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Working-Class Socialism in 1848 in France

Samuel Hayat

The Revolution of 1848 was a major turning point in the history of French political thought. Conservatism, liberalism, and republicanism all underwent profound transformations. However, the most important transformation may well be one that is often overlooked: the invention and the spreading of a distinctive working-class socialist ideology, along with the formation of a national labour movement.¹ Indeed, after the June insurrection, this working-class socialism shattered intellectual and political fields. Liberals and conservatives saw the labour movement as the most dangerous threat to society, leading to new alliances. Moderate and democratic republicans opposed about this working-class socialism and their opposition became an organising feature of the French political field.² Finally, socialism itself, which was until then largely considered as social science developed by harmless theorists, transformed into a revolutionary political ideology.³

How can we account for the fact that this working-class socialism has rarely been studied, particularly as its effects were so great on the history of political thought? A major reason is that workers did not generally express themselves through the publication of books,

¹ For an introduction to the history of the French working class in the nineteenth century, see B. H. Moss, *The Origins of the French Labour Movement, 1830–1914: The Socialism of Skilled Workers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); W. H. Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labour from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); G. Noiriel, *Workers in French Society in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: Berg, 1990); R. Magraw, *A History of the French Working Class*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

² M. Agulhon, *The Republican Experiment, 1848–1852*, (Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l’homme, 1983); A. Coutant, 1848, *Quand la République combattait la Démocratie* (Paris: Mare & Martin, 2009); S. Hayat, *Quand la République était Révolutionnaire. Citoyenneté et Représentation en 1848* (Paris: Seuil, 2014); S. Hayat, ‘The revolution of 1848 in the history of French republicanism’, *History of Political Thought*, 36/2 (2015), 331–53.

³ On the history of French socialism, see J. Droz (ed.), *Histoire Générale du Socialisme, 1: Des origines à 1875* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972); J. Birnberg (ed.), *Les Socialismes Français, 1796–1866 : Formes du Discours Socialiste* (Paris: Éditions Sedes, 1995); P. M. Pilbeam, *French Socialists Before Marx: Workers, Women and the Social Question in France* (Teddington: Acumen, 2000).

contrary to the thinkers usually studied in intellectual history. Therefore most studies of the nineteenth-century French working class are divided between two trends: on the one hand, ‘social history’, focused on economic history and sometimes cultural history; on the other hand, ‘intellectual history’, focused on expert socialist thinkers and theories. Both implicitly consider the political ideas of the workers themselves, the ‘parole ouvrière’,⁴ as secondary – either to the economic infrastructures or to the ideas of expert thinkers. If we want to study the history of working-class thought and to document the creation in 1848 of a new ideology embedded in the working class, it is thus necessary to turn our attention to the more minor or mundane texts written by workers: rules of labour organisations, claims and petitions, pamphlets and manifestos.

The point of this chapter is to show how the Revolution of 1848 gave birth to a distinctive working-class democratic-socialist ideology that we can provisionally call working-class socialism. Working-class socialism was an ideology aiming at the emancipation of the proletariat through the democratic association of workers. It was irreducible to what could be called learned or expert socialism, i.e. socialist thought produced by professional thinkers and writers. It was anchored in the workers’ organisations themselves, and resulted from the organised workers’ interpretation of the 1848 Revolution, and in particular one of its main features: the adoption of universal male suffrage.

I The Emergence of Working-Class Thought

In order to write a history of the political thought of the workers, the first problem is to locate this thought. How can we determine what is ‘real’ working-class thought and what is the expression of only a small minority of workers? After all, if some workers speak and debate, does it follow that they are utterly unrepresentative of the majority? This suspicious stance is well founded but it may lead to discarding working-class thought without looking at its content, focusing only on the social position of its speaker. As Jacques Rancière put it in at the beginning of *Proletarian Nights*, ‘is it possible that the quest for the true word compels us to hush so many people? What exactly is the meaning of this evasion that tends to disqualify the verbiage of every proffered message in favour of the mute eloquence of one who is not heard?’⁵.

⁴ J. Rancière and A. Faure (eds.), *La Parole Ouvrière: 1830–1851* (Paris: Fabrique, 2007); J. Rancière, *Proletarian Nights: The Workers’ Dream in Nineteenth-century France* (London: Verso Books, 2012).

⁵ Rancière, *Proletarian Nights*, p. 33.

However, Rancière's solution is not entirely satisfactory, as it reformulates – in an arguably more sympathetic way – the exclusion of workers from the production of political thought. Indeed, according to Rancière, the workers think, but they do so as humans, not as workers: it is only when they stop being workers, during their daydreams or their nightly meetings, that they actually become thinkers. On the contrary, here I would like to focus on political thought produced not by individual workers outside of work, but by workers that speak and write as workers, on behalf of workers. In that respect, I will provisionally consider working-class thought as the intellectual production of organised workers: not necessarily workers in trade unions or parties – those did not exist during the first half of the century – but workers engaged in some sort of collective organisation and, more importantly, some form of collective intellectual activity. Working-class thought can then be defined by its material context: it is composed of ideas collectively or individually produced by organised workers engaged in the process of constructing labour organisations. It is true that these workers were only a minority of the people who worked in France; but industrial workers were themselves a minority: there were only around four million workers in the middle of the century, a third of whom were women, with most of them working in small-scale industries.⁶ As there were far more employed in agriculture, should we thus discard industrial workers since they were not representative of real workers? On the contrary, we should try to understand how this contradiction was constituent of the labour movement and how it evolved throughout the nineteenth century. The same can be said about the organised urban industrial workers: they are not representative as such, but they have a 'representative claim', i.e. they claim to speak on behalf of all the workers.⁷ Therefore by labelling their ideas 'working-class thought', we do not mean they are the ideas of the majority of the workers. We mean that they are presented and constructed by organised workers as the ideas of the working class, anchored in the situation of workers, collectively discussed and produced on behalf of the working class.

With that definition, working-class thought can be said to emerge when some workers started to organise and to produce political thought with the intention to speak on behalf of workers as a whole. As such, working-class ideas were largely absent from French political thought before the nineteenth century. The reason is that the idea of a 'working class' was uncommon under the *Ancien Régime*: industrial work was then organised through a complex co-operative system, in which the trades had a legal existence and pretty much defined the

⁶ R. Price, *A Social History of Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1987), p. 197.

⁷ M. Saward, *The Representative Claim* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

identity of the workers. There was not much place for individual or collective discussion about labour in general. As William Sewell puts it, 'both masters and workers were subjected to the collective discipline of the corporation, which regulated everyone and everything in the trade'.⁸ Trade organisations produced a distinction between workers of different trades that was sometimes more important than the differences inside a given trade between workers of different statuses – journeymen and masters. Therefore it rendered quite absurd the idea of a 'working class' as a collective subject unified by a common experience of exploitation – let alone the ability to produce something called 'working-class thought'.

The revolution changed all that, in at least three ways. First, in 1791, the Le Chapelier law and the d'Allarde decree destroyed the whole trade system: corporations were dissolved and any form of trade organisation became illegal.⁹ As a result, the economy, previously controlled rigidly by hierarchical corporations with fixed rules, suddenly became disorganised. All trades became free and the traditional ways of harmonising wages and controlling the job market in each trade disappeared. A second change was that the normative ideals of the revolution changed the way workers could envision their situation. Even if it was no structural necessity that artisans became *sans-culottes*, many of them did (especially in Paris and in Lyon), and one should not underestimate the penetration of revolutionary ideas among workers.¹⁰ The combination of these two changes led to a third: the emergence of a large and protean movement aiming at renewed control over the economy by the workers, but reinterpreted through the prism of revolutionary values. This movement cannot be described as a 'labour movement' in the contemporary sense of the phrase. It was mostly triggered by the will to continue organising themselves the same way as before the revolution, but taking into account the legal, social, and conceptual changes it caused.

However, this change in the framework in which workers acted and thought had an important effect: they could not simply use the same means as before the revolution. They had to reflect collectively upon their organisations and the way they could construct devices to control their economic activity. This situation constituted one of the main triggers for the emergence of working-class thought: it had become a necessity for workers who wanted to pursue their traditional goals, born under the *Ancien Régime*, to think about the ways they could

⁸ W. H. Sewell, 'Artisans, factory workers, and the formation of the French working class, 1789-1848' in A. R. Zolberg and I. Katznelson (eds.), *Working-class Formation: Nineteenth-century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 54.

⁹ S. L. Kaplan et P. Minard (eds.), *La France, Malade du Corporatisme?: XVIIIe-XXe Siècles* (Paris: Belin, 2004).

¹⁰ A. Soboul, *The Parisian Sans-culottes and the French Revolution, 1793-4* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).

organise themselves and to translate their claims into a vocabulary that was acceptable in the post-revolutionary public sphere. An example of such a process of induced reflexivity can be found in the history of the *prud'hommes*, the representative labour courts created in Lyon in 1806 to solve conflicts between merchants and workers.¹¹ As Alain Cottureau observed, the Revolution of 1789 and the 1791 laws created a new situation. On the one hand, they destroyed traditional hierarchical, corporative work relations. On the other hand, they promoted a language of equality and liberty. The combination of the two provided workers with new arguments to defend the concept of equal representation of workers and merchants in the negotiations about the cost of work (*le tarif*), and more generally in arbitration of conflicts. A new conception of rights and justice, and new quasi-judicial institutions such as the *prud'hommes*, resulted from the intertwining of co-operative culture and the values of the new regime. In the debates in and about the *prud'hommes*, we can see the appearance of a distinctive political thought, centred on the problem of the organisation of work and economic relations, based on norms that blend co-operative culture and revolutionary ideals¹².

During the first decades of the nineteenth century, it was thus possible to see the first signs of distinctive working-class thought, embedded in the organisations that emerged from the paradoxical situation of induced reflexivity created by the revolution: a collective will on the part of the workers to continue regulating the economy, but a new legal and conceptual framework in which this regulation did not naturally fall into place. Nevertheless, this collective will was mostly expressed by diverse and often unrelated groups, 'most' of them still divided among different trades or *corps d'état* and hostile journeymen's associations, the *compagnonnages*.¹³ Workers reflected upon their situation, but the idea of a collective representative subject that could produce a unified political thought aiming to defend the interests and the point of view of all workers was scarcely present.

William Sewell showed that the rhetoric of class consciousness and class struggle appeared in labour discourses after the Revolution of 1830.¹⁴ It was a way for workers to

¹¹ A. Cottureau, 'Justice et injustice ordinaire sur les lieux de travail d'après les audiences prud'homales (1806–1866)', *Le Mouvement Social*, 141 (1 October 1987) 25–59; A. Cottureau, 'Droit et bon droit', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 57/6 (2002), 1521–57; A. Cottureau, 'La désincorporation des métiers et leur transformation en "publics intermédiaires": Lyon et Elbeuf, 1790-1815' in S. L. Kaplan and P. Minard (eds.), *La France, Malade du Corporatisme ? : XVIIIe-XXe Siècles* (Paris: Belin, 2004) pp. 97–145.

¹² The same could be said about mutual aid societies and co-operatives. See M. D. Sibalís, 'the mutual aid societies of Paris, 1789–1848', *French History*, 3/1 (1989), 1–30; J. Rougerie, 'Le mouvement associatif populaire comme facteur d'acculturation politique à Paris de la révolution aux années 1840 : continuité, discontinuités', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 297 (1994) 493–516.

¹³ É. Coornaert, *Les Compagnonnages en France: du Moyen-Âge à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions ouvrières, 1966).

¹⁴ Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France*.

reformulate their corporative language and claim rights, especially the right to association, of which they were deprived by the new regime. We should add that this reformulation extensively used not only the vocabulary of the Revolution of 1789, on which Sewell focuses, but also the distinctive vocabulary of representative government. The latter became a clearly formulated political project during the restoration, in the midst of a movement that was then called liberalism.¹⁵ A group of thinkers and politicians, the *doctrinaires*, and, in particular, François Guizot, theorised representative government as government by representation.¹⁶ Society was left free, but not sovereign, and the most apt men in society, those with the better knowledge of it and the best ability to use reason, the *capacités*, were in charge of selecting those among them who should govern. The July Revolution gave power to these liberals, making it possible to apply their project. These liberals, influenced by the principles of 1789 but also willing to strictly control society – and especially the poor – set the outlines of an economic government that placed work and workers into a new area of political action, in what Giovanna Procacci called the ‘government of poverty’.¹⁷ Workers were not considered as divided by their trade, but as one category subjected to poverty. This enabled research on poverty to be carried out, for example, in a study presented by Villermé in 1840 to the *Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques* (Academy of Moral and Political Science) in his *Tableau de l’état physique et moral des ouvriers* (Table of the physical and moral state of the workers), as well as the creation of government plans to fight poverty which was its logical complement. All this contributed to seeing the poor or labourers as a unified and homogeneous group.¹⁸ The implementation of a liberal representative government and, in particular, the attempt to find policies based on reason and public interest, revealed a new group, subject to unified policies and characterised by their poverty and the fact that they were workers. Because this creation of a unified group of workers was concomitant with the freeing up of different possibilities for society to organise itself, this group was then left with the opportunity to speak and act on its own behalf.

If it is true that the shift from the diverse conditions of craftsmen to the belief in the existence of a unified class was related to the practice of representative government, it was

¹⁵ A. Jardin, *Histoire du Libéralisme Politique: De la Crise de l’Absolutisme à la Constitution de 1875* (Paris: Hachette, 1985); L. Girard, *Les Libéraux Français, 1814–1875* (Paris: Aubier, 1985); P. Nemo and J. Petitot (eds.) *Histoire du Libéralisme en Europe* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2006).

¹⁶ P. Rosanvallon, *Le Moment Guizot* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985).

¹⁷ G. Procacci, *Gouverner la Misère: La Question Sociale en France (1789–1848)* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1993).

¹⁸ M. Gribaudi, *Paris Ville Ouvrière: Une Histoire Occultée (1789–1848)*, (Paris: La Découverte, 2014).

nevertheless achieved concretely within specific groups. In this respect particular importance must be granted to the republican groups, which constituted places where radical liberals, disappointed with the new government, met workers who tried to regain some control over economic relations in the co-operative tradition. This led to the progressive radicalisation of the advanced liberals and to the emergence of a common, republican identity, which incorporated the idea of improving the fate of the largest and poorest class.¹⁹ One of the results of this politicisation of the working-class question, which occurred at the same time as a change in the treatment of workers by the government, was that, beginning with the 1830 Revolution, the term ‘proletarian’ acquired a new meaning for a growing number of workers: a class identity, intrinsically linked to their status as producers, one which transcended the boundaries of particular trades and was marked by its exploitation by the bourgeoisie. This affected it to the point that, ‘from 1840 the distinctiveness of the “working class” was a received truth in all worker circles’.²⁰ It was only under the July regime, and after the encounter with its concept of work (particularly the liberal refusal to grant power to the guilds), that workers – granted, only a minority – started to restructure their action in ways that transcended the barriers of trades, notably by establishing newspapers that were led and written exclusively by workers (*L’Artisan*, *Le Journal des Ouvriers*; and *Le Peuple, Journal des Ouvriers, Rédigé par Eux-mêmes*), and also by entering republican societies.²¹ For the first time, an idea appeared as a distinctive labour idea, anchored in both the corporative tradition and in republican values, and inseparable from the workers’ will to organise and to exert a measure of control over the economy: association. The notion of association, which ‘has a clearer political connotation, that of challenging the social order’²² than the terms ‘corporation’ or ‘organisation’, acquired the status of a ‘Messianic formula’²³ under the July regime. After 1830, several plans appeared to promote the unification of the diverse workers’ associations. In 1833, a republican shoe maker, Zael Efrahem, formulated, in very strong terms, the need for trade associations to be

¹⁹ E. L. Newman, ‘La blouse et la redingote: l’alliance du peuple et de la bourgeoisie à la fin de la Restauration’, *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 47 (1975), 513–35; P. M. Pilbeam, ‘Republicanism in early nineteenth-century France, 1814–1835’, *French History*, 5/1 (1 March 1991), 30–47; J.-C. Caron, ‘Elites républicaines autour de 1830 : la Société des Amis du Peuple’ in M. Vovelle and R. Monnier (eds.), *Révolution et République: l’Exception Française, Actes du Colloque de Paris I* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 1994), pp. 498–510.

²⁰ T. Judt, *Marxism and the French Left: Studies in Labour and Politics in France 1830–1981* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) p. 62.

²¹ Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France*

²² A. Gueslin, *L’Invention de l’Économie Sociale : Le XIXe Siècle Français* (Paris: Économica, 1987), p. 135.

²³ L. A. Loubère, ‘The intellectual origins of French Jacobin Socialism’, *International Review of Social History*, 4/3 (1959), 422.

replaced by a workers' association unifying the different trades.²⁴ In 1840, Agricol Perdiguer published the *Livre du Compagnonnage* in which he described the journeymen's customs and songs and advocated a union of their rival associations.²⁵ And in 1843, drawing on these projects, the 'pariah' Flora Tristan published *L'Union Ouvrière*, a vibrant call to working-class unity.²⁶

On the eve of 1848, working-class thought was the result of the successive reformulations and re-institutionalisations of co-operative culture consecutive to the Revolutions of 1789 and 1830. After 1789, the universalistic revolutionary rhetoric was used to justify new, more egalitarian relations of negotiation, in each trade, between merchants and workers. There was no socialism involved: working-class political thought remained oriented by trade division and by co-operation (or, more precisely, negotiation) between classes. After 1830, the language of class unity and class struggle appeared. But what was criticised was mostly the fact that the workers were prevented from associating to defend their collective rights. The perspective was not the abolition of the wage system or capitalism, but a fair recognition of the distinctive interest of the working class, and its antagonism towards merchants and owners. Socialism (i.e. the expert socialism of Fourierists, Cabet, etc.) existed and provided radical solutions to the social question. Many workers were attentive to these solutions. But no distinctive working-class socialism had emerged, and socialist ideas were not embodied in institutions or institutional projects.

II The Democratic Experience of 1848

This is the distinctive contribution of the Revolution of 1848 and the major change it had on working-class thought: before 1848, socialism was advocated only by a minority of organised workers, and when it was advocated it was always in reference to a certain form of expert socialism. After 1848, socialism became consubstantial with workers' projects, and socialist workers took great care to distance themselves from expert socialists. As such, this was a turning point in the history of both the labour movement and socialism. Whereas the political failure of expert socialists and the catastrophe of June 1848 could have rendered socialism totally unacceptable to workers, it ended up not being the case. As early as autumn 1848, forms

²⁴ Z. Efrahem, *De l'association des Ouvriers de tous les Corps d'État* (Paris: Imprimerie A. Mie, 1833).

²⁵ A. Perdiguer, *Le Livre du Compagnonnage* (Paris: Pagnerre, 1841).

²⁶ F. Tristan, *Union Ouvrière* (Paris: Prévot, 1843).

of organised labour reappeared, frequently attempting to put socialism into practice.²⁷ In order to explain the effect of the Revolution of 1848 on working-class thought, one has to take into account the changes in both the concrete life conditions of the organised workers and their representations about their role – the combination of the two resulting in what can be coined as the working-class experience. We can distinguish four main factors that modified this experience in 1848.

Firstly, working-class experience was transformed by the massive encounter with socialism. It is true that some members of the fringes of the working class were already members of socialist sects – actually they had played a central part in the development of working-class movements before 1848.²⁸ But 1848 constituted a real change of scale. During the weeks that followed the February Revolution, hundreds of newspapers and clubs were created, and the most popular of them were often centred on a socialist figure such as Étienne Cabet or François-Vincent Raspail.²⁹ For the first time in history, socialists were able to talk publicly to a large audience. More importantly, their ideas started to be discussed in mainstream newspapers: the moderate republican *Le National* became involved in heated debates with Proudhon on the creation of economic value, while the popular comical newspaper *Le Charivari* became filled with caricatures of socialist leaders.³⁰ And in every newspaper that reproduced the parliamentary debates (which was the case for most of them in 1848), people could read the speeches made by the few socialist representatives: Victor Considérant, Proudhon, Pierre Leroux ... Some of these speeches were then printed and sold separately, such as the famous defence of socialism by Proudhon on 31 July 1848. All this contributed to socialists and socialism becoming familiar to workers on a much larger scale than just the well-read minorities that composed most socialist movements before 1848. It is difficult to measure the penetration of socialist ideas in the working class, but if we consider the electoral results of the socialist candidacy of Raspail in December 1848, we can see that it fared relatively well

²⁷ R. Gossez, *Les Ouvriers de Paris. 1: L'Organisation, 1848–1851* (Société d'histoire de la Révolution de 1848, 1968), pp. 327–64.

²⁸ See, for example, M. Riot-Sarcey, *Le Réel de l'Utopie : Essai sur le Politique au XIXe Siècle*, