

PART VI

THE BARRICADES OF
PARIS

NOTES

1. *Journal de l'Assemblée Nationale* (Paris, 1871) cited in David Mervin, *The French Revolution of 1848* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 72.
2. *Palmer, French Revolution*, p. 273-5.
3. *Journal de l'Assemblée Nationale* (Paris, 1871) cited in Mervin, *French Revolution*, p. 72.
4. *Journal de l'Assemblée Nationale* (Paris, 1871) cited in Mervin, *French Revolution*, p. 72.
5. *Journal de l'Assemblée Nationale* (Paris, 1871) cited in Mervin, *French Revolution*, p. 72.
6. *Journal de l'Assemblée Nationale* (Paris, 1871) cited in Mervin, *French Revolution*, p. 72.
7. *Journal de l'Assemblée Nationale* (Paris, 1871) cited in Mervin, *French Revolution*, p. 72.
8. *Journal de l'Assemblée Nationale* (Paris, 1871) cited in Mervin, *French Revolution*, p. 72.
9. *Journal de l'Assemblée Nationale* (Paris, 1871) cited in Mervin, *French Revolution*, p. 72.
10. *Journal de l'Assemblée Nationale* (Paris, 1871) cited in Mervin, *French Revolution*, p. 72.

CHAPTER 25 The Revolution of February 1848

The French Revolution of 1830 sent shock waves throughout Europe. In Britain, Belgium, Portugal, and Spain, as well as a number of states in the German Confederation, movements for the reform of dynasties or monarchies flared up, sometimes taking the form of insurrections. But most of these reforms were nationalist in character, or liberal—seeking to broaden political rights—or both, rather than *social* uprisings, in which the masses fought for a radically new economic as well as political dispensation. In time, nagging problems of national unification were resolved, not by popular insurgencies but by forceful statesmen, such as Cavour in Italy and Bismarck in Germany, who fulfilled the aspirations of established monarchs rather than those of quasi-democratic popular movements.

It was almost exclusively in France, in the nineteenth century, and usually in Paris, that mass armed revolts transcended essentially nationalist goals and focused on the “social question” of economic exploitation, class rule, and property ownership. As we have seen, the Great Revolution had by no means eliminated all of the social arrangements of the *ancien régime*. Ironically, in fact, it was not only the traditions of 1789 but France’s very economic backwardness, at least by comparison with England, that made it a hotbed of revolution and radical ideologies.

THE PERSISTENCE OF OLD FRANCE

Despite the economic and technological changes that took place very noticeably in the 1840s, the propertied classes of France—the middle classes as well as the nobility—still equated prestige and power with the ownership of land. Even the

bourgeoisie, with or without titles, aspired to the ownership of large estates, which alone would gain it a privileged position in the management of the country. Admittedly, this high regard for land ownership was diminished in French cities, particularly in Paris, where commerce and banking flourished. Certainly in the capital, talented men with fairly plebeian origins such as Jacques Laffitte, Casimir Périer, Adolphe Thiers, and François Guizot—bankers, journalists, and academics—attained positions of prominence in national affairs; nor were these men denied entry into aristocratic circles, or even the opportunity to marry into the nobility, as trade and finance became ever more lucrative sources of income.

But in the rural areas and the small towns, French provincial and municipal affairs were almost completely controlled by landed notables, who despised urban businessmen and ruled over the peasantry and craftsmen of their districts with prerevolutionary arrogance. Together with the clergy, they dispensed favors and issued directives as though the Revolution of 1789 had never occurred. Nor were their claims to local sovereignty seriously challenged by the peasantry and lesser urban classes, who viewed titles and the ownership of landed property with subservient awe, especially in the royalist hotbeds of the west and south.

That a great deal of power was exercised on the provincial and even the local level was not politically trivial. During the 1830s France was still a comparatively decentralized country—in some respects barely a modern nation-state. Travel conditions outside the great urban hubs were very primitive, leaving many parts of the country isolated and under the dominion of local landowners. Despite a considerable amount of road and canal construction during the Restoration, “in the 1830s the nation’s transportation system . . . was still that of the eighteenth century,” as David Pinkney pointedly observes.¹

In 1830, for example, stagecoaches still moved at an average speed of four miles per hour, and it took ten to twenty days for freight wagons to move from Paris to Orleans. A steamship journey up the Rhône from Arles to Lyon required three to four days, and even more if the river was swollen by flooding or shrouded in fog. In winter, when ice clogged the waterway, traffic might be suspended entirely for a week. Travel along canals, whose construction tripled under the Orleans monarchy, still faced all the riverine difficulties of weather, flooding, and drought. Rural France thus had only limited, and usually very little, contact with the capital. The affairs of large areas of the country were necessarily left in the hands of the local aristocracy—many of whom remained Legitimists, that is, supporters of the old Bourbon dynasty to which Louis XVI and his brothers belonged.

The continuities with the past, it should be emphasized, encompassed not only regional isolation, poor roads, and strong feelings of provincialism but a

fairly primitive banking system. By continuing to invest mainly in safe government bonds and low-risk securities that brought short-term returns, this system impeded the growth of more mechanized, capital-intensive enterprises. Even small enterprises such as the production of iron in charcoal-fueled furnaces (which still supplied most of the country's iron) had to rely on overly cautious local banks or else be self-financed. The larger coal-fueled plants, so necessary for the production of iron for locomotives and railroad tracks, required large capital investments that vastly exceeded the capacity of most local financial institutions. Indeed, not until the Paris—Saint-Germain Railroad proved to be a financial success were the large Parisian banks prepared to invest heavily in railroad construction or trade in railroad shares on the Paris Bourse.

Finally, any attempt by a peasant household to improve its lot beyond subsistence farming came up against the resistance of local financial institutions, which were extremely reluctant to make low-interest loans to small-scale food cultivators. French peasant agriculture consequently stagnated, imprisoned in quasi-medieval forms of finance, such as high-interest loans from small-town notaries, with the result that peasants were still easy prey to their traditional vicissitudes, such as bad harvests and droughts. Indeed, even in an age of railroads, steamships, and factories, food shortages, so redolent of the ancien régime, were still serious problems.

For those who had wealth, the purchase of land usually left insufficient capital for industrial growth or even sophisticated agricultural techniques. The real measure of a family's wealth continued to be the amount of acreage it owned rather than the level of its agricultural productivity. "The values and aspirations of the bourgeoisie were still predominantly those associated with landowners and not those of businessmen or the English captains of industry," notes Pinkney, "fully committed to the pursuit of profit and to a regimen of work."²

Nevertheless France could not resist change altogether, least of all during the latter decade of the July Monarchy. Economically, despite the overwhelmingly artisanal nature of the manufacturing economy, industrial advances could not be avoided, but by no means could they be instituted on a scale comparable to English industry. The north was home to the mechanized production of cotton cloth; the Loire basin was greatly expanding its production of coal; and the small forges that had formerly accounted for much of the country's iron output were consolidated into large-scale foundries, presaging the Industrial Revolution that had already swept over parts of Britain.

Perhaps of greatest significance, railroads began to come into their own, reaching isolated regions that had previously been all but completely closed off to trade. The passage of the 1842 Dufaure railway law mandated the formation of a national railway network, in which land, track, and stations were to be supplied by the government, then leased to private companies that would

provide the necessary operating equipment and rolling stock. Between 1842 and 1848, the amount of track in France tripled from roughly 600 to 1800 kilometers. It was a first step in overcoming the isolation of the French regions and at the same time provided a stimulus to the metallurgical industry, so indispensable to modernization.

Politically, however, the regime of Louis-Philippe was closed to everyone but a few wealthy citizens; by the election law of 1831, only those Frenchmen could vote who paid taxes of at least 200 francs—a franchise qualification that effectively barred all but 250,000 out of 9 million adult males from voting. Such franchise reforms as were proposed in the Chamber of Deputies did not apply to the working class, which all parties in the government seemed to assume should be barred from electoral participation. Morally, the regime had become scandalously corrupt, with bribery and dishonesty rampant at all levels of government, including the military. The July Monarchy was, in effect, a huge holding company, as Marx called it, for stockbrokers and financiers who had been reaping immense fortunes ever since Louis-Philippe ascended the throne. It baldly justified its existence by the extremely favorable and privileged environment it created for the rising bourgeoisie and rural nouveaux riches. Commercialism had become the ruling ethos of the elite, and the propertied classes proceeded to gorge themselves financially, through shamelessly lucrative contracts, reckless speculation, and shady loans, generating enormous discrepancies in wealth throughout the country.

THE ASSOCIATIONIST DEMANDS OF THE 1840s

In the years directly following the Great Revolution, France had preserved its predominantly artisanal economy, so that the manufacturing sector of the French economy was still overwhelmingly made up of craftsmen. Although their economic position had changed somewhat between 1789 and 1840, the interests and status of artisans had remained surprisingly constant. Even Paris, as we have seen, had hardly changed during the fifty years that passed since the Bastille was taken, and the methods of manufacturing production, even working-class lifeways, were remarkably similar to those of two generations earlier.

Master artisans usually owned their own tools and managed their own shops, using the labor of their families, apprentices, and journeymen for assistance in production. Allowing for differences among individuals, they shared certain basic values, habits, and hopes. Those who did not own property aspired, in time, to acquire their own workshops and enjoy the status of master craftsmen. The more well-to-do master artisans worked side by side with

apprentices, journeymen, and hired workers, who not only shared their ideas, hopes, and lifeways but often lived in their homes and shared their meals.

Toward the middle of the nineteenth century, social forces emerged to threaten these independent artisanal lifeways: new technologies, most notably rail transportation, opened hitherto isolated markets to cheap mass-produced goods from abroad and at home. Merchant capitalists were becoming more central figures in economic life, especially those who paid for the artisans' products at a given rate, then traveled elsewhere to sell them. Increasingly these merchants began to control the allocation of jobs and the prices that artisans received for their goods, often with little or no concern for the needs of their producers. As the merchants' role became even more pronounced with the expansion of trade, they threatened to reduce the artisans to a lowly, dependent status, at the beck and call of bourgeois masters. At the same time the industrial capitalist world was poised to invade their craft world, threatening to replace it with the factory system.

These looming changes raised several basic questions that urgently had to be addressed. What would be the place of artisanal workers in the changing economic and political life of France? How could they deflect the cruel impact of a harshly competitive market economy? Could they, as artisans, create an alternative to the emerging predatory and competitive capitalist economy?

A spate of communist and socialist books and pamphlets were published that tried to address these searing questions. But following the Revolution of 1830, experience and need counted almost as much as theory in persuading militant French workers to join together in organizations of associated or cooperative production that were known as "associations." The popularity of the word *association*, instead of the more archaic, prerevolutionary word *corporation*, was due in no small part to the writings of Fourierists, and especially Buchez, in his very popular public lectures in the autumn of 1830.

Precisely when French workers began to form associations differs from one historian to another. According to Bernard Moss, "Associationism was born during the wave of strikes and organized protests provoked by the Revolution of 1830"—specifically, with the large wave of strikes that swept over French cities, particularly Paris, in 1833.³ William Sewell, on the other hand, dates associations back to workers' philanthropic societies of the previous century, which were then revived after 1831. What is clear is that in 1833 an economic upswing, and an accompanying strike wave, began to generate a strong associationist movement among French workers. Idled by work stoppages, the strikers formed cooperative associations simply in order to earn an income.

It was worker-militants who formulated the organizational contours of these new entities. In 1833 a militant shoemaker known to us only as Efrahem called upon the "workers of an *état* [to] form a corps among themselves; they must choose, from the midst of that society, a commission charged with representing

it in debates with the masters, to fix wages according to *tarifs* [contracts specifying wage rates], discussed and decreed by its members."⁴ The words *état* and *corps* are evidence of the archaisms that persisted in artisans' language and thinking, but the intention of an association like Efrahem's is patently clear: essentially it was to be a labor union. Although such associations were often marked by initiation ceremonies, rites, secret signals, and shared festivities, they were hardly socialistic entities.

Indeed, associations seem to have emerged out of the simple trade unions that workers formed to advance their interests during the course of the strikes. To conduct a strike, workers had to eat and provide their families with the means of life. Associations that functioned as labor unions or mutual aid societies could make some such provisions for their survival. But as strikes intensified, striking workers took the function of their associations further. Striking shoemakers, tailors, and cabinetmakers in various French cities actually formed producers' associations or cooperative *workshops*, by which they could gain employment to support themselves during strikes, until their masters or the merchants to whom they sold their goods agreed to an acceptable *tarif*. Most of these producers' cooperatives were not long-lived; as Sewell tells us, they

were not envisaged as continuing beyond the end of the strike. Even the most ambitious—such as the "national workshop" that was formed by the Parisian tailors during their long strike of October and November [1833], which they saw as becoming a permanent part of the tailors' corporation—were conceived of as strictly a subordinate arm of the overall workers' corporation [i.e., trade union of a single trade].⁵

Significantly, a limited form of association, that had been little more than a prototypical trade union, had mutated under strike conditions into a collectivistic producers' association. In response to the discontent of workers expressed in such strikes and associations, the government passed a Law of Association in 1834 that prohibited associations of all but the most innocuous sort. For the rest of the 1830s and the 1840s, producers' cooperatives and collectivist associations, which had been formed only during strikes in actual practice, were elevated to a major component of the ideology of artisanal socialism. This ideology envisioned a socialist society based on cooperative production and distribution, whose economy would be structured around producers' associations.

Moreover, these associations would be confederally interlinked into a "fraternity" of *all* trades. In a pamphlet titled *On the Association of Workers of All Trades*, the shoemaker Efrahem cast his sights beyond one particular *état* to a confraternity of the working class as a whole. Without broader association, he warned, individual "corporations" would "dissipate and dissolve . . . annihilate

themselves in the individualism and egoism of isolation." Associations, this remarkable worker went on to write, should instead elect delegates to represent all trades in a coordinating "central committee." When strikes took place, the central committee would collect and disburse funds among strikers.⁶

That practical structure seems to have been about as far as Efrahem was prepared to take his proposed confraternity. But it was one that the most revolutionary Parisian workers came to regard as the alternative structure to industrial capitalism: a central committee of workers' delegates from all trades that would coordinate the funding of collectivist producers' associations and the distribution of their earnings in as egalitarian a manner as possible. In the years to come, they would debate further aspects of this artisanal socialism. Would the earnings in such collectivist cooperatives be shared among the workers in an individual association, or among the members of a trade, or among the working class as a whole? Would they be shared according to work performed (socialism) or according to the needs of the worker and his or her family (communism)? Would producers' cooperatives depend upon the state for start-up credit, or on contributions from the pockets of its members? Would the confraternity of the associations be supervised—temporarily or permanently—by the state (in what later socialist movements might call a "workers' state") or by confederal councils of delegates from the workshops themselves?

In the 1840s, in addition to these expressly associationist forms of socialism, Parisian workers also encountered the highly individualistic, so-called "anarchistic" scheme proposed by Proudhon, which, as we have seen, was based on the personal ownership of property and the use of contracts to knit producers and consumers together. A bitter foe of collectivism of any kind, Proudhon was nonetheless obliged in 1851, in the wake of the associationist ferment of 1848 and after, to acknowledge that association of some sort was unavoidable for large-scale enterprises:

Association has indeed its use in the economy of nations. The workmen's associations are indeed called upon to play an important part in the near future; and are full of hope both as a protest against the wage system, and as an affirmation of *reciprocity*. This part will consist chiefly in the management of large instruments of labor, and in the carrying out of certain large undertakings, which require at once minute division of functions, together with great united efficiency; and which would be so many schools for the laboring class if association, or better, participation, were introduced. Such undertakings, among others, are railroads.⁷

Proudhon's large-scale associations were to be owned by the men who worked in them, and their components were to be bound together by contracts rather than by ethical or fraternal sentiments.

By 1848, all of these associations—be they trade unions, cooperatives, or producers' associations of a socialistic or communistic type, and their confraternities or confederations—were part of the variegated but passionately held ideology of artisanal socialism: they were to constitute the economic infrastructure of the "democratic and social republic." The most revolutionary militants in Paris adopted a vision of a republic based on the "organization of work," consisting of producers' associations that were socialistic or communistic in nature. The less socially sophisticated workers adopted a vision of a republic that would be managed by associations ranging from mutual aid societies and simple producers' associations to confederations of trade associations.

In general, in the 1830s and 1840s, it was the sophisticated militants who set the tone for working-class demands, and it was Louis Blanc's *Organization of Work*, that synthesized many of these ideas, which became what G.D.H. Cole calls "the rallying cry for the main body of the Paris workers."⁸ So nearly did the "organization of labor" into associations acquire quasi-mystical proportions that even republican societies such as the *Droits de l'Homme* called for a republic whose primary task would be to hand over to workers the means by which they could refashion their trades into cooperative associations that they themselves controlled.

By the winter of 1848, the social cauldron of France was already boiling over with the menace of revolution. In January of that year, Alexis de Tocqueville warned his colleagues in the Chamber of Deputies that the revolution they feared was already looming on the horizon:

See what is passing in the breasts of the working classes, who, I grant, are at present quiet. . . . Do you not see that there are gradually forming in their breasts opinions and ideas which are destined not only to upset this or that law, ministry, or even form of government, but society itself, until it totters upon the foundations on which it rests today? Do you not listen to what they say to themselves each day? Do you not hear them repeating unceasingly that all that is above them is incapable and unworthy of governing them; that the present distribution of goods throughout the world is unjust; that property rests on a foundation which is not an equitable foundation? And do you not realize that when such opinions take root, when they spread in an almost universal manner, when they sink deeply into the masses, they are bound to bring with them sooner or later, I know not when nor how, a most formidable revolution?⁹

Nor was Tocqueville wrong in this warning that France was faced with a social as well as a political revolution. Having been robbed of their victory in the 1830 uprising by a clique of constitutional royalists and liberals, French workers were

not eager to mount barricades and spill blood once again for mere changes in government. The majority of veterans of 1830 were determined, at a minimum, to gain the freedom to form associations, which had been prohibited by the Le Chapelier law of 1791, and by the 1834 Law of Associations. Their demand seemed to threaten in the minds of the bourgeoisie a sweeping social revolution against property and wealth as such. Moreover, workers were listening more intently to the ideas that the militants proffered in working-class cafés and sifted them through with greater care, while reading and discussing works by Blanc, Cabet, and Proudhon, as well as lesser-known socialists. It was their debates that Tocqueville urged the Chamber to heed when he rose to address it, barely a month before Paris exploded in the February Revolution of 1848.

PRELUDE TO REVOLUTION

Nevertheless, despite the debates among Parisian workers about social change, it is doubtful that socialistic ideas alone would have sufficed to plunge Paris into insurrection. In February 1848 what certainly primed the people of the capital for a new revolutionary upheaval was the prolonged economic crisis that had begun two years before. Reaching serious proportions between 1846 and 1848, it significantly threatened the well-being not only of the working classes but of the middle classes, especially the multitude of small shopkeepers who formed an integral part of the mass movements in the cities. The depression began with agricultural shortages, such as had been so common during the ancien régime—namely, a potato blight in 1845, followed by a bad wheat harvest in 1846—inciting food and tax riots. It soon extended to commerce, finance, and industry, producing major social instability among ordinarily moderate sectors of French society. Unemployment soared among the working class, seriously affecting the well-being of the petty bourgeoisie as well. As Mark Traugott notes:

the crisis was more severe in Paris than in France as a whole. The annual total of bankruptcies in the capital rose from 691 in 1845 to 931 in 1846 and 1,139 in 1847. A disproportionate share of these failures occurred in small businesses.¹⁰

In the absence of work, the artisans and the poor suffered enormously, as can be judged by the fact that petty thefts in Paris rose “by more than 60 percent and arrests for begging nearly trebled.”¹¹ During the winter of 1846–47 about a third of the capital’s million residents were obliged to rely on some form of charity to maintain themselves, while the number of children

abandoned by their parents soared. By far the greater number of conscripts for the army had to be rejected because they were too undernourished and physically unfit to be suitable as soldiers. Astonishingly, the ministry did little to alleviate the human suffering; as a result, when the crisis abated at the end of 1847, it not only left thousands of paupers in its wake but, among ordinary Parisians, an ominous mistrust of the regime.

Adding to these dissatisfactions were the restrictive policies of the July Monarchy itself. Indeed, the most pressing issue that the government faced in the Chamber was the demand for extending the suffrage. The Legitimist deputies, who considered Louis-Philippe a usurper, tried to embarrass his regime and attempted to curry public favor by calling for nothing less than universal suffrage. No one in the Chamber took this spiteful demand seriously except for the most radical republican deputies, whose number, because of the suffrage restrictions, was insignificant. But the numerically much larger Orleanist Center—the so-called “dynastic opposition,” those who, like Odilon Barrot, were loyal to Louis-Philippe although not to his minister, Guizot—advocated broadening the electorate to include talented and educated as well as wealthy men, in the hope of widening the electoral base for the monarchy among a politically reliable sector of the population. Finally, in March 1847, Prosper Duvergier de Hauranne, a protégé of Thiers and a constitutional monarchist, presented a reform proposal that would have added 200,000 “men of talent” to the electoral rolls. So well received was this proposal that it even gained the enthusiastic support of Barrot, the leader of the dynastic opposition, as well as other deputies.

Increasing the urgency of these demands, François Guizot, a conservative Calvinist, had for some eight years been presiding over the government of Louis-Philippe, creating an impressive record of reactionary obduracy and public distrust. With mindless provocation, the minister consistently opposed all the suffrage proposals, with the result that virtually the entire Chamber galvanized against him. Collectively, the opposition deputies and their extraparliamentary supporters resolved to remove him from his position and demand a broadened franchise.

The proponents of electoral reform resolved to take their concerns to the people of France, to gain a base of popular support for their goals. But inasmuch as it was illegal to hold large-scale political assemblies without the permission of the authorities, they devised a stratagem to skirt the law. Starting in June 1847, they organized and conducted a series of public banquets, whose purpose was ostensibly apolitical, to promote civic fraternity; but during the lengthy “toasts” participants in the banquets freely used the occasion to air their grievances and even excoriate the government policies on suffrage and other questions. At least fifty such banquets were held throughout France in the second half of 1847, stirring up public sentiment in favor of limited electoral

reform. Although largely attended by the middle class—the price of admission, six francs, excluded the poor—the sullen and desperate workers, suffering bitterly from the economic crisis, closely followed reports of the speeches in their cafés and in the press.

Notwithstanding the popularity of the banquet campaign, the government adamantly resisted demands for reform. As if to fan the flames stirred up by the banquet movement, Guizot, who composed the king's customary addresses to the legislature, added an incendiary passage to Louis-Philippe's otherwise innocuous speech to the Chamber of December 28, 1847:

In the midst of the agitation fermented by blind or hostile passions one conviction animates and sustains me, that we possess in the constitutional monarchy, in the union of the great powers of the State, the sure means of surmounting these obstacles and of satisfying all the moral and material interests of our dear country.¹²

Guizot could have conveyed the same message—notably, that the government would countenance no reforms—without openly insulting the opposition deputies. But his reference to “blind or hostile passions” induced by “agitation” not only affronted the opposition deputies but was entirely gratuitous. Neither the Legitimists, nor the liberals, nor the dynastic opposition—all the alleged bearers of these “passions”—had the least intention of challenging the constitutional monarchy, nor, for that matter, were most of them trying to unseat Louis-Philippe as king. However much they wanted the franchise extended, deputies such as Thiers and Barrot were equally fearful of instability, which might well have given the surly working classes the opportunity to impose themselves on the political scene. In fact, the greater part of the Chamber's hostility was directed against Guizot, not against Louis-Philippe, who remained in their eyes a tolerable monarch.

Ironically, it was precisely in the month that the speech was made—December 1847—that a banquet was planned for Paris for February 20 of the following year. This banquet was intended to be somewhat different from the others: in the first place, it was organized not by the opposition deputies but by officers from the twelfth legion of the National Guard, the legion recruited from the twelfth Parisian *arrondissement*, which included the working-class neighborhoods of Saint-Victor and Saint-Marcel. And not only was the planned banquet to be held in this volatile neighborhood, but it was to occur on a Sunday, a day of rest, precisely to enable working people to attend. The price of admission, moreover, was set at a mere three francs, a sum that was within the means of many craftsmen. Finally, the banquet was to be preceded by a (hopefully) dignified demonstration winding through the streets of Paris. Almost provocatively, the organizers planned for unarmed but fully uniformed

National Guards—most of whom, to be sure, were shopkeepers and members of the lower middle classes—to maintain order during the occasion.

Needless to say, when permission for this dangerous banquet was requested, the authorities flatly refused to grant it. The city had already seen “hunger demonstrations” by the poor, portending trouble and possibly uprisings. Despite this rejection, the organizers proceeded with their plans to hold the banquet, even if it was to be done illegally. The royal administration was by no means alone in its unease about having a banquet in a working-class neighborhood: the opposition deputies, fearful that the banquet would air radical views, themselves intervened to sidetrack the plan by persuading the twelfth-*arrondissement* organizers to allow a new organizing committee to be formed.

Conveniently for the deputies and the royal administration, the new committee contained a majority of more respectable members, who succeeded in shifting the venue of the demonstration and banquet to the middle-class Champs-Élysées district. Moreover, the price of admission was raised from three to six francs, and the date of the affair was rescheduled for Tuesday, February 22, a work day, which—together with the higher admission price—would hopefully keep working people from attending. A government official was to be stationed at the opening of the banquet tent to advise the banqueters that they were engaging in an illegal action. Despite these significant changes in the plan, however, the government, fearing that danger still lurked, proceeded to strengthen the Paris garrison by 50,000 troops.

Had the demonstration and banquet been publicized merely as the tepid, informal protest that the opposition intended, the entire charade might have succeeded. But Armand Marrast, a moderate but erratic republican who edited the widely read opposition newspaper *Le National*, decided to publish the details of the next day's demonstration in his February 21 issue, and in a way that made it seem like a veritable battle plan. Indeed, to the readers of *Le National*, the plan must have seemed more like orders for a *journée* than a call for a mild protest. Peremptorily, Marrast spelled out every feature of the demonstration in detail: its assembly point (the Place de la Madeleine), its line of march to the Champs-Élysées, the order of the procession, and even the exact positions to be taken by units of the National Guard. The plan was published not only in Marrast's own paper but in *La Réforme*, the most radical of the republican periodicals, and even in the Fourierist *La Démocratie pacifique*.

Marrast almost certainly acted on his own initiative, apparently with the support of his fellow republican journalists, but without consultation with the opposition deputies. The banquet program, according to de Tocqueville,

was resolved upon, drawn up and published without the participation or the knowledge of the members of Parliament who considered themselves to be

still leading the movement which they had called into existence. The programme was the hurried work of a nocturnal gathering of journalists and Radicals, and the leaders of the Dynastic Opposition heard of it at the same time as the public, by reading it in the papers in the morning . . . M. Odilon Barrot, who disapproved of the programme as much as anyone, dared not disclaim it for fear of offending the men who, till then, had seemed to be moving with him.¹³

The fat was now in the fire. Marrast's battle plan, wittingly or not, had provocatively transformed the affair from a domestic demonstration into a confrontation with the regime, indeed a direct challenge to the legitimacy of the government. To the ministry, it must have sounded like an ultimatum. Moreover, by summoning the National Guard, an authority that the government regarded as its own exclusive prerogative, the banquet committee had ostentatiously preempted the state's own police powers.

The government reacted accordingly—and with characteristic stupidity. On the afternoon of Monday, February 21, the ministry forbade the banquet by suspending all public meetings in Paris. The police chief of the capital declared that if a demonstration took place the next day as planned, it would be viewed as an effort to create an illegal governmental power, which amounted to declaring a state of siege. That evening, the unnerved opposition deputies met fearfully in Barrot's home and voted unanimously to submit to the ban by calling off the entire affair.

But by now the plans for the next day were no longer in their hands: their immediate and abject surrender utterly disappointed, among others, the many students who had their hearts set on the banquet and were resolved to hold a demonstration the next day regardless of the consequences. The many republican and socialistic groups that were intent not only on dislodging Guizot but on toppling the monarchy were no less disgusted; indeed, that evening, as the socialist Marc Caussidière recalls,

Committees of insurrection sat constantly in the secret societies, and in the offices of the Republican journals. We are ignorant of what passed there. They were probably rather engaged in observation than in action. The limited power of the conspirator, who has but scanty numbers at his disposal, only possesses influence as it ministers to a sentiment generally entertained, or a pre-existing passion.

In reality, the aggrieved sentiment upon which activists depended was present among ordinary people as well. In the editorial offices of *La Réforme* a hundred people anxiously gathered to discuss what was in the offing when daylight broke, and as Caussidière puts it, each man resolved to

betake himself separately, and with his hands in his pockets, to the Place de la Madeleine, to watch the course of events, and to gain over public opinion against royalty. In case of an outbreak, each member was to repair immediately to the office of *La Réforme*, to organize the movement with vigour, and to give it a Republican character.¹⁴

Despite its military precautions, the government radically underestimated the consequences of the ban. In an eerie reprise of Charles's nonchalance some eighteen years earlier, Louis-Philippe, peering out the windows of the Tuileries on the cold, rainswept streets of the capital, nonchalantly remarked that Parisians never made revolutions in the wintertime, taking comfort in the hope that the calendar would assure his safety.

On February 22 the banquet did not, in fact, take place. Most workers took the day off to walk through the streets, sometimes gathering in small crowds to discuss the events of the previous week. In some areas, barricades were actually built, but no republican luminaries led these efforts; indeed, one of the most strikingly consistent features among the eyewitness accounts was the absence of any prominent leader among the radicals. Blanqui, most notably, was still in semibanishment in Blois, some distance from the main theater of events. Other stories have it that, during the night, secret societies gathered to plot insurrectionary acts, but there is no substantial evidence that they were quite as active as police agents claim or that they played a leading role in the events.

Actually, during the morning, a large crowd of students assembled in protest at the Place du Panthéon, on the Left Bank, infuriated mainly because three popular teachers—the historians Jules Michelet and Edgar Quinet and the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz—had been banned from lecturing. After a while the students set out for the Palais Bourbon, where the Chamber of Deputies normally convened, on a route that passed through the working-class districts across the Seine. Singing the “Marseillaise” and “Mourir de la Patrie” (a Girondin chorus from a popular play by Dumas) and shouting “Down with Guizot!” and “Long live reform!” they were joined by workers, forming a huge crowd that made its way through the streets to the Chamber of Deputies. When they arrived at the Palais Bourbon, a small group tried, unsuccessfully, to invade the building, but that morning it was empty. A serious assault was made on the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, but also without success.

That afternoon, almost inexplicably, a frenzy of spontaneous barricade building swept over the city, inducing the government to send troops out to occupy key positions and buildings to abort any incipient uprising. At the Palais Bourbon a unit of dragoons advanced with drawn swords against a crowd. But before they reached the people, they abruptly halted and, probably on the orders of their officers, sheathed their weapons, to the ecstatic cheers of the people. It would not have required a very perceptive observer to see in this

behavior by the king's most reliable forces a portent of his downfall. Although the troops did capture one barricade, at dusk the fighting, such as it was, seemed to subside, and the government, confident that it was in control of the city, ordered the soldiers to return to their barracks. Yet whatever Louis-Philippe might suppose Parisians did during the winter, his regime, so thoroughly despised after nearly two decades of misrule and demagoguery, was now on the verge of an insurrection that would shake the foundations of the established order in all of Europe.

THE BARRICADES OF FEBRUARY

The next day, Wednesday, February 23, a deep sense of expectation still pervaded Paris, since the previous day had seen neither the banquet nor a major protest. Shops remained closed and shuttered; the streets were empty, and the Comédie-Français bolted its doors—a sure sign that trouble was afoot. The journalists of *La Réforme* kept their “hands in their pockets,” meaning that they were scattered through the city, more as observers than participants. The clubs of the Right were rife with ominous fears of impending massacres and “communist” conspiracies—a “red specter” that was becoming a highly fashionable object of fear among the upper classes. Generally, deputies of all factions sought the safety of their homes or the Palais Bourbon, which was well guarded by troops and artillery.

But even more barricades now began to appear—in all, more than 1500 were erected throughout Paris, some of which reached stupendous heights in the main boulevards and squares. Priscilla Robertson's account of these traditional barriers is too colorful not to quote at length:

Enthusiastic Paris citizens had used barricades ever since 1588 (against the Duke of Guise) and now they went methodically to work with crowbars to dig up the foot-square paving stones. They politely stopped omnibuses, untied the horses, assisted the passengers to alight, and turned the vehicles over to be weighted down with stones. They tore iron railings from houses, cut down four thousand trees along the boulevards and destroyed nearly as many lampposts, so that afterward the streets looked as if they had been swept by a tornado. Between the barricades men crouched around huge fires casting lead balls [for muskets]. All over town, houses had been ransacked for arms, and chalked on doors one could read, “Arms Given Up”—some added, “With Pleasure.” Through the incessant tocsin, the *Marseillaise* sounded everywhere, or *Mourir pour la Patrie*.¹⁵

The vast heaps of *pavés*, vehicles, furniture, trees, and lampposts with which the insurgents blocked entire boulevards far surpassed in size all previous barricades. Lithographs of the time show barricades as tall as multistoried buildings, generally surmounted by a tricolor and armed citizens clutching muskets over their heads.

During the morning the government, mindful that there might be disturbances in the capital, called out its forces to occupy strategic places such as the Place de la Concorde, the Hôtel de Ville, the Porte de Saint-Denis, and the Porte Saint-Martin—traditional trouble spots in times of unrest. Drummers were ordered to different parts of the city to beat out the *rappel*, to summon to arms the National Guard from the various *arrondissements*. The National Guard was a force in which the government felt it could have confidence: it had been revived for the express purpose of protecting and defending the July Monarchy. The Guards had been “the chosen, especially created instrument of bourgeois ascendancy and defence,” as John Plamenatz puts it.¹⁶ Every citizen between the ages of twenty and sixty who paid a property tax, however modest, was required to enroll in this legendary citizens' militia. Inasmuch as a Guard was required to buy his own uniform and, if he wished to be in the cavalry, supply his own horse, most Guards were necessarily of bourgeois origin, in order to be able to cover these expenses. Notwithstanding the costs of belonging to the Guard, however, its members included a sizable number of shopkeepers, professionals, and other members of the lower middle class.

Ironically, however, for want of paying the 200-franc *cens*, many of the Guards were denied the franchise under the very monarchy they were expected to defend, and except for the elite units of well-to-do members, they would have benefited from the electoral reform proposed by the Chamber opposition. Hence any plan to quell disturbances that relied on their support rested on very questionable foundations. In fact, when the *rappel* summoned the Guards on the morning of February 23, only a few units responded. The Cavalry Legion, whose members were relatively wealthy, answered the call, and so did a mere three of the twelve infantry units, but the remaining units mustered on their own, hostile to the purpose for which the government now sought to use them.

In the Chamber, meanwhile, the dynastic opposition, to the catcalls of the conservative majority, was demanding the resignation of Guizot and the enactment of moderate electoral reform. Louis-Philippe now realized that he had to heed the cry of “Down with Guizot!” if the dynasty was to survive. On Wednesday afternoon the sovereign, tears freely flowing down his cheeks, informed a sullen Guizot that he and his ministry were dismissed. This concession to popular pressure appalled—and thoroughly alienated—the conservative deputies, who had wrongly decided that the uprising could easily be put down by the military.

The news that Guizot had been forced to resign, however, brought plaudits from the liberal leaders. They were quite prepared to live with the monarchy, which, having fulfilled the wishes of the middle classes, seemed to distance them further from giving support to any uprising. But the news was greeted with joy by the working classes, bringing crowds into the streets, jubilant at the demise of the hated minister. In fact, Paris was enraptured by a spirit of *fraternité*, as people of different classes embraced each other in the streets, while the National Guard fraternized with the population. It seemed that a new dawn was breaking upon the country, and many found reason to hope that the republic for which they had longed was not far off, even though the king still occupied the throne; indeed, if Guizot could fall, then perhaps the "democratic and social republic" itself was on the horizon.

But this festive atmosphere did not last long. Around nine-thirty in the evening, according to the Countess d'Agoult, an acute eyewitness, a joyous "long column, waving torches and a red flag, appeared on the heights of the rue Montmartre."¹⁷ Almost certainly a working-class column, accompanied by enthusiastic children, it had come from the plebeian Faubourg Saint-Antoine. The column was soon joined by popular processions coming from other directions. The merged crowds stopped outside the offices of the republican *National*, where they were greeted by Armand Marrast, the paper's editor, who "by turns delighted as a wit and hurled in thunder the sarcasms and the indignation of the republican opposition"¹⁸—but also lauded the pacific nature of the *journée*. Then they continued on their way, reinforced by still more demonstrators, until they arrived before the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the Boulevard des Capuchins. There they encountered a guard consisting of some 200 men of the fourteenth regiment of the line.

The commander of the guard, one Lieutenant-Colonel Courant, was apparently panicked by so large a crowd and ordered his troops to form a firing square, which thoroughly astonished the festive merry-makers. Worse still, as the restless people were pressed forward against the troops by their own numbers, an order was given for the soldiers to fix bayonets. Suddenly an unforeseeable event occurred that transformed the demand for Guizot's removal into a demand for the removal of the monarchy. The Countess d'Agoult tells us what happened:

Amidst the movements occasioned by the execution of this order, a shot went off; a soldier was hit. Instantly, without any preliminary summons, without any drum roll, without anyone later being able to recall having heard the command, . . . a volley of murderous firing hit the mass of the people.

It was unclear whether the first shot was an accident or a deliberate provocation by one side or the other; most likely it was an accident. But whatever the cause,

it was enough to make the soldiers feel themselves under attack. No one had given the order for their volley. When the cloud of smoke cleared,

it revealed a spectacle whose horror nothing can convey. A hundred men were lying on the pavement; some were dead, others mortally wounded; a great number had been knocked over by the commotion; several had been thrust face-down in an instinctive flight for safety. Blood flowed in torrents. The groaning of the wounded, the choked murmurings of those who were trying to move away from the melee of the dead and dying, tore at the heart of the soldier who was the innocent author of this massacre, who watched it with eyes of dismay.¹⁹

Fifty-two were killed, and the wounded were not even counted. News that the soldiers had fired on the people spread like wildfire. Blame was instantly placed on the ministry—and on the king himself, the very sovereign who had come to power as a result of the people's uprising in 1830. Numb with horror and disbelief, working people collected the bodies of the dead, piled them onto wagons, and paraded them through the streets of the capital, to display the results of the government's brutality to everyone. D'Agoult tells us that "a worker in bare arms"—*aux bras nus*—led a white horse by the bridle, pulling a wagon, atop which

five corpses are arranged in a horrible symmetry. Standing on the shaft [of the wagon] a child of the people—of pallid complexion, his eyes ardent and staring fixedly, his arms extended, almost immobile, as one might portray the spirit of vengeance—is illuminating with the reddish glow of his torch, the body of a young woman whose neck and bruised chest have been stained by a long trail of blood. From time to time another worker, at the rear of the wagon, embraces the inanimate corpse with his muscular arms, lifting it. From his shaking torch escape sparks, and he exclaims, as they make their way through the crowd, "Vengeance! Vengeance! They are slaughtering the people!" The crowd responds, "To arms!" and the corpse falls back to the bottom of the wagon, which continues on, followed by silence.²⁰

Such scenes were probably repeated throughout the city as wagons passed from neighborhood to neighborhood. In the working-class neighborhoods, armed men appeared at the doors of homes, summoning the residents to vengeance, and joined by members of the lower middle classes, thereby forming the key alliance between the workers and the lower petty bourgeoisie that turned the uprising into a popular movement. "Soon the dry noises of pick axes could be heard on the pavements," d'Agoult tells us, "and the heavy felling of trees on the boulevard."²¹ The people were pulling up *pavés*, erecting more

barricades, and sounding the tocsin. The peaceful *journée* of February 22 had become the February Revolution.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE MONARCHY

With the massacre on the Boulevard des Capuchins, the very fate of the monarchy hung in the balance. Oblivious to the seriousness of the situation, however, that Wednesday Louis-Philippe was still making ministerial changes: having dismissed Guizot, he was searching for a minister to replace him. His first choice was a vacuous and reactionary Empire courtier, Count Molé, who around midnight refused the offer, mindful that no conservative could handle the situation that was exploding in the streets. A few hours later, in desperation, Louis-Philippe turned to Thiers, the indubitable leader of the dynastic opposition, whose appointment, the king hoped, would conciliate the people. He seems not to have considered that Thiers himself was despised by the masses for his willingness to suppress insurrections. (Thiers had been primarily to blame for perpetrating an infamous massacre at the Rue Transnonain in 1834.) Before he would agree to form a ministry for Louis-Philippe, Thiers laid down a number of demands for reform, among which was that his fellow opposition leader Odilon Barrot be brought into the government. Despite his distaste for Barrot, the king finally had no alternative but to yield, whereupon Thiers became the last minister of the July Monarchy.

Meanwhile, the troops of the line as well as the National Guards who were ordered to occupy strategic parts of the city were becoming uneasy; they were not eager to crush a resolute and vociferous public insurgency. Although some accounts put their number at 50,000, Alphonse de Lamartine, the poet who later became head of government, held that there were no more than 25,000. Whatever their number may have been, the troops of Louis-Philippe, like those that Charles X had sent out to quell the July 1830 uprising, were hungry, fatigued, and demoralized from having huddled in the February cold for forty-eight hours—and they were deeply torn by doubts about their purpose.

Late Wednesday evening the king was informed of the massacre and the escalating insurrectionary situation in the streets. The reports coming into the Tuileries now seemed to justify decisive military action by the monarchy against its citizens. Early on the morning of February 24, the king placed all the city's military forces under the command of the ruthless Marshal Thomas Bugeaud, who was also loathed by the people for his leading role in suppressing the 1834 Parisian riots. Accordingly, in the early hours of Thursday morning, at one-thirty a.m., Marshal Bugeaud held a council of war at the Tuileries in which he

laid out a plan to sweep the capital clean of all insurgents. Four columns of line troops, artillery, and Municipal Guards were ordered, within hours, to leave their barracks and try to cut through the barricades, taking the sleeping insurgents by surprise. Setting out at five in the morning, the first column, under the command of General Sébastiani, was to make its way past the Hôtel de Ville, eliminating any obstacles in the main streets and occupying the area around the Bank of France. At the same time, a second column, led by General Bedeau, was to march through the Grands Boulevards and the Bourse to the Bastille area. Both columns, in turn, were expected to provide cover for a third column that was to clear away any barricades that might be raised again in the aftermath of their passage, while a fourth was dispatched to occupy the strategic Panthéon area.

Allowing for minor losses, all the columns reached their destinations except for Bedeau's, which was stopped short by a large and well-defended barricade that stretched across the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle, not far from the Bank of France. To avoid bloodshed, the general entered into parley with the insurgents, with the aid of an intermediary National Guard officer, one Fauvelle-Delabarre, a local businessman who had gone over to the insurgents. But Bedeau could think of no better argument to persuade the insurgents of the government's good intentions than to tell them that Barrot had ascended to power.

Fauvelle-Delabarre shrewdly got the two sides to agree to a delay, so that he could go to the Tuileries and seek a compromise with Marshal Bugeaud. When the wily merchant met with the marshal, however, he got more than he bargained for: Bugeaud wearily consented to withdraw his column entirely. In the meantime, most of the waiting troops, already demoralized and listless, began to go over to the insurgents, while others handed over their weapons and withdrew to the Tuileries. The king, having agreed to Thiers's condition to recall the troops, ordered all the columns that had been sent out that morning to return to their barracks. Eventually the entire army was obliged to withdraw from Paris. The capital was placed in the hands of the National Guard, which by now openly supported the insurrection.

The February Revolution was far from bloodless. Serious fighting occurred between workers and Municipal Guards (a militarized police force that should not be confused with the citizen National Guard) at the Château d'Eau and the Palais-Royal. Both conflicts ended with a victory for the insurgents. Demonstrators fought Municipal Guards before the Hôtel de Ville, while General Sébastiani merely stood by and watched; at around eleven a.m., the city hall was taken over effortlessly by a National Guard officer and a small group of students, whereupon General Sébastiani and his column returned to their barracks. For all practical purposes, Paris had fallen to the insurgents without any serious resistance from the government. The main problem the insurgents now faced was the capture of the monarch and his remaining followers.

Louis-Philippe, ensconced in the Tuileries, could hear firing muskets steadily approaching the palace, the scene of so many memorable civil conflicts. Surrounded by despairing ministers, courtiers, and princes of the blood, he took one last step to save his crown. At eleven o'clock in the morning on Thursday, February 24, bedecked in a general's uniform and accompanied by his two sons and a small retinue, he decided to review the troops and National Guards that were lined up in the square outside the palace. Initially, the troops greeted the king with supportive cheers. But amid cries of "Long live the king!" one rebellious contingent of National Guards thrust itself before the sovereign with cries of "Long live reform!" and "Down with the system!"—even brandishing their weapons in the monarch's face. Instantly the discouraged king veered his horse back toward the palace and disappeared into its interior. The collapse of the monarchy was now complete.

Before the day was out, Louis-Philippe, his family, and his retinue had left Paris for England, and never again did any member of the Bourbon or Orleans dynasty occupy a throne in France. The barricades had prevailed and the nation would soon declare itself a republic. But what kind of republic would it be—a conventional, formal republic, or the "democratic and social republic" for which the artisans longed? The remaining months of the 1848 revolution saw an intensifying and finally explosive conflict over this issue, between the working classes of Paris and the upper classes who tried to contain them.

NOTES

1. David H. Pinkney, *Decisive Years in France: 1840-47* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 13.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
3. Bernard H. Moss, *The Origins of the French Labor Movement, 1830-1914: The Socialism of Skilled Workers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 32.
4. Quoted in William H. Sewell, Jr., *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 210.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 212.
7. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. John Beverley Robinson (1923; London: Pluto Press, 1989), p. 98.
8. G.D.H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought*, vol. 1: *The Forerunners, 1789-1850* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 168.
9. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, trans. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos (New York: Macmillan, 1896), p. 14.
10. Mark Traugott, *Armies of the Poor: Determinants of Working-Class Participation in the Parisian Insurrection of June 1848* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 11.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Quoted in Arnold Whitridge, *Men in Crisis: The Revolutions of 1848* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 28.

13. Tocqueville, *Recollections*, pp. 30-1.

14. Louis Marc Caussidière, *Mémoires* (London, 1848), in *1848 in France*, ed. Roger Price, Documents of Revolution series (London: Thames & Hudson; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 54-5.

15. Priscilla Robertson, *Revolutions of 1848: A Social History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 35.

16. John Plamenatz, *The Revolutionary Movement in France, 1815-71* (London: Longmans, Green, 1952), p. 64.

17. Daniel Stern (pseud. for the Countess d'Agoult), *Histoire de la révolution de 1848* (Paris: Gustave Sandre, 1850), vol. 1, p. 135. The appearance of this red flag was in "formal contravention of the orders given by the office of the *Réforme* and in other centers," which had explicitly prohibited the "hoisting of any flag other than the tricolor, and against uttering any cry other than 'Vive la réforme!'" If D'Agoult's account is accurate, the self-appointed leaders of the *journée* were trying to confine the masses to strictly legislative demands, rather than demands to alter the structure of the government. Lamartine agrees with her that a red flag was present; see Alphonse de Lamartine, *History of the French Revolution of 1848* (London: Bell & Daldy, 1871), p. 56.

18. Lamartine, *French Revolution of 1848*, p. 54.

19. Stern, *Histoire de la révolution*, pp. 137-8.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 140-1.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

CHAPTER 26 The Incomplete Revolution

The conflict over what kind of republic would follow the monarchy began almost at the very moment the king fled Paris. Some insurgents, to be sure, were content to occupy the Tuileries and caricature the nobility by sitting at Louis-Philippe's vacated dining table and playfully addressing one another as "duke" and "marquis." But thousands of others, armed with muskets, bayonets, pikes, and swords, raced to the Palais Bourbon, where the panicked Chamber of Deputies was in session, and to the Hôtel de Ville, where Paris traditionally established its revolutionary governments. The city's main streets and boulevards were clogged with people joyously shouting huzzahs, singing the "Marseillaise," and calling for a republic. They waved red flags as well as the tricolor—symbolic portents of the differences that were soon to divide the capital between supporters of a conventional middle-class republic and those of a "democratic and social republic."

THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

For guidance, those insurgents who sought political direction in forming a new government turned to the editors of the two major republican newspapers. The more middle-class elements clustered around *Le National*, whose editor was the moderate but anti-socialist republican Armand Marrast; the workers gravitated toward the offices of *La Réforme*, whose editor, Ferdinand Flocon, exhibited more radical republican tendencies. The two periodicals had been bitter rivals before the uprising, but now the need to arrive at a common list of republicans who would make up a provisional government was imperative. According to Blanc, the job of negotiating such a list was undertaken by himself, representing *La Réforme*, and by one M. Martin of Strasbourg, for *Le National*.

The two men arrived at a mutually agreeable list that both newspapers found

acceptable, and scarcely before the fighting had come to an end on February 24, Blanc read it out to the huge crowd gathered before the office of *La Réforme*. The list included several longstanding republicans, as one might expect, including the venerable Jacques Dupont de L'Eure, who had been politically active in the Directory during the closing years of the Great Revolution; François Arago, whose principal credential was his reputation as an outstanding astronomer; Alexandre Ledru-Rollin, generally regarded as a radical republican; Louis Blanc, the socialist; and Marrast and Flocon, who represented the constituencies of their respective newspapers.

But the list also contained many erstwhile constitutional monarchists who had suddenly undergone a conversion to republicanism in the last day or two. Alphonse de Lamartine, a poet and aristocrat, had been a monarchist sympathizer until the evening of February 24 and perhaps later, but his name was placed on the list, as were the names of Alexandre Thomas Marie, a lawyer and opposition deputy whose conversion to moderate republicanism was as newborn and tenuous as Lamartine's; Adolphe Crémieux, a deputy who had initially supported a monarchical regency to replace Louis-Philippe; Louis-Antoine Garnier-Pagès, another opposition deputy, whose dubious republicanism represented the interests of the well-to-do middle classes. Garnier-Pagès, in fact, had no sympathy for radical republicans, and whatever prestige he had among working people came from the reflected glory of his late brother, who had been an ardent republican leader.

Massive crowds gathered beneath the windows of the *Réforme* offices, Blanc recounts, and the names of the proposed government members were read out for their approval. Although the names of Blanc and Flocon pleased the crowd, they were disinclined to accept a government made up of so many former monarchists and moderate republicans. They recalled only too vividly how just such moderates had stolen their uprising of 1830, and they considered it a matter of the utmost urgency that the same thing should not be permitted to happen again. A cry went up to add the name of Albert, the *nom de guerre* of Alexandre Martin, a buttonmaker who was highly regarded by the Parisian workers for his revolutionary views and activities. A well-known socialist, he had close ties to the secret societies. With a worker like him sitting in the government, the crowd assumed, no measure detrimental to the interests of working people would go unchallenged. And when a rumor spread that over at the Palais Bourbon, the Chamber of Deputies was preparing to accept the regency of the Duchess of Orleans and her young son, the Count of Paris, the crowd flew into a rage and headed over to the palace to put an end to this prospect.

The rumor was more than justified. At the Palais Bourbon the Orleanists and the old dynastic opposition were still hoping that the old king could be replaced by a regency of the duchess and the count. It was during the debate over this regency that the insurgent crowd burst into the Chamber. Weapons in

hand, they provocatively aimed some of them at the speaker's rostrum. As Tocqueville tells us:

Loud blows were heard at the door of one of [the galleries,] and yielding to the strain, the door burst into atoms. In a moment the gallery was invaded by an armed mob of men, who noisily filled it and soon afterwards all the others. A man of the lower orders, placing one foot on the cornice, pointed his gun at the President and the speaker; others seemed to level theirs at the assembly.¹

Amid the melee, the duchess and her son extricated themselves from the scene as quickly as they could, followed by deputies of the Right and many moderate factions, leaving the chamber half empty. Almost all the remaining legislators were unnerved and tried to make themselves as inconspicuous as possible. The president of the Chamber, after trying in vain to formally close the session, simply handed over the palace to the crowd, which reconstituted itself as a popular legislature irrespective of any legalities.

Partly at the prompting of Tocqueville, the poet Lamartine had taken the speaker's rostrum. Lamartine had initially favored the duchess's bid for the throne, but ever pliable and adaptable, the elegant aristocrat was nothing if not a careerist. A former monarchist, this political flirt now exuded a spirit of *fraternité*—draping himself in the tricolor and applauding the republic, at a time when its ascendancy was clearly irresistible.

Tocqueville, who had momentarily left the Chamber to see to the safety of the duchess, returned to find that "confusion was at its height." Lamartine was conversing with the crowd around him rather than orating, and several speakers were trying to make their points all at once, so that "there seemed to be almost as many orators as listeners." Finally someone, apparently Ledru-Rollin, handed Lamartine the list of names that had been endorsed by the crowd before *La Réforme* a few hours earlier.² "In a moment of semi-silence," recounts Tocqueville, "Lamartine began to read out a list containing the names of people proposed by I don't know whom to take share in the Provisional Government that had just been decreed, nobody knows how."³ As each name was called, the crowd shouted its approval.

But wiser heads in the Palais Bourbon knew that this endorsement by what remained of the Chamber of Deputies could hardly suffice to consecrate an insurgent government in Paris. Revolutionary protocol required that any new government had to be sworn in at the Hôtel de Ville and only at the Hôtel de Ville. Moreover, in this situation, those who wished to harness the revolution and put it in a conventional middle-class bridle had not a moment to lose: in their absence a more revolutionary regime could establish itself at the Hôtel de Ville at any time. From somewhere in the Palais Bourbon, as Tocqueville

tells us, the cry went up: "To the Hôtel de Ville!" To which "Lamartine echoed, 'Yes, to the Hôtel de Ville,' and went out forthwith, taking half the crowd with him."⁴

Lamartine's own memoirs give us a slightly different account—one that self-flatteringly claims that the wiser head that initiated the departure was his own. Consistently referring to himself in the third person, he writes with impeccable hindsight,

Lamartine had intuitively felt that if this provisional government were installed at the Chamber of Deputies, or at the office of the minister of the interior, it would probably be attacked and annihilated before night. The civil strife which had been extinguished by the proclamation of this government would be rekindled in the evening between two rival administrations. The Hôtel de Ville, the head quarters of the revolution, the Palace of the People, the Mount Aventine of seditions, was occupied by innumerable multitudes of people from the surrounding quarters, and from the armed faubourgs. These masses, directed by the most enterprising and intrepid men, would not fail, on hearing the defeat of royalty, the flight of the regency, and the triumph of the revolution, to name a government for themselves. The sanguinary anarchies and tyrannies of the Commons of Paris under the first republic naturally occurred in the thoughts of Lamartine. He instantly saw them afresh in all their horror, still further augmented by those elements of social strife which the absurd doctrines of communism, socialism, and expropriation were causing to ferment, and would cause to burst forth in these masses of workmen, destitute of food, but possessed of arms.⁵

On the other side of the Seine a new insurrection was indeed brewing in the Place de Grève, the huge square that opened out before the Hôtel de Ville, as well as inside the labyrinthine city hall itself. Huge crowds of armed workers, brandishing muskets, bayonets, pikes, and swords, carrying torches, and waving red flags, had massed in the area, occupying the building and the square and spilling over into the nearby streets, in order to complete their revolution with a government of their own choosing.

Hardly anyone at this "Mount Aventine of seditions" seemed aware that at the Palais Bourbon, "the revolution"—that is, Lamartine and the others on the list, some of whom had been trying to install the duchess as regent only a few hours earlier—had established a provisional government in their absence and without their consent. Moreover, had they known of it, the immense number of insurgents surrounding the sprawling city hall, their clothing spattered with blood and their faces smeared with gunpowder, might well have dispersed the Chamber of Deputies with their weapons. It was the prospect of forming a

social republic, or at least a broader democratic republic, that held the attention of the workers, who seem to have formed the great bulk of the crowd.

Meanwhile, the new members of the Provisional Government, en route from the Chamber to the Hôtel de Ville, had to push and shove their way through this crowd to reach their destination. The diminutive Louis Blanc, a virtual dwarf in stature, actually had to be carried on the shoulders of brawny workers. In fact, setting out as a single group from the Palais Bourbon, they and their escorts soon lost contact with one another and finally arrived in small groups of twos or threes.

Upon their arrival at the city hall a large meeting of insurgents was under way in an assembly chamber known as the Salle Saint-Jean. When the news got out that a provisional government had been selected, the new ministers, as they arrived, were obliged to submit themselves and their principles to the crowd in the Salle for its approval. Garnier-Pagès, Ledru-Rollin, Dupont, Arago, and Lamartine arrived first, whereupon they came before the generally orderly assembly and were pilloried by often argumentative queries. Their responses were written down and passed out through the windows to the crowd in the Place de Grève. The people, both inside the city hall and in the square, constituted a remarkable mass jury, as it were, questioning and disputing with the various would-be ministers and roaring their approval where they agreed.

This mass jury was far from sympathetic to Lamartine, especially since he refused to commit himself to declaring a republic immediately. Shortly before Blanc was borne into the Salle by "muscular workmen," as he calls them, Lamartine had explained his refusal. "Strikingly cautious and involved was his exordium," Blanc notes dryly. Lamartine

said that the question [of declaring France a republic] was one of paramount importance, one which the nation would naturally be called upon to examine, and which he, Lamartine, did not mean to prejudge. These words gave rise to a violent tumult. A tremendous shout of *Vive la République!* shook the walls of the building.

Amid the tumult, one of the militants managed to interrupt Lamartine, warning the poet that he must not "cheat the people of what they had so dearly paid for," if he was to serve as a republican minister. Nimbly Lamartine modified his position, and when he resumed his speech, says Blanc, "he took great care to deviate by degrees from the path he had got into, and he concluded by declaring for the Republican form of Government, whereupon he was warmly applauded."⁶ When it came to be Blanc's turn to speak before the insurgents, he called not only for a formal republic but for the abolition of economic as well as juridical injustice. His own speech, Blanc tells us, was greeted with the cry "*Vive la république sociale!*"

Once the first group of government members—Lamartine, Ledru-Rollin, and the others—had been approved, they were led by a sympathetic guide through endless passages in the mazelike Hôtel de Ville to a small chamber in another part of the building. Here they shut the door and convened to assert their authority, posting a group of armed students from the École Polytechnique outside to stand guard. Meanwhile Blanc, Flocon, and Marrast, who had arrived later, were obliged to find their own way to the remote chamber. "It was not without difficulty," Blanc notes, "that we succeeded in finding [the government members] out, through the winding passages of the Hôtel de Ville."⁷ The absence of their more radical colleagues had not prevented Lamartine and his clique from proceeding without them, and their arrival was not received cordially. In his memoir Lamartine writes of Blanc's arrival as if he were an alien being who had suddenly intruded. Although the poet greeted them with his characteristically "radiant" expression, to use Blanc's adjective, others glared at them sullenly or even with hostility. They could scarcely bring themselves to accept Blanc, Marrast, Flocon, and Albert (who arrived still later) as part of the government. But then, the new ministers could ignore the radical members only at their peril, as it would have produced a storm in the crowd outside. At the bright suggestion of Garnier-Pagès, the late arrivals were designated as "secretaries," leaving their status in the government ambiguous.*

Yet even Lamartine leaves no doubt that the legitimacy of the government as a whole was arguable. Lacking any real foundation apart from the sheer effrontery of its members, the Provisional Government, at this point, could have been dispersed by any resolute body of armed men, such as the workers milling around in the square below their window. And before the night was over, the challenges to the new government's authority would come thick, fast, and furious.

The first issue of contention was whether the Provisional Government would declare the republic that the crowd outside was demanding so vehemently, a step that the moderate majority were not eager to take. The thought of a republic still evoked images of the Great Revolution, with its mass mobilization of the poor and dispossessed. There can be little doubt that, fearing the influence of the urban workers, the majority of the ministers wanted rural France, particularly the reactionary peasantry, to decide the question of the governmental form. Accordingly, the ministers offered a tepid statement of intention written by Lamartine, declaring that the government "prefers" a republic, which Blanc altered to say that the government "stands by" a republic.

* Albert's name and background gave a plebeian veneer to the Provisional Government. The ministers consistently called him Albert, to the point that he threatened to resign if they continued to address him disdainfully by only a Christian name, as though he were not their social equal.

By now, the delays and equivocations on this crucial question were beginning to anger the masses in the square below. Accordingly, the government finally promulgated its first decree. It proclaimed that the Provisional Government existed "in the name of the French people" and declared that "the government desires a republic, pending ratification by the people, who will be immediately consulted."⁸ But a statement of "desire" was not enough. In short order, the popular revolutionary socialist François Raspail "commanded the Provisional Government to proclaim a republic," observes Marx; "if this order of the people were not fulfilled within two hours, he would return at the head of 200,000 men."⁹ Blanc was obliged to go out to the Place de Grève and assure the people that "the Provisional Government will[s] the Republic"—which they took to mean that the government had actually proclaimed the republic.

The grim faces I had before me, made still more terrible by the glare of numberless torches, expressed on a sudden a feeling of indescribable satisfaction, and this feeling burst out into a triumphant roar. . . . Some workmen having found in a corner of the Hôtel de Ville a large piece of linen, took a bit of charcoal and traced on it in colossal letters: *La République une et indivisible est proclamée en France.*¹⁰

The banner was hoisted up to a window in the Hôtel de Ville, where it was illuminated by torches for all those below to see.

Having made this declaration, the Provisional Government parceled out the ministries among its various members. Although most histories of 1848 treat Lamartine as the head of state, officially he was merely the minister of foreign affairs. Nonetheless he was certainly the most conspicuous figure in the new government, even in the eyes of his opponents. The elderly Dupont de l'Eure was made the official president of the ministerial council, his name lending the government an aura of the First Republic, in which he had participated, and an air of republican virtue. Crémieux acquired the ministry of justice, and Marie public works. Arago became minister of the navy, and Ledru-Rollin was made the minister of the interior, while the so-called "secretaries" received no ministerial portfolios at all.

The remaining ministries were allotted to men who had not been on the lists compiled by the two republican newspapers. The banker Michel Goudchaux was made minister of finance (to be replaced a few days later by Garnier-Pagès); Baron Subervie, an Empire general, became minister of war; Eugene Bethmont, a liberal republican lawyer well known for defending left-wing republicans, was given the ministry of agriculture and trade; and the Vicomte de Courtais became the commander of the National Guard. Finally, one Hippolyte Sarnot was granted the ministry of education.

Marrast took over the mayoralty of Paris without further ado. Marc Caussidière, a Jacobin who had been close to Blanqui in the 1830s and then became a journalist for *La Réforme*, simply went to the prefecture and boldly declared himself chief of police, a declaration that aroused no opposition from the tremulous occupants of the police headquarters. He obliged all the officers to swear their allegiance to the republic, warning them that they would be shot if they violated their oath, then issued a proclamation urging the people to retain their arms, since they had been betrayed in the past by those who had ridden to power on their backs. In short order Caussidière created a small army, called the "Montagnards," who were pledged to protect the revolution from its enemies, including potential opportunists in its ranks. Finally, Étienne Arago (brother of the astronomer François) became minister of the post, bringing another *Réforme* journalist into the government.

The Provisional Government now engaged in a marathon night of decree-writing, abolishing monarchical institutions and creating new republican ones. One decree simply eliminated the Chamber of Peers; another guaranteed the freedom of speech and the press, ending the censorship that had vexed so many opposition periodicals, while another established the rights of free assembly and association. Still another "democratized" the National Guard by opening its ranks to all adult males and by providing uniforms for those who could not afford them. As the ministers scrawled out decree after decree, the documents were recopied a hundredfold by hand, then tossed out of the windows to the waiting crowd below. A while later, printing presses were brought to the city hall to publish the decrees, which were then placarded all over Paris. Overnight, the government seemed to become a machine for producing one decree after another. Indeed, more than sixty decrees, by Lamartine's count, were written on that night of February 24.

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE HÔTEL DE VILLE

In the meantime, during the evening, people continued to stream into the Place de Grève from the neighborhoods and suburbs—according to Lamartine, their numbers soared to about 200,000 men and women in all. By the thousands they flooded into the huge Hôtel de Ville itself, packing its salons, halls, and vestibules. At every turn a different orator, it seemed, exhorted the masses—primarily workers—to assert their rights.

Lamartine aptly calls the Hôtel de Ville on the night of February 24 a "field of battle."¹¹ Especially to the workers newly arrived from the faubourgs, the earlier rounds of queries and debates in the Salle Saint-Jean had by no means endowed the ministers with the right to function as the chief officers of the

republic. In fact, the new arrivals, red flags fluttering from the points of their bayonets, seemed on the point of expelling the government members from the Hôtel altogether, and perhaps thrashing them in the bargain.

Their most persistent sentiment was the fear that they would be cheated of a revolution they had made at the sacrifice of their own blood and lives. When they learned that the government radicals—Blanc, Flocon, and Albert, men whom they had come to respect during the years of agitation against the monarchy in favor of a “democratic and social republic”—were to serve only as secretaries in the government, while those who had the real power were moderates or even former monarchists, they were outraged and demanded that the title “secretary” be struck from their names on all decrees. Just as surely as Lamartine and his clique feared the demands of the huge crowd in the Place de Grève, so the workers feared the intentions of the small clique that had installed itself as the Provisional Government. And both sides behaved as though they were girding themselves for a confrontation.

Finally, by the sheer thrust of their bodies, some members of the crowd reached the doors of the remote chamber where the new government was meeting. They beat on the doors insistently, demanding that the ministers inside heed their wishes and carry out their demands, repeatedly charging the entryway with muskets and swords in hand. But the new ministers had pushed furniture up against the doors and in the vestibules to keep the crowds out. Somehow, despite the urgency of their demands, the surging crowd was rebuffed—partly by the furniture, but partly too by persuasion, as periodically Lamartine would emerge from the room to soothe them with his rhetoric. Then, to the sounds of muskets firing, the government members returned to work, churning out decrees and signing them, as if each one were a brick in a wall that could safeguard them from the assault of the plebeian crowd. One decree abolished the death penalty for political crimes (apparently the government wished to demonstrate its intention of avoiding a Jacobin terror), and another repealed the Le Chapelier Law, giving the workers the right to form associations and trade unions. Another called for a national Constituent Assembly, to be composed of nine hundred “representatives of the people” endowed with the authority to write a new, presumably republican constitution. Still another proclaimed universal suffrage for all males over twenty-one years of age, the broadest franchise France had ever seen. (Like the call for a Constituent Assembly, this decree was certain to diminish the political influence of the urban workers in favor of the peasantry.)

In the Place de Grève the threats and knock-down fights between workers and supporters of the government continued up to midnight and beyond. Finally, exhausted, the crowds departed from the square, and the entire quarter fell silent. All the clamor, threats, and pushing notwithstanding, the ministers had held their own, and they steadfastly refused to leave the Hôtel de Ville,

rotating their sleeping hours until daybreak, lest it be reclaimed by radical workers.

As morning dawned on February 25, groups of fifteen to twenty men drifted from the working-class quarters back into the Place de Grève, each group carrying a red flag. Armed with muskets and swords, they distributed red strips of cloth to the rest of the people as they arrived, until a large crowd had assembled, flecked with red. When other groups of workers showed up bearing the tricolor, they skirmished, but red triumphed over the tricolor.

The fighting that continued on this day was over the issue of which flag would be adopted as the symbol of the Second Republic. The government, the propertied classes, and the middle classes, as well as the more nationalistic of the workers, wanted to retain the old tricolor, with its overtones of the Great Revolution, the First Republic, and French national pride. To the politically aware minority of workers, however, the tricolor had been sullied by its association with Louis-Philippe's July Monarchy. Instead, they demanded the red flag as the symbol of the “democratic and social republic.”

Finally, just when the crowd attacking the Hôtel de Ville to establish the red flag seemed on the point of overcoming his guards, Lamartine emerged to deliver an oration in defense of the tricolor as the symbol of the republic. The red flag, he intoned, was the flag not of France but of “a party,” one composed of “Terrorists and Communists.” It was the “flag of terror,” the flag of blood and strife,¹² and had been “dragged through the mud and blood around the Champ de Mars” (a reference to Lafayette's massacre of 1791). But the tricolor was the accepted national flag of France among nations, having “gone around the world in triumph.”¹³ Largely as a result of Lamartine's rhetoric, the tricolor finally carried the day as the republican standard, if only because most of the people succumbed to his appeal to national glory. As a concession to the sizable minority of militants who were still unappeased, the government agreed to add a red rosette to the staff of the national flag and require all members of the government to wear one in their buttonholes.

Even now, however, the victory of the tricolor did not seem certain to Lamartine, and to play it safe, he decided he needed a large crowd that would demonstrate its warm enthusiasm for the established national flag. That evening he sent out his young guardians and other students from the École Polytechnique to mobilize support for the government. They, aided by other middle-class elements, fanned out through the capital, calling upon the propertied classes to rally with arms in hand at the Hôtel de Ville the next morning. On the morning of February 26, when workers with red flags reappeared to resume their battle, they found the Place de Grève filled with conventional republicans waving tricolors, not to speak of at least 5000 men surrounding the Hôtel de Ville with bayoneted muskets. As the day wore on, by Lamartine's account, the red flags virtually disappeared in the sea of tricolors.

With or without a red flag as an adornment, the workers' desire for the "democratic and social republic" was very real, and even under the tricolor their hopes persisted. All day on the twenty-fifth they pressured the government to establish the "right to work"—that is, to guarantee employment—and a Ministry of Labor and Progress to look after the workers' interests.

Around noon, the people chose as their spokesman a young workman, a militant named Marche—"the Spartacus of this army of the intelligent poor," Lamartine calls him—to head a delegation to impress their demands upon the ministers. According to Lamartine, Marche entered the government chamber,

a man of twenty or twenty-five years of age, of middle stature, but erect and strong, with limbs firmly knit and strongly moulded; his face, partially blackened with powder, appeared pale with emotion; his lips trembled with anger, and his eyes, sunk under his projecting forehead, darted fire. In his look the electricity of a whole people was concentrated. . . . He waved in his left hand a strip of red ribbon or cloth, and in his right held the barrel of a carbine, the butt-end of which, at every word he spoke, he caused to ring upon the pavement. . . . He spoke not as a man, but as a people, who will be obeyed, and will brook no delay. . . . He repeated, in accents of increasing energy, all the conditions of the manifesto of impossibilities, which the vociferations of the people enjoined it to accept and to realize on the instant—the overthrow of all known social order, the extermination of property, and of capitalists, spoliation, the immediate installation of the destitute in the community of goods, the proscription of bankers, of the rich, the manufacturers, the bourgeois of every condition.¹⁴

Marche appears to have said no such things; Lamartine's crassly tendentious account is valuable primarily as a reflection of the extreme polarization that existed between the workers of Paris and the privileged classes. Blanc's account of the incident is almost certainly closer to the truth: speaking briefly and firmly, Marche simply

presented himself in the name of the people, pointed with an imperious gesture to the Place de Grève, and making the butt of his musket ring upon the floor, demanded the recognition of the "*Droit du Travail*" [right to work]. . . . I [Blanc] drew [him] aside, and showed him a paper on which, while M. de Lamartine was speaking, I had written the following decree:—"The provisional Government . . . engage themselves to guarantee labor to every citizen."¹⁵

To this overture, officially establishing the "right to work," Marche replied to Blanc, "The People offers the Republic three months of poverty"—by which he

clearly meant that they would endure three more months of hardship to give the government time to make significant changes. Then, presumably, if their demands were not met, the workers would rise in earnest.¹⁶

THE PARADOXES OF 1848

Marche's warning is evidence of an unprecedented turn in France's revolutionary behavior by comparison with earlier uprisings. "How thoroughly things had changed since 1830 was made clear in 1848," observes William H. Sewell, Jr., in his account of the workers' movement in that remarkable year.

Whereas the July revolution of 1830 had caught the workers unaware and incapable of articulating an independent program until it was too late, the February revolution of 1848 immediately provoked a massive class-conscious workers' movement, not only in Paris, but in cities throughout France. From the beginning, the workers of Paris pushed the revolution to the left, forcing the provisional government to proclaim a republic on February 24, to proclaim the "right to labor" and the establishment of National Workshops on February 25, and set up the famous Luxembourg Commission on February 28.¹⁷

The National Workshops and the Luxembourg Commission will be discussed presently. What is important to note here is that, generally speaking, the French Revolution of 1848 was the most class-oriented civil conflict of the entire nineteenth century. The workers and the propertied classes confronted each other with greater directness and a stronger sense of their social identity and their conflicting interests than was to be the case even in the Paris Commune of 1871, which socialists and anarchists have, for generations, erroneously depicted as a classical proletarian revolution. In contrast to the *sans-culottes* of 1793, who had vaguely thought of themselves as "the people," the workers of 1848 were far more aware of themselves as a social class, distinct from "the people" as a whole. And as a class, they had very specific social and economic demands. Although few of them were actually industrial proletarians, these artisans who formed the majority of the working class in the French capital did not hesitate to call themselves *proletaires* or, more commonly, *ouvriers* and *travailleurs*, who opposed a distinct class enemy, *les capitalistes* or *la bourgeoisie*.

The militant *ouvriers* of 1848 had two demands of historic proportions: the right to form associations, and the "right to work." The right to form associations, as we have seen, meant the repeal of all laws curtailing or banning associations, including producers' cooperatives, mutual aid societies, and trade

unions. With the repeal of the Le Chapelier Law, the government had granted the first part of this right; it remained to be seen whether it would carry out the second by encouraging the growth of associations. The "right to work" meant that workers who could not find employment in their own trade should be provided with the means of life until such employment was to be acquired. This demand was particularly urgent in 1848, since Paris was filled with unemployed workers who lived from hand to mouth, pawned or sold even their most necessary possessions, stole, prostituted themselves, slept in parks, and huddled against inclement weather in doorways, sewers, and under the bridges of the Seine. And workers who fled local famine conditions in the provinces to seek work in the city often had the appearance of scarecrows. Hunger was pervasive in the working-class districts. One of the ministerial council's most important decrees established the right of the poor to reclaim articles from pawnshops for which they had been paid less than ten francs. But it was manifestly necessary for the Provisional Government to do more and translate the "right to work" into practical reality.

These rights were not simply ordinary demands that might be raised in demonstrations and riots. The workers who raised them, rather, conceived them as *inherent* natural rights, comparable to the inalienable rights of "liberty, equality, fraternity" demanded by the radicals in the Great Revolution. The workers saw themselves as claiming rights that greatly expanded society's concepts of justice, revealing how far beyond the juridical rights of 1789 their consciousness had advanced. Politically, the militants wanted representation, by universal manhood suffrage, in all organs of government, largely to ensure that the "democratic and social republic" would satisfy their economic demands. However unclear the structure of this republic may have been, they keenly desired that working men with "calloused hands" (as they put it) should occupy many, if not most, of the seats in the Palais Bourbon and the Hôtel de Ville. Despite the large number of radical intellectuals who rallied to their cause and whose support they accepted willingly, they were eager to see trusted *proletaires* in the new government, such as Alexandre Martin (to use Albert's real name), who came out of the workshops and the secret societies.

At the risk of repetition, however, it cannot be emphasized too strongly that the Parisian workers of 1848 did not oppose the existence of private property as such. Lamartine's effort to paint them as enemies of "property," not to speak of "society," was knowingly demagogic, intended to curry favor with the bourgeoisie and, later, to justify repressive measures against the working class. Parisian workers themselves were still rooted economically in the preindustrial age, and as artisans, many were small proprietors in their own right. The majority of artisans who worked for master craftsmen generally aspired to establish small workshops of their own, which they could run with or without hired labor.

But the demand for the "right to work" left open the question of what *institutional* form this inalienable right would take. How would society be organized to give it material reality? Other rights could be given tangibility in relatively obvious and straightforward ways, within the framework of the republic's legal system. Liberty could be institutionalized by passing laws to protect freedoms of the press, speech, and assembly. Equality (of opportunity, not condition) could be embodied in a juridical process that regarded everyone as equal before the law, irrespective of wealth or status. But what would it actually mean to institutionalize the "right to work"?

The theorist whose ideas seemed to answer this question best was Louis Blanc, who advanced a notion of social workshops (as we saw in Chapter 23) that were oriented toward production to meet human needs rather than toward the acquisition of profit, and that would federate in associations of mutual support to create a cooperative society. His *Organization of Work* had been immensely popular, and in the weeks following the February Revolution, militant French workers regarded him as their most outstanding spokesman. It was to Blanc, in fact, that many workers looked for practical direction in creating a cooperative alternative to industrial capitalism and from whom they received a fairly workable scheme.

On February 28, three days after Blanc wrote the "right to work" decree in response to Marche's demand, the Provisional Government established a Government Commission of Labor to develop various projects on behalf of workers and to study the means to provide workers with the fruits of their labor. To gild this Commission with pomp, the government housed it in the distinguished Luxembourg Palace, which had formerly accommodated the Chamber of Peers, ostensibly to convey the impression that the Commission was labor's "upper house," and that the workers had a major institutional place in the new republic.

The Luxembourg Commission, as it came to be known, was essentially an executive committee composed of a number of notable economists, socialist theorists, and publicists, including, among others, the Fourierist Victor Considérant, the economist Charles Dupont-White, and the Saint-Simonian Constantin Pecqueur. In addition to the Labor Commission, Blanc established what he pompously called the Labor Parliament, which was actually an ad hoc Labor Assembly, composed of three delegates from every trade corporation or union. Of the three delegates, one was to function as part of the Labor Commission itself, while the other two would attend the meetings of the Labor Assembly.

On March 1, the first meeting of the Luxembourg Commission drew about 200 deputies (in time they were to number more than 700) from "various trade unions," as Blanc says, to take "places formerly occupied by the peers of France,"¹⁸ an allusion to the Luxembourg Palace. Almost immediately after

opening this first official session, however, Blanc came up against militant workers' demands for an appreciable reduction in the length of the work day and for the abolition of the *marchandage*, a system in which parasitic middlemen, standing between the employers and the workers, distributed jobs to workers in return for a slice of their earnings. Fearful of antagonizing the propertied classes, Blanc says in his memoir, he did not want to act on these two demands right away, "without having previously appealed to the employers for their advice on so delicate a subject."¹⁹ He tried to persuade the workers to drop their demands, an effort, he confesses, that was not "warmly received."

There was a gloomy silence, forerunner of some coming struggle, and indeed, scarcely had a minute elapsed, when a great number of workmen, rising altogether and talking loud, declared that no kind of labor should be resumed until the two demands had been conceded.²⁰

Indeed, Blanc tried earnestly to get employers to participate as equals in discussions with workers at the Luxembourg Palace. Over the next months he successfully negotiated agreements to end strikes, which had become fairly commonplace in France. Blanc appears to have had virtually no understanding that capitalists and workers were irreconcilable opponents, and he consistently opposed class conflicts as socially harmful. Nevertheless, the Luxembourg Commission, with the Labor Assembly, was the nearest thing to an institutionalized counterpower against the Provisional Government that the Parisian working class had. In William Sewell's judgment the Commission constituted the "focus and organizational center of the workers' movement in 1848."

Although its official function was only advisory, revolutionary workers saw its role in much loftier terms. In the words of the cabinet makers' delegates, its task was nothing less than elaborating "the constitution of labor," and Louis Blanc himself characterized the commission as "the Estates General of the people."²¹

Indeed the Labor Assembly ultimately was able to compel the Provisional Government not only to abolish the *marchandage* but to adopt a ten-hour day for Parisian workers and eleven for those in the provinces. (The Provisional Government, to be sure, resisted these demands, but when the delegates threatened to leave the Labor Assembly en masse—which would have eliminated the Assembly altogether—it submitted.) Moreover, the Commission could celebrate its role in successfully initiating several social workshops, most notably a journeymen tailors' cooperative at the abandoned Clichy prison, which turned out cloaks for the National Guard. But despite much talk about

its function as France's second legislative house, the Luxembourg Commission had none of the power, let alone the resources possessed by the old Chamber of Peers. In the early days of the February Revolution, Blanc had initially proposed the creation of a Ministry of Labor and Progress as part of the government itself, with full authority to carry out the policies it deemed necessary. But the other ministers had found the prospect of Blanc playing a significant role in the government to be intolerable, despite his basically moderate views. Minister of Public Works Marie later celebrated the fact that, in response to Blanc's proposal, the government had been

sufficiently energetic to refuse this claim, behind which it saw clearly both the dictatorship of this man and the complete and immediate upheaval of the social order, yet was unable to do otherwise than accord him the foundation of the [Luxembourg] Commission.²²

Created by Lamartine and his cronies, the Luxembourg Commission was soon reduced to a largely decorative and insubstantial entity whose purpose was to appease militant workers who wanted a social republic. Moreover, by making Blanc its chairman and Albert its vice-chairman, Lamartine shrewdly shunted the two radicals out of the cabinet and marooned them in the palace, a powerless if massive showpiece. As Marx was to put it, through the Luxembourg Commission,

the representatives of the working class were banished from the seat of the Provisional Government, the bourgeois part of which retained the real state power and the reins of administration exclusively in its hands; and *side by side* with the ministries of Finance, Trade and Public Works, *side by side* with the Bank and the Bourse, there arose a *socialist synagogue* whose high priests, Louis Blanc and Albert, had the task of discovering the promised land, of preaching the new gospel and of providing work for the Paris proletariat. Unlike any profane state power, they had no budget, no executive authority at their disposal. . . . While the Luxembourg sought the philosopher's stone, in the *Hôtel de Ville* they minted the current coinage.²³

Nonetheless it should be noted that with the Luxembourg Commission, Blanc was genuinely trying to create the only socialistic alternative that a predominantly artisanal economy could have adopted to countervail the growth of industrial capitalism. Blanc's "socialist synagogue" sought to create producers' cooperatives, nationalize the Bank of France and the railroads, provide financial aid to a few experimental social workshops, encourage labor associations, and guarantee the "right to work". In its report to the government, clearly prepared by Blanc, the Luxembourg Commission proposed to establish

agricultural colonies in every department of France, each to be composed of a hundred families, with common kitchens and laundries, and also model housing complexes with their own schools, nurseries, libraries, baths, and gardens. Long anticipating reforms that were to be adopted generations later, Blanc hoped to see all workers provided with old-age pensions and state-sponsored insurance for the ill and financially deprived. Reformist and modest as these goals seem today, such proposals were innovative and even radical in 1840s France.

No other kind of socialism could have constituted an alternative to capitalism during the middle of the nineteenth century, when France was in a transition from a preindustrial economy to a modern industrial capitalist one. Socialism in the later sense of a nationalized economy would have been out of the question: few substantial branches of production existed, apart from railroads and banks, that could be taken over by a republican state. Nor was a factory-based socialism feasible: the factory system, while it had grown by leaps and bounds in Britain, had not yet rendered the French artisanal workshop a marginal and subordinate form of productive activity. Silk textiles were still made mainly in small workshops in Lyon; and although cotton goods were spun and woven by machine in large factories, the industry was still of secondary importance. As for Proudhonism, that alternative amounted to retreating to an economy that was already obsolete. If any cooperative economy was to come to France, it could not have been in a Marxist, Proudhonist, or Cabetian form; it would have to be a scheme that, like Blanc's, was suited to an artisanal economy, all its weaknesses and statism notwithstanding.

But at best, the social workshops could have been only a brake on the growth of the factory system—they could hardly have been a substitute for it. Once England had introduced machinery for mass production, no country could compete with British goods. To create a cooperative economy, France's only alternative would have been to isolate itself from the world market, on which many of her artisans, especially her silk workers, depended for their prosperity. By the nineteenth century, the ascent of capitalism was all but impossible to arrest, and nothing short of complete economic isolation—a ruinous economic autarchy—could have prevented cheaply manufactured commodities from ultimately subverting most preindustrial systems of production.

In any case, Blanc's social workshops, although the most important plan to slow the advance of industrial capitalism, were never seriously adopted. As we will see in the next chapter, a scheme of "National Workshops" was introduced that, despite its similarity in name to Blanc's social workshops, bore no relationship whatever to his own socialist goal and, if anything, was used to discredit it.

THE CLUB MOVEMENT

Even before the February Revolution, as we have seen, Paris had been the center of secret societies and illegal working-class organizations. The success of the revolution produced a politically active club movement that was unprecedented in France since the heyday of the Great Revolution. Clubs, as well as workers' corporations, educational societies, and rudimentary trade unions, emerged everywhere. Located in all the neighborhoods of Paris, many of these clubs bore a superficial resemblance to the old sectional assemblies of 1793, and they quickly became thriving centers for educating, discussing, and mobilizing the city's most militant workers and intellectuals, often with a view toward directly intervening in the city's political life.

In the weeks following the February barricades, few people understood the potentiality of the club movement more clearly than Auguste Blanqui, who had been freed from his domestic exile in Blois on February 24 and was hastening to Paris as the Provisional Government was being formed. On February 25, scarcely a day after the king's abdication, Blanqui spoke before the Club de Prado in a large dance hall, where he forcefully declared that under the new Provisional Government,

France is not republican. The Revolution that has just passed is nothing more than a happy surprise . . . Leave the men in the Hôtel-de-Ville to their impotence; their feebleness is a sure sign of their fall. Their power is but ephemeral: we—we have the people and the clubs, where we shall organize them in revolutionary fashion, as was the way of the Jacobins of old.²⁴

For a time it seemed that this prediction of club empowerment might soon be fulfilled. Shortly after the monarchy fell, at least 203 political clubs were formed in the greater Paris area, 149 of which belonged to a common federation. Peter H. Amann, in his study of this mass democracy, conservatively estimates that total membership in the Parisian clubs numbered from 50,000 to 70,000, but "a somewhat higher figure in the neighborhood of one hundred thousand seems more likely." So avidly involved were workers in the club movement that in mid-March, when the novelist George Sand found herself locked out of her apartment, she had the greatest difficulty finding a locksmith. They were all attending club meetings. As Amann puts it, "Within a few weeks a mass movement had taken root"—and an organized mass movement at that.²⁵

By mid-April, every neighborhood and *arrondissement* in the capital had clubs, mainly workers' clubs, whose meetings often drew thousands of members and informal participants. The larger clubs usually met in school buildings, churches, dance halls, municipal buildings, and even in cafés. They

varied considerably in structure: some were very formally organized, such as the *Société des Droits de l'Homme*, while others were quite informal and even free-wheeling. A few clubs consciously maintained continuities with the past. Some had members who had belonged to the secret societies: of seventeen club presidents in mid-March 1848 whose political backgrounds are known, ten were veterans of the prerevolutionary secret societies, most notably Blanqui and Barbès, who had been the leading figures in the *Saisons* during the 1830s. The more radical clubs tended to subdivide themselves into "sections" or "cells," just as the illegal societies under the monarchy had done, despite the fact that such subdivisions were now superfluous. Other clubs consciously invoked names drawn from the Great Revolution, such as *Jacobins*, *Montagnards*, *Amis du Peuple*, *Egalité et Fraternité*, and *Commune*. Among the revolutionary periodicals that appeared were those titled *Père Duchêne* and *Vieux Cordelier*, invoking the memory of Hébert's and Desmoulins's papers of more than a half century earlier.

But most of the clubs had no roots in the earlier secret societies. Significantly, a large number of them had names including the words *Work* and *Workers*. Moreover, the class composition of the clubs was striking. Among half of the 178 club presidents whose occupations are known,

23 percent were workers, 22 percent intellectuals (writers, journalists, professors), 21 percent bourgeois (employers, proprietors, managers, *rentiers*—though this last category is ambiguous); 18 percent white-collar workers (ranging from clerk through bookkeeper to priest); 9 percent members of the "popular bourgeoisie" of wineshop owners, rooming house operators, modest greengrocers; and 5 percent university students.²⁶

At least half of the club presidents thus consisted of workers and intellectuals, if students are included among the latter. This high proportion of workers and intellectuals is classical in revolutionary situations; in later uprisings revolutionary groups were often marked by even more radical intellectuals, in fact, than workers. Indeed, the intelligentsia—mainly public individuals and professionals—supplied the leaders of organizations that were predominantly working class in composition and orientation.

In 1848 the clubs held their meetings with extraordinary frequency. It was not uncommon for them to convene as often as four or five nights a week, a frequency redolent of the numerous section meetings during the Great Revolution. Most of the clubs still formally limited their meetings to twice a week, but this semiweekly schedule was commonly ignored during February and March. Blanqui's Central Republican Society—or Club Blanqui, as it was familiarly called—met every evening with the exception of Sundays. Rules were often honored in the breach; many clubs functioned with minimal formality, especially those whose meetings

were packed with thousands of tumultuous workers, and attendance in the more important clubs often ran into the thousands.

In addition to the numerous clubs, the radical political culture of 1848 included a burgeoning revolutionary press, which formed a vital lifeline between the clubs and the people. The clubs used both posters and periodicals, especially neighborhood ones, to announce their meetings and publish their minutes. The avidly read journals also published passionate orations. According to an official count, there were 171 newspapers in the capital, although only a minority were able to survive more than a few weeks. Working-class neighborhoods in particular were flooded with posters voicing a host of opinions, pamphlets advancing criticisms and demands, and the speeches of lecturers and street orators. Along with organized club meetings, this electrifying level of discussion produced a delirium of radical fervor. To the privileged classes it seemed that the Revolution had unleashed a social monster that only force could finally subdue.

Several of the clubs enjoyed enormous prestige, partly because famous radical leaders had helped to create them, and partly because of their radical views. Among the most important was Blanqui's Central Republican Society, which attracted hundreds, possibly thousands to a single meeting, including many spectators curious to see the notorious black-coated and black-gloved revolutionary par excellence. By shifting its meeting places to various locations in the capital, the Club Blanqui managed to reach a large cross-section of the Parisian working class. Its meetings were notable for their open and often heated discussions of ideas, and for the profusion of oratory that, as Amann observes, "Blanqui made no attempt to dominate."²⁷ But to join the Club Blanqui was no frivolous affair: a prospective member had to have two members as backers and sign a written oath of support.

Étienne Cabet's Central Fraternal Society, on the other hand, was notable for the formality of its proceedings and the authoritarian behavior of its founder. Cabet had created a dogmatic sect—the Icarians—based on his immensely popular novel, *Voyage to Icaria*, and his widely read periodical, *Le Populaire*. Some 4000 men and 1000 women belonged to the club, the majority of whom were working people and were apparently mesmerized by their famous leader. In the weeks immediately following the February uprising, the Central Fraternal Society drew enormous working-class audiences, possibly larger than any other club. By this time the word *communiste* was being used throughout Paris, and as a term of opprobrium it was replacing *anarchiste*, which had been used so promiscuously in the Great Revolution. Although Cabet himself was anything but a militant, *communisme* terrified the respectable strata of society, much to the glee of the workers. Cabet's Central Fraternal Society was basically nonrevolutionary and his views were surprisingly tepid, but in the spring of 1848 Parisian workers revered him. In March and April the sect's discipline

would temporarily propel Cabet and *communisme* to the forefront of events. Comparable in its didactic tone to Cabet's club was François Raspail's *Société des Amis du Peuple* (Friends of the People), which was more an educational forum than a political arena. Raspail was widely respected by the workers for his tested commitment to their interests, but unlike Blanqui he tended to lecture his audiences rather than listen to them. At times his "courses," as he called them, drew as many as 4000 people. But none of these clubs compared in size with the older *Société des Droits de l'Homme*, which claimed nearly a 100,000 members, 34,000 of them in Paris. The club, reborn in 1848 after its suppression in the 1830s, was a neo-Jacobin association that vaguely espoused the ideals of political equality contained in Robespierre's Preamble to the Constitution of 1793, tinged with quasi-socialistic 1840s concepts of justice. Its central committee included Armand Barbès, and it received subsidies from Ledru-Rollin's Ministry of Interior. Despite its attempt to make itself into a disciplined military organization, the *Droits* was marked more by ideological confusion than by coherence. In addition to his role in the *Droits* club, Barbès also collected a following in the *Club de la Révolution*, or Club Barbès, which gained a measure of fame mainly because he was its leader.

Apart from these "big name" clubs, many smaller and more transient clubs abounded everywhere. Attempts to unite them into a common revolutionary movement gave rise to various organizational alliances, but the effectiveness of these alliances was limited. The most famous was the Revolutionary Committee of the Club of Clubs, which played an important role in bringing various clubs into contact with one another, both within Paris and without. Like the *Droits*, the Club of Clubs took subsidies from the Ministry of Interior and was strongly inspired by Ledru-Rollin, but its most important function seems to have been to bring republican ideas and propaganda to the provinces, and to provide information about the provinces to Paris. Indeed, the many accounts of provincial revolutionary activity that appeared in the Club's reports provide the historian with one of the main sources of information about political activity outside Paris. Other federative clubs, like the Central Democratic Society and its rival, the Central Committee for the General Elections, were little more than temporary electoral coalitions, mainly designed to promote the middle-class republican candidates to the Constituent Assembly.

With all its many rivalries, coalitions, interactions, functions, and secret supporters, what is important about the club movement is that, in conjunction with the Luxembourg's Labor Assembly, it formed part of an independent working-class power that was emerging against the Provisional Government. As Amann observes, the clubs "constituted the apex, the revolution *en permanence*, the popular will organized, institutionalized, hardened."²⁸ Indeed, some of the clubs saw themselves as performing precisely this sort of role. The Democratic Club of Blancs Manteaux, for example, openly declared:

The members of the [Constituent] Assembly are our delegates, yet the sovereign people does not relinquish its powers and must watch over the discussions of the deputies. The clubs must necessarily be the voice of the people and the expression of its will.²⁹

The strong implication of this statement is that the clubs were indeed a separate power, counterposed to the Provisional Government, as were the workers' corporations whose delegates gathered in the Luxembourg Palace. Nor did the government itself fail to ignore the danger that the clubs, together with the Luxembourg's Labor Assembly, posed to its sovereignty. William H. Sewell, Jr., in fact, has argued that the "workers' corporations were the closest equivalent, in 1848, to the sections of 1792-94."³⁰ Whether the workers' corporations and the clubs could have actually become a dual power is arguable. Eventually, the Luxembourg Assembly was dissolved (in fact, it was always a completely powerless body), and the corporations that made it up ceased to constitute "units of government," as Sewell has called them, comparable to the sections of the Great Revolution.³¹ Many clubs, on the other hand, remained rooted in the neighborhoods of Paris, as the earlier sections had been, and discussed a wide range of political as well as economic issues.

Proudhon made the bright suggestion, in his periodical *Le Représentant du peuple* (April 28, 1848), that the mass democracy of the clubs could become a popular forum where the social agenda of the revolution could be prepared for use by the Constituent Assembly—a proposal that would essentially have defused the potency of the clubs as a potentially rebellious dual power. Owing to the intransigence of the government, which refused to yield the least amount of its power to any popular authority, Proudhon's suggestion came to nothing.

The Revolution, patently incomplete, was being pulled in two directions: by distinctly working-class demands on one side and a conventional middle-class republic on the other. This growing tension between mutually suspicious classes could not continue to exist for long, but could easily ignite into an open conflict at any time. In the days and weeks following the February barricades, the government had secretly built up its military forces, while the workers, for whom the passage of time without victory was an enemy, girded themselves for a renewed confrontation. In revolutions, where weeks telescope months and months telescope years, the confrontation was to come with rapidity and fury.

