

URBAN WORKERS IN PROVINCIAL FRANCE,  
FEBRUARY-JUNE 1848

Historians of the Second Republic have long given over stage center in their accounts to Paris. Indeed, the role of the capital in most histories of the period has been so great that we often seem to be reading not about the French revolution of 1848, but the Parisian revolution. Correspondingly, the role of the provinces has rarely been recognized: Paris acts and France reacts. It is from Paris, not only the seat of government but also France's most important and most turbulent city, that all the great revolutionary stimuli proceed. Until lately, we have been accustomed to thinking of the provinces as conditioned to salivate at the sound of the Parisian bell – voting in negative response to Parisian radicalism, sending off volunteers to help crush the June insurgents, and so forth.

Some recent historical scholarship has begun to right the balance. Concentrating mostly on rural communities, historians and sociologists alike have made it increasingly clear that the revolution did have an independent existence in the countryside.<sup>1</sup> Though grievances may have been purely local in origin, they nonetheless linked up to national issues.<sup>2</sup> The revolution, begun as a Parisian export, was soon transformed into an event meaningful in local terms. Curiously, however, provincial cities and towns have received less attention, so that we are still left with a picture in which the Parisian workers are, if only by

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the major studies by Philippe Vigier, *La Seconde République dans la région alpine: Etude politique et sociale* (Paris, 1963), 2 vols; Georges Dupeux, *Aspects de l'histoire sociale et politique du Loir-et-Cher, 1848-1914* (Paris, 1962); Christianne Marciilhacy, *Le Diocèse d'Orléans au milieu du XIXe siècle: Les hommes et leur mentalité* (Paris, 1964); André Armengaud, *Les Populations de l'Est-Aquitain au début de l'époque contemporaine: Recherches sur une région moins développée (vers 1845 – vers 1871)* (Paris, 1961); and Louis Chevalier, "Les Fondements économiques et sociaux de l'histoire politique de la région parisienne (1848-1870)" (unpublished thèse ès lettres, University of Paris, 1950), I.

<sup>2</sup> For one detailed regional account of this process, see Leo A. Loubère, "The Emergence of the Extreme Left in Lower Languedoc, 1848-1851: Social and Economic Factors in Politics", in: *The American Historical Review*, LXXIII (1968), pp. 1019-51.

default, almost the only representatives of revolutionary action among the French working classes.

The problems of Paris may, by virtue of the sheer size of the capital, have been more complicated and more acute than those in provincial cities and towns.<sup>1</sup> But serious social and political tensions, which occasionally prompted violent upheavals, did exist among the urban workers of the provinces, and they were often strikingly similar to the conditions which made Paris such a powder keg. In the critical period between the February 1848 revolution and the Parisian uprising of late June, clashes between workers and the authorities went on all over France. The purpose of this exploratory article is, however, modest: it attempts only to indicate the *kinds* of conflict characteristic of provincial cities and towns during those four months. Hopefully, besides pointing toward areas worthy of future research, it will help demonstrate that 1848 was a truly national revolution.

The present state of historical studies on the provincial city gives little basis for confident generalization, but then sweeping generalization may not even be desirable. Social structure and the nature of working-class life in particular was bound to vary widely from place to place, and even within cities of basically the same type. There were, for instance, older industrial cities like Lille and Rouen, but also newer industrial boom-towns like Roubaix, Tourcoing, and Saint-Etienne, commercial centers like Bordeaux and Nantes, traditional administrative cities like Dijon and Angers, and so-called military cities like Strasbourg and Toulon. Some of the larger concentrations – Lyon and Marseille, for example – shared characteristics of all these types.<sup>2</sup> In most places, however, the workers were chiefly artisans from traditional craft occupations, working independently or in small shops. In the small and middling towns, where artisans produced mostly for local consumption, the worker was never very far from the countryside, to which he might return for employment during periods of industrial slump. In the very smallest villages, not really the focus of this paper, artisanal tasks were frequently performed part-time by people who were primarily peasants,

<sup>1</sup> The authoritative study is Rémi Gossez, *Les ouvriers de Paris, livre premier: L'Organisation, 1848-1851* [Bibliothèque de la Révolution de 1848, XXIV] (La Roche-sur-Yon, n.d.).

<sup>2</sup> For an introduction to the state of French urbanization at mid-century, see, among many others, Charles H. Pouthas, *La Population française pendant la première moitié du XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1956); Georges Friedmann, ed., *Villes et Campagnes: Civilisation urbaine et Civilisation rurale en France* (Paris, 1952); Pierre Lavedan, *Histoire de l'urbanisme* (Paris, 1952), III. A useful bibliographical guide is Philippe Dollinger et al., *Bibliographie d'histoire des villes de France* (Paris, 1967).

so that to speak of “workers” at all is to stretch the category. The mayor of Courlandon, in the Marne, doubtless described the condition of the literally thousands of these hamlets when he admitted – in response to a questionnaire on working-class misery – that only “seven or eight workers [...] exist in the commune”.<sup>1</sup>

For all this variety, it still seems safe to say that conditions in most provincial cities were far from happy in February 1848. The great economic crisis of 1846-47 had entailed widespread unemployment, coupled with high bread prices which had only just begun to dip at the beginning of the new year.<sup>2</sup> But conditions were none too good even without the exacerbations of the crisis. Many of the artisan trades were becoming seriously overcrowded, probably due to the waves of emigration from the countryside, and in certain areas small-shop production was beginning to feel the first pressures of more modernized manufacturing.<sup>3</sup> In these circumstances, news of revolution in the capital was virtually guaranteed to bring discontent in provincial cities boiling to the surface.

In any number of places, word of the Paris upheaval inspired little municipal revolutions. The classic pattern of these miniature eruptions featured a spontaneously-formed crowd, in which liberal bourgeois and workers usually stood side by side, forced the local administration to proclaim the republic and sometimes to resign – or at least accept into the municipal council representatives of the old liberal or republican opposition.<sup>4</sup> But revolution in the capital also triggered independent working-class action in the provinces. City and town artisans lashed out at what they took to be the causes of their misery. At the

<sup>1</sup> Archives départementales de la Marne, Châlons-sur-Marne (hereafter cited as ADM), 189 M 5.

<sup>2</sup> See especially C.-E. Labrousse, ed., *Aspects de la crise et de la dépression de l'économie française au milieu du XIXe siècle, 1846-1851* [Bibliothèque de la Révolution de 1848, XIX] (La Roche-sur-Yon, 1956).

<sup>3</sup> See the returns of the *Enquête sur le travail agricole et industriel*, conducted by the Comité de travail of the Assemblée nationale constituante, Archives nationales, Paris (hereafter cited as AN), C 944-69.

<sup>4</sup> For accounts of some more or less typical municipal revolutions see, in addition to the works cited above, p. 661, note 1, Emile Appolis, “Les débuts de la seconde république dans l’Hérault”, in: *Revue historique et littéraire du Languedoc*, XVII (1948), pp. 278-79; A. Desauvais, “La Révolution de 1848 dans le département du Jura (24 février – 10 décembre 1848)”, in: *Mémoires de la Société d’émulation du Jura*, XIV-XVI (1946-48), pp. 74-84; L. de Tricaud, *Histoire du département de l’Ain du 24 février au 20 décembre 1848* (Bourg-en-Bresse, 1872), I, pp. 21-22, 31-33; (?) Jossierand, *Notice historique sur l’établissement de la république dans le département de l’Ain* (Bourg-en-Bresse, 1860), pp. 10-11; report of the Procureur général (Douai) on the events of February 25, 1848, to the Minister of Justice, May 21, 1848, AN, BB<sup>30</sup> 360.

same time, peasant disorders stirred much of the French countryside: there were assaults upon tax offices, depredations in the forests in protest against the strictures of the forest code, attacks upon the railroads which appeared to be endangering the livelihood of traditional rural carriers.<sup>1</sup> But agitation in the countryside tended to fade away in the next few weeks, as the peak season for agricultural labor drew close. In the cities, however, the social conditions which underlay agitation deteriorated, if anything. The shock of the revolution converted the inflationary *crise des subsistances* into a depression: business confidence was badly rattled by the prospect of a revolutionary government; production continued to decline, and unemployment continued to rise.<sup>2</sup>

The subsequent expressions of working-class unrest are sometimes difficult to characterize. Of the hundreds of "incidents" reported to the central government during the first four months of the republic, many appeared to be little more than vague and even aimless agitation. Unemployed workers in Rive-de-Gier pillaged houses in middle-class neighborhoods; some 200 railway workers in Saint-Quentin milled about noisily in a demonstration for higher wages, but dispersed peacefully at the request of the National Guard; workers from Lunel descended upon landlords in the district, insisted upon working the land for a day – whether or not it needed working – and then demanded a wage fifty centimes above the going rate.<sup>3</sup> Such occurrences were perfectly common in provincial France during early 1848, so much a part of the natural rhythms of urban life that it is difficult to categorize them as distinct movements.

Still, some persistent themes do emerge from the records of working-class ferment, themes frequently associated with the unemployment crisis. One prominent focus of discontent was the pockets of newly mechanized industry. Workers in Rouen made threatening demonstrations against the new power looms.<sup>4</sup> In the Ardennes, workers from the smaller textile towns banded together with the intent of burning down new factories in Rethel and Neufchâteau, and the region suffered

<sup>1</sup> See the correspondence scattered through AN, BB<sup>30</sup> 316, 363, 365, and Albert Soboul, "Les troubles agraires de 1848", in: *La Pensée*, Nos 18-20 (1948), pp. 55-66, 25-37, 46-56, lately reprinted in A. Soboul, *Paysans, Sans-culottes et Jacobins* (Paris, 1966), pp. 307-350.

<sup>2</sup> Labrousse, ed., *Aspects de la crise*, passim.

<sup>3</sup> Reports in the AN from the Procureur général (Amiens), March 25, 1848, BB<sup>30</sup> 359; Procureur de la République (Saint-Etienne), May 24, 1848, BB<sup>30</sup> 361; Procureur général (Montpellier), May 15, 1848, BB<sup>30</sup> 362.

<sup>4</sup> André Dubuc, "Les émeutes de Rouen et d'Elbeuf (27, 28 et 29 avril 1848)", in: *Etudes d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, II (1948), p. 245.

several incidents of machine-breaking.<sup>1</sup> Textile workers in Reims turned on the factory of one Théodore Croutelle. In fact, Croutelle paid the highest wages of any local industrialist, but artisans warmly hated his new hydraulically-powered looms. On February 26, crowds wrecked the machines and burned the building to the ground.<sup>2</sup> Most such activity seems to have come from artisans threatened by competition from newer modes of production, but there were a few occasions on which the new industrial workers themselves rose up.<sup>3</sup> In the coal-producing areas east of Saint-Etienne, miners occupied a number of mines early in June and forced owners to remove some of the new steam-powered machines which threatened to create an early version of technological unemployment.<sup>4</sup> Some 4000 workers at the modernizing *Arsenal de la Marine* in Toulon went out on a week-long strike in early March.<sup>5</sup>

Unemployment also brought out a xenophobic streak in some workers. Dockworkers in Dunkerque protested against competition from Belgian laborers, and in the Nord a crowd of 500 glassworkers invaded the factory of their employer and insisted that he fire his Belgian employees.<sup>6</sup> Rouennais textile workers protested loudly against English and Irish competition in their factories.<sup>7</sup> Painters in Nevers demanded the expulsion of Italian immigrants in the same trade.<sup>8</sup> Unemployment was so serious that the government not only tried to keep out foreign workers,<sup>9</sup> it even attempted to clamp down on the internal circulation of French nationals so that no one city would become glutted with jobless workers.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Comité du centenaire de la II<sup>e</sup> République, 1848 dans les Ardennes (Mézières, 1948), pp. 5-50. On a somewhat smaller scale, workers from the départements of Loire and Rhône tried to destroy a new factory in neighboring Saône-et-Loire; see the correspondence in AN, BB<sup>30</sup> 361.

<sup>2</sup> ADM, 194 M 9; Gustave Laurent, "La Révolution de 1848", in: Comité départemental marnais de célébration du centenaire de la révolution de 1848, Le département de la Marne et la révolution de 1848 (Châlons-sur-Marne, 1948), pp. 48-57.

<sup>3</sup> This is consistent with the findings of Peter N. Stearns, "Patterns of Industrial Strike Activity during the July Monarchy", in: *The American Historical Review*, LXX (1965), pp. 371-94.

<sup>4</sup> See the correspondence in AN, BB<sup>30</sup> 361.

<sup>5</sup> Maurice Agulhon, "Aperçus sur le mouvement ouvrier à Toulon sous la Monarchie de Juillet", in: *Provence historique*, VII, fasc. 28 (1957), pp. 131-42.

<sup>6</sup> Reports of the Procureur de la République (Dunkerque), April 3, 1848, and the Juge de paix (Douai sud), April 3, 1848, AN, BB<sup>30</sup> 360.

<sup>7</sup> Dubuc, "Les émeutes de Rouen et d'Elbeuf", pp. 245, 249.

<sup>8</sup> Report of the Procureur général (Bourges), March 29, 1848, AN, BB<sup>30</sup> 359.

<sup>9</sup> General circular of A.-T. Marie, Minister of Public Works, March 16, 1848, AN, F<sup>1A</sup> 45.

<sup>10</sup> For example, the directive from the Ministry of the Interior to the Prefecture of the Marne, April 18, 1848, ADM, 51 M 18.

Competition from cheap labor also inspired the numerous attacks on convents, prisons, and orphanages which engaged in some small textile production.<sup>1</sup> Workers in Bourg, after having chased the Prefect out of town on February 26, turned the next day on a local convent.<sup>2</sup> A crowd in Lons-le-Saulnier attacked an orphanage for similar reasons.<sup>3</sup> In fact, such institutions rarely offered a serious threat to conventional labor, but in a time of unemployment their competition took on exaggerated proportions, and impoverished textile workers were in no mood to engage in fine distinctions about “symbols” of discontent. Indeed, supposed competition from convent labor inspired Saint-Etienne’s most violent spasm of the year.

Saint-Etienne, with its working-class suburbs, was one of France’s fastest-growing cities and principal industrial centers: coal-mining, metallurgy, and arms production employed about 12,000 workers, but textiles – and principally silk work – accounted for another 20,000.<sup>4</sup> Shortly after the revolution, textile workers protested against the continued existence of looms in half a dozen local convents, though in reality the convents altogether did not employ more than 300 women. But Saint-Etienne’s municipal council, anxious to placate the insistent workers, ordered the looms sealed up. This order was shortly reversed by the republic’s newly-arrived *commissaire*, Eugène Baune, who argued that the convents had no other means of support.<sup>5</sup> On March 25, a crowd of perhaps 500 persons tried to invade two of the convents to smash the looms, but were turned away by the National Guard.<sup>6</sup> The issue continued to rankle local textile workers, however, and on April 13 they mounted a massive offensive against all the neighboring convents in which machine-breaking soon gave way to simple pillaging. And this time, the rioters resisted the National Guard

<sup>1</sup> The *Enquête sur le travail agricole et industriel* took the problem seriously enough to make the role of cheap competitive labor in such institutions an issue in its inquiry.

<sup>2</sup> Tricaud, *Histoire du département de l’Ain*, I, pp. 21-22.

<sup>3</sup> Desanais, “La Révolution de 1848 dans le département du Jura”, pp. 146-48.

<sup>4</sup> See the *Enquête sur le travail agricole et industriel*, AN, C 956 (Loire); Pierre Guillaume, “La situation économique et sociale du département de la Loire d’après l’enquête sur le travail agricole et industriel du 25 mai 1848”, in: *Actes du 86e Congrès national des sociétés savantes*, Montpellier, 1961: Section d’histoire moderne et contemporaine (Paris, 1962), pp. 429-50; Jean Merley, “La Révolution de 1848 et les débuts de la Seconde République à Saint-Étienne” (unpublished *Diplôme d’études supérieures*, 1950), pp. 10-95. I am deeply grateful to M. Merley for the opportunity to consult his study.

<sup>5</sup> Merley, “La Révolution de 1848”, pp. 98-99.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Baune to the *Procureur général* (Lyon), March 30, 1848, AN, BB<sup>30</sup> 361.

more vigorously than before, at a cost of four persons killed in addition to nearly 200 arrests.<sup>1</sup>

Paris' main response to unemployment was the famous *ateliers nationaux*, an institution which had its provincial counterparts in untold numbers of *ateliers municipaux*, *chantiers municipaux*, *ateliers de charité*, and the like. Such devices had, in the provinces, long been used to tide unemployed workers over times of crisis, and in mid-March the central government encouraged their resuscitation.<sup>2</sup> But even the Ministry of Public Works found the *ateliers nationaux* a grave burden, and of course the municipalities had none of the central government's financial resources. Municipal budgets everywhere strained under the added load, and sometimes even levied surtaxes to support these projects.<sup>3</sup> The city of Rouen found itself paying out 5,000 francs a day to those enrolled in its *ateliers communaux*; yet workers found the individual dole of sixty-five centimes far beneath their daily needs, while bourgeois taxpayers complained roundly about the ten per cent surtax which supported the *ateliers*.<sup>4</sup> Saint-Etienne chose not to levy a surtax, but then had to limit enrollments in its *chantiers de travail* at the pitifully small number of 300.<sup>5</sup> When lack of funds threatened to close down the *ateliers municipaux* in Amiens, workers threw up barricades and engaged in a five-hour battle with the National Guard.<sup>6</sup> Some towns tried to finance *ateliers* out of public subscriptions, a stop-gap measure at best.<sup>7</sup> In Nancy, when donations began to run out, the mayor was forced to cut the daily dole by twenty-five centimes; workers immediately came into the streets, and the ensuing demonstrations brought nineteen arrests.<sup>8</sup> Unemployed textile workers in Charlieu, in the Loire, were cared for in an *atelier de charité* supported by private donations; but the funds permitted only a wage of one franc per day, far beneath the minimum required for subsistence. The workers demanded two francs a day and, when authorities refused, tried literally to take over the town – invading the town hall and the post office, only

<sup>1</sup> Letters from Baune to Procureur général (Lyon), April 17, 1848, and April 21, 1848, AN, BB<sup>30</sup> 361; see also Merley, "La Révolution de 1848", pp. 101-131.

<sup>2</sup> General circular of the Ministry of the Interior, March 15, 1848, AN, F<sup>1A</sup> 45.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Desauvais, "La Révolution de 1848 dans le département du Jura", pp. 258-75.

<sup>4</sup> Dubuc, "Les émeutes de Rouen et d'Elbeuf", pp. 251-52.

<sup>5</sup> Merley, "La Révolution de 1848", p. 89.

<sup>6</sup> Report of the Procureur général (Amiens), April 29, 1848, AN, BB<sup>30</sup> 359.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Georges Rocal, 1848 en Dordogne (Paris, 1934), I, p. 135.

<sup>8</sup> Report of the Procureur général (Nancy), April 14, 1848, AN, BB<sup>30</sup> 362; J. Baudry, "Les cahiers du capitaine Dauné: Mémoires inédits sur la Révolution de 1848 à Nancy", in: Le Pays lorrain, VIII (1911), pp. 688-89.



to be routed out a few hours later at the point of National Guard bayonettes.<sup>1</sup>

Since the National Guard served as the police force for most provincial cities, clashes between it and disorderly workers were frequent. But such conflicts were bound to take on a class character, since the Guard usually maintained its bourgeois composition even in spite of the republican government's attempt to democratize it.<sup>2</sup> In Rouen, the Guard was a center of anti-radical and anti-worker hostility which in late April flared up into violence.<sup>3</sup> When the National Guard in Limoges was forced to open its ranks to all adult males, the middle-class veterans of the monarchist Guard maintained a monopoly on arms – the source of still another upheaval in April.<sup>4</sup> In Marseille, radicals tried to form their own, politically homogeneous, units within the National Guard, thus contributing to the tension which erupted in bloodshed in June.<sup>5</sup>

Such conflicts show that working-class agitation in provincial cities was more than just hunger politics. Though it would be pointless here to try to disentangle economic deprivation from political agitation, it is still true that the provincial urban poor did involve themselves significantly in political activities which usually had as their goal the shaping and even the control of political institutions. Such activities were most frequently undertaken through the medium of the political clubs which, after the February revolution, sprang up in almost every provincial town of note. One important feature of club activity was preparation for the election to the National Constituent Assembly, set for April 23. But clubs also served as a forum for the dispersion of left-wing ideology, and also sometimes as pressure groups trying to influence local authorities – the municipal council, the *commissaire* or *sous-commissaire*, the *juge de paix*.<sup>6</sup> On some occasions, clubs might

<sup>1</sup> Report of the sous-commissaire (Roanne), April 1, 1848, AN, BB<sup>30</sup> 362.

<sup>2</sup> See Louis Girard, *La Garde nationale, 1814-1871* (Paris, 1964), pp. 291-304.

<sup>3</sup> Dubuc, "Les émeutes de Rouen et d'Elbeuf", p. 247 and *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> Victor Chazelas, "Un épisode de la lutte des classes à Limoges", in: *La Révolution de 1848, VII (1910-11)*, pp. 252-54; Antoine Perrier, "La Société populaire de Limoges en 1848", in: *Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, Actes du 90e Congrès national des Sociétés savantes, Nice, 1965: Section d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* (Paris, 1966), III, pp. 285-87.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Masson, ed., *Les Bouches-du-Rhône: Encyclopédie départementale, V: Raoul Busquet and Joseph Fournier, La Vie politique et administrative* (Paris and Marseille, 1929), pp. 160-69; Thomas Rodney Christofferson, "The Revolution of 1848 in Marseille" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Tulane University, 1968), pp. 128-31.

<sup>6</sup> Helpful indications of the extent of club activity may be found in the reports of the Club des clubs delegates who circulated through the provinces during the



even try to influence higher authorities in their appointments to local positions, though here simple localism and hostility toward Parisian meddling might cut across political radicalism.<sup>1</sup> The election itself was the occasion of only minor disorders, but left-wing frustration over election results prompted two of the country's most serious explosions of 1848.<sup>2</sup> Rouen was one of France's major textile centers, and in 1848 its working-class population experienced the gravest sort of misery.<sup>3</sup> The propertied classes, whose principal power base was in the National Guard, resented the municipal surtax which supported unemployed workers and were continually frightened by the series of working-class demonstrations which punctuated the early weeks of the republic. To make matters worse, the new Minister of the Interior, Alexandre-Auguste Ledru-Rollin, had ired local conservatives by appointing one of his left-republican friends, Frédéric Deschamps, as *commissaire* for the *département* of Seine-Inférieure. Though Deschamps strove to maintain order, every disruption was laid at his doorstep, as when a crowd of angry workers attacked Rouen's Bicêtre prison in late March to liberate a prisoner accused of burning down a railroad bridge the month before. The excitement occasioned by this episode led, in nearby Lillebonne, to a bloody clash between workers and troops which cost six lives and further tarnished the reputation of the left. Tension and expectation fed directly into the election campaign, and when the left-wing list was soundly defeated – even Deschamps was not elected to the Assembly – workers' hopes evaporated and were replaced by violence. On April 27, incidents involving bands of angry workers and National Guard detachments escalated into something far more serious. The workers hastily constructed barricades, and were not dislodged from their strongholds until the next afternoon. Over 500 insurgents were arrested, and twenty-three were killed in the fighting. A smaller, sympathetic flare-up took place in neighboring Elbeuf on April 29, but was quickly snuffed out.

Limoges also had an important textile industry, and in the nineteenth century had also begun to assume considerable importance as a

election campaign; their correspondence with the Parisian coordinators may be found in the AN, C 938-40.

<sup>1</sup> For example, the reports of the Procureur général (Aix), May 9, 1848, AN, BB<sup>30</sup> 358; the Procureur général (Amiens), April 16 and April 18, 1848, and the Commissaire général Bergeron, April 30, 1848, AN, BB<sup>30</sup> 359; Rocal, 1848 en Dordogne, I, pp. 30-48; Prosper Rossi, *Mes Souvenirs* (Toulon, 1888), I, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> On election results, see George Fasel, "The French Election of April 23, 1848: Suggestions for a Revision", in: *French Historical Studies*, V, No 3 (1968), pp. 285-98.

<sup>3</sup> The remainder of this paragraph is based upon Dubuc, "Les émeutes de Rouen et d'Elbeuf", pp. 243-75.

center for the manufacture of porcelains. Neither industry had been very grievously shaken by the economic crisis of the 1840s, but there was still serious enough misery to feed a rather durable left-wing tradition among the workers.<sup>1</sup> On the evening of February 25, 1848, when news of the Parisian revolution reached Limoges, a crowd stormed the prefecture and forced the formation of a *Comité administratif provisoire* – composed of local republicans and led by attorney Théodore Bac – to govern the *département*. The next day, republican leaders organized a political club, the *Société populaire*, which, thanks to its links with the *Comité administratif*, assumed a quasi-official stature.<sup>2</sup> Early in March, the *Comité* retired upon the arrival of the government-appointed *commissaire*, Maurrat-Ballange, but the *Société populaire* continued to reign as the unchallenged spokesman for Limoges republicans.

The *Société populaire* was never an exclusively working-class club; indeed, in its earlier days, it included a number of old monarchist *fonctionnaires* who had joined as proof of their conversion to republicanism. But the *Société* preached largely to the workers, and its gospel of social republicanism – increasingly sharpened during the election campaign – began to raise fears among the city's propertied classes. Anticipation of the election grew increasingly keen, and the *Société's* apprehension mounted, in the first days after the vote while ballots were being counted, that its own list of eight candidates would not be successful.<sup>3</sup> The club's list took an early lead on the basis of votes from Limoges, but as the tally from the peasant *cantons* came in, the balance began to tip toward more conservative candidates.<sup>4</sup> Bourgeois elements of the National Guard, on the other hand, began to take heart, and their self-confidence was further bolstered by lately arrived news from the capital that the Paris Guard had successfully put down a workers' demonstration on April 16. On the night of April 26-27, some members of the Limoges Guard began, without authorization, to distribute cartridges through its ranks; simultaneously, the *Société populaire* met and called for the wholesale resignation of the municipal council.<sup>5</sup>

On the day of the 27th, crowds of workers appeared at the *Société populaire*, though it is not clear that the *Société* actually invited them.

<sup>1</sup> Antoine Perrier, "Esquisse d'une sociologie du mouvement socialiste dans la Haute-Vienne et en Limousin", in: Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, Actes du 87e Congrès national des Sociétés savantes, Poitiers, 1962: Section d'histoire moderne et contemporaine (Paris, 1962), pp. 378-83.

<sup>2</sup> Chazelas, "Un épisode de la lutte des classes", pp. 240-43, 332-35.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 337-38.

<sup>4</sup> Perrier, "La Société populaire de Limoges", pp. 285-87.

<sup>5</sup> Chazelas, "Un épisode de la lutte des classes", pp. 404-411.

At any rate, the occasion was the counting of ballots from the army, which was done publicly at the club.<sup>1</sup> When it became clear that the army votes were going for conservative candidates, the crowds angrily destroyed the ballots and swarmed out of the hall.<sup>2</sup> Still insisting that working-class segments of the National Guard be armed, they forced the bourgeois legions to lay down their weapons and soon occupied every Guard post in the city. The *commissaire* resigned and turned over his authority to a refurbished version of the old *Comité administratif provisoire* – now numbering several working-class representatives – which was ominously renamed the *Comité insurrectionnel*.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, troops surrounded the city, and when tensions had eased somewhat by mid-May, the army suddenly occupied Limoges and instituted a rule of informal martial law.<sup>4</sup>

A year later, the government charged forty-four persons with various offenses associated with the rising of April 27. Concentrating on the role of the *Société populaire*, the indictment named at least thirty workers, eight of them from the porcelain industry.<sup>5</sup> Yet there is also some evidence that the bulk of the rioters on the 27th came not from the porcelain or textile workers, but rather from what Marx would have called the *Lumpenproletariat* – the inhabitants of Limoges' disreputable *quartier Naveix*, unemployed river bargemen and even the former denizens of the local jail who had been summarily released on the morrow of the February revolution.<sup>6</sup>

Marseille was France's second largest city in 1848, with a population of nearly 190,000, and it suffered nearly all the ills which had facilitated violent disturbances elsewhere in the country: serious working-class unemployment; *ateliers municipaux* which hardly began to meet the unemployment problem, provoked resentments among the well-to-do, and badly sapped the municipal budget; left-wing political clubs which sharpened tensions during a bitter electoral campaign; conflicts within the National Guard between older bourgeois groups and newer, more democratized and more radical units.<sup>7</sup> Emile Ollivier, the government's

<sup>1</sup> Soldiers voted for candidates in their home constituency, regardless of where they were stationed at election time; ballots were then transported to the various parts of the country, so that army votes were the last ones to come in.

<sup>2</sup> See the Acte d'accusation against persons charged with various misdeeds on this day in Limoges, AN, BB<sup>30</sup> 361; this official account must, however, be compared with Chazelas, "Un épisode de la lutte des classes", pp. 41-44.

<sup>3</sup> Acte d'accusation, AN, BB<sup>30</sup> 361.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Chazelas, "Un épisode de la lutte des classes", pp. 44-45, 49-50.

<sup>7</sup> Busquet and Fournier, *La Vie politique et administrative*, pp. 160-69; Christofferson, "The Revolution of 1848 in Marseille", pp. 51-157; Pierre Guiral, "Le cas d'un grand port de commerce: Marseille", in: Labrousse, ed., *Aspects de*

twenty-two year old *commissaire* for the *département* of Bouches-du-Rhône, attempted to conciliate all the antagonistic factions. Such a policy, especially when undertaken in the polarized atmosphere of revolution, requires for success a rare blend of political skill and luck. Ollivier seems to have been blessed with neither. The radicals in particular were embittered when Ollivier proved to be far more moderate than his father, for years a leader of the left-wing movement in Marseille.<sup>1</sup>

The April elections returned, in Bouches-du-Rhône as most everywhere, a delegation of moderate republicans and conservatives which left the radicals angry and disappointed. Some club members may have planned to destroy the completed ballots in late April; the ubiquitous police spies alerted the authorities, however, and the alleged conspiracy came to naught.<sup>2</sup> Further attempts to democratize the National Guard were frustrated, and a short-lived company of working-class *tirailleurs* disbanded in early June. A week later, legislative by-elections produced two conservatives and one moderate republican.<sup>3</sup>

But the most volatile issues of these months were economic. The municipal workshops were a woefully inadequate response to Marseille's economic crisis and unemployment difficulties. The *ateliers* were unable to absorb all the jobless, and near the peak of their operation authorities reported that some 9000 workers were still unemployed. Those who were enrolled in the *ateliers*, frequently members of skilled artisan crafts, were unaccustomed to the strenuous physical labor of construction work and clearing urban land. The municipal budget had to run a substantial deficit in order to finance the *ateliers*; yet wages were barely at the subsistence level, and Ollivier in effect cut them further in early May when he converted from flat daily payments to piecework rates. Later that month, when the central government refused to loan Marseille emergency funds, the municipal authorities began to close up some of the *ateliers*.<sup>4</sup>

An even larger segment of workers was involved in the controversy over the length of the working day. The provisional government had decreed that the working day not exceed ten hours for Parisians, nor eleven for provincial laborers. But an eleven-hour day was already a widely-accepted maximum in Marseille, whose workers demanded

la crise, pp. 200-225; P. Dubosc, *Quatre mois de République à Marseille* (Marseille, 1848); and the various reports of the Procureur général (Aix), AN, BB<sup>30</sup> 358.

<sup>1</sup> Theodore Zeldin, *Emile Ollivier and the Liberal Empire of Napoleon III* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 12-20; for a general evaluation of Ollivier's performance in Marseille, see Christofferson, "The Revolution of 1848 in Marseille", pp. 177-91.

<sup>2</sup> Christofferson, *ibid.*, pp. 117-18.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128-29, 142-43.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 123-25, 145-51.

parity with the capital. Ollivier complied, in defiance of the central government. But the *commissaire's* decree was difficult to enforce upon local employers, and rumors persisted that he would retract his own ruling and return to the eleven-hour system.<sup>1</sup> The rumors were fueled by the arrival, in early June, of 100 or so refugees from the Paris *ateliers nationaux*. Themselves apparently non-Parisians who had been forced from the capital as part of the government's campaign to reduce the financial burden of the *ateliers*, these roving revolutionaries were on their way to Italy to offer their services in the Italian war of independence. The Piedmontese monarchy wanted nothing of republican aid, however, and its consul in Marseille refused the Frenchmen passports. Stranded far from home, the "Parisians", as they were called, turned for aid to the political clubs, who promptly demanded that the group be maintained at public cost. Conservatives resisted, especially when the Parisians sowed fears in the clubs that the ten-hour ruling would be retracted and that all France would soon follow the Parisian lead in beginning a total shutdown of the *ateliers*.<sup>2</sup>

On June 22, workers staged a demonstration of uncertain purpose: in part, it was meant to reaffirm working-class commitment to the ten-hour day; in part, to intimidate employers who allegedly were not honoring the *commissaire's* ten-hour decree; and in part, to protest Ollivier's allegedly ungenerous treatment of the Parisian contingent. The demonstrators massed at the prefecture; they soon became involved in some jostling incidents with the regular army troops on sentry duty, and before long push came to shove. The demonstrators dispersed, but only to put up barricades elsewhere in the city. Ollivier was now forced to call out the National Guard. But the left-wing legions sympathized with the demonstrators, and at the Guard's first organizational review radicals shot and wounded the commanding general of the city's Guard and killed his aide-de-camp. These units of the Guard then joined the clubs behind the barricades, and were not rooted out until the afternoon of the 23rd. Government figures put the death toll at nine soldiers or National Guardsmen from loyal units and eighteen insurgents.<sup>3</sup>

Like most armed risings of any significance, the June Days of

<sup>1</sup> Acte d'accusation of persons charged with various crimes during the Marseille June Days, dated November 1848, AN, BB<sup>30</sup> 358; cp. Christofferson, *ibid.*, pp. 155-56.

<sup>2</sup> Acte d'accusation, AN, B<sup>30</sup> 358; Christofferson, *ibid.*, pp. 153-55; Busquet and Fournier, *La Vie politique et administrative*, p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph and the next are based largely upon documents from the trial of the insurgents, held in the Cour d'Assises de la Drôme and now in the AN, BB<sup>30</sup> 358, and Christofferson, *ibid.*, pp. 158-170.

Marseille were the product of complex economic and political issues involving people from a variety of social strata. This is not the place to sort out such questions in detail, but let it be noted that of the 150 persons tried in 1849 for their role in the insurrection, no less than ninety-four were skilled laborers or artisans, another eleven or twelve were employed in large factories, and twenty-one more were domestics and menial laborers of various kinds.<sup>1</sup> More than eighty per cent of the defendants, in other words, would have fit into contemporary categories of "working-class".

A brief survey such as this one can, at best, hope to indicate some of the outlines of urban discontent in the French provinces during the early months of 1848. Hopefully, however, it should make clear that serious social problems and a revolutionary temperament in the working classes were not confined to the capital. Provincial cities and towns were experiencing difficulties strikingly similar to those of Paris, and provincial workers were by no means waiting for a cue from Paris to try to solve them. The range of provincial problems here suggested, and the gravity of agitation described, strongly fortify the case that 1848 was a truly French, and not merely a Parisian, revolution. Indeed, the famous June Days of the capital served not as a prod to laggard urban radicals in the provinces, but actually came as a spectacular culmination to months of revolutionary turmoil in cities throughout the entire nation.

<sup>1</sup> In addition to the trial documents, see Christofferson, *ibid.*, pp. 171-76.