

THE FRENCH PROVINCIAL COMMUNAL MOVEMENT  
AND PARIS: 1870-71

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ABSTRACT

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The communal movement in France in 1870-71 was not simply a Parisian phenomenon but a national movement. From the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war to the signing of the armistice there were many attempts to establish revolutionary communes in the provinces, most notably at Lyon and Marseille. This was also a period of great social turmoil in the departments in which large numbers of people demonstrated their discontent with the Bonapartist regime and its successor, the Government of National Defense.

The Paris Commune was welcomed with considerable enthusiasm in the provinces. Lyon, Marseille, Toulouse, Narbonne, Saint-Etienne and Le Creusot all founded their own communes.

The Commune addressed many proclamations to the provinces, discussed the issue in the Communal Council and sent a number of emissaries into the departments. Although the provincial uprisings were soon crushed by Thiers, they played a significant role in the French communal movement.

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## INTRODUCTION

On hearing the expression "communal movement," the first thing that usually comes to mind (assuming everyone is a student of French history!) is Paris, March 18th, "working men's Paris, with its Commune . . . forever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society." (Marx) This is only natural because the revolution of March 18th was the zenith, the culmination, the most dramatic manifestation of Communard aspirations. However, the seventy-two revolutionary days of the Paris Commune were only one episode in the history of the communal movement. In Paris, attempts had been made to establish the Commune, in one form or another, on August 14, 1870 (Blanqui's abortive insurrection), September 4, 1870, October 31, 1870 and January 22, 1871. For the provinces the list of dates is even longer; August 7, 1870, September 4, 1870, November 1, 1870 and March 22, 1871 . . . Thus, it can be said that the communal movement comprises the period from the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war (July 19, 1870) to the defeat of Paris on May 28, 1871.

But what exactly is meant by "communal movement"? In French history the word "commune" is synonymous with great revolutionary traditions. As far back as 1115, the monk and chronicler, Guibert de Nogent, could write

"Commune is a new and extremely bad name; it releases vassals from their due servitude." During this period, the bourgeoisie, attempting to free itself from the rents, tolls and dues of the nobility, would unite to form communes. These were liberated areas, usually a town or village, in which feudal laws and rights were eliminated. "The commune, frequently though not invariably, began as a tumult of the people, a Council of Action--the municipality under arms."<sup>1</sup> And it was from these origins that the commune became the unit of local government in France.

But it was during the French Revolution that the commune achieved its real revolutionary baptism. With the Constitution of 1791 municipal governments became more democratic and autonomous and it was through the agency of the commune that laws were executed, taxes assessed and collected and the National Guard or troops called out.<sup>2</sup> Being most susceptible to popular pressure the communes of a number of cities became not only governments for the people but also governments by the people. The most famous of these was the Revolutionary Commune formed by representatives of the Paris sections on the night of August 9-10, 1792. It became a driving force which

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<sup>1</sup>D. Torr, "Introduction" in F. Jellinek, The Paris Commune of 1871 (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>A. Mathiez, The French Revolution (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964), p. 90.

spurred the Revolution on to greater and greater acts of daring and heroism. The Paris Commune of '92 and '93 played a part in the internment and execution of Louis XVI and in the suppression campaigns against suspected royalists, the establishment of popular tribunals being the method of checking counterrevolution. In the economic field it drew up returns of the available supplies of commodities, requisitioned vital necessities and enforced acceptance of the assignat as legal tender.<sup>3</sup> And the concept of people's war or la levée en masse, as it was then expressed, finds its origins in the patriotic fervor of the Paris Commune.

However, this revolutionary tradition<sup>4</sup> of the commune was not confined to old history textbooks. The average Communard in 1870-71 and especially the participant in a provincial uprising was very conscious of the commune's revolutionary heritage. So much so, in fact, that Marx could warn his French comrades not to be deluded by the national souvenirs of 1792, and that the task was to build the future, not to recapitulate the past.<sup>5</sup> The idea and practice of the commune was indeed deeply embedded in the political ideology of the French insurgent.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>4</sup>Of course, the bourgeois content of this tradition in the 12th and 18th centuries differed radically from the essentially proletarian content of the late 19th century. What was common to these eras was that the commune was associated with revolution, or resistance against oppression.

<sup>5</sup>K. Marx and F. Engels, On the Paris Commune (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), pp. 46-47.

Thus, in 1870-71 the content of the communal movement was revolutionary. The sections of the population that comprised the "stormers of heaven"--workers, artisans, small shopkeepers, intellectuals and some republican bourgeois--demanded and fought for a radical restructuring of the economic, political and cultural life of France.<sup>6</sup> Their enemies were the Bonapartist regime, the bourgeois and landlords who put class interest before national interest, and the Thiers government.

The goals of the communal movement were local autonomy and self-determination. For the Communards, the institution which would carry out the revolutionary transformation of society would be the commune. Free from outside interference, it would control its own police, taxes, social reforms, and would unite (or federate--a more popular word at the time) with other communes to solve national problems. Thus, the commune was to France what later the soviet was to Russia.

The aim of this thesis is two-fold. First, to describe the breadth and depth of the communal movement in the provinces. And second, to depict the Paris

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<sup>6</sup>It is for this reason that in Chapter II I have not dealt with the activities of what has come to be known as the "conciliators." These people did not support Thiers but they were also opposed to the Paris Commune and its provincial sisters. Their main interest was to put a stop to the civil war. They organized a number of congresses of municipal mayors and also sent many delegations to Versailles to try to convince Thiers to be more lenient. These men were completely distinct from the communal movement.

Commune's attitudes to and relations with the events taking place in the departments.

In writing this thesis all the relevant material available in Montreal was utilized. With regard to the movement in the provinces the principal primary sources are the Enquête parlementaire sur l'insurrection du 18 mars 1871 (Paris, 1872) and the Enquête parlementaire sur les actes du Gouvernement de la Défense nationale du 4 septembre 1870 au 8 février 1871 (Paris, 1872-75).

Each of these has a number of chapters on the insurrections in the departments but they have to be used with care for the authors, witnesses and reporters were all violently anti-Communard. There is also Les Murailles politiques françaises (Paris, 1873-74) which is indispensable for the notices, proclamations and manifestoes posted on the walls of the main provincial cities. On-the-spot observers such as L. Andrieux, La Commune à Lyon en 1870 et 1871 (Paris, 1906), A. Duportal, La Commune à Toulouse (Toulouse, 1871), P. Leroy-Beaulieu, "La Province pendant le siège de Paris," Revue des deux mondes, 1871, M. Aubry and S. Michelesi, Histoire des événements de Marseille (Marseille, 1872) and Paris newspapers provide the bulk of the contemporary printed material and are more reliable than the Government Inquests. A number of Communards, particularly B. Malon, author of La Troisième défaite du prolétariat français (Neuchâtel, 1871), and P.O. Lissagaray, author of Histoire de la Commune de 1871 (Paris, 1969),



were knowledgeable on provincial affairs and their writings were consulted with profit.

Several well-documented monographs concentrating on one provincial town yielded much valuable information. The most important of these were: P. Ponsot, Les Grèves de 1870 et la Commune au Creusot (Paris, 1957); A. Olivesi, La Commune de 1871 à Marseille (Paris, 1950); J. Girault, La Commune et Bordeaux: 1870-1871 (Paris, 1971); and J. Archer, "La Commune de Lyon," Le Mouvement social, 1971. Works which only mentioned the departments in passing were sparingly used.

To do a thesis on France while residing in another country obviously presents one with the problem of a scarcity of sources and this is particularly true for material on the smaller towns in the provinces. However, the gist of events was not impossible to trace.

For Paris the pastures are much greener. The Journal officiel, the Procès-verbaux de la Commune de 1871 (Paris, 1924-45), Paris newspapers and Les 31 séances officielles de la Commune de Paris (Paris, 1871) adequately allow one to examine what the Communards officially said and did. And, of course, the secondary sources are unlimited.

"The whole is the truth." This aphorism of Hegel concisely points to the weaknesses of this thesis. However, to understand the main trend, the principal

aspects and contradictions, or the essence of a problem,  
a knowledge of all human experience is not required.  
And so it is hoped that this paper "uncovers" the kernel  
of the subject.

# I

## THE POPULAR MOVEMENT IN THE PROVINCES:

AUGUST 1870 - FEBRUARY 1871

On the 10th of January 1870, Victor Noir, a republican journalist, associated with the very popular Paris newspaper, La Marseillaise,<sup>1</sup> was murdered by Prince Pierre-Napoleon Bonaparte, a cousin of the Emperor. By the evening of the same day, the news of the assassination had reached Marseille, a city about five hundred miles to the south of Paris. At one of the main squares there quickly assembled a crowd of twelve hundred people, armed with sticks, knives, pistols and the red flag, that proceeded to march along the main avenues of the town shouting "Long live the Republic!", "Down with the Emperor!", "Down with the Pope!", and "Long live Rochefort!" Certain participants suggested that the Prefecture of Police should be stormed by the demonstrators but the cavalry-like charge of the gendarmerie and more than one hundred

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<sup>1</sup>La Marseillaise was established in December 1869 by Henri Rochefort, a radical déclassé and man of letters. La Marseillaise was soon to become the semi-official organ of the International with a daily circulation of one hundred thousand, a very high figure for those days.

arrests abruptly put an end to these suggestions.<sup>2</sup> Two days later, two hundred thousand Parisians-- mostly working people--followed the funeral procession of Victor Noir chanting revolutionary slogans, all united in their contempt for the Second Empire. A contingent of two thousand armed Blanquists led the demonstration and it was only the calm persuasion of Rochefort and Delescluze (one of the future leaders of the Paris Commune) that prevented the crowd from attempting right then and there to overthrow the government.

One week later, at Le Creusot, the business empire of E. Schneider, ten thousand workers went on strike protesting the firing of members of a workers' delegation who were discussing with the management the question of the control over the pension fund.

The new decade was hardly three weeks old and, so far as Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was concerned, the future did not look at all bright. The crisis of the Second Empire was reaching its climax and this was as true for the provinces as it was for Paris.

While the immediate causes of the popular movement in the provinces were varied, it was the economic conditions which provided a constant material base for potentially explosive activity. By the end of the Second Empire, the first stage of the industrial revolution had basically been

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<sup>2</sup>A. Olivesi, La Commune de 1871 à Marseille (Paris: Librairie Marcel Rivière et Cie, 1950), p. 63.

completed in France. Almost all the essential branches of industry were becoming mechanized and factories with hundreds or even thousands of employees were no longer a rarity. Not only was industrialization extending but it was also becoming more and more concentrated: for example, in 1866 there were 1,660,000 patrons while in 1872 there were only 725,000.<sup>3</sup> This development was obviously not without its effect on smaller business. In some industrial regions as many as 50% of the small enterprises disappeared or deteriorated greatly.<sup>4</sup>

However, in spite of this industrial boom (punctuated by economic depressions in 1857-1860, 1867 and 1870) small and medium industries still predominated. (In 1872 the ratio of non-owners to owners was just under 3:1.)<sup>5</sup> The majority of workers were employed in small industry, usually an enterprise with one working owner and a few hired help.

The extension and intensification of capitalist production had brought about a deterioration in the general situation of the working people. Wages in certain industries were being lowered and what pay increases there were

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<sup>3</sup>G. Duveau, La Vie ouvrière en France sous le Second Empire (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), p. 197.

<sup>4</sup>E. Jeloubovskaia, La Chute du Second Empire et la naissance de la Troisième République en France (Moscow: Editions en langues étrangères, 1959), p. 21.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

never kept pace with the rise in prices. Staple goods were particularly vulnerable to rapid increases. (For example, from 1850 to 1870 the price of meat rose 40%).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, not only were rents going up but housing was also difficult to find. Thus, for example, the prefect Vaisse, the Haussmann of Lyon, had organized construction in such a way that the workers were driven from their old houses in the centre of town to make way for luxurious buildings and were forced to move to the suburbs.<sup>7</sup>

Working conditions were generally on the decline and unemployment was a chronic problem.<sup>8</sup> Many workers had jobs which were only good for seven or eight months of the year. This rather bleak picture resulted in the growth, in both numbers and militancy, of trade unions (chambres syndicales) and other workers' associations. So the time was ripe for an upsurge in working-class political activity.

But what of the peasantry who in 1870 still comprised more than sixty percent of the population? (Of about ten million electors, almost five and a half million were engaged in agriculture, with three and a half million owning their own land.)<sup>9</sup> The rural areas, with very few

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<sup>6</sup>G. Duveau, op. cit., p. 334.

<sup>7</sup>M. Moissonnier, "La Commune et le mouvement ouvrier lyonnais, La Nouvelle critique, no.125 (April, 1961), p. 106.

<sup>8</sup>See G. Duveau, op. cit., pp. 233-299.

<sup>9</sup>F. Jellinek, The Paris Commune of 1871 (New York: The Universal Library, 1965), p. 42.

exceptions, were ideologically, socially and politically the most reliable backbone of the monarchical and imperial regime.

On the whole, the larger landowners and the villagers on their estates favoured the Legitimist branch of the Bourbons, the supporters of the Restoration regime of Louis XVIII, while the squires and yeomen created by the Napoleonic settlement of the Revolution preferred the constitutional monarchism of the Orleanist descendants of Louis Philippe.<sup>10</sup>

This did not mean that the situation in the countryside was completely dormant, that the peasants were all satisfied, and without grievances. In the South and South-east there were rumblings, and in order to ensure that the peasants would not support or unite with the revolutionary elements in the cities and towns, the Bonapartist government stepped up its propaganda in the countryside during the period 1870-71. The Ministry of the Interior sent its agitators into the villages where they circulated "gory" details about demonstrations, murders, debauchery and all the other vices of the workers and socialists of the Red Capital. As an example of this type of propaganda, the government hired a journalist to write a pamphlet on "Public Meetings in Paris" (one hundred thousand copies were printed and spread throughout the countryside) in which it was explained how radical orators preached to the unknowing masses ideas about the forced distribution of land, regicide, pillage and, of

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

course, the denial of individual liberty.<sup>11</sup>

These activities were much in evidence during the period of the Paris Commune, March 18 to May 28, 1871. Thiers would send out reams and reams of decrees, communiqués, notices, all luridly depicting the "horrifying" events that were taking place in Paris and these exaggerations and this calumny reached such a point that what Thiers said was usually the exact opposite of the truth. It is difficult to ascertain whether the peasants believed Thiers' propaganda but the fact that the truth of what was really happening in Paris never penetrated the countryside obviously hindered peasant support for the Commune.

But these pacifying procedures of Bonapartism, and of the bourgeois republicans that followed (after September 4, 1870), did not always succeed. In the summer of 1870 a number of procureurs généraux reported the peasants were beginning to think that the priests and the rich were conspiring with the Prussians to betray France, and even a Legitimist newspaper from Lyon, La Décentralisation, commented that the population of the countryside was tired of seeing in the landlord only a tax-collector, and that the peasant who produced had a latent dislike for the bourgeois who consumed but who did not give

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<sup>11</sup>E. Jeloubovskaia, op. cit., p. 193; J. Jaurès (ed.), Histoire socialiste, Vol. X (Paris: Publications Jules Rouff et Cie, n.d.), p. 329.



anything to the country.<sup>12</sup>

These instances of peasant discontent, though, never manifested themselves in any organized movement. The majority of working-class militants did not recognize the revolutionary potential of the countryside (this question will be examined in more detail in the third chapter) and even those advanced members of the International who did see the necessity of mobilizing the peasants, such as André Bastélica, member of the first Commune of Marseille (October 31 to November 4, 1870), did not possess the resources or knowledge of how to go about this task.

Thus, during the period 1870-71, the rural areas were politically calm. This passivity can be explained by the conditions of working the land itself which was responsible for the isolation of the peasants, social and economic divisions among them, and a general political disunity. The influence of the clergy and the preponderance and domination of the notables further promoted the backward and conservative outlook of the countryside. Urban uprisings were still generally considered the work of "levellers" and the lack of contact between the proletariat of the towns and the poor peasants negated the possibility of combatting anti-socialist propaganda or of attaining a worker-peasant alliance.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>J. Bruhat et al., La Commune de 1871 (Paris: Editions sociales, 1970), p. 55.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

Therefore, in dealing with the provinces one must differentiate between town and countryside, and especially so in terms of the extent and depth of the revolutionary movement. For it must not be forgotten that it was the large urban centres which would provide the setting for the major provincial uprisings.

Let us now briefly examine the principal political trends that influenced the revolutionary events which followed in the provinces during 1870-71.

First, the working-class movement. Outside of highly industrialized centres, such as Le Creusot, there were very few concentrated working-class areas--only some pockets here and there--and no developed industrial proletariat. This meant that organizationally, politically and ideologically the working-class movement was fragmented, uneven, weak and, in certain regions, non-existent. However, the general trend was towards increased militancy and maturity.

The main and most popular organization of the workers was the Association Internationale des Travailleurs (AIT), or First International as it was more commonly known. Since its inception in 1865, the French section of the AIT had continuously grown by leaps and bounds, both organizationally and ideologically. This process was unwittingly aided by the Bonapartist government which, sensing a threat, proceeded to hunt down the AIT and arranged three prominent trials to convict its members (those of December 1867, May 1868 and

June 1870). The arrested militants eloquently and courageously conducted their own defense, thus attracting to the International sympathy and support both in Paris and in the provinces. In fact, a number of the more famous personalities of the AIT were associated with provincial towns--Albert Richard with Lyon, André Bastélica with Marseille, and Emile Aubry with Rouen.

In 1870, the activities of the French sections of the AIT reached their zenith. Members of the International organized, participated in, and supported strikes all over the country. For example, at Le Creusot, La Marseillaise (organ of the AIT) initiated a strike fund which sent money to the workers, and when the miners of Le Creusot stopped work on March 21, 1870, it was a young member of the International, Benoît Malon, who took over the leadership of the movement. Three weeks before the strike, Eugène Varlin (probably the most famous militant of the AIT in France at the time), came to Le Creusot to lay the basis for a new section of the International.<sup>14</sup>

The AIT was not the only working-class organization in France at this time. Each town, depending upon the numbers and concentration of workers, had its small chambre syndicale, société ouvrière, mutual-help association, or workers' educational society, but the AIT was the only

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<sup>14</sup>P. Ponsot, Les Grèves de 1870 et la Commune de 1871 au Creusot (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1957), p. 24.

national working-class movement. The other associations concerned themselves with strictly economic, social-welfare oriented, or local questions. The International was the only workers' political group to have links in more than one provincial town.<sup>15</sup>

A great weakness of this movement was its lack of political unity. It was in fact a hodgepodge of conflicting ideologies: Proudhonism, Anarchism, Jacobinism, combined with a tinge of Marxism, all played their part; Blanquism, so important in Paris, was little known outside.

Proudhonism expressed the aspirations of artisans and workers in very small industries. Proudhon's view was that "the tyranny of gold" was responsible for the creation of an immoral and unjust method of exchange, credit, and interest; and that as soon as these three facets of the economy were correctly regulated, most of the workers' problems would be solved. Private property in itself was not an evil, and in fact, Proudhon envisaged everyone becoming a member of the middle class. Therefore, what was needed was a "just exchange," a "just price," and easy

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<sup>15</sup>As for membership of the AIT at this time (c. 1870), the sources are contradictory. The figures range from a couple of thousand to 400,000. The number most commonly cited is 200,000. This seems reasonable, since some provincial towns alone, such as Lyon and Marseille, had about 4,000 each. Naturally this does not mean that all these members were active. In fact it was this degree of "passivity" of a large proportion of the AIT's membership which was to hinder its activity. A. Olivesi, *op. cit.*, p. 52; J. Bruhat et al., *op. cit.*, p. 53; J. Maitron and M. Egrot, Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier français, Vol. IV (Paris: Editions ouvrières, n.d.), pp. 12-16.

credit. Proudhonism was opposed to strikes, to consistent political agitation, and to the participation of women in the working-class movement. but, by the time of the upsurge in revolutionary activities (c. September 1870), although the theories of the master still retained many adherents, these tactics were on the wane.

During this time there periodically appeared in France the most famous of the anarchists, the Russian Michael Bakunin. He and his ideas exerted a considerable influence on a number of militants especially in Lyon and Marseille.<sup>16</sup> The following remarks by A. Richard (who was somewhat affected by Bakunin's theories) well illustrates the essence of anarchism:

I want the masses to be truly emancipated from all authority and from all the great men of the future . . . I see hope only in revolutionary anarchism, led in all places, by an invisible collective force . . . The revolution should be and should remain everywhere independent of any central authority. We must unleash all passions, produce anarchy and, as invisible pilots in the middle of a proletarian storm, lead it . . . [and speaking of his immediate objectives] achieve an abolition and liquidation of the State . . . spontaneous organization of insurrectionary groups in provisional communes and the immediate federation of all communes . . .<sup>17</sup> [My own translation, as of all passages from French texts that follow]

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<sup>16</sup>In 1870, Bakunin organized within the International a secret, scissionist group called the Alliance de la démocratie socialiste, which was particularly influential in Lyon.

<sup>17</sup>Cited in J. Bruhat et al., op. cit., p. 60. Bakunin was against the idea of a unified leading organization, against alliances with any other strata but workers, and against ideological and organizational discipline. He supported the complete spontaneity of the masses, daring and usually adventurist political putsches (e.g., September 28th, at Lyon), and what he called "pure" freedom of action.

In the provincial towns Jacobinism was the most prominent ideological trend. The prevalence of the war rendered such slogans as "la levée en masse," "la résistance à outrance" and "la patrie en danger" easily acceptable to the majority of the population. The constant appeals to the great traditions of '92 and '93 and to the glorious fathers of the Revolution--Robespierre, Danton, Marat, etc.--were the rallying cry of the Jacobins. These people did not make distinctions between classes but only between le peuple and the monarchists, or between patriots and traitors. Jacobinism responded to the demands of revolutionary defencism, not to the need for a precise political, economic, and social programme. For this reason it was utilized by all social classes and political movements which were opposed to the Bonapartist regime and later to the half-diluted republicanism of an Adolphe Thiers.

Yet the strongest force, both financially and politically, in the provinces at this time was radicalism, the movement of the left wing of the republican bourgeoisie. For, beginning in the late sixties and reaching its high point in 1870, the domestic and foreign policy of the Bonapartist government was antagonizing more and more sections of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. The growing economic crisis, combined with disastrous military adventures in Mexico, Italy and Luxembourg had alienated the majority of Frenchmen.

During this period the radical Republicans were able

politically and ideologically to entrench themselves in the major provincial urban centres. They established influential newspapers such as the Emancipation at Toulouse, Le Progrès at Lyon, Le Peuple at Marseille, and La Gironde at Bordeaux. Radicals became patrons and benefactors of charitable organizations, cultural societies, and occasionally of workers' clubs. Their own political associations (the words "Alliance républicaine" usually appearing in the name) were not well disciplined or completely consolidated; however the elections of 1869--the opposition candidates received 3.3 million votes versus the government's four million--and the plebiscite of May 1870 provided the radicals with an extra opportunity of presenting their views and becoming well known.

Fiery speeches and trenchant articles, epitomized by those of the famous irréconciliable, Leon Gambetta, called for more individual liberties, such as freedom of the press, speech and association. The radicals claimed that the Empire was becoming more and more bureaucratically centralized and that the municipalities should have greater powers. Two of their most frequently repeated demands were the separation of church and state and the establishment of free, secular and compulsory education.

But the programme of these Republicans was usually confined to political objectives. They rarely took up questions of an economic or social nature, and the principle of private property and increasing class divisions (the manifesto of the Alliance républicaine of Paris, which was

adopted by many provincial radicals, called for a "Republic, not of classes, but a fusion of all classes"<sup>18</sup>) were facts of life that could not seriously be challenged. Change to these people simply signified a replacement of the Bonapartist governmental apparatus by Republican officials. These attitudes reflected the interests of those strata which provided the social basis of radicalism--doctors, lawyers, teachers, journalists, artisans and small and medium businessmen.<sup>19</sup>

The radicals were clearly in opposition to the Bonapartist regime but what of their relations with the workers? In Paris, relations were tenuous indeed. Men like Gambetta, Clémenceau, and even Louis Blanc realized that although they might receive the workers' votes they would not receive their trust, confidence or direct political leadership. In the provinces the situation was somewhat different. The local leading lights of republicanism were respected people. Had they not been deported or exiled in 1851, brought before the courts many times for having illegally opposed the Empire, and refused to yield unless the Republic was proclaimed? And were not anti-clericalism, political liberties and municipal autonomy also prime working-class demands? Add to this the radicals' electioneering campaigns, their control of a number

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<sup>18</sup>J. Kayser, Les Grandes batailles du radicalisme (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1962), p. 322.

<sup>19</sup>J. Bruhat et al., op. cit., p. 57.



of widely read provincial journals, and the popularity of many of their "personalities" and one can explain why a considerable segment of the workers were under the influence of radicalism.

This does not mean to imply that the radical movement and the revolutionary movement were completely identical. On the contrary, workers were fighting for the end of economic exploitation and aspiring to a classless society, and these were demands from which radicals steered away. However, the overthrow of the imperial regime, the expulsion of the Prussians, and the defense of the Republic and the Paris Commune against the monarchical schemes of the National Assembly--these were overriding and dominant issues on which radicals and revolutionaries could unite. They did not eliminate the inherent contradictions between worker-revolutionary and petty-bourgeois or bourgeois radical, but reduced them to a secondary position. If the workers had comprised an independent political, organizational and ideological force they could have led the radicals in the fight for the above-mentioned overriding issues and once these were resolved turn to the "simple" question of labor versus capital. However, the reality was closer to the reverse. Most radicals soon realized that, similar to the Paris Commune, a political revolution involving workers could soon lead to a social revolution, and so it was necessary for the radical to be the conductor of these "locomotives of history."

In order to clarify the contradictory position in which the radical found himself let us briefly describe the

activities of one of these men, Gaston Crémieux, the leader of the Commune of Marseille. Gaston Crémieux (1856-1871) was the son of a merchant. He managed to receive a law degree and soon became known as the "lawyer of the poor."<sup>20</sup> He participated in the establishment of chambres syndicales, cooperatives, educational societies and a chapter of the freemasons. In 1869 he campaigned for Gambetta and the following year he supported the Ligue du Midi (see pages 45-47). During the Commune of Marseille Crémieux's actions clearly showed that while the revolution had carried him into the fray, he was not prepared to carry the revolution to the end: he refused to support the red flag or the tricolor but instead ordered the hanging of the black flag on city hall as a sign of mourning for France; he believed conciliation between the Commune and its enemies was possible; and he opposed the arrest of anyone no matter what his activity.

Crémieux was also notorious for having personally announced in the National Assembly that the deputies comprised nothing but an assembly of "rurals." It was this insult plus his association with the revolutionaries which resulted in Crémieux being executed on November 30, 1871, the only provincial radical to receive such a fate.

Crémieux was probably more sincere and honest than most radicals, but his class background and political ideology prevented him from completely identifying with the

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<sup>20</sup>A. Olivesi, op. cit., p. 70.

workers' cause, a "predicament" in which most radicals found themselves.

To place the provincial communal movement in context, it is necessary to say a few words about its enemies, the established governments. First the Bonapartist regime. Its unpopularity<sup>21</sup> and impending doom have already been discussed. Locally the provincial Communards were harassed by the imperial bureaucracy led by the departmental prefect, the army and the police; and when, on September 4th, the Second Empire was replaced by the Government of National Defense, the latter nominated its own prefects, dismissed many imperial officials, tampered with the police and, outside of removing the most notorious Bonapartist generals, left the army intact.

On September 11th, the Government of National Defense in Paris, sensing the approaching siege, delegated Adolphe Crémieux to organize defense operations in the non-occupied provinces of France, and they transferred three ministries--

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<sup>21</sup>The provincial urban centres were particularly antagonized by the Second Empire and the 1869 election results clearly demonstrate that the outbursts on September 4, 1870 were not fortuitous:

	<u>Opposition Votes</u>	<u>Government Votes</u>
Lyon	46,465	13,746
Bordeaux	17,679	5,540
Toulouse	16,400	6,056
Limoges	7,143	1,977
Narbonne	2,081	1,459

I. Tchernoff, Le Parti républicain au coup d'état et sous le Second Empire (Paris: A. Pedone, éditeur, 1906), p. 555.

War, Interior and Foreign Affairs--to Tours and, in early December, to Bordeaux. However, the dominant personality behind this "provincial government" was Gambetta. While more energetic and patriotic than Trochu and his associates in Paris, Gambetta was hostile to the popular movements

. . . Metternich [Prince Richard] was able to admire the skilful way in which Gambetta had "without a shot" [not entirely accurate] succeeded in quelling the insubordination of the southern cities, and in re-establishing "a relative but very salutary order."<sup>22</sup>

The provincial communal movement was never in direct contact with the Government of National Defense at Paris, Tours or Bordeaux.

On February 8, 1871 elections to the National Assembly were held, and under extremely abnormal conditions.

Forty-three Departments were occupied by the Germans, who posted up the electoral decrees themselves . . . postal communications were forbidden and circulation was very difficult. 420,000 Frenchmen were prisoners in Germany, 240,000 disarmed at Paris, 90,000 interned in Switzerland; deputies heard of their elections from regiments, hospitals, even prisoners' camps.<sup>23</sup>

The issues were soon reduced to one: whether to sign a humiliating peace treaty or to continue the war to the end. The peasants had provided 700,000 men for the armies of the Government of National Defense,<sup>24</sup> and although a Bismarckian

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<sup>22</sup>J. Bury, Gambetta and the National Defense (New York: Howard Fertig, 1970), p. 234.

<sup>23</sup>F. Brabant, The Beginning of the Third Republic in France (New York: Howard Fertig, 1972), p. 63.

<sup>24</sup>J. Bruhat et al., op. cit., p. 92.

peace would play into the hands of landlords and speculators, the rural population was in no mood to go on fighting (what appeared to them) a fruitless war. And so the election results were no surprise: 200 Legitimists, 200 Orleanists, 30 Bonapartists, 100 Republicans (of the type of Jules Simon and Jules Favre) and 100 radicals (including Benoît Malon, Henri Rochefort, Felix Pyat and Gustave Tridon who all later resigned from the Assembly). The deputies selected Adolphe Thiers as Chief of the Executive of the Republic and it was his personal rule which became synonymous with all government policies--hence the phrase "the Thiers government."

As far as the provincial Communards were concerned the elections had changed little: outside of a handful, all representatives sitting in the National Assembly were violently opposed to the idea of a revolutionary commune and Thiers was no exception. There was no love lost between the Chief Executive and the provincial revolutionaries and the latter would probably have agreed with Marx's estimation of Thiers ". . . M. Thiers, the mischievous gnome, has charmed the French bourgeoisie for almost half a century, because he is the most consummate intellectual expression of their own class corruption . . ."25

Between March 18th and March 30, 1871 Thiers personally nominated thirty-six new prefects to pacify the provinces,<sup>26</sup> but for the most part, he was too busy dealing

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<sup>25</sup>K. Marx and F. Engels, op. cit., p. 186.

<sup>26</sup>A. Ollivier, La Commune (Paris: Gallimard, 1939), p. 191.

with Paris to directly engage in provincial affairs, the local regiments and bureaucracies accomplished their tasks faithfully enough. Thus, the political wheelings and dealings in the hallowed halls of the Versailles Assembly were somewhat remote from the provincial Communards.

Let us now return to the course of events which led up to the provincial uprisings.

On the 19th of July 1870, France declared war on Prussia. The political and social crisis had reached such a stage that the only apparent hope of survival for the Bonapartist government lay in the conduct of a short and victorious war. As one of Louis Napoleon's close associates, Sylvestre de Sacy, later stated -

So I was not opposed to a foreign war which seemed to me a last resort and our only means of security . . . The most alarming symptoms were flaring up on all sides; the bourgeoisie were steeped in every kind of insatiable and revolutionary liberalism and the population of the industrial towns in socialism . . . It was then, I believe, that the Emperor decided to attempt a big coup, that of the war against Prussia.<sup>27</sup>

But, as a Chinese folk-saying puts it: "A fool lifts a rock only to drop it on his own feet." The war was the direct cause of Napoleon's downfall and it provided a great impetus to the further extension and intensification of the popular movements in the provinces.

Yet, at first, it was only a small number of advanced members of the AIT<sup>28</sup> that resisted the general contagion and

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<sup>27</sup>Cited in E. Jeloubovskaia, op. cit., p. 302.

<sup>28</sup>Napoleon used the war as a pretext to further hunt down militants of the International and, by the spring of 1870, many sections of the AIT in the provinces were in disarray and confusion.

the great majority of the population of the provinces was dragged into the Bonaparte-inspired wave of chauvinism and patriotism.<sup>29</sup> Thus it would be the imperial, and then "republican," conduct of the war that would determine the content and direction of the popular movements in the autumn of 1870.

Before we begin to describe these events, it is necessary to mention two important factors--one that almost completely eliminated the revolutionary movement in certain departments, and another which hindered its development.

The first of these was the occupation of French territory by Prussian troops. It began on August 4th and, during this month, it spread to Alsace, a large section of the departments of Haut-Rhin and Bas-Rhin, Lorraine, a part of the departments of la Meuse, la Moselle, la Meurthe, Vosges, and Ardennes. In September, the departments of Seine-et-Oise and Seine-et-Marne were invaded. In these occupied territories under Prussian rule, it was practically impossible for any political activity to take place, and so these areas were effectively cut off from the rest of France.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>There were notable exceptions, though. It was reported to the Enquête parlementaire sur les actes du Gouvernement de la Défense nationale (Vol. I, p. 15. Hereafter referred to as Les Actes . . .), that Lyon received the declaration of war with little enthusiasm and that the official press could not arouse the population. Also, a group of eighty workers from Neuilly-sur-Seine signed a declaration which said in part: "Is the war just? No! Is the war national? No! It is purely dynastic . . ."

<sup>30</sup>E. Jeloubovskaia, op. cit., p. 584.

Secondly, as soon as the sounds of popular discontent made themselves heard, the Bonapartists, and after them the Government of National Defense, put nineteen departments under a state of siege.<sup>31</sup> A number of these regions were adjacent to areas where fighting was going on, but the real reason for imposing these harsh conditions was given by Baron Haussmann, confidant of the Empress Eugénie: "It is necessary to immediately proclaim a state of siege; this is indispensable for the safety of the throne, which is menaced."<sup>32</sup> And, after September 4th, the words "safety of bourgeois republican rule" would be the substitute for "safety of the throne."

On August 4th, at Wissembourg in Alsace, a French division was overrun by a superior Prussian force. Two days later at both Woerth and Forbach (on the Rhine front), the French army suffered heavy defeats. France and its soldiers were on the retreat, a manoeuvre the French army would continue to perform until the armistice of January 28, 1871.

It was this military debacle, engineered by a host of Bonapartist commanders--General Ducrot, Marshal McMahon, General Douay and others--that was the spark that set off a number of demonstrations and uprisings in the provinces.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Seine-et-Oise, Seine-et-Marne, Aube, Yonne, Loiret, Eure-et-Loir, Nord, Pas-de-Calais, Somme, Marne, Aisne, Ardennes, Doubs, Jura, Côte d'Or, Haute-Marne, Haute-Saône, Ain, and Saône-et-Loire.

<sup>32</sup>J. Bruhat et al., op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>33</sup>In Paris, August 7th, 8th and 9th were tumultuous days. There were marches and mass rallies, the two most popular slogans being "Down with the Emperor!" and "Long live the Republic!" "There was already a breath of revolution in the air." J.P.T. Bury, op. cit., pp. 40-41.



The city of Marseille was the first in the field.<sup>34</sup> On August 7th, a crowd of forty thousand people, led by Gaston Crémieux<sup>35</sup> and Gustave Naquet<sup>36</sup> (two prominent radical republicans) assembled in front of the Prefecture expressing their discontent at the way the war was being conducted.<sup>37</sup> The government responded by arresting Naquet. This provoked the establishment of a revolutionary action committee composed of radicals and socialists, and the following day this committee led a demonstration to the town hall. The latter was occupied by the marchers and a special Commission was set up to form a new revolutionary government. The Commission

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<sup>34</sup>During the Second Empire the population of Marseille had increased from 195,000 in 1851 to about 313,000 in 1872. This was the result of the growth of the port (new shipping companies, etc.) and the concomitant rise of commerce and trade. A working-class suburb had appeared in the north end of town and, combined with a very high cost of living (prices were up 45%, wages only 17%), the International had established a strong section in Marseille, about 4,500 members. Marseille also possessed a vital radical movement headed by organizations such as la Société d'union démocratique and le Comité de l'association phocéenne. (A. Olivesi, op. cit., pp. 35, 36, 52, 58, 59.)

<sup>35</sup>See pages 23-24.

<sup>36</sup>Gustave Naquet (1819-1889), a journalist, was editor of the Marseille newspaper, Le Peuple, which consistently opposed the Empire and supported reforms for the workers, especially educational facilities. Naquet was a founder of the Société d'union démocratique which was involved in the Marseille uprisings of September 4th and November 1, 1870. The following year Naquet was named prefect of Corsica by Gambetta. In 1876 he was unsuccessful in a bid for a seat in the National Assembly.

<sup>37</sup>The description of these events is taken mainly from A. Olivesi, op. cit., pp. 69-74 and Les Actes . . . rapports, Vol. II.

consisted of two members of the International, five other workers and some prominent radicals headed by the lawyer, Gaston Crémieux.

However, this popular government only lasted a few hours because the leaders, after endless debates, hesitations and confusion, did not know what to do with their newly won revolutionary authority. The people outside the town hall, vainly waiting for further instructions, quietly dispersed; soon after, the police arrived, fired a few shots, and arrested about thirty persons, including Crémieux. The latter, just before being taken, drafted a manifesto which served as an apologia for the day's events.

The representatives of the patriotic city of Marseille . . . moved by the dangers to the motherland, proceeded to the town hall to demand the organization of the National Guard, and they remain at the disposition of the authorities in order to help them immediately carry out this organization.<sup>38</sup>

This rather feeble and inaccurate explanation of the aspirations of the people reflected the lack of ideological and organizational preparation of the revolutionary movement.

However, Marseille was not the only place in the provinces to stir. From August 7th to the 17th, Bordeaux<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>A. Olivesi, op. cit., p. 72.

<sup>39</sup>From 130,000 in 1851 Bordeaux' population had risen to 194,000 in 1872. It was primarily a city of small enterprises and independent workers. There was a mutual-help society for almost every category of worker (e.g., la Société de résistance et de solidarité des ouvriers lithographes, founded June 1870), but these organizations were apolitical. The working-class movement was very weak--a small section of the International was formed only late in the year--and even the radicals were timid. (J. Girault, La Commune et Bordeaux: 1870-1871. Paris: Editions sociales, 1871, passim.)

was the scene of tumultuous demonstrations and public rallies. At first the people shouted the slogans "Long live France!", "Long live the army!", and "Long live the Emperor!", and called for the creation of volunteer battalions, "the sons of 1792." But as the days wore on and the government refused to divulge the disastrous information from the front, the demonstrations became more vigorous and violent. When the news of the defeats of the French finally reached Bordeaux, the political complexion of the popular agitations changed appreciably. A Jesuit building was ransacked, cries of "Long live the Republic!" were more frequently heard, and the statue of the Emperor was threatened with destruction.

The republicans of Bordeaux were taken aback and terrified by this outburst of mass protest; they preached calm and order. Large numbers of demonstrators were arrested during these ten days of marches and mass meetings.

The tangible results of these activities were that a National Guard was established, an active Mobile Guard was organized, and preparations for national defense were intensified. Two themes which constantly manifested themselves during the demonstrations in August at Bordeaux were hostility to clericalism and to the military manouvres of the Bonapartists. But discouraged by the radicals and tricked by the false reports issued by the government, the discontent of the people of Bordeaux, which could have turned into a class hatred directed against the landlords and bourgeoisie, was dissipated and diverted into purely anti-Prussian

channels (into such actions as building of forts, military parades and so on) and were thus less dangerous for order and property.<sup>40</sup>

Elsewhere in the provinces, August 8th witnessed a demonstration of four thousand workers at Le Creusot protesting against the war: the marchers sang republican war songs, "La Marseillaise" and "Le Chant du départ."<sup>41</sup>

At Toulouse, Limoges, and a number of other smaller provincial towns, there were large demonstrations protesting against the Emperor and his government's handling of the war.

On August 13th, in a working-class district of Lyon, the Croix-Rousse, a crowd assembled and a notary by the name of Joseph Lentillon proclaimed the Republic, but the gendarmes quickly arrived and the whole affair ended up in front of a military tribunal.<sup>42</sup> Four days later the Bakuninists tried to stop the Mobile Guards from going to the front and convince them to march on the city hall, but they were unsuccessful.

The general atmosphere in the provinces was becoming more and more anti-Bonapartist, as George Sand noted in one of her letters:

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>41</sup>P. Ponsot, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>42</sup>E. Jeloubovskaia, op. cit., p. 383.

I must tell you what you do not know in Paris about what is happening in our countryside, the most peaceful, the most patient, the least revolutionary of France . . . Well, there is a consternation, a furor, a hatred against this government which stuns me. It is not a class, a party: it is everyone, above all the peasants . . . I believe the Empire is lost, finished. The same men who voted for the plebiscite with confidence would now unanimously vote for dethronement . . . They say they are betrayed, surrendered in advance to the enemy, abandoned without help.<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, the Empire was lost. Militarily, politically (in the municipal elections of August 6th and 7th the official candidates suffered many setbacks), and socially the imperial edifice was fast crumbling and Louis' crushing defeat at Sedan on September 2nd was only the icing on the cake.

The Republic was proclaimed at Marseille and Lyon on the morning of September 4th, even before it was proclaimed in Paris.<sup>44</sup>

At Lyon,<sup>45</sup> workers and petty bourgeois radicals

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 340-41.

<sup>44</sup>The official announcement of the Republic (Government of National Defense) in Paris, in the afternoon of September 4th, provided an impetus and encouragement to many provincial towns to overthrow the imperial administration.

<sup>45</sup>Lyon's population had risen from 250,000 in 1856 to 325,000 in 1871. The working people consisted mainly of silk and cotton weavers (canuts), small textile shopowners (chefs d'atelier), and a growing industrial proletariat. The latter, especially the metallurgists, gradually became the leaders of the working-class movement at the time of the fall of the Empire. The International, predominantly in the hands of anarchists and some Proudhonists, was quite strong. The radical republicans, Andrieux, Hénon, etc., were also influential and well organized, but Lyon's revolutionary traditions--1831, 1834, etc.--made the gap between worker and bourgeois radical wider than in most other provincial towns. (S. Maritch, Histoire du mouvement social sous le Second Empire à Lyon. Paris: Rousseau et Cie, 1930, passim.)

seized the city hall and proclaimed the Commune of Lyon a republican revolutionary government. The leadership of this new administration was entrusted to two organizations: a Committee of Public Safety composed of seven members of the International, other workers, and a majority of petty-bourgeois and bourgeois radicals. Alongside of the Committee of Public Safety a group of the most revolutionary and "extreme" National Guardsmen seized the central police station and set up what they called a "Comité de Sûreté Générale." The latter was responsible for imprisoning the most reactionary and hated of the imperial police and administrators.

The red flag was hoisted on the city hall and it was not until March 2, 1871, that it was taken down.

During its brief rule the Committee of Public Safety eliminated the octroi and replaced it by an annual tax on the capital from stocks and shares; it decreed that police commissioners should be elected by universal suffrage and ordered the sergents de ville to be removed and disarmed. All political prisoners were amnestied, religious communities were suppressed and their goods confiscated. The final touch was a requisition of twenty million francs on the rich of the city.<sup>46</sup>

There were some attempts to suppress pro-imperial newspapers, but the new government only got as far as sending letters of warning. "We are sweeping away the refuse of the

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<sup>46</sup>L. Andrieux, La Commune à Lyon en 1870 et 1871 (Paris: Perrin et Cie., 1906), pp. 71-72.

past. Do you want to survive?")<sup>47</sup>

However, the Government of National Defense in Paris was wary of these revolutionary activities at Lyon and, under the auspices of Gambetta, Minister of the Interior, it sent Paul Challemeil-Lacour,<sup>48</sup> designated as the prefect of the Rhone, to try to moderate the Committee of Public Safety's enthusiasm. With the help of a few of the more conservative and bourgeois members of the Committee (such as Louis Andrieux), Challemeil-Lacour succeeded in freeing a handful of imperial officials who had been imprisoned by the new government.

Right from the beginning there was an intense struggle between the revolutionary and radical elements of the Commune of Lyon. The latter wanted to emulate the government of Paris with its upholding of law, order, property and its overall "respectability," while the socialist workers wished to proceed in a revolutionary manner--tight vigilance against monarchists, confiscation of the property of the big bourgeoisie, and a 1792-style levée en masse.

The final struggle arose over the question of whether to proceed to normal municipal elections or to retain the

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>48</sup>Challemeil-Lacour, like Gambetta, was one of those radicals who refused to have anything whatsoever to do with the communal movement. But as his biographer points out, "Challemeil preferred to be crafty (ruser) with the revolution in order to master it, rather than break his head against it." E. Krakowski, La Naissance de la Troisième République: Challemeil-Lacour le philosophe et l'homme d'état (Paris: Editions Victor Attinger, 1932), p. 181.

revolutionary Committee of Public Safety. By September 11th, Challemeil-Lacour was able to report to Gambetta: "Almost all the city is for me. I believe I am master of the situation."<sup>49</sup> The elections took place on September 15th, and the following day a municipal council, consisting primarily of moderate bourgeois republicans, replaced the Committee of Public Safety.

Revolutionary events were far from over in Lyon, however. On September 18th, Bakunin arrived in town and established a Comité central du salut de la France, which attempted to organize opposition to the new municipal council and to the authority of Challemeil-Lacour. On September 28th, Bakunin, Cluseret,<sup>50</sup> Albert Richard and a contingent of the International managed to occupy the city hall for a few hours until they were forced out by the police. The whole affair was staged in a rather farcical manner, and the following notice placarded on the streets of Lyon by Bakunin's supporters is typical of French anarchism at this time. "The administrative and governmental

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<sup>49</sup>E. Jeloubovskaia, op. cit., p. 579.

<sup>50</sup>Gustave-Paul Cluseret (1823-1900), a pseudo-revolutionary adventurer who, among other things, participated as a lieutenant in the repression of the June 1848 uprising, in the Irish Fenian movement, in the American civil war, in the International, and in the Paris Commune as delegate for war. In short, an unstable and politically immature radical dilettante.



machinery of the State, being impotent, is abolished.<sup>51</sup>

On the morning of September 4th, in Marseille, an official communiqué was posted in the city which described the defeat at Sedan and the capture of the Emperor. A large crowd assembled and proceeded to march to the city hall where a municipal council, elected at the beginning of August and composed primarily of bourgeois republicans, was holding its first meeting. Alexandre Labadie, a rich merchant, was delegated to head a Provisional Departmental

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<sup>51</sup>Cited in J. Bruhat et al., op. cit., p. 310. The comments by Marx (in a letter to E.S. Beesly, October 19, 1870) on the September events in Lyon are worthy of note: ". . . At first everything in Lyon went well. Under the pressure of the 'International' section, the Republic was proclaimed before Paris had taken that step. A revolutionary Government was at once established--La Commune--composed partly of workmen belonging to the 'International,' partly of Radical middle-class Republicans. The octrois were at once abolished, and rightly so. The Bonapartist and Clerical intriguers were intimidated. Energetic measures were taken to arm the whole people. The middle class began, if not really to sympathise with, at least to quietly undergo, the new order of things . . . But the asses, Bakunin and Cluseret, arrived at Lyons and spoiled everything. Belonging both to the 'International,' they had, unfortunately, influence enough to mislead our friends. The Hôtel de Ville was seized--for a short time--and most foolish decrees on the abolition de l'état and similar nonsense were issued. You understand that the very fact of a Russian, represented by the middle class papers as an agent of Bismarck, pretending to impose himself as the leader of a Comité du Salut de la France was quite sufficient to turn the balance of public opinion. As to Cluseret, he behaved both as a fool and a coward. These two men left Lyon after their failure . . ." (K. Marx and F. Engels, Selected Correspondence. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, n.d., pp. 304-05.)

Committee whose task was to organize governmental affairs.<sup>52</sup> Alongside of this official government was formed a Civic Guard, possessing arms and popular support, which occupied the Prefecture and acted as if it were making the laws of the city. This other authority, while not official, was more revolutionary.<sup>53</sup> Members of the International were the prime movers behind the latter organization.

In the midst of this "dual power" arrived Alphonse Esquiros,<sup>54</sup> designated by Gambetta as "administrateur supérieur du département des Bouches-du-Rhône," supposedly entrusted with full military and civil control. His main task was to make sure that Marseille did not embark on too revolutionary a path. However, Esquiros informed Gambetta that order could be maintained only by "wise concessions to revolutionary sentiments."<sup>55</sup> This led Esquiros to attempt

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<sup>52</sup>This took place on September 5th. The previous evening, 20,000 Marseillais roamed the streets attacking all physical symbols of Bonapartism, including a monument to Napoleon III. This same crowd marched to the prison where the August 8th insurgents were confined and forced the guards to release them. (A. Olivesi, *op. cit.*, p. 75.)

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 77. Their first activities were the arrest of a number of leading and "notorious" Bonapartist officials, in the army, police and bureaucracy.

<sup>54</sup>Alphonse Esquiros (1812-1876), a free-lance writer, had supported the June 1848 insurgents and represented the "Mountain" in 1850-51. After the fateful December of 1851 he was exiled to England. In 1869 and again in 1871 he was elected by Marseille to the National Assembly. In later years he advocated amnesty for the Communards and was elected a senator. Ideologically, Esquiros was a believer in utopian socialism, particularly in Fourier's plan for the creation of phalansteries.

<sup>55</sup>J.P.T. Bury, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

to force the resignation of magistrates, to harass and imprison Jesuits and other clericals, and to suppress a royalist journal, the Gazette du Midi, which had been guilty of publishing a manifesto of the Comte de Chambord (the Legitimist pretender to the throne). But Gambetta did not approve of such measures and repealed these progressive decrees.

On October 16th, Esquiros was dismissed by Gambetta, and the next day the population of Marseille greeted the new emissary, Marc Dufraisse, by arresting him. On October 19th, Esquiros, before a crowd of 100,000 declared ". . . I will put myself at your head and we will go from village to village preaching our crusade, all ready to die in order to save France and to firmly establish the Republic!"<sup>56</sup> Esquiros was forced to accept the acclamations of the people of Marseille in order to avert a potential civil war between the revolutionary elements grouped around the National Guard and the conservative bourgeoisie of the official municipal government.

The month of September in the provinces witnessed the dissolving of the imperial state power and the development of the popular protest movement in the most important towns. At Toulouse, a radical municipal council installed itself in the city hall, and at Le Creusot, Jean-Baptiste Dumay, a very popular lathe-worker, was appointed mayor by

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<sup>56</sup>A. Olivesi, op. cit., p. 110; Les Actes . . . .  
rapports, Vol. II, p. 91.

the prefect of Saône-et-Loire. At Grenoble a vociferous crowd forced a Bonapartist general to resign: ". . . an unusual spectacle to see a general sign his own resignation before a crowd assembled in the street using the attorney-general's hat as a writing desk."<sup>57</sup>

On October 31st, 280,000 French soldiers, led by Marshal Bazaine, capitulated at Metz. The result was a spate of demonstrations and mass movements. As soon as the news reached the provinces there was a sudden explosion of popular anger. At Saint-Etienne the red flag was hoisted. At Toulouse le peuple arrested a general and threatened to kill him. There were shouts of "Death to the Royalists!" At Nîmes the Prefecture was invaded by a crowd which demanded a purging of the administration and the army of imperial officials. At Grenoble a general accused of treason was thrown into prison. At Lannemezan another general was pelted with stones by a group of women who claimed he was a traitor and an accomplice of the Emperor. At Perpignan a similar fate awaited a Lieutenant-Colonel.<sup>58</sup> In Marseille and Lyon attempts were made to install revolutionary governments. At the latter town, police headquarters were invaded and there was a large demonstration which included workers from the national building yards. Order was restored relatively easily, accompanied by dozens of arrests.

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<sup>57</sup>J. Bruhat et al., op. cit., p. 306.

<sup>58</sup>Leroy-Beaulieu, "La Province pendant le siège de Paris," Revue des deux mondes, Vol. 92, 1871, p. 418.

At Marseille, the struggle between the bourgeois of the municipal council and the socialist workers of the revolutionary government (see page 39) was reaching a climax. The news of Bazaine's treason added fuel to the fire. On November 1st, a mass gathering marched to the city hall and proclaimed a revolutionary Commune. Several members of the International and a number of radicals and socialists headed the new authority. Cluseret appeared once more, this time as the newly appointed chief of the National Guard.

The first pronouncement of the Commune tersely explained its objective:

. . . the safety of the Republic one and indivisible.<sup>59</sup>  
The people found the majority of the municipal council incapable of accomplishing this grand and noble task. They have wished to replace it with a revolutionary commune acting with energy and resolution.<sup>60</sup>

On November 2nd, Alphonse Gent, named "administrateur extraordinaire" by Gambetta, arrived in Marseille to replace Esquiros (who was still popular with le peuple). During discussions with the new government, Gent was injured by a civic guardsman, and in the confusion that followed Esquiros faded away, Cluseret disappeared, the other revolutionary

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<sup>59</sup>This demand for the Republic one and indivisible and at the same time municipal autonomy would appear to be contradictory. However, most Communards found the two quite compatible, for municipal freedom did not mean separatism or the setting up of independent city states, and "one and indivisible" was not necessarily synonymous with autocratic centralism. Local autonomy did not negate the necessity of retaining the unity of France.

<sup>60</sup>A. Olivesi, op. cit., p. 118; Les Actes . . . rapports, Vol. II, p. 107.

leaders hesitated and retreated, and the masses became demobilized. The result of these events was that by November 13th, Gent and the bourgeois sections of the National Guard had restored conservative republican "normalcy" to Marseille.<sup>61</sup>

In the provinces, the period from late October 1870 to the outbreak of the Paris Commune (March 18, 1871) was a time of consolidation of bourgeois republican rule, interspersed with attempts by revolutionaries to establish a government similar to the September Commune of Lyon. The following announcement issued by César Bertholon, Prefect of the Loire, on December 23, 1870, well illustrates the struggle that was taking place:

Citizens: Under the pretext of calling for a plebiscite on the question of municipal elections, a small number of agitators persist in keeping the city [Saint Etienne] in a constant state of unrest . . . It is time to put an end to a pretension founded neither on reason nor right. The majority of Citizens reject the Commune . . . Besides, the Citizens have a legal means of presenting their wishes to the Government; . . . The tumult, the cries in the streets, the provocations, the violence of language at meetings would not be tolerated under any government, least of all under the Republic. These excesses can only profit the Prussians and their internal accomplices. In consequence, Citizens are warned that all instigators of provocation, of calls to arms, organizers of all demonstrations capable of disturbing the peace of the city, will be immediately arrested.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Les Actes . . . rapports, Vol. II, pp. 121-26.

<sup>62</sup>Les Murailles politiques françaises (Paris: Armand Le Chevalier, éditeur, 1873-74), Vol. I, p. 619. This is obviously the bourgeois republican view of the contradictions that were arising between le peuple and the forces of order.

At Lyon, on December 20th, news arrived that two legions of volunteers from the Rhône had been decimated by the Prussians. There was much exasperation and agitation in the workers' suburbs and a suggestion was made to march on the city hall to demand more vigorous military preparations. In the confusion that ensued, an officer of one of the battalions of the National Guard, who refused to call his men to arms and who used his revolver to try and disengage himself from the demonstrators, was beaten to death. Fifty people were arrested and the next day it was decreed that all public rallies and meetings be banned.<sup>63</sup>

On December 5th an attempt to seize the city hall at Rouen was crushed by the authorities. At Marseille, many large meetings were held in which orators demanded a tax on the rich, the arrest of all traitors, the overthrow of Gambetta (ridiculed as a planche pourrie), and a revolution in the city.<sup>64</sup>

The announcement of the signing of the armistice by the Government of National Defense on January 28, 1871 gave a further impetus to demonstrations, agitation, small uprisings and general popular discontent in the provinces.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>L. Andrieux, op. cit., pp. 150-58; J. Bruhat et al., op. cit., pp. 311-12.

<sup>64</sup>Les Actes . . . rapports, Vol. I, pp. 165-66.

<sup>65</sup>In Bordeaux there was a march by 20,000 people to protest against the "capitulards" and "traîtres" (J. Girault, op. cit., p. 98).

On September 14th, the Departmental Committee<sup>66</sup> of the Bouches-du-Rhône, headed by Esquiros, issued an ultimatum to Gambetta, warning that if in three days he did not send precise military instructions, the southern departments would constitute themselves into a Ligue du Midi. Nothing was heard from Tours (the provincial home of the Government of National Defense) and so, on September 18th, twelve departments met in Marseille to form the Ligue du Midi.<sup>67</sup> This was the most significant attempt by radicals and revolutionaries to coordinate and unify the activities of the provincial towns<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>A committee whose main task was to organize the military forces for the protection of Marseille and surrounding areas.

<sup>67</sup>J. Gaillard, Communes de province, Commune de Paris: 1870-1871 (Paris: Flammarion, 1971), p. 37. The twelve departments were: Isère, Vaucluse, Drôme, Hérault, Gard, Var, Ardèche, Basses-Alpes, Alpes-Maritimes, Haute-Loire, Bouches-du-Rhône and Haute-Alpes (Les Actes . . . dépositions, Vol. V, p. 56.)

<sup>68</sup>There were other attempts to form regional organizations but they were relatively insignificant and did not last for long. In Brittany thirteen prefects gathered to establish a League of the West and at Toulouse, Armand Duportal (one of the chief figures responsible for setting up a short-lived Commune in Toulouse) summoned thirty departments to set up a League of the South-West. It is interesting to note the political programme of the latter League as printed in a public declaration." . . . The candidates pledge themselves to affirm, support and defend the Republic, one and indivisible, at the risk of their lives; 2. To outlaw all pretenders to the throne; 3. To march . . . at the head of the armies to assure the nation's defense, following in this the glorious example of our fathers of '92; 4. To take up and resolve the social questions in the interests of the working class; 5. To separate Church from State . . ." (Les Murailles politiques françaises, Vol. I, p. 175.)



and, on this occasion, official support to the League was given by the International. Marseille was chosen as the organizational centre, Lyon as the military headquarters, and Toulon as the main arsenal.

