial printer during the French Revolution -- Simon Lacourt in Bordeaux -- and placing his activities in the wider context of revolutionary printing.<sup>2</sup> Like many printers Lacourt's social milieu shaped his fate.

I will begin with the story of Simon Lacourt's execution in Bordeaux, early in the Terror. On 17 December 1793 (27 Frimaire, Year II, in the revolutionary calendar) at the age of 72, after one of the briefest of trials, he mounted the scaffold at *Place Nationale* (*Place Dauphine* in the Old Regime and now *Place Gambetta*) ending a long and enormously successful career in the printing business, a business his family had dominated in Bordeaux for several generations (Labadie, 1900; Bouchon, 1901; Desgraves, 1995).<sup>3</sup> For members of the Lacourt family, the printing business had supported significant wealth and land accumulation, prestigious marriages and, for some, access to the nobility. They printed and sold a range of titles, entered early into the newspaper business, and printed for the diocese. Also, very importantly, they fought for and obtained the cherished position of King's

Printer in Bordeaux, an office that brought with it a very lucrative monopoly on official printing, notably the right to print and sell royal decrees (ADG C 3315). Simon Lacourt was granted a printer licence by the royal council in 1755 and in the same year took over the printing house on the Rue St. James from his aunt, whose sons had decided to leave the printing business behind for careers in the army and the judiciary.<sup>4</sup> Lacourt later moved the business to larger quarters at 42 rue du Cahernon (now the rue Sainte-Catherine), still very centrally located in Bordeaux.<sup>5</sup> In 1771 Lacourt entitled himself *Simon de La Court, Bourgeois de Bordeaux, Libraire et Imprimeur du Roi, et de Monseigneur l'Archevêque*. He was warden of the Printers' and Booksellers' Guild and, by 1775, also sporting the title *Imprimeur de Monseigneur le duc d'Aiguillon, gouverneur de la Haute et Basse Alsace*. Later he added the titles *Imprimeur juré de l'université de Bordeaux* and *Imprimeur de l'Amirauté de Guienne*. In 1759 Simon Lacourt married the daughter of a merchant and, in 1782, his own daughter married a barrister, Pierre Desmirail, who was active in town politics before the Revolution and elected to Bordeaux's municipal government in 1790. At the expiration of his term as municipal officer, Desmirail secured high judicial posts and later became vice-president and then president of the *Commission populaire du salut public*, the body that led the federalist revolt in Bordeaux.<sup>6</sup> Lacourt, like many other provincial printers, made a fortune printing for the government in the Bourbon monarchy and continued to do so after 1789. Unfortunately for him, he made the fatal decision in 1793 to become the official printer of the *Commission populaire*. In November 1793, following the failure of the federalist revolt, he was ordered to give two of his presses to Silva Lafforest, the printer for the *Commission militaire* (the committee that ran the Terror in Bordeaux), who put them to active use printing for the government. Lacourt was placed under house arrest. At his trial, after giving his name and age, he was asked if he was the printer for the *Commission populaire* and he replied yes. When accused of being an aristocrat since the Revolution and sharing the crimes of the Girondins<sup>7</sup> and royalists by accepting to print "des actes liberticides" of the *Commission populaire*, he replied that he was forced to do this. The interrogators countered by claiming that one is never forced to do harm: "if he had been asked to kill citizens he would not have done so." Lacourt admitted that, of course, he would not. Thus charged with "killing the fatherland" (*assassiner la patrie*) Lacourt was condemned to death (ADG 14L 22). The printed poster announcing the judgment against him said that Lacourt had shown no proof of patriotism after the beginning of the

Revolution, had made no sacrifice for liberty although very rich, had manifested aristocratic sentiments and shown his love of tyranny by printing the horrible writings of the *Commission populaire*. He was found guilty of contravening the law of 29 March 1793, ordering the execution of all those convicted of composing or printing works that provoked the dissolution of the government, the re-establishment of royalty or any attack on the sovereignty of the people. By printing for the *Commission populaire* he was one of its principal accomplices; the conspirators “would never have formed their audacious project of usurping the powers of the people if they had not counted on a printer as cowardly, as self-interested, as hostile to the nation as to give vent far and wide to their federalist and counter-revolutionary venom.” He was to die along with everyone who had “soiled their presses with writings intended to break apart the unity and indivisibility of the republic” (ADG 14L 22; Vouillot, 1990: 695).