NOTES

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, trans. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos (New York: Macmillan, 1896), pp. 66-7.
2. According to Neil Stewart, the list did not include the names of Flocon, Marrast, Blanc, and Albert, and it was read out to the crowd at the Palais-Bourbon by Ledru-Rollin. See Neil Stewart, *Blanqui* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939), p. 99. I have chosen to follow Tocqueville's account, as he was in attendance.
3. Tocqueville, *Recollections*, p. 70.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
5. Alphonse de Lamartine, *History of the French Revolution of 1848*, trans. unknown (London: Bell & Daldy, 1851), p. 128. Aside from Lamartine's insufferable verbosity and tendentiousness, his is one of the most detailed accounts of the establishment of the Provisional Government.
6. Louis Blanc, *1848: Historical Revelations* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1858), pp. 16-17.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
8. Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 29, 30, 32.
9. Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 10: *Marx and Engels 1849-1851* (New York: International Publishers, 1978), p. 54.
10. Blanc, *Historical Revelations*, p. 31.
11. Lamartine, *French Revolution of 1848*, p. 180.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 234.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 230.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 218, 219-20.
15. Blanc, *Historical Revelations*, pp. 81-2.
16. Quoted in Georges Duveau, *1848: The Making of a Revolution*, trans. Anne Carter (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 66.
17. William H. Sewell, Jr., "Artisans, Factory Workers, and the Formation of the French Working Class, 1789-1848," in *Working-Class Formations: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States*, ed. Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 65-6.
18. Blanc, *Historical Revelations*, p. 126.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 129-30.
21. William H. Sewell, Jr., "Property, Labor, and the Emergence of Socialism in France, 1789-1848," in *Consciousness and Class Experience in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. John M. Merriman (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1979), p. 59.
22. Émile Thomas, "Conversations with M. Marie," from *Histoire des ateliers nationaux*; in *Revolution from 1789 to 1906*, ed. Raymond Postgate (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 201-2.
23. Marx, *Class Struggles in France*, p. 55.
24. Blanqui quoted in Alphonse Lucas, *Les Clubs et les clubistes* (Paris, 1851), in *1848 in France*, ed. Roger Price, Documents of Revolution series (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press; London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), p. 72.
25. Peter H. Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy: The Paris Club Movement in 1848* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 34, 35.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 200.
29. *Ibid.*
30. William H. Sewell, Jr., *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 255.
31. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 27 "Defeat of the Revolution!"

Every revolution that fails to complete its social tasks immediately opens the way to counterrevolution and finally its own bloody annihilation. This principle can be taken as absolutely fixed. The vacuum that an unfinished revolution leaves behind is quickly filled by its enemies, who, sometimes presenting themselves as "compromisers," "realists," and "reasonable" men, try to harness the revolution and steer the energy it has churned up toward its own destruction. In the English Revolution irresolute Levellers such as Lilburne failed to use their influence with the army to move decisively against Cromwell; and in the Great French Revolution the *enragés*, lacking any coordinating leadership, were manipulated by Marat and delivered over to the Committee of Public Safety. A hesitant revolution is a doomed revolution.

The moment when a revolutionary situation crests and the insurgents are psychologically prepared to take control of society is therefore crucial. Even a delay of several days may result in the ebbing of the revolutionary tide. Few revolutionary leaders understood this more clearly than Lenin, who on the eve of the October Revolution demanded an immediate insurrection, in opposition to most of his own colleagues, and threatened to resign from the Bolshevik Central Committee because of its dilatory behavior.

The Parisian workers of 1848, having overthrown the monarchy, had arrived at just such a moment, yet their leaders were unwilling to seize it and replace the government that Lamartine and his allies had set up with a truly social republic. Like the July Monarchy, the Provisional Government had been brought to power by an insurrection, and its principal leaders—with the exception of Blanqui, Raspail, and possibly the weary Caussidière—were once again committed gradualists. Blanc, with his hazy notions of fraternity between employers and their employees, was wholly unwilling to try to match the growing armed forces of the government with an independent working-class force. Mesmerized by the ideal of *la République*, hamstrung by a limited notion of socialism—artisanal associationism—and led by the irresolute

Blanc, the revolution that the workers made in February was left tragically incomplete.

To be sure, ordinary Parisian workers understood the need to continue the revolution, or at least to accumulate their own stores of weapons, in anticipation of a struggle to defend it. In turn, the new government and the classes it represented realized that the arms possessed by the working people constituted the greatest potential threat they faced. On the morning of February 25, the day of the conflict over the red flag, a group of workers in the Place de Grève had demanded that the immense arsenal of the old regime at Vincennes be turned over to the people—a demand the government firmly opposed: convinced that the workers must not be permitted to accumulate even more weapons than they had, Lamartine sent out Flocon to quiet them. Flocon then accompanied a group of workers to Vincennes, where he allowed them to take only a few thousand muskets, carefully withholding the great bulk of the weapons and ammunition that were stored in the fortress. Lamartine, it is worth noting, afterward clasped Flocon's hands and fervently thanked him for "preserving the national arsenals"—and for using his radical credentials to pacify the Faubourg Saint-Antoine.¹ Once in power, Flocon, ostensibly a radical only days before, made every effort to control the masses and to place the reins of government securely in the hands of the privileged classes.

REVOLUTION AND COUNTERREVOLUTION

The new ruling classes also realized that to retain power they would have to create a reliable military force superior to anything the working class could organize. From the very moment they took office, even as Blanc was naively echoing Lamartine's appeals to *fraternité*, class cooperation, and republican unity, the rest of the Provisional Government's ministers began to systematically assemble a variety of military forces that could be used to control the working-class movement. Lamartine, in particular, had noticed that unruly working-class boys and teenagers played a major role in the barricade fighting; owing to their youth, they were the boldest and most reckless of the insurrectionaries. Sensing that their adventurous behavior could propel any popular unrest into an armed insurrection, the foreign minister shrewdly decided to harness them into a special force in the government's service. In one of his earliest decrees during the early morning of February 25, Lamartine established the Mobile Guard, a force to be composed of youths between sixteen and thirty years of age. In the next few weeks, some 25,000 youths, almost entirely from the working class, were recruited into twenty-four battalions and placed at the disposition of the government.

The Mobile Guard, unlike the National Guard, was no citizens' militia: on the contrary, its members were single men housed in their own barracks and isolated as much as possible from the general population. The government took every precaution to keep them from fraternizing with their fellow citizens in the neighborhoods. They were given distinctive uniforms and were armed and equipped at the state's expense. Carefully trained in urban fighting, they were treated as an elite corps, flattered as the government's praetorians, and slowly weaned from any loyalty to their own social class. They were even paid a wage of a franc and a half daily—a relatively comfortable sum for single young men. Although they were allowed to elect their own officers, the officers they elected had to be approved by the commanding general and the minister of war, who were professional military men detached from the regular army.

Almost alone among the republican leaders, Blanqui recognized that the *mobiles* were precisely the praetorian guard of the privileged classes and that they constituted a sword pointed at the very heart of working-class resistance. From the first meetings of his Central Republican Society, he vigorously denounced the recruitment of this extremely dangerous force, calling not only for its disbandment but for that of all other professional military forces. For their part, the ruling classes knew that they were taking a dangerous gamble in creating the Mobile Guard. As working-class "children" or youths in the main, their political allegiances were uncertain. In the event of a working-class insurrection, would these young men stand with their families and neighbors in their districts? Or would they obey their officers? This ambiguity was heightened precisely by their youthful bravado, which had verged on uncontrollable elation in the face of battle. Whoever gained the loyalty of the *mobiles*, it was suspected, would control Paris. Upon viewing a parade of the Mobile Guard and other military units on the Champ de Mars, Tocqueville nervously opined:

The battalions of the Garde Mobile uttered various exclamations, which left us full of doubt and anxiety as to the intention of these lads, or rather children, who at that time more than any other held our destinies in their hands.²

The workers, for their part, uneasily observed the Provisional Government sequestering their "children" in barracks, then using regular army officers to indoctrinate them. They tried, as best they could, to reach their sons and restore their sense of class identity. But for the first months of the force's existence, their political ideas—if they had any—remained hidden in their barracks.

As for the social aims of the Revolution, the workers, who knew their enemies well, were becoming guarded, even as Blanc tried to establish a few token social workshops. They viewed with alarm not only the formation of the Mobile Guard but the resistance and increasing arrogance of the well-equipped bourgeois National Guards toward the common people. And they took note of the growing

belligerence of the employers and the seething hatred of the privileged classes toward the workers' social aims. Even if Blanc did not, workers of the Luxembourg and the militant workers in Paris generally realized they might well be thrown into a serious collision with the privileged classes of the realm.

THE NATIONAL WORKSHOPS

Shortly after the Place de Grève had been cleared of insurgents in February, a young engineer, Émile Thomas, formerly a student at the École Centrale, approached the minister of public works, Marie, with a proposal. Thomas, an ambitious man, had a fanciful vision of a new France in which all workers would eventually become prosperous enough to become members of the bourgeoisie. As a step in the realization of this utopia, he suggested that the unemployed be rounded up and given temporary employment in public works through a state-subsidized and state-controlled system of "National Workshops."

To Marie, a member of the erstwhile dynastic opposition, the prospect of neutralizing unrest among the unemployed by transforming them into clients of the state was irresistible. On March 23 the minister of public works advised the young engineer (Thomas was only twenty-six at the time) that the government was prepared to accept his proposal and give a five-million-franc subsidy to establish the Workshops.³ The minister then took Thomas aside and told him to take the unemployed "in hand" and "attach them" to himself. He should spare no expense in creating his workshops, he advised Thomas, and he placed the ministry's "secret fund" at his disposal.

Naively, the new director asked Marie, "What object, other than public calm, have your recommendations?" To which the minister replied: "Public safety. Do you think you can manage to command your men altogether? It may be that the day is near when it will be necessary to march them into the streets"—that is, against their fellow workers. In fact, Thomas proceeded to follow Marie's recommendation and organize the Workshop enrollees, numbering some 120,000 at their peak, into military-style units—such as companies, battalions, and brigades—under his own command, with subordinate officials composed of his middle-class student friends. In effect, with Thomas's assistance, Marie had created still another potentially counterrevolutionary army.

The immediate impact of the announcement of the National Workshops was to draw a 100,000 unemployed Frenchmen from the provinces into the capital, seeking temporary work. Those who were given jobs were paid two francs daily, a very modest wage for men with families and other expenses. But an additional 50,000 provincials arrived for whom there were no National Workshop jobs at all. Once in Paris, they lingered in the city, adding to the

hunger and restlessness that existed among the working class generally. Some National Workshop enrollees were given no actual work to perform, as Georges Duveau observes:

The workers enrolled in the National Workshops spent most of their time playing billiards and making speeches in praise of the social-democrat Republic. Here and there a few were to be found carting one or two barrowloads of sand on the Champ de Mars or the heights of Belleville. They did a bit of digging and then went back to their games or talk.⁴

Duveau's description more closely reflects the image of the National Workshops fostered by the bourgeois press than reality; thousands of National Workshop employees were, in fact, fully occupied with useful jobs. They replanted the trees that had been felled to form the February barricades, leveled the Champ de Mars into an attractive public mall, manufactured clothing and shoes for other unemployed workers, and, in Marseilles, helped to dig a much-needed canal. Nor were the unemployed artists of Paris neglected; they were put to work painting republican propaganda posters and creating other politically inspirational artwork.

Yet the invidious image of the Workshops as a dole for idlers soon became prevalent among the middle classes, an image that, like the Luxembourg, was pointedly used against the radicals. "Marie told me," says Thomas,

that it was the determined intention of the Government to allow the experiment (of the Luxembourg) to have its run; that in itself it would have the good result of convincing the workmen of the emptiness of Louis Blanc's inapplicable theories; ... that in this manner the working classes would be disabused by the experience; that their idolatry of Louis Blanc would of itself crumble to pieces, and that he would lose for ever all his influence, all his prestige, and cease to be a danger.⁵

Predictably, the press had a field day with the National Workshops, sneeringly identifying them with the Luxembourg Commission and socialism. Indeed, the project was given the name National Workshops in a calculated move to confuse it in the public mind with Blanc's social workshops. Marie and the bourgeoisie spared no effort to turn the workers' demands for the "right to work" into a socialistic chimera. By vitiating this major demand, Marie divested the uprising of February 24 of much of its social meaning.

Blanc, for his part, responded with vitriol against Marie's cynical debasement of his socialistic plans. He condemned the National Workshops as a

rabble of paupers, who it was enough to feed, from the want of knowing

how to employ them, and who had to live together without any other ties than a military organisation, and under chiefs who bore the name, at once so strange and yet so characteristic, of sergeant-majors—*brigadiers*.⁶

But his attacks against the National Workshops as cesspools of idleness and militarism were as inept as they were self-defeating. To Marie's delight, Blanc's denunciations served to pit the Luxembourg Commission and its Labor Assembly against the tens of thousands of workers who were drawing their sole livelihood from Thomas's brigades, thereby opening a dangerous rift within the ranks of the working class itself.

Yet the normally employed workers had reason to resent the National Workshops, which had become a mercenary military force intended for use on behalf of the privileged classes. In fact, by mid-spring, Émile Thomas had effectively rallied the sympathies of most of the National Workshop workers behind the Provisional Government. Materially, he purchased their support by paying them a regular wage; psychologically, he gained their enthusiasm by staging celebratory festivals that were carefully designed to inculcate a strong military spirit that could be placed at the service of the state. A little more than a month after the February barricades were dismantled, the Ministry of Public Works and the Provisional Government generally were lavishly spending public funds to create a counterrevolutionary army that could be deployed against the same Parisian workers who had shed their blood to bring the Republic into existence.

THE JOURNÉE OF MARCH 17

By no means had the Republic as yet sunk deep roots into the country's middle classes, still less into people at all levels of rural society. Royalism was still widespread in France, and the masses in the countryside and in a few provincial capitals viewed the events in Paris, and the radical working class that propelled them, with deep hostility. Yet with each month that passed after the February Days, the influence of radical ideas in Paris itself receded, and the workers' faith even in a "formal" democratic republic, let alone a social republic, began to wane. At the same time the forces of reaction were regaining their confidence and mobilizing against the limited social achievements of the February republic. In the opening passage of his *Class Struggles in France*, a remarkable work that has been the point of departure for many historians of the 1848 Revolution, Marx observed that, "with the exception of only a few chapters, every more important part of the annals of the revolution from 1848 to 1849 carries the heading: *Defeat of the Revolution!*"⁷

Marx appropriately identified the various stages that led to this defeat with four major *journées* that the Parisian working class carried out that spring, at almost one-month intervals: namely, those of March 17, April 16, and May 15, culminating in the working-class insurrection of June 23. With each *journée*, the influence of the radicals declined, and the power of the counterrevolution became stronger and its policies more resolute.

The first *journée*, which took place on March 17, began when the clubs and the various trade organizations made plans for a demonstration against the government, in support of three demands that the clubs had generally agreed upon. First, they wanted to postpone the date for the national elections to the Constituent Assembly. The Provisional Government had originally set these elections for April 9, but the close proximity of that date did not give the republicans in the cities sufficient time to bring the message of the Revolution to people in the countryside, least of all to the peasantry, which was still strongly influenced by the country priesthood and fearful of the local gentry. The republicans strongly felt that before the national elections were held—and especially since the new assembly would be authorized to write a new constitution for France—the Republic should have the opportunity to establish its legitimacy in the provinces and to educate the peasantry about republican ideas. The election date of April 9 was little more than three weeks away. A revolution that had yet to fully define itself even in progressive Paris could hardly be expected, in so short a time, to gain the support of illiterate peasants, most of whom looked to highly reactionary clerics for leadership.

In fact, the Republic itself, far from reaching out to the peasants for support, had taken a step that grievously and irreconcilably alienated them. On March 16, strapped by mounting financial problems, it had voted to impose a levy of forty-five centimes on every franc due not in income taxes but in property taxes. Agreeable as this measure was to the bankers of Paris, the levy increased by nearly fifty percent the tax burden on small landholders, effectively turning poor, hardworking peasants against the cities.

Nor was the peasantry sympathetic with the workers' demands for a social republic. The press was largely succeeding in turning public opinion in the provinces against the "reds" in Paris, and the National Workshops in particular were used by periodicals and pulpits to stoke deep resentment among the peasants. Goaded by the propaganda of rural reactionaries as well as urban ones, these small parochial proprietors were convinced that the new property tax was meant to subsidize idlers in the Workshops. Blanqui, realizing that the tax would be "the death sentence of the republic," fought it vigorously.⁸ As Priscilla Robertson observes,

The 45-centime tax may have saved the republic from bankruptcy, but it also killed it by arousing the hatred of the countryside. From that day all the

propagandists, including Louis Napoleon, who tried to win the peasants, promised its repeal.⁹

Thus it was imperative that the Left and even moderate republicans gain more time to win over the country as a whole to republicanism, lest reactionary representatives gain the majority in the Constituent Assembly. The demonstrators of March 17, on Cabet's suggestion, made it a cardinal demand that the elections be postponed to May 31, although even that delay was clearly too short to get rural voters to shed their well-entrenched rural prejudices and adopt views advanced by urban radicals.

An issue of almost equal importance—and in Blanqui's eyes, of more importance—was the date for the election of National Guard officers. In accordance with the new policy of democratizing the Guard, its amiable commanding general in Paris, the Viscount de Courtais, had offered to open fourteen positions on his staff exclusively to workers. But from the radicals' perspective, the date of the election of these officers, like the date of the Assembly elections, was set too early. It did not allow sufficient time for fraternization between the newly enlisted workers and the veteran middle-class Guards to make possible the election of authentic republican officers. More fully than any of his associates, Blanqui, the most class-conscious and able tactician among the club leaders, grasped that more time would be needed for the new working-class Guards to overcome the traditional class prejudices of the bourgeois veterans. The demonstrators of March 17, again on Cabet's suggestion, demanded that the National Guard elections be postponed from late March to April 5, which was still a minimal and ineffectual delay.

The third and final issue for the planned demonstration involved the presence of regular army contingents in Paris, which deeply vexed the workers. Although these residual troops, according to Ledru-Rollin, numbered only about 2000, the workers were wary of the government's reasons for keeping them in the capital at all. Moreover, they had reason to suspect that Lamartine was in secret communication with the commander of regular army troops in Lille and with other officers who commanded full-sized brigades, some of which could quickly arrive at the capital by rail. The size and position of the military forces at the government's disposal thus was a troubling issue in the minds of the militant workers, who had no well-organized force of their own to defend their interests. They wanted the army contingents to be removed.

All of these concerns were reinforced on March 9, when a demonstration of three thousand businessmen marched from the Bourse, or Parisian stock exchange, to the Hôtel de Ville, threatening to lock out their workers if their maturing notes were not granted a three-month extension. Although their demonstration was followed by a crowd of students who voiced their support for the government against the Bourse, it was apparent that reactionary

discontent was now migrating from private homes and cafés to the streets, vitiating the *fraternité* that had prevailed during the February barricades.

Blanqui, mindful of the gravity of the situation, tried on March 14 to bring the republican clubs together to make a common public show of strength. At a meeting in the home of Benjamin Flotte, he helped form a central committee that consisted of representatives of 14 clubs and 300 labor organizations, with the goal of petitioning the government for the satisfaction of their three demands. When the council of ministers refused to receive the committee's spokesmen, the working-class leaders decided that the time had arrived to give open expression to their demands by calling a mass demonstration in the capital.

This demonstration probably would have been held later than March 17, but it was precipitated by a parade of elite units of the National Guard who were determined to protest what they regarded as the excessively egalitarian principles of the Revolution. By the Provisional Government's decree of February 24 opening the Guard to all able-bodied adult males, some 90,000 newcomers were now poised to enter the militia's ranks. Most of them were workers, raising the possibility that they might outnumber the middle-class Guards. Mass pressure from the workers, moreover, compelled the Provisional Government to dissolve the Guard's elite bourgeois grenadier battalions—distinguished by their ornate uniforms and high bearskin hats, or *bonnets à poil*—and disperse them among socially mixed legions. These disbanded “bearskins,” as they were called, were now faced with the socially humiliating prospect of having to serve in units composed of members of the lower classes—and the prospect of marching alongside shabby workers with calloused hands made them shudder.

On March 16, in protest of this threatened degradation, some 30,000 *bonnets à poil*, resplendently uniformed, marched through the streets of the capital to the Hôtel de Ville. En route, when the “bearskins” reached the Pont au Change (near Notre Dame), they encountered an angry group of cabinetmakers, mechanics, and typographers who vigorously shouted: “Down with the *bonnets à poil*!” This counterdemonstration of the workers may not have been entirely spontaneous; some reports have it that Caussidière, the police prefect and a close associate of Ledru-Rollin, had rallied the working-class hecklers to humiliate the elite Guards and give them a public tongue-lashing.

Nonetheless, the demonstration of the “bearskins” in support of their elite status revealed once again that, less than a month after the February Days, reaction was already openly mobilizing its supporters. To the heckling of the workers on the Pont au Change, the Guards flung back, with equal hostility, “Down with the communists!” and “Down with Ledru-Rollin!” These imprecations were peculiarly hollow: the word *communist* at this time denoted the followers of the pacifist ideas of Cabet, who in February, despite his

communist beliefs, had enjoined the insurgents to scrupulously respect private property and support the middle-class republic. Indeed, in the opinion of the Countess d'Agoult and even Lamartine, Cabet's generally moderate views had played a role in restraining the Parisian workers from challenging the Provisional Government. Even more absurdly, Ledru-Rollin, a founder of the moderate *La Réforme*, was drifting steadily to the right and trying to shed his image as a radical. Nonetheless, that thousands of Guards would openly denounce the tepid acolytes of Cabet and the left-leaning liberalism of Ledru-Rollin would have been inconceivable a few weeks earlier. As Georges Duveau notes, the cry “Down with Ledru-Rollin!” is “worth remembering, for it was the first time the reactionary element had raised its voice.”¹⁰

The March 16 demonstration of the elite Guards failed to alter the ministers' decision to eliminate their special status: the Provisional Government was still republican enough to stand by its own decree and the egalitarian principles it embodied. The Guards were informed that the democratization of their ranks would proceed as planned, and they had no choice but to submit to the government's changes. But the Parisian working class could not permit the arrogant behavior of the elite Guards to go unanswered, and on the night of March 16, the clubs were feverishly planning for a massive counterprotest against the “bearskins” and in support of their three basic demands.

The next morning, on March 17, an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 people, mainly workers, rallied in the Place de la Concorde. The leadership of the march belongs not only to Cabet but also to Blanqui, who more than any single individual articulated the deeply felt concerns of the workers. The demonstrators carried a petition, drawn up by Cabet, to withdraw the remaining regular troops from Paris and postpone the National Guard and Constituent Assembly elections. Beating drums, singing the “Marseillaise,” and chanting slogans, the crowd wound its way through the very center of bourgeois Paris to the Hôtel de Ville. In a solemn and orderly fashion, they strode behind the banners of their various trade organizations and clubs—indeed, a sea of banners, denoting the tide of associationism that had swept over the Parisian workers since the February Revolution—as well as a multitude of tricolors, and the national flags of all the exiles in Paris, including the Russian flag, for among the exiles in the march were the novelist Ivan Turgenev and the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin.

The procession was massive. Indeed, the enormity of the crowd and its very orderliness were redolent of the great *journées* of 1792–93 and testimony to the latent power of the working classes and their extraordinary capacity for organization. Yet the demonstration struck panic into the hearts of the notables and bourgeoisie, who long associated republicanism with bloodthirsty mobs, riots, and terror. Ironically, although many of the demonstrators were merely expressing their support for the new Republic, this massive turnout stunned not only the middle classes but even moderate socialists who fancied the

demonstration too massive for their liking. Indeed, Blanc panicked at the size of the *journée* and began to tilt toward the government's side as soon as the first demonstrators reached the Place de Grève.

In retrospect, the March 17 demonstration was the largest show of republican strength in 1848. Moreover, it may well have been the only moment that spring when the working classes could actually have taken over the government with very little bloodshed. Such an insurrectionary plan, in fact, does seem to have existed: police chief Caussidière was eager to enlist Ledru-Rollin, the darling of the lower middle class, and Armand Barbès to join their old *Saisons* colleague Blanqui and mobilize the workers for an uprising. The revolt he envisioned was to purge the government of its conservative members and turn the Revolution leftward.

Such an attempt, had it been made, could well have succeeded, since no military force yet existed in Paris that was strong enough to prevent it. But Ledru-Rollin was too eager to curry favor with the moderate republicans to collaborate with Blanqui. Nor would Barbès even think of joining forces with his old co-conspirator, who he had come to hate with an almost manic frenzy. Indeed, in Max Nomad's judgment, "the fate of the Revolution of 1848 was sealed by the contemptuous attitude toward Blanqui of Ledru-Rollin and Blanc, and the growing hatred of Barbès.

The moment was very favorable for a well-nigh bloodless revolution which would have removed the Right from the Provisional Government. But such a victory would have meant the ascendancy of the Richelieu of the Revolution, as some historians have called Blanqui. . . . As a result, not only near radical-Liberals like Ledru-Rollin, and moderate socialists like Louis Blanc, but even revolutionary communists like Armand Barbès, who incidentally had a personal grudge [against Blanqui], preferred to remain passive—thus paving the way for a complete victory of the Right.¹¹

Blanqui, whose strategic sense of revolutionary possibilities had become more sophisticated over the years, may well have been unwilling to do more than purge the Provisional Government of reactionaries. But if Nomad's speculations are correct, then it would seem that the Revolution of 1848 was doomed to failure in part, at least, by the pettiness and irresolution of its key radical leaders. The result was that the demonstration did nothing but terrify the bourgeoisie without gaining much for the workers.

When the parade reached the Hôtel de Ville, the meeting that took place between the workers' delegation and the Provisional Government ministers was a study in pathos. The ministers, including Blanc, were obliged to leave the safety of the Hôtel de Ville and descend its steps to face the crowded Place de Grève as a visible acknowledgment of the demonstrators' petition. The more

militant workers in the square were hardly deceived by this gesture. As Blanc was to later recount, "a man of energetic mein, and whose flashing eyes lit up the extreme paleness of his face, rushed impetuously towards me, and seizing me by the arm, wrathfully exclaimed, 'You are then a traitor, even you!'"¹²

This angry accusation was not without justification. To be sure, the ministers did accede to some of the demonstrators' demands. Mainly on the insistence of Blanc and Albert, they agreed to postpone the National Guard elections to April 5, and they agreed to postpone the national elections—although not to May 31, as the demonstrators had wanted, but to April 23, leaving committed republicans and socialists with little more than a month to produce a sea change in the peasantry. But the ministers adamantly refused to budge on the demand for the removal of the remaining army troops, ostensibly on the grounds that the bulk of the army was outside the capital—which in itself was very unnerving to the workers.

Thus, in retrospect, the March 17 *journée* was a failure. It had achieved only a few concessions from the Provisional Government, and it left the split within the National Guard unhealed. The revolution remained incomplete, not only in a social sense but even in a formal sense. The democratic gains of the February period had been extremely fragile to begin with and could easily be swept away by a reactionary Constituent Assembly. Finally, having frightened the bourgeoisie and notables by its size and force, the *journée* propelled them into taking serious action against any prospective working-class challenge. The history of revolutions shows repeatedly that there is nothing more dangerous than a terrified middle class, whose vindictiveness is matched only by its cowardice. The militant workers in the clubs seemed to understand this, and for nearly a month after March 17, they placarded the city with warnings that Lamartine and his ministers were risking a serious confrontation with the masses.

THE JOURNÉE OF APRIL 16

If the March 17 *journée* was "the last glorious day of the democratic party," to use the words of Louis Ménard,¹³ thereafter the shaky bloc of moderate republicans, radical republicans, socialists, and communists—of workers and middle classes—who had supported the republic despite their mutual distrust, began to fall apart as each divided against the others, along not only class but even vocational lines.

This process of disintegration was accelerated two weeks after the *journée*, when a sensational effort was made to defame Blanqui and to divide the radical movement. Almost ten years earlier, according to one Jules Taschereau,

Blanqui, while in police custody, had confessed confidential information about the *Saisons* putsch of May 1839. This seemingly compromising "confession," which Taschereau published in his *La Revue rétrospective*, contained information about the alleged plot that only Blanqui and a few of his co-conspirators could have known. Barbès, whom Blanqui had dragged from his sybaritic lifestyle at his estate in the south to participate in the 1839 uprising, was now only too eager to corroborate Taschereau's questionable claims and thoroughly blacken his old comrade's name.

In Paris the sensational document became a widely discussed topic in cafés and salons, even leading to street brawls. Appearing as it did in the aftermath of the March 17 *journée*, its authenticity might reasonably have been viewed with deep suspicion. Taschereau himself had been a suspected police informer under Louis-Philippe, while Barbès was by now Blanqui's sworn foe. Above all, the "revelation" came at a very convenient time for the government: it knew only too well that its greatest danger came from Blanqui and his associates. Nothing could have served its purposes better than to defame the old revolutionary and thereby foment a serious division in the radical camp.

There is no compelling evidence, however, that Blanqui actually made the confession published by Taschereau. The document was not written in his hand, nor was his name even mentioned in it. Moreover, even if Blanqui had made it, he certainly gained absolutely nothing from doing so—neither the police nor the judicial system treated him with any leniency whatever. A close study of the document, in fact, revealed that it contained very little that was not already known to other people in the *Saisons* or to the police spies who had infiltrated the organization.

Blanqui's reply, as logical and powerful as it was, might have blasted his opponents to the lower depths and laid to rest most of the accusations against him, had he not been beleaguered by so many opponents who were eager to believe the document, discredit him personally, and above all divide the revolutionary movement that he had done so much to organize. Although the Taschereau document cast a shadow over him that persisted to the end of his days, it did little to diminish Blanqui's influence with the workers, many of whom all but revered him for his dedication and sacrifices.

While the Taschereau document was generating mistrust and inciting acrimony among the various republican factions, the government was busily engaged in bolstering the military forces at its command, bringing the Mobile Guard up to full strength. At the same time it tried to fan the prejudicial flames that divided the working-class and bourgeois units of the National Guard. The privileged classes, frightened by the March 17 *journée*, were soon spoiling for another confrontation. When it finally came, it was under circumstances that were so idiosyncratic that, were its effects not so tragic, it might well have constituted a comedy of absurd errors.

On April 5, the general elections for the National Guard officers were held as scheduled. But for a variety of reasons, republican and working-class candidates who were challenging the veteran Guard officers did not receive enough votes to prevail. The commander of the National Guard, Courtais, thereupon decided to allocate fourteen staff officer positions specifically for working-class members, in a special election that was to take place at the Champ de Mars on the morning of April 16.

Moreover, apparently on Blanc's inspiration, the workers at the Champ de Mars were also expected to express their goodwill toward the republic by taking up a monetary collection in the government's behalf. It was then planned that they would march in a peaceful procession along the Right Bank to transport this "patriotic donation" to the Hôtel de Ville, carrying tricolors and trade banners in an orderly array. There they were also expected to present the government with a petition that mildly appealed for more socially oriented policies. The ministers were not in the dark about these plans: Blanc had advised them the day before that they should expect a peaceful march, and that the crowd would bring them not only a "patriotic donation" but a number of social demands as well.

The conservative ministers, however, were only too eager to treat this planned march as an insurrectionary *journée*. Feeding this strategy was a particularly reckless article in the *Bulletin de la République* on April 14, published while its editor was absent from his office. Written by George Sand, the article's provocative language threatened insurrection unless the upcoming Constituent Assembly elections, only a week away, returned a radical majority. As the famous novelist luridly put it:

Unless the elections bring about the triumph of *social truth*, if they are no more than an expression of the interests of one class, wrenched from the loyal and trusting people, then the elections which should be the salvation of the Republic will be its destruction, of that there can be no doubt. Then there will be only one road to the salvation for the people who set up the barricades, and that will be to demonstrate their wishes for a second time and put off the decisions taken by a false *national representation*.¹⁴

In anticipation of an insurrection, Lamartine says in his memoir, he frantically prepared his will and burned his secret papers, while still other ministers scurried around the capital, making preparations to counter a working-class uprising.

Sand also alleged that Blanqui was conspiring (this time without Barbès, Caussidière, and Flocon) to use the upcoming "insurrection" to forcibly replace Lamartine with—of all people—that paragon of wayward radicalism, Ledru-Rollin. The month before, of course, Ledru-Rollin had contemptuously rejected

any collaboration with Blanqui and was himself moving steadily toward the right. Indeed, that Blanqui was conspiring to overthrow the government at all on April 16 is hardly credible. As Blanc has convincingly documented, on the day before the march the revolutionary spent several hours conversing in a rather amiable manner with Lamartine in the minister's home, who apparently was trying to use his irresistible charms—as he supposed—to win the radicals to his side. Marx, more realistically, writes that the government needed “an excuse for recalling the army to Paris,” which seems the most probable reason for its show of hysteria in reaction to the proposed demonstration.¹⁵

When the morning of April 16 arrived, tens of thousands of unarmed workers gathered at the Champ de Mars, wholly unaware that insurrectionary intentions were being imputed to them. In a festive but organized mass, they cast their ballots for their fourteen Guard officers, then took up the “patriotic donation” and began their march to the Hôtel de Ville. The demonstration was entirely peaceful, indeed almost solemn. Their trade banners and signs called for the “organization of labor” and an end to “the exploitation of man by man,” general slogans that were anything but provocative, still less menacing. Finally, the tone of their petition was anything but belligerent:

Citizens, the re-action raises its head; calumny, the favourite weapon of unprincipled and dishonourable men, is on all sides assailing with its venomous falsehoods the true friends of the people. It is for us, the men of the Revolution, men of action and devotedness, to declare to the Provisional Government that the people decree the Democratic Republic; that the people desire the abolition of man's servitude to man; that the people desire the organization of labor by association. *Vive la République! Vive le Gouvernement Provisoire!*¹⁶

Despite this exclamatory closing endorsement of the Provisional Government, a rumor was spread through Paris during the march that the workers were planning to seize the city hall and proclaim a “communist” government. Precisely who spread this rumor remains a mystery, but one of the ministers immediately authorized that the National Guard be summoned to arms, not by the usual *rappel* but by a “general alarm,” a rare drumbeat and bugle call that was sounded only in an extreme emergency or general state of siege.

The peaceful, mostly placid and unarmed demonstrators made their way from the Champ de Mars across the Pont Royal. As they moved toward the Hôtel de Ville, however, they suddenly ran up against some 50,000 armed and extremely hostile National Guards with muskets and bristling bayonets. The city hall was surrounded by a veritable army of Guards and even hostile workers from the National Workshops. Indeed, to reach the city hall, the demonstrators were obliged to file through a gauntlet of jeering Guards, who

derided them as “communists,” while Mobile Guard units, which had been interspersed among the marchers, sectioned off the demonstrators into small groups, ostensibly to prevent a coup.

Who had ordered the provocative mobilization? Although several ministers later claimed this very dubious honor, it was actually none other than Ledru-Rollin, in consultation with Lamartine, who had placed the capital in a state of siege. The minister of the interior had now definitively cast his lot with Lamartine against the workers. Nor was he the only prominent radical to thoroughly discredit himself on April 16: Barbès, as a colonel in the National Guard, marched in full uniform at the head of his unit, prepared to defend the Hôtel de Ville against an attack by workers.

The workers were astonished by this reception, and they were no less astonished to learn that their delegation, bearing the “patriotic donation” for the Provisional Government, had been received not by the council's ministers but by the deputy mayor of the city. They were humiliated, even degraded by this behavior and by the large show of military force, which treated an orderly march as a virtual insurrection. It was now clear that two distinct worlds had emerged out of the February barricades—the masses of people who worked with their hands and the privileged population that lived off their labor. The government could no longer be trusted to defend the workers' interests, nor did the presence of Blanc and Albert alleviate the fact that it was bourgeois to the core. As Duveau metaphorically puts it,

The shop counter had carried the day over the factory bench, and from April 16 onward a great wave of social reaction began to spread over the country. “All devoted republicans,” wrote Caussidière, “are lumped together under the name of communists.”¹⁷

After April 16, the “party of order”—the privileged classes and the small shopkeepers, united in common hostility to the workers' demands—emerged with increasing strength and confidence. In fact, five days later, on April 21, the government predictably used the specious *journée* as an excuse to bring five army regiments—three infantry and two cavalry—into Paris. Although Albert, at the council of ministers, vehemently protested this provocative move, the ministers refused even to record their decision in the official *Moniteur*. Thus the decision to bring in army troops was legally withheld from the public at large, but ordinary citizens could soon see troop contingents and cavalry patrols at various strategic places in Paris. If the militants of April needed any evidence that the revolution was slipping from their hands, the steady tramp of line troops and the clatter of cavalry hooves on the cobbled streets was an ever-present reminder of their loss of power.

THE GROWING CRISIS

In the days before the election of representatives to the Constituent Assembly, delegates from the Club of Clubs began to send to the capital ominous reports on the political state of mind in the rural areas of France. Writing on April 13 from Saint-Cloud, outside Paris, one delegate's report provided a remarkable description:

The farther I go from the big cities the more I come across memories of the past and incomprehension of the present. . . . In Paris among those great enlightened people who overturned the government of vested interests it is appreciated that social inequality is a thing of the past. People hope for the future that was proclaimed by the man from Nazareth. In the principal towns of the various departments you also find noble, loyal hearts, spirits that foresee the future opened up for us by the coming of the Republic. But in the smaller places everything is different. The citizens are the victims of their own selfishness, or narrow-mindedness and of deplorable prejudices.

The writer then went on to emphasize that the

bourgeoisie, nobles and money-grubbers, who yesterday were divided into many different camps, today make common cause in order to change the nature of the Revolution and to stem the tide of reform. . . . The workers who are still dependent on these people—and who feel it—do not dare to lift up their heads. In public or in the clubs they protest only by their silence against the anti-liberal sentiments expressed by the aristocrats.¹⁸

On April 23, Easter Sunday, adult males all over France went to the polls, most of them for the first time, to elect a Constituent Assembly. In accordance with the Provisional Government's decree mandating universal manhood suffrage, eighty-two percent of Frenchmen over twenty-one years of age participated in the elections. As Blanqui had warned, most of the provincial voters followed the guidance of their social betters, such as the notables, clergy, and employers, and in some backward areas peasants were marched in troops by priests to polling places or voted under the watchful eyes of local notables.

If the April 16 demonstration was a humiliating failure for the Parisian radicals, the results of these elections were a disaster for all conscientious French republicans. The new Constituent Assembly, a body of 900 representatives, was composed mostly of men from provincial France; in fact, it contained a larger proportion of landowners, priests, and nobles than any assembly that had been elected even under the highly restrictive suffrage permitted by Louis-Philippe. At least half of the new Assembly consisted of

"moderate republicans"—in many cases, a euphemism for former monarchists who, while voicing support for the republic, had not forsaken their reactionary convictions. Less than ten percent of the seats were gained by radical republicans (who thenceforth called themselves "Montagnards," after the Jacobins of 1793), and at least a third of the representatives were expressly monarchist in their leanings, mostly Orleanists and a small number of Bourbon Legitimists.

By no means was this reactionary Assembly willing to let Louis Blanc and Albert retain leading positions in the government, although both men did win seats in the Assembly. Indeed, however fainthearted Blanc may have been in advancing the interests of the workers, the new government wasted no time, after it convened on May 4, in eliminating him and Albert from its executive body. It dispensed with the Provisional Government's council of ministers and created a new council, the Executive Commission, to manage the country's affairs. Like the Directory during the First Republic, the Commission was composed of five men (a "Pentarchy," as its critics labeled it disdainfully) and was placed completely under the thumb of the reactionary Assembly.

The members of the five-man Commission were all representatives of the ruling classes: Lamartine, Arago, Marie, Garnier-Pagès, and Ledru-Rollin. (The once-radical Ledru-Rollin was made a member of the government only on the insistence of Lamartine, as an expression of appreciation for the minister's betrayal of the workers on April 16.) The Parisian workers, who had carried the brunt of the February fighting and, more than any other part of the population, had created the republic, had no representatives on the Commission at all. On May 4, as if to declare that the February Revolution was definitively over so far as the ruling classes were concerned, the Assembly officially proclaimed that France was merely a "formal" rather than a "social" republic, thus ending any hopes among the workers that their economic needs would be satisfied.

But the election of the predominantly reactionary Assembly cannot be blamed exclusively on the provincial vote alone. All of petty-bourgeois and bourgeois Paris—indeed, all men of property—had come out in force to defeat the working-class candidates, and their numbers were considerable. Out of the twenty radical candidates nominated by the Luxembourg Labor Assembly, Parisians elected only one, while Blanqui was defeated with a humiliating vote. Even the generally amiable and theatrical Barbès lost out in Paris and acquired a seat in the Assembly only because he was chosen by voters from a different department. As a whole, the Parisian electorate gave more votes to conservative ministers like Garnier-Pagès and Marie than to Louis Blanc. Although Blanc was elected as a representative, he received less than half the vote that was given to Lamartine, while Cabet, the darling of March 17, and the Fourierist Considérant suffered crushing defeats. The result was an Assembly that had little sympathy for the Parisian workers. As Samuel Bernstein observes,

A no-man's-land lay between the Assembly and workers. The Chamber was heavily committed to abide by the *status quo*. Consequently it made no advances to the workers, did nothing to ease their pains or to disarm their wrath. Theirs were fallen hopes. The illusions that had mantled the National Workshops were dispelled. Only their charitable character remained to chide human dignity; and even this source of relief, rumour had it, would soon stop. . . . Workers were dispirited, nearly desperate.¹⁹

After the elections, popular participation in the club movement dropped precipitously: out of 200 clubs in the greater Paris area during March and April, fewer than sixty continued to meet in May and June, and clubs that had formerly attracted thousands of members shriveled to only a few hundred or less. Perhaps one reason for the decline was that many workers had regarded the clubs primarily as a means of preparing for the elections, abandoning them once the voting, with its disappointing results, was over. But the decline in the clubs also seems to have reflected the sense of defeat that the workers felt after the April 15 *journée*. But the clubs that remained were radical ones: they held discussions that ranged far beyond issues of parliamentary power to more social issues, giving greater attention than before to wealth differentials, the organization of work, and the need for a "democratic and social republic."

The reactionary complexion of the Constituent Assembly nurtured their radicalism enormously. Militants felt they had little reason to follow a parliamentary course of action, and they increasingly sensed that Blanc's and Cabet's balms offered no possibility for improving their miserable condition. Even the cautious Blanqui returned to favoring organizations that resembled the secret societies of the 1840s. The demimonde that gained renewed vigor in the slums of Paris was one that favored armed working-class resistance.

THE JOURNÉE OF MAY 15

The working-class radicals in the clubs made one last desperate effort to retake the initiative from the growing counterrevolution—notably, in the *journée* of May 15.

This *journée* centered on two issues. The most important was the question of Polish liberation, a cause that was very popular in the capital. At that moment Prussia was occupied with brutally mopping up a bloody insurrection in Polish Posen, while Austria had been bombarding the venerable Polish city of Cracow. A Polish émigré committee petitioned France for help, since immediate assistance by French troops would be able to prevent serious reprisals against the rebels. The clubs demanded urgently that, unless Russia and Prussia freed

Poland in the next twenty-four hours, France should declare war against the two countries.

But the Constituent Assembly was continuing a policy of nonintervention abroad, a policy that had been established by the Provisional Government shortly after the February Days. Lamartine, as minister of foreign affairs, had then informed the European powers that

the proclamation of the French Republic is not an act of aggression against any sort of government in the world. There are differences between forms of government which are as legitimate as the different sorts of character, of geographical situation, and of intellectual, moral and material development seen in various nations.²⁰

With this reassurance to the continent's despots of their legitimacy, Lamartine had reduced the February Revolution to a purely national affair, peculiar to France in character and geography. But to militant French republicans, his statement stood in sharp contrast to the universalistic claims of the Great Revolution. It seemed to deny that France was the "mother of republics" and hence the foremost defender of liberty everywhere in the world. By all rights, they insisted, France must intervene to assist the cause of Polish liberty.

The second issue that gave rise to the *journée* was the demand, originally made by Blanc and Albert, that the Constituent Assembly create a Ministry of Labor and Progress. The demand had considerable support among the clubists, for whom it constituted a basic test of the Assembly's politics, determining whether the Second Republic would go beyond a purely formal republic to create a social republic as well. On May 11, when the Assembly flatly, indeed derisively, refused to create such a ministry, the workers knew that their interests had no place on the government's agenda.

Another *journée* was now unavoidable. The Parisian clubs, particularly infuriated by the refusal to help Poland, scheduled a demonstration for May 15, the day the Constituent Assembly was expected to debate French policy toward the desperate Polish situation. But did they also plan an insurrection? The increasingly reactionary *Le National* decided in retrospect that an uprising had indeed been planned. The day after the *journée*, the newspaper fumed that, under the cover of a demonstration "in support of Poland," a "plot was being mounted against the assembly, against the whole nation, whose life, essence, thought, and energy is expressed by the assembly."²¹ But the closest anyone came to making a public call for an insurrection was Joseph Sobrier, a socialistic republican who was actively involved in organizing the demonstration.

Sobrier had briefly occupied the position of prefect of police in February and, shortly after the February uprising, had helped Caussidière organize the auxiliary "Montagnards" force (not to be confused with the Montagnards in the

Assembly). He was now editor of the important club newspaper *La Commune de Paris*. On May 11, after the constituent assembly rejected Blanc's Ministry of Labor and Progress, Sobrier editorially declared that "the time of vain hopes has passed." "Will the hour of justice perhaps soon strike?" he asked ominously, ending his warning with the same battle cry that had been voiced by insurgent silk workers in Lyon in 1834: "Live working or die fighting!" Moreover, Sobrier's house seems to have served not only as the editorial offices of the *Commune de Paris* but as an informal headquarters for a *journée*, where weapons were deliberately stockpiled to arm the demonstrators in the event of an insurrection. Seven draft decrees, written by a journalist for *La Commune de Paris*, one Seigneuret, were later discovered in Sobrier's home, announcing that representatives in the Assembly were "excluded from all power" and that a Committee of Public Safety was to be appointed. One decree irresponsibly listed as committee members individuals who had no truck whatsoever with his plans.²²

Although accusations were made afterward that Blanqui had played a key role in planning the insurrection, his admonitions against rash action and his call for patience clearly belie such charges. The draft decrees found in Sobrier's house provide no evidence of his involvement in any attempted uprising. Nor does the fact that he appeared in the crowd on May 15 constitute evidence that he planned even to participate in a coup, let alone lead one. In fact, Blanqui was quite convinced that an attempted coup at that time would be a failure. Loyal to his club, he seems to have obeyed its decision to participate in the *journée* only reluctantly. Indeed, according to one newspaper account, Blanqui argued fervently for restraint. In response to a speaker who

demanded that the people should take action immediately, . . . the president of the club, M. Blanqui himself, has spoken out against him two days running, declaring that it would be imprudent to embark on matters in so hasty and drastic a fashion, that the working masses have so far no firm principles, and that by trying to press on so fast there was a risk of bringing everything into jeopardy.²³

Whatever plans for an insurrection were afoot, not only did Blanqui oppose them but so did Barbès and even Sobrier, who was reported to have soon been depressed about its prospects for success.

When May 15 came, a crowd assembled at the Place de la Bastille and began a solemn march to the Palais Bourbon. Estimates of the size of the column range from about 10,000 to 20,000. The actual number was likely somewhere in between, probably toward the lower end of the numerical spectrum. In any case, it was substantially smaller than the huge *journée* of March 17, and few of the demonstrators carried any arms. According to the plan, such as it may have been, if the crowd was fired upon, the demonstrators were expected to rush

home to retrieve their weapons, and only then return to fight—a logistically difficult if not absurd scenario.

No sooner did the demonstrators reach the Palais Bourbon than they came up against contingents of the Mobile Guard and National Guard, which had been deployed to protect the Assembly. General Courtais, who still commanded the National Guard, was disposed, because of his republican sentiments, to treat the demonstrators in a genial, if firm, manner. He tactfully ordered the Guards not to fire on the crowd and instead agreed to admit into the Chamber a delegation of twenty-five demonstrators, bearing a petition that called for a war in support of the Poles. But once the doors to the Palais Bourbon were opened, thousands of agitated demonstrators burst through, flooding the galleries to a point where the floors began to collapse. Some of the insurgents were forced to drop to the floor below, while others were swept directly into the assembly hall, where the deputies sat in frozen silence. Whether Blanqui cried "Forward!" to the surging crowd, as he is alleged to have done, is arguable; if he did, the old insurrectionist may have been temporarily carried away by the excitement of the moment. In any case, if there is any truth to the allegation, he seems to have quickly regained his composure and self-possession and behaved with considerable prudence.

Although the mayhem that followed this invasion seemed, to all appearances, like the kind of insurrectionary *journée* that had marked the Great Revolution, the appearance was entirely deceptive. Since the crowd was neither armed nor voiced any intention of disbanding the Assembly, it obviously had no plans to take over the government. It was moved more by a generous passion to aid the Poles than by any clearly formulated putschist intentions. If anything, the club leader François Raspail, an ardent revolutionary, read the petition on behalf of the Poles with deliberate and monotonous slowness (as he later told the court that tried him for his role in the May 15 events) in order to calm the crowd. Indeed, so much was Poland on the crowd's mind that when Blanqui, all but swept up to the dias of the Assembly, attempted to shift its attention from Poland to the organization of labor, he was quickly interrupted by Sobrier with the cry: "No, this is not what matters. Poland! Tell us about Poland!" This cry was echoed throughout the Chamber, compelling Blanqui to return to the main subject of public interest. As Duveau emphasizes, what the crowd wanted, despite its economic desperation, "was to sweep oppressive kings and oppressed peoples from the face of Europe. They wanted Ireland, Italy, Poland to be free."²⁴ Even the British ambassador Lord Normanby, a bitter enemy of the insurgents, noted that the crowd was anything but ill-humored and dangerous. In no way did they threaten the immobilized deputies who remained behind, many of whom, like Tocqueville, calmly sat out the Assembly's session with dignified imperturbability.