While it is true that the principal aim of the Ligue du Midi was to give vigorous promotion to revolutionary national defense, in the tradition of 1792 to which it continually referred, an integral part of the League's objectives involved radical political and social measures as well. In its official programme it called for a tax of thirty million francs on the rich, confiscation of the property of traitors and clergy, separation of church and state, freedom of the press, abolition of religious schools, the election of judges by the people, the enrolling of priests in the army, and the creation of a people's, in the place of a professional, army.<sup>69</sup>

In order to propagate these views, the Ligue du Midi appointed a number of delegates to go and "spread the word" among the population of the southern provincial villages and towns. Local committees were set up whose main task was to organize energetically for the military defense of the area.

However, the Ligue du Midi never managed to become a significant and influential force in the South. The primary reason for this failure was that right from the beginning of its inception Gambetta and the government at Tours were opposed to it. The latter feared that the League was under-

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<sup>69</sup>J. Gaillard, op. cit., p. 37; A. Olivesi, op. cit., p. 96; Les Actes . . . rapports, Vol. I, pp. 51-52.

mining its authority and, more important, the League's revolutionary manifestations were becoming all too evident.

As a result Gambetta "disposed" of two of its senior officials (Esquiros was forced to resign and Gent was ordered transferred to another part of France), deprived it of funds and legality and finally dissolved it on December 28, 1870.<sup>70</sup> It was a sad ending, indeed.

What were the principal characteristics of the popular movements in the provinces from August 1870 to February 1871?

From the declaration of war to the fall of the Empire, there were a few minor outbreaks (mostly inspired by the International) whose main purpose was to point out to the people that the war was a dynastic

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<sup>70</sup>L. Greenberg, Sisters of Liberty (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 180.

one and that it was in the interests of Napoleon and Bismarck, but of no benefit at all to the working people of France and Germany. With the proclamation of the Republic on September 4th and Prussia's annexation of parts of France, however, the whole situation changed. There were now two intimately inter-related questions on the agenda: first, to defend the country from the foreign invader, and second, to thoroughly "republicanize" the political, social and economic life of France. In essence, though, these two problems reflected a fundamental class antagonism. After September 4th, the big bourgeoisie (and certainly the Bonapartists, Legitimists, and Orleanists too) were speculating on a military defeat. They would rather have had a Prussian peace with business as usual than a people under arms. This was strikingly demonstrated by the capitulationist activities of many high officials who anxiously received the Prussians as liberators, as occurred at Nancy, Vernon(Eure), Rouen, Darnetal, Châteaudun, Versailles, Corbeil, and other places eventually occupied by the Prussians.<sup>71</sup> However, this

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<sup>71</sup>M. Choury, Les Origines de la Commune (Paris: Editions sociales, 1960), pp. 103-108; E. Jeloubovskaia, op. cit., p. 569. In contrast to this were the fifty thousand francs-tireurs, consisting of workers and peasants, who led a resistance movement somewhat similar to the one of seventy years later.

policy of "national defection" could not be too openly pursued. Under the guise of patriotic slogans and even defense of the Republic, military preparations were haphazard and subtly sabotaged and arms were kept as far from the people as possible. Even bourgeois republicans who wished to defeat Prussia were caught between the Scylla of popular uprising and the Charybdis of open treason.

For the aspirations and demands of le peuple (that is, workers and petty-bourgeois) and some progressive bourgeois entailed a radical restructuring of the social and economic order.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, even though the defeat of Bismarck was uppermost in the people's minds, the anti-national attitude of the big bourgeoisie pointed to the obvious conclusion that this could be achieved only in a revolutionary fashion.

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<sup>72</sup>On October 17th, a revolutionary organization of Lyon adopted a republican programme. Its main points typified what changes the people were hoping to bring about: "1) Ineligibility of all princes and princely families to any power, function, job, etc.; 2) To deprive of all civil and political rights imperial administrators, and senators and deputies who voted for the declaration of war; 3) Abolition of standing armies . . . 5) Elective benches of magistrates at all levels . . . 6) Separation of Church and State . . . 7) The ministers of all denominations to be subject to the common law . . . 9) Education to be secular and free at all grades, and compulsory at the first grade. 10) Abolition of religious teaching in all national schools . . . 11) Abolition of all monopolies, sinecures, pluralism and inflated salaries . . . 13) Progressive taxes . . . 17) Association of labour and capital . . . 19) Freedom of the press and printing . . . 20) Freedom of assembly and discussion." (Cited in J. Gaillard, op. cit., pp. 106-107.)

After September 4th, the imperial state apparatus was in complete disarray and disintegration. Who would wield this state power--the radicals and revolutionaries or the bourgeois republicans? The answer to this was decided by the outcome of the struggles that took place in the key provincial towns during the autumn and winter of 1870. The typical course of events might be traced as follows: the bourgeois republicans would inherit the imperial regime (Lyon was an exception); le peuple would grow impatient; demonstrations and rallies would ensue; an uneasy and mutually suspicious combination of revolutionaries and radicals (the leadership in the hands of the latter) would attempt to seize the city hall; they would be successful for a few hours or a few days (again Lyon was the exception where the revolutionary Commune lasted for twelve days); confusion, chaos, ill-preparedness, bungling plus the counter-attack of the gendarmerie or police would put an end to the uprising; the same process would repeat itself one or a couple of times more; and by March 1871 power would be safely in the grip of the bourgeois republicans.

From the revolutionaries' viewpoint there were many things lacking: unity among the revolutionary organizations (especially among the different sections of the National Guard); ideological clarity and maturity; for class consciousness was obscured by "tout ce fatras de la légende '93" (Jules Vallès); there was undue faith in the patriotism of

the bourgeoisie and in the high-sounding phrases of the radicals; and a lack of organizational and political farsightedness. Such shortcomings were due to the prevailing political and economic trends which have been summarized by a modern historian as follows:

. . . the balance of political and economic forces among the classes had already decided in favor of the maintenance of "order," in the dominance of the bourgeoisie and its state apparatus; . . . the unevenness of capitalist development in the provinces created a geographical dispersion of proletarian groupings and an insufficient maturity of the working-class movement and of revolutionary ideas . . . the will to fight and the élan of the masses were dissipated by sporadic and short-lived demonstrations . . . anarchist tactics [especially at Lyon and Marseille], disrupted the cohesion of small groups of militant workers, and disabled them, . . . while local radicalism was satisfied with what had already been won.<sup>73</sup>

What were the relations between Paris and the provinces during this period, August 1870 to February 1871?

From September 18th to January 28th Paris was surrounded and besieged by the Prussian army and the capital was effectively cut off from outside contact. Before and after the siege the central government bombarded the provinces (via the prefects) with instructions, decrees, and pious pronouncements, but on the whole the departments retained a degree of sturdy independence.

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<sup>73</sup>J. Bruhat et al., op. cit., p. 316.

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## II

### THE POPULAR MOVEMENT IN THE PROVINCES:

#### MARCH TO MAY 1871

The end of February and the beginning of March was a calm period for the provincial communal movement.<sup>1</sup> The voting for the National Assembly on February 8th had deflected the spirit of open rebellion into the safer, but equally time-consuming, activity of electioneering campaigns. And the results of these elections (out of six hundred and seventy-five deputies at least four hundred were avowed monarchists) had a significantly disheartening effect on those revolutionaries and radicals who looked forward to a Republic of free communes. The spate of demonstrations, skirmishes and mass meetings had used up a great deal of popular energy and local authorities took advantage of this situation to try to consolidate their rule.

However, the political, social and economic reasons for the previous autumn's uprisings had not disappeared.

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<sup>1</sup>As always, there were exceptions. Isolated incidents such as the National Guard raising the red flag, protests against the peace settlement and so on attested to the fact that the insurrectionary fires of September, October and November 1870 had been doused but the coals were still hot.



Workers were still discontented with their wages and working conditions; artisans and shopkeepers still felt the squeeze of big enterprises, and radical republicans still demanded municipal autonomy. The cancer had been covered with a band-aid, not cured.

But Paris was different. Nothing could stop the revolutionaries from continuously organizing their forces. This, in spite of the extreme rigors of four months of siege by the Prussians, two unsuccessful attempts to establish the Commune (October 31, 1870 and January 22, 1871), the entry of Prussian troops into the capital for three days and the National Assembly's provocations whereby the moratorium on payment of debts and rents was suspended and the one and one-half franc salary of the National Guard was removed. And when the opportunity presented itself-- on March 18th--the representatives of le peuple, the Central Committee of the National Guard, seized the city hall and its administrative apparatus forcing Thiers to flee to Versailles.

The news that Paris was setting up its own revolutionary Commune was all that was needed to ignite the provincial communal movement, and for a while it appeared as if the 18th would not be the only historic date of the month of March. Lyon proclaimed its Commune on March 22nd, Marseille on the 23rd, Toulouse and Narbonne on the 24th, Saint-Etienne on the 25th and Le Creusot on March 26th. But by April 4th, each of these Communes had frittered away or been violently suppressed, leaving only a few last revolutionary gasps for April and May.

What was the nature of these uprisings and why did they fail?

The movement in the departments witnessed a mass heroism and daring which in many ways emulated the renowned glories of the Parisian street fighters. In every town where there were disturbances large numbers of people were involved, even if only for a short period. Women, in particular, were everywhere. They distributed leaflets, posted notices and proclamations on the walls of the city and helped to encourage fraternization between the National Guard and Thiers' army. The initiative and resourcefulness of the rank-and-file insurgent proved to be boundless. Spontaneously, groups of rebels would occupy a fort, seize arms wherever they could find them, arrest well-known and universally despised pro-Versaillais officials, and generally try to consolidate the revolution at the base. The crowds who invaded the city halls and fought on the barricades were not wild and unruly mobs but people who were conscious of the main issues involved. A comprehensive ideological outlook might have been lacking but political awareness was not.

However, revolutionary spirit alone cannot successfully overthrow established orders and when it came to organization, leadership and sustained discipline, the provincial communal movement could not meet the requirements. Each uprising was a separate and isolated episode: ill-prepared and uncertain of its immediate strategy, every insurrection was left to fend for itself. Since the

leadership usually drifted into the hands of radicals, the continued mobilization of the masses was hampered. Men such as Crémieux at Marseille and Duportal at Toulouse were afraid of allowing le peuple a completely free hand.

But the principal characteristic of the provincial revolutions was their spontaneity. Even after the first successful onslaught and capture of political power, the popular organizations that did exist could not rally the masses and sustain the revolutionary drive. It was a case of the calm after the storm. Lissagaray astutely summed up the strengths and weaknesses of the movement:

Everywhere victorious at the first shot, the workers could only shout "Long live Paris!" But, at least, they showed they had heart, vigor and pride and that eighty years of bourgeois domination was not able to transform them into a people of beggars.<sup>2</sup>

Before we describe the actual events, it will be worth noting that, in spite of the exaggerated falsehoods and calumnies that inundated the departments right after March 18th,<sup>3</sup> the population of the towns still managed to

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<sup>2</sup>P.O. Lissagaray, op. cit., p. 196.

<sup>3</sup>Due to the official despatches of Thiers and his minister of the interior, E. Picard. For example: March 19th: ". . . the army, numbering 40,000 men, has concentrated in good order at Versailles." (There were only 22,000, all in a miserable state); March 20th: "The government did not want to engage in any bloody action but it was provoked"; March 21st: "The news from all over France is perfectly reassuring . . ." and on March 22nd: "From all parts battalions of mobile guards are being offered to the Government to support it against anarchy . . ."  
P.O. Lissagaray, op. cit., p. 154; E. Pierotti (ed.), Décrets et rapports officiels de la Commune de Paris et du Gouvernement français à Versailles, Paris: 1871, p. 20.

grasp the essence of what was happening in Paris and they responded with immediate and considerable enthusiasm.

As on September 4th, Lyon was the first to join the revolutionary fray. It took three days before any news reached Lyon about the events in Paris, and it was Thiers' message announcing the concentration of troops at Versailles which first aroused suspicions. So when the conservative prefect, Edmond Valentin, issued an address warning that there was only one authority, the National Assembly, and that any individual or group who dared to question this would be treated as a traitor against the nation, the revolutionaries of Lyon were now convinced that an important struggle was taking place in Paris.<sup>4</sup>

On March 21st, the Lyonnais Central Committee of the National Guard, fearing an anti-republican coup, called for a meeting of battalion officers to discuss the situation. The following day, about three hundred and fifty National Guardsmen (eight hundred according to Lissagaray), fifty civilians, and a number of radicals gathered at a place called Saint-Pierre Palace.<sup>5</sup> The meeting was addressed by

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<sup>4</sup>L. Greenberg, op. cit., pp. 248, 249; L. Andrieux, op. cit., p. 219.

<sup>5</sup>J. Archer, "La Commune de Lyon," Le Mouvement social, No. 77, October-December 1971, p. 11; P.O. Lissagaray, op. cit., p. 155; L. Andrieux, op. cit., p. 220; L. Greenberg, op. cit., p. 249.

Albert Leblanc,<sup>6</sup> a delegate from Paris, who explained the significance of the Paris uprising and urged Lyon to denounce Versailles and support the capital. A resolution was taken calling on the mayor, Louis Hénon, and the municipal council to recognize the new Parisian government and establish a commune at Lyon while temporarily maintaining the present administration. A delegation of National Guardsmen was sent to speak to the mayor. Although there were a number of deputies on the municipal council who suggested a sympathetic response to the resolution, Hénon persuaded the majority to reject firmly the National Guards' demands. However, the council advised Versailles that Lyon feared that the Republic was in danger and that the National Assembly should make way for a constituent body.<sup>7</sup>

On hearing of the mayor's rejection of their proposals the National Guard proceeded to take more militant action. A call to arms was sounded and the battalions from the popular suburbs of Croix-Rousse and La Guillotière were assembled. By evening of the 22nd the revolutionaries had occupied the city's two major squares, the city hall and the prefect's apartment.<sup>8</sup> The Commune of Lyon was proclaimed,

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<sup>6</sup>On February 28, 1871, Albert Leblanc was delegated with full powers by the International and the Central Committee of the Twenty Districts of Paris to travel all through France to help local sections of the International and to promote insurrections.

<sup>7</sup>L. Greenberg, op. cit., pp. 250-51.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 251.

Valentin and a number of other officials were arrested and a provisional committee was established; it was composed of five of the present municipal councillors, four activists of the International (all sympathetic to Bakunin), two members of the old September 4, 1870 Committee of Public Safety, the president of the Revolutionary Committee of La Guillotière (a working-class organization), and four unknowns.<sup>9</sup> The red flag was hoisted on the front balcony of the city hall, one of the forts on the outskirts of the city was occupied, and an unsuccessful attempt was made to seize the telegraph offices.

On the morning of March 23rd the population of Lyon awoke to find two proclamations plastered on its walls, one issued by the provisional committee and the other by the National Guard and the Alliance républicaine (composed of radical republicans). These documents informed the citizens what the aims of the new government were. The first stated that the National Guard had become disturbed over the attitude taken by Versailles vis-à-vis Paris, and that being faithful to the tradition of September 4th (see pages 34-37), the Commune of Lyon should assume its true rights and authority. It claimed that the municipal council had not acted and that the newly proclaimed provisional committee would temporarily assume executive authority, relinquishing its power as soon as the Commune was elected. Insofar as

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<sup>9</sup>J. Archer, op. cit., p. 16.

it formulated precise demands, it announced that it was Lyon's right to establish and collect its own taxes, form its own police force, control its own National Guard and assume responsibility for its own forts and garrisons.<sup>10</sup>

The second proclamation argued that the Commune having been established, Lyon had resumed control of its own interests which had been too long "absorbed" by the central government. It explained that with the Commune taxes would decrease, public funds would no longer be wasted, social measures would be put into practice, and pauperism would disappear. It concluded by enjoining le peuple to remain united and armed in support of the Republic.<sup>11</sup>

Officially, Lyon's communal autonomy had been proclaimed on September 4, 1870, and so these rather general and vague demands of the insurgents did not forcefully attract the attention of the population of the city. This was reflected in the lack of resourcefulness and energy of the new government. Although many orders and decrees were written on March 23rd, little was done to win over the people or militarily defend its position. Many National Guardsmen left the city hall, and troops under the command of the conservative General Crouzat began to reassert their authority. Meanwhile the provisional committee was still trying to negotiate with the municipal council, but the mayor

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<sup>10</sup>Cited in L. Andrieux, op. cit., pp. 226-27.

<sup>11</sup>Les Murailles politiques françaises, p. 60.

refused to yield an inch.

In the midst of all this, Charles Amouroux, the official delegate of the Paris Central Committee, arrived in Lyon on the evening of the 23rd.<sup>12</sup> He went to the city hall, spoke at a republican club but was unable to aid effectively the revolutionaries' cause. The next morning he departed. Albert Leblanc also quickly removed himself from the scene and returned to Paris. The revolution seemed to be fizzling out.

On the 24th of March a proclamation signed by a new National Guard commander announced that the committee was usurping the powers of the legally elected municipal council and that the National Guard would support the present mayor.<sup>13</sup> By this time only two battalions were left to defend the revolution.

On the morning of March 25th, there was a rumor circulating in the town that if order were not quickly re-established, the Prussians would attack the city. Add to this the waning enthusiasm for the new government, and one can appreciate why the committee decided to evacuate the city hall, leaving behind it a letter of resignation in which it was frankly stated that since the National Guard no longer supported the Commune, the members of the committee were

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<sup>12</sup>L. Greenberg, op. cit., p. 254.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 255; L. Andrieux, op. cit., p. 233.



relinquishing their functions.<sup>14</sup> The revolutionary Commune of Lyon had faded away after lasting a mere three days.

But why had the insurrection in Lyon--a city with such rich and recent revolutionary traditions--been defeated in so humiliating a fashion? The key question in all the provincial uprisings (and Lyon was no exception) was who controlled the National Guard. Without an organized armed force any suggestion to overthrow the government was sheer dreaming. In Lyon, except for the battalions from the working-class suburbs of La Croix-Rousse and La Guillotière, the National Guard was composed mainly of shopkeepers.<sup>15</sup> While these people were far from fervent supporters of the Thiers regime, they were not politically integrated with the revolutionary movement. Class divisions in Lyon were much sharper than in most other French cities, and the petty bourgeoisie was wary of aiding the "new" Commune, especially since there appeared to be no great difference between the "new" Commune and the "old." This also explains why the National Guard (including the working-class battalions) slowly but surely disassociated itself from the insurrection. There was so much in-fighting, negotiation and petty haggling that the new government never managed to act in a revolutionary fashion. So why support a new authority if it was no better (or worse) than the old?

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<sup>14</sup>Cited in L. Andrieux, op. cit., p. 238.

<sup>15</sup>J. Archer, op. cit., p. 15.

Let us now turn to Marseille where, with its Commune of March 23rd to April 4th, the longest-lasting of the provincial communes, the "southern capital" was to experience its third revolution since September 4, 1870.

By the middle of March 1871, Marseille had become a very agitated and socially tense city. One newspaper described the situation as follows:

There is a general discontent here against the present government. The cost of living is rising and there is a lack of work. It is the social problem that is most pressing. Every day we have a new strike, but the bosses are showing themselves flexible and usually these strikes end to the advantage of the workers. The bourgeoisie is manifesting a terrible fear . . . Suffering is more prevalent. A revolution is at hand.<sup>16</sup>

The news of a Paris uprising was all that was needed to spark the revolutionary movement. However, the first information to arrive was not directly from Paris but from Versailles. Copies of the Parisian Journal officiel which had been sent by train to Marseille were seized at the station and telegraphic communications between Marseille and the capital were immediately cut by the local authorities. These attempts to isolate Marseille failed, for Thiers' dispatches announcing that former Bonapartist officials, such as Rouher and General Canrobert, were being enlisted to help Versailles, aroused deep suspicions among the staunchly republican-minded population of Marseille.

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<sup>16</sup>Cited in E. Jeloubovskaia, "La Lutte pour la Commune à Marseille," in E. Jeloubovskaia (ed.), op. cit., p. 315.

The first call to action was given by Gaston Crémieux at a mass meeting of two thousand people on the evening of March 22nd. He lambasted the Versailles government, acclaimed the Parisian insurrection and urged the people to return home, "to take up arms not for attack, but for defense."<sup>17</sup>

The second call to action was the work of the rather dull-witted and conservative prefect, Admiral Cosnier. On the pretext of maintaining order in the face of the revolt that had broken out at Lyon, he announced that the National Guard should demonstrate in favor of the government at Versailles.<sup>18</sup> And so, on the morning of March 23rd, the majority of the battalions of the National Guard assembled in the middle of town. But these men were not supporters of Versailles, and in fact the slogan that was most commonly shouted by the National Guardsmen and the Garibaldians, Civic Guardsmen and francs-tireurs who had joined them was "Long live Paris!" As the day progressed the crowd became larger and more revolutionary and, with the encouragement of such militants as Léon Mégy,<sup>19</sup> the prefecture was occupied, a

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<sup>17</sup> A. Olivesi, op. cit., pp. 132-33.

<sup>18</sup> M. Aubry and S. Michelesi, Histoire des événements à Marseille (Marseille: Imprimerie T. Samat, 1872), p. 303.

<sup>19</sup> The Central Committee of the National Guard of Paris had sent L. Mégy, a lathe-worker and confirmed Blanquist, to the Midi in order to try and spread the ideals of the communal movement. After the repression of the uprising in Marseille, he returned to Paris.

number of officials, including a general, were arrested, and a departmental committee was established whose task it was to govern the department of the Bouches-du-Rhône and the city of Marseille.<sup>20</sup> The committee was to be composed of twelve people: three representatives of the radical Republican Circle of the Midi (which included Crémieux), three representatives of the popular clubs (which included a member of the International), three National Guardsmen and three members of the municipal council, the body that was theoretically the legal government of the town. The municipal council was an amalgam of moderate republicans, merchants, manufacturers, bankers, landlords and intellectuals who were opposed to any revolutionary political or social change.<sup>21</sup> By entering the committee the councillors hoped to tone down the revolutionary potential of the new authority.

The council found itself in a very delicate position. While hostile to the Paris uprising it feared that public support for Versailles might provoke further agitation, and so it attempted to undermine the revolution from "the inside." This set the stage for what was to be the most time-consuming and debilitating activity of the Commune of Marseille--the constant haggling among the members of the departmental committee. It was a reflection of the struggle

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<sup>20</sup>A. Olivesi, op. cit., p.135; L. Greenberg, op. cit., p. 190; P.O. Lissagaray, op. cit., p. 165.

<sup>21</sup>E. Jeloubovskaia, op. cit., p. 316.

between the two governmental authorities, the council and the committee, each trying to present itself as the sole legitimate power.

The first proclamation addressed to the population by the committee was ambiguous and conciliatory. It stated that civil war had been averted, that all republican groups, including the council, were united, and that, due to Marseille's lack of confidence in the central government's administration, a new committee had been set up. It added that it was waiting for news from the government in Paris.<sup>22</sup> This failure to clearly delineate its political objectives produced a noncommittal attitude on the part of the population toward the activities of the committee. The latter attempted to redress this situation by issuing a statement a few days later in which the demands of the "new" government were enumerated.

We want the consolidation of the Republic by republican institutions. We want unity of political direction, with a constituent assembly and a republican government coming from this assembly, both having their seat at Paris. We want administrative decentralization and the autonomy of the Commune. The institution of Prefectures is the death of liberty. We want the consolidation of the Republic by the federation of the National Guard over the whole of our territory . . . The prefectoral administration at Marseille must be eliminated. The Municipal Council must be dissolved. A new Municipal Council must be elected entrusted with the departmental administration and the control of communal interests.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> M. Aubry and S. Michelesi, op. cit., p. 303.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 318.

This proclamation did little to clarify the real issues that separated the revolutionaries from the proponents of the established order. What the Commune of Marseille should strive for was left implicit rather than explicit; all that was needed was to follow the guiding light of Paris.

Let us return to the revolution in the streets. The day after the uprising a number of workers took the initiative in occupying the railway station, the post office and the telegraph. Arms were seized from the prefecture and a munitions factory, but the most important strategic points of the town were not taken. Militarily, the Commune did little to ensure its defense.<sup>24</sup>

The same day several delegates were dispatched to Paris to investigate the exact nature of the insurrection. However, when they returned they failed to give an accurate description of the events, saying that reconciliation between Versailles and Paris was inevitable.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile the contradictions among the leaders of the Commune became more acute. On the morning of the 24th of March, the crowd had placed the red flag atop the Prefecture. At first, the objections to this were overruled, but a few days later the red flag was replaced by a black flag as a sign of mourning for the calamities that

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<sup>24</sup>E. Jeloubovskaia, op. cit., p. 322.

<sup>25</sup>L. Greenberg, op. cit., p. 193.

were besetting France. There were attempts to release some of the officials who had been arrested, but the more resolute members of the committee prevented this.

On March 27th the council decided to make a complete break with the committee and it withdrew its three representatives. Crémieux could not stop them from reversing their position though he tried to placate them by saying that the council was a legitimate body.<sup>26</sup>

At this juncture there appeared on the scene three delegates from Paris--Bernard Landeck, Charles Amouroux and Albert May--<sup>27</sup> and it was Landeck who was to become the real driving force behind the activities of the Marseillais Commune.

The municipal council, fearing that the arrival of the Parisian delegates might revivify the committee, attempted one more manouvre. Crémieux had asked the council for four thousand francs to enable the committee to pay off its debts. The council agreed to forward the money but on condition that the departmental committee liberate the arrested functionaries, leave the Prefecture and renounce

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<sup>26</sup>A. Olivesi, op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>27</sup>Bernard Landeck was a member of the International who was sent by the Central Committee of the National Guard to Lyon and Marseille. Lissagaray describes him as "un cabotin de foire" who "doubted nothing because he knew nothing." A. May was head of the Secretariat of the Paris Commune; Charles Amouroux was a hatter and a member of the International. The Paris Commune had sent him on a mission to Lyon, Marseille, Saint-Etienne and Toulouse.

all power.<sup>28</sup> Crémieux's reply to this ultimatum was to denounce publicly the council and on April 1st Landeck dissolved it, calling on the population to participate in communal elections on April 6th. The councillors, fearing an attack on the town hall, regrouped on a frigate lying in the harbor.

However, during this whole affair the relations between the radicals and the Parisian delegates had deteriorated to the point of open conflict. Crémieux, who had been in favor of freeing the imprisoned officials, was arrested by Landeck. He managed to escape, but after a short absence returned, hoping that his presence would avert a civil war. Because of Crémieux's popular following, Landeck agreed to retain him as nominal head of the departmental committee.<sup>29</sup> The unity of the revolutionaries was evidently far from stable.

On March 29th, more than five hundred people gathered at a meeting of representatives of the National Guard. It was resolved to create a Federation similar to the one that existed in Paris. However, the declarations made did not openly come out in favor of either the departmental committee or the municipal council, and the latter took advantage of this passivity by establishing close contacts with the more

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<sup>28</sup>A. Olivesi, op. cit., p. 141; E. Jeloubovskaia, op. cit., p. 326.

<sup>29</sup>L. Greenberg, op. cit., p. 199; A. Olivesi, op. cit., p. 143.



conservative sections of the National Guard.

From this time on the most urgent question was the military one, and each side proceeded to mobilize its forces. On the 26th of March, General Espivent, the MacMahon of Marseille, announced that the town was under a state of siege and martial law.<sup>30</sup> This prompted the committee to take more energetic measures than before. Quantities of arms were seized and brought to the Prefecture and a decree was issued ordering that only those authorized by the committee might distribute arms or print public notices. However, these measures did not prevent the municipal council from paying a number of people to join the "battalions of order" or hinder Espivent from coordinating his army on the outside of town with the conservative sections of the National Guard inside. All in all, in spite of increased vigilance, the Commune of Marseille was in dire military straits.

The final blow came on April 4th. With six thousand men and twenty-four canons General Espivent launched his attack. The battle was short but fierce. By the next day thirty combatants had died on the government's side and one hundred and fifty on the Commune's, and in the following week five hundred and forty people were arrested, of whom three were sentenced to death.<sup>31</sup> The fury of repression

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<sup>30</sup> Like Thiers, Espivent had fled with his troops to a point just outside Marseille where he consolidated his forces and waited for the opportune moment to attack.

<sup>31</sup> L. Greenberg, op. cit., p. 202; M. Aubry and S. Michelesi, op. cit., p. 336.

was a dress rehearsal for what was to occur eight weeks later in Paris. But for Espivent everything was fine and dandy. In a despatch to Thiers he boasted: "I made a triumphant entry with my troops into the city of Marseille; I was greatly acclaimed."<sup>32</sup> Thiers' generals were not known for their honesty!

The Commune of Marseille had lasted for twelve days; during this time the only social measure initiated was the partial annulment of the debts on rents for the previous six months. While it was true that the leaders of the Marseillais Commune were constantly preoccupied with internal squabbling and external threats, it was also true that these men--Crémieux, for instance--were not really interested in fundamental economic and social change. They sincerely supported the Paris Commune, not because it served the needs of the working people but because it opposed the monarchists of Versailles. They viewed the struggle as Republic versus Monarchy, not workers versus bourgeoisie. Those who were aspiring for the Social as well as the Democratic Republic, such as the activists of the International, did play a role in Marseille, but their effectiveness and influence were limited. The radicals predominated over the revolutionaries.

At Toulouse, events proceeded in a rather different manner. The National Guard had been formed just after September 4, 1870 and it was the only popular organization

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<sup>32</sup> B. Malon, op. cit., p. 361.

existing in town.<sup>33</sup> There was a working-class suburb, Saint-Cyprien, which was politically conscious, but lacked leadership. The dominant personality was Armand Duportal, an old exile from 1851, who was known for his radical republicanism.<sup>34</sup>

After the news of March 18th reached Toulouse the National Guard began parading about shouting "Long live Paris!" and "Long live the Commune." There were a number of agitated public meetings and the clubs called on the officers of the National Guard to demand ammunition and arms.<sup>35</sup> Thiers, alert to the fact that the prefect Duportal was not attempting to calm any of these revolutionary spirits, sent Emile Kératry, the former chief of police of Paris, to replace him. When Kératry arrived he learned that the garrison of six hundred men was in an unreliable mood and that the National Guard favored Duportal; so he decided it would be safer to retreat to Agen, a small town just outside Toulouse.

The real point of contention which eventually sparked the uprising was: who should control the arsenal, the National Guard or the regular army? On March 22nd the arsenal was forcibly occupied by the army and the National

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<sup>33</sup>Enquête parlementaire sur l'insurrection du 18 mars 1871 (Paris: Librairie Germer-Baillièrre, 1872), p. 129.

<sup>34</sup>Armand Duportal (1814-1887), a journalist, was deported to Algeria after the coup d'état. He soon returned to France to set up a mining company in Paris and also administered a number of metallurgical enterprises in Russia and Sardinia. In the 1869 election he ran for deputy but was defeated. In 1870 he was named prefect of Haute-Garonne by Gambetta. He was arrested for his "subversive" activities in Toulouse but was acquitted. From 1876 to 1887 Duportal was a radical-socialist deputy from Toulouse in the National Assembly.

<sup>35</sup>A. Duportal, La Commune à Toulouse (Toulouse: Imprimerie Générale Paul Savy, 1871), p. 10.

Guard's response was to plan a large demonstration.<sup>36</sup> At this juncture the situation became very confusing. The generals of the regular troops, a bit shaken by the strength and popularity of the National Guard, decided to seek refuge in the arsenal. However, Duportal, attempting to play both sides at the same time, reassured the generals that he would maintain order and that he also recognized the legitimacy of the Versailles government.

On the 24th of March, the National Guard, as promised, organized its demonstration to protest the presence of Kératry. A large crowd of over two thousand assembled in the main square, proceeded to the Prefecture and declared that they were ready to march against Thiers. The more politically aware of the officers of the National Guard decided that not only should they support the Parisian revolution but they should also initiate their own. Kératry's arrest was determined and the Commune of Toulouse was proclaimed.<sup>37</sup> Duportal was designated as head of the Commune, although this was by forced acclamation rather than by his own desire. (In his book Duportal continually reassures his readers that he really was not in favor of a revolutionary commune.)

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>37</sup>J. Duclos, La Commune de Paris à l'assaut du ciel (Paris: Editions sociales, 1970), p. 155; P.O. Lissagaray, op. cit., p. 169.

Duportal then quickly drew up a manifesto which was read to the crowd from the balcony of the Prefecture. This document stated that the Commune stood for the "Republic one and indivisible" and it urged the Parisian deputies to the National Assembly to be the intermediaries between Versailles and the capital. It blamed the National Assembly and "clerical corruption" for all of France's troubles, and charged that those who started the war should pay for it. In conclusion, he gave the assurance that all public and private interests would be respected by the Commune, its principal aim being the protection of the Republic from monarchical conspiracies.<sup>38</sup> This manifesto clearly illustrates that Duportal was steering as far as possible away from the revolutionary course.

To run the Commune's affairs an executive committee was named, composed entirely of National Guardsmen. The committee did not take the necessary military or political precautions and the top governmental officials joined the army at the arsenal where they issued a call to the population of Toulouse.<sup>39</sup> The National Guard occupied the telegraph offices, but Duportal persuaded them to leave.

At this point, the more revolutionary-minded Guardsmen, along with the workers from Saint-Cyprien, prepared to make an assault on the arsenal. But the

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<sup>38</sup>A. Duportal, op. cit., pp.44-45.

<sup>39</sup>J. Duclos, op. cit., p. 155; P.O. Lissagaray, op. cit., p. 168.

committee preferred to negotiate. It sent a representative to the arsenal who said that the committee would dissolve itself if the government named a republican prefect in place of K eratry. The negotiations dragged on for half a day, and by this time the masses had become demobilized and the National Guardsmen had left the Prefecture and returned to their homes. The following day, March 27th, K eratry arrived at the arsenal. Realizing that the insurrection's energy was dissipating, he broke off the negotiations and ordered the army to surround the suburb of Saint-Cyprien and to occupy the Prefecture. Some of the National Guardsmen would have resisted but the committee persuaded them not to do so.<sup>40</sup>

And so the Commune of Toulouse surrendered without a fight, its leadership making such an about-face that one of the members of the executive committee was appointed mayor by the victorious K eratry.

Toulouse is a classic example of what happens to a revolution when it is not led by men with revolutionary aims. The National Guard was on the side of le peuple, eager and willing to fight; the masses of the people were in a combative mood; and the municipal administration was in complete disarray and confusion--all the necessary

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<sup>40</sup>P.O. Lissagaray, op. cit., p.169; A. Duportal, op. cit., p. 56.

prerequisites, it would seem, for a successful uprising; that is, all but one: leadership. Who was to demonstrate in which direction the movement should proceed? Who were its enemies and friends? When to attack, when to retreat, and so on? Obviously not Duportal. Revolution was, as he himself, admitted, what was furthest from his mind. But there was no International, no workers' organizations, and no Gaston Crémieux. So Duportal, forced to accede to the prompting of the crowd (a crowd which, like other crowds in the provinces during this period, possessed a remarkable faith in radical personalities) would be the "leader for a day." The result was that Duportal led the population of Toulouse as far away as possible from the revolutionary Commune. It was Duportal, too, who wrote its epitaph: "The Communards of Toulouse did not accomplish one single public act." These words sum up the timid, tragic and, in some ways, pitiful attempt of Toulouse to establish its own Commune.<sup>41</sup>

At Narbonne the leadership of the communal movement came into much more resolute hands.

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<sup>41</sup>A. Duportal, op. cit., p. 69. It is interesting to note that the Journal officiel of Paris published a special article written by the Central Committee congratulating Toulouse on her entry into the communal movement. Whether this message reached Toulouse or not is difficult to verify. One Parisian, Eugène Razoua, a commanding officer in the military school under the Commune, happened to be passing by Toulouse on his way from Bordeaux but his role was negligible during the uprising. L. Fiaux, Histoire de la guerre civile de 1871 (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1879), p. 215.

Emile Digeon,<sup>42</sup> a former exile of December 2, 1851, had been one of the organizers of the Ligue du Midi in 1870. Ideologically he was closer to radicalism than socialism, but his courage and forcefulness earned him respect among the population.<sup>43</sup> So recognizing that Narbonne was enthusiastically supporting the Parisian revolution, Digeon attempted on March 23rd to convince the municipal council and the mayor Raynal to proclaim the Commune. On hearing the mayor's adamant refusal, le peuple spontaneously occupied the city hall the following day and Digeon, with the approval of the crowd, put himself at the head of the movement. The red flag was hoisted and immediate steps were taken to defend the uprising. It was none too early, for the mayor soon appeared in front of the city hall with a regiment of troops. However, the soldiers refused to fight and they were disarmed by the crowd. The mayor continued to foment

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<sup>42</sup>Emile Digeon (1822-1894) came from a bourgeois family and entered the field of journalism. In 1851 he was deported to Africa. In January 1871, a Committee of Public Safety was created at Carcassonne and Digeon, its vice-president, was delegated to confer with the government at Bordeaux. A few weeks prior to the proclamation of the Commune at Narbonne Digeon gave a speech in which he called for the arming of the National Guard and the adoption of the red flag, "the flag of blood, because it has been dipped in the blood of martyrs." He was arrested for his leading role in the uprising at Narbonne but was acquitted. In later years Digeon called himself a socialist-revolutionary. He ran in the legislative elections of 1880-1881 but was defeated.

<sup>43</sup>J. Bruhat et al., op. cit., p. 324.



resistance to the Commune and on March 26th he was arrested along with three lieutenants who were taken as hostages. Using these hostages as cover, a detachment of National Guardsmen seized the sub-Prefecture, posted some men at the railway station and telegraph offices, and even managed to persuade the soldiers at the arsenal to supply them with arms.<sup>44</sup>

On March 30th Digeon published a proclamation which explained the events and significance of the Commune of Narbonne. He pointed out that the irresistible impulsion of the masses had brought about the Commune, and that since the day of the insurrection Narbonne was perfectly calm; there was respect for property and persons, and Raynal had been arrested only for reasons of public safety. Digeon warned that the Commune would hold onto its arms until its demands were met. These were federation with the Commune of Paris and democratic elections for the National Guard. He concluded by condemning those who would dare try to crush the new revolutionary authority.<sup>45</sup>

But it was not Thiers' generals who read these flowery manifestoes and soon there were troops from Montpellier, Toulouse and Perpignan converging on Narbonne. Barricades were quickly erected, the women gathering bricks and furniture. But the defense was no match for the

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<sup>44</sup>P.O. Lissagaray, op. cit., p. 170.

<sup>45</sup>Cited in B. Malon, op.cit., pp. 366-68.

artillery of the attackers and, after a short scuffle in which two insurgents were killed, Digeon evacuated the city hall, thus ending the seven-day rule of the Commune of Narbonne.