Lacourt’s story is interesting for a number of reasons, not the least because he was not alone. Lacourt was one of many old-regime provincial printers persecuted during the Terror, many of them charged with Federalism. Victims in Bordeaux include Antoine Pallandre (ADG 14L 30) who went to the guillotine in the Place Nationale in Bordeaux and Phillippot and Albespy who were imprisoned (ADG 13L28; 13L17). In Lyon one of the King’s printers, Aimé Delaroche, fled and the two Bruysset brothers were arrested and one of them guillotined. The Lyonnais printer Faucheux was guillotined and two others shot in the repression following the siege of Lyon by the Paris government forces in the summer of 1793 and other printers were arrested (Varry, 1997; ADR 2Q2). Printers in Marseille, Metz and Nîmes were executed and several others arrested or emigrated (Scott, 1973:348; Billioud, 1962: 20; Teissier, 1828: 155; Mellot, Queval and Sarrazin, 1993:77-80). Lacourt was just one of several old-regime printers who moved very successfully into revolutionary printing in the early years of the Revolution but suffered very serious consequences for doing so.<sup>8</sup>

Relations between printers and the authorities in the Bourbon monarchy were centred around privilege. In four important ways printers enjoyed privileged status: Many were guild members. All were licensed by *arrêt du conseil*, and beneficiaries of a century-long royal policy of enforcing very low quotas on printers in French towns. All obtained *privileges* (copyrights) or permissions to print books or newspapers, and finally, Bishop’s Printers or

King's Printers had monopolies on diocesan and government printing. The King's Printers worked in especially close relationship with the royal government. A few basic facts about these positions are needed: 1. They had been around since the sixteenth century but became more important in the eighteenth century when their number was reduced and the demand for official printing by the king and the intendant increased. 2. They were very lucrative positions. 3. In most large towns there was only one King's Printer. In some towns competing dynasties had divided the position, but in the late eighteenth century the government was trying to get the number down to one per town: in 1772, for example, the practice of having two King's Printers in Metz ended and, in the 1780s, Foreign Minister Vergennes resisted appointing two in Lyon in 1785, claiming that he wanted these positions to make men rich and the object of emulation by other printers (Tessier, 1828:155; ADR 1C221). 4. The positions had features of royal offices: those in Lyon and Dijon were transferred for around 30,000 livres.<sup>9</sup> King's Printer positions generally passed from generation to generation within families but this practice came under critical scrutiny in the reign of Louis XVI when royal officials wanted them to lose the quality of inherited offices. Vergennes was adamant that the printer Delaroche could not secure a guarantee that his King's Printer position in Lyon would pass to his grandson, arguing that this might give the impression that the positions were hereditary, a notion they must be very careful not to admit (ADR 1C221). Generally, it was the King's Printers in the provincial towns who had the largest printing houses and employed the most workers.

The monopolies of King's Printers were challenged regularly in the eighteenth century, forcing Intendants and the royal ministers to resolve the conflicts. In Bordeaux, Simon Lacourt sought the intervention of Intendant Dupré de Saint-Maur when Michel Racle (the last in the long serving Brun printing dynasty) began printing for the Intendant: Lacourt claimed to have been "pained" at the appearance of royal ordinances printed by Racle who was calling himself the *Imprimeur de l'Intendance* (ADG C 3315). The investigation revealed that Lacourt kept a library of all royal decrees in excellent order where any given decree could be found by the first word in the text. The Intendant -- who clearly wanted to placate both parties and, at the same time, reserve his right to choose his printer -- decided that two printers were better than one because of the high, and often urgent, demand for printing. He thus facilitated a compromise between the two long-

standing printing dynasties by giving Racle the title of Printer for the Intendant, and Lacourt the title of King's Printer (Bouchon, 1901:127-28). The conflict in Bordeaux over royal printing was mild compared to that which occurred in some other towns.

It is thus not surprising that the issue of royal printing came to the fore in the spring of 1789 when politics seized the imagination of the realm and heightened interest in the messages the king sought to communicate to his subjects. The Bordeaux guild complained in May 1789 about the right of the printer Michel Racle to print official decrees. The guild sent a memorandum to Necker complaining about the royal decree authorizing the director of the royal printing house, Anisson Duperron, to delegate to selected provincial printers the right to print all publications concerning the Estates General. Such an exclusive privilege, the guild contended, was harmful to the rest of the printing and book selling community. It was, they said, a means invented by the director of the royal printing house to make fortunes for the chosen few at the expense of the others. Not only was this monopoly unfair to them, it was also against the interests of both the public and the king because printed instructions and laws emanating from the Estates General were, after all, "manifestations of the king's love for his people" and should be made available to the public at as low a price as possible. Competition was the way to keep the cost down. Copies of the celebrated address of Louis XVI to the Estates General and of Necker's speech were sold by Racle for more than three livres, too expensive for many citizens. The guild contended that these items should have cost no more than 40 sols and ended its memorandum with a complaint about privilege in general: "At the very moment that all privileges are being judged by public opinion surely they should not expect to see one created that burdens all society in order to satisfy the cupidity of some . . ." (AN V<sup>1</sup> 552).

King's Printers in other towns rushed letters to Versailles seeking royal enforcement of their monopolies on government printing. Two items being pirated were the *Lettres de Convocation pour les États généraux* and the *Règlement pour les États-généraux*. In February 1789, the Lyon book trade inspector, La Tourette, reported he was having difficulties preserving Jean-Marie Bruysset's monopoly on the publication of the *Lettres de Convocation*; copies had arrived in Lyon three days before Bruysset received his shipment and La

Tourette was touring all the printing houses to prevent its reprinting (AN V<sup>1</sup> 549). Couret de Villeneuve, King's Printer in Orléans complained about official printing being done by other local printers (AN V<sup>1</sup> 549). The ministry, concerned to protect Anisson Duperron's rights and profits and those of the King's Printers in the provincial towns, issued decrees protecting the monopolies. But in the political climate of 1789, protecting monopolies on official printing was a lost cause. Throughout the eighteenth century, licensed printers had been able to lobby government very successfully, arguing that print culture threatened the monarchy if it was not carefully restricted to them; they had been very outspoken proponents of the idea that the government, society and religion all had much to fear from print culture. In 1789 this argument simply did not work and the influence of the publishing lobby collapsed bringing to an end the power of Versailles over provincial printers very early in the Revolution: printers turned to local authorities for contracts, notably the municipalities and especially to the new Departments.

To understand the fate of Lacourt we must begin by asking where printers saw themselves fitting into the new regime established by the Revolution. It is well known that newspapers and pamphlets flourished, but much printing in the Revolution was institutional in origin: the Departments, Districts, Municipalities, National Guards, Sections, political clubs and committees all ordered copies of laws, propaganda, pamphlets, minutes, forms and other printed ephemera. Printers moved naturally into printing for the changing official bodies during the Revolution. Former King's Printers, Parlement Printers and Bishop's Printers became official printers for the Departments, Districts and Municipalities.

The municipality, district and department authorities made unprecedented demands on printers (Patrick, 1978). The efforts of some of the last intendants to use print to communicate and mould public opinion pale in comparison to the energetic efforts of the Revolutionary authorities. The explosion of administrative printing began in the summer of 1789. In Lyon, Millanois Delaroche billed the Intendant of Lyon 4,844 livres for the year 1789. For the first six months of the year the bill was only 941 livres and included charges for the publication of royal council decrees, ordinances, administrative forms to record births, deaths, marriages etc. But, after the fall of the Bastille when the work of the National Assembly got underway,



his printing orders increased almost five-fold. On 19 July 1789 he printed for the Intendant 2,000 copies of an account of what was probably the king's reaction to the fall of the Bastille (*Récit de ce qui s'est passé à la séance tenue par le roi le 15 juillet 1789*) and thousands of orders, declarations and letters directed at establishing order in the summer of 1789. In the fall, many copies of royal declarations sanctioning decrees of the National Assembly were printed in runs of 1,000 or more. For example 1,000 copies of the decree abolishing judicial offices were printed and at least 5,000 of the decrees on the constitution of the municipalities. In 1790 Millanois Delaroche continued this work, billing the provincial administration for 2,943 livres to pay for thousands of pages and posters informing the Lyonnais about taxes, the *contribution patriotique*, seigneurial dues, *assignats* and their municipal governments (ADR 1L 535). He was far from being the only printer in Lyon doing government printing: in 1790, the Bruyset brothers printed, among other items, *Tableau de ventes de biens nationaux* for the District (Vingtrinier, 1894:423-24). The Widow Barrêt in Lyon printed lists of *émigrés* in 1792 for the District, (ADR 1 Q 451). The same administrative demand was evident in other provincial towns: In Besançon Antoine-Joseph Simard received large sums from the Department of Doubs for printing, but could not keep up with the demand obliging the authorities to send the surplus to other printers (Vernus 1989: 128). In Rouen the departmental administration paid out 219,119 livres for printing between October 1791 and March 1793. In 1792 Noubel in Agen obtained a contract from the Department for 20,000 a year (Gough, 1991: 200). Michel Racle became the official printer for the Bordeaux Municipality and printed items such as 1,500 copies of the division of the town into 28 *arrondissements*; 100 copies of royal decrees concerning the patriotic contribution and 100 more in poster form; 600 copies of an ordinance on convoking assemblies to elect their municipal leaders; 2,400 copies of an extract of the minutes of a meeting of the leadership of the Bordeaux National Guard, and 1,200 copies of the address of the National Assembly to the people (AMBx, L 45). Between May 1791 and March 1792 the Department of the Gironde paid at least 41,111 livres to the printers Antoine Pallandre, Simon Lacourt and Alexis Levieux for printing. Pallandre printed, for example, 4,000 copies of the *Décret du code de la justice de paix* (ADG 3L 208). The Department of the Doubs spent 50,000 francs for printing from November 1790 to the summer of 1794 and the Department of the Jura paid 30,000 for printing in 1790, representing 10 percent of its total budget, later estimating these costs

at 67,000 livres. In 1793 the Department of the Creuse spent 29% of its budget on printing (Vernus 1989:128-30; Barbier, 2000: 195). There was an enormous administrative demand for circular letters, forms, posters, *cartes de civisme*, instructions, information on weights and measures, lists of tax payers, of elected representatives, and of *émigrés*. A government that undertook in a short period of time to organize elections, implement tax reform, re-organize the Church and sell its lands, introduce the metric system and change the calendar, badly needed its printers to inform and rally public opinion.

The Municipalities, the Districts and the Departments not only ordered and paid for printing but they also took on the civic role of justifying the new revolutionary laws. The minutes of the Municipality of Bordeaux convey clearly the importance attributed to printing, which was often an urgent matter because the Municipality wanted to put out its version of events rapidly, aiming for the maximum influence both locally and nationally. In 1791 it made payments to Madame Racle for overtime and for extra workers to ensure the prompt publication of pamphlets sympathetic to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy (AMBx D 119). In January 1791 it sent a two-member delegation to the leaders of the District to congratulate them on having printed the “*Lettre à son ancien curé*” which was, they said, a letter eminently suitable for enlightening devout churchmen and unmasking the manoeuvres of the Constitution’s enemies (AMBx 89 ). Overtime was paid again to Madame Racle later that year for printing the official version of the flight to Varennes, a spin on the event that presented the king and his family as the victims of a kidnapping scheme (AMBx D 120). From early in the Revolution, governments complained about the high cost of printing but continued to order huge amounts of it. In 1794 the *directeur de l’imprimerie des administrations nationales* outlined procedures to pay printers and decried printers’ tendency to make quick fortunes in order to retire in three or four years (ADG 3L3; ADR 1L1081). For printers the Revolution was a business opportunity of unparalleled scope.

How were official printers to be chosen? New ideas appeared on how to allocate government printing locally and, in some areas, debate developed. In Paris the Electoral Assembly of the Department met in August 1791 to discuss how their official printer should be chosen. There were motions to give the position to each of two established printers (Laurent-François

Prault and André-Charles Cailleau) but these were followed by another motion stating that they should avoid keeping the same printers in the jobs (“de perpétuer les places”) and choose the less wealthy; a fourth motion was to name a printer who would give them a reduced rate. A fifth motion was to have a vote. A sixth motion was to have certain printers draw lots. Prault objected to this last idea saying that decisions made by chance never inspire confidence as they are not flattering to the winner. The title of printer of the electoral assembly should be an honour, indicating the confidence enjoyed by the recipient (Casselle, 1986:210, 1989). Outside Paris, elections were held in Angers: In 1790 the *conseil général de Maine-et-Loire* in Angers voted on two candidates for the title of department printer: Mame got eighteen votes and Pavie twelve (Letortu, 2001:120-21). In Bordeaux in 1790 the departmental administrators chose the printer who put in the lowest bid, Simon Lacourt (ADG 3L3). Unsurprisingly, these choices were contested: in Troyes the Widow Gobelet complained bitterly that she offered the lowest prices but was not awarded the position of departmental printer (Lhote, 1969 :213). In Angers, Pavie wrote to the *Electeurs du Département de Maine-et-Loire* to complain about irregularities in the elections he had lost (Letortu, 2001:120-121). In Châlons, the printers Collignon and Pinteville were told to share the position of departmental printer, a decision that Collignon fought because he had made commitments when he set up in Châlons that were based on the assumption that he would have all the printing in the *généralité*. In his eyes the “inviolable” attachment of the administrators to “the principle of equity” should mean that he was the sole departmental printer (Lhote, 1969 : 209-213). Quality issues seemed to have played a role in Caen; the printer Le Roy lost municipal printing to Chalopin because of the poor quality of paper he used (Lepreux, 1912 : 481).

However they were chosen, members of established printer dynasties obtained many of these positions.<sup>10</sup> With the end of printer licensing, freedom of the press and the abolition of the guilds, many new printers set up businesses after 1789 but few of these new men broke into the world of administrative contracts until 1793. In general they could not compete with the established printers who had the connections needed to obtain the positions, the printing capacity to produce the large quantities of printed ephemera and the experience of working with government officials. In many towns the most privileged of the Bourbon printers benefited in the early

years of the Revolution improving their position in society, investing in land and consolidating their ties with the ruling elites.

Simon Lacourt was one of those who became a major government printer although he was not exclusively an administrative printer: early in the Revolution he joined the local Jacobin club, the Société des Amis de la Constitution<sup>11</sup> and worked with the journalist Denis Dorte to produce the *Journal de Guienne* which became the *Journal patriotique de commerce* (Labadie, 1910: 25, 77). He added the title *imprimeur des communes* to that of King's Printer, and became printer for the Department of the Gironde in 1790 (Bouchon, 1910: 155). In 1791 he was calling himself Printer for the Department of the Gironde and the Marine (ADG 3E 12691). Between May 1791 and March 1792 he billed the Department 28,000 livres (ADG 3L 208). The inventory of Simon Lacourt's printing house in 1793 shows that his business had overwhelmed his shop and house: he had paper, books, type and seven presses worth 64,953 livres and had just purchased a new press. Paper, registers, administrative printing and copies of decrees were everywhere— in the halls, under the stairs, in the parlour and in rooms of the recently nationalized Feuillant convent (ADG Q923-4). Lacourt was a high-profile and wealthy man who contributed both professionally and personally to the Revolution: he paid a large *contribution patriotique* of 2,000 livres which was more than was required and was able to provide evidence of contributions to the subsistence of the poor in both Bordeaux and around his country estate in Pissos (ADG14L22). Simon Lacourt also added to his investments in real estate by buying property during the Revolution -- a house near the Palais Gallien in 1790 and nationalized lands in Macau in the Medoc in Year II (ADG, Bordeaux 1/2/m et n 3, p. 71, 27 May 1790, Marion, 1: 156.)

Historians of printers in the Revolution tend to focus their attention on the ways in which the collapse of their guilds and the end of royal censorship hurt many established printers by allowing many newcomers into the business and by destroying their hold on copyrights (Hesse, 1991). As important as it was for Paris, however, this theme does not capture the story for printers like Lacourt. Some provincial printers did protest against new printers but, after 1789, Municipalities across the land were actually begging men to set up printing shops. In some areas of the country, quotas established by the royal bureaucracy in the eighteenth-century had made

access to print difficult. In these localities, the Revolutionary government wanted to increase the number of printers whom they valued as accessories to the reform of France. A large number of provincial printers moved very quickly in line with their local governments and adopted the rhetoric of the Revolution with considerable ease and skill. The years between 1789 and 1792 were an era when these printers many were onside with the government, when there was much idealism about the potential of printing to reform society and when the government did in fact pay its printing bills. State media co-operation came to a crashing end, however, when large printing houses printed for the federalist revolt in 1793. In Simon Lacourt's case it seems highly probable that three factors played a role in his decision to print for the federalists. First, his position as official department printer really gave him no choice. It was the Department of the Gironde that took the initiative in the revolt and declared to the courts, the municipality and the district authorities on June 7 that an emergency government was to be established. This emergency government, the *Commission populaire de salut public*, rejected the authority of the national government -- the National Convention -- which had been elected in 1792, in essence rebelling against government from Paris. Knowing full well the gravity of their decision, the *Commission* nevertheless enjoyed widespread support in Bordeaux. In becoming its printer and printing its decrees and newspaper, Lacourt was probably behaving the way he and his fellow citizens thought completely appropriate for a department printer. (It is possible Lacourt thought along the same lines as printers who had printed *remonstrances* and pamphlets for their provincial parlements when they were in conflict with the Ministry during in the reigns of Louis XV and XVI, but they did this anonymously.) Lacourt put his name on the printing he did for the *Commission*: the decrees it issued and the *Bulletin de la Commission populaire de salut public*, a daily which took the form of reports of the meetings of the Commission. Between 9 June and 31 July 1793 Lacourt printed the *Bulletin* in the form of large posters which the bailiff posted all over town, distributed throughout the Department and had the town criers trumpet. As a response to popular demand Lacourt introduced an eight-page octavo edition (Labadie, 1910:111-119; Bouchon, 1901:165-6). When the government decentralized the publishing industry and the Departments began selecting and appointing their own printers, former King's Printers did not necessarily change these habits of deference to their patrons.

A second major factor in his decision to print for the rebels was Lacourt's relationship with his son-in-law Pierre Desmirail, a man who was fully integrated into the group of lawyers and rich merchants who dominated political life in revolutionary Bordeaux and who led the federalist revolt. For example during Desmirail's term as vice-president of the *Commission*, the well-known federalist leader Pierre Sers was president. Desmirail, Sers and other high-profile leaders were at the heart of the movement in Bordeaux to resist what they regarded as the illegal manipulation of the Convention by the Jacobins (De Mathan, 2004; Hanson, 2003; Forrest, 1975, 1996). These leaders formed a well-connected and identifiable group (De Mathan, 2004: 82-86) Desmirail lived with Lacourt on the rue du Cahernon: the printing house must have been the site of much political discussion. We do not know what part the elderly Lacourt (a freemason whose personal library was heavily religious) might have had in the tense political talk or how committed he was to the federalist cause (ADG Q 923-4). We can only speculate that -- whatever his views-- they were surely shaped by this milieu which also shaped his options.

The violent treatment of Lacourt and other federalist printers must be seen, of course, in the context of the violence of the French Revolution generally, but the severity with which they were treated cannot be disassociated from the wider issue of state-media relations in the French Revolution. Lacourt's family may have been right when they claimed that Simon Lacourt was guillotined because the Jacobins and their leader Jean-Baptiste Lacombe, wanted his presses, a line of argument offered in 1795 by Desmirail after he returned from hiding and by Lacourt's widow when she sought her husband's rehabilitation. Desmirail wrote "... il paraît qu'on s'est déterminé à faire assassiner Simon Lacourt pour s'emparer de son imprimerie. On avait décidé d'en faire une imprimerie nationale qui n'aurait rien coûté à ceux qui espéraient l'obtenir. La mort seule du propriétaire pouvait faire remplir cette scandaleuse spoliation, et aussitôt sa mort est décidée. C'était Lacombe qui paraissait être à la tête de ce complot . . ."<sup>12</sup> (ADG 13L34). The Widow Lacourt wrote that "Lacombe avait formé le projet de s'emparer de son imprimerie. Déjà il en avait fait enlever deux presses . . . Il voulait s'emparer du reste; il croit que pour en devenir propriétaire, il ne faut que la mort de cet infortuné; et un quart d'heure après, sa mort est prononcée."<sup>13</sup> (ADG 14L22). To follow too closely the thinking of Lacourt's widow and son-in-law would, however, be to underplay the sense of betrayal the Jacobin

government felt on the part of government printers who had printed against them during the revolt, a sentiment no doubt enhanced when many federalists claimed at their trials to have been misled by propaganda (Forrest, 1975: 128-35). After the failure of the federalist revolt, the representatives of the Convention and their allies had to wrest the printing equipment from the printers and start to print their laws and their own educational materials. They were furious at the betrayal of the Bordeaux printers and very fearful of printing presses getting into the wrong hands. The violent treatment of Lacourt must be seen in this context.<sup>14</sup>

An important role of privilege in the printing industries of Bourbon France was to keep the printers wealthy enough to allow them to resist the temptations of the clandestine book trade. As a policy it had failed Louis XVI. But many kept thinking along these lines well into the Revolution. The Widow Lacourt and her daughter certainly did: it was incredible to them that Lacourt had been convicted of incendiary printing and central to their defence was the argument that he was rich and that he was a government printer. In their view, the law of 29 March 1793 was directed at completely different sorts of men: the poor, the greedy, the outsiders, not at men like Lacourt. This framing of publishing -- as an industry populated by privileged insiders who obeyed the government and disreputable outsiders who did not -- was almost universal practice among eighteenth-century printers and publishers. In 1775, as guild warden, Lacourt had offered his contribution to this discourse by applauding the many wise laws that confined the book trade to “personnes choisies” who had good morals and knowledge and could stop the trade in dangerous books carried on by “particuliers sans titre” (ADG C 3771). As attractive as it was for many printers at the time (and remains for historians of the clandestine booktrade today<sup>15</sup>), this trope never accurately described the actions of the many printers who worked in alliance with divided political elites before the Revolution and after. By 1793, the stark realities these printers faced about printer responsibility and options were very evident to all. As Lacourt’s widow and daughter queried “Was it up to . . . [Lacourt] to examine the content of the writings he had orders to print?” The law said he should obey the constituted authorities and he printed on their orders. “Did the right to revise these writings belong to the printer?” (ADG 14L22).

# Annexe

## LACOURT FAMILY TREE

Pierre Lacourt

= Berthonne  
= 1653  
Laumon  
Marguerite  
Mercier  
(d. 1652)

Gaill. Lacourt

Marie = Roby = Denmout = 1680 procureur en la cour

Nirolas = 1680 Anne Deluynes (père libraire à Paris)

Jean prêtre docteur en théologie à Paris

Charles docteur en théologie à Paris

Petrouille

Denisard

(d. 1740)

Simon (d. 1725) = 1682

Marie = Vincent = 1740 Jean-Baptiste Bastart écuyer, conseiller du roi au sénéchal et siège présidial de Guenne (père François Bastart, ancien conseiller et secrétaire du roi en la cour des aides de Guenne)

Marguerite = Pierre Bourret huissier de la cour

Jeanne

Marguerite

Jeanne

Jean = 1729 Thèse Laré (père chirurgien juré; frère substitut du procureur général)

Jean = 1719 Marguerite Peré (père premier huissier au sénéchal et siège)

Rose religieuse dans le couvent de St. Urme (père Massias huissier de la cour du parlement)

Charles d. 1727 Marie Massias (père huissier de la cour du parlement)

Thèse = Vieille bourgeois marchand

Angelique = 1741 Pierre Foulède bourgeois marchand

Marguerite = Raymond Douneau bourgeois marchand

Simon = Marie Denard = 1728 Eandras (père Vivier)

Marguerite = 1740 Jean-Baptiste Bastart écuyer, conseiller du roi au sénéchal et siège présidial de Guenne (père François Bastart, ancien conseiller et secrétaire du roi en la cour des aides de Guenne)

Nicolas conseiller du roi, lieutenant général au sénéchal et siège présidial de Bazas = 1760 Marie Gombault (père écuyer, chevalier, seigneur de Plan Pont)

Louis lieutenant des dragons au régiment de Guenne aide-de-camp de Mouchy

Charles négociant

Simon = 1759 = Marie Datis = 1782 = Pierre Desmural avocat

Desmural avocat = Marguerite de Ribail

Marguerite = Marc Aphonée Bortie de Pomerade



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank Anne de Mathan and Dominique Varry for suggestions that improved this article. A grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada supported this research.

<sup>2</sup> The subject, of course, extends well beyond the administrative printing discussed here. Further research is needed to assess the role of the press, censorship, the collapse of diocesan printing and the rise of new printers.

<sup>3</sup> On the Lacourt family see his *arrêt du conseil privé* (AN V<sup>6</sup> 985), his aunt's *démission d'imprimeur*, the *renonciation* of the King's printer position by his cousins, his parish *mariage* and his *contrat de mariage* in 1759. For his trial dossier and the inventories of his property see ADG 14 L 22; Q 923-4. Born on 7 May 1721, Lacourt was the son of the printer Jean Delacourt and Marguerite Périer. He married Marie-Etiennette Dartis from Pissos, daughter of the merchant Jean Dartis and Marie Lapios. Both bride and groom were legally emancipated because the bride's father was reluctant to approve of the marriage (*actes de respect*). The marriage of his daughter to Desmirail (described by Bouchon as from a *très ancienne famille de Bourgeois de Bordeaux* and landowners in Cantenac and Macau) was on 11 September 1782.

<sup>4</sup> One of Simon's first cousins purchased the office of *conseiller du roi* in the Bordeaux Parlement and later in the Presidial Court in Bazas. Another was a *lieutenant des dragons au régiment de Guienne* (ADG 3E 12 681; *contrat de mariage*, 1760).

<sup>5</sup> On printer licensing see Jane McLeod, *Licensing Loyalty: Printers, Patrons and the State in Early Modern France* (in press, The Pennsylvania State University Press).

<sup>6</sup> The term federalist is used for the revolt although many historians have shown that the participants did not favour federalism.

<sup>7</sup> The Girondins were a faction in the National Convention opposed by the Montagnards who seized power in 1793.

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<sup>8</sup> This is a preliminary conclusion of my current project tentatively entitled *Printers and the Courts in Eighteenth-Century France*.

<sup>9</sup> In the Dijon printer Frantin's marriage contract, this was the estimated value including the printing equipment (Archives départementales de la Côte-d'Or, notary Menu, 13 February 1775). In Lyon, the printer Valfray's business lost 30,000 livres of value when the King's Printer rights were removed. In an enquiry in the 1780s, Delaroche claimed they normally cost ten to twelve thousand livres (ADR 1 C 221).

<sup>10</sup> Some exceptions are Levieux in Bordeaux, Collignon in Châlons, Sainton in Troyes, Tournel in Montpellier, all of whom enjoyed extensive connections before the Revolution although they were not officially licensed printers (ADG C 3310; AN V<sup>6</sup> 1147; V<sup>6</sup> 1148).

<sup>11</sup> I am grateful to Anne de Mathan for this information.

<sup>12</sup> Translation: . . . it seems that they were determined to have Simon Lacourt murdered in order to seize his printing equipment. They had decided to create a national printing house at no cost. Only the death of the owner would allow them to carry out this scandalous despoilment and thus his death was decided. Lacombe seems to have been at the head of this plot . . .

<sup>13</sup> Translation: Lacombe formed the idea of seizing the printing house. He had already removed two presses . . . and wanted to seize the rest; he believed that to possess the presses he only needed the death of this unfortunate man and one quarter hour later his [Lacourt's] death was pronounced . . .

<sup>14</sup> A study of the relationship between the government and provincial printers in the Terror includes examining the lives of many newcomers to the printing business, a separate subject.

<sup>15</sup> The most well known is Robert Darnton. Recent research is beginning to undermine this vision: many established printers in Lyon, for example, were involved in the clandestine trade (Varry, 2003).

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*Transaction*, notary Fournier, 8 July 1733.

*Inventaire après décès*, notary Séjourné, 28 May 1738.

*Renonciation*, notary Séjourné, 1 May 1755.

*Démission d'imprimeur*, notary Séjourné, 26 June 1755.

*Actes de respect*, notary Séjourné, 31 January 1759, 3 February 1759, 6 February 1759.

*Contrat de mariage*, notary Séjourné jeune, 26 April 1759.

*Contrat de mariage*, notary Duprat, 30 January 1760.

Contrat de mariage, notary Brun, 2 September 1770.

*Partage*, notary Séjourné, 2 February 1777.

C 3310 Imprimerie et librairie.

C 3315 Imprimerie et librairie.

C 3771 Instruction publique et librairie.

3E 12681 Titres de créance sur la nation.

3E 12691 Titres de créance sur la nation.

3L 3 Procès-verbaux des délibérations du conseil général du département.

3L 208 Journal des recettes et dépenses du département.

13L 17 Suspects, inculpés, détenus, dossiers individuels, 1792-An VIII. (Abespy)

13L28 Suspects, inculpés, détenus, dossiers individuels, 1792-An VIII. (Phillippot)

13L 34 Prévaricateurs, terroristes, dossiers individuels. (Lacombe)

14L 22 Enquêtes, interrogations, jugements. Dossiers individuels. (Lacourt)

14L30 Enquêtes, interrogations, jugements. Dossiers individuels. (Pallandre)

Q 923-4 Post-Mortem Inventory of Lacourt's property.

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Q Bx ½ /m et n, 3 Table des acquéreurs et des vendeurs p. 71.

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V<sup>6</sup> 985, 22 December 1755, arrêt du conseil privé.

V<sup>6</sup> 1147, 22 February 1790, arrêt du conseil privé.

V<sup>6</sup> 1148, 29 March and 19 April 1790, arrêts du conseil privé.

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