

Terror as Justice

Terror is a quick, easy, and effective tool of coercion and the subsequent short term imposition of order. However, it proves itself to be just as equally ineffective at winning popular opinion and support over the medium and long term, especially when this method of enforcement is administered in large doses; Maximilien Robespierre was one of many examples of national leaders who met their ultimate demise as a result of the ensuing backlash following their harsh policies. The Terror, often associated with Robespierre in a personal light, proved itself to be worthy of note in this aspect.

With the fall of any national governing body, will come chaos; it is then the ultimate responsibility of the succeeding governing body to quell this ensuing unrest and disorder in order to prove itself more capable of managing the nation than its predecessor. The governing authority that replaced the Bourbon monarchy in France understood this all too well. The inability of the revolutionary government of France to subdue its rebellious provinces would almost certainly invite foreign intervention and meddling, most pressingly by hostile armies on the borders of France herself. On the domestic front, failure to accomplish the aforementioned would enable potential governing bodies to emerge and challenge the national Revolutionary government for its legitimacy over its right and governance of France.

The popular term that can be applied to this is that desperate times require ever more desperate measures. This is the exact mentality expressed by Robespierre, utilizing the phrase, "Its force to repress must be commensurate with the audacity or treachery of those who conspire against it." It was essentially argued that extreme terrorist measures were justified in their execution by virtue of their goal of protecting the fledgeling government, with the goal of establishing a regime that championed liberty afterward. This is not an unknown mentality in its application and usage. The use of guerilla tactics and raids on hostile towns and facilities by American forces during the previous American Revolutionary war could be framed as being heavy handed and terroristic in nature. The government tasked itself with survival, accomplished this, then further established itself as an institution at least nominally protecting individual liberty. This is where the French revolutionary government, and its Reign of Terror, ultimately went wrong.

With the passage of the Law of Suspects, the government authorized itself with sweeping powers to suppress and arrest dissenters to the new regime, with loosely defined parameters as to who