Now what exactly did this "rule" signify to the citizens of this city? It would seem that for one week Narbonne was in a state of suspended revolutionary animation. There was order in the streets, although probably a tense one, since the battle lines were slowly but surely being drawn. At the city hall there was much discussion, squabbling and confusion, but without effect on the outside world. No decrees were published and it would appear as if there was not even an attempt made to alter the military or administrative apparatus. The National Guard was for the most part unarmed and unorganized.

Again it was a case of not knowing what to do next once the reins of government had been seized. There is no reason to doubt Digeon's sincerity or revolutionary ardor, but will alone does not make a revolution. In order to retain the active support of the population it was not sufficient to resort to military measures alone; and this is where the Commune of Narbonne so signally failed.

Since October 1870 Saint-Etienne had been clamoring for its own revolutionary Commune. The workers (miners, gunsmiths, trimmers) and socialists were grouped around a politically active Club de la Rotonde while the left-wing republicans congregated in the Alliance républicaine.

The radicals and revolutionaries were united in their dislike of Thiers but it was only the revolutionaries who were willing to follow the example of Paris.

On March 23rd representatives from the popular clubs went to the city hall to urge the municipal council to proclaim the Commune. The mayor replied that he would submit the question to his colleagues, and the following day it was announced that by a vote of seventeen to seven the council had decided that it would resign as soon as new elections had taken place.<sup>46</sup>

However, the revolutionaries did not trust the council and they decided to take over the city hall for themselves in spite of the Alliance républicaine's refusal to aid them. A crowd of four hundred people accompanied by National Guardsmen then broke through an iron railing with which the prefect de l'Espée had surrounded the town hall. For the time being the mayor managed to placate the crowd by promising a plebiscite on the question of the establishment of the Commune. But calm was short-lived and the following day, March 25th, the revolutionary crowd reappeared and forced de l'Espée to sign the proclamation of the Commune. A special committee was formed composed of National Guardsmen and the most popular orators of the revolutionary clubs. The National Guard then occupied the railway station, seized the

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<sup>46</sup>M. Sapey, "La Commune à Saint-Etienne," Europe No. 70, October 1951, pp. 92-93; P.O. Lissagaray, op. cit., p. 158.

telegraph office and posted a notice all over town which summoned the people to elect a Commune on March 29th.<sup>47</sup>

The Commune [it stated] is not fire, theft or pillage, as is so often repeated, but the conquest of our liberties and independence of which we have been robbed by imperial and monarchical laws; it is the true foundation of the Republic.<sup>48</sup>

In spite of the fact that Saint-Etienne's working class was large and vocal, the only document that the Commune issued made no mention of the workers or of their problems and aspirations. In fact, those who drafted it seemed to view the Commune in strictly political terms; moreover, the workers--and this is even more important--were relegated to a subordinate role. So it is perhaps hardly surprising that the "social question" was almost entirely neglected. And even when at this juncture there arrived from Lyon two delegates sent by Charles Amouroux to help consolidate the revolution at Saint-Etienne, these men were unable to give life to the movement.

In short, passivity and inaction of the committee demobilized both the masses and the National Guard; and on the 28th of March hundreds of regular troops under the command of one of Thiers' generals, Lavoye, nudged the Commune of Saint-Etienne out of existence. Another provincial uprising had faded away!

At Le Creusot the socialists had controlled the

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<sup>47</sup>P.O. Lissagaray, op. cit., p. 160.

<sup>48</sup>Cited in B. Malon, op. cit., pp. 362-63.

municipal administration since September 4, 1870. Their leader, the mayor, was Jean-Baptiste Dumay, a member of the International who had been a lathe-worker at the Schneider factory. Since the beginning of March, Versailles had been threatening to dismiss Dumay but the possibility of a workers' uprising had prevented this threat from being realized.<sup>49</sup>

On the 24th of March a large public meeting of three thousand people was organized to protest against Dumay's proposed removal. The speakers declared that they would resist, with arms if need be, any attempts by the National Assembly to restore the monarchy and they expressed their sympathy with the Communards of Paris.<sup>50</sup>

The following day, Albert Leblanc, the Parisian emissary, arrived from Lyon. At another mass rally he described the events at Paris, Lyon and Saint-Etienne and urged his audience to follow their example. He claimed that if Le Creusot revolted all the towns in the centre of France would follow and Paris would be saved by the provinces. After the

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<sup>49</sup>P. Ponsot, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 62-63.

meeting the members of the Comité républicain socialiste, the local revolutionary organization, decided on the next steps to be taken towards setting up a Commune at Saint-Etienne.<sup>51</sup>

Meanwhile the central government, through the local prefect, had been mobilizing its army and when, on March 26th, Dumay and Leblanc reviewed eight hundred National Guardsmen, Versailles' cuirassiers and infantry were there to greet them. Several officers threatened to charge the insurgents but when one colonel suddenly shouted "Long live the Republic!" both sides began to fraternize and mingle with each other.<sup>52</sup> Dumay then read the proclamation of the Commune from the steps of the city hall and it appeared as if the insurrection had gained a firm foothold. But when later on that same evening Leblanc asked for the services of six hundred National Guardsmen to occupy the railway station and telegraph and post offices, only twenty men showed up.

Why this sudden desertion of their leaders by the people at large? It is difficult to find a certain answer, but the most likely explanation is that Dumay and Leblanc failed to mobilize the workers around the day-to-day issues that were affecting them. This was a period of increased unemployment, lowering of wages, and a rise in prices. The

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., pp. 64-65; P.O. Lissagaray, op. cit., pp. 161-62.

<sup>52</sup>B. Malon, op. cit., p. 373; P. Ponsot, op. cit., p. 68.

appeals for a Commune were strictly political in nature and while this might produce a momentary uprising, it could not attract a sustained initiative. Besides, Dumay had been in office for seven months and the workers had witnessed no significant change in their economic conditions.

So now, with the population standing "curieuse et passive" (Lissagaray), the prefect and a thousand troops returned to put the fief of Schneider back in order. Fearing arrest, most of the militants fled to Geneva, leaving the short-lived communal movement at Le Creusot (it had survived from March 26th to 27th) to die a peaceful death.

Lyon, Marseille, Toulouse, Narbonne, Saint-Etienne, Le Creusot . . . six Communes proclaimed within the space of four days, March 22nd to March 26th, varying in duration from one to twelve days. What were the principal characteristics of these provincial attempts to emulate the heroics of the capital?

According to Jules Guesde ". . . it was less the socialist aspect than the political aspect of the Commune, that is to say, the demand for the Republic and communal autonomy, which was acclaimed by the provinces."<sup>53</sup> And the experience of the six cities mentioned above bears this out. Whether the leadership was in the hands of the radicals, anarchists or members of the International, the problem of satisfying the economic and social needs of the working

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<sup>53</sup>J. Guesde, Ca et là (Paris: Marcel Rivière et Cie, 1914), p.75.

population was either consciously ignored (as at Toulouse and Saint-Etienne) or neglected as a secondary issue. As was the case at Le Creusot, this was partly responsible for the lack of sustained political energy exhibited by the revolutionary crowds. It was not the seizure of power that presented the main problem. Every one of these six city halls or Prefectures was occupied relatively easily. But what to do then? That was the crux of the matter. Proclamations were read, decrees were issued and strategic points were seized. This did not prevent the demonstrators from dispersing after waiting for hours on end while the new and old authorities negotiated over who was to constitute the legitimate power. The arming of the masses was very haphazard and military vigilance was lacking. But did not these uprisings possess the same features as those of the previous autumn?<sup>54</sup> To learn from the past in order to build the future was not as simple as it looked.

Although, with the single exception of Marseille,

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<sup>54</sup>There was, however, one aspect of the autumn popular movement that did not appear during the following spring-- patriotism. Contempt for the treasonous activities of the Bonapartists and the Government of National Defense "capitulards" had mobilized many an insurgent. By March 1871 the war was not forgotten but repulsing the Prussian ogre was no longer the prime question. The armistice had been signed, German troops were secure in their positions and there was not much that could be done about these faits accomplis. Although not at all absent from the events of the fall of 1870, the struggles of Republic versus Monarchy and labor versus capital came to the fore during the spring of 1871.



the major provincial upheavals were defeated by the end of March, April and May were to present the local authorities with many a worry; and it was not until the semaine sanglante in Paris that the departments returned to peace and quiet.

The most serious attempt to overthrow the government occurred at Lyon at the end of April, and this uprising was better organized than all the other ones put together.

During the middle of April a secret committee was formed at Lyon whose task was to plan strategy for the establishment of a revolutionary Commune. Reliable men were recruited and assigned specific tasks. The proposed attack was to include the seizure of forts and the city hall, the arrest of functionaries sympathetic to Versailles and the suppression of reactionary newspapers.<sup>55</sup> A leaflet was widely distributed in which details about the Commune were outlined: the new government would vote its own taxes, organize and dispose of its own National Guard and police; schools would be made independent of the University of France,<sup>56</sup> judges would be elected, the property of the Church would be confiscated, and a Commission of Labor would set up cooperative workshops of working men and women for all "travaux d'utilité publique." And, most important, it was explained that the political revolution was the prelude to a social revolution that must follow.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>J. Archer, *op. cit.*, pp. 30, 32.

<sup>56</sup>This probably refers to the desire to be free from the oppressive centralization of the educational system.

<sup>57</sup>J. Archer, *op. cit.*, pp. 32, 35.

The immediate pretext for the uprising was the passage of a new municipal law by the National Assembly on April 16th. According to its main provision, municipal councillors residing in towns of more than twenty thousand inhabitants would not be allowed to elect the mayor--he would be named by the Prefecture. This was a direct blow at communal autonomy. April 30th was the date set for the municipal elections and the revolutionaries of Lyon urged the people to abstain, for voting, they said, would imply recognition of the Versailles government.

On election day the call to arms was sounded. In the working-class suburb of La Guillotière the insurgents occupied the town hall, suspended the elections, and proclaimed the Commune. At the same time in another popular quarter, La Croix-Rousse, the crowd had likewise invaded the town hall, installed a committee of seven and erected a number of barricades.<sup>58</sup> But it took a whole day of fierce and bloody fighting before General Crouzat was able to crush the revolt. According to J. Archer, twenty-one people were killed; Malon and Andrieux cite over fifty.<sup>59</sup>

The following day four battalions of the National Guard were dissolved and disarmed by the prefect for having participated in the insurrection. France's second city had finally succumbed to the Versailles peace.

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 41; L. Andrieux, op. cit., p. 277.

<sup>59</sup>J. Archer, op. cit., p.41; B. Malon, op. cit., p. 377; L. Andrieux, op. cit., p. 275.

Another explosive issue was Versailles' decision to commandeer troops. On March 24th the National Assembly had decreed that each department should keep at the disposal of the government one or more battalions of volunteers. The officers were to be selected by the executive power.<sup>60</sup> This law was directly responsible for much of the social turmoil that occurred in the provinces during the spring of 1871. At Lille it was reported that two regiments designated for transfer to Versailles raised their rifles in the air and shouted "Long live the Republic!" and "Long live the Commune!" Only seven soldiers offered their services.<sup>61</sup>

At Melun, five canons destined for Versailles were spiked by the crowd and at Clermont the National Guard responded to the call of sending volunteers by shouting "Long live Paris!" and "Down with Versailles."<sup>62</sup>

On April 3rd in the town of Limoges, a detachment of four hundred and fifty men received the order to go to Versailles. The men refused to leave, began chanting revolutionary slogans, and attracted a large sympathetic crowd. The soldiers declared that they would not fight their Parisian brothers and they handed over their arms to the citizens. The mayor then ordered a colonel and his cuirassiers to attack the crowd but in the process the colonel was killed and a

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<sup>60</sup>G. Bourgin, op. cit., p. 281.

<sup>61</sup>La Commune, May 1, 1871; La Sociale, April 3, 1871.

<sup>62</sup>La Commune, April 23 and April 28, 1871.

captain injured. The National Guard sounded the alarm and for a short while the Prefecture was occupied. A Commune was proclaimed but hours later the troops returned and Limoges was restored to order.<sup>63</sup>

One of the prefects from the department of Isère related the following episode to the Parliamentary Inquest. On the 15th of April delegates from Voiron came to a public meeting in Grenoble where they announced that the population of their town was just waiting for the word from Grenoble to start an uprising. In the midst of the discussion the audience was suddenly told that a trainload of troops bound for Versailles had just arrived in town. It was immediately decided that the soldiers should be stopped from reaching their destination by all possible means. After two unsuccessful attempts to obtain aid from the commander of the National Guard and the mayor, three hundred people surrounded the railway station, entered the cars and left, apparently believing that they had received a promise from a high official that the troops would not depart. But this was only a ruse, and instead of the train being stopped, the cavalry arrived. The upshot was the dispersal of the crowd and forty arrests.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> La Commune, April 8, 1871; Paris libre, May 7, 1871; J. Duclos, op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>64</sup> Enquête . . ., p. 141. This description is probably not one hundred percent accurate but the gist of the story is corroborated by a much shorter report in La Commune, April 23, 1871.

As can be seen, there were very few volunteers for Thiers' army,<sup>65</sup> and this in spite of the fact that pay was raised, more food was made available and other inducements offered. This would seem to illustrate that in the towns, and again in spite of Thiers' censorship of news, the Parisian movement was understood and welcomed.<sup>66</sup> As one leaflet posted in Limoges phrased it:

The Assembly at Versailles made a call for volunteers in the departments against Paris. The Commune of Paris made a call for justice against the Assembly at Versailles. The volunteers responded to the call for justice.<sup>67</sup>

Indeed, sympathy for the Paris Commune and hostility to Versailles manifested themselves in various forms in the provinces. For example, at Bordeaux, on the 16th, 17th and 18th of April, supporters of the Commune roamed the streets protecting the proclamations from Paris which had been posted all over the city and forcibly prevented the police from tearing them down. Large crowds demonstrated in the main squares shouting "Long live Paris!" and "Long live the Commune!" Garrisons of gendarmes, infantry and marines were pelted with stones and harassed wherever they went. For a while it appeared as if the authorities would lose complete

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<sup>65</sup>The exact number is not known but the case of Toulouse is probably typical. There, four out of a possible sixty officers of the Mobile Guard agreed to fight for Versailles.

<sup>66</sup>Guesde, op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>67</sup>Cited in La Commune, April 8, 1871.

control of the situation.<sup>68</sup>

On April 10th, during a review of the National Guard in the town of Cosne, one of the men stuck a small red flag in the butt of his rifle and began to sing "La Marseillaise." Thirty of his comrades followed suit and the commanding officer was unsuccessful in his attempts to put a stop to this display. Joined by a number of sympathetic onlookers, the National Guard then proceeded to the city hall where they hung the red flag from the balcony. Several people were arrested but a little while later they were freed by the crowd. The following week, for two consecutive days, this sequence of events repeated itself and it wasn't until the end of April that Cosne returned to normal.<sup>69</sup>

At Saint-Armand, which was typical of many small towns in the province, there were continuous demonstrations in favor of Paris. All despatches from Versailles were torn down and replaced by handwritten notices praising the Commune. A witness at the Parliamentary Inquest related: "The 3rd of May, the chief of police tried to take down these seditious posters; he was booed, insulted and was forced to depart."<sup>70</sup>

The Communard newspapers--La Sociale, La Commune, Le Cri du peuple, Le Vengeur, Paris libre, Le Réveil du

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<sup>68</sup>J. Girault, op. cit., pp. 124-32; Enquête . . .  
pp. 64-66.

<sup>69</sup>Enquête . . ., pp. 147-48.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

peuple, Tribun du peuple and Le Mot d'ordre--every day reported the hoisting of red flags, the plantation of trees of liberty, attacks on government troops, the posting and guarding of Parisian manifestoes, and parades and demonstrations hailing the achievements of the capital. This happened at Montpellier, Drôme, Abon, Lille, Vierzon, Nîmes, Maçon, Amiens, Perpignan, Montbrison, Périgueux, Le Mans, Rouen, Cette, Toulon . . . the list is endless.

Elsewhere, municipal councils, republican committees, socialist committees, sections of the International and spontaneous groups of people publicly announced their support of Paris in the form of manifestoes, proclamations and messages addressed to the capital, or sometimes to Versailles. These documents pictured the struggle as one between the monarchists at Versailles preparing a restoration and the republicans at Paris defending their communal autonomy. Among them were the citizens of Nevers who declared the "indissoluble union between the capital and the provinces" and sent their "cordial congratulations as well as their energetic support and assurance of their absolute help for the defense of the Republic."<sup>71</sup> And the radical committee of the Seine-Inférieure and the Rouen federation of the International assured the Paris Commune that

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<sup>71</sup>Cited in B. Malon, op. cit., pp. 384-85.

. . . in this bloody duel of authority against the sovereignty of the people, of privilege against equity, while the monarchists promote the aims of the criminal coalition sanctified by the Church, it is good that Paris should know that, in spite of the corruption and pressure of government, in spite of the lies and calumnies of a disloyal press, there are, in the provinces, hearts that beat in unison with the aspirations of the capital and share her hopes.<sup>72</sup>

Such statements were typical of hundreds more that were published in the spring of 1871, and they further demonstrate that many a provincial enthusiastically identified himself with the Parisian revolution.

Although there were six major uprisings in the departments and hundreds of minor ones, the provincial communal movement was not powerful enough to deter or delay the onslaught on Paris. The six big towns all erupted within the space of one week, but their sporadic, isolated and spontaneous nature enabled Thiers to put out six brush fires rather than contend with a much more dangerous conflagration.

Consistent organizational links among the cities of the provinces were lacking. Most Parisian delegates visited more than one town but they were unable to coordinate revolutionary activities. The prevailing attitude among provincial militants was the domino theory: "As soon as Marseille goes, Aix goes, Toulouse goes, Avignon goes . . ." Each big city would be a single spark that would start a

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<sup>72</sup>Cited in M. Boivin, "La Fédération ouvrière rouennaise et les événements de 1870-71," Revue d'histoire économique et sociale, Vol. XL, 1962, pp. 541-42.



prairie fire. There were some attempts made to help this process along but it was mostly a case of too little and too late: Limoges sent emissaries into the surrounding areas of La Creuse and La Corrèze to do propaganda and stimulate the movement;<sup>73</sup> Gaston Crémieux issued a manifesto addressed specifically to the countryside around Marseille, and Emile Digeon hoped to arrange for united action among the towns of Béziers, Perpignan, Cette, and Narbonne but, for military reasons, he was forced to remain immobile.<sup>74</sup>

Outside of the International, which during this period was nationally weak, fragmented and ineffective,<sup>75</sup> there existed no organization of revolutionaries which could unite the efforts of the provincial Communards. And so the Versailles hinterland remained shaky but, in the final showdown it could be counted on, and a war on two fronts was avoided.

The events of March to May 1871 attest to the wide and deep sympathy which the Paris Commune evoked among Frenchmen in the departments. Hundreds were killed and injured because they stood up for the capital; many a red

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<sup>73</sup>G. Bourgin, "Le Mouvement communaliste dans les départements en 1871," La Revue socialiste, Vol. XLI, January - June 1909, p. 409.

<sup>74</sup>p.o. Lissagaray, op. cit., p. 170.

<sup>75</sup>Although the list of members of the International was large, this did not reflect its real strength. Organizing strikes was one thing but organizing a revolution was another, and this amorphous and ambivalent membership could not cope with the powerful forces aligned against it.

flag was hoisted, many a "Long live Paris" was shouted. The provincial communal movement was desperately trying to imitate its idol in Paris, but it failed. It did not lag far behind the capital but far enough for us now to speak of a Paris Commune and provincial communes rather than a French commune that spoke for the whole of France. However, revolutionary unity is not a one-way affair. It was also the responsibility of Paris to ensure that her revolution did not become isolated from the rest of France. Let us now examine how she faced up to this problem.