But the clubists who called the *journée* did not count on the emotional

instability of one of their leaders, Aloysius Huber, a fixture from the old demimonde of the secret societies, who seems to have been completely carried away by the uproar. Shoving Blanqui aside, Huber almost hysterically declared that the Constituent Assembly was dissolved. His declaration was echoed by calls from unknown individuals calling on the crowd to march to the Hôtel de Ville. This was indeed an open call for an insurrection. The excited crowd instantly set off for the city hall, with memories of the February uprising and its itinerary still fresh in their minds. In the background, they could hear the *rappel* being beaten, summoning the National Guard to arms to quell their action.

The *journée* was part mayhem, part farce—part, perhaps, the work of government agents as well—while the “takeover” of the Parisian city hall verged on opera bouffe. Barbès, notwithstanding his initial opposition to the whole affair, rushed to the forefront of the march, probably to upstage his old rival Blanqui—who, in fact, wisely lingered behind and soon drifted away. Under Barbès’s leadership, and with Albert’s support, the demonstrators arrived at the Hôtel de Ville and took over one wing of the building. They encountered no resistance: the officer commanding the guard of the huge structure, one Colonel Rey, was an old friend of Barbès and made no attempt to forcibly prevent the unarmed crowd from occupying the city hall.

Meanwhile the mayor of Paris, Marrast, simply shifted over to the other wing of the Hôtel de Ville, where he printed counterstatements against the “insurrection” and dropped them from windows to the crowd below. Barbès, from his own wing, proceeded to issue two decrees. “The people having dissolved the National Assembly, there remains no power but that of the People itself,” announced one, so the existing Constituent Assembly was replaced with a new “Commission of Government.” A second decree declared that “the Russian and German governments” were faced with war if they failed “to reconstitute Poland.”²⁵

What emerges from the various conflicting accounts of this event is that, after an hour of such operatics, a National Guard artillery officer arrested Barbès, and he, together with Raspail, Sobrier, Albert, and other working-class leaders, were carted off to jail. Blanqui managed to elude the police for ten days until he too was jailed. As to the crowd, it quickly dispersed once the Guard arrived, and its leaders were hauled away without resistance.

The demonstration of May 15 and its farcical “insurrection” provided the government with exactly the pretext it needed for curtailing working-class activities. Caussidière, who had stayed out of the entire adventure, was compelled to surrender his strategic position as chief of police to a “moderate republican,” and his armed “Montagnard” forces were disbanded. Blanc, who had barely escaped serious injury at the hands of the National Guards in the Palais Bourbon, had to use all his eloquence to retain his seat in the Assembly. In all, several hundred people were temporarily rounded up. All the militant

clubs and even the moderate ones were closed down for a time, and leaders such as Blanqui and Raspail, whose guidance would have been invaluable to the workers in the battles that lay ahead, were imprisoned.

Early in June, the Assembly passed a general law banning all street gatherings. This law, as Robertson observes, was so “ferocious” that “to stand unknowingly next to a person bearing a concealed weapon became a crime. The monarchy’s decrees seemed mild in comparison.” But the ban on gatherings did not subdue the workers of Paris. Indeed, having been pricked by the thorns of a reactionary parliamentary republic, the workers, Robertson adds, “began making cartridges again in their suburbs.”²⁶

In the weeks before the May 15 *journée*, the Executive Commission decided to proclaim a “Festival of Concord,” summoning all Parisians and provincials to the Champ de Mars in order to publicly express their feelings of national *fraternité*—and, above all, their solidarity with the government. The date had been set for Sunday, May 14. But when the fourteenth came around, the government and the Luxembourg Commission were locked in an angry battle, which obliged the Executive Commission to defer the festival to the following Sunday, May 21. On that blessed day, the festival finally took place. Lanterns lined the buildings from the Place de la Concorde to the Arc de Triomphe, and floats representing arts and industry were paraded before a huge crowd of onlookers. But *fraternité* was the sentiment most notably absent from the festival. Many Parisians ridiculed the floats and the pageantry, especially deriding the slogans supporting the government. As the Countess d’Agoult notes,

People laughed at the float that depicted agriculture, which the program described as being drawn by oxen with gilded horns. In fact it was pulled by twenty carthorses. They hooted at the five hundred maidens crowned with oak leaves who followed the cart. They jeered at the statue of the Republic with four lions crouched at her feet, and they generally regarded the Festival of Concord as a bad imitation of the Festival of the Supreme Being [which had been staged by Robespierre shortly before his fall from power].²⁷

The climax of the festival was to be a huge military review before the new Executive Commission, headed by Lamartine, and the Assembly representatives. But the review miscarried woefully. When the resplendently uniformed National Guards paraded by shouting “Long live the National Assembly!” their fellows in working-class blue *blouses* (or smocks) responded with the cry: “Long live the democratic and social republic!” Alongside the silent troops of the line marched the strangely unpredictable Mobile Guard, whose political loyalties aroused such concern in Tocqueville.

Thus, within a span of only three months, the veneration of *fraternité* that had existed in February had been replaced by a spirit of furious class hatred. The

liberals had behaved true to form: having patronized the working class when they needed their support against the July Monarchy, they quickly turned against the "blue blouses" once the workers demanded minimal social improvements for themselves and their families. Nor were the bourgeois and the notables prepared to permit any modification of the status quo. The pleas of the more decent elements of society—journalists, professionals, and even clerics like the Archbishop of Paris, who was deeply sensitive to the miserable lives of the workers—had no credibility with the employing and privileged classes. It was now apparent that there could be no reconciliation between the possessing and dispossessed classes of society. An explosion was looming on the horizon, one that would be the workers' last attempt to establish a "democratic and social republic" in 1848.

NOTES

1. Alphonse de Lamartine, *History of the French Revolution of 1848*, trans. unknown (London: Bell & Daldy, 1871), p. 226.
2. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, trans. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos (New York: Macmillan, 1896), p. 179.
3. Émile Thomas, "Conversations with M. Marie," from *Histoire des ateliers nationaux*, Document 85 in *Revolution from 1789 to 1906*, ed. Raymond Postgate (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 201-2.
4. Georges Duveau, *1848: The Making of a Revolution*, trans. Anne Carter (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 67.
5. Émile Thomas quoted in Louis Blanc, *1848: Historical Revelations* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1858), p. 146.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
7. Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 10: *Marx-Engels: 1849-51* (New York: International Publishers, 1978), p. 47.
8. Blanqui quoted in Samuel Bernstein, *Auguste Blanqui and the Art of Insurrection* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), p. 150.
9. Priscilla Robertson, *Revolutions of 1848: A Social History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 66.
10. Duveau, *Making of a Revolution*, p. 82.
11. Max Nomad, *Apostles of Revolution* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), p. 42.
12. Blanc, *Historical Revelations*, p. 309. Actually, this man was Benjamin Flotte, one of the demonstration's organizers.
13. Ménard quoted in Mark Traugott, *The Armies of the Poor: Determinants of Working-Class Participation in the Parisian Insurrection of June 1848* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 20.
14. Sand quoted in Duveau, *Making of a Revolution*, p. 89.
15. Marx, *Class Struggles in France*, p. 65; emphasis in the original. Blanc's evidence about the secret meeting between Blanqui and Lamartine appears in his *Historical Revelations*, pp. 338-42.

16. Blanc, *Historical Revelations*, pp. 316-17; emphasis in the original.
17. Duveau, *Making of a Revolution*, p. 92.
18. M. Prat (delegate of the Club of Clubs), Report from Saint-Cloud (April 13, 1848); in *1848 in France*, ed. Roger Price, Documents of Revolution series (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press; London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), p. 90.
19. Bernstein, *Blanqui and the Art of Insurrection*, p. 176.
20. *Les Murailles révolutionnaire de 1848*, in *1848 in France*, ed. Price, p. 70.
21. *Le National*, May 16, 1848, in *1848 in France*, ed. Price, p. 98.
22. "Documents Prepared for Issue in the Event of the Success of the Revolt of May 15," Document 91, reproduced in *Revolution from 1789 to 1906*, ed. Postgate, pp. 207-9.
23. As reported in *La Liberté* (Rouen, May 17, 1848), in *1848 in France*, ed. Price, p. 99.
24. Duveau, *Making of a Revolution*, p. 120.
25. "Decrees Actually Issued by Barbès During his One-Hour Occupation of the Hôtel de Ville, May 15," Document 92 in *Revolution From 1789 to 1906*, ed. Postgate, p. 209.
26. Robertson, *Revolutions of 1848*, p. 86.
27. Daniel Stern (pseud. for Countess d'Agoult), *Histoire de la révolution française*, vol. 3 (Paris: Gustave Sandre Librairie, 1853), p. 125.

CHAPTER 28 The Insurrection of June 1848

Although the immediate cause of the insurrection of June 23 to 26 was the government's decision to terminate the National Workshops, it was a profound underlying class conflict that brought it about. Militant and class conscious, women as well as men, the June insurgents had reached a complete impasse with the Assembly, and they were left with no recourse but to rise up in armed revolt.

In an extraordinary statement that appears to date from June, the workers of the nineteenth brigade of the National Workshops warned the Assembly:

Do not forget, Monarchists, that it was not that we could remain your slaves that we brought about a third revolution. We fought your social system, the sole cause of the disorder and poverty that devours and swallows contemporary society.¹

The first revolution had overthrown the absolute monarchy in 1789; the second, in 1830, had given rise to a royal constitutional system. In the third, the uprising of February 1848, the workers had hoped to achieve their "democratic and social republic," a hope that had gone unfulfilled because of the usurpers at the Hôtel de Ville. The workers had now exhausted every legal and moral means at their disposal to gain that republic, but the demand for the "third revolution" still persisted—that is, for the historical realization of the promise of the February barricades.

Many, perhaps the majority, of those who rose to complete the "third revolution" of June were essentially demanding basic economic changes, which they regarded as constituting a social republic: the expansion of the National Workshops into cooperatives with state assistance, universal compulsory education, living standards commensurate with their work, and free associations to govern their own economic and political affairs. As a placard on the Porte Saint-Marceau pronounced on June 23, the "democratic and social

republic" was "democratic in that all citizens are electors, ... social in that all citizens are permitted to form associations for work."²

To be sure, among the insurgents, there were undoubtedly many workers with broader social aspirations—socialists and communists, including Fourierists, Saint-Simonians, and Cabetists—who dreamed that the insurrection would usher in the public ownership of property in one form or another. But these men and women were probably a minority. Radical legends to the contrary notwithstanding, many of the insurgents thought of themselves as good republicans, and the tricolor was at least as conspicuous on the barricades as the red flag. Individuals from different walks of life participated in the June Days (even the poet and art critic Charles Baudelaire fought with the insurgents), but it was above all a historic and desperate working-class uprising—the first in revolutionary history.

Indeed, however limited were the immediate goals of the June insurrection, its implications were far broader, and again, no one saw them more clearly than Tocqueville:

What distinguished [the June insurrection], among all the events of this kind which have succeeded one another in France for sixty years, is that it did not aim at changing the form of government, but at altering the order of society. It was not, strictly speaking, a political struggle, in the sense which until then we had given to the word, but a combat of class against class, a sort of Servile War. It represented the facts of the Revolution of February in the same manner as the theories of Socialism represented its ideas; or rather it issued naturally from these ideas, as a son does from his mother. ...

It must also be observed that this formidable insurrection was not the enterprise of a certain number of conspirators, but the revolt of one whole section of the population against another.³

The fact is that the "servile war" that broke out on the barricades of June 23 was overwhelmingly a class war, indeed the first self-conscious and explicit working-class insurrection in history, and it was seen as such by the workers as well as by their opponents. It dissolved the myth of *fraternité*, which the conventional "formal" republicans had emblazoned together with their most sacred claims to *égalité* and *liberté*, and it added to them a right born of the social question. Or as Marx put it: "Only after being dipped in the blood of the *June insurgents* did the tricolor become the flag of the European revolution—the *red flag!*"⁴

“LIVE WORKING OR DIE FIGHTING”

If the workers were trying to achieve a “third revolution,” the counter-revolutionary Constituent Assembly was trying to turn back the clock of history to the state of affairs that had existed prior to February 24. How far back they wanted to turn it varied from one Assembly representative to another, a difficulty that sometimes confused the train of events. But the deputies, however much they disagreed with each other, were united in the conviction that the Parisian workers had to be suppressed. First, the Assembly officially disbanded the Luxembourg Commission, although the Luxembourg Labor Assembly continued to exist on its own as an extralegal body under the name *Société des Corporations Réunies*; indeed, adding insult to injury, the Executive Commission proceeded to occupy the Luxembourg Palace for its own sittings.

Once the Luxembourg was out of the way, the remaining clubs and trade corporations were next in line for repression. In the second week of June, Marrast, as mayor of Paris, took systematic steps to close down the corporations as well as the clubs by eliminating their municipally controlled meeting places. “Between June 12 and 16,” notes Peter H. Amann,

clubs still meeting in schools, hospitals, asylums, and palaces had their municipal authorization canceled. In some instances they simply found the school building where they met locked and barred. . . . The fact that organized craft workers were being denied public meeting places while employer groups were not, or that a displaced conservative club like the Democratic Club of the National Guard could turn to Marrast for help in finding a new home, lends weight to the charge of class discrimination.⁵

Ironically, Marrast’s restriction was counterproductive from his own perspective because many of the clubs, which had recovered after the repression following May 15, were actually calling upon the workers for restraint. These clubs had constituted an arena for the peaceful expression of working-class grievances, in contrast to open areas such as the Portes Saint-Martin and Saint-Denis, where workers who still congregated during the evenings voiced their anger in more vitriolic phrases, sometimes leading to violent arguments and near riots.

Meanwhile, late in May, behind closed doors, the government had begun its most consequential act of repression: the assault on the National Workshops. The Executive Commission ordered Émile Thomas to “invite” young unmarried male workers to either enlist in the army or be dropped from the Workshops’ rolls. Older or married workers who could not “formally prove residence in Paris for six months before May 24” were to be dismissed. Employers, in turn, were free to “requisition any number of employees” from

the Workshops—apparently at whatever wage rates they chose—and a worker’s refusal to accept such a job would result in dismissal. The rates, moreover, that the workers were obliged to accept were not hourly wages but piecework rates, which they hated as unduly exploitative. Finally, “brigades of workers” were to be sent to provincial departments, there to engage in “public works under the direction of the Engineers of Bridges and Roads.”⁶

Thomas, apparently appalled by the massive transformation in his project, asked that the issuance of the decree be delayed. On May 26, for this insolence, the young director was arrested by the minister of the interior and bundled off to Bordeaux under an armed escort. The explanation given to the public was that Thomas had been assigned to study canals in the provinces. So sudden and surreptitious was this “reassignment” that Thomas was denied any opportunity to visit with or even write to his mother before his departure. The director had, by then, become a thorn in the side of the Executive Commission. Although no friend of Blanc’s, Thomas was idealistic and seems to have come around to the Luxembourg’s way of thinking about the “organization of labor.” Had he remained in Paris, he might even have stirred up the workers. Once he arrived in Bordeaux, the government kept him under surveillance until late June—“a procedure so high-handed,” notes Priscilla Robertson, “that Louis-Philippe’s police would never have dared to try it.”⁷ In its arrogance and indifference to the rights of its citizenry, the Second Republic had outdone even the July Monarchy.

Before the decree of the Executive Commission could actually be issued, however, a second assault on the Workshops was being prepared from another governmental quarter: a group of Catholic reactionaries in the Assembly led by Count Falloux, a believer in a theocratic government who had been disposed to defend the Inquisition until political circumstances obliged him to veil his real views in a republican veneer. Falloux now proposed to close down the National Workshops completely, without the elaborate arrangements detailed in the Pentarchy’s plan.

Incredibly, Falloux’s proposal gained the support of Proudhon, as well as of the naive Victor Hugo. Proudhon later acknowledged that he had behaved like an imbecile, yet the content of the Falloux decree was consistent with his own hatred of doles, which was how he saw the National Workshops; hence his support for the proposal would have been no great departure for him in principle. In any case, the majority of the Assembly rejected Falloux’s proposal as too provocative, yet the rejection made little difference to the workers. The proposal had already been widely publicized, and the workers were only too aware that the workshops would be abolished by one means or another.

The measures against the National Workshops, however, could not have occurred at a worse time for the Parisian working class. Their economic straits were now desperate. Not only was a cholera epidemic raging in the city,

afflicting its poorer districts more severely than the wealthier ones, but unemployment had produced a desperate situation. In the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, about two-thirds of the workers were without jobs. Many of them relied entirely on their two-franc wage from the National Workshops to feed their families. Almost three-quarters of the furniture makers in the Faubourg, a very important craft in that area, were without regular work and were faced with outright starvation. These men and women were the most revolutionary people in Paris. Among the most active participants in the February rising, the men were probably the best trained in the use of arms and in street fighting, and later, as members of National Guard legions, National Workshop battalions, clubs, and trade unions, they had grown accustomed to acting with discipline and forethought. When Marrast closed the municipal buildings that had housed their club meetings, the workers of the Saint-Antoine held their own "open-air clubs," as they called them, to listen to orations, engage in debates, and formulate and discuss practical decisions.

In the meantime, the Luxembourg workers and the National Workshops workers, who had formerly been divided against each other, finally recognized their common grievances as a class. On June 18, the extralegal Luxembourg Assembly, led by Pierre Vincard and August Blum, now united with working-class leaders of the National Workshops and issued a joint statement declaring that "nothing is possible now in France but the Democratic and Social Republic."⁸ Although their statement was intended to calm the workers, their declaration was doubtless regarded as a challenge to the Constituent Assembly. As Blanc observed, the "three months" grace period that the workers, in February, had given to Lamartine to introduce major social changes "was past!"⁹

Finally, on June 21 the Executive Commission's sweeping decree dissolving the National Workshops was finally issued and published in *Le Moniteur*, producing a sensation among the workers. Crowds gathered throughout the poorer quarters of the city, debating, demonstrating, and slowly gathering into ever larger groups that clearly portended an uprising. Even the reactionary *Le Constitutionnel* belatedly (on June 23) disapproved of the government's handling of the decree.

More effort could have been made, in our view, to prepare opinion for the announcement; more prudence could have been shown. Because the announcement was sudden and because there was a lack of reassuring comment, there is a danger of jeopardizing this decision which has been staved off for so long.¹⁰

Nevertheless, even if the government had behaved more prudently in dissolving the Workshops, it is extremely unlikely that the result would have been significantly different.

THE BARRICADES OF JUNE

On Thursday morning, June 22, nearly 300 workers marched toward the Place du Palais-National carrying banners with the insignia "National Workshops" and singing the stirring "*Chant du départ*." Other crowds marched to the Hôtel de Ville, denouncing plans to ship former Workshop workers off to drain the unhealthy marshes of Sologne.

They appear to have chosen a spokesman in the person of a lieutenant from the National Workshops, Louis Pujol. Pujol was an apocalyptic mystic, whose scriptural-sounding *Prophecy of Days of Blood* seemed like a proletarian Book of Revelation. At nine o'clock that morning, he and four working men were delegated to question the Executive Commission about its plans for the workers under the newly published decree. Pujol asked Marie what the government would do if the workers resisted the decree. As Blanc tells the story, Marie responded that

"The workmen ... who do not submit to the decree will be sent out of Paris by force."...

The reply of M. Pujol ... was as follows: "Citizen Representatives, you insult men invested with a sacred character as delegates of the people; we withdraw with the profound conviction that you neither desire the organisation of labor, nor the prosperity of the French people."¹¹

By late afternoon, after the story of the interchange had circulated, thousands of workers from all parts of the city gravitated toward the Place du Panthéon and assembled there by torchlight, in great agitation. As if to add even greater drama to the events, the dark sky flashed with lightning and resounded with thunder. At the Palais Bourbon, Blanc could hear one continuous chant: "*Du pain ou du plomb!*" (Bread or lead!) By nine o'clock, according to police reports, the crowd before the Panthéon numbered in the tens of thousands. Pujol told the newly arrived workers what Marie had said and called upon them to swear vengeance, which they solemnly did. On the initiative of radical National Guards from the Twelfth Legion, they agreed to return to the Panthéon at six the next morning, Friday, June 23.

Despite the inclement weather, a huge crowd gathered again at the Place du Panthéon the next morning. There, at Pujol's direction, they marched with grave determination through the rain to the Place de la Bastille, their numbers swelling along the way. At the site where the Bastille had been besieged some sixty years before, the great mass of men and women uncovered their heads and knelt in homage to the revolutionary heroes and heroines who had fallen on July 14, 1789. Then, breaking up into columns and groups, they scattered to all the working-class neighborhoods and began to build barricades.

Over the next few days more than a 1000 barricades were built, according to a count made after the hostilities came to an end. They were concentrated mainly in the northeast, in the traditional working-class areas of Paris: the Faubourgs Saint-Martin, du Temple, and Poissonnière, extending into the heights of Montmartre; the Faubourg Saint-Antoine and the Place de la Bastille. But others sprang up in the Faubourg du Panthéon, the Latin Quarter, and Gentilly in the south; and in the Faubourg Saint-Jacques and the Cité in the center—with its well-guarded prize, the Hôtel de Ville. Thirty-eight were erected in the Rue Saint-Jacques alone, and nearly thirty along the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Antoine.

Although many of them were little more than tentative barriers to obstruct the movement of the government's troops, a large number were imposing structures, in some cases reaching as high as fifteen feet, with portholes for muskets, strongly reinforced by bulky objects, even trams and wagons. Tocqueville marveled at the workers' meticulousness in preparing their defenses:

In all the little streets surrounding [the Hôtel de Ville], I found people engaged in making barricades; they proceeded in their work with the cunning and regularity of an engineer, not unpaving more stones than were necessary to lay the foundations of a very thick, solid and even neatly-built wall, in which they generally left a small opening by the side of the houses to permit of ingress and egress.¹²

The grim determination, self-discipline, and courage with which the Parisian workers set about their task is attested by virtually all honest observers on both sides of this desperate social war. Walking along the right bank of the Seine at four o'clock on the afternoon of June 23, Alexander Herzen, the Russian revolutionary exile, noticed that as "the shops were shutting, columns of the National Guard with sinister faces were marching in different directions." A bell sounded from Saint-Suplice, summoning the workers to arms.

On the other side of the river, barricades were being thrown up in all the streets and alleys. I can see now those gloomy figures dragging the stones, women and children helping them. A young Polytechnic student climbed one barricade that apparently was finished, unfurled the flag and began singing the Marseillaise in a mournfully solemn voice, all who were working joined in, and the chorus of the grand song resounding over the stones of the barricades made the heart throb. ... The alarm bell still rang out. Meanwhile, there was the thud of artillery over the bridge, and General Buguot on the bridge scanned through a field-glass the *enemy's* position.¹³

A coalescence was taking place among the crowds roaming around the capital, chanting slogans that grimly vowed to resist the government's decrees and policies. Had any coordinated leadership created this coalescence? Certainly various organizations spoke for various strata within the working population, such as the Union of Brigadiers of the National Workshops and the now-semimilitary *Société des Droits de l'Homme*, which lived on memories of the great *journées* of 1792-93. But there was no overall plan for an insurrection, and no guiding military strategy or organization—still less a party that had a strategy for taking over the government. With their ablest leaders jailed in the Vincennes, the workers rose up mainly on their own, and local militants—usually men with military training, such as insurgent National Guards—provided them with leadership. Every serious account of the June insurrection indicates that the insurgents acted with extraordinary spontaneity and ingenuity. Tocqueville notes that they "fought without a war-cry, without leaders, without flags, and yet with a marvellous harmony and an amount of military experience that astonished the oldest officers."¹⁴ About half of the insurgents seem to have been National Workshop workers.

Within a given street or its environs, the spontaneous coordination of the workers was astonishing. Women and children took over noncombative tasks, such as repairing damaged barricades, provisioning supplies and water for the combatants, caring for the wounded, and the like. Each neighborhood tried to cast lead and zinc bullets for its fighters, and to produce black gunpowder—often compelling reluctant local chemists to help them. But even as the neighborhoods coordinated their activities peacefully and efficiently, no coordination existed between the *quartiers* or even between barricades only a few streets distant. In its structure, the insurrection almost seemed a matter of individual neighborhoods rising up, rather than large sections of the city as a whole. As Blanc tells us,

This insurrection, so general in its causes and in its spirit, assumed at almost every point the character of a local protest. In many districts, the inhabitants reserved to themselves exclusively the guard of their own barricades, *rejected the assistance of strangers, and after closing all access to their streets, refused to cooperate in the general attack.*¹⁵

Even barricades that could have easily spared men commonly refused to send them to support insurgents in other faubourgs who were being hard pressed by government troops.

This orientation was not the result of myopia, or of a failure to understand that the fate of each barricade depended ultimately on the fate of all. It was due in great part to recent radical history, as Amann notes, which associated coordination and strategy with failure, as exemplified by impotent conspirators

like Barbès and Blanqui and with the abortive conspiracies of secret societies like the *Saisons*.

Successful revolutions, on the contrary, were assumed to be spontaneous (and therefore unplannable) upheavals of the masses—witness July 1789, July 1830, and February 1848. By June 1848 everyone foresaw violence, widespread popular violence provoked by a hostile government. But no revolutionary organization dreamed that it could control the direction, intensity, and timing of that violence.¹⁶

The insurgents, fearing any degree of coordination that might demand even a modest sacrifice of local autonomy, veered to the extreme of almost pure spontaneity and independent decision-making. This highly anarchistic mentality was to make the uprising disastrously vulnerable to attacks by the government and its troops, which carefully coordinated its strategy on a citywide scale. The June insurgents seemed unwilling to take conscious control of the coming storm and draw up plans for dealing with it on a wider scale so that their uprising, while retaining considerable local flexibility, could make systematic headway against the well-disciplined troops that confronted them. This fetishization of untempered localism and spontaneity sealed the fate of the insurrection.

Nevertheless, for a time the question of whether the government would be able to hold Paris at all was very much in question. The Mobile Guard, the army, and the bourgeois units of the National Guard were placed under the command of General Eugène Cavaignac, who had acquired a reputation for ferocity in campaigns against Algerian tribesmen. Cavaignac decided not to attack the insurgents or obstruct their barricade building until he had completely equipped and massed his own troops. As a result of his inaction, on Friday, fully half of Paris fell into the hands of the insurgents.

Tocqueville, amazed that the army had permitted this to happen, asked General Lamoricière why his troops had not engaged the insurgents.

"What are you doing?" I asked him. "They have already been fighting at the Porte Saint-Denis, and barricades are being built all round the Hôtel de Ville."

"Patience," he replied, "we are going there. Do you think we are such fools as to scatter our soldiers on such a day as this over the small streets of the suburbs? No, no! we shall let the insurgents concentrate in the quarters which we can't keep them out of, and then we will go and destroy them. They sha'n't escape us this time."¹⁷

Shrewdly, Cavaignac aimed to avoid a guerrilla war against numerous elusive bands of workers. In such fighting, in the capital's intricate streets and alleys,

even his well-disciplined troops would clearly have been at a disadvantage. Rather, he preferred to corral as many of the insurgents as he could into fixed positions that could be easily encircled and fight them like one field army opposing another, striking annihilating blows against a relatively small number of well-defended positions.

Despite their desperation, the insurgents behaved with exemplary decency, respecting the well-being and property of people whose neighborhoods they occupied. They committed no serious crimes; even jewelry shops remained untouched, and Victor Hugo could report that although his house was searched, probably for arms and ammunition, all his personal belongings remained in place, including his manuscript for *Les Misérables*. The workers were eager to show that they were not the riff-raff that their enemies had depicted them as being. They continued to collect the usual taxes at the city's tollgates, permit anyone to use the semaphore telegraph (as long as they did not report on the battle), and even set free a number of prisoners, who were duly permitted to cover their uniforms with workmen's *blouses*.

THE FOUR DAYS

At around ten o'clock on Friday morning, June 23, Cavaignac finally put his troops into action, starting a conflict that lasted until Monday, June 26, when the last barricade in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine was taken. For much of that time, the insurgents held their own, with astonishing boldness, against substantially larger and better-equipped military forces. Barricades were taken and retaken as the fighting surged and ebbed furiously in the squares, boulevards, and narrow streets.

As described by the novelist and Assembly member Victor Hugo, the first skirmish took place at a barricade near the Porte Saint-Denis. When the loyalist National Guards ordered its defenders to surrender, the barricade fighters responded by opening fire, killing thirty Guards. Soon "a young woman, beautiful, disheveled, and terrible" climbed to the top of the barricade.

The girl, who was a woman of the streets, hoisted her skirts up to her waist and yelled at the National Guards, "Cowards, fire, if you dare, at the belly of a woman." A volley of fire hurled the unfortunate creature down. She gave a loud scream and fell. Immediately, a second woman appeared. This one was younger and lovelier still, little more than a child, seventeen at most. She too was a woman of the streets. Like the other she showed her stomach and screamed, "Fire brigands!" They fired and she fell, riddled with bullets, on the body of the first.¹⁸

The novelist's judgment that the women were prostitutes may well have been the product of a middle-class prejudice, but his account decidedly reveals the incredible courage and bravery of the insurgents.

To reconquer the city, Cavaignac divided his forces into three columns, sending the first and largest, under the command of General Lamoricière, into the heart of the insurgent center, between the Faubourg Poissonnière and the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. It made slow progress and encountered such furious resistance that at least part of the column had to retreat. The second column, under General Bedeau, was dispatched to relieve the troops at the Hôtel de Ville, which the insurgents had nearly succeeded in capturing. The third, commanded by General Damesme, was ordered into the Left Bank to march toward the Panthéon and take the twelfth *arrondissement*.

Surrounded by mazes of barricades, the three columns were soon isolated from each other, easy prey to insurgent sniper fire. As the city settled down to a relatively quiet night, the commanders were obliged to hold a council of war to reassess their strategy, while the insurgents repaired existing barricades and built new ones.

On the second day, Saturday, the fighting was bloody and inconclusive but generally went even better for the insurgents than it had the day before. The government's attempts to take the northern districts met with more failures than successes. The insurgents captured the local city halls (*mairies*) of the eighth and ninth *arrondissements*, coming within striking distance of the Hôtel de Ville. Indeed, after expelling the eighth *arrondissement* mayor, the seemingly ubiquitous Victor Hugo, they set up a revolutionary government in its place. Here the able leadership of Léon Lacollonge, the president of the club named *L'Organisation du travail* and editor of its eponymous newspaper, was essential, organizing the efforts of the members of the Club des Antonins. The revolutionary government issued a manifesto calling for a "social and democratic Republic; Free association of Labour, aided by the State; the impeachment of the Representatives of the People and of the ministers, ... the immediate arrest of the Executive Commission," and "the removal of troops from Paris."¹⁹ Only the Mobile Guards, on the Left Bank in the Panthéon area, made significant progress for the government. Their political loyalties were no longer indeterminate—they fought eagerly on behalf of the generals. Meanwhile the Assembly used the uncertain military situation—what it called a "state of siege"—to unseat Lamartine and the rest of the Pentarchy and to make Cavaignac dictator, endowing him with extraordinary powers to crush the insurrection.

The third day, Sunday, started out badly for the government troops once again, when Lamoricière's forces failed to make any advances against the insurgents in the northern sector. Nor could the army, at first, dislodge the insurgents from the eighth *arrondissement*. But by the late afternoon, the captured *mairie* had fallen to regular army troops, and the tide of battle turned

against the insurgents. In vigorous fighting supported by artillery, government forces overcame the barricades in nearly every district, leaving only the Bastille and the Place du Trône in insurgent hands. Meanwhile, on Sunday night, eager National Guards from the provinces flocked into Paris in great numbers. (Apart from Marseilles, most other French cities, including Lyon, remained quiet during the June insurrection.) As a result of the railroads, Tocqueville notes, it was possible to bring rural Guards—mainly young nobles, shopkeepers, and peasants—from distances of about a 150 miles to the capital only a day after the fighting had begun. By Monday morning, June 26, the defeat of the insurrection was imminent. Troops were closing in on the Place de Bastille and the Place du Trône, while insurgent resistance in other pockets of the city had become sporadic. At some barricades the insurgents fought to the last, but most of the remaining workers, owing partly to spurious promises by the army of an honorable surrender, laid down their muskets. The Faubourg Saint-Antoine was the last holdout, but finally it too surrendered.

Apart from General Bedeau, who earnestly tried to negotiate an honorable surrender with the insurgents, and General Duvivier, who expressed genuine compassion for the material plight of the workers as he lay dying from his wounds, there is no evidence that the bourgeois National Guard or the Mobile Guard felt any sympathy for their opponents. The regular soldiers, by contrast, seem to have fought with no strong conviction, and in all likelihood some individual Guards acted with a modicum of decency toward their insurgent captives. But the nearly crazed young Mobile Guards killed workers as wantonly as they had risked their lives in battle. To these "children" of the working class, a battle was a festival, and they killed members of their own class without remorse.

The behavior of the Mobile Guards has always been a puzzle to historians of the Revolution. Marx dismissed them as members of the lumpenproletariat, whose services were for sale to any purchaser, but this view, as recent research has shown, can no longer be supported. In fact, their occupational background closely parallels that of Parisian workers as a whole. Recruited from the February barricades, their working-class identity seems to have been dissolved into a strictly military identity, reinforced by decent pay, strict training, isolation, and above all a strong *esprit de corps*. By June, their sense of belonging was to a corps rather than to a class. As for their ardor, it is perhaps more explicable by their youth—their average age was about twenty-one—than by any social or political convictions.

By contrast, the National Guards who fought for the government functioned as the armed force of a class—specifically, merchants, retailers, professionals, some artisans, and outright capitalists—for whom the defeat of the insurgents would be a victory over "communism." Unlike the Mobile Guard units, however, a number of National Guard units, especially from the eastern sector

of Paris, did defect to the insurgents, while others were politically ambivalent and therefore untrustworthy in the eyes of their officers.

The workers who fought on the barricades were nothing if not bold. They certainly numbered no more than 50,000—that is to say, barely a quarter of the more than 200,000 male workers in Paris. Against them were arrayed at least an equal or greater number of well-trained and well-equipped troops of all kinds, supported by devastating artillery, with provincial forces flowing into the capital to support them. In fact, the willingness of these forces to slaughter as many of the defeated Parisian workers as they could is a shocking testimony to the provincial hatred of Paris—or to rural idiocy.

Partly as a result of the provincial infusion, the June insurrection became one of the bloodiest of all Parisian *jours*. Statistics on the number of insurgents who were killed vary widely. Some claim that only 1500 workers were killed in all, including about 150 insurgent prisoners. But contemporary accounts make this overall figure difficult to accept. The most plausible toll comes from Georges Duveau:

Only four or five hundred of the rebels appear to have perished on the barricades, but more than three thousand were massacred by the soldiers of the *garde mobile* and the regular army after the fighting was over. In all, 11,671 persons were arrested. A few of these were executed and some were sentenced to forced labor, but by far the most common penalty was deportation [to Algeria].²⁰

Alexander Herzen, the famous Russian revolutionary, witnessed the June uprising with his family, noting the brutality of the counterrevolution in his diary:

On the evening of the 26th of June, after the victory of the Nationale over Paris, we heard shots being fired at short regular intervals. ... We glanced at one another, all our faces were livid. ... "They are shooting prisoners," we said with one voice, and turned away from one another. I pressed my forehead against the window-pane. Such moments provoke ten years of hatred, a lifetime of revenge: *woe to him who forgives at such moments!*²¹

And according to Louis Blanc:

Prisoners were being shot in the plain of Grenelle, at the Montparnasse Cemetery, in the racecourse of Montmartre. Prisoners were being shot in the Place du Panthéon. Prisoners were being shot at the Cloister of St. Benedict and in the court of the Hôtel de Cluny. A wounded rebel was stretched on a bed of straw. Some monsters fired it and burnt the dying man alive.²²

The Luxembourg Gardens had to be closed until rain could wash away the blood of the unknown number of prisoners who had been executed there.

THE AFTERMATH OF JUNE

Histories of 1848, the most revolutionary year of the entire nineteenth century, usually recount, in addition to the events in Paris, the revolutionary upheavals that occurred in Hungary, Austria, Germany, Italy, and elsewhere in Europe. But it was above all in France that the revolution's aims went far beyond the nationalistic goals that marked other insurgencies, as a revolution made in the name of universal principles. In this sense the June insurrection in Paris marks both the beginning of the revolutionary year and its finale.

Even after the June uprising, however, insurgencies of workers and even peasants continued in other parts of France for a few more years. The most important urban working-class uprising of 1849 occurred in Lyon, which was the silk-producing center of Europe.

Predominantly artisanal in its production methods, Lyon had begun to seriously feel the impact of commercial capitalism almost a century earlier, when the silk trade had been taken over by merchants who distributed jobs and bought the produce of master craftsmen and journeymen—many of whom yearned for the guild-type corporate society that had existed before the Great Revolution. In 1831, the silk-weaving artisans, or *canuts*, rose in armed conflict to gain a better *tarif*, or contract, from the merchants. For a brief time they actually took control of the city, under red and black flags—which made their insurrection a memorable event in the history of revolutionary symbols. Their use of the word *mutuellisme* to denote the associative disposition of society that they preferred made their insurrection a memorable event in the history of anarchist thought as well, since Proudhon appears to have picked up the word from them during his brief stay in the city in 1843-44 to describe his own essentially contractual vision of a just society.

In 1834, the Lyon *canuts* rose once again—this time led mainly by the journeymen rather than the master weavers—to gain better working conditions both from the merchants and from their employers. This short-lived revolt probably inspired a republican uprising in Paris in the same year. In 1848, however, although the silk workers were the target of considerable socialistic and communistic propaganda, the June insurrection in Paris did not provoke a corresponding uprising in Lyon. Whatever revolutionary sympathy the *canuts* might have felt for their Parisian fellow workers was undermined by the local government's carrot-and-stick policy of permitting the clubs to continue to meet while blanketing the city with troops—and the clubists were not eager to suffer

the repression inflicted upon their counterparts in Paris. In the main, the preoccupation of many *canuts* with harmless cooperatives absorbed much of their energy, leaving the city's political sphere in the hands of moderates and outright reactionaries.

Meanwhile, in the Paris of June 1848, once the smoke and debris had been cleared away and the shattered bodies removed from the barricades, the Revolution began a journey backward, from its "red" peaks, over its republican plain, and ultimately back down toward its monarchical swamp, made even more odious by the presence of a Bonapartist adventurer whose "repulsive face" (in Marx's words) was covered with the "iron mask" of the original emperor.

General Cavaignac's brief dictatorship—technically a "state of siege"—remained in force all summer, until October 29. In July a decree was issued permitting clubs to meet—but only under conditions that prevented any significant political activity. Any club that wished to meet had to provide the police with a "declaration" of its intention twenty-four hours in advance. Club members could engage in discussions only under the surveillance of "a judicial or administrative official"—that is, the police—and they had to desist from talking about "any proposition contrary to public order or public morality." After the meeting the club had to hand over to the police a summary of the meeting's actions and discussions and provide a list of the members in attendance. It also had to provide "reports, addresses and all other communications between clubs." The organization of "secret societies," of course, was strictly forbidden.²³ The decree, in fact, struck at the very heart of one of the workers' most basic demands: the right to form associations. Revolutionary organizers were now obliged to go underground, where they had so often been since the Bourbon Restoration.

Additionally, Cavaignac required newspapers, in order to continue publishing, to deposit caution money (*cautionnement*) to guarantee their future "good conduct"—that is, to guarantee that they would avoid publishing politically offensive articles, such as those that discussed a "social republic" or criticized the government. This was a revival of Louis-Philippe's hated policy of suppressing dissident literature. In 1848 the *cautionnements* imposed were so high (up to 24,000 francs) that only papers like the conservative *Constitutionnel* could afford to pay. Finally, the ten-hour day was raised to twelve hours, returning the workers to the workday that existed before the February barricades. As the reactionary *Mémorial bordelais* put it, "France needs moral order and material order, and any force determined to provide her with both is entitled to the sympathy and collaboration of right-thinking men."²⁴ The Party of Order had openly emerged, not as an organization but as a coalition of Legitimists, Orleanists, and complete reactionaries—deputies and notables who would not have dared breathe a word about their views three months earlier.

In opposition there developed a coalition of diverse leftists, notably socialists and radical republicans who shifted increasingly to the left, as the "state of seige" became more repressive. Their numbers included the left-republican representatives in the Assembly, as well as militants who inhabited what was once the thriving club scene and who remained in the much-curtailed clubs and societies. They were collectively known as *démoc-socs*, for democratic socialists, or interchangeably as Montagnards. Their political program centered on demands for a social as well as democratic republic. "The political problem is no longer the problem of the future," even *La Réforme*—the liberal republican newspaper having moved to the left—declared in August, "A new problem has come to the fore, and democracy has had to emblazon its banner with the words: 'The democratic and social Republic.'"²⁵ Despite the "caution" laws, the *démoc-socs* managed to generate a huge amount of propaganda—political pamphlets, brochures, satirical engravings—with which they flooded the provinces, shipping it out by any means they could, including the sending of agitators to small towns and villages in all parts of France.

Moreover, despite the repression of strikes and the working-class political activity that followed the June insurrection—or perhaps because of it—the militant French workers took refuge in associationism. Producers' associations and various mutual aid and cooperative activities were still legally permitted as economic and commercial enterprises, and they now proliferated in Paris and nearly all the cities of France. The fortunes of these associations changed with the shifting political moods of the Constituent Assembly: a Union of Associations was established in November 1849, embracing 104 member associations, that planned to provide credit and open channels for commercial exchange between its component entities. In May 1850, before the Union could carry out its plan to issue bonds toward these ends, a panicked government raided its headquarters, jailed its leaders, and made it illegal.

In Paris alone, an estimated 300 workers' associations of various kinds emerged, in 120 trades with about 50,000 people. A typical association was open to any member of a trade who could make a nominal investment in its capital funds and was guided by the principles that had been outlined by Buchez and the producers' cooperatives represented in the Luxembourg Labor Assembly.

In the years that followed, these associations failed to establish a cooperative and egalitarian system. More often than not, associations that could compete successfully with privately owned enterprises were those that became capitalistic themselves. Even those with the best intentions had to join the capitalist system as collective capitalistic enterprises, if only to remain viable. One of the most successful such enterprises was the association established by a group of Parisian masons in 1848, with shares valued at fifty-five francs apiece, and with visions of freeing all construction workers from wage labor. By 1852 these visions were all but dead, but the association was so successful

economically that the value of its shares had soared to 3,000 francs each, and it finally closed its doors to new members. To meet the needs of its expanding operations, it hired 1,600 wage earners. To complete its capitalistic turn, during the masons' strike of 1866, it took the side of the employers against the strikers.

Another problem that producers' associations faced were the difficulties arising from the conditions of dire material scarcity in which they existed. Mismanagement, disputes over distributions of earnings, desultory attitudes toward work obligations, and even theft became cardinal problems in keeping the associations alive. As Bernard Moss observes:

For most associations life was hard and short. Lacking credit and customers, many were also beset with administrative problems and disputes. Elected managers did not always possess the requisite managerial and commercial skills. Internal disputes over managerial authority and the distribution of earnings often led to the dismissal of managers and exclusion and resignation of members. [Of those for which there are records], most remained marginal operations, comprising fewer members in 1851 than when they began. . . . Of forty-nine trades that started associations in 1849, only twenty-six had them in 1851. Since new ones were constantly being created, there were still 200 in that year.²⁶

Understandably, workers in producers' associations did not expect to receive the low wages that masters and capitalists typically paid; nor was the working class in an economic position to purchase the consumer goods produced by the associations, when associations tried to equalize the incomes of their members by raising their prices. No amount of ethical commitment or working-class solidarity could override the rumblings of empty stomachs.

But, in the end, it was the tugging and pushing of market forces which worked against the socialistic aspirations of the producers' associations, cooperatives, mutual aid societies, workers' credit institutions, and the like, and made it impossible for them to succeed in ending competition or replacing the hard core of the capitalist entrepreneurial and market system with a cooperative and egalitarian one, let alone with their vision of a socialistic society. The most the associations could finally hope to accomplish was to ease the working conditions of their artisan members, establishing federations of producers' associations and reasonably endowed credit institutions through which the more successful enterprises could assist those in difficulty. But even this was something the government was not prepared to let them do on a large scale. Louis Bonaparte suppressed most workers' associations when he became emperor, although in the 1860s the empire began to encourage a number of them (often with the aid of the more tepid Proudhonists). During the 1860s, too, to curry favor with the workers, even Orleanists, not to be outdone by Bonapartists and moderate

republicans, established their own cooperative-oriented bank. Clearly, the state had nothing to fear from the associationist movement; however large and mutualistic they became, associations could never have supplanted the capitalist and market system that was gaining increasing command over the French economy. Blanc's associationist vision could have led only to a slowed entry of the industrial system into France and a mitigation of its worst abuses. But in no sense could it have replaced the capitalist system in France.

"THE LITTLE NAPOLEON"

In September a by-election finally injected a Bonaparte into the Assembly where, with appropriate modesty, he betrayed no inkling of any aspirations to greater power. "*Napoleon le petit*" ("the little Napoleon," as Victor Hugo called him) was the son of Napoleon's brother, Louis Bonaparte. Following the early death of Napoleon's own son, Louis Napoleon had become head of the Bonaparte family, and with it he inherited all the Napoleonic pretensions that came with the name. His youth had been spent in Switzerland and Germany—like all Bonaparte notables, he spoke French with a foreign accent—after which he drifted to Italy and then France, where a comic attempt at insurrection obliged him to seek exile in the United States and England. The "prince," as he was known to his supporters, returned to France as a "citizen" rather than as a pretender to the throne, and his ability to hold his tongue, to listen politely, and to behave almost demurely earned him support among the more guileless deputies of the Assembly, including Hugo and Proudhon. Having been in exile during the most hectic events of 1848, including the June Days, Louis—unlike the liberals who had so abjectly failed the workers—appeared untarnished and almost virginal politically. When it became apparent that his presence as an Assembly representative was an embarrassment to nearly all factions in the government, he politely withdrew from the Constituent Assembly and seemed to hold his peace, although no one could forget that he was waiting in the wings.

Prince Louis prudently steered a course between all of the contending classes in France—a policy that was to be called Bonapartism—concentrating his efforts on restoring the Bonaparte dynasty and its fortunes. Indeed, the essence of his success was his ability to seem to be everything to everybody. To the workers, who began to vote for him in droves, he professed an interest in socialism, even a willingness to make the rich pay the expenses of the government. To the bourgeoisie and notables, he promised order and an intention to discipline the masses, particularly the working class. As for the peasants, they associated him with the original Napoleon, who had

consolidated the gains of the Great Revolution on their behalf against feudal exactions. In fact, the forty-five-centime tax that had so infuriated the peasantry encouraged a revival of the mystique of *Napoléon le grand*, who had once provided the French with *la gloire*, internal stability, and decisive if authoritarian leadership. The original Napoleon's victory at Austerlitz was remembered far more vividly than the terrible losses suffered by the Grand Army in its retreat from Moscow.

Meanwhile the Constituent Assembly had written a constitution for the torn and mutilated nation, which it finally proclaimed on November 21, 1848. It established the office of president, but in an effort to fend off the possible reemergence of monarchy, it stipulated that the president could not be reelected after the expiration of his single four-year term. It also created a single-chamber Legislative Assembly that, like the president, was to be elected by universal adult male suffrage. Nearly everyone could see that the constitution would inevitably self-destruct, since the authors had failed to establish any way in which the two branches of government could possibly adjudicate their differences in the event of a serious clash of authority.

Finally, on December 10, 1848, the nation went to the polls to elect the officials to inhabit this governmental structure—and the vast majority of Frenchmen seemed to want to take their revenge on the nearly moribund Second Republic. Of the three men of national stature who ran for the presidency, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte received 5.5 million votes out of 7.5 cast. His most important opponent, General Cavaignac, the darling of the moderate republicans, received only 1.5 million, and Lamartine, a humiliating 18,000. A Bonaparte—Louis Napoleon—was now president of the French Republic.

In the meantime, the Left was still an active presence in France. In anticipation of elections for Assembly representatives in May 1849, the Montagnards and *démoc-socs* went to work in earnest, holding banquets, creating electoral alliances, and offering joint candidacies for the Assembly. The country was sharply polarized politically. As *Le National* summarized it: "Today there are only two parties left in Europe—the Party of Revolution and the party of counter-Revolution. . . . The days for middle-of-the-road policies and hesitation have passed."²⁷ Although the May election results packed the Palais Bourbon with monarchists—nearly two-thirds of them Legitimists—it also constituted a victory for the Left by returning 150 Montagnard representatives, a proportion that surpassed that of the moderates. The center was beginning to wither away, its constituents drifting to the Right or to the Left—a characteristic feature of a growing political crisis.

Meanwhile in Rome, a revolutionary republic, inspired by the French example, had emerged in February 1849, as a result of what was "the nearest thing to a social revolution in 1848 outside France." Although the republic was presided over by the romantic republican nationalist Mazzini, it made social

advances as well, particularly weakening the power of the Church: the carriages of cardinals, whose red robes were said to be the blood of the poor, were overturned and set ablaze; the offices of the Holy Inquisition were converted to housing for the poor; and most significantly, some of the landholdings of the Church were confiscated and distributed to the peasants as leaseholds. "Rome and Venice," says Robertson, "were the only places in Europe that dared to carry their revolutions to the very limit set by France."²⁸

The Pope, horrified by this state of affairs, called upon Catholic France for assistance, and Louis Napoleon, who was courting the support of the Church and of French Catholics generally, was only too happy to come to his aid. Five months after the declaration of the Roman Republic, on April 30, he sent a French expeditionary force south to Rome, there to crush the insurgency.

Even the moderate Republicans in the Assembly exploded at this outrage. This use of military force was a violation not only of the Assembly's wishes but of the constitution itself, which obliged the president to gain the Assembly's consent before using the army abroad. On June 11, Ledru-Rollin—the last prominent, ostensibly republican leader in France—tried to bring a bill of impeachment against the president and his ministers. The next day the majority Party of Order placidly rejected this defense of its own constitutional power, in what can only have been an act of provocation against the Left. The Montagnards fell for it and stormed out of the Assembly in petulant protest—a fatal tactic that left the government entirely in the hands of the Left's opponents in the midst of a major crisis.

Two days later the Montagnards proclaimed that the government was "outside the Constitution," and on June 13 they organized a peaceful demonstration to protest the Roman expedition. Thirty thousand people participated, mainly unarmed National Guards, as well as middle-class republicans and members of the workers' secret societies, marching collectively to the cry of "Long live the Constitution!" But awaiting the demonstrators at the end of the Rue de la Paix were the dragoons and chasseurs of General Changarnier, who swiftly scattered the crowd into the side streets. The more resolute Montagnards and workers tried to make an armed stand at the Museum of Arts and Trades, but it collapsed miserably when the National Guard failed to support them. Where the workers in the June 1848 insurrection had called for the "organization of work" under the slogan "bread or lead"—that is, for basic demands of the working class—the demonstration of June 1849 raised the formal republican demands of the middle classes. Or as Marx observed: "If June 23, 1848, was the insurrection of the revolutionary proletariat, June 13, 1849, was the insurrection of the democratic petty bourgeois, each of these two insurrections being the *classically pure* expression of the class which had been its vehicle."²⁹ It marked the definitive defeat of the Left in French politics for more than a decade. The government used the

occasion to declare a state of siege, pass a new law that banned the clubs completely, and tighten the press laws still further, until no paper more radical than *Le National* could appear. As repression dragged the Revolution backward, the "leaders" of the June 13 demonstration were tried, and the jails were filled with Montagnards and real or suspected socialists.

When news of the events in Paris reached Lyon, together with the news that the French army had been used against the Roman republicans, insurgency once again stirred the city. The Lyonnais rose in insurrection on June 14, 1849, erecting barricades and raiding gun shops, but the well-organized line troops of the government and particularly their artillery put an end to the uprising in only two days. As a historian of the revolt observes:

The carrot-and-stick approach of encouraging economic dependence and discouraging political opposition, initiated under the Second Republic and elaborated under the Second Empire [of Louis Bonaparte], seemed to have extinguished the radical movement of Lyon.³⁰

The prince-president now made a tour of the provinces, drumming up support for his administration and, above all, himself, while the Legislative Assembly, completely controlled by Party of Order, prepared to restrict the franchise. On May 31, 1850, the Assembly disenfranchised some three million voters, mainly mobile workers who would have voted for the *démoc-socs*, by requiring evidence of a three-year residence in a given electoral constituency. It also enacted an educational "reform," proposed by the overzealous Falloux, that granted considerable power to the Church in the schools, while adherents of the prince-president circulated petitions to allow him to run for a second presidential term, again in flat violation of the constitution.

Bonaparte had garnered wide popular support among the peasants, and he had even lured many workers into his camp by calling for a return of exiled June insurgents and a restoration of universal suffrage. So confident was he of popular support that he now felt that he could dissolve the Assembly. On the fateful night of December 1, 1851, assured of the army's aid and the quiescence of the Parisian workers, he arrested the major Assembly leaders and ordered the military to occupy the Palais Bourbon. In a proclamation the next day, December 2, justifying this coup d'état, he condemned the Assembly for being "a hot-bed of sedition," for "forging weapons for civil war," indeed, for "making a bid for the power which I wield directly by virtue of the people's will."³¹ Louis Bonaparte, in effect, accused the Assembly of damaging the very constitution that he himself was in the process of jettisoning.

Police accounts report that, amid cries of "To arms!" barricades went up in the Rue Rambuteau, at the intersection of the Rue Saint-Denis and the Rue Saint-Martin. But by December 4, the army could laconically report: "Paris is

quiet. The barricades that were erected last night were removed without difficulty."³² A staff captain of the National Guard tried to account for the lack of resistance to the coup:

the unpopularity of the chamber, the surprise and the remarkable way the arrests were timed to take place at the same moment—the attitude of the army, too, perhaps—meant that in the end nothing very nasty happened. . . . You know, moreover, that those gentlemen [the deputies] were arrested without any show of resistance. . . . Among the workers—indifference, almost approbation.³³

Even Lyon, which had risen on March 13 of the previous year, made virtually no effort to resist the prince-president's coup, and reports from other provincial cities suggest that they had been awaiting news of resistance in Paris before undertaking it themselves.

It was mainly in more remote southern areas, such as Provence, that serious resistance to the coup occurred. Ever since June 1848, Montagnard and *démoc-soc* agitators had been working hard to loosen the grasp of extreme conservatism on the French peasants. They succeeded, to a great extent, fulfilling Blanqui's hopes from the spring of 1848 that the peasants, given enough time, could become receptive to the new political ideas. In fact, they had learned about the democratic-socialist ideas that had been popular in the Parisian neighborhoods and clubs of 1848, and they proved to be even more responsive than the Parisian workers could have expected. Peasants in about thirteen departments, particularly in southern and central France, actually took up arms in support of the Republic against Bonaparte and embattled themselves with the superior forces of the government.

But the regime struck back swiftly and effectively: approximately 27,000 people were arrested or prosecuted *in absentia*, of whom some 15,000 were sentenced to imprisonment and 9,000 deported. Many of the workers' associations, including trade unions, were closed down. After two plebiscites (on December 21, 1851, and November 21, 1852) staged by *Napoleon le petit*, France became an empire, if nothing else than in name, and Louis Napoleon Bonaparte an emperor. In much of France, the events of 1848-49 faded from collective memory, opening two decades of mediocrity and banality in French history.

NOTES

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2. Quoted in John M. Merriman, *The Agony of the Republic: The Repression of the Left in Revolutionary France, 1848-1851* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 51.
3. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, trans. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos (New York: Macmillan, 1896), pp. 187-8.
4. Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 10: *Marx-Engels 1849-1851* (New York: International Publishers, 1978), p. 70.
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6. "Decree on the Workshops Prepared for May 24, Issued June 21," Document 93 in *Revolution from 1789 to 1905*, ed. Raymond Postgate (New York: Harper & Row, 1920), p. 210.
7. Priscilla Robertson, *Revolutions of 1848: A Social History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1952), p. 85.
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11. Blanc, *Historical Revelations*, p. 429.
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13. Alexander Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, trans. Constance Garnett (London: Chatto & Windus, 1925), vol. 4, pp. 3-4.
14. Tocqueville, *Recollections*, p. 187.
15. Blanc, *Historical Revelations*, p. 436.
16. Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy*, pp. 298-9.
17. Tocqueville, *Recollections*, p. 192.
18. Victor Hugo, *Choses vues* (Paris, 1918), quoted in Georges Duveau, *1848: The Making of a Revolution*, trans. Anne Carter (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 134.
19. J.-J. Guillet, "On Behalf of the Citizens on Guard at the Mairie of the 8th Arrondissement" (n.d.), Document 96a in *Revolution from 1789 to 1906*, ed. Postgate, p. 214.
20. Duveau, *Making of a Revolution*, p. 156.
21. Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, vol. 4, pp. 4-5.
22. Louis Blanc, untitled excerpt, Document 100 in *Revolution from 1789 to 1906*, ed. Postgate, p. 216.
23. "Decree of 28 July 1848," in *1848 in France*, ed. Price, pp. 119-20.
24. *Mémorial bordelais*, July 18, 1848, in *1848 in France*, ed. Price, p. 122.
25. *La Réforme*, August 21, 1848, in *1848 in France*, ed. Price, p. 126.
26. Bernard H. Moss, *The Origins of the French Labor Movement, 1830-1914: The Socialism of Skilled Workers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 45-6.
27. *Le Nationale*, May 22, 1849, in *1848 in France*, ed. Price, p. 137.
28. Robertson, *Revolutions of 1848*, pp. 365, 367.
29. Marx, *Class Struggles in France*, p. 106.
30. Mary Lynn Steward-McDougall, *The Artisan Republic: Revolution, Reaction, and Resistance in Lyon, 1848-1851* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1984), p. 154.

31. "Proclamation by the President of the Republic" (December 2, 1851), in *1848 in France*, ed. Price, p. 154.
32. "Report from the Armée de Paris" (December 4, 1851), in *1848 in France*, ed. Price, p. 157.
33. Raymond de Breda, letter to General Pelissier (December 14, 1851), in *1848 in France*, ed. Price, p. 157.

CHAPTER 29 Reaction and Revival

Even as Louis Napoleon brought the Revolution of 1848 to a definitive end in France, the high hopes that swept over Germany, Italy, Austria, Hungary, and even the Slavic countries under Turkish and Austrian rule were smothered by counterrevolution and the triumph of reaction. Dreams of a unified Germany and Italy, a sovereign Hungary, a constitutional monarchy in Austria, and independent Czech, Slovak, and south Slav nations were effaced by a renewal of authoritarian rule, press censorship, increased surveillance, the arrest of countless nationalists and republicans, and the fading of social ideals. Throughout the 1850s the French, Prussian, Austrian, and Russian governments unrelentingly persecuted their domestic radicals, suppressing their writings and lectures, censoring their press, and honeycombing their meetings with police and spies when they did not execute, jail, or exile them. The dark cloud of repression settled over the continent, instilling listlessness in the masses and despair among their leaders.

Blanqui, convicted for his participation in the May 15 *journée*, spent ten years in prison, often under unbearable conditions. Cooped up with his rival Barbès in the penitentiary of Belle-Ile-en-Mer, his futile attempts at escape from their mutual harassment resulted in transfers to even more punitive dungeons. A forgiving Louis Napoleon finally pardoned the innocuous if adventurist Barbès and allowed him to return to his comfortable life on his southern estate. But Blanqui himself remained in debilitating confinement until 1859.

As for Proudhon, he had not supported the June insurrection. But in the Assembly, of which he was still a member, he rallied to the defense of the insurgents, making fiery speeches on their behalf and attacking the regime in his newspaper *Le Peuple*, which had acquired an immense readership among the working class for its militancy. When he published an article accusing Louis Napoleon of plotting to enslave the people of France, both *Le Peuple* and his other paper, *Le Représentant du peuple*, were suppressed, and he was expelled from the Assembly. Faced with arrest, Proudhon fled to Belgium but was

detected upon his return to Paris and sentenced to prison for three years, a term that he served out in various jails. There, in contrast to Blanqui, he spent

some of the best years of his life. French political prisoners in that happy age underwent a mild confinement. Proudhon was well-housed and well-fed; he could write, study, and receive his friends; he was even allowed to go out of his prison once a week to look after his affairs.¹

Other revolutionists fled to England, Switzerland, or the United States. Cabet had returned to his utopian experiment in the United States even before the June insurrection; he died there, unknown, and was soon forgotten even in the land of his birth. Louis Blanc fled to England and became increasingly reformist; when he returned to France, upon the overthrow of Napoleon III in 1870, he would participate in the National Assembly and oppose the Paris Commune of 1871. When Blanqui, by contrast, was released from prison in 1859, he immediately renewed his conspiratorial activities against the Second Empire; jailed again in 1861, he escaped from a prison hospital four years later and took refuge in Belgium.

Nothing so clearly conjures up the reactionary nightmare that descended on Europe in the 1850s than the treatment of Mikhail Bakunin, the Russian aristocrat-turned-revolutionary who became one of the most important anarchist leaders of the century. Owing to his violent rhetoric and behavior Bakunin had earned the bitter acrimony of Tsar Nicholas I, the spearhead of reaction in Europe. Although the Russian anarchist was by no means a regicide, his impassioned words and his collectivist views separated him markedly from the basically pacifistic and individualistic Proudhon, despite his encomiums to the Frenchman, whose anti-authoritarian ideas remained a lifelong inspiration to him.

But following an abortive uprising in Dresden in March 1849, in which he participated with Richard Wagner, Bakunin was captured by Saxon authorities and imprisoned for a year. The Saxons sentenced him to death, only to issue a reprieve so that he could be handed over to the Austrians, who in turn chained him to a dungeon wall for eleven months before sentencing him once again to death. Finally they commuted his sentence at the request of the tsar, and he was sent back to Russia, where Nicholas immured him in the recesses of the dreaded Peter and Paul Fortress, in St Petersburg. Bakunin languished in the fortress for six years, often under harsh conditions, neglected and plagued by scurvy, his isolation broken only by occasional visits from members of his family. With the advent of a more enlightened tsar, Alexander II, he was sent into exile in Siberia, where he remained for still another four years, after which he escaped, making his way back to Europe by crossing the Pacific Ocean to North America and then journeying eastward to London.

EXILE IN LONDON

London had become the home of many exiles, who gravitated toward the English capital because of the freedom England offered to refugees from the counterrevolutionary governments on the continent. Nevertheless, the exiles—Prussian, French, Russian, and Austrian—were still the targets of continental police spies, who infiltrated their radical groups and reported on them in detail to their respective governments. These governments, in turn, tried to persuade the British home secretary to crack down on the exiles. They embroidered their reports with lurid plots, accusing some exiles of planning to assassinate Queen Victoria and, more absurdly, all the crowned heads of Europe. In 1850 the Austrian ambassador warned the home secretary that “the members of the Communist League, whose leaders were Marx, Engels, Bauer, and Wolff, discussed even regicide,” while the next year the Prussian interior minister pressed the home secretary to take “decisive measures against the chief revolutionaries known by name” and transport them to the colonies. Happily for the exiles, the British authorities usually ignored these police accounts. As David McClellan notes in his biography of Marx, the Austrian ambassador

got the reply: “under our laws, mere discussion of regicide, so long as it does not concern the Queen of England and so long as there is no definite plan, does not constitute sufficient grounds for the arrest of the conspirators”. The most the Home Office was prepared to do in answer to these demands was to give financial assistance to those refugees willing to emigrate to the United States.²

Marx himself had by no means played a radical role in the German Revolution of 1848–49. Enamored of his “stages” theory of revolution, he had decided that the liberal German bourgeoisie, struggling to assert its supremacy over the feudal classes of the ancien régime, must take the lead in the unfolding revolutionary events. According to this theory, the bourgeoisie had to carry out its own revolution and establish a highly centralized republic, free of all feudal encumbrances, subdivisions, and obstacles to free trade and nationhood, before the workers could hope to achieve their own socialist goals.

Although Marx’s writings from the 1840s had often spoken of the need for the workers to create their own revolutionary parties, independently of the bourgeoisie, during the 1848–49 revolutions he expressly advised them to subordinate their demands to those of bourgeois parties. The working class, he felt, was obliged to render critical support to the creation of a middle-class republic and assist the bourgeoisie in pushing the revolution toward the goal of a unified, industrialized, and commercially viable Germany. “The proletariat

has not the right to isolate itself,” he declared; “however hard it may seem, it must reject anything that could separate it from its allies.”³ Accordingly, he suppressed *The Communist Manifesto* (which he had co-written with Engels in 1847) and essentially disbanded the Communist League (which he had headed) in all but name. This policy of middle-class liberalism aroused the bitter opposition of the militant labor organizer Stephan Born, who was trying to form an all-German workers’ movement, into which, as P. H. Noyes tells us, “such revolutionary force as workers had in 1848 was channeled.”⁴

In contrast to Born, Marx was determined to have nothing to do with an independent workers’ movement and instead became editor of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, a Cologne newspaper (backed by Engels) that called itself “An Organ of Democracy” and dedicated itself to the emancipation of the bourgeoisie from feudal exactions. As editor, Marx pandered to the middle-class Cologne Democratic Union—the *Zeitung* even contained stock market reports—and established an editorial line that was hardly distinguishable from that of the liberal bourgeoisie, thoroughly antagonizing the workers of the city. Andreas Gottschalk, the militant leader of the Cologne Workers’ Union, a socialist labor organization, excoriated the newspaper for being “in the hands of confirmed aristocrats, indeed the most dangerous of all, the aristocrats of money” and took Marx sharply to task for his essentially liberal editorial role.⁵

Upon the collapse of the German revolution in the spring of 1849, the newspaper was shut down, and Marx was expelled from Prussia. He and his family arrived in Paris in time for the June 13 demonstration against Louis Napoleon’s breach of the constitution by invading Rome. But in August disappointment with Bonaparte’s reactionary regime forced him to go to London, where he encountered various exile groups from the continent.

Soon after his arrival in London, however, Marx radically altered his policy. In an 1850 “Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League” (which had been revived in 1849), he and Engels essentially adopted Gottschalk’s view of the relations between the workers and the “democratic” bourgeoisie, calling for an independent workers’ party that would establish its own “revolutionary workers’ governments, whether in the form of municipal committees and municipal councils or in the form of workers’ clubs and workers’ committees.”⁶ Moreover, in any revolutionary situation, the “Address” argued, the workers’ party must be distrustful and strictly independent of its presumed bourgeois and peasant allies. At best, it could ally itself with sectors of the bourgeoisie, but only cautiously and only with the most radical sectors. Following the victory of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, such an alliance, the “Address” warned, must come to an end. The working class must retain its independence and compete electorally for positions in the new republic, seeking the “strictest centralization” of governmental power and opposing any

federalist schemes that would increase "the autonomy and independence for the [local] communities."⁷

This document is one of the most important in the theoretical armamentarium of what in time would be called Marxism, and its strictures were to be followed—or argued about—by Marxian movements, well into the 1900s. Based on this "Address," Marxist parties were expressly prohibited from participating in the cabinets and ministries of bourgeois governments or from forming coalition governments even with radical middle-class parties. This emphasis on the independence of the workers' parties remained a guiding policy of Marxist parties, often leading, in periods of crisis that erupted after 1848, to bitter factional disputes and cleavages within the fold of international Marxism.

Notwithstanding popular wisdom to the contrary, Marx's exile in London was not devoted exclusively to theoretical work. Indeed, he could hardly avoid becoming drawn into the internecine warfare that went on among his fellow exiles of various nationalities. During the 1850s and 1860s they battled each other incessantly over issues both trivial and major. Thus, republicans fought with each other and with socialists; putschist Blanquists crossed swords with advocates of a mass workers' movement; proto-anarchists, or at least opponents of political action, denounced "authoritarian socialists," or those who believed in parliamentary activity; and even the parliamentary wing of the various socialist groups was divided over how and to what degree legislative activity could produce basic social change. *Socialist* became an ecumenical word denoting everyone from social reformers to social revolutionaries; *communist* was increasingly identified with those who shared Marx's basically insurrectionary strategy; and *anarchist* encompassed the highly individualistic ideas of personal rebellion pioneered by Max Stirner and the Proudhonist mutualists.

Yet these conflicts should not be dismissed as mere wrangling. On the contrary, they were enormously important in sorting out major issues in revolutionary theory and strategy that had not been resolved—indeed, that could not have been resolved—during the heat of conflict. The workers who reared barricades in Paris, Berlin, and Vienna in 1848 had often had no clear idea of their goals, the best methods to achieve them, the divergent interests of their middle-class "allies," or the nature of the social forces they opposed. A man like Lamartine had been able to gain acceptance among many Parisian workers because he could veil his moderate policies in radical rhetoric, while Blanqui's followers hurled themselves into putsches that were doomed to failure because they failed to properly assess either the mood of the workers or the power of their class opponents. If they were not to repeat the miscalculations that had cost them the revolutions of 1848, the exiles had to use the hiatus to resolve a multitude of such unsettled problems and issues. If

there was to be a new revolutionary wave, as everyone expected, "exile wrangling" would be indispensable to its success.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE INDUSTRIAL PROLETARIAT

It was also necessary for the exiles to analyze the deep and lasting transformations that Europe was undergoing: the spread of the Industrial Revolution to the continent, the expansion of the market economy, the emergence of still more new technologies, and the rise of a new type of worker—the factory-based industrial proletarian.

In England the Industrial Revolution, already under way for decades, catapulted her to global economic dominance, earning the country the appellation "the workshop of the world." But in France it would not become a considerable force until the 1880s. Even during the Second Empire, the country was still rooted in an artisanal and peasant economy. Under Louis Napoleon craft production still retained a firm hold on French manufacturing, especially since the country had uniquely positioned itself as the producer of fine handcrafted products, which necessitated the purposeful retention of traditional skills. But the authoritarian regime of Louis Napoleon, undisturbed by political factions, clubs, or legislatures, laid the basis for the Industrial Revolution by greatly expanding French markets and, above all, the country's transportation infrastructure. Steam engines, which in 1850 had numbered around 5,300, increased to 14,000 in 1860, and to 26,200 in 1869. Most important, French railway mileage soared between 1850 and 1870—from a mere 1,800 miles to 10,800. Before the establishment of the Second Empire, railroad lines had radiated out from Paris in only a few abbreviated trunk lines, but Louis Napoleon's twenty-year regime produced a full-fledged national railway system. Between 1852 and 1870 rail lines were extended to Bayonne on the Spanish frontier, Brest on the Atlantic, Cherbourg on the Channel coast, and Grenoble near Luxembourg—and the spaces between were filled with a complex network of subbranches.

The spread of railways would soon open up hitherto untouched areas of the country to economic development, enlarging the domestic market for consumer goods and undermining traditional ties between peasants, craftspeople, and notables by drawing them into the competitive cash economy. The growing industries in the north and northeast now had relatively easy access to remote parts of the countryside, whose inhabitants, in turn, could sell their produce in markets beyond their immediate locales. Trade was breaking down old provincial barriers between regions that had barely advanced beyond barter exchange, bringing them first handmade and later factory-made commodities. By lowering its own often-prohibitive tariffs in return for lowered tariffs abroad,

France greatly increased its volume of foreign trade—the value of French imports and exports increased from 2.6 billion francs in 1851 to about 8 billion in 1869, further impelling French capitalists to acquire modern machinery and use new methods of industrial production. The Paris Exposition of 1855 was a celebration not only of much-coveted French luxury goods but of French machinery and technical know-how.

Germany, for its part, was beginning to see significant industrial development as well. Although the German industrial revolution did not fully take off until the 1870s, the Zollverein, a customs union initially comprising seventeen German states, had already been established in 1834, removing internal barriers to trade, while in 1831 the Prussian government established the Gewerbe-Institut (Trade Institute) to stimulate the development and use of new industrial methods.

Slowly, factory machinery was introduced into the Prussian economy, especially for the weaving of cotton, while the military, recognizing the enormous importance of railroad lines in times of war, strongly encouraged their construction as well. In 1840, only 340 miles of railway track had been laid in all of the German states; in 1850, the mileage reached 3,700, nearly doubled a decade later, and even exceeded that of France, at 12,237, in 1870. Strikingly, in the same year Germany also exceeded France in output of pig iron. Despite wave after wave of emigration to the New World, Germany's population was growing rapidly—from 35 million in 1849 to 41 million in 1871. Before the century was out, England and Germany would both be engaged in mass production, and after the 1870s German industry would outstrip the British in chemicals, electrical goods, and sophisticated machines.

As the demand for steel increased—necessary as it was for engines, railroad tracks, and other metallic goods (including arms)—the inventions that made it more plentiful and less expensive followed apace. Coal and coke, available in huge quantities, had replaced charcoal early in the nineteenth century. In 1828 the Scottish inventor James B. Neilson built a blast furnace to spurt hot air over melting iron ore, which greatly economized the smelting process and increased the height of the small furnaces of the day to forty or even sixty feet. Traditional techniques for hammering the impurities out of pig iron were replaced by puddling, in which molten iron was stirred continually to produce a more malleable metal. Finally in 1856 Henry Bessemer patented the process that bears his name, in which cold air driven through molten iron rapidly removes the impurities. The cost of producing steel now dropped precipitously, as did the amount of time required to produce it: what had formerly taken ten days with charcoal and puddling now took only ten minutes with the Bessemer process. The price of steel plummeted to a fraction of its former cost, and the metal's availability made it a commonplace in industry, homes, and construction. At the same time the rural European landscape was changing

into a modern industrial panorama, complete with tall chimneys belching smoke, and huge furnaces that produced a fiery glare against the dark polluted sky.

The technological changes of the second half of the century were comparable in every way to those of cloth production and transportation that had driven the earlier stages of the industrial revolution. But the advent of electric power and synthetic chemicals, as well as advances in mining, brought ruin to many artisans, who were in no position to compete with the cheap goods produced by capital-intensive factories. By midcentury, except in France, merchants and industrialists were vastly diminishing both the status and function of independent masters and journeymen, increasingly making them ancillary to the larger industrial economy.

Nor could the power of the autocrats of Europe—large or small, pernicious or gentle—withstand the onslaught of industrialization. News now traveled faster than ever, over electric wires and by mail trains; printing presses became ever more automatic, disseminating ideas in the form of cheap books and periodicals to all parts of Europe and the entire world. The bourgeoisie wanted free trade, open borders, “free” workers, and a major say in affairs of state. As geographical barriers began to crumble, so too did the ideological barriers of the parochial quasi-feudal past, and the obstacles to new goods and new ideas, opening the way to mass nationwide movements such as trade unions and political parties.

By the 1860s European autocrats found that they had to make concessions not only to the bourgeoisie but also to the working classes, as they awakened from the torpor of their defeats of the late 1840s and early 1850s. Working-class militancy indeed began to revive, although it took a different form from what it had been in the 1840s. The ideas of associationism—the formation of cooperatives of artisans in similar trades in order to control those trades—and mutualism—the provision of low-interest credit to small entrepreneurs, linked by nonexploitative contracts—were acquiring an expanded meaning. The very social context of labor was undergoing significant changes. Artisans, who had hitherto been pitted against small factories and merchants, could hardly expect individually to supplant the industrial bourgeoisie, with its ever-larger plants, its multitude of unskilled or partly skilled proletarians, and its vast economic resources. The word *association* increasingly came to include the unity of the working class *as a whole*—internationally as well as nationally, despite differences in craft and status groups. In addition to cooperatives and trade associations, workers began to envision powerful “armies of labor,” to use a phrase from proletarian socialism—namely, great unions, confederations, and even political parties that were sufficiently encompassing to confront the enormous power of the industrial bourgeoisie.

THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL

Among the monarchs of continental Europe, none seems to have more acutely sensed that changes were in the offing than Louis Bonaparte. After 1860, under increasing fire from the French bourgeoisie, who wanted a greater say in the state, Louis was obliged to loosen his tight grip on France's political life. He now gave greater freedom to the press and allowed government measures to be openly criticized in the Corps Législatif (the lower legislative house), while the throne's annual speech could be freely debated by the parliamentarians. Indeed, before the decade was out, a republican opposition had even been permitted to emerge and enjoy a certain measure of political autonomy.

To countervail the demands of the new industrialists, Bonaparte also tried to gain working-class support, thereby pitting one class against the other—another typically Bonapartist feature. In 1860 he allowed workers to form mutual aid and benefit associations, restored their legal right to strike, and permitted individual workers to run for public office on labor-oriented platforms—provided, to be sure, that they did not form a political party. (When the government made overtures to offer better credit terms, the Proudhonist mutualists, with their demand for the low-interest loans for artisans, were surprisingly responsive and flirted politically with members of the royal family.)

To placate the bourgeoisie, between 1860 and 1862 the emperor concluded a series of commercial treaties with Britain, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, and Prussia that reduced trade barriers and provided a strong stimulus to French industry. Key French companies were concentrated in fewer hands, leading to more large-scale production and technological modernization. But Bonaparte's motives were not entirely economic. Closer cooperation between the French and English economies was spurred not only by commercial considerations but by the emperor's own diplomacy, which was oriented, despite centuries of bitter enmity, toward forging an alliance between the two major Channel countries.

The growing entente between Britain and France nurtured not only closer economic and diplomatic ties but a closer affinity between the French and British working classes. The interlocking of English with French economic interests and the introduction of English technological innovations into French industry meant that the working classes of the two countries shared a new community of interest. But French unskilled workers lagged far behind their British counterparts in self-organization and in concrete economic gains: in Britain the working day had been reduced to ten hours, but when the Bonapartist regime tried to pass similar legislation in France, the bourgeoisie was able to circumvent it. Although French workers acquired a limited right to

strike, they were not permitted to organize trade unions like their class brothers and sisters in England.

In 1862 a delegation of French workers crossed the Channel to attend the London International Exhibition. Their trip was subsidized by the government, which probably hoped that the moderate reform-oriented mentality that prevailed among English workers would make an impression on the more volatile French. Actually, the visit resulted in a renewed liaison between militant English trade unionists and French insurrectionists. In December 1863 British workers dispatched an appeal to their French counterparts to take common action in support of the emancipation of Poland, a cause that was almost as popular in London as it was in Paris. The British workers also had a very practical self-interest in international working-class comity: their employers had been importing continental strikebreakers during labor disputes, a practice that severely obstructed their struggles for better pay and working conditions. The trade unions were particularly eager to enlist French working-class support, in order to bring this practice to a definitive end.

As a result, contacts between working-class leaders on both sides of the Channel became more frequent; not only was the solidarity between the French and English greatly strengthened, but each contributed to the other's strike funds. Finally, they decided to hold a joint public meeting in London to strengthen their ties and to support the Poles. The meeting, which was held on September 28, 1864, in Saint Martin's Hall, was packed with 2,000 people, many of whom claimed to represent British, Irish, and continental European workers. It proved to be of historic importance: even as almost all the governments of continental Europe were trying to crush any incipient workers' movement, or perhaps because they were trying to do so, the working classes of various countries eagerly met to mobilize their forces and create their own unified international movement.

Ideologically, the assembly in Saint Martin's Hall was very mixed: it consisted mainly of English trade unionists, including former Chartists and Owenites, who were eager to eliminate continental strikebreaking, but there were also French Proudhonist mutualists, Italian and Polish nationalists, and a medley of exiles from other countries. After much oratory, largely focused on solidarity with the Poles and the need for working-class unity, the meeting enthusiastically resolved to found what was to be called the International Workingmen's Association (IWMA), which eventually entered into the history of socialism as the First International.

Listed last among the distinguished supporters invited to sit on the platform was one "Dr. Marx," who had been asked to address the meeting on behalf of the German workers. Rather than speak himself, however, he gave the floor to Johann George Eccarius, his fellow exile and member of the old Communist League, who ably acquitted himself while Marx remained in the background.

Thus Marx played no direct role in convening or addressing the meeting, claims that he founded the First International (made by some historians of the labor movement) notwithstanding.

After much oratory and enthusiasm, the meeting elected a Central Committee (later renamed the General Council) to administer the organization's affairs, consisting half of English trade unionists and the remaining half of the diverse radical and nationalist exiles in London. The Committee quickly established a subcommittee to draw up the declaration of principles and a set of governing rules for the new Association. Several plainly tendentious declarations and sets of statutes were submitted, including the provisional regulations of Mazzini's Italian Workers Association, a highly centralized organization, strongly nationalistic in orientation, that actually had very little standing among Italian workers. This document, despite its literary crudity and its ideological confusion, was nearly adopted by the subcommittee, but fortunately, due largely to Marx's remonstrances, it was agreed that the proposed document should be "edited," a task that finally fell to Marx himself, who proceeded to rewrite large portions of the declaration of principles and reduce the rules from forty to ten. The new draft, patently superior to its Mazzinian precursor, was unanimously adopted by the Committee at its next meeting and published widely as a penny pamphlet.

In this respect, Marx deserves the credit, if not for founding the IWMA, at least for writing its founding document, the historic "Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International Association." More than half of the address is occupied with contrasting the enormous increase in the wealth of the capitalist countries with the absence of progress in the material condition of workers and detailing the miseries they suffer. In its closing pages it celebrates recent working-class victories, such as the passage of the ten-hour working day by the British parliament and the growth of the cooperative movement. Marx's hand can be seen very clearly when the address calls upon workers to unite to "conquer political power," and very dramatically in its closing appeal, "Proletarians of all countries, Unite!" As for the "provisional rules," its preamble opens with the assertion that "the emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working classes themselves," and it closes with the slogan: "No rights without duties, no duties without rights."⁸

This last slogan—which would later adorn the mastheads of socialist and anarchist periodicals worldwide—did not come easily from Marx's pen; it was foisted on him, and he seems to have accepted it only reluctantly. As he wrote to Engels, shortly after the adoption of documents, he had been "obliged to insert two sentences about 'duty' and 'right' and ditto about 'truth, morality and justice' in the preamble to the rules, but these are so placed that they can do no harm."⁹ This passage reveals the aversion that both men shared toward any socialism that was even vaguely moralistic, in contrast to the materialistic approach they hoped to foster.

The actual role that the IWMA played in the struggle for socialism has been greatly exaggerated over the years, in no small part by the bourgeois press, which tried to frighten its readers by invoking a perilous "red specter" that threatened to undermine society itself. In fact, many of its national sections could not even be regarded as collectivist in outlook, let alone socialist. The English trade unionists were primarily looking for ways to make their strikes more effective, while the Proudhonist mutualists, who were hostile to strikes, loathed all forms of collectivism and regarded small-scale property and the patriarchal family as the building blocks of a new society. The Italian nationalists, following Mazzini, almost entirely eschewed socialism. It is noteworthy that neither the "Inaugural Address" nor the preamble to the rules makes any mention of collectivism, still less of socialism and communism— notions that would have been offensive to many of its members. Rather, the documents contain encomia to cooperatives, which were popular among workers in England and France at the time. As for Marx's call to "conquer political power," it must have been essentially smuggled into the document during an unguarded moment, for it could only have survived the scrutiny of the Proudhonists on the committee because their enthusiasm momentarily swept away their critical faculties.

Despite its many different, often bitterly conflicting tendencies, the IWMA managed to remain intact until 1876, after which it was formally dissolved. During the 1860s it consisted largely of a loose agglomeration of national and local sections or "federations," many of which were at odds with each other over a host of political and organizational issues. Admittedly, the IWMA played a valuable practical and inspirational role in mobilizing, educating, and leading workers, often in large numbers, in common struggles to improve their material conditions. But it was largely a defensive organization: more often than not, its national sections were fighting with their backs to the wall against the assaults of their respective governments and various employers. By its very existence, however, the International gave workers a boost in morale and a sense that they were not completely isolated in their specific local struggles.

Many actions, be they strikes or uprisings, were imputed to the International with little or no regard as to whether it was actually involved in them. Although it was falsely accused of leading the Paris Commune of 1871, the International never staged an uprising anywhere in the world; nor did it lead any sizable strike or strike movement of its own. Many of the strikes that swept over Britain and the continent during the 1860s, to be sure, involved members of the International—in England, even members of the General Council—but they functioned primarily as trade unionists rather than as Internationalists. For the most part, the federations of the International tried to assist strikes and protests by publicizing workers' grievances, opposing foreign strikebreakers, and gathering funds among other workers' organizations for the support of their

striking comrades. While these activities greatly enhanced the prestige of the International among workers throughout the world, they hardly constituted a danger to bourgeois society.

During its short existence, the IWMA held four major congresses between its founding meeting in London and its Hague Congress, where it was split irreparably in 1872, and its General Council was transferred to the United States. At no time did the delegates to these congresses ever number more than a hundred people, and although they presumably represented affiliated federations in about eleven countries, a number of delegates represented only token sections. Some delegations were merely individual exiles from countries in which all working-class activity had been completely suppressed, while others represented groups so small that they barely qualified as more than nuclei of national federations. In fact, the size of a national delegation at an IWMA congress usually depended upon the country where the congress was held. At the Geneva (1866) and Lausanne (1867) congresses, for example, the largest delegations were Franco-Swiss, more or less reflecting the general population of the area in which the congress was convened, while at Brussels (1868) the largest was, not surprisingly, the Belgian delegation. These annual congresses were often riven by a multitude of important theoretical issues that were furiously debated, often culminating in IWMA resolutions that were adopted by a majority vote. In practice, the national groups, on their return home, frequently went their own way, irrespective of the congresses' decisions. Nevertheless, the congresses were grappling, slowly, painfully, and sometimes indecisively, with issues that would be of enormous significance for the labor movement for generations to come—indeed, because of their theoretical and practical consequences in later years, their proceedings deserve closer study than is possible here.

In the early congresses (Geneva in 1866, Lausanne in 1867, and Brussels in 1868), the most compelling issue was the debate between the so-called "Marx party" (few of whom, in fact, were Marxists doctrinally), which favored socialism, and Proudhonist individualists, who hoped to supplant capitalism by fostering small-scale peasant and artisan proprietors. The Proudhonists, whose views reflected the interests of an archaic and waning stratum of artisans and small food cultivators, were convinced that the principal causes of their economic difficulties lay with moneylenders and bankers, and that the problems of the working class could be removed by having worker- or state-controlled People's Banks provide proprietors with low-interest credit. This analysis minimized the social relations embodied in the capitalist market and industry and instead regarded the main enemy of small entrepreneurs as finance capitalists and bankers, who lived off interest rather than the fruits of productive labor. Often this emphasis took an expressly anti-Semitic turn when Jews, such as the Rothschilds, were cast as the main villains of society, rather than manufacturers and the system of capitalist social relations as such.

Proudhon bequeathed a very mixed legacy to his disciples in his *On the Political Capacity of the Working Classes*, published in 1865, the year of his death. Here, as in the *General Idea* in 1851, he softened his aversion for associationism by allowing that it could not be avoided in large-scale industries. In a passage that had an immense influence on many Proudhonists, the *maître* wrote:

Mutualism intends men to associate *only insofar* as this is required by the demands of production, the cheapness of goods, the needs of consumption and the security of the producers themselves, i.e. in those cases where it is not possible for the public to rely on private industry, nor for private industry to accept the responsibility and risks involved in running the concerns on their own. . . . There is undoubtedly a case for association in the large-scale manufacturing, extractive and metallurgical industries. . . . What is the position if we think of the thousands of crafts and trades proliferating in the towns and even in the rural areas? For these I do not think association offers any advantages; all the more so since any benefits that might follow are already assured by the network of reciprocal guarantees, mutual credit and insurance, market control, etc. etc.¹⁰

Proudhon's reluctant acknowledgment of the need for association was a pragmatic response to the rise of large-scale production and modern transportation. Although he was a federalist (as distinguished from a statist), it did not supplant in any way his commitment to individual entrepreneurship. Not surprisingly, when the anarchist Bakunin, at congresses of the International, supported collectivism, the major Proudhonist spokesmen furiously opposed him. But many workers read Proudhon's remarks not as a circumstantial endorsement of associations (or cooperatives) in only certain large-scale industries, but as a general endorsement of them as an alternative to modern capitalist industry—that is, they wrongly concluded that economic cooperatives, confederally organized by means of contracts and credit networks, lay at the heart of Proudhon's vision for the good society.

Nor was this the only respect in which Proudhon exhibited a regressive influence. Owing to their emphasis on the patriarchal family as the basic unit of social life, the Proudhonists rejected any role in the productive process for women (although most artisans freely used the labor of their wives, daughters, and female domestics in their workshops). Seeming to oppose all civil rights for women, they argued that woman's place was in the home, where her "natural" limitations destined her to rear children and see to family needs, while the civil realm fell "naturally" within the purview of men. Finally, as we have seen, the Proudhonists also objected to local strikes, which they regarded as coercive and potentially violent. But life repeatedly intruded on this Proudhonist shibboleth,

and the Proudhonists at the Lausanne Congress reluctantly surrendered it, together with their opposition to political action. The French delegation to the IWMA, it should be emphasized, was predominantly Proudhonist, led by Henri Tolain, a bronze engraver; Pierre Coullery, a physician from French-speaking Switzerland; and even Charles Longuet, later Marx's son-in-law and devout supporter. Opposed to the Proudhonists were the collectivists or socialists, who called for participation in elections and the public ownership of land, railways, mines, and forests and tended to make more searching analyses of capitalism. Marx, from London, provided much of their theoretical framework, although many groups within the IWMA supported socialistic views on their own initiative. Even in France, notable collectivists appeared, as Henryk Katz notes in his highly objective account of the International:

The repressions in France [in the 1860s] pushed the [labor] movement toward resistance societies and syndical chambers, the types of organization tolerated by the government. This was in line with the continuing trend from classical Proudhonianism toward militant syndicalism.¹¹

This shift was typified most notably by the bookbinder Eugène Varlin and the dyer Benoît Malon, who had begun as Proudhonists but were drifting away from many of its key tenets.¹² Not only were they prepared to engage in political activity, in violation of Proudhon's ideas (if not his practice), they were also committed to trade-union organization, strikes, and armed insurgency.

Most at odds with Proudhon's views were the revolutionary syndicalist ideas that these men began to advance. Indeed, Varlin, as the ablest and most militant trade-union leader in France, may well be regarded as the father of revolutionary syndicalism. But their ideas also had a communalist dimension: they opposed both mutualism and "authoritarian Communism"—that is, both Proudhon and Marx. Varlin and Malon called themselves "collectivists" and were committed to a form of socialism or anarchism based on communal confederations as well as trade unions.¹³ How far they had moved from Proudhonism may be judged by the acrimony of their clashes with their former comrades: the French Proudhonist Ernst Fribourg disdainfully described them as a strong "party of liberal communists [*communistes liberaux*]," words that were as close as one could come in the 1860s to "libertarian communists,"¹⁴ while Varlin, for his part, did not hesitate to dismiss Tolain and his following as "Proudhonist enragés." In the new labor movement, says Katz,

Varlin was the recognized national leader and enjoyed increasing international prestige. He was in continuous correspondence with provincial centers and various organizations and leaders in Belgium, Switzerland, and

Germany. . . . More than anyone else, Varlin was capable of articulating the ideas of the radicalized movement that was variously described as "Socialisme collectiviste," "Communisme libérale," "Communisme anti-autoritaire," and "Socialisme révolutionnaire."¹⁵

Significantly, Marx and Bakunin were both to describe Varlin as their comrade in their writings on the Paris Commune.

At its early congresses the International wrangled repeatedly over the distinctions between collectivism and Proudhonist individualism. At Geneva and Lausanne, both in French-speaking Switzerland, a sufficient number of Proudhonist delegates were in attendance to pass resolutions that favored their view, but at the Brussels Congress of 1868, the majority adopted a collectivist resolution on public ownership. At that point most—albeit not all—of the Proudhonists ceased to attend congresses of the International.

The IWMA congresses also debated other issues, such the role of violence in transforming society, the formation of popular militias, the coalitions (if any) that federations of the International could validly make with radical bourgeois or petty bourgeois organizations, and even the legitimacy of the presence of nonworkers in congresses and the General Council. (Excluding nonworkers would have made all intellectuals, including Marx and Bakunin, ineligible for membership.)

But the next explosive issue to confront the International was that of the state and parliamentary politics. In fact, this issue haunted every one of its later congresses and was raised repeatedly—explicitly or implicitly—in debates among socialists, collectivists, Proudhonists, trade unionists, nationalists, and anarchists. By opposing all forms of collectivism, the large contingent of Proudhonists in the early years had averted a direct confrontation between statist socialists and antistatist socialists, since all socialists felt the need to unite against the individualists. But the departure of most of the Proudhonists at Brussels freed statist and antistatist socialists for an open collision that was finally to tear the International apart.

MARX AND BAKUNIN

This conflict was shaped overwhelmingly by the duel between Karl Marx and Mikhail Bakunin for the control of the International. Bakunin did not join the International until fairly late, in July 1868, while to all appearances he and Marx were still on excellent terms. In the 1840s Bakunin had been a friend and collaborator of Marx and Engels around the publication of Arnold Ruge's *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. Removed from European politics for twelve

years after 1849 by his imprisonment and exile in Russia, he finally escaped from Siberia and reappeared in London at the end of 1861. In November 1864, shortly before Bakunin's departure for Italy, Marx exhibited a very amiable attitude toward the Russian and assured Bakunin that, rumors to the contrary, he had defended Bakunin against a slander that he had been a Russian spy. Writing to Engels, Marx noted that "I liked [Bakunin] very much, more so than previously," and said that he was "one of the few people whom after sixteen years I find to have moved forward and not backward."¹⁶ As a sign of friendship, Marx even sent Bakunin an inscribed copy of his newly published *Capital*.

Bakunin did not respond to this gesture for quite some time. He had been occupied with establishing his own international anarchist organization, the International Alliance for Socialist Democracy, a network with a central bureau in Geneva and sections in Italy, France, and Switzerland. (At the same time he was also trying to create a secret, elite, and highly disciplined vanguard group, the International Brotherhood.) The Alliance had its own statutes and program, calling for an end to religion, equality of the sexes, the abolition of inheritance, and a scattered number of other proposals. Bakunin seems to have intended that it function both inside and outside the International, ostensibly to compensate for the IWMA's emphasis on economic questions by placing a special emphasis on philosophical and religious matters. In November 1868 he applied to the General Council in London for admittance of his Alliance to the International as a relatively autonomous branch.

Up to this point, as Franz Mehring observes, Marx had "continued to harbour feelings of friendship for the old revolutionary Bakunin, and he opposed various attacks which were made or planned against Bakunin amongst his, Marx's, immediate circle."¹⁷ But Marx had strong disagreements with the formulations in the program and statutes of the Alliance, producing a disaffection toward Bakunin that was exacerbated by personal gossip. Moreover, the Alliance's application for admittance appeared to be a *de facto* proposal for the existence of two parallel internationals, each with its own central body, that would inevitably come to loggerheads. This caused Marx to develop strong suspicions about Bakunin's intentions in joining the International.

Needless to say, the General Council decided to reject the Alliance's application—and ironically, it was on this very day that Bakunin finally responded to inquiries that Marx had indirectly passed on to Bakunin about his intentions. "You ask whether I am still your friend," Bakunin wrote.

Yes, more than ever, my dear Marx, for I understand better than ever how right you were to walk along the broad avenue of the economic revolution, to invite us all to follow you, and to denounce all those who wandered off

into the byways of nationalist or exclusively political enterprise. . . . My fatherland is now the International, whose chief founder you have been. You see, then, dear friend that I am your pupil—and I am proud to be this.¹⁸

Marx may very well have perceived in the letter a Proudhonist subtext that denied the importance of "political enterprise." Be that as it may, the General Council did not reject the Alliance altogether: rather, it permitted Bakunin and his supporters to enter the International—on the condition that they disband the Alliance as an international organization and convert its sections into branches of the IWMA. Bakunin agreed, but whether he really intended to dissolve the only successful international organization he had created up to that time is a much-disputed issue. Surprisingly, however, the Council agreed to let him retain his central bureau in Geneva as a propaganda group, which Bakunin and his supporters readily accepted, allowing as it did a distinctive organizational center for themselves. There is ample evidence to show that in 1870–71, as the dispute between Bakunin and Marx escalated, the old Alliance sections generally retained their libertarian identity and ideas. But that they continued to exist as a parallel organization, as Marx maintained, is arguable.

Many accounts of the dispute between the Bakuninists and Marxists tend to focus so strongly on the unsavory machinations by both sides that their important theoretical and organizational differences are often neglected. In principle, Marx was committed to a strong, highly centralized workers' movement, ultimately a workers' party, that would use the political arena to mobilize the entire working class to attain state power. Where artisanal socialists in the 1840s had merely called upon the state to foster the development of associations, Marx persistently argued for the nationalization of the economy and for planned production and distribution. Following the success of the workers in a revolutionary confrontation with capitalism, there would eventually emerge a communist society that would be guided not by profit but by the principle "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."

This approach, for Marx, presupposed the existence of the state—a workers' state, to be sure, but a state nonetheless—that would initially exercise dictatorial powers to suppress the bourgeoisie and rapidly develop the productive forces to eliminate material want and reduce the long working hours that inhibited the community's participation in public life. Writing in the 1850s and 1860s, Marx assigned a "historically progressive role" to capitalism, namely the development of modern industrial technology, without which arduous toil and material scarcity could not be eliminated. Moreover, the modern factory, in Marx's view, would play the additional role of organizing the

working class in huge industrial units and bringing it into direct confrontation with the industrial bourgeoisie.

This theoretical orientation had distinct political consequences. Marxian socialists welcomed the elimination of archaic barriers to capitalism such as guild restrictions, artisanship, small-scale peasant agriculture, and the like, indeed all decentralized political and economic entities that might impede the centralization of the state and the economy, and the opening of the domestic market for capitalist expansion. Hence, Marx vehemently championed the formation of centralized nation-states as the most suitable economic terrain for the growth of industry and technology.

By the same token, he favored the formation of a highly centralized workers' party that would ultimately challenge the political sovereignty of the bourgeoisie, through elections where possible, through insurrection, or both. In the "Inaugural Address" for the International, Marx had consciously compromised his basic views in order to satisfy the largely artisanal working class, at a time when forging unity among workers was a far more important task than highlighting doctrinal differences. But it was precisely the industrial proletariat that he believed was capable of bringing about the demolition of capitalism and ultimately the achievement of a communist society.

To be sure, Bakunin shared many views with Marx—his materialistic approach to history and contemporary social problems, his emphasis on class struggle, and his advocacy of the collective ownership of property. Allowing for many ambiguities, both men championed a collectivist society that, be it gradually or rapidly, would lead to the elimination of private property and classes and to the resolution of the historic "social question"—notably, the existence of oppression, exploitation, poverty, and domination. But Bakunin's differences with Marx were also enormous. In contrast to Marx's reliance on the industrial proletariat, Bakunin, drawing on his experiences in Russia and Italy, favored small-scale artisans, peasants, and even lumpenproletarians (whom Marx despised) as constituting the hegemonic strata for the destruction of capitalism. Moreover, Bakunin considered the state as the principal support of oppression and saw no need for it in any form—bourgeois or proletarian. Indeed, in his view, the centralization of the state, far from advancing the workers' and peasants' prospects for social change, would have detrimental effects on them, remaking them in its own technocratic and bureaucratic image. It subverted their "instinct" for resistance and revolution, as he put it, blunting their "natural" impulse for freedom. Engaging in politics, Bakunin held, and especially forming centralized parties, would oblige workers and peasants to create centralized political bureaucracies that would eventually bring them into complicity with their own oppression in the political as well as the economic sphere.

To Marx's centralistic and statist views, Bakunin, taking his cue from

Proudhon, opposed a confederal system of production and social administration.* Confederalism denoted a system of contractual agreements among workshops, factories, and communities that were collectively controlled by their members, in which collective affairs are managed through confederal councils of mandated and recallable delegates. These councils, Bakunin believed, would not constitute a state: their principal functions would be administrative, coordinating the decisions of the people in a given commune and among communes at the various regional, national, and international levels of confederation.

Bakunin's vision of an anarchist society was most succinctly expressed in "Principles and Organization of the International Brotherhood," where he sketched out a "federal government," based on "the absolutely autonomous commune, always represented by the majority vote of all the inhabitants," as well as "workers' associations," which would be pyramidally structured into regional and national confederations. This society would have its own libertarian "social constitution," with "laws," "courts," and "parliaments"—structures that are by no means compatible with the "absolute and complete freedom" of the individual that Bakunin, like Proudhon, also prized.¹⁹

It is difficult to say whether Bakunin used words such as "social constitutions," "laws," "courts," and "parliaments" literally or metaphorically. Well versed neither in economics nor in history, he seems ultimately to have relied on the "revolutionary instinct" of the masses to achieve workable collectivist agreements, and on their "revolutionary spontaneity" and on public opinion to administer an equitable anarchist society based on quasi-communistic principles. Marx, for his part, maintained that the proletariat would be compelled toward class consciousness and revolution not by any "revolutionary instinct" but by the "inexorable laws" of capitalist economic development.

The differences between Marx's centralistic, political, and statist approach and Bakunin's decentralistic, antipolitical, and confederalist approach were to be hardened into dogmas by their disciples, opening a chasm between them that seemed unbridgeable, far greater, perhaps, than either man ever intended. But before this hardening took place, Marx and Bakunin were extraordinarily flexible and open to the effects of new social developments on their political ideas. Occasionally they also advanced ideas, especially concerning methods of changing society, that were very much at odds with their seemingly rigid ideological premises.

Despite his affirmations of "revolutionary spontaneity," for example,

* The word for confederalism commonly used in Europe at this time was *federalism*. I am using *confederalism* here because *federalism* has since come to mean an association of small states held together by a fairly centralized nation-state.

Bakunin clearly believed that a well-disciplined, secret vanguard organization, indeed a "general staff" (as he called it in one of his several programs for the International Brotherhood), would be necessary to shepherd the masses through a social revolution. He explicitly rejected endowing it with powers of "dictatorship and custodial control," but in achieving the overthrow of capitalism, it would doubtless have to play a guiding role at the very least.*

Moreover, although abstention from participation in the institutions of the state was a cardinal principle of Bakunin's libertarian faith, one that he propounded with all his vigor, he sometimes encouraged his own supporters to stand as candidates in parliamentary elections. In a letter to one of his adherents, Carlo Gambuzzi, Bakunin seemed to fully agree that he should run for the Italian Chamber of Deputies. "You will perhaps be surprised that I, a determined and passionate abstentionist from politics," he wrote,

should now advise my friends [members of the Alliance] to become deputies—this because circumstances have changed. First, all my friends, and most assuredly yourself, are so inspired by our ideas, our principles, that there is no danger that you will forget, deform, or abandon them, or that you will fall back into the old political habits. Second, times have become so grave, the danger menacing the liberty of all countries so formidable, that all men of goodwill must step into the breach, and especially our friends, who must be in a position to exercise the greatest possible influence on events.²⁰

Bakunin's confidence in the anarchistic integrity of his supporters was surely misplaced—he had already seen more than one of them become Marxists, strict parliamentarians, or worse, over the passage of time.

Again, despite his decentralist views, Bakunin was quite prepared, even eager, to grant the IWMA's General Council enormous powers—powers that, in fact, were later to be used with serious effect against him. The Basel Congress of 1869 gave the Council the right to admit or refuse entry to individuals or groups, and to suspend any section that it regarded as working against the interests of the International. Such actions on the part of the Council, to be sure, could be appealed to the International's congresses, which alone had the authority to reverse them. But the measure, passed with Bakunin's strong

* Michael Bakunin, "Programme and Purpose of the Revolutionary Organization of International Brothers," in *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings*, ed. Arthur Lehning (New York: Grove Press, n.d.), p. 172. There is a good deal of confusion over which program of the International Brotherhood is more definitive. Certainly the more comprehensive is the "Principles and Organization of the International Brotherhood" (also in the Lehning collection), which is nearly four times as long as the "Programme and Purpose."

support as well as Marx's, centralized the International far more than it had been in the past.

By the same token, Marx could seem, at times, almost as libertarian as Bakunin. In *The Civil War in France*, a set of addresses that he wrote on behalf of the General Council, Marx extolled the Paris Commune of 1871 in extraordinarily quasi-libertarian terms. The Commune, as we will see, was a revolt against state centralization *as such* and was deeply influenced by anti-authoritarian concepts of confederalism. Surprisingly, Marx decidedly did not reject this opposition to state centralization—indeed, the libertarianism of this book is highly unusual in the bulk of his writings concerning the state and stands very much at odds with the centralized ideas that dominate the "Address" of 1850. As we shall see, he hailed the Commune's decentralized organizational structure profusely and for a time seemed to regard it as a model structure to be followed by proletarian revolutions.

After 1868 the conflicts between Marx and Bakunin played themselves out at the congresses of the International. In 1868-69 it became clear that despite Bakunin's concessions to the General Council, the Alliance had not fully merged into the International. Bakunin continued to champion the Alliance's program, especially its antipolitical views and its call for the abolition of inheritance as a decisive step in attaining the abolition of private property. To Marx, abolishing inheritance first, before private property, was like placing the cart before the horse: inheritance was merely a peripheral issue, in his analysis, and like all aspects of capitalist relations, it would obviously be swept away when the proletariat became the majority in a given country and directly abolished private property as such.

Bakunin also continued to recognize the right to the private ownership of land (a Proudhonist precept), which, he maintained, would finally disappear only when inherited property reverted to the community. It seems very likely that, while personally supporting the abolition of private property, he camouflaged his antiproprietary views (which conflicted with Proudhon) in order to avoid antagonizing the peasantry and possibly his artisan supporters. Once again, Marx argued that land ownership would necessarily be abolished along with all private property. Indeed, capitalism, Marx held, would eventually eliminate nearly all preindustrial classes, or at least draw them into the orbit of the capitalist market. Hence only the proletariat would be capable of abolishing capitalist society, possibly with the aid of other oppressed strata.

These conflicts came into the open at the Basel Congress of 1869, where Bakunin and his supporters made the abolition of inheritance "the most hotly contested issue" on the agenda, as G.D.H. Cole puts it.²¹ After considerable debate, a plurality of the delegates voted in favor of Bakunin's position, but they failed to acquire the absolute majority that was necessary for the position to be officially adopted by the International. The respective supporters of Marx and

Bakunin now girded themselves for a bitter confrontation at the next congress—but only two weeks before the 1870 congress was to convene, Louis Napoleon was provoked into declaring war against Prussia.

History, as it were, now intervened to push the International to the background, for searing events not only rendered all abstract theoretical discussions academic, they led to the creation of the Paris Commune of 1871, an uprising that was to acquire legendary proportions in the history of Marxism and anarchism alike.

NOTES

1. George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1962), p. 130. Woodcock's reference to "that happy age" is quite inaccurate. Many French prisoners, including Blanqui, were treated very harshly and either became seriously ill or died as a result of their suffering.
2. David McClellan, *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 231.
3. Marx quoted in Stephan Born, *Erinnerungen*, p. 102, in *ibid.*, p. 202.
4. P. H. Noyes, *Organization and Revolution: Working-Class Associations in the German Revolutions of 1848-1849* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 123.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League" (March 1850); in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 10: *Marx and Engels 1849-1851* (New York: International Publishers, 1978), p. 283. I am using the standard English title for this work, despite the title given it in *Collected Works*, "Address of the Central Authority to the League."
7. *Ibid.*, p. 285.
8. Karl Marx, "Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International Association" and "Provisional Rules of the Association," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 20: *Marx-Engels 1864-1868* (New York: International Publishers, 1985), pp. 5-16.
9. Karl Marx, letter to Engels, November 4, 1864, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 42: *Marx-Engels 1864-1868* (New York: International Publishers, 1987), p. 18.
10. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *On the Political Capacity of the Working Classes* (1865); excerpted in *Selected Writings of P.-J. Proudhon*, ed. Stewart Edwards (New York: Doubleday, 1969), pp. 62-3; emphasis added.
11. Henryk Katz, *The Emancipation of Labor: A History of the First International* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), p. 44.
12. Eugène Varlin was erroneously referred to as "Jean Varlin" on page vii of volume 1 of *The Third Revolution*.
13. Quoted in Katz, *The Emancipation of Labor*, p. 45.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
16. Marx, letter to Engels, November 4, 1864, *Collected Works*, vol. 42, pp. 18-19.

17. Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald (New York: Covici, Friede, 1935), p. 434.
18. Bakunin to Marx, December 22, 1868, quoted in Anthony Masters, *Bakunin: The Father of Anarchism* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1974), p. 181.
19. See Michael Bakunin, "Principles and Organization of the International Brotherhood" (1866), in *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings*, ed. Arthur Lehning (New York: Grove Press, n.d.), pp. 64-93, esp. pp. 69, 70-1.
20. *Bakunin on Anarchy*, ed. Sam Dolgoff (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), pp. 218-19.
21. G.D.H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought*, vol. 2: *Marxism and Anarchism, 1850-1890* (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 130.

CHAPTER 30 Prelude to the Paris Commune

The Franco-Prussian War marked the clash of two contrasting but hitherto parallel developments in nineteenth-century Europe.

In 1870 both France and Germany—in its various stages of unification—were still predominantly rural. Although both countries were on the threshold of the industrial revolution, nearly seventy per cent of the French population and sixty per cent of the German population lived in rural areas. In the two decades that Louis Napoleon sat on the throne, as we have seen, he did not decisively alter this basic economic landscape: even when the Second Empire came to an end, artisanal labor still produced the bulk of French goods, and the peasants still accounted for the great majority of the French population. Unskilled proletarians producing machine-made commodities were becoming much more numerous, but in 1870 French artisans still occupied a considerable place in the economic life of their country—particularly in Paris, which remained a world center of artisanal excellence, and its working class still consisted mainly of artisans rather than industrial proletarians.

Politically, after the bloodletting of June 1848, the Parisian workers had retreated back to their neighborhoods, apathetic and disdainful of the bourgeoisie that had condemned their rising. The years of repression, accompanied by improved economic conditions, left France politically inert—its provincials largely Bonapartist, its city residents smoldering with bitter disillusionment or turning inward to cope with problems of material well-being. The reputation of the Second Empire as not only dissolute and pleasure-loving but crassly mean-spirited and egoistic has a strong basis in fact. In the 1850s, much to the satisfaction of the ruling classes, Bonaparte delivered on his promise to provide a stable authoritarian state, control over the working classes, and economic growth.

Most notably, as we have seen, Napoleon III laid the infrastructure for France's leap forward into an industrial economy in the closing decades of the century. Much of the new economic prosperity he gave France came as a result

of the massive public works programs he instituted. His government borrowed great sums to build or improve the country's roads, railways, bridges, canals, and cities. But the years of growth in the Second Empire were gained essentially by mortgaging France's economic future to achieve a buoyant present. By concentrating its economic resources on constructing transportation and infrastructure—and equipping a large French army—Bonaparte's regime failed to generate an industrial revolution in France. In effect, the emperor had laid the groundwork for the transformation of France to an industrial society, rather than produce it directly.

Which is not to say that industry was absent—on the contrary, Bonaparte himself did import English-style factories to the country and foster their development at home. Indeed, if Paris itself was still artisanal, the Parisian suburbs were filling up with factories. Locomotive works, railway repair shops, chemical plants, and metallurgical works materialized outside the capital's walls, utilizing the labor of a new type of working class, the industrial proletariat. These men and women, instead of selling wares they had made to merchants and the public, were paid hourly or piecework wages for producing goods according to increasingly rationalized systems of production, and commodities that had once been crafted by skilled handworkers were increasingly fabricated by relatively unskilled workers mobilized in highly mechanized factories. Moreover, many French and German artisans were now *de facto* subsidiary employees of factory owners who, since they still required their skills, permitted them to work at home or in small workshops. Try as they might to hold on to their independence and maintain their corporations (in Germany, guilds were still common), these workers occupied an intermediate position between traditional craftspeople and the modern industrial proletariat. Nevertheless, even as factories multiplied, these artisans were steadily absorbed into the industrial world and reduced to mere proletarians.

During the two Bonapartist decades, the population of all of France's industrial cities ballooned. Roubaix, a major textile center in the north, trebled in population; Toulouse, Lille, and Lyon doubled; and the great port cities of Marseilles and Bordeaux were half again as large, despite the fact that the French population as a whole rose by only two million between 1851 and 1861 and in fact by 1872 decreased by more than a million, which suggested that much of the urban population increase was primarily the result of internal migration from the countryside and the conversion of peasants into proletarians.

In Paris in particular, as David H. Pinkney tells us, population growth was so rapid that in 1850 congestion was already an immensely serious problem:

the area within the inner ring of boulevards on the Right Bank, the seventeenth century line of fortifications, was an almost impenetrable hive of

tenements and shops. Here in an area not twice the size of New York's Central Park, piled one above another in rooms or tiny apartments, lived more than a third of the city's one million inhabitants. The density of the population was higher than on the lower East Side of New York in the 1930s.¹

The size of the city expanded enormously in the next two decades, especially in 1861, when the outlying suburbs were annexed to the existing twelve *arrondissements*, bringing the total to twenty, so that by 1870, an estimated 1.9 million people lived in an area that barely exceeded six miles at its widest diameter.

Yet in physical and logistical terms, the city could scarcely support such a large population. In 1851, the year Louis Napoleon performed his coup, Paris had still been an agglomeration of largely medieval villages. Its boundaries scarcely extended beyond the old eighteenth-century "General Farmers' Wall," at whose sixty gates the city taxes (*octroi*) were imposed on all goods entering the capital. The city's narrow, winding streets, its dark caverns of houses crammed together with open sewers running alongside, were virtually impossible for visitors to negotiate, and many parts were unknown even to native Parisians.

In the face of these problems of congestion and sanitation, Louis Napoleon undertook a massive rebuilding program, assigning the task in 1853 to Baron Georges Haussmann, the prefect of the Seine department who became, under the Second Empire, the virtual ruler of Paris. Over the course of seventeen years, Haussmann cleared and enlarged the narrow streets, opening them up to create wide boulevards with sweeping vistas and immense squares whose great expanses made the capital one of the civic splendors of the world. Parisians who had formerly lived, worked, and met all their needs within their immediate neighborhood, as Balzac and Eugène Sue portrayed them in their novels, now had easy access to the central areas of the city.

But beautification, mobility, and improved sanitary conditions were not the only motivations that impelled Haussmann and Louis Bonaparte. The highly congested Parisian neighborhoods had been notorious hotbeds of sedition and insurrection, and the narrow streets in the working-class neighborhoods were famously suited for the construction of barricades in periods of insurrection. Between 1827 and 1849, in a span of a single generation, barricades had been reared eight times in the eastern half of the city; in 1830 and twice more in 1848, they had been used in insurrections. That the city was physically congenial to insurgency had been a source of vexation to regime after regime. The problem had been raised in the Chamber of Deputies as long ago as the rising of the *Saisons* in 1839 and as recently as the street fighting of 1851; indeed, some measures had already been taken to push wider streets into the

most intractable of the working-class areas. There can be little doubt, as Haussmann himself attests in his memoirs, that the Bonapartist regime straightened, widened, and lengthened the streets and boulevards of Paris so that it could more effectively deploy its artillery and cavalry against barricades. With extraordinary determination and sometimes guile, Haussmann transformed Paris into a city that was not only remarkably beautiful but that was far more defensible against future insurgencies.

To perform the massive construction work required to rebuild the city, Haussmann brought in from the provinces thousands of unskilled workers, or *gros métiers* (as distinguished from skilled artisans), who added greatly to the restiveness of the Parisian working class. Moreover, the reconstruction worsened rather than improved working-class housing, exacerbating workers' anger and militancy; indeed, by tearing down their hovels and entire districts, it produced an upward spiral of rents that ultimately forced the removal of many to new slums in annexed suburban areas. These changes were not without their political consequences: in the 1860s many cities in France began to return republican deputies to the Corps Législatif, where they joined the opposition of bourgeois critics to Louis Napoleon. Despite the high esteem in which the French bourgeoisie held their free-trading English counterparts, they had long been nurtured in protectionism, and they now tended to blame every setback in the French economy on trade agreements that Louis Napoleon had signed with Britain to lower tariffs. Indeed, many industries, particularly small firms, openly criticized the emperor's policies for their mounting economic difficulties. As rumblings against the government mounted in the Corps Législatif, the liberal deputies began to demand more participation for the middle classes in state affairs, with the result that the imperial government had to face discontent by all but the most reactionary social classes in the realm.

As the 1860s drew to an end, great cracks were opening in the Empire's façade and challenges to the government were everywhere on the increase. The huge debts that Bonaparte had piled up to make possible his massive infrastructure and reconstruction projects were destabilizing the economy without increasing the productive capacity of the country, as were the emperor's costly war against Russia in the Crimea and his futile imperialist adventures in Mexico (from which French troops were evicted in 1867 by a combination of Benito Juárez's peon armies and American pressure). Money that went into roads and urban development was money that did not go into industry as a whole, lining the pockets of French financiers without dramatically advancing industrial development.

Moreover, the end of the building boom in the late 1860s left thousands of workers unemployed, and the heavy bank speculation in real estate that had partly underwritten Haussmann's civic improvements led to the virtual collapse of the financial structure. In 1868 France slipped into an economic crisis that,

although relatively mild, was the most serious the Empire had experienced. Credit tightened up, the reckless financial improvisations of the previous decade came to an end, and the French bourgeoisie beat a quick retreat to what Tom Kemp has called its traditional system of "orthodox finance." By withholding funds from the state or else charging it high interest rates, the bankers now "staged a kind of strike against the régime as the expression of [their] disapproval."²

Bonaparte's response to these difficulties was typical of his temporizing policies: in 1868 he put an end to the economic and imperialist adventurism that had previously characterized his regime's behavior and converted the "Authoritarian Empire" into what has been called the "Liberal Empire," essentially creating a limited monarchy under the premiership of the liberal deputy Émile Ollivier. The Corps Législatif now became an increasingly authentic parliamentary forum in which deputies openly challenged policies of the emperor's ministers—challenges that found their way into an ever-freer press and that were echoed in open public meetings and discussions. Indeed, a critical republican opposition, which had been emerging since the mid-1860s, now crystallized around three flamboyant deputies: Léon Gambetta, Jules Favre, and Jules Ferry. Even the archreactionary Orleanist Adolphe Thiers prudently aided the opposition with advice and votes when he deemed it politically expedient to do so.

The emperor's declining status in the country can be judged by the election results for the Corps Législatif since 1857. In that year only seven opposition candidates had been elected to the chamber; only a few years later, in 1863, this number leaped to thirty-five; and by 1869, the last election prior to Louis Napoleon's abdication, opposition deputies soared to ninety-three. In this last election, all the large cities—Paris, Lyon, and Marseilles—returned deputies for the opposition; in Paris the opposition got 234,000 votes, to the government's paltry 70,000. In 1868, to lessen public discontent, the nervous government further liberalized press controls, and before the year was out, 140 new periodicals mushroomed in the capital alone, including *Le Rappel* (an unmistakably militant name), with a circulation of at least 120,000. Finally, the 1860s witnessed the revival of the socialist left and the labor movement and the reactivation of the secret societies, many of which were Blanquist and Jacobin in their orientation, leading to conspiracies to overthrow the regime, even to assassinate the emperor. To ease working-class hostility, the government completely legalized trade unions in 1864, whereupon the ever-zealous Eugène Varlin toured the country in a campaign to establish combative working-class associations, or *sociétés de résistance* (as distinguished from the fairly tepid trade councils, or *chambres syndicales*, favored by the Proudhonist mutualists).

Although he was always deferential to the bourgeoisie, Louis Napoleon

varied his policies toward the workers, allowing for reforms that were often followed by acts of repression. In the 1860s, as we have seen, he courted the workers in order to countervail the demands of the bourgeoisie, on the hopeful assumption that the workers had abandoned their bloody insurrectionary course of June 1848. Yet despite the legalization of unions, men of Varlin's stripe were frequently arrested and sent to prison or to exile in North Africa. In March 1868 fifteen leaders of the Paris bureau of the International were tried and convicted, followed two months later by a second trial, and still a third one in June 1870. The International had been banned and its members were ruthlessly persecuted by the police—in fact, by the last year of the Empire, it was effectively suppressed. Varlin was obliged to seek refuge in Belgium, where he ceaselessly attacked the regime and tried, even from a distance, to strengthen the French working-class opposition to the regime.

These feverish shifts in the emperor's policy earned him only the contempt of nearly all classes in France; indeed, by 1869, the Bonapartist system was on the brink of toppling. Louis Napoleon was a sick man—physically (due to a massive kidney stone) as well as politically, and his regime was clouded by economic instability, a restless working class, and a dissatisfied bourgeoisie. It was haunted by financial scandals and painful defeats, most recently his humiliating failure to turn Mexico into a colony.

Moreover, despite his thirst for "glory" and his incongruous posturing over a decaying regime, the emperor was afflicted with a bumbling and sclerotic officer corps and an army that, despite costly military expenses, was ill trained and, by comparison with the developments in weaponry that were being made elsewhere, especially in Prussia, poorly armed. The French *chassepôt* rifle, to be sure, was immensely superior in range and accuracy to the Prussian needle gun, but the emperor's army had not advanced appreciably in heavy equipment beyond the 1840s. Where the Prussian artillery, thanks to Alfred Krupp, was the most advanced in Europe, Prussian logistics and training made the French army, despite its celebrated élan, seem almost amateurish by comparison. Prussian officers, although less colorful and dashing than their French counterparts, were typically efficient, and the Prussian cavalry was perhaps the most superbly trained in Europe, certainly far more able to reconnoiter enemy terrain than the French. The "Iron Chancellor" of the Prussian-dominated North German Confederation, Otto von Bismarck, having already united many of the northern German states under a Prussian king, was only too eager to establish a still more powerful German empire by annexing the long-cherished territories of Alsace and Lorraine, which were under French rule.

VIVE LA RÉPUBLIQUE!

That Bismarck wanted a war with France can hardly be doubted. All his geopolitical aspirations demanded it. Filled with pride in their country's economic expansion and Prussian military efficiency, the north Germans regarded France as effete, even dissolute, and disdained her pretensions to leadership of the European continent as archaic. Louis Napoleon, in turn, was eager to restore national unity by using war to mobilize popular support for his throne. But the French were by no means enthusiastic about engaging the Germans; indeed, even reactionaries like Thiers feared for the ability of the military, led principally by the intransigent monarchist Marshal MacMahon, to take on the more able Prussian army.

For Bismarck, the question of war with France was simply how to provoke one. The opportunity came as a result of an affront that France suffered, or seemed to suffer, at the hands of Prussia in a dynastic quarrel in Spain. In July 1870 the Spaniards had had enough of their bumbling queen, Isabella II, and called upon the Hohenzollern rulers of Prussia to provide them with a new sovereign. The Prussians were delighted to oblige, anticipating the wealth and power that a dynastic alliance with Spain would bring. Following a series of secret negotiations, Prince Leopold of Sigmaringen, a Hohenzollern notable, was made available. But the prospect of a Hohenzollern dynasty on the other side of the Pyrenees was not only a slap in France's face, it seemed to open the French southern flank to Prussian encirclement. Indeed, in Paris's eyes, for the Prussians to try to extend their influence to France's southern frontier was absolutely intolerable.

After much diplomatic maneuvering, in the course of which the prince withdrew his own candidacy, the French issued a virtual ultimatum stipulating that Leopold would never be allowed to sit on the Spanish throne. Although the Prussian king's telegram in reply to the ultimatum was fairly tepid, Bismarck shrewdly reworded it to make it appear that the king had rebuffed the French ambassador. He then released the doctored telegram to the press, knowing it would provoke the French. The French, confident of their military superiority over the Prussians, allowed themselves to be infuriated by this manufactured snub, and on July 19, 1870, Louis Bonaparte declared war on the Prussian-controlled North German Confederation. As French troops marched out of Paris, jubilant crowds lined the streets, certain that a vibrant Gallic military would surely rout the dour Teutons.

Their hopes were grossly misplaced. Within weeks, the poorly mobilized French armies, led by incompetent generals who lacked any realistic offensive strategy against the well-coordinated Prussian forces, were surrounded. Where Bismarck's well-trained infantry and ubiquitous Uhlan cavalry did not crush them, they fled in a near panic. By August 7, news reached Paris that the

Prussians had pushed back both Generals MacMahon and Frossard, resulting on August 9 in an angry demonstration before the Palais Bourbon, where the Corps Législatif was obliged to protect itself with troops against its own citizens. With a crisis at hand, the ministry was changed, with Thiers installed at its head. But now outraged, even defiant calls to replace the empire with a republic and save France from the Prussians were heard throughout the city, redolent of past revolutionary situations and insurrections.

In mid-August Blanquist hotheads decided that the time was ripe for another putsch and called upon Blanqui himself to return to Paris from his refuge in Brussels. Their plan was, first, to attack the barracks of the Villette fire station, where the firemen had stored a number of rifles, and with arms in hand to arouse the people in the streets against the government. Inasmuch as the fire station and barracks were located in a radical working-class district, the Blanquists naively thought the residents would instantly rise up and rally to their support. From there they would capture other key points in the city and march on the center of Paris. Blanqui, recalling the defeats he had suffered earlier, objected to the plan, warning that the time was still not propitious for an uprising—but he was overruled by his followers and was obliged to yield to their wishes.

On August 14, armed with little more than a handful of revolvers and daggers, the putschists and perhaps a hundred supporters launched their attack on the barracks—only to be met with a refusal by the firemen to surrender their weapons. The Blanquists withdrew, mindful of Blanqui's injunction against spilling any blood in the attack, and proceeded down the Boulevard Villette toward the Belleville district, shouting "Long live the Republic!" and "To arms!" to a startled crowd along the way. Needless to say, hardly anyone responded to their cries. The "uprising" was patently a fiasco, and its initiators scattered before either the police or the troops could arrive in force. Two were captured and sentenced to death, but their sentences were commuted to life imprisonment after a number of notable Parisians called for administrative clemency. The Villette fiasco definitively revealed the failure of Blanquist putschism. Without trying to garner mass support for their tiny conspiracy, Blanqui's elitist followers were simply stranded. Parisians had understandably remained unmoved when a small group of revolutionaries, planning behind their backs, tried suddenly to stir them into an adventuristic action. But the putsch also provided the authorities with an excuse to crack down on the entire revolutionary movement in Paris, which they did with all the energy at their disposal.

With the revolutionary movement in retreat, the privileged classes found they had little to fear but their Bonapartist emperor. Even this problem was resolved when, on September 2, the last of the operational French armies—107,000 troops—capitulated to the Prussian army at Sedan, and the ailing and listless

emperor, who accompanied rather than led them, gave his sword over to the Prussian king. The cities of Strasbourg and Metz managed to hold out longer against the German juggernaut and were duly besieged. But Louis Napoleon was now Bismarck's prisoner, a shock that, back in Paris, threw the Corps Législatif into an uproar. The proclamation of a republic now seemed unavoidable, but both Orleanists and republicans tried in every way to delay it: the Orleanists were monarchists, still committed to an Orleans dynasty, and the republicans feared the Paris "mob," which was already demanding radical change.

On September 4, a demonstration with vague patriotic themes was planned for the Place de la Concorde, but the night before, the Blanquists, who still managed to retain an organized presence in Paris, combed the working-class quarters, fervently urging the workers and the National Guard to follow them, with arms in hand, in a popular insurrection the next day. Nor were the workers alone in taking to the streets; this time, the largely bourgeois National Guard, long neglected and humiliated by Louis Napoleon, joined them. Thus, on September 4, while the deputies were trying to decide on the future of the government, a huge crowd burst into the Palais Bourbon, with the Blanquists at their head, and demanded the immediate creation of a republican regime.

In a replay of the invasion of the Palais Bourbon in February 1848, Jules Favre acted out Lamartine's role as the reluctant republican leader. Although Favre was no last-minute convert to republicanism, as Lamartine had been, he clearly did not want the republic to be proclaimed in the heat of another insurrection, that is, when the workers might sweep the entire government away and possibly proclaim a social republic. To distract the invading crowd, the nervous Favre, aided by several deputies, once again led the workers and the National Guards in a march to the Hôtel de Ville to proclaim the republic, and once again, he and his procession found the Place de Grève filled with workers. The Hôtel was occupied by Jacobins and Blanquists who were already busily forming their own government, dropping from the windows to the crowd below lists of proposed names, including those of the old Jacobin Charles Delescluze, Blanqui, and the heady republican journalist Henri Rochefort, among other radical candidates. And like Lamartine before him, Favre, who had been a moderate republican in 1848, slyly proposed, to placate the radicals in the crowd, that until a permanent republican legislature could be established by national elections, a provisional Government of National Defense should be created, composed exclusively of the existing legislature's Parisian deputies—presumably in emulation of the "Mountain" of 1793. By seeming to promise the restoration of a Commune, the proposal quieted potential popular objections to the fact that such a government would in reality be filled with Orleanist deputies left over from the old regime. Finally, as if to complete the parody of February 1848, a younger republican, Léon Gambetta, persuaded the crowd in the Place de Grève to retain the tricolor in preference to

the red flag—a task that, in the wake of national military humiliation at Prussian hands, was not very difficult to achieve.

Gambetta's symbolic victory acquired political reality when the coterie established the Government of National Defense, politically not unlike the Provisional Government that had emerged from the February Revolution of 1848. The new government, working closely with the old monarchist and republican rump of the Corps Législatif—many of whose deputies had fled Paris for the safety of their respective departments—immediately set about to eliminate the potential for further revolutionary changes. Installed at the head of the government was a dour Breton, General Jules Trochu, who was not only a devout Catholic but a firm Legitimist. His political beliefs alone would hardly have made him acceptable to working-class Parisians. But because he had had the foresight to criticize the army for its unpreparedness—even before the war—he had been rewarded with the military governorship of Paris and, known to be a mild man, was fairly popular with the crowd.

The real leaders of the government, however, were Favre and Gambetta. As vice-president and minister of foreign affairs, Favre was situated to negotiate an armistice with the Prussians, which he was only too eager to do to restore normality in France. Gambetta, whose militant republicanism made him popular with the crowd, was given the equally strategic Ministry of Interior, from which he ostensibly "republicanized" France by appointing men of republican sympathies to the departmental prefectures as well as the Paris *mairies*. Ernest Picard, a major opposition leader in the Corps Législatif, became minister of finance; General LeFlô was selected for the Ministry of Defense; and Étienne Arago, the aging playwright who had headed the Paris Post Office in 1848, was made the mayor of Paris. Still another remnant of 1848, Garnier-Pagès, also found his way into the government. Less known to the public was Pierre Dorian, an industrialist who apparently prided himself on his good labor relations and his efficiency; he became the minister of works, a position largely concerned with fortifying the capital. The prefecture of the police was given to Edmund Adam who, in time, proved a fairly honorable man in a dubious crew of naifs and cynics.

As a concession to the Left, Favre and Gambetta appointed Rochefort to a sinecure position in the government. A prominent opposition journalist during the Second Empire, Rochefort had opened his newspaper, *La Marseillais*, to Blanquist and Jacobin writers; moreover, he had the distinction of being imprisoned for his oppositional activities under Bonaparte and had just now been freed by the rebellious crowd. But it speaks volumes about the provisional government that it even offered a post to Adolphe Thiers, the aging counterrevolutionary reprobate of Louis-Philippe's reign. At a time of potential danger to his person, however, this architect of counterrevolution and notorious coward discreetly refused any post and professed to withdraw into political retirement.

To the bitter disappointment of the socialists, Jacobins, and Blanquists, the February Revolution of 1848 seemed to be replaying itself. Once again the moderates had, by deft manipulation, trickery, and persuasion, captured the power from the popular movement. Bitterly, the old Jacobin writer Delescluze remarked to a friend that evening, "We are lost."³

Indeed, as Samuel Bernstein points out, "Except in décor, the government was not a sharp departure from the Liberal Empire" of the 1860s. In fact, several of the government members, in 1848, had contributed to the destruction of the Second Republic: "Favre, for example, had drafted the decree ordering the deportation, without trial, of the June insurgents; and Garnier-Pagès had been the author of the ill-starred supertax of forty-five centimes."⁴ Marx put it well when he wrote that the Government of National Defense neither replaced the monarchy nor introduced social measures of worth, but merely occupied Louis Bonaparte's vacant throne in the guise of republicanism.

PARIS UNDER SIEGE

The military defeat that France had just suffered was as total as it was unexpected. Once the emperor surrendered his sword in September, Prussian armies moved rapidly toward Paris, a move for which the capital was woefully unprepared. Of the regular army, only 60,000 effectives remained in Paris, along with 100,000 Mobile Guards who were now ill-trained reserves or "territorials" from the provinces, and a miscellany of police, firemen, and sailors. Short of an outright surrender of the capital, a Prussian siege was unavoidable.

Yet even as Prussian artillery moved ever closer to Paris, the significant event, for the citizens of the capital, seems to have been less the danger of the military defeat than the new prospects opened by the fall of the imperial regime. A heady air of expectancy buoyed up the city—another republic had been created, this time bloodlessly, and a carnival of fraternity prevailed. To be sure, patriotism and wartime chauvinism also infected Parisians—even Blanqui succumbed to it and called for unity among all Frenchmen, if need be at the expense of social conflict, editing a newspaper called *La Patrie en danger*. But in the main, Parisians seem to have assumed that the fall of Louis Napoleon had been the fulfillment of the Prussians' own military goals as well as the consummation of their own wishes.

In fact, this was not at all the case. The Prussians were seeking France's complete humiliation and a sizable chunk of French territory. As the weeks went by, reality set in for the Parisians, and faced with the danger of a siege, the National Guard ballooned from 20,000 into a huge force of 350,000 in Paris

alone. Once again, as in 1848, the Guard was opened up to all able-bodied men, including large contingents of workers, who received a franc and a half a day for their service and, as tradition dictated, had the right to elect their own officers. Moreover, Paris was very well fortified: surrounding the city was a thirty-foot wall, outside of which was a moat and, spaced at strategic intervals, sixteen powerful forts, each mounted with fifty to seventy heavy guns that could rain fire on much of the surrounding landscape. About 3000 cannons of varying types were available for the city's defense, many of them purchased by popular subscription, with funds contributed by the workers and middle classes.

Trochu saw to it that the city was as well provisioned as possible for a siege. Inside the city walls sheep by the thousands were permitted to graze on any open spaces that were not under cultivation, from the Bois de Boulogne to the small plazas. Cattle roamed everywhere. Farmers brought their vegetables and poultry into the capital, not only to feed Parisians but to prevent the Prussians from living off the land. The Tuileries became an artillery emplacement, factories were converted to cannon foundries, and the Louvre was emptied of art treasures and transformed into an arsenal. With all these preparations, it seemed certain that Paris could hold out against the Prussians almost indefinitely, with the result that the city was flooded with foreign tourists as well as provincials. The looming siege thus took on the air of an exciting festival rather than a painful ordeal.

Finally, on September 20, the Prussian armies completed their encirclement, or investment, of the capital, and the siege was under way in earnest. But apart from skirmishes and some artillery duels, initially the two armies scarcely engaged each other. In fact, it is entirely possible that the Prussians might have succumbed to a concerted, well-planned, and resolute offensive, had the French launched one early on, when they were still positioning themselves around the city. But no such undertaking was mounted. Rather, a siege mentality pervaded the government's thinking; far from mounting an offensive against the Prussians, the government eagerly hoped to reach an armistice with them. The Government of National Defense was already betraying a greater fear of its own armed people—particularly the workers—than of the artillery and infantry of the invaders it was expected to repel.

Although by their behavior most Parisian bourgeois exhibited little serious inclination to resist the Prussians, they bombastically declaimed their refusal to allow "even one inch" of French territory to pass to the enemy. It was generally assumed that some other military force would eventually rally to the capital's defense, most likely one gathered from the provinces. To organize such a force, an extension of the government was established some distance from Paris, in Tours, known as the Delegation of Tours. There was also some hope that a foreign power, such as England, might come to the aid of Paris and bring the insufferable

investment of Europe's most glorious city to its rightful end. Favre and Thiers all but begged the English to provide assistance, even invoking the danger of a possible "red revolt" by an enemy more terrifying than even the Prussians, namely the revolutionary elements of the working class. But the Prussians had sufficiently intimidated Europe with their victory over the French to render international aid to Paris implausible, assuming it was ever contemplated.

In contrast to the passivity and defeatism of the government, the workers—or at least their most socially conscious leaders—were determined not to surrender the capital to the Prussians. On the contrary, they were eager to defend the new republic—the fruit of the most recent of France's revolutions—to the bitter end if necessary. With understandable suspicion, they regarded the government, with all its passivity, as treacherous and demanded that Paris continue to resist by calling a *levée en masse*, or general mobilization and arming of the population, such as the Jacobins had done in 1793. This demand was forcefully articulated on September 5, a day after the formation of the new government, when a delegation met with Gambetta at the Hôtel de Ville. Composed of members of the Paris Council of the IWMA, the Trade Union Federation (a loosely formed group of *chambres syndicales*), and a miscellany of socialists, the delegation's demands were not limited only to the military situation. In fact they bluntly called for municipal elections (stirring memories of the Commune of 1792-93) and, even more disturbingly, the substitution of the National Guard for the police, complete freedom of speech and the press, and the election of all judges.

Gambetta received them politely, but he was conspicuously evasive in his response. The next day the International, together with the trade unions, convened a meeting that was attended by 400 to 500 people. This meeting called upon Parisians to establish a defense and vigilance committee (so redolent of similar committees in the Great Revolution) in each of the twenty *arrondissements*. The committees, in turn, were to be coordinated by a Republican Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements for National Defense, consisting of four elected delegates from each local vigilance committee. These committees were duly formed over the next few days, under a Central Committee headed by Eugène Varlin. Significantly, the Central Committee met in the same building—a hall in the Rue de la Corderie—that housed the International and the Trade Union Federation and in time became a center for the most revolutionary tendencies in Paris. With the support of the unions, the Central Committee would virtually turn the "Corderie" (as it was called) into a dual power against the Government of National Defense.

Nor were the Committee and its supporters without a radical program. On September 15, members of the Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements issued a proclamation that was posted on the walls of Paris, listing the full range of its demands.⁵ In addition to the demands of September 5, it called

for a complete inventory of all the essential commodities in the city, and demanded that these goods be shared equitably among the people according to need. Moreover, it called for the arming of all citizens (including the provision of ammunition), for placing the police under popular control, and for housing for all, including the "appropriation" of all empty apartments and buildings for "various defence services." Without explicitly using the language of the Great Revolution, it called for "national delegates" to be sent out to the departments, with functions similar to those of the old Representatives on Mission of 1793.

The government, fearful that the terror of 1793-94 would return—this time as a "red" specter, with an implicit challenge to property and exploitation—clearly viewed the Prussians as the lesser enemy and began to extend feelers for an armistice. In fact Favre, as the foreign minister, had already called for an armistice shortly after the Government of National Defense was established. On September 18, he secretly met with Bismarck, only to find the Prussian terms so demanding that he rode back to Paris in complete despair. Not only would Prussia require France to cede Alsace, parts of Lorraine, and Metz, as well as provide a huge indemnity, but even during the siege itself, Favre was warned, Paris would no longer have access to outside provisions unless the government gave up Strasbourg and permitted the Prussians to occupy Mont-Valérien, the massive French fort to the west of the city walls. The news of these terms incited widespread protests in the capital, and on September 20 the Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements sent a delegation to the Hôtel de Ville to make known its objections to any armistice with the hated invaders. Even the ever-resourceful Thiers failed to persuade the Prussians to preserve French honor in the peace terms; indeed, he encountered the same difficulties that confronted Favre.

In the fall of 1870, the people of Paris stood firm against the Prussians—although very much alone. On October 7, in the hope of mobilizing support from the rest of France for the defense of the capital, Gambetta left for Tours in a hot-air balloon (this was the only way he could cross the Prussian lines) to head the government's delegation there. Taking over the ministry of war from the elderly Crémieux, he bestirred the delegation's somnolent members with his usual bluster and energy and tried to mobilize new troops from the provinces to create an Army of the Loire. But until this force could prove itself to be effective in the field, Paris was still isolated militarily and politically. Indeed, to many of its citizens, it seemed that the city would be left to function as a sovereign municipality in its own right.

But what political structure would such a sovereign municipality have? Would it continue to be led by a politically mixed group of leaders who were committed to capitulation to the Prussians, as well as to a counterrevolutionary domestic agenda? Or would it be a Commune, revived for the first time since the Great Revolution, with a municipal council of elected representatives? Or

would it be a direct democracy of the more radical kind, like the sectional democracy of 1793, which had variously supported and later opposed the old Commune?

The Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements now became the arena for a debate over the nature of the prospective Commune. With the support of many Blanquists, Gustave Lefrançais, one of the committee's most militant and socialistic members, bluntly demanded that a future Commune be structured around a direct democracy like that of 1793. The defense and vigilance committee of the eighteenth *arrondissement* declared in *Le Combat* of September 21 that "the *quartiers* are the fundamental base of the democratic Republic,"⁶ thereby voicing a radical demand for mass democracy and the possible reconstruction of the old sections. In the end, however, moderates on the Central Committee succeeded in toning down this proposal: the final version, as published in *Le Combat* of October 5, simply called upon citizens to use their local assemblies as vehicles for the election of members to a citywide Municipal Council: "at your public meetings, in your *arrondissement* committees, in your National Guard battalions, right now you must select the men most worthy to represent you at the Hôtel de Ville."⁷ The proposal was not received enthusiastically by the Corderie—the International, the Trade Union Federation, and the National Guard Central Committee—but the idea of a Commune structured around sectional assemblies faded permanently from the political horizon.

October, however, was to be filled with continued demonstrations and stormy events. On October 5, a young National Guard officer named Gustave Flourens (who had written an account of an ideal society in which "men, freed from their chains, governed themselves"⁸) led a march of Guard battalions to the Hôtel de Ville, where he repeated the demands for a *levée en masse*, municipal elections, and a fair distribution of rations in the besieged city, only to be pleasantly escorted out by the government, which made no commitments. This escapade was followed three days later (October 8) by a demonstration, held by the Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements, to demand municipal elections. As yet, few Parisians responded to the call, and the turnout was embarrassingly meager. Delighted by this failure, the government used the opportunity to ban demonstrations and postpone municipal elections until the siege was lifted, but as Stewart Edwards puts it, the defense and vigilance committees "were constantly crossing the border between active attempts to 'aid' the Government in conducting the defence and attempts to supplant the official administration because it was not vigorous enough" in pursuing the war.⁹ By now it was only a matter of time before these small skirmishes would give rise to a major clash between the government and its radical critics.

The occasion for the clash was provided, in part, by the surrender of Metz

to its Prussian besiegers. With nearly a 100,000 troops under his command, Marshal Bazaine had been quietly sitting out the siege of the city by surrounding Prussian forces. A Bonapartist general, the marshal detested the republic, and when Louis Napoleon surrendered at Sedan, he had made little effort even to engage the Prussians, let alone raise the siege. Finally, on October 27, after seventy days, he capitulated to his besiegers—an act that freed an entire Prussian army to reinforce the siege of Paris and engage in operations against growing French provincial resistance. Everywhere across the French political spectrum, the cry of "treachery" went up—not only from the Left but from Gambetta himself, who openly denounced Bazaine as a traitor.

To exacerbate an already turbulent situation, at the end of October the government announced not only the fall of Metz but the news that Thiers was traveling abroad once again to seek an armistice with Bismarck. However much the announcement may have pleased the bourgeoisie, which was eager to return to businesslike normality, the news sent a shock wave through the city. The prospect of Paris falling as Metz had just done, of a Bazaine surrender followed by a Thiers armistice, was intolerable to the infuriated working and lower-middle classes, who alone seemed prepared to defend France against Prussian aggression.

At length, at midday on October 31, about 150,000 Parisians, many of them National Guards, gathered in the Place de Grève in pouring rain, furiously denouncing the military setback and crying "No armistice!" and "Vive la Commune!" The demonstration was spontaneous and so large that the mayors of the capital's *arrondissements* hastened to the Hôtel de Ville to demand that the government call municipal elections, presumably to calm the situation and hold out hope to the demonstrators for the prospect of a Commune. The government, in turn, fearful that the huge demonstration would encourage radicals to take over the Hôtel de Ville, beat the *rappel* in the bourgeois districts of the capital, hopefully to rally the reliable or "good" battalions of the National Guard to its defense. But even these "good" battalions failed to respond. Indeed, it now seemed that almost everyone in Paris was fed up with the treachery of Trochu's coterie in the Hôtel de Ville, if not the entire Government of National Defense.

For his part, the hot-headed Gustave Flourens decided that the demonstration had created an opportunity for establishing a Commune. Despite the objections of his more prudent fellow officers, he took it upon himself to rally his Belleville battalions of the National Guard—they included a contingent of sharpshooters equipped at his own expense with *chassepôt* rifles—in an advance on the Hôtel de Ville, clearly with the intention of deposing the existing government and replacing it with a revolutionary Commune composed of, among others, Delescluze, Blanqui, the radical republican Félix Pyat, the

socialist Jean-Baptiste Millière, and, oddly, Victor Hugo (who declined the honor as soon as he learned of it).

Meanwhile in the early afternoon, a rumor—wrong, as it turned out—spread among the demonstrators that Mayor Arago had consented to call municipal elections and that Trochu would be replaced as president of the government by Pierre Dorian, the more popular minister of works. Viewing the concession on municipal elections as a victory, the crowd now began to disperse, and the situation once again seemed under control. Suddenly Flourens and his sharpshooters burst into the room in the Hôtel de Ville where the government was meeting, leaped up on to the long baize table around which the members were seated, and flamboyantly began to march up and down, his spurs tearing the fabric. He firmly demanded the formation of a Commune, to which he gave the chilling name Committee of Public Safety, and he furnished the ministers with his list of committee members. In their eyes, the names Blanqui and Delescluze might just as well have been Robespierre and Saint-Just.

At six-thirty Blanqui, learning that he had been anointed for the new Commune, very reluctantly appeared at the Hôtel de Ville but with his usual decisiveness quickly sat down to write decrees, requisitioning food and closing the city's gates, lest the Prussians take advantage of the disarray in the city and attack. When the remaining members arrived—Delescluze, Millière, and Pyat, among others—it seemed that a "red republic" had indeed been established, with Blanqui and Delescluze at the helm. But as it turned out, the appearance was entirely deceptive and provided the occasion that the government needed to strike back at the Parisian Left.

The table upon which Flourens was striding collapsed when a defender of the government leaped up to challenge him. In the general melee that followed, Trochu, as well as other ministers, escaped from the room and, making their way to the Louvre, where their panicky supporters were assembling, laid plans to retake the Hôtel de Ville. In the meantime, the news that the city hall had been seized by "the reds" galvanized middle-class opinion in favor of the government. By early evening contingents of "good" bourgeois National Guards appeared before the Hôtel de Ville and demanded of Delescluze, who had come out to parley, that the building be evacuated. In return, they said that the government's promise to hold municipal elections would be scrupulously kept. Delescluze returned inside to tell his fellow insurgents of the proposal and persuade them to leave. Meanwhile Mobile Guards, who had been brought to the scene by the government, infiltrated the building by passing through a little-known subterranean passageway from a nearby barracks. The would-be Commune established by Flourens was now in a hopeless situation, facing hostile National Guards outside the building and *mobiles* within.

Peace was finally established when the government agreed to call municipal

elections the very next day and promised to take no reprisals against the confused insurgents. This agreement was vouchsafed by Jules Ferry and Adam, the police prefect. Finally, at three o'clock on the morning of November 1, the leaders of both sides amiably walked out of the city hall arm in arm—Blanqui with General Tamasier (the commander of the National Guard), Delescluze with Dorian, and so forth—each insurgent linked with a military or government leader. After politely shaking hands with their opposites in the nearly empty Place de Grève, the insurgents wisely hastened to the Belleville, there to find safety from the reprisals that were certain to follow if the government broke its agreement.

THE WINTER OF REACTION

Needless to say, less than twenty-four hours after the agreement was made, the government broke it. Before Prefect Adam was even awake the next morning, a ruthless crackdown against the insurgents was under way. Orders were issued for the immediate arrest of Blanqui, Delescluze, Pyat, Flourens, and Millière, among others. (Blanqui managed to elude the authorities for several months, as did his second in command, Gustave Tridon, and the future leader of the Blanquists in the 1880s, Edouard Vaillant.)

Creditably, Adam angrily resigned his post in protest over this breach of promise. He was replaced by a far less honorable police prefect, Cresson, who proceeded to ferret out insurgent leaders. Rochefort also resigned, as could have been expected, while the honorable General Tamasier turned in his command of the National Guard. He was replaced by the reactionary General Clément Thomas, who promptly cashiered sixteen of the more radical Guard commanders. On November 3, almost as an afterthought, the government defaulted on its promise to hold municipal elections by conducting a mere vote of confidence. In this Bonaparte-style plebiscite, it received 560,000 affirmative votes as against 63,000 negative ones. The plebiscite was followed the next day by an election simply for *arrondissement* mayors—and beyond these steps the government refused to budge.

With the failure of the October 31 insurgency at the Hôtel de Ville, the influence of the Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements quickly waned, and the members of the defense and vigilance committees disappeared into their respective republican, Jacobin, and Blanquist clubs, which for their part underwent a sudden revival. Clubs such as the Club des Montagnards and Club de la Patrie en Danger (both Blanquist) and the Club de la Commune (Jacobin) replaced the *arrondissement* committees and the public assemblies that had grown up around them. In a sense, the Parisian militants were

becoming more politicized and revolutionary, a change that would not become evident until the beginning of 1871.

In the meantime, the pressure mounted on Trochu, as commander of the defense of Paris, to carry out an offensive against the Prussians, who seemed to be waiting patiently for the siege to starve the city into submission. This pressure was inspired in part by Gambetta's efforts to raise an army in the provinces, efforts that were now showing some success. On November 9, in an engagement against Bavarian forces, his troops won the first French victory in the war, recapturing the city of Orleans. Indeed, had the cavalry pressed its advantage over the retreating Prussian forces, the French army might very well have routed them completely.

As much as the news of Gambetta's success delighted Paris, it threw Trochu's own plans for a military offensive into disarray. The general had massed a large army with considerable equipment in the northwestern part of the capital and planned to break through the Prussian lines—which were weak in this sector—and try to drive toward the Channel ports. But having captured Orleans in the south, Gambetta now demanded that Trochu link up his forces with those of the Army of the Loire, which required that Trochu transport all his troops and supplies across the city to the southwestern part of the capital—where the Prussians were very numerous and well entrenched. Nor could Trochu take the Prussians by surprise there: the movement of a large French army across an open city could easily be seen from the high ground outside the besieged capital.

On November 29, having obliged Gambetta and moved his troops and supplies to the southwest despite his own doubts, Trochu initiated a "great sortie" against the Prussian forces to the south. It was a disaster. Despite the undeniable courage of the French troops, everything seemed to work against them: the weather, which had swollen the Marne to flood level (which they then had to cross under Prussian fire), the lack of command coordination, the poor logistics, and the treacherous terrain, which gave the Prussians the high ground, all assured a complete rout. The fighting was bloody, presaging the kind of losses the French would suffer in the First World War—in only three days of combat, they lost some 12,000 men and officers. The results for the French were pitiful: the siege was still intact, and to add insult to injury, Orleans was soon recaptured by counterattacking Prussians, causing Gambetta to shift his government from Tours to Bordeaux, farther to the south of France.

With the arrival of the winter months, the siege of Paris now took its terrible toll in hunger, disease, and cold. Although wealthy Parisians still had access to premium foodstuffs, the poor, already accustomed to horsemeat, were reduced to eating dogs, cats, and even rats. So high were prices, especially of necessities, that Blanqui's newspaper, *La Patrie en danger*, folded on December 8, due in part to the limited resources of his subscribers.

Although few adults actually succumbed to outright starvation, long lines of small coffins, containing the bodies of children, moved in a steady train to the Père Lachaise cemetery.

Military failures now brought the Government of National Defense and the people of Paris into open conflict. The government was desperate for an armistice, in marked contrast to most Parisians, who astonishingly were still prepared to fight on against the Prussians. On December 21, compelled by popular opinion, Trochu launched a second "sortie" toward the northeast, this time in bitterly cold weather. This attack, too, failed miserably, at a cost of 2,000 casualties, removing whatever remaining confidence Parisians had in the government and especially in Trochu. On December 27, intensifying the demoralization that had settled into the city, the Prussians began to bombard Paris—barely a week after the failed sortie. For several weeks shells fell on the capital at the rate of 300 to 400 daily, mostly exploding in the Left Bank, where they did surprisingly little damage. Indeed, no more than 97 people were actually killed and 278 wounded, and by early January, Parisians were taking the bombardment in their stride, as a routine and virtually harmless assault.

What really plunged the city into despair was the lack of fuel. The winter of 1870-71 was the most brutal in memory, and virtually every tree in the parks and along the avenues of Paris was cut down to provide warmth. The weekly death rate from infections (principally smallpox, typhoid, and respiratory ailments) soared from 1,200 during the first week of the siege to 4,444 between January 14 and 21. The prestige of the Government of National Defense had reached its nadir, and it was only a matter of time before Parisian workers would try to replace it with a Commune. Indeed, on January 6 the Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements plastered Paris with an *affiche rouge* (or "red poster"), declaring that "the Municipality or the Commune, whatever one chooses to call it, is the only salvation of the people, their only guarantee against destruction," and it closed with the call: "MAKE WAY FOR THE COMMUNE!"¹⁰

Anticipating that an uprising was in the offing, the blundering government cynically decided to bleed the National Guard by sending it out on a completely useless sortie. Having abandoned all hope of lifting the siege, the government had made no effort to train the Guards, whose main function had been crowd control, for combat in open warfare against a highly disciplined and well-officered foreign army. To send them out against the Prussians, who had already routed well-trained regular armies, was a transparent attempt to teach revolutionary Paris a bloody lesson. As one member of the government is quoted as declaring, "there must be a big sortie of the National Guard because opinion will only be appeased when there are 10,000 National Guards dead on the ground."¹¹

Surprisingly, despite this lack of training, the National Guards were eager to take up arms against the enemy. Filled with patriotic and revolutionary ardor, they hoped to overcome the Prussians with an overwhelming "torrential" charge, or *sortie torrentielle*, sweeping them away by sheer force of numbers and bayoneted rifles. The *sortie*, directed against Buzenval, to the west of the city, began on January 19—and from the start, the Guards were badly coordinated and plagued by delays. They were faced with the logistical nightmare of getting as many as a 100,000 men across two narrow bridges. Within a short time, the attack degenerated into confusion. Ironically, only a few National Guard battalions were sent into the heat of battle, bourgeois units rather than popular ones. Once Trochu decided that the National Guard had had enough of combat and bloodshed, he quickly ordered them to retreat—an order that astonished the popular battalions, who had hardly had a chance to take on the Prussians. When it was noticed that most of the *sortie's* six hundred casualties were from the bourgeois units, the rumor spread that the bourgeois units had fought with heroism, while the popular units had behaved with cowardice—a falsehood that only contributed to divisiveness among the Guards and their overall anger toward Trochu and his government.

Ordinary Parisians, in turn, were infuriated by the fact that the Guards had scarcely been permitted to see battle. The government was more detested than ever, by nearly all sectors of popular opinion. In their outrage, the Jacobins of the Republican Alliance, led by veterans of 1848 such as Delescluze and Ledru-Rollin, even made sympathetic overtures to the largely Blanquist "reds" of Belleville and Montmartre, offering to join forces in a common alliance against the government. No such alliance was actually made, and the Belleville revolutionaries decided that the time for an uprising against the government was finally at hand.

On the night of January 21, a public meeting of Club de la Révolution in Montmartre solemnly vowed to take the Hôtel de Ville at noon on the following day. (The government had shifted its proceedings to the safety of the Louvre, but the Commune, it was felt, could not properly be proclaimed anywhere but in the city hall.) When other groups were told of this solemn oath, they responded warily; the International and the Trade Union Federation, convinced that the time was not right for a *journée*, did not join them, while the Republican Alliance, which opposed socialism, decided to content itself with making a plea for municipal elections. Even Blanqui kept his distance from the uprising, regarding the attack as hopeless, although he went to a café near the Hôtel de Ville to observe it, as did Delescluze elsewhere near the Place de Grève.

If the time for a full-scale uprising had not yet arrived, however, the idea did have a measure of popular support. So thoroughly disgusted was the population with the government that when the National Guard commander sounded the *rappel* summoning the Guards to come out against the uprising,

very few responded. At noon on January 22 the most radical Guard battalions showed up at the Place de Grève, not to defend the government but to take it over in alliance with the young Blanquists Vaillant and Théophile Ferré, and the Internationalist Benoît Malon. Not unexpectedly, the anarchist Louise Michel, an unfailing insurgent, also appeared in her customary National Guard uniform, with rifle in hand.

To guard the city hall, the government had left behind contingents of Mobile Guards within the building. These *mobiles* were not Parisians: deeply religious Catholics who barely spoke French, they had been recruited from Brittany and dutifully hated the atheistic, dissolute, and urbane Parisians. Barely had Vaillant, Ferré, and Malon's National Guards been reinforced by the radical battalions, when the *mobiles* suddenly opened fire from the windows—not only on the Guards but on everyone in sight, including bystanders. The murderous firing continued for a full half hour before it came to an end, leaving thirty dead and at least as many wounded. The National Guards tried to return their fire from neighboring houses but were completely routed.

Up to this point in the siege, no blood had been shed between Parisians, but at least two score workers had now been shot down by troops of the Government of National Defense, a toll that was impossible to overlook. So extreme was the polarization that civil war between the government and the people was now a realistic possibility. Immediately, General Joseph Vinoy, who had just replaced Trochu as commander of the Paris garrison, outlawed the clubs, suspended the newspapers of Delescluze and Pyat, and ordered the mass arrest of known and suspected revolutionaries. It was clear to all that the siege, if it continued, would lead to Parisians turning their weapons on each other. Accordingly, the next day Favre visited Bismarck at Versailles, where the German command was ensconced, and on January 28 the Government of National Defense put an end to the four-month siege by signing an ostensible armistice that was in fact a capitulation to the Prussian army. The siege was to be lifted, and Paris was to receive food and other provisions from outside, but at a price that was very high. The Government of National Defense was obliged to pay the Prussians an armistice indemnity of 200 million francs, followed by a full indemnity, whose amount would be set in formal peace negotiations. Paris was to surrender its perimeter forts, and a National Assembly was to be convened at Bordeaux within three weeks, to negotiate the final peace treaty with the Prussians. The French army was permitted to retain only one division within the walls of the capital. The National Guards were allowed to keep their arms, but only because, as Favre fully realized, any attempt to disarm them would certainly lead to an open civil war.

When the harsh terms of the armistice were made known, they infuriated the capital. Gambetta, who had been kept in the dark about the armistice negotiations and was still mobilizing the Army of the Loire, went into a rage;

after much soul-searching, he resigned, filled with hatred for the monarchists on whom he blamed the detestable agreement. The radical workers were equally outraged, which created a problem for the government, since the *arrondissements* had acquired so much political and administrative autonomy during the four months of the siege that the revolutionary sectors of Paris were now a force to be reckoned with, especially since the National Guard was still under arms. As Stewart Edwards notes:

The war . . . had broken up the political forces of repression so greatly relied on by the highly centralized system of government in France. Instead the Paris population had begun to assert itself. It was also a population that was armed, and the National Guard did not feel it had been defeated. On the contrary, it was spoiling for a fight and needed little to turn it completely against a Government that was held to have betrayed the nation. This frustrated patriotism was important in providing a general animosity which extended to a wider section of the population than just the regular revolutionaries.¹²

The air in Paris was fraught with tension, and only by showing some understanding and making some concessions to the long-suffering working class could the powers in control of the city avoid a bloody confrontation with the masses.

THE COMING STORM

No such understanding was shown or concessions made. Instead, the government set February 8 as the day for elections to the National Assembly, which would negotiate the final treaty. The Paris clubs were permitted to reopen only as electoral organizations, in order to present their Assembly candidates. Once again, as occurred so often in the past when Parisian radicalism became too menacing, the government tried to counter it by holding Assembly elections, which would invariably permit the peasants to determine the policy of the country. This time the peasantry would be joined by many members of the lower middle class, who had had all they could take of the war.

The voting results were as disastrous as they had been in April 1848, and far worse than even the most pessimistic Parisian revolutionaries could have anticipated. Out of 675 deputies, the country at large returned about 400 Legitimists and Orleanists. Despite the fact that France was a republic, only 150 authentic republican deputies were elected. Far from recognizing the legitimate complaints and needs of the Parisian working classes, rural France took its

revenge on them by filling the Assembly with upper-class reactionaries and bourgeois elements.

Not even Paris as a whole acquitted itself well. Parisian voters accorded Louis Blanc the single largest number of votes, followed by Victor Hugo, Garibaldi (who had fought in support of France against Prussia), Edgar Quinet (a romantic nationalist), Gambetta, Rochefort, Delescluze, Ledru-Rollin, Millière, and the Proudhonist Jérôme Langlois. Of the "revolutionary socialist slate" put forth by the "Corderie"—namely the International in alliance with the Delegation of the Twenty Arrondissements (as the guiding body of the vigilance committees was now renamed)—the only candidates elected to the Assembly were those whose names also appeared on the slates of other groups, such as Garibaldi, Gambon, Pyat, Tolain, and Malon. Blanqui, the most important of the socialist nominees, received only 50,000 votes—which was not enough to earn him even the last place in the list of Parisian deputies to the Assembly. Although Thiers received a deservedly low vote in Paris, he headed the list in twenty-six provincial departments of the country.

The National Assembly that convened at Bordeaux on February 13 was not only reactionary but unruly and spiteful. It selected Thiers as chief of state, whereupon the old Orleanist formed a determinedly conservative government, composed of monarchists and, for decorative reasons, moderate republicans. So suffused was the Assembly with venom toward all liberal, let alone radical, deputies, that the moment Garibaldi tried to speak, the delegates rose from their seats and tried to silence him with shouts of "No Italian!" and "No Garibaldi!" When spectators in the chamber's galleries protested this treatment, they were rudely cleared from the chamber. Garibaldi, in turn, left with them and returned to Italy in sheer disgust.

Thereafter the Assembly, faced with Bismarck's February 19 deadline, turned to the issue of a peace treaty. It was hardly necessary for Thiers to warn the deputies that he would resign if the German terms were not met: the Assembly accepted the terms he had negotiated with little hesitation. These terms required France to give to Bismarck Alsace, Lorraine, Metz, and Strasbourg, as well as five billion gold francs as the full indemnity; and to permit the Germans to conduct a military parade through the French capital, as part of a token occupation of the city. Indeed, until the indemnity was paid in full, the German troops would occupy the northern part of France, including the outskirts of Paris. The treaty, with all these humiliating stipulations, was ratified by a staggering majority vote of 546 to 107.

The Assembly now turned its attention to Paris, with a degree of hostility that it had not shown toward the Prussians. To many rural deputies—or *ruraux*, as they were called—the capital was a far greater danger than a foreign occupying army. General d'Aurelle de Paladines, a violently anti-Parisian Bonapartist, was named as commander of the Paris National Guard,

and Blanqui and Flourens, among others, were sentenced to death for their roles in the October 31 uprising. Six left-wing journals were proscribed, and the one-and-a-half-franc daily wage for National Guard service was voided, a decision that would make it virtually impossible for working-class members to remain in the militia.

But the most provocative behavior of the Assembly—and, in terms of its own goal of quelling the Parisian workers, the stupidest—was the passage of a series of acts so punitive that they ultimately delivered over the most politically indifferent sectors of the lower middle classes, let alone the workers, to the Left. During the siege, the poorest of the poor had been obliged, to keep themselves alive, to deposit goods (often little more than mattresses and the scissors of seamstresses) in the state-run pawnshop, Mont de Piété. To protect these items, a moratorium had been placed on the selling of unredeemed goods. The Assembly, with insensate cruelty, now abolished the moratorium, so that any items that were not instantly redeemed by their owners would be put up for sale. In a second act, the Assembly allowed landlords to immediately claim from their impoverished tenants all the back rent that had come due to them during the terrible months of the siege. And as if these measures were not brutal enough to infuriate the poorer sectors of Paris, the Assembly delivered its *coup de grâce*: during the economically grim months of the war, when few could afford the basic means of life, Parisian shopkeepers, independent artisans, and small merchants had had to depend on promissory notes (*échéances*) from their customers. The Assembly now decreed that these had to be fully paid, with interest, within four months.

Just as the forty-five-centime tax of 1848 had infuriated the peasantry, the Assembly's abrogation of the credit moratorium now infuriated the middle classes. Innumerable small entrepreneurs who had built up a crushing backlog of loans were faced with the complete loss of their livelihood. Middle-class Parisians, many of whom had formerly regarded the workers, unemployed and poor as "rabble," now joined forces with the poor, bringing the middle class back into an alliance with the workers. In fact, the Assembly made it clear that it viewed the very existence of a republic in France as merely "provisional," implying that the gains of the September 4 uprising might soon be annulled and a monarchy restored. Having done their handiwork, these malicious reactionaries, presided over by Thiers, adjourned, to meet again on March 20 in Versailles.

More than any single factor, the Assembly's behavior (which frustrated even Thiers) revived the radicals of Paris. The clubs came back to life with renewed vigor, and during February 20 and 23, a general meeting of the Delegation of the Twenty Arrondissements adopted a resolution to create a Revolutionary Socialist Party. The avowed aim of the new party was

the abolition of the privileges of the bourgeoisie, its elimination as a ruling

caste and the advent of the workers to political power. In a word, social equality: no more employers, no more proletariat, no more classes."¹³

It would difficult not to see the hand of the International in this resolution. A meeting of delegates from the local vigilance committees approved the document, and membership in a vigilance committee now became contingent on acceptance of the resolution.

At the same time, the National Guard began to form its own decidedly leftist federation. After the armistice, some 140,000 people, mainly from the well-to-do classes of Paris, had fled the hardships of the city for the provinces, appreciably reducing the number of bourgeois or "good" National Guards. On February 6, the popular battalions sent delegates to a general meeting that endorsed the most radical of the republican candidates for the Assembly. At a second meeting, on February 16, they laid the basis for a Federation of the Paris National Guard, whose existence was confirmed a week later by 2,000 delegates from the majority of the battalions. This step-by-step process of consolidation was completed on March 15, when delegates to the new Federation of the National Guard established an officially mandated Central Committee, consisting of representatives from battalions in more than half of the *arrondissements*. Significantly, at the same time many local Guard battalions were forming their own committees to maintain a vigil in all the *arrondissements* of the capital, ready to alert Paris to any attempt by the Prussians to enter the city—and any attempt to disarm the city.

The Guard Federation was now the most formidable citizen army in France, numbering perhaps 200,000 armed men—or *fédérés*, as they preferred to call themselves, following in the traditions of the Great Revolution—with more than 200 cannons at their disposal. In late February and early March, what remained of the official government in Paris had collapsed, and the Guard Federation, with its Central Committee, and its members drawn from various local committees, effectively became the real government in the capital. Indeed, the Federation and its Central Committee now constituted themselves into an independent power—a revolutionary *dual* power—that, as Thiers and his government properly saw, had the potential to replace the official government. As long as the Central Committee remained a dual power, civil war with the new government, now based in Versailles, was inevitable. The sole question that faced Thiers and the *Versaillais* (as the government and the National Assembly came to be called) was the specific circumstances that would bring this latent conflict into the open.

NOTES

1. David H. Pinkney, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958), p. 7.
2. Tom Kemp, *Economic Forces in French History* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1971), p. 178.
3. Quoted in Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune: 1871* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1971), p. 54.
4. Samuel Bernstein, *Auguste Blanqui and the Art of Insurrection* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), p. 320.
5. "First Proclamation of the Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements" (September 15, 1870), in *The Communards of Paris, 1871*, ed. Stewart Edwards, Documents of Revolution series (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973), pp. 44-6.
6. *Le Combat* (September 21, 1870), quoted in Edwards, *Paris Commune*, p. 73.
7. "Appeal to the Paris Population by the Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements to Hold Elections," *Le Combat* (October 5, 1870), in *Communards of Paris*, ed. Edwards, p. 47.
8. Quoted in Edwards, *Paris Commune*, p. 72.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
10. Poster Issued by the Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements, January 6, 1871, in *Communards of Paris*, ed. Edwards, p. 49.
11. A. A. Ducrot, *La Défense de Paris (1870-1871)*, vol. 4 (Paris, 1875-78), quoted in Edwards, *Paris Commune*, pp. 104-5.
12. Edwards, *Paris Commune*, p. 113.
13. "Formation by the Vigilance Committees of a 'Revolutionary Socialist party'" (February 20 and 23, 1871), in *Communards of Paris*, ed. Edwards, p. 54.

 CHAPTER 31 The Paris Commune of 1871

The peace treaty between Bismarck and the National Assembly, it has been noted, permitted the Prussian army to stage a formal march into the French capital on March 1 and "occupy" it (more as a symbolic gesture than a reality) until the first payment on the indemnity was met—which the national government promptly proceeded to pay. Prior to the parade, Parisians furiously debated whether they should violently resist this military insult to the city or treat it with disdainful indifference. After much discussion in the Central Committee of the National Guard and the Delegation of the Twenty Arrondissements, it was wisely decided not to provoke the Prussians, who, after their parade, confined their occupation of Paris to the north of the capital's perimeter.

At the same time, the more radical sectors of the populace were mindful that Thiers and his government were only too eager to disarm Paris, indeed to disband any potentially revolutionary National Guard units that might challenge the authority of the National Assembly over the French capital. Accordingly, workers in Paris began to seize weapons wherever they were stored, especially the *chassepôts* and early machine guns, or *mitrailleuses*, that had been denied to radical Guard battalions during the siege. Above all, they began to collect the cannons that had been parked in the middle-class districts of western Paris for use against the Prussians. Since large numbers of these cannons had been purchased by patriotic popular subscription, they were now seen as, by all rights, belonging to the people. Hence the cannons in the western half of Paris were dragged by them across the city and installed on the working-class heights of Belleville and Montmartre, presumably to keep them out of the clutches of the Prussians.

Ironically, the peace treaty was to prove very serviceable to the radicals in Paris. Not only did it give them the excuse they needed to park as many cannons as they could in the eastern working-class areas, but inasmuch as the agreement between Thiers and Bismarck obliged the French national

government to significantly reduce its garrison in the capital to some 60,000 men, most of the French army regulars in and around the city were demobilized. As a result, the largest military force remaining in Paris was the National Guard—which had been allowed, under the terms of the earlier armistice, to keep all of its weapons. The army demobilization left some 200,000 well-trained line soldiers and *mobilés* in the city without income, and although many of them returned to their home provinces, others remained behind and fraternized with the National Guard, in many cases joining its ranks.

If the National Assembly had ever had any possibility of regaining the cannons from the potential insurgents in Paris, it had foreclosed it when it ended the moratorium on rental payments and overdue loans. Having just emerged from an agonizing siege, ordinary Parisians were now expected to make payments that they could not possibly afford. On March 15, as we have seen, the National Guard angrily responded to these provocations by forming a Federation of its local battalions and electing a guiding Central Committee. This Central Committee was determined to keep the cannons in Paris under its own control. Negotiations between the Central Committee and the National Assembly—mediated by the *arrondissement* mayors—ultimately failed, and the city's artillery remained in the hands of the people.

THE CANNONS OF MONTMARTRE

Thiers fully understood that the cannons had to be removed and Paris disarmed if the government was to exercise control over the capital. On March 16 he arrived in Paris with his ministers, and a day later, at a government council meeting, they formulated a plan to seize the cannons in the working-class districts. Regiments of line troops were to occupy all the major squares, buildings, railroad stations, bridges, and strategic points in the center and eastern half of the capital. Generals Lecomte and Paturel were to enter the city from the north and scale the steep heights of Montmartre and Belleville, which together had 245 cannons out of the 417 guns held by the Guard. It is apparent that Thiers intended not only to confiscate the Guard's artillery but to establish military control over revolutionary Paris, stationing troops in considerable force in strategic positions and, if necessary, subduing any resistance in the working-class districts. The police were authorized to arrest and imprison some thirty members of the Central Committee and to seize every known radical that they could find in the capital.

The success of Thiers's coup would depend entirely on secrecy, speed, and surprise. At three a.m. on March 18, while most of Paris was asleep, the troops

were ordered out of their barracks, without even eating breakfast, and swiftly marched to their assigned positions. When they arrived at the artillery park at Montmartre, they found it poorly guarded and occupied it easily, taking complete possession of the guns. They then settled down to await the horses that were to come to cart them away. Owing to a lack of coordination as well as horses, however, the soldiers found themselves waiting for hours.

At dawn, the unsuspecting neighborhood around them began to stir. Incredibly, the soldiers were still sitting in the park as late as eight a.m., famished and chilled by the night mist. Many men had left their posts and weapons to get something to eat at the opening bistros. No sooner did the working-class women emerge from their houses and see the soldiers than they set off a furious alarm—Louise Michel ran through the neighborhood, calling out the National Guard, who quickly arrived in their kepis and assembled in columns to protect the artillery. The demoralized regular soldiers were no more eager to fight the Guards than the Guards were eager to fight them. When General Lecomte ordered his men to fire, they flatly refused, and troops on both sides began to fraternize. The entire operation soon collapsed. By nine in the morning, government soldiers, National Guards, and workers—female as well as male—were toasting each other and the republic in joyous celebration.

Thiers's foray into the revolutionary heart of Paris had been a complete fiasco. Allowing for minor variations, much the same story was repeated throughout the city: either horses came too late to be used, or National Guards were alerted in time to prevent the government troops from seizing the cannons. Everywhere soldiers of the line fraternized with the Guards. The Parisians' victory was not entirely bloodless, to be sure—it cost the life of General Clément Thomas, the former Guard commander who, dressed in civilian clothing, had been drawn into the streets out of curiosity. There he was recognized and pursued by a crowd who remembered his bloody role in repressing the *journée* of May 15, more than two decades earlier. Despite earnest efforts by National Guards to protect him—he was a republican now—he was killed, as was General Lecomte, who had provocatively unsheathed his sword against an angry crowd. An autopsy later revealed that dozens of bullets from army *chassepôts* accounted for their deaths, which suggests that they had been shot by troops. This evidence notwithstanding, Thiers would claim that they had been brutally murdered by the "reds" of Paris.

At three in the afternoon, Thiers and his ministers convened at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where they decided that, in the light of the fiasco, the government would evacuate the city. Suddenly, looking down from a window, the minister of war saw a battalion of National Guards marching in the street below. Fearing that the Guards intended to capture them, all the ministers were thrown into a panic. Although the Guard battalion marched past the Ministry, with no inkling of the haul they could have scooped up by taking the building,

the ministers scattered in different directions. Thiers, scurrying down the back stairs to a carriage and cavalry escort, paused only to confirm the order to evacuate the capital, then made his way as quickly as possible to Versailles.

Despite furious opposition from Jules Ferry, the mayor of Paris, and by some of the *arrondissement* mayors, Thiers's decision to abandon the capital was irrevocable. Behind it lay a strategy that the chief of state had advocated as far back as 1848, when in the last days of Louis-Philippe's reign he had urged the king to retreat with all his troops outside the capital, regroup his forces, and then return to retake the city in a bloody conquest. Where Louis-Philippe had declined to follow his advice, Thiers himself was now free to carry it out himself. Once he had built up his forces at Versailles, his hand, Thiers reasoned, would be free to eliminate the revolutionary "pest" once and for all. As time was soon to reveal, he considered the Parisian working class to be little more than vermin who had to be ruthlessly driven back to their holes in the slums.

PARIS UNDER THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

Once the ministers had departed, control over Paris and its environs, for all practical purposes, lay in the hands of the Central Committee of the National Guard Federation. Barely had the government fled, however, when the Committee, apparently stunned by its own success, performed the first of the many blunders that were to mark its actions—or lack of them—during the two weeks when it was the governing body in Paris, with potentially enormous power. It did virtually nothing against the fleeing government or its troops. Even as Thiers and his cabinet were hurrying to Versailles, the Committee behaved as though it were faced with the need to defend itself. Rather than mount an attack to crush its opponents, the Committee ordered the Guard's battalion officers to build barricades to protect themselves against an attack, indeed to withdraw if the government undertook a resolute assault.

On the following Sunday night, March 19, the Central Committee convened at the Hôtel de Ville to decide on its next step. Two energetic Blanquists, Émile Eudes, a steelworker, and Paul Brunel, a student, called on the Committee to make an immediate attack upon the retreating and demoralized government troops and march on Versailles, demands that were supported by the Montmartre committee of the National Guard. At the very least, the two Blanquists demanded that the city gates be closed—as Blanqui himself had ordered during the attempted coup of October 31—to prevent the troops from escaping to Versailles. Lissagaray, whose *History of the Commune of 1871* has long been regarded by the Left as the official account of the Commune, notes that at the very time of the Committee's meeting, "files of soldiers were still

marching off [to Versailles] through the gates of the left bank."¹ Had the Central Committee mounted such an attack on Thiers's fleeing troops, it is fairly certain that the Guards could have defeated them and taken Versailles. Indeed, as Edwards observes,

The retreat of the army to Versailles was chaotic. The troops were insubordinate to their officers, and it was only the gendarmes who could keep some sort of order. So hasty was the withdrawal that several regiments were forgotten and left stranded in Paris.²

Possibly because the two Blanquists were too young to be treated with the respect that their mentor had earned by his long years of experience and imprisonment, their pleas were ignored. Lissagaray describes how their demands to immediately march on Versailles were answered: "No. We have only the mandate to secure the rights of Paris. If the provinces share our views, let them imitate our example."³ The Committee, apparently suffering a disastrous failure of nerve, gave every excuse it could muster for doing almost nothing. Far from mounting an attack, it procrastinated, even allowing the demoralized Versailles troops to retreat by failing to close the city's gates.

Moreover, most of the forts, which had originally been held by regular army troops outside the city during the war, were unoccupied. It seems not to have occurred to the National Guard at least to claim Mont-Valérien, the most important stronghold in the whole Parisian defensive system, while it could still be easily taken. Indeed, for two whole days it lay virtually unoccupied; not until Monday did Thiers's forces take over this vital outpost and foreclose the possibility that the Central Committee could claim it.

What the Central Committee lacked that Sunday night and for much of its remaining existence was the presence of Louis-Auguste Blanqui, who had acted so decisively in the uprising the previous October. But Blanqui, still at large since that failure, had finally been captured by the government in the provinces on March 17, only a day before the attack upon Montmartre and Belleville. Thiers, who was only too familiar with Blanqui's resoluteness, would keep him imprisoned throughout the entire period of the Commune. Perhaps more than anyone else, he knew that no one could have better given it clear direction, at least in military affairs, than the old revolutionary.

In fact, few revolutionary institutions were more confused about their immediate goals and functions than the Central Committee of the National Guard Federation. As Lissagaray observes, the Committee "saw not—very few saw as yet—that this was a death struggle with the Assembly at Versailles."⁴ Instead, hesitant, overly cautious, and reluctant to confront Thiers and the National Assembly, it was preoccupied with clarifying the scope of its own powers and its own legal status. Finally the members decided to call, as quickly

as possible, for the election of a Commune to replace their own Committee. Thus, in its "Appeal to the Departments," the Committee declared that its "existing powers are essentially provisional, and will be replaced by an elected Communal Council."⁵ At a time when the Committee should have been subduing Thiers, it issued a statement limiting its own authority.

"Let the provinces therefore hasten to imitate the example of the capital by organizing themselves in a republican fashion," the "Appeal" continued. Herein, as Edwards emphasizes, lay another of the great failings of the Paris Commune of 1871: the parochial mentality of its officers and men. On the afternoon of March 18, when the Central Committee was busy issuing defensive orders to Guard battalions and ordering the battalions of the seventeenth and eighteenth *arrondissements* to take the Place de Vendôme, "the local commanders hesitated to lead their men into the centre of Paris away from the safety of their own districts," Edwards notes dryly.⁶ And indeed it was not until eight that evening, nearly six hours after the order was given, that the battalions had moved toward the plaza in the heart of the capital. Moreover, the Central Committee's strategic vision of a revolution, in many cases, did not extend further than the immediate neighborhoods in which its members lived, let alone beyond the walls of Paris. As in June 1848 they were imbued with a notion of revolutionary spontaneity that precluded any serious attempt to give their revolutions guidance, still less direction.

The Committee's "Appeal to the Departments" also reveals the nature of the political thinking that guided the members of the Committee. After calling upon the provinces to imitate the capital, it declared: "We have only one hope, one end: the safety of the country and the final triumph of the democratic Republic, one and indivisible."⁷ Like many other proclamations of the Central Committee and of the Commune that followed it, the "Appeal" echoes the republican appeals of the Great Revolution more than the class-oriented proclamations of the June insurgents of 1848.

But in a less tepid and more class-oriented vein, Central Committee delegates to the government's *Journal officiel* declared that

the proletarians of the capital, faced with the incompetence and treachery of the ruling classes, have understood that the hour has come for them to save the situation by taking direction of public affairs . . . Will the workers, who produce everything and enjoy nothing in return, who endure poverty in the midst of wealth which they have produced by the sweat of their brow, always be subjected to abuse? . . . The proletariat, faced with a constant threat to its rights, a total denial of all its legitimate aspirations, along with the imminent destruction of the country and of all its hopes, has realized that it is its imperative duty and absolute right to take its destiny in its own hands by seizing political power.⁸

The two statements seem strangely at odds with each other. The first emphasizes civic autonomy and political rights, speaking to the citizens of Paris in the same way that the Great Revolution addressed "*la Nation*," without any reference to economic or class issues. The second statement speaks to a specific oppressed class, the "proletariat," referring to the bitter economic war between workers and their exploiters. Since these two classes could hardly be expected to live amicably together under the existing economy, let alone share the management of a municipality, the statement stakes out a claim for the proletariat to seize "political power."

Taken together, the two statements reveal the confusion that existed not only in the Central Committee but in the Paris Commune itself, which was the all-inclusive name given to the institutions and events in Paris in the spring of 1871. The two statements were addressed to very different strata: the first to citizens of Paris, irrespective of their class status; the second, to radical workers in the eastern parts of the capital. The working class, principally the impoverished residents in the eastern half of Paris who worked with their hands, were the backbone of the Commune. By appealing to them in statements like the second one, with its militant class-oriented phrases, the Commune acquired the image of being a strictly working-class phenomenon.

But if the working class formed the pillar that supported the Commune, its support was also more broadly based than the working class alone. Many middle-class people—shopkeepers, small-scale producers, merchants of all kinds—actively supported the emerging Commune, which clearly issued statements to satisfy their sentiments and interests as well. The republican statements were directed toward the large numbers of bourgeois patriots as well as workers who tacitly or actively supported the Commune because they opposed the treaty that Thiers had negotiated with the Germans.

Nor did such republican appeals contradict the predominant sentiment among Commune members: the Proudhonists and Jacobins who composed a sizable part of the Central Committee and later the Commune of Paris were not opposed to the private ownership of property and hoped merely to achieve its widest distribution. Given its respect for property and legality, the Committee (and later the Commune) made no attempt to appropriate the vast gold holdings in the Bank of France; leaving the Bank's treasury completely untouched, they simply negotiated a substantial bank loan. Nor did the new officials even touch the substantial funds that lay in the safes of various ministries, which the government had left behind—despite their desperate need for money, they never broke open the locks. Instead of expropriating property, they used very moderate means to bring in much-needed funds, such as the collection of the *octroi* (the tax on goods entering the capital's gates). Republican legality seems to have had a paralyzing effect upon these ostensible revolutionaries who, once they were in power, despite their federalist and

sometimes socialist rhetoric, were virtually hypnotized by the mystical ambience that surrounded the French state and its financial institutions.

Where the Central Committee fretted over the legality of every action it undertook, even questioning its right to meet in the Hôtel de Ville, the *Versaillais* threw all conventional restrictions to the winds. In this respect the contrast between the behavior of Paris and Versailles is arresting. Despite bloody altercations between the National Guards and supporters of the *Versaillais*, the Committee—unwilling to impede freedom of speech—placed few if any restrictions on the circulation of essentially pro-Versailles propaganda in the capital. For their part, by contrast, the *Versaillais* used every measure at their disposal to prevent news from Paris from reaching the provinces, especially pamphlets and other literature that tried to rally provincial support for the capital. Thiers's control over information was a major obstacle to the Commune's vague injunctions that other French cities and towns should follow its own example. No mere republican legalities would deter him from his goal of suppressing revolutionary Paris.

THE CREATION OF THE COMMUNE

Finally, on March 26, Parisians went to the polls to elect their Commune. For once, they could choose their delegates in proportion to their numbers rather than by district, so that in the final tally, the densely populated working-class neighborhoods gained a representation that reflected their actual size. Out of a presumed electorate of 480,000, it was reported that some 229,000 men voted—ostensibly a rather small proportion, and one that Thiers used in order to argue that over half the voting population had abstained from the elections, in sympathy for his Versailles government. In fact, the proportion of Parisian men who voted was actually much higher; the 480,000 figure was based on the voting lists for the 1870 plebiscite—after which a large number of bourgeois had fled Paris during the siege and the armistice for nonpolitical as well as political reasons.

The Commune of Paris was finally proclaimed on March 28 on the steps of the Hôtel de Ville. As the radical journalist Jules Vallès described the momentous occasion in his newspaper, *Le Cri du peuple*:

The artillery thunders a salute from the quays; the grey smoke is gilded by the sun. A crowd has gathered to greet the triumphal procession; men wave their hats and women their handkerchiefs while from the barricades the cannon humbly bow their bronze muzzles lest they threaten the joyful onlookers. . . . The Commune is proclaimed by a revolutionary, patriotic

celebration, a day of peace and joy, excitement and solemnity, splendor and merriment worthy of the days lived by men of '91. . . . Today is the festive wedding day of the Idea and the Revolution.⁹

Indeed, the festive mood of the population seemed irrepressible and continued throughout the life of the Commune. So joyous were the people, even as the threat of the *Versaillais* loomed over them, that Villiers de l'Isle-Adam wrote:

Would you believe it? Paris is fighting and singing! Paris is about to be attacked by a ruthless and furious army and she laughs! Paris is hemmed in on all sides by trenches and fortifications, and yet there are corners within these formidable walls where people laugh!¹⁰

More insightfully, L. Barron emphasized that underlying the festivity lay an idealistic revolutionary exaltation:

In these solemn ceremonies, these festivities, these battles joyously fought, are born the great and sublime movements that cause people to break out of their habits and set their sight on a new ideal. The educated and positive-thinking, the sceptically and the spiritually inclined, all find themselves involved in spite of themselves, carried along with the sublime multitude. This is how viable revolutions begin and develop. One returns from each exalted experience as one would awake from a dream, but the memory remains of a brief moment of ecstasy, an illusion of fraternity.¹¹

But what in fact was the Commune? The word has multiple meanings that depend upon the context in which it is used. Derived from the medieval Latin *communa*, it originally meant a communality or a corporate community, that is, a municipality. As European towns and cities had developed self-governing institutions since the medieval era, *commune* had also come to mean a city council. Finally, French revolutionary history imparted to the Commune a uniquely radical connotation: the popular city council of 1793 was generally regarded as the most radical municipal force in the Great Revolution, until it was purged by Robespierre. The Paris Commune of 1793 included not only the communality and the city council but also the supporters and institutions of the extreme Left, which implicitly included the sections and even the radical clubs into which the *sans-culottes* were mobilized.

As for 1871, the "Commune of Paris," which appeared at the bottom of decrees and called for mobilization in the spring of that year, meant, strictly speaking, the Communal Council, the assembly of delegates who had been elected to the city council. As a substitute for the ministries that existed under the Government of National Defense, the Communal Council created nine

commissions, whose operations were supervised and coordinated by an Executive Commission. Although each commission was charged with a specific governmental portfolio, the Communal Council as a whole tended to preempt most of the activities of its commissions, which often meant that many practical details were neglected except in emergencies.

Coexisting with the Communal Council was the Central Committee of the National Guard (which had welcomed the Commune and surrendered all of its powers to it with much fanfare—only to continue meeting on its own afterward), as well as the Delegation of the Twenty Arrondissements, and the Trade Union Federation. In addition, popular clubs existed in every *arrondissement* of Paris, which also could be placed, together with the other organizations, under the rubric of “the Commune.”

In a broad sense, then, *all* of these institutions constituted the Paris Commune of 1871: the Council and the Commissions that met at the Hôtel de Ville, the Central Committee of the National Guard Federation, the Delegation of the Twenty Arrondissements, the trade unions, the International, the multitude of clubs, the various committees of the National Guard battalions, and the vigilance committees—in short, the richly articulated body of organizations that gave immense vitality to Parisian political life. To define the Paris Commune exclusively in terms of the Communal Council and its commissions is to lose sight of the wealth of public activity that engaged all the socially conscious people of the capital—activity that the privileged class profoundly feared as evidence of rampant and revolutionary anarchy.

But who were the delegates who were elected to the Commune, or more specifically the Communal Council, the body that met for some thirty-one sessions at the Hôtel de Ville? Out of a total of ninety-two seats, a good number actually went unoccupied: roughly fifteen to twenty were vacant, having been awarded to moderate republicans from the western, bourgeois half of Paris who resigned immediately after they were elected in protest of the Commune’s formation. Other seats were held by delegates in absentia, such as Blanqui, who was in prison, or by Garibaldi, who was no longer in France; both had been elected for entirely honorific reasons.

How working class were the delegates? Only the roughest occupational estimates are available—hence only a general sense of the Commune’s class composition can be given. About thirty-five were artisans, such as carpenters, house decorators, masons, metalworkers, bookbinders and the like. Thirty or so could be classed as intellectuals of sorts, such as journalists, and another eleven were professionals, notably doctors, lawyers, and teachers. The remainder were clerks, even businessmen, and two were soldiers. Only four or five industrial workers, from factories on the outskirts of Paris and railway shops, can be identified—indeed, the French industrial proletariat had still to find its identity and assert its interests in the largely artisanal capital. The

average age of the delegates has been placed at thirty-seven, but no single generational group predominated.

What was the political composition of the Commune? Some twenty-five of the delegates were neo-Jacobins, followed by fifteen or twenty neo-Proudhonists and protosyndicalists like Varlin, nine or ten Blanquists, a miscellany of radical republicans, and a few Internationalists who were influenced by Marx—namely Léo Frankel and Auguste Serrailier, the latter having been dispatched by the General Council as an observer. When by-elections were held on April 16 to fill the seats of those who had resigned, the Jacobin contingent was increased by nine delegates, the Proudhonists by six (including affiliates of the International), and the Blanquists by two.

Although the Blanquists were a minority, it was they who gave the Communal Council whatever fiery militancy it had. Having urgently demanded an attack on Versailles when Thiers fled, they continued to argue that the Council should undertake a military offensive against the *Versaillais* and exercise repressive measures against *Versaillais* propaganda inside Paris—even calling, late in the Council’s life, for the formation of a Committee of Public Safety. As decisive as they were militarily—they believed in a dictatorship of Paris over the rest of France—the Blanquists had little in the way of a concrete social or economic program, apart from a militant if vague socialism.

The Jacobins, inchoate politically, were opposed to socialism, but their radical republicanism admitted the use of measures that the bourgeoisie would have regarded as socialistic, at a time when laissez-faire capitalism was becoming the ideology of the day. The most prominent Jacobin in the Council, the venerable Charles Delescluze, believed that France should be a “social democracy,” by which he meant a politically (and to some extent economically) more “egalitarian” society. But the word *egalitarianism* may connote anything from equality of opportunity to equality of condition—and it is not at all clear that Delescluze meant anything more than equality of opportunity, reinforced by a humane concern for the plight of the poor and downtrodden. His supporters do not appear to have advanced much further in their thinking than Robespierist ideas of political egalitarianism, the Committee of Public Safety, and the Commune of 1793. The policies they called for, in the main, would have been acceptable to the earlier Commune. They generally looked askance upon any measures that were more radical than Saint-Just’s old Ventôse decrees, which had pledged to divide the property of suspects and convicted opponents of the Convention among needy patriots. Their opposition to socialism notwithstanding, however, when it came to practical details, especially in military matters and the formation of a Committee of Public Safety, the Jacobins joined with the Blanquists and the more radical Internationalists to form the majority voting bloc in the Communal Council.

The Proudhonist Internationalists and more moderate republicans formed

the Communal Council's minority, and as we have seen, they believed in the private ownership of property. Indeed, to soothe unfounded bourgeois fears that the Commune was about to expropriate the wealthy, Proudhonist periodicals assured the public that the Commune held private property in "sacred" regard and would fully respect it. A few days after the Commune was established, one newspaper, the *Sociale*, wrote soothingly: "Be assured, bourgeois and peasants, there is no question of robbing you of your conquests. You legitimately possess what you have gained."¹² Although the Proudhonists were in the minority on the Council, they had reason to make such an assurance in the name of the Commune because, as Samuel Bernstein observes:

Whatever social and economic programme the Commune had, stemmed from the [Proudhonist Internationalists]. The primary demands were Proudhonist, such as free credit, co-operation, a peoples's bank and free exchange of the products of labour. . . . History, to be sure, had pulled them into strikes and political action. But they preferred autonomy and federalism to centralism, a cardinal point with neo-Jacobins and Blanquists.¹³

In practice, the concrete Proudhonist demands did not add up to much; the Commune was too besieged, quarrelsome, and short-lived to effectuate much of an economic program before it was crushed.

If socialism is to be defined in any modern sense (especially as proletarian socialism), as a cooperative society involving the public ownership of the means of production—including workshops, factories, and land—then apart possibly from Léo Frankel and the other non-Proudhonist Internationalists on the Council, the Paris Commune of 1871 was not socialist. Certainly, the Commune's practices were neither Babouvist nor Marxist, let alone anarchist in Bakunin's collectivist sense of the word. If, more strictly speaking, the Commune is conceived as a government of workers or a "workers' state," the student of the Commune encounters even more ambiguities. Most strikingly, the Council did not expropriate the bourgeoisie or try to socialize the many workshops and industrial facilities of Paris. There is nothing, in fact, to show that most of its delegates ever intended to do so—as we have seen, most of the delegates on the Council were Jacobins, followed by Proudhonists, who together believed in private property.

The only official program that the Commune ever promulgated, published in the *Journal officiel* of April 20, was notable not only for its brevity but for its largely political demands.¹⁴ It called for the recognition of the republic (which the National Assembly, as yet, had not formally proclaimed), and many of its affirmations were municipalist in nature, invoking the "inherent rights" of the Commune itself. It asserted the right of French communes to function autonomously based on a Proudhonist "contract of association" to "secure the

unity of France," affirming the Commune's "inherent right" to vote its own budgets and taxes, and to create its own administrative, judicial, and police apparatus. Not only were elections to be free, but voters would also have "the permanent right of control and revocation" of all magistrates. Citizens were to enjoy the right of "permanent intervention into Communal affairs by the free manifestation of their ideas and the free defense of their interests."¹⁵

But the program expressed no commitment whatsoever to the collective ownership of property—a lacuna that was of deep concern to the anarchist communist Peter Kropotkin in his discussion of the Commune. Nowhere did the Commune's program even make basic assertions of artisanal socialism for the "organization of work" or the "right to work," which was unusual considering that most radical French socialists of the time were still mainly associationist. To be sure, it cited the "liberty of work" and expressed the Commune's intention to "universalize power and property according to the necessities of the moment." But such a right could have been exercised by any bourgeois government as a response to the exigencies of war.¹⁶

The essentially nonsocialist nature of the Paris Commune is somewhat ironic, considering that the Commune quickly became legendary in the international socialist movement as a socialist uprising, perhaps because of the rhetoric articulated by its more radical adherents, especially the Blanquists and the non-Proudhonist Internationalists, as well as miscellaneous class-conscious workers and intellectuals. Yet to call the Commune "socialist" in any modern, proletarian sense is to stretch the meaning of the term beyond recognition until it is lost in a foggy notion of "equally" modest nonexploitative enterprises. The actual social practices of the Commune, if anything, were oriented toward artisanal socialism, but even in this respect, as we will see, its efforts toward sponsoring the creation of a cooperative society, along the lines of Louis Blanc, were half-hearted at best. (Ironically, Blanc himself, having returned to Paris from England with the fall of Louis-Napoleon, was quietly sitting as a representative in the National Assembly at Versailles.)

Although there is no important evidence that most members of the Communal Council meant to expropriate the bourgeoisie, there was much talk in the capital about the possibilities for workers' control of production, particularly in the large factories on the outskirts of Paris, and for a more equitable distribution of goods and the wealth of the country. But this talk was not formulated into a systematic program that went beyond moral cries for economic justice and denunciations of class exploitation. The most broadly felt view of the artisanal socialists in Paris was that the means of life should be distributed based on toil, not on the ownership of capital. Put colloquially: they stood for the "workers against the bosses"—a deeply *moral* class consciousness, to be sure, but hardly the programmatic or theoretical foundations for ending the power of capital in France.

What, then, were the concrete economic policies of the Commune? The first item on the Council's economic agenda was to counteract the specific pieces of unfeeling legislation that the National Assembly had visited upon the workers and middle classes. On March 30, only two days after it was inaugurated, the Council reinstated the moratorium on overdue rents, much to the relief of ordinary Parisians. On April 12, not without considerable wrangling, it also reinstated the moratorium on overdue commercial bills, but partly because of its qualms about offending the sensibilities of Parisian "commercial interests"—the more well-to-do entrepreneurs who were least friendly to the Commune—the Council did not officially announce this measure until April 18. The delay undoubtedly induced the financially vulnerable to wonder how real was the concern of the Commune for their own interests. Insofar as both these moratoriums had been enacted by the old bourgeois Government of National Defense in a time of national emergency, then abrogated by a vindictive National Assembly, their reinstatement, however humane it was, can hardly be regarded as revolutionary. The moratoriums were both popular, but the Council's qualms about rushing to reinstate the delay on overdue bills is a striking example of its economic conservatism, reflecting the awe in which the Proudhonists held property, credit, and banking practices. Indeed, it was not until April 25—nearly a month after its establishment—that the Council requisitioned vacant lodgings for the homeless.

Nor did it behave with conspicuous zeal in dealing with one of the issues most vexing for the working class—the National Assembly's heartless law permitting the sale of goods that had been pawned in the state pawnshop, Mont de Piété. For ordinary Parisians, cancellation of the Assembly's legislation was imperative—indeed, many of the poorest artisans had pawned their tools and even their clothing during the most difficult moments of the siege. Not that the pawnshop had been much of a boon to working people. Although Mont de Piété was the city's largest recipient of workers' pawned goods, it had been particularly biased, as has been noted, against the poorest workers, charging the highest interest rates for loans on the least expensive items, and the lowest rates for those on the most expensive items. Nonetheless, allowing the pawned goods to be sold had been a cruel blow on the part of the Assembly, divesting workers of the much-needed personal possessions and tools.

Once the Commune was in power, the cancellation of the Assembly's legislation was held up by a lively debate in the Council over the issue of socializing the pawnshop. The Council's delegates argued intensely among themselves about whether the pawnshop should be nationalized (as the Blanquists thought), modified (the Jacobins), abolished (the revolutionary socialists), turned into a workers' bank (the Proudhonists), or simply left as it was (a variety of republicans). Not until May 7, more than five weeks after the Commune had been brought into existence, was the decree canceling the

Assembly's law proclaimed, and in the end, the Council made no change in the pawnshop's directorship; it simply renewed the old moratorium, allowing for the restitution of work tools and household items of up to twenty francs in value.

To be sure, many workers benefited from the Council's decrees. Thus on April 27, employers were forbidden to deduct fines from workers' wages, and the next day, April 28, the exacting nightwork hours imposed on bakers were abolished. But even this measure was delayed because of the protests of bakery owners. Moreover, the Council also abolished the *livret de travail*, the personal record of employment that every worker had been obliged to carry and show to any new employer.

From a leftist perspective, the most celebrated of the Council's decrees was the one issued on April 16 that concerned the empty factories and workshops whose owners had fled Paris during the siege. These vacated premises, according to the new law, could be transformed into self-managed cooperatives. To radicals of the time the measure on cooperatives seemed a remarkable instance of associationism, but the fact remains that the besieged regime had to mobilize production in any way it could, and any bourgeois regime under similar circumstances of impending military threat could have created cooperatives to do so. In all, about ten factories were taken over and run as cooperatives by the trade unions. The new industrial cooperatives, it should be emphasized, were not created as a result of expropriations; in fact, although the former owners were scathingly denounced as cowards for fleeing Paris, they were promised financial restitution for their property when they returned. By contrast, the large Cail factory, which had been continually troubled by strikes and class antagonisms, was left completely untouched.

To be sure, the Commune did try to promote voluntary producers' associations, in which privately owned workshops cooperated with each other in sharing resources and fixing prices. About forty-three such craft cooperatives were established, but few of them were able to get under way before their workers were obliged to mount barricades against the *Versillais*. Moreover, they faced problems typical of later attempts at what came to be called workers' control: the market threw them into competition with completely independent enterprises. Generally, in fact, such producers' cooperatives have a disconcerting tendency to drift toward "collective capitalism." Not only do they tend to become part of the capitalist system, but their ability to survive as cooperatives is impaired when conventional independent workshops can charge less for their products than the cooperatives, thereby driving them out of business or forcing them to compete with each other.

Unfortunately, Proudhon had not explained in his writings how this problem of marketplace competition could be overcome, but capitalist economic imperatives reigned no less in "red" Paris than in "white" Versailles. Contrary to all ideas of artisanal socialism, the Commune tended to buy not

from the cooperatives, which badly needed paying customers, but from the cheapest vendors—the conventional independent firms. Not until May 12, in response to a surge of complaints, did the Commune change its policy to favor cooperatives and instruct its various agencies to buy primarily from them. That it had to be pressured into adhering to a basic tenet of artisanal socialism is revealing of the Commune's fiscal conservatism and limited economic outlook.

The Commune's dealings with the Bank of France were no bolder than those of the Central Committee, more closely resembling comic opera than a challenge to a major financial institution. On March 29, the day after the Commune's inauguration, the Commune sent the seventy-six-year-old Charles Beslay, an engineer, to the Bank as its delegate. Contrary to what one might have expected from a revolutionary socialist body, the Council did not authorize Beslay to assert the Commune's control over this immensely important institution, still less to hold it hostage against the entire bourgeoisie of France. Rather, his task was to exercise a vague surveillance over the Bank's activities. Beslay was not predisposed to be confrontational, least of all toward so austere and powerful an enterprise as a national bank. The old man had been a friend of Proudhon, indeed a fervent disciple, an association that appears to have disarmed what fortitude he might have possessed in dealing with a large bank. Ironically, where Proudhon had once demanded the "organization of credit" on behalf of artisans, his friend Beslay now stood in awe of the most important credit institution in France—which might have been expropriated and even transformed into a Proudhonist People's Bank.

Instead, the meeting between Beslay and the Marquis de Ploëuc, the Bank's acting governor, was the beginning of a beautiful friendship. The crafty marquis, chatting amiably, managed to establish a rapport with the old man that was to last the entire life of the Commune. Personally, Beslay thanked the marquis for his public-spiritedness in heading an ambulance service during the siege, and the two warmly agreed that the financial integrity of France, not to speak of her business interests, depended upon retaining the integrity of her financial institution—especially after the day the National Guards rudely entered the bank to search it for arms. The vigilant Beslay, wrapped in the authority of his red sash, dissuaded the Guards from intervening in the Bank's business and even took up residence there in order to prevent further intrusions. Meanwhile, for the remainder of the spring, the marquis, while honoring the financial requests of the Commune, systematically smuggled sizable amounts of gold out to the *Versillais*—under the very nose of Beslay. The Council, for its part, seemed satisfied with the Bank as long as it was loaning it the relatively modest sums it requested.

Marx was later to claim that the Commune would have needed more time than it had to unfold its internal logic—presumably a socialistic logic. But would the Commune have evolved toward socialism, even if time had been on

its side? To radical artisans, the most humane alternatives to the existing economy were still associations—cooperatives—whether owned and managed by a sizable number of factory workers or by cooperatives of craftspeople in small privately owned workshops. At most, the Commune might have evolved toward fostering cooperatives more aggressively. But as we have seen, any notion of the ownership and control of the means of production even by the municipality as a whole, still less the nationalization of property, was far from the minds of the majority of delegates. The Commune either ignored or eschewed the need to create a society in which private ownership, the market, and even profit would be replaced by the social ownership of the means of production and the distribution of goods according to needs—in short, a communistic society.

Despite the abundance of red flags on the Communard barricades and the wealth of legends that have grown up around the Commune itself, it was not the climax or even necessarily the most class-conscious of the nineteenth-century revolutions. The June insurrection of 1848—which, by comparison with the Commune, the revolutionary tradition has all but forgotten—was far more class-conscious and far more committed to making basic changes in the "organization of work"; it was even more audacious in its demands to replace capitalist relations of production with cooperative ones. In his closely researched comparative study of the June insurrection of 1848 and the Commune of 1871, Roger V. Gould has shown that the class nature of the Commune has been overemphasized at the expense of its civic features—to which I would add, its patriotic features. Where the June 1848 uprising widely demanded the emancipation of workers, the Communal Council (and the Central Committee of the National Guard Federation) addressed themselves overwhelmingly to the citizenry as a whole. The Commune's "demands for municipal liberties and the safeguarding of the Republic," Gould observes, were far different from the class-oriented statements and proclamations common in 1848:

The Central Committee of the National Guard Federation, in its own carefully drafted announcement of elections to the Commune, made it abundantly clear that the constituency on whose behalf it saw itself as acting—the constituency, in other words, of the revolution itself—was the entire city of Paris, irrespective of class position.¹⁷

What the insurgency of June 1848 and the Commune have in common is that they were both expressions of artisanal socialism, one coming early, during its period of hegemony, and the other at its waning phase. In marked contrast to the insurgents of June, the Commune's approach, both in its declarations and in its practices, was notable for its moderation. In this respect—contrary to

the prominent place it has been given in the history of socialism—the Commune marked a retreat from the high point of the artisanal socialist agitation that had been reached in 1848.

THE CONFLICTS WITHIN THE COMMUNE

On the day following its inauguration, the Commune created commissions corresponding to the regular ministries of the national government. The most important of these, during the early weeks, were the Executive Commission and the Military Commission. The Executive Commission was composed of four civilians and three military officers. The civilians were Gustave Lefrançais, a Proudhonist schoolteacher; Gustave Tridon, a fervent Blanquist and journalist-historian; Edouard Vaillant, a Blanquist engineering student; and the mischievous Félix Pyat, whose ultraradical rhetoric was equaled only by his cunning in extricating himself from dangerous situations. The three military members were Jules Bergeret, a bookshop worker whose main military qualification was that he had been elected to a leading position in the National Guard; Émile Duval, a committed Blanquist steelworker who had urged an immediate attack on Versailles after March 18; and Émile Eudes, the Blanquist student who had also urged an attack on Versailles.

The Military Commission, for its part, contained all three of the Executive Commission officers—Bergeret, Duval, and Eudes—as well as Gustave Flourens, whose flamboyant role in the October 31 attack on the Hôtel de Ville had gained him a reputation for courage and militancy. Raoul Rigault and Théophile Ferré, both young Blanquists, took charge of Security—that is, of the Parisian police.

Unlike the Provisional Government in 1848, the Commune also created a Labor and Exchange Commission, as evidence of its concern for the interests of the Parisian working class. Sitting on this commission and the Industry Commission were three of the Commune's most prominent Internationalists and socialists: the jeweler Léo Frankel (who was in close touch with Marx), the bronze worker Albert Thiesz, and the publicist Benoît Malon. The syndicalist and Internationalist Eugène Varlin sat on the Finance Commission, together with the Internationalist Victor Clément and the bumbling Proudhonist Charles Beslay. Mention should also be made of one of the Commune's most impressive figures, the aging and ailing Jacobin journalist Charles Delescluze, who tried to let younger, more energetic individuals take leading roles in the Commune but was continually drawn into it by the demanding problems it faced.

As a whole, the Communal Council and its commissions were too disparate

ideologically and included too many prickly intellectuals and even bohemians to function effectively. The Proudhonists were embattled with the socialists, while the Jacobins dueled with almost everyone, including each other. Moreover, many of the Commune's members were answerable to multiple constituencies. Too often, when the Commune attempted to cope with the city's needs in an orderly fashion, its efforts were impeded by the presence of many groups and institutions claiming jurisdiction over different aspects of the capital's life. In reality, however, the inauguration of the Communal Council on March 28 had been of no great significance to the various committees, clubs, and other local institutions that embodied the Commune in the everyday life of the neighborhoods. For one, the local mayors of the *arrondissements* were a constant nuisance to the Council, challenging its legality, claiming that they alone were the sole legal governing authority in Paris—a claim that they did not give up until local National Guard committees, acting on their own initiative, simply expelled the mayors from the *mairies*. For its part, the Central Committee of the National Guard Federation—although it welcomed the Council and with much fanfare surrendered all its legal powers to it—still continued to exist, almost as a parallel power to the Hôtel de Ville, its preoccupation with legal niceties notwithstanding. Another constant presence was the Delegation of the Twenty Arrondissements, which issued local challenges to many of the Communal Council's policies at the neighborhood level.

The plethora of committees and clubs that flourished in the neighborhoods constituted still another level of local power. Attendance must have varied enormously from one meeting to another, but some involved thousands of people. The political outlook of the clubs seems to have ranged across the whole political spectrum and often constituted a strange mix of centralistic Jacobin and extreme libertarian views akin to those of Varlet in 1783. The Club des Prolétaires, meeting in the Church of Saint-Ambroise, for example, emulating the radical sections of the Great Revolution, demanded that the Commune desist from issuing decrees and seek popular sanction for its proposals, a view that was echoed by the Club Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs.

But sectional democracy or not, the clubs seem to have been very conscious of themselves as an important political phenomenon. The Club Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs exhibited a great deal of initiative in promoting a federation of the clubs: it published a daily *Bulletin communal* to provide accounts of debates in the different clubs and present the various proposals that they had accepted. In fact a short-lived Federation of Clubs was established, as Edwards tells us, whose committee held daily meetings in the public assistance building and whose individual component clubs began “to circulate motions among themselves.”¹⁸ When the time came for the Commune to resist the troops of the National Assembly in the streets of Paris, the clubs played a vital role in mobilizing popular local support for the struggle.

All of these various committees, as well as the Council and its commissions, were plagued by disagreements—political, social, and unfortunately, personal—that frequently threw them against one another and wracked them internally as well. The Parisian municipality was direly in need of a communal constitution that clearly delineated the jurisdictions of its many committees and that established ways to coordinate its administration. No such constitution existed. Where the Assembly was centralistic and statist, the Commune was decentralistic and confederal, not only in administering the city but in its militia, or *fédérés*, as the National Guard was appropriately called. For the first time since 1793, Varlet's day, Paris had created a loosely libertarian alternative to central government in France. But in the face of a military emergency it would have been difficult enough to maintain this libertarian structure, and even the most libertarian institutions require a degree of centralization to defeat a well-organized military force. Unfortunately, the *fédérés* were often as local in their orientation as the rest of the clubs and *arrondissement* organizations. Their decisions were usually based on the will of individual neighborhood committees, which often acted entirely on their own.

To add to these problems, the Communal Council's authority was subverted when the Central Committee of the National Guard Federation adamantly refused to accept the fact that responsibility for the *fédérés*—the military arm of the Commune of Paris—no longer belonged to itself but was now the province of the Military Commission. The Central Committee regarded the Commune as a purely political and administrative body—and an inadequate one at that—rather than a military one and thus tried to recover the control over the Guard that it had surrendered with the installation of the Communal Council.

Finally, even among the *fédérés*, the National Guard battalions often disregarded orders they received, whether they came from the Commune's Military Commission or from the Central Committee itself. Some artillery battalions acted entirely on their own, obeying no one but their own independent *arrondissement* committees. Others went so far as to arrest their own commanders if they suspected them of any dereliction of duty. Indeed, so chaotic was their behavior that they often made the Commune's military force essentially dysfunctional. Even in a time of dire emergency, when the Commune's military commanders tried to mobilize the city against the *Versillais*, battalions of *fédérés* were often unresponsive to their commands. Ironically, the Central Committee's attempt to assert itself against the Commune diverted its attention and energy from the task of bringing military discipline to the ranks, and turning them into the effective fighting force that the city needed so desperately.

Not only was the National Guard undisciplined and chaotic, but as Lissagaray emphasizes, it was not trained to fight as a field army, despite its valiant showing during the sortie of January 19. The *fédérés* were at their best as

a defensive force, not in attacks upon regular troops. A well-trained, experienced, and disciplined force might have had a good chance of defeating Thiers's troops—especially in the early days of the Commune—and the Guards were certainly more motivated than their opponents, but they had none of the qualities that would have made them effective against a well-organized army. Despite small successes and acts of extraordinary heroism, the *fédérés* never won any major victories against the well-disciplined *Versillais*.

THE COMMUNE AT WAR

The Commune's inability to coordinate the Guards and train them to become an offensive fighting force was particularly troubling in light of the fact that the National Assembly and the head of state in Versailles had absolutely no intention of allowing the Commune to continue to exist for any longer than it was obliged to. As the history of revolutionary movements over the centuries has repeatedly revealed, counterrevolution takes no quarter in any class war, and as such, if the Commune could hope to survive at all, it was obliged to throw the *fédérés* against the *Versillais* quickly, before Thiers could mobilize his regular army.

This the Commune did not do. Nothing reveals the Commune's naïveté better than its public response to a limited foray that the *Versillais* made on April 2, to occupy a temporary barracks at Courbevoie, some six miles to the northwest of Paris. When the National Guards engaged Thiers's forces that day, they acquitted themselves poorly—in fact, they fled in a pell-mell retreat. Thiers could have ordered his troops to pursue the fleeing *fédérés* into Paris, but as yet he did not feel his forces were strong enough: two weeks after he had vacated Paris, he still had a total of only 35,000 disorganized troops and 3,000 gendarmes at his disposal.

But he did give evidence of his deadly intentions by executing five captured Communards, which caused the Commune to explode in injured outrage. In a genuinely shocked denunciation, the Executive Commission declared, "Royalist conspirators have ATTACKED. In spite of our moderate attitude, they have ATTACKED."¹⁹ This reaction was surely highly symptomatic of a larger problem: that the Commune expressed shock at being attacked in the midst of a conflict that was, if not a clear-cut class war, then clearly a social war, was self-deceptive in the extreme. That it could have been so shocked revealed an absence of psychological fortitude and political sophistication, not to speak of an unpreparedness to determinedly resist its resolute and committed enemy.

The Commune had not yet accepted the reality that it was facing a civil war, led by a ruthless enemy that was remorselessly planning its extermination. Not

until it was too late did it come to terms with this fact—or realize the necessity for confronting its enemy while it still had a chance to prevail. The failure of the Central Committee and then the Communal Council to perceive the intentions of the *Versaillais* in the weeks after March 18; their continued quibbling over republican legality; the uncertainty that surrounded almost every action they took outside a strictly “constitutional” framework that had yet to be defined; their trepidation in dealing with the Bank of France; their respect for the money that lay untouched in various ministries; and their qualms over expropriating property (which even many bourgeois states would have done in wartime)—all guaranteed the doom of the Paris Commune of 1871.

The failings of the National Guards—as well as their courage—were demonstrated very clearly on April 3–4, just after the *Versaillais* incursion on Courbevoie. In blind outrage against the attack, instinctively understanding that it was necessary to mount a counterattack, the Commune undertook a “grand sortie” against Thiers’s troops. Apart from his incursion of the day before, Thiers had helped this endeavor along by making belligerently provocative statements and sending shells into the capital. The prospect of a full-scale civil war, which had still seemed somewhat of an abstraction, now became searingly real.

At a meeting the night before the sortie, the Communal Council gave command of the *fédérés* to Gustave-Paul Cluseret, a professional officer who, oddly enough, had begun his military career as a reactionary, capturing barricades in June 1848, but later developed more liberal sympathies. He served as a Union officer in the American Civil War, then shifted his allegiance to the International. His detractors often called him “the Yankee” because, like many American officers, his uniform was slovenly and his demeanor easygoing—and he sported a cheroot, in the fashion of General U.S. Grant. Despite his democratic “Yankee” mannerisms, however, Cluseret was a stern disciplinarian who vowed to shape the National Guard into a highly disciplined military force. But he regarded the “grand sortie” that was planned for the next day as a reckless and doomed endeavor, led by officers who were wholly unqualified to mount it. In any case, having been appointed the Commune’s war delegate only at the last minute, there was little he could do to improve its prospects. As Edwards notes, he “wisely avoided taking responsibility, leaving the other generals to see through what they had so rashly begun.”²⁰

And rash it was. The most ardent proponents of the sortie were the members of the Military Commission: Duval, Eudes, and the former bookseller Bergeret. According to the plan of attack, each of these inexperienced officers was to head a column, lead it out of one of the western gates, march to Versailles, then converge with the other two columns to make a common assault. As Lissagaray bitterly observes, this simple plan would have been “easy of execution” had there been “experienced officers and solid heads of column.”

But most of the battalions had been without chiefs since the 18th March, the National Guards without *cadres*, and the generals who assumed the responsibility of leading 40,000 men had never conducted a single battalion into the field. They neglected even the most elementary precautions, knew not how to collect artillery, ammunition-waggons, or ambulances, forgot to make an order of the day, and left the men for several hours without food in a penetrating fog. Every Federal chose the chief he liked best. Many had no cartridges, and believed the sortie to be a simple demonstration.²¹

The columns departed from Paris in a festive mood, even accompanied by women and children, naively assuming that when they encountered the *Versaillais* soldiers, the rank-and-file, rather than fight them, would instantly fraternize with their National Guard brothers, as they had done on March 18. As a result, the *fédérés* were poorly equipped and thoroughly unprepared for any serious fighting.

Not surprisingly, everything went wrong. When the northernmost column—the 15,000 *fédérés* under Bergeret’s command—marched northwest toward the village of Rueil (with only eight cannons!), they were obliged to pass by Mont-Valérien, the most pivotal fort on the Parisian military perimeter—the one that the Central Committee had neglected to take when it lay virtually unoccupied immediately after March 18. A rumor was circulating among the *fédérés* that the fort was now back in the Commune’s hands, but this rumor was entirely false. As Bergeret’s column passed the fort, *Versaillais* artillery fire erupted and rained on the Guards, producing complete panic. Bergeret’s *fédérés*, wholly astonished, scattered into the fields shouting “Treachery!” and the entire right flank fled in haste, heading back to Paris as quickly as their feet could carry them. Bergeret continued on with a few troops, coming within four miles of Versailles, after which he finally had to withdraw. Flourens, who was attached to this column, reached Rueil with a handful of men, but there he was killed, sword in hand, by a Versailles cavalry officer.

On the extreme left flank of the march, the column under Duval did no better. Lacking artillery and sufficient cartridges, the *fédérés* retreated, abandoning Duval to the *Versaillais*, who executed him. As for the center, the 10,000 Guards under Eudes managed to push due west to Meudon, but lacking sufficient artillery and ammunition to take the well-fortified *Versaillais* garrison, they retreated back to a strong point near Paris. Fortunately, guns were rushed from the capital in time to prevent the Versailles troops from taking the offensive.

The sortie was a decisive turning point in the military fortunes of Paris and Versailles. The Paris Commune was never again to undertake a major offensive against Thiers, and the National Guard, despite limited successes and individual acts of extraordinary heroism, won no major victories over its

enemies. The *Versaillais*, in turn, emboldened by their victory, moved steadily closer to Paris, taking crucial forts such as Issy on May 9 and Vanves on May 13. Within a matter of days, Thiers's forces—reinforced by the thousands of French war prisoners that Bismarck had released precisely for this purpose—were only a few hundred yards from the city's walls.

On April 6, in response to the executions of the captured Communards, the Commune passed a Law on Hostages, which permitted it to arrest and try potential "hostages of the people of Paris." Indeed, a few individuals, including the archbishop of Paris, were taken into custody, and in mid-April the Commune offered all of these hostages to Thiers in exchange for the release of Blanqui. But Thiers cannily refused, observing that to give the old revolutionary to the Commune would be equivalent to providing it with an army corps.

On May 1, due to internal disputes, the Commune arrested Cluseret and replaced him as war delegate with Louis Rossel, an able officer who had turned against the National Assembly because of its capitulation to the Prussians. Rossel tried to transform the National Guard into a disciplined force but encountered the usual obstructions over autonomy. A less flamboyant and inspiring commander than his predecessor, he quickly lost the confidence of the *fédérés* as well as his credibility with the Commune. Only nine days after he was appointed, he resigned, in part because of the fall of Issy—the linchpin of the city's defense—and fled into the warrens of Paris before he had to answer for real or imagined malfeasances against the Commune. Indeed, in the three weeks left to the Communard leaders, the quarrels among them intensified. On May 1, in the wake of the fall of Issy, the Jacobin-Blanquist majority split with the Proudhonists and some of the Internationalists over whether to tighten central control by establishing a Committee of Public Safety.

In the face of the military emergency, there could be few disputes that at least some degree of centralized control was vital, but a rancorous conflict arose over the committee's name. The Jacobins and Blanquists favored calling it the Committee of Public Safety, invoking the tradition of which they saw themselves the continuation; but the Proudhonists and many Internationalists pointed out that it was the Committee of Public Safety that, in 1793, had destroyed the Paris Commune of that era. So bitter was the acrimony that Jules Miot, a Jacobin, demanded that the minority who opposed the name be tried as "Girondins." Although Miot's demand was happily not fulfilled, the majority in the Commune—by six votes—finally voted in favor of the ill-starred name.

Although its name raised alarms about a new terror, the new Committee of Public Safety inflicted no mass executions on the Commune's opponents. In fact, it did little more than close down critical or hostile periodicals, enforce conscription (which the local battalions of the *fédérés* carried out with considerable zest), and issue identity cards as a safeguard against the many agents in Paris who were working for Versailles. Some of its actions were merely

symbolic, such as the pulling down of Napoleon I's Vendôme column, a symbol of Bonapartist imperialism and militarism that had been forged from cannons captured by the emperor after the battle of Austerlitz. Influenced by Delescluze, however, the committee did manage to bring the majority and minority together in the waning days of the Commune, although they were by no means reconciled ideologically or even freed of mutual distrust. The Central Committee of the National Guard, now essentially a corpse, came to terms with the Commune on issues of their respective authority. But this agreement no longer had any meaning: the *Versaillais*, reinforced by newly released prisoners of war, were about to break into the streets of Paris.

On May 21 the fully assembled Commune was meeting at the Hôtel de Ville, preoccupied with a malicious attempt by Jules Miot to put Cluseret on trial for the loss of Issy. Suddenly, at seven o'clock in the evening, a member of the Committee of Public Safety broke in with the cry: "Stop! Stop! I have a communication of the utmost importance, for which I demand a secret session."²² The *Versaillais*, he informed the Commune, had found an entry into Paris and were pouring into the city in force.

It might have been expected that at this point the Commune would finally rally itself to take immediate and decisive military action. In reality, stunned, it managed to acquit Cluseret of the charges against him; whereupon its members quickly dispersed, each to his own *arrondissement*. "Thus the council of the Commune disappeared from history and the Hôtel de Ville at the moment of supreme danger, when the Versaillaise penetrated Paris." As Lissagaray emphasizes in disgust,

there was no one to demand a permanent committee; no one to call on his colleague to wait here for news. . . . There was no one to insist at this critical moment of uncertainty, when it might be necessary to improvise a plan of defence at a moment's notice or take a great resolution in case of disaster.²³

It was the ultimate ineptitude of a conflicted, often confused, and tragic group of men lacking any clear political or organizational direction.

THE BLOODY WEEK OF MAY 22-28

By mid-May, Thiers's troops had moved so close to the southwestern wall of Paris that their conversation could be overheard by the *fédérés* on the other side, only a few yards away. Despite these advances, however, they still could not breach the wall: their previous attempts to enter the city had been repelled often enough to render them extremely prudent about launching a direct

frontal attack. Instead, they continued their heavy artillery bombardment of the city. Unknown to them, however, they might well have made a successful foray into the city because the *fédérés* had carelessly failed to guard key parts of the wall that were highly vulnerable to attack.

On Sunday, May 21, one Ducatel was taking an afternoon stroll near the Porte de Point du Jour, in the southwestern part of the city. An engineer for the Department of Public Works, Ducatel had no sympathies for the Commune. In the course of his walk, he happened to notice that no *fédérés* were defending an immensely strategic area—indeed, that a gate was unguarded and available for the taking. At three o'clock he climbed to the top of the wall, waved a white handkerchief to the Versailles troops on the other side, and shouted, "Come!"

The *Versillais* hesitated; they had been deceived twice before in similar situations, entering the city only to encounter fire from the *fédérés*. A naval officer prudently made his way over to Ducatel—and was astonished to find that a whole section of the wall and its ramparts were indeed completely deserted. Returning to his troops, the naval officer telegraphed the news to General Douay, the commanding divisional officer, who took careful precautions to confirm that the call was not a ruse. Ending the artillery bombardment of the area, he ordered his troops to advance carefully into the city in small groups. Before the day was out, some 60,000 *Versillais* had entered Paris, and a full-scale assault upon the capital was under way.

That night Delescluze, head of the Committee of Public Safety and the *fédérés'* nominal commander, exhibited the Commune's fatal proclivity for a strictly localized defense by plastering Paris with posters calling to the people and the Guards to take to the streets in decentralized barricade fighting. "Enough of militarism, no more staff-officers," the poster declaimed, evoking the myth of popular spontaneity in military engagements.

Make way for the people, the bare-armed fighters! The hour of revolutionary war has struck. The people know nothing of elaborate manoeuvres, but when they have a rifle in their hands and cobble-stones under their feet they have no fear for the strategists of the monarchist school.²⁴

The Parisian working class responded to the call, as they had before, by building barricades. Starting that night and continuing for several days, the Communards built a total of 600, in all parts of the city but especially in the eastern half. As in June 1848, everyone helped—women and children as well as men, piling not only *pavés* but buses, cabs, furnishings, mattresses, and even soil from the streets. In the working-class districts in particular, they formed an individually strong but disorganized network, entirely defensive in nature.

Unfortunately, the *fédérés* had much to fear from "the strategists of the monarchical school." As Cluseret and Rossel understood but Delescluze did

not, strategy and meticulous planning count for a great deal in war, and these features were conspicuously lacking among the Communards. "When the Minister of War [Delescluze] thus stigmatises all discipline," Lissagaray observes trenchantly, "who will henceforth obey?"

When he repudiates all method, who will listen to reason? Thus we shall see hundreds of men refusing to quit the pavement of their street, paying no heed to the neighbouring quarter in agonies, remaining motionless up to the last hour waiting for the army to come and overwhelm them.²⁵

The *Versillais* divided themselves into two major columns, one for each bank of the Seine. In the western half, they had relatively little difficulty moving down Haussmann's boulevards and overcoming the *fédérés'* resistance. Much of the resistance they encountered was heroic: Paul Brunel, in particular, comported himself with extraordinary bravery. No less striking was the brilliant defense put up by General Jaroslav Dombrowski, a Polish nationalist of aristocratic lineage, who had completely identified with the Commune and held back the *Versillais* for nearly two months at Neuilly with remarkable courage.

But these heroic cases do not alter the fact that many working-class *fédérés* defended the bourgeois portions of the city with less zeal than they would have defended their own *quartiers*. Most of the barricades in western and central Paris gave way fairly rapidly to the superior firepower and tactics of the *Versillais*. In addition, Haussmann's broad avenues enabled Thiers's men to execute pincer movements, unexpectedly taking barricade after barricade from the rear. In fact, the days when a frontal attack upon a barricade was the rule had come to an end; henceforth the barricade would be merely a symbolic structure rather than a military one.

Thiers knew, however, that the most ferocious battles still lay ahead, in the eastern half of the city. Those battles would have been even more ferocious if the Communards had been able to use the eighty-five cannons and two dozen machine guns that they had collected on the heights of Montmartre. But since Thiers's abortive attempt to retrieve them in mid-March, the guns had been neglected and left to corrode—indeed, they were all but useless just when they were most needed. For the few that were serviceable, there was hardly enough ammunition. The same was true of the cannons in the artillery park at the École Militaire. The disorder in the National Guard, to which all the generals appointed by the Commune had consistently objected week after week, now left them with relatively few usable cannons—the weapons par excellence that Thiers was using to demolish the capital's defenses.

At nine o'clock on the morning of May 22, the Commune—or rather, twenty of its members—assembled again at the Hôtel de Ville. Apart from rhetoric and Pyat's histrionics—he pledged, with tears in his eyes, to die on the barricades

(but disappeared before the fighting came too near and was next seen in London, after the conflict)—the Communal Council had little to offer its beleaguered *fédérés*.

On May 23, fires broke out in many important government buildings in the center of the city, including the Tuileries, the Finance Ministry, and the Hôtel de Ville, among many others. Various causes by the artillery of the *Versillais* or by *fédérés*, the burnings cleared the way for guns to arrest the flanking movements of both sides. Later, Thiers was only too eager to claim that the fires had been the work of *pétroleuses*, or “women incendiaries,” an accusation that, like so many others generated by the *Versillais*, has been shown to be entirely spurious. To be sure, few Communards would have wept to see the symbols of French royalism, such as the Tuileries and the Louvre, go up in flames; but neither the Commune nor the workers tried to systematically burn down Paris. In all likelihood, the bombardment of the city by the *Versillais* destroyed more structures than the Communards did.

But what is indubitably true is that the bloody repression now conducted by the *Versillais*—the purge that Thiers had urged upon Louis-Philippe in 1848—led to the most wanton slaughter of men, women, and even children in the history of nineteenth-century counterrevolutions. Every time the *Versillais* took a barricade, they would line up its defenders against a wall and shoot them, even those suspected merely of helping the actual fighters. Anyone found with a weapon, or wearing a portion of a National Guard uniform—such as a kepi, jacket, or cartridge belt—indeed, anyone with darkened hands that resembled powder burns—was executed at once, as were outright captives who had been cajoled into surrendering with promises of clemency. One working-class child begged an officer to temporarily release him so that he could give his watch to his mother: when the officer consented, he left, then was shot on his return. The savagery perpetrated by the Versailles troops as they advanced through the boulevards and streets of the capital beggars all description.

The executions increased the fury of the *fédérés* and made their resistance so desperate that they sometimes retaliated in kind. Not surprisingly, the six notable hostages taken by the Commune, including the archbishop of Paris, were executed in reprisal. A furious crowd, incensed by the wanton butchery by the *Versillais* of the Communards, massacred fifty-one prisoners—mainly police and priests—despite vigorous efforts by Varlin to save them.

But the advance of Thiers's troops was relentless. Like the June insurgents of 1848, the Communards at nearly every barricade fought desperately in their own neighborhoods, sparing little or no effort to assist nearby insurgents in greater need of aid. “The troops of Versailles could only be seriously checked,” Edwards observes, “if there had been a coordinated line of barricades across Paris, covering each other and preventing any given position from being outflanked and taken from behind.”²⁶ No such line was formed.

The imprisoned Blanqui had long urged the Parisian working class to overcome its neighborhood parochialism at such moments and recognize the importance of developing a coordinated strategy—“above all, not to become shut up, each in his *quartier*, as all uprisings have never failed to do, to their great loss.”²⁷ But in the seventeenth *arrondissement*, when Malon called on adjacent Montmartre for help, the *fédérés* there refused to leave their home district. Despite the Communards' ferocious resistance, their neighborhood focus allowed the *Versillais* to vanquish them barricade by barricade, with little fear of having to face reinforcements from other districts before each barricade fell.

Belleville was the last neighborhood to hold out against the *Versillais*, but by Saturday, May 27, the entire district was invested by Thiers's troops. At the end of the day the *Versillais* broke into the Père Lachaise cemetery, where the Communards were making their last stand. Despite fierce hand-to-hand fighting, the Communards failed to halt the advancing troops. On Sunday, they were finally compelled to surrender—and the last important engagement of the Commune was over. The *Versillais*, almost as a matter of course, lined the prisoners up against a cemetery wall—the *mur des fédérés*, as it came to be called—and shot them. Thousands of corpses, including those of men and women who had had to surrender because they lacked ammunition, littered the gravesites. Dramatically, the very last barricade fell on Sunday in Belleville, on the Rue Ramponeau, where one man held out alone, as long as he could, coolly defending his position against hopeless odds. After a quarter of an hour, he fired a parting shot in the direction of the attacking *Versillais*, then calmly stepped down from the barricade and disappeared into the streets.

Charles Delescluze went to his death with all the nobility that had marked his life and character. On Thursday, May 25, dressed in an unassuming black hat, coat, and trousers, with a red scarf around his waist, the venerable Jacobin leader walked with great dignity toward a barricade at what is now the Place de la République and mounted it in full sight of the *Versillais* guns. He was shot down. Two Communards who tried to rescue his body were also killed. Eugène Varlin, on the last day of the fighting, led a column of fifty men under a huge red flag to a barricade at the intersection of the Rue de la Fontaine and the Rue du Faubourg du Temple. After Thiers's troops took the barricade, this remarkable man wandered through the streets, dazed by the fury of the fighting. When he was recognized and taken, his captors beat him with their rifle butts, and an enraged crowd of bourgeois surrounded him and mercilessly pelted him with stones. Finally, with his face smashed and one eye out of its socket, he was placed before a firing squad. Despite his battered condition, Varlin managed to raise his head high and defiantly shout, “Long live the Commune!” It took two volleys to finish him off. Well-dressed bourgeois ladies

prodded his body as it lay in the street, until it was finally carted off with the rest of the dead.

Women had played a crucial role in the Paris Commune. Not only did they aid in building the barricades, but they readily took up arms against the *Versaillais*, for which a large number paid with their lives, either in battle or at the hands of the government's executioners. The roster of women Communards is impressive, including Elisabeth Dmitrieff, who organized the Women's Union for the Defense of Paris, as well as uncounted working-class women whose names are lost to us forever. Perhaps the most outstanding and militant among them was Louise Michel, who seems to have been everywhere during each of the Commune's major crises: participating in the October uprising after the surrender of Metz; orating at the clubs, where she was a familiar and inspiring figure; rousing the workers of Montmartre on March 18, when the cannons were about to be taken away, and fighting in various battles, wearing a kepi and carrying a weapon. After March 18, during the controversy over whether to pursue Thiers out of the city, Michel had even made her way to Versailles itself, merely to demonstrate that the head of state could be assassinated.

By the time the fighting came to an end, Michel had achieved a degree of distinction unequalled by any other female Communard. Since the authorities had singled her out as the leader of the mythic *pétroleuses*, who ostensibly set fire to the buildings, the troops and police combed Paris to find her. She managed to elude them completely and take refuge in the recesses of the capital. Not until December 16, when the government took her mother hostage, did she voluntarily surrender herself to the Sixth Council of War. Placed on trial, Michel defiantly shouted back at her judges:

Since it seems that every heart that beats for freedom has no right to anything but a little slug of lead, I demand my share. If you let me live, I shall never cease to cry for vengeance.²⁸

Louise Michel's courage so impressed the spectators at her trial that she was prudently sentenced to exile instead of death. When it was suggested that she lodge an appeal for clemency, she refused, declaring that she "would have preferred death."²⁹

Brunel, Cluseret, Eudes, Frankel, Longuet, Lefrançais, Miot, and Vaillant—all survived, and several of them later became prominent figures in the French Socialist Party. Ferré, Moreau, Rigault, Rossel, and Clément Thomas were shot by the *Versaillais*—although Rossel was executed after leaving his hideout, a refugee from the Commune as well as the *Versaillais*. The many thousands who were shot or killed in the barricade fighting and afterward remain an anonymous mass, their names forgotten in the history of humanity's fight for social justice. Yet they died in huge numbers as heroically as their better-known leaders.

After the barricade fighting was over, the carnage continued without respite. The prisoners of the *Versaillais* were slaughtered by the hundreds, even thousands, without any discrimination. Commanders like the Marquis de Galliffet simply strode up and down the ranks of the captives and arbitrarily selected individuals for immediate execution. The Paris correspondent of the London *Daily News*, observing the marquis's behavior, wrote:

It was not a good thing on that day to be noticeably taller, dirtier, cleaner, older, or uglier than one's neighbours. One individual in particular struck me as probably owing his speedy release from ills of this world to his having a broken nose. . . . Over a hundred being thus chosen, a firing party told off, and the column resumed its march, leaving them behind.³⁰

In June 1871 the British *Standard* correspondent reported that two courts-martial were shooting people at the rate of 500 a day, including women and children. Thousands of captives, marched off to the Satory encampment at Versailles, were shot indiscriminately or perished from exhaustion. The Lobeau barracks were turned into a killing ground and the corpses thrown into a shallow grave at the Place Saint Jacques or into the Seine. In some places, blood ran in a steady trickle into the gutters. So chilling and grotesque were the reports coming out of France that revulsion gave rise to protests against the slaughter, even in conventional newspapers abroad, and in time the government was obliged to replace outright executions with transportation to New Caledonia, a French colony where more than 3,000 Communards were forced to live in huts under the eyes of brutal wardens. In all, 10,000 people were condemned and confined, either within France or in French possessions abroad. Twenty thousand more, who suffered terribly through the winter of 1871-72 in ad hoc forms of confinement, were released without ever being formally charged.

As for fatalities, the most commonly accepted estimate is that 25,000 Communards were killed, although a figure of 30,000 would not be unreasonable. The *Versaillais* lost only 877 dead and 6,454 wounded. Most by far of the Communards who perished were executed by Thiers's troops, usually summarily, without even a pretense of courts-martial. For months after the suppression of the Commune, Paris suffered from a labor shortage due to the murder and imprisonment of its best artisans. Thiers did complete his purge of Paris—with far more brutality than even the Terror of the Great Revolution, in which, during 1793-94, about 2,600 were killed in Paris and about 17,000 in the rest of France.

NOTES

1. Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, *History of the Commune of 1871*, trans. Eleanor Marx Aveling (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967), p. 91. Lissagaray was a participant in the Commune.
2. Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune, 1871* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1971), p. 150.
3. Lissagaray, *History of the Commune*, p. 90.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
5. "Appeal to the Departments," *Journal officiel* (March 20, 1871), quoted in Edwards, *Paris Commune*, p. 155.
6. Edwards, *Paris Commune*, p. 146.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
8. *Journal officiel* (March 21, 1871), in *The Communards of Paris, 1871*, ed. Stewart Edwards, Documents of Revolution series (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press; London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), pp. 68-9.
9. Jules Vallès, in *Le Cri du Peuple* (March 30, 1871); in *Communards of Paris*, ed. Edwards, p. 74.
10. Document 50 in *Communards of Paris*, ed. Edwards, p. 140.
11. L. Barron, *Sous le drapeau rouge* (Paris, 1889); Document 51 in *Communards of Paris*, ed. Edwards, p. 142.
12. *Le Sociale* (Mar. 31, 1871); quoted in Edwards, *Paris Commune*, p. 261.
13. Samuel Bernstein, *Auguste Blanqui and the Art of Insurrection* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), p. 337.
14. "Declaration to the French People," originally published in English in the *London Times* (April 21, 1871); republished with corrections in *Communards of 1871*, ed. Edwards, pp. 81-3.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. Roger V. Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 168.
18. Edwards, *Paris Commune*, p. 281.
19. Cited in Arthur Adamov, *La Commune de Paris, 18 Mars-28 Mai 1871* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1959), p. 30, emphasis in the original.
20. Edwards, *Paris Commune*, p. 198.
21. Lissagaray, *History of the Commune*, pp. 164-5.
22. Cited in Alistair Horne, *The Fall of Paris: The Siege and the Commune of 1871* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 364.
23. Lissagaray, *History of the Commune*, p. 309.
24. Charles Delescluze, "To the People of Paris, to the National Guards" (May 21, 1871), in *Communards of Paris*, ed. Edwards, p. 160.
25. Lissagaray, *History of the Commune*, p. 314.
26. Edwards, *Paris Commune*, p. 319.
27. Blanqui, "Instruction for an Armed Uprising," quoted in Edwards, *Paris Commune*, p. 319.
28. Quoted in Edith Thomas, *The Women Incendiaries*, trans. James and Starr Atkinson (London: Secker & Warburg, 1967), p. 170.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *London Daily News* (June 8, 1871), quoted in Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*, note 1, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 22: *Marx and Engels, 1870-71* (New York: International Publishers, 1986), p. 356.

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