### III

#### PARIS AND THE PROVINCES

It has been shown that during the spring of 1871 the provinces of France were far from dormant, and that the communal movement was not simply a Parisian phenomenon. The fate of the Paris revolution was intimately linked with the outcome of the provincial revolution. But was this view also held by the Communards? How did they visualize the relationship between Paris and the departments, between workers and peasants? and what did the Parisians do about the physical and spiritual barriers that Thiers was successfully attempting to erect between Paris and the provinces? The present chapter will try to answer these questions.

Although, as it turned out, the peasant played an insignificant role in the events that follow, one of the items that the drama of March 18th forcibly put on the agenda was how to unite the city and the countryside; in other words, how to lessen the intellectual and political gap between the peasant and the worker. This was, in fact, an issue that could not safely be ignored. Previous to the Paris uprising there had been a few "insightful" thinkers among the working-class militants. In his La Critique sociale (1869-1870) Blanqui pointed out that it was necessary that the peasant

be patiently educated in such a manner that the word "communism" did not bring fear, but hope, to his heart. One had to convey that "communauté" or "association" simply implied the geographical, political and economic unity of France but rid of aristocracy and clergy. Also, it should be clearly explained that no one would be forced to participate in a collective against his will and that small and medium property holdings would not be confiscated.<sup>1</sup>

In April 1870, the Parisian section of the International issued a manifesto which was specially intended for the countryside. It emphasized the community of interests that existed between worker and peasant:

Like your brothers in the cities, you carry the crushing burden of the present social system: you are endlessly producing and yet most of the time you lack the necessities of life while the tax collector, usurer and landlord enrich themselves at your expense.<sup>2</sup>

An article in La Marseillaise added that the peasants would remain the enemies of socialism so long as they were left in the clutches of "conservateurs omnicoles" and the writer warned that it was unjust to feel indignation against the peasant--it was better to educate, enlighten and organize him instead.<sup>3</sup>

As for the relationship between Paris and the

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<sup>1</sup>V. Volguine (ed.), Blanqui: Textes choisis (Paris: Editions sociales, 1955), p. 168.

<sup>2</sup>Cited in E. Jeloubovskaia, op. cit., p. 277.

<sup>3</sup>Cited in Enquête . . ., p. 277.

provincial towns, orators in popular clubs, progressive journalists and future Communard leaders all claimed that a Paris Commune would eliminate the evils of centralization (bureaucracy, taxes, etc.) and promote mutual cooperation among the communes of France. The capital would no longer hold a privileged position.

However, beyond these vague generalizations the Communards were ideologically ill-prepared and, for that matter, organizationally as well (as contacts with the departments were few and far between), for solving the problem of linking the Parisian movement to the stirrings in the rest of France. And when the test came with the explosion of March 18th, what did the Commune do to translate these words into deeds?

The Journal officiel de la Commune de Paris, as its title explains, was the official newspaper of the Commune. It was here that were printed all the decrees, documents and policy statements.<sup>4</sup> In the second issue (March 20th) there appeared an article headed "To the Departments," in which it was explained how le peuple of Paris, after having courageously endured the Prussian siege, had in a republican

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<sup>4</sup>During the Commune the Journal officiel had three editors. Until March 28th the editor was E. Lebeau, an unstable character and a close friend of C. Lullier, the quack general of the National Guard who was later arrested by the Commune. The Central Committee of the National Guard then designated as editor Charles Longuet, a member of the AIT, a Proudhonist and a supporter of the Minority in the Communal Council. Longuet was replaced on May 13th by P. Vésinier, flamboyant, unprincipled and a member of the Jacobin Majority.

spirit rallied around itself the majority of the National Guard, maintained public order, avoided the shedding of blood, reorganized the public services and respected the preliminaries of the peace treaty. The article pointed out that the large towns of France were animated by the same republicanism as in Paris and that the countryside would soon imitate the towns in the tasks of social regeneration. The provinces were urged to join the capital and in a republican fashion prove to Europe that there were no internal divisions in France.<sup>5</sup>

Two weeks later, on April 7th, the Executive Commission of the Commune published a document called "The Commune of Paris to the Departments." Here was the first official attempt by the Commune to describe to the rest of France what was happening in Paris: "You are thirsting for the truth and up till now the government of Versailles has fed you with nothing but lies and slanders." This was the theme reiterated again and again in public statements to the provinces. The article then proceeded to denounce Versailles for spreading slanderous propaganda and informed its readers that -

They are deceiving you, brothers, by telling you that Paris wants to govern France and to exercise a dictatorship which would be the negation of national sovereignty. They are deceiving you when they say that robbery and assassination are openly practised in Paris.

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<sup>5</sup>Journal des journaux de la Commune, 2 vols. (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1872), Vol. I, pp. 19-21.

It went on to say that Paris aspires only to secure the Republic and attain its communal liberties, happy to serve as an example to the other communes of France. The statement ended by warning its provincial brothers not to be taken in by the monstrous inventions of the Versailles royalists and that by uniting their efforts Paris and the provinces would be victorious in their fight for justice, liberty and happiness.<sup>6</sup> This publication of the Executive Commission illustrates clearly enough that the Communards were becoming ever more conscious of the fact that their biggest obstacle to national unity was Thiers' determination to put Paris into quarantine.

The most famous document issued by the Commune was its "Declaration to the French People."<sup>7</sup> While the main purpose of this article was to elucidate clearly the principles embodied in the communal revolution, it did touch on a few points relevant to provincial-Paris relations. "Paris works and suffers for the whole of France . . ." Again the point made was that Paris did not wish to impose anything on the rest of France and that true political unity was "the voluntary association of all local initiatives and and the spontaneous and free cooperation of individual efforts toward a common goal." The Declaration ended by

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 272-73.

<sup>7</sup>Written by Pierre Denis, a Proudhonist, and Charles Delescluze, a Jacobin. The result was a heterogeneous mixture of general principles.

calling on the provinces to disarm Versailles and closely unite with Paris and support its efforts.<sup>8</sup>

A week after the publication of the Declaration the Commune issued a proclamation entitled "The Character of the Revolution of March 18: To the People of the Countryside." This article did not deal directly with the problems of the peasants or the countryside; its main aim was to explain the essence of the struggle between Versailles and Paris. It enumerated what Paris was fighting for and warned that a victory for Versailles would mean the death of the capital. But a victory for the popular forces would entail -

a free Paris in a free France, and marching in unison with the departments now fettered by the terror and lies of reaction, Paris will resume its place as the heart and head of France and of Europe, but without any claim to a domination which she disavows and which would be a negation of her most cherished principles.<sup>9</sup>

In order to inform the population of Paris about events in the departments, the Journal officiel reported daily on the communal movements in the provinces. It reprinted the major proclamations of the Communes of Lyon, Marseille, Toulouse, etc., and occasionally it included Thiers' circulars or instructions to the provincial prefects, thus enabling the Parisians to keep a continual watch on the manouvres of Versailles.

One of the ministries that the Commune created was

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<sup>8</sup>Journal officiel de la Commune de Paris, April 20, 1871.

<sup>9</sup>Cited in Enquête . . ., p. 545.



the Department of Foreign Affairs which was headed by Paschal Grousset.<sup>10</sup> While principally responsible for relations with foreign countries, this ministry also attempted to handle the problem of developing contacts and communications with the provinces. It issued two important proclamations both of which were specially intended for the departments. The first one, written about April 20th, was called "A Manifesto from the Population of Paris to the Provinces." It opened with the following passage: "The Population of Paris, wishing to proclaim in the provinces the truth which has been intentionally falsified by the nation's rulers at Versailles, addresses the following manifesto to all Frenchmen:" It then briefly described the events of March 18th and the significance of the elections of March 26th. The activities of the Commune and of Versailles were compared and evaluated. It was emphasized that Paris did not want to separate from France, that the right of all communes to govern themselves was recognized, and that Paris hoped "that all the communes of France would be united by the most powerful of all ties, the tie of federation." The article pointed out that two-thirds of the population of Paris were originally from the provinces and that Paris would never be an enemy of the departments; Paris would not ask for material aid but only for moral support because she

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<sup>10</sup>Grousset, a journalist, was elected to the Communal Council by the 18th district. He wrote for La Marseillaise and during the Commune he edited his own newspaper, L'Affranchi which was of Jacobin persuasion.

deemed herself sufficiently courageous to resist alone and, should she succumb, she would, in the convulsions of her agony, crush the royalist army of Versailles.<sup>11</sup>

The second proclamation issued by the Foreign Affairs Department of the Commune was published during the thick of the battle between Versailles and Paris (May 15th). Headed "The Commune of Paris to the Large Cities," it was much more urgent and militant than the preceding manifesto. It asked whether the large towns were going to witness in silence the fight to the finish between the future and the past; and charged that not to aid Paris was to betray her.

. . . What then is keeping you from rising up? . . . Are you waiting until Paris is transformed into a cemetery with each of her houses a tomb? Great cities, you have sent your fraternal support; you have said: "In heart, I am with you." Great cities, the time for manifestoes is past, it is time for action, it is the canon's turn to speak. Enough platonic sympathies. You have guns and ammunition: To arms! Arise, cities of France! . . .<sup>12</sup>

Paschal Grousset attempted to distribute these two manifestoes in the provinces and, although Thiers' agents were omnipresent, a few copies did manage to get into the countryside.

However, the Parisian document most widely publicized and circulated in the provinces was the manifesto written by

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<sup>11</sup> Cited in Enquête . . ., pp. 545-46. It is interesting to note that eight popular clubs in Paris officially adhered to this manifesto.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in J. Bruhat et al., op. cit., p. 329.

André Léo with the help of Benoît Malon,<sup>13</sup> "Au Travailleur des Campagnes." More than a hundred thousand copies were distributed in the departments.<sup>14</sup> In the May 3rd issue of La Sociale, André Léo called on all Parisian socialists to bring to her offices the addresses of socialists in the provinces who could act as agents or distributors of the proclamation. Mme Léo also urged Parisian militants to send copies to relatives or friends residing in the countryside. Let us now examine this extremely important manifesto.

It began by explaining that the interests of the worker in the field and the worker in the factory were the same. Both were oppressed, both labored long and hard, both were "slaves of poverty." The peasant was reminded of the difficult life he led and shown that, in spite of all his efforts, he still did not possess enough of the necessities. "Property is not acquired by labor--It is handed on by the accident of birth or gained by trickery." It went on: "the rich are unproductive; the producers are poor. It is for this reason that Paris has revolted--in order to change this

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<sup>13</sup>André Léo (the literary pseudonym of Léodile Champséix), editor of the newspaper, La Sociale, was one of the most astute and farsighted members of the Commune as far as the "peasant question" was concerned. She was a close friend of Louise Michel and actively participated in the mobilization of women to support the Commune. Benoît Malon, a dyer, was a prominent figure of the AIT; was elected to the National Assembly in February, 1871 and resigned, and became a member of the Public Service Commission of the Commune.

<sup>14</sup>B. Malon, La Troisième défaite du prolétariat français (Neuchâtel: Guillaume Fils, 1871), p. 169.

state of affairs." The peasant was then presented with the Parisians' demands: free education, an end to privileged officials, a progressive income tax, those responsible for the war (Bonapartists, etc.) to pay an indemnity, the election of judges, and, most important of all:

And finally, what Paris wants--listen carefully to this, worker in the fields, poor day-laborer, petty proprietor harassed by usury, cottager, sharecropper, farmer, all who sow, harvest, sweat, so that the best of your products go to someone who does nothing; what Paris wants, in the final analysis, is land for the peasant, tools for the worker, work for all.

The manifesto ended by encouraging the peasant to make Paris victorious because the cause of Paris was the cause of the peasant.<sup>15</sup>

Of the proclamations written expressly for the provinces, this one was the clearest, simplest, most concrete, and most attuned to peasant aspirations. Since a large number of these manifestoes were found and destroyed by the Versailles police just outside of Paris, it is most probable that the vast majority of the rural population were unaware of the proclamation's existence.<sup>16</sup>

The most important legislative and executive body of the Commune was the Communal Council, composed of the citizens who had been elected by the twenty districts. How did these leading Communards react to the problem of Paris-provincial relations?

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<sup>15</sup>Cited in Ibid., pp. 169-73.

<sup>16</sup>A. Molok, "La Commune de Paris et la paysannerie" in E. Jeloubovskaia (ed.), La Commune de Paris 1871 (Moscow: Editions du progrès, 1971), pp. 304-05.

At the sitting on April 6th, T. Ferré (renowned Blanquist and police chief of the Commune) urged that the revolutionary movement at Marseille needed the presence of L. Mège and that the Commune should authorize his journey. C. Amouroux supported Ferré's request and added that three other citizens should also be delegated. It was finally decided to send citizens Mège, Dupont and Coulet de Tayac as emissaries from Paris to Marseille. Two thousand francs were allocated for this purpose.<sup>17</sup>

At the session of April 7th, C. Gambon, future member of the Committee of Public Safety, recounted his experiences during his voyage in the provinces. He was convinced that France was awakening and that the principal reason the Communes of Marseille, Lyon and Saint-Etienne had been crushed was because of the leaders' refusal to take the necessary energetic and revolutionary measures. Gambon pleaded that Paris send militants to all the large cities in the provinces so as to aid the communal movement and to mobilize all republicans against the Versailles government.<sup>18</sup>

At the sitting of April 19th, C. Delescluze brought to the attention of the members that a delegation from Lyon had arrived in Paris in order to try to lay the basis for a conciliation between Versailles and Paris. The delegates

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<sup>17</sup>G. Bourgin and G. Henriot (eds.), Procès-verbaux de la Commune de 1871, 2 vols. (Paris: Editions Ernest Leroux, 1924-1945), Vol. I, pp. 132-33.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

claimed that Lyon could give to Paris only moral, not material aid. Commenting on this, Delescluze remarked in exasperation that the "bonne province" was waiting until Paris broke her head before it joined her, but he added that Paris would not wait for the provinces. Delescluze concluded by saying that the Commune would answer the questions of the representatives from Lyon by the publication of "The Declaration to the French People."<sup>19</sup>

The April 22nd session of the Communal Council witnessed the most heated debate over what to do about the communal movement in the departments. Jules Miot<sup>20</sup> opened the discussion by charging that, although the Paris revolution was having its effect on the provinces, the Commune was doing nothing to support them. He suggested that a resolution be taken immediately to send delegates into the departments to instigate and consolidate revolutionary activities, all of which would obviously help Paris. Miot then read a letter which described the serious nature of the events taking place in the Nièvre, and concluded by warning that it was absolutely necessary that Paris tell France what attitude she would hold in relation to the provinces and

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 288-89.

<sup>20</sup>Jules Miot, a pharmacist by profession, was one of the few Blanquists to join the International. He was a proponent of the most radical measures and it was at his suggestion that the Committee of Public Safety was formed. He worked on the Commission of Education and the Commission of Barricades.

whether she would support and promote the communal movement there.

Jules Babick (member of the Public Service Commission) was opposed to Miot's proposal of sending emissaries to the provinces, claiming that since Paris had a scarcity of revolutionaries, her forces would be weakened if good men left the capital.

Francois-Louis Parisel<sup>21</sup> insisted that it was the Commune's duty to send representatives to the departments, not many, but at least "enough to show the flag." He reminded his fellow Communards that they had published a manifesto<sup>22</sup> embodying all the revolutionary principles and now urged that they send people into the provinces to investigate how extensive its influence had been. He added that the best way to fight a war was to create diversions behind the enemy lines. If the provincial movement was strong, Parisel continued, Paris would encourage a national uprising; if not, the Commune would advise the provinces to remain calm and let Paris handle the situation by herself.

Eugène Varlin remarked that since March 18th the Parisian militants had not been inactive in this respect and

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<sup>21</sup>Parisel, a doctor of medicine, was a member of the Commission of Provisions and a supporter of the Committee of Public Safety. During the month of March he visited Lyon in order to establish contacts for the Central Committee of the Twenty Districts, one of the popular organizations of Paris.

<sup>22</sup>The Declaration to the French People, April 19, 1871.

that the Ministry of Finance had already allocated funds for the purpose of sending delegates.

Raoul Urbain<sup>23</sup> warned that the Commune would not be true to its principles if it left the provinces to fend for themselves, and that such a policy could only leave the door open to reactionaries and monarchists. He demanded that Paris do more than it had done and that reliable men (but not men appointed from among the members of the Communal Council, as Dr. Parisel had suggested) aid the provincial revolutionaries, bring with them pro-Communard newspapers, and arrange for the dissemination of all Parisian revolutionary writings.

Varlin interjected once more, claiming that, since the Department of Foreign Affairs was responsible for communications with the provinces, the Communal Council was not the right place to discuss this type of problem. Miot strongly objected to this. The Communal Council was the only body to decide whether Paris should advise the provinces to remain calm or to rise up and support the Commune, he felt. On Clément's suggestion (this may have been either Emile-Léopold or Jean Baptiste), it was agreed that the session discontinue the debate over the ways and means of linking up with the provinces.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Urbain, a teacher, was a member of the Commission of Education and the Commission of War. He staunchly supported the Majority and continuously insisted that the Commune's decree on hostages should be put into practice.

<sup>24</sup>G. Bourgin and G. Henriot (eds.), op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 362-64.



Two days later, Louis Chalain<sup>25</sup> reported to the Council that with the small amount of funds allotted he was able to send only a few citizens into the departments, but on that very day a delegate had left for Brittany to post up the programme of the Commune at Le Mans, Rennes, Brest and all along the coast. He added that he had also instructed people to go to the East and to the Midi, in fact, "un peu partout."<sup>26</sup>

Chalain then proceeded to describe how the town of Le Mans, after having heard about the proclamation of the Paris Commune, had embarked upon a revolution of its own; he pointed up the significance of this action since Le Mans had no reputation as a revolutionary town. He concluded by remarking that all the important cities were announcing their support for the capital and requested that the Commune officially thank the provinces for what they had been doing.

The session ended as two citizens described events at Bordeaux and at Lyon where fifteen hundred manifestoes had been circulated.<sup>27</sup>

On May 3rd, Grousset informed the Council that the news from the provinces was most gratifying: in all the

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<sup>25</sup>Chalain, a member of the International, belonged to both the Commission of Labour and the Commission of General Safety.

<sup>26</sup>G. Bourgin and G. Henriot (eds.), op. cit., p. 431.

<sup>27</sup>Les 31 séances officielles de la Commune de Paris (Paris: E. Lachaud, 1871), pp. 78-79.

cities the election results were excellent and, in almost all, the most radical list had been adopted.<sup>28</sup> The situation in the departments had greatly improved in the last eight days.<sup>29</sup>

Grousset then requested two things: first, that he be allowed, if the need arose, to donate 10,000 francs to any city that could utilize the money to initiate a revolution; and second, that reliable and sincere republicans be sent to his department to carry out propaganda on behalf of the Commune.<sup>30</sup> This was the last time the Communal Council discussed the question of Paris-provincial relations.

Other links between Paris and the provinces were forged by the press. The Communards of Paris were avid newspaper readers. A number of dailies, such as Le Cri du peuple and Le Père Duchêne had a circulation of 60,000, sometimes rising as high as 100,000.<sup>31</sup> The working people of the capital received much of their political and ideological education from these journals. Almost all the papers (that is, those supporting the Commune) had a special column

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<sup>28</sup>This refers to the municipal elections of April 30th in which, out of 700,000 city councillors returned by 35,000 communes, the Bonapartists, Legitimists and Orleanists managed to elect only 8,000.

<sup>29</sup>Les 31 séances . . ., p. 161.

<sup>30</sup>G. Bourgin and G. Henriot (eds.), op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 88-89.

<sup>31</sup>A. Dupuy, 1870-71: La Guerre, La Commune et la presse (Paris: Armand Colin, 1959), p. 106.

devoted to reporting events--above all revolutionary activities--in the provinces. Some journals, such as La Commune, possessed special "contacts" (friends just returned from visits to the departments, "roving reporters," etc.) which enabled their coverage of provincial news to be fairly extensive. But, aside from this factual reportage, most editors published "theoretical" articles analyzing the essence of what was and what should be the relationship between the Paris Commune and the rest of France. It was probably these articles that were most responsible for influencing the opinions of the Communards. Let us examine what the journalists had to say about such problems.

As mentioned before, André Léo was the most gifted and insightful commentator on the ideas and opinions of the provincials, particularly the peasants. In an article entitled "A Call to Conscience" she bemoaned that ". . . the provinces were on the one hand, an ignorant mass capable of believing anything [and] on the other, a network of hatred and prejudice, the natural enemy of truth clinging tenaciously to the old ideas . . ."; but in a different vein and with a more optimistic appreciation, she argued that it was only reasonable that the peasant should want peace, for he saw no usefulness in war, only treason and poor generals; and so "if democratic propaganda were free to express itself, the people of the countryside and those of the cities would now be forming a powerful bulwark

against their exploiters."<sup>32</sup>

A typical Communard analysis of peasant attitudes was made by Louis Dagé in the Proudhonist newspaper La Commune. He reasoned that peasants were reactionary because they were ignorant and because monarchists of all colors could exploit this rural imbecility. These enemies of the capital say to the peasants: "Paris wants to establish a bloodthirsty government. Why let her impose her will on you--the majority?" In spite of this, Dagé was confident that the countryside would not attack Paris since ". . . in all his politics the peasant has only one motive: material gain. If he still remains attached to the fallen dynasty it is because goods and products have reached prices unheard of before . . ." <sup>33</sup> But Odilan Delimal, writing in the same newspaper, was not as understanding. He accused en bloc the peasants of having imposed on France the Bonapartist regime and of having elected to the National Assembly monarchist deputies. "It is enough. The gullibility of these good men has cost us too dear . . . We must raise ourselves without them. With them we can only stoop further than we have already." <sup>34</sup>

If one judges by the number of letters addressed to the newspapers, then Le Père Duchêne, edited by Alphonse

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<sup>32</sup>La Sociale, April 23, 1871 and May 16, 1871.

<sup>33</sup>La Commune, April 1, 1871.

<sup>34</sup>Cited in A. Molok, op. cit., pp. 299-300.

Humbert and Maxime Vuillaume,<sup>35</sup> could be considered the most popular daily of the Commune. Its colloquial style, extremely militant politics and constant reference to revolutionary tradition clearly distinguished it from the other journals, and attracted a faithful audience. What did the "furnace-merchant" with his grandes colères, grandes émotions and grands discours have to say about the people in the provinces?

. . . the peasants don't understand the Republic. Ah! the peasants! they did us a bad turn with their silly votes. And yet, they're good fellows! If only Father Duchêne, who likes them a lot, could chat a bit with them . . . he would show them that the swells, the churchies, and the whole damned gang of royalists screwed them up with their tricks and pounded them down instead of giving them a helping hand . . . and you will see that he can make all these good chaps understand who, after all, are really good friends of the People since it is they who plant the vine and grow the wheat. But, meanwhile these fellows are giving us a rough political time which only helps the nobs to screw the republicans . . . However! citizens of the Commune! Let us unite against these poor devils of peasants. Not to eliminate them. But to enlighten them! May the city shine on the countryside . . .<sup>36</sup>

Most writers on Paris-provincial relations, however, failed to deal with the peasant question. This was reasonable enough as it was from the provincial cities that the response to the Paris Commune came. So the main topics

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<sup>35</sup>Both these men were staunch supporters of the Majority, and particularly of the Blanquist faction.

<sup>36</sup>Le Père Duchêne, 19 ventôse and 9 germinal, year 79 (i.e., late March 1871). The translation of these excerpts into English would in itself have been enough to provoke the grande colère of the irascible "Father"!

for analysis were federalism, centralization and autonomy. For example, an article in La Commune proclaimed that Paris, like the provinces, desired liberty but not political separation and that the solution to the country's problems lay in restricting, as much as possible, the powers and functions of the central authority and in increasing, as much as possible, the powers and functions of the municipal authority.<sup>37</sup>

Le Cri du peuple believed that the cities of France finally realized that Paris no longer wished to oppress or impose her will on them and that the capital was only inviting the towns to proclaim themselves free and federate with her. To illustrate its point, the reader was reminded that true republican states like the United States and Switzerland were federations.<sup>38</sup>

On the other hand, Le Mot d'ordre argued that the unity forged by the revolution of 1789 had to be preserved; federalism could possibly lead to the dismemberment of the country.<sup>39</sup>

But this view was not the dominant one during the time of the Commune and an article such as "Commune and Federation" in Le Fédéraliste probably reflected the attitudes of most Communards when it pointed out that,

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<sup>37</sup>La Commune, March 27, 1871.

<sup>38</sup>Le Cri du peuple, April 12, 1871 and May 11, 1871.

<sup>39</sup>Le Mot d'ordre, April 18, 1871.

politically, the revolution of 1871 was, in this respect, a reaction against 1793 and a return to 1789, and that in embracing the idea of federalism, the Commune had rejected the monarchism and despotism associated with centralization.<sup>40</sup>

During the last weeks of April, an organization was formed whose sole aim was to rally the provinces to the cause of Paris, the Alliance républicaine des départements. It was to be composed of all those people born in the provinces but residing in Paris.<sup>41</sup> On April 30th, at a mass meeting of one hundred thousand, the Alliance resolved to work for the adherence of the departments to the Paris Commune, in order to exert moral pressure on those who persisted in rejecting the capital's legitimate aspirations.<sup>42</sup> These tasks were to be performed by means of propaganda and by sending delegates into the departments. However, the Alliance, whose main support was provided by the petty bourgeoisie, never really managed to get off the ground, as the exigencies of the Versailles attack forced its members to concentrate on other matters.

Let us now summarize the ideas and activities of Paris regarding her relationship with the provinces. The proclamations and manifestoes published by the Journal officiel emphasized a variety of themes: Paris did not wish to separate from the rest of France; she was fighting for

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<sup>40</sup>Le Fédéraliste, May 21, 1871.

<sup>41</sup>It is difficult to ascertain how many of these people were first-generation Parisians or how many had relatives living in the provinces. These two factors no doubt played a role in engendering departmental support for the capital.

<sup>42</sup>Journal officiel, May 1, 1871.

her legitimate right to determine her own political destiny; Versailles was responsible for instigating the civil war; the cause of Paris was the cause of the whole of republican France, including the peasants, and the provincial towns should imitate the example of the capital, proclaim themselves free communes and then federate with Paris. Failing this, they should at least give the Commune moral support.

Considering that there were thirty-one sessions of the Communal Council, some lasting as long as six hours or even longer, this very important legislative and executive body spent very little time discussing what to do about gaining the sympathies, both material and spiritual, of the people in the departments. As has been shown, there were even some (e.g. Varlin) who did not want to debate the matter at all. The decisions reached by the Council were few, not well thought out and lacking urgency and force. In fact, the initiatives actually taken were often not inspired by the Council itself.

The newspapers in general stressed the same themes as the proclamations of the Commune, although they did concentrate more on winning over (or denouncing, depending upon the editor's point of view) the peasants to the cause. Their analyses of federalism, centralization and autonomy were extremely detailed and they minutely delineated how and where Paris should fit into the national and political structure. Most newspapers tended towards federalism and "municipal liberty" (yet not denying the necessity for



political unity), while others remained faithful to the Jacobin tradition.

In conclusion, something needs to be said about the Parisian emissaries to the provincial towns. A few days after March 18th, the Versailles government stopped and searched all trains going to and from Paris, interfered with the postal service and attempted by all possible means to isolate the capital. The only way the Commune could possibly break through Thiers' blockade was to send delegates to plead their cause in the large provincial towns. We may take the activities of two of these as typical as those of any others. A. Collet was a joiner, a member of the AIT and a reporter for the newspaper, La Marseillaise. In the middle of April he left for Sens and from here he wrote a letter to a radical town-councillor of Rouen, enclosing with the letter three copies of the programme of the Commune. He then travelled through six towns in the region and returned to Sens on May 27th. Collet, along with thirty rounds of ammunition, was then seized by the authorities.<sup>43</sup>

François Boussard was an office clerk and belonged to a sedentary company of the twenty-second battalion of the National Guard. He and twenty-three other persons, originally from the department of La Nièvre, were appointed civil delegates by the Commune. Boussard was provided with clothing and ten days' pay and on May 15th he left Paris with a pass signed by Rigault and Grousset. He reached Clamecy where he was joined by two scouts (éclaireurs). They waited

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<sup>43</sup>M. Choury, La Commune au coeur de Paris (Paris: Editions sociales, 1967), pp. 241-2.

in vain for a shipment of arms which was supposed to arrive from Nevers. The collapse of the Paris Commune on May 28th ended their mission.<sup>44</sup>

As for the more prominent delegates, Lissagaray described those at Lyon--Amouroux, the journalist Coulet de Tayac, and Dumont, a former member of the Central Committee of the Twenty Districts of Paris--as being without experience in politics or provincial affairs and unable to give life to the movement they were sent to enthuse.<sup>45</sup> At Marseille on the other hand, the representatives from Paris--Mégy, Landeck, May and Amouroux (once more)--played an active part in the attempt to establish and consolidate a Commune, yet in the other provincial towns the influence of the emissaries from the capital was minimal.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>M. Choury, op. cit., p. 251.

<sup>45</sup>P.O. Lissagaray, op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>46</sup>On May 2nd the Journal officiel of Versailles published a document purporting to be the instructions for these emissaries: "1) Only convey the nature and spirit of the mission to sure political friends . . . 2) Establish relations with newspapers; where there are none . . . replace them with printed circulars which concisely trace the content and form of the communal movement. 3) Act through and with workers . . . 4) encourage businessmen to continue their affairs with Paris, above all food provisioning. 5) Establish contacts with the bourgeoisie and the moderate republicans . . . in order to push the municipal councils to send addresses or delegates to citizen Thiers calling on him to put an end to the civil war. 6) Prevent recruiting for the Versailles army; write to soldiers to divert them from the war against Paris.

In sum, work hard all over France to drive spokes into the wheels of the Versailles chariot of state." Cited in G. Bourgin, La Guerre de 1870-1871 et la Commune (Paris: Editions nationales, 1938), p. 285. The authenticity of this document is difficult to substantiate.

Judging from the Journal officiel, the daily newspapers and the sittings of the Communal Council, the Communards were well informed as to what was really happening in the provinces and quite accurate in their judgments of the extent and depth of the communal movement. But how they utilized this information was quite another matter. Objective conditions were against them: there was Thiers' blockade and large parts of the country were held by the Prussians. But, even so, the Communards must bear a large share of the blame for failing to recognize the extreme urgency (it might be called a matter of life and death) of establishing close contacts with and gaining the sympathies of the people of the provinces. It was a failure which was to cost them dear.

## CONCLUSION

The National Assembly was victorious. The canaille both in the departments and in the capital had been soundly dealt with. But was the provincial communal movement (as part of the national movement) just a flash in the pan, without effect or influence on the political destiny of France? More than two thirds of the deputies of the National Assembly were monarchists, yet the Republic--in name anyway--remained. Perhaps the Communards were partly responsible for this. None other than Thiers would seem to agree:

. . . for, even supposing that the various monarchical parties had been able to agree among themselves on one of the three pretenders to the crown, the greatest cities in the South were in revolt and Paris in the hands of 200,000 fanatics, and these towns would never have opened their gates to a king chosen at Bordeaux.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, it can be said that in 1871 the provincial communal movement played a role in forestalling an attempt to restore the monarchy.

Arthur Arnould, a member of the Communal Council, pictured the relation of Paris to the provinces as "a thinking head on a corpse."<sup>2</sup> Can this harsh judgment

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<sup>1</sup>F. Atkinson (ed.), Memoirs of M. Thiers 1870-1873 (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1915), p. 118.

<sup>2</sup>A. Arnould, Histoire populaire et parlementaire de la Commune de Paris (Brussels: Librairie socialiste, 1878), p. 118.

(shared by other Parisians) be justified?

The vast majority of the people in the provinces were peasants, and it was no secret that they were not enthusiastic supporters of revolution or even of republicanism. However, relations between the peasants and the landlords were not particularly harmonious either. In spite of all the pressure that Versailles exerted on the people of the countryside, very few of them actively aided or even sympathized with Thiers' cause. The best proof of this was the feeble response to the government's call for volunteer battalions. The peasantry was most interested in peace and since it appeared to them that neither side offered this hope, they remained passive.

This leaves us with the remainder of the departments, the urban areas. And it has been clearly demonstrated that a great number of the cities and towns of France were far from dormant<sup>3</sup> and that the communal movement, far from being confined to the capital, was a national movement.

Who were these people who invaded the town hall, raised the red flag and threatened to defy all authority? At Narbonne, of thirty-two people arrested, there were four

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<sup>3</sup>It must be remembered that during this period-- August 1870 to May 1871--a third of French territory was occupied by Prussian troops. There could be no political activity in these regions. Also, the west of France, where royalist influence remained strong, was quiet. But on the whole, the most populous sections of France, the centre and the south, were involved in the communal movement.

intellectuals, six artisans, eight workers, nine peasants (this probably refers to those city dwellers who worked part-time in the fields), two merchants and three without any stated profession.<sup>4</sup> At Le Creusot, the members of the provisional Commune included nine tradesmen, five artisans and five workers.<sup>5</sup> At Marseille there were two lawyers, two clerks, two shoemakers, one varnisher, two masons, one painter, one fitter, one tailor, one journalist and one vagabond among those who occupied the city hall on August 8th.<sup>6</sup> At Lyon, the majority of the revolutionaries were composed of metal workers, textile and clothing workers, builders, weavers and small tradesmen.<sup>7</sup>

On the whole the class background of the leaders of the uprisings was bourgeois and petty bourgeois--merchants, doctors, lawyers, intellectuals, while the mass of the rebels were working people--proletarians, artisans, shopkeepers. One of the more astute witnesses at the Parliamentary Inquest thus described those who were most likely to become Communards:

[In Toulouse] there are at most 1,500 to 2,000 mauvais sujets, or scoundrels. Perhaps this is because we do not have large conglomerations of workers who, in crowding together, become easily corrupted. We only have small workshops and even

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<sup>4</sup>J. Bruhat et al., op. cit., p. 324n.

<sup>5</sup>P. Ponsot, op. cit., p. 70n.

<sup>6</sup>M. Aubry and S. Michelesi, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>7</sup>J. Archer, op. cit., pp. 46-47.

isolated workers, of whom only some are capable of becoming supporters of a Commune like the one in Paris.<sup>8</sup>

But did not Paris have more small industries, proportionately, than many regions in the province? And did not the Paris revolution dwarf the uprisings of all the other towns combined? This seeming paradox may be explained by examining certain other factors which are involved in the outbreak of revolutions.

The communal movement in the provinces was more spontaneous than organized. It proceeded from outburst to outburst, being unable to master favorable situations. (It was the organization of the National Guard which allowed the Paris Commune to consolidate itself and retain power for more than just a couple of days.)

What leadership there existed was irresolute and corrosively divided between revolutionaries and radicals, and while it is true that the Parisian leaders were not known for their mutual admiration they did agree on most fundamental questions, in contrast to their provincial counterparts. In fact, the inadequacies of the revolutionary cause may be generally traced to the political, organizational and ideological unpreparedness of the militants. Not one of the major insurrections was well planned in advance, and everything was done on the spur of the moment. Most of the organizations that existed, outside of the International,

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<sup>8</sup>Enquête . . . , p. 129.

were not fighting organizations. They were usually centred around one of the popular clubs whose principal utility was debating the issues and generating enthusiasm, but when the time came to mobilize people to accomplish all sorts of tasks, the link between leaders and followers proved tenuous indeed.

Courage, daring, popular initiative--these assets existed in abundance. Well-knit, disciplined organizations, political acumen and foresight--these, unfortunately for the provincial Communards, were lacking.

This leads us to a vital difference between the movement in Paris and the departments: the influence of radicalism and the part played by the bourgeois radical. In Paris the Communards sneered at men like Gambetta and Clémenceau. In the provinces they might even emerge as leaders of the movement as Duportal did, for example, at Toulouse and Crémieux at Marseille.

The predominance of radical ideas in the departments manifested itself by a lack of concern for economic and social issues. The majority of the proclamations and manifestoes drafted by the provincial Communes totally ignored questions which were of great concern to the population: wages, working conditions, health care and so on. This was no accident, since it was the radicals who wrote these documents. And the radical was caught between two cross-fires: he must oppose either the sly monarchism of Thiers or oppose the violent revolution of le peuple. The result was usually a compromise with the former and a compromise of the latter.



Thus, as mentioned before, the provincial communal movement was hampered by haphazard organization, ideological precepts unable to cope with the objective situation, and a leadership which, in most cases, was detached from the masses.

One of the causes of Paris' defeat was its isolation from the rest of France. In examining Communard pronouncements, it was demonstrated that Parisians were certainly aware of the urgency<sup>9</sup> of linking up with the provinces, but in spite of this they did not put as much effort into this task as could possibly have been accomplished. The major stumbling block, of course, was Thiers. By every conceivable means he attempted to quarantine Paris, the most effective being the bombarding of the countryside with slanderous propaganda. Even so, there was still one loophole for the Parisians, the sending of emissaries to the provincial towns and villages. But not enough men were delegated and those that did travel through France on Paris' behalf left much to be desired. One dedicated and conscientious revolutionary could have made a lot of trouble in an area where the people were restive and ready for action. Unfortunately for the Commune, it failed to meet the test and communication and cooperation between herself and the rest of France were sadly lacking.

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<sup>9</sup>This urgency was well recognized by Thiers, "for if we had been forced to detach fifteen or twenty thousand men from the army of Versailles in order to restrain Lyon, Marseille, Toulouse, Bordeaux, we should never have got into Paris." F. Atkinson (ed.), op. cit., p. 136.

But all the blame does not lie on Parisian shoulders. The provincial revolutionaries were not always conscious of the fact that the success of the capital depended greatly on their support. The insurrections in the provinces were localized and the towns could not coordinate their activities to lend Paris a helping hand; when it came to the final showdown, the capital was forced to rely on its own strength alone.

However, these weaknesses must not be overemphasized. For, from the provincial Communards' point of view, there was much to be proud of. Thousands of people consciously risked their lives to support and emulate one of the great revolutionary movements and, in some respects, the most significant of the nineteenth century. In spite of Versailles' intimidation and repression, in spite of the rigors of having just fought a bloody and humiliating war and in spite of the sometimes overwhelming odds, many a Frenchman residing in the provinces refused to be cowed, refused to submit to Thiers' "civilizing" order. "What elasticity, what historical initiative, what a capacity for sacrifice . . .!"<sup>10</sup> Surely Marx's praise of the Parisians can be given to the provincial Communards as well. Their success was minimal and even ludicrously short-lived, yet they left a legacy and a tradition that have perhaps not all been in vain.

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<sup>10</sup>Cited in K. Marx and F. Engels, On the Paris Commune, p. 284.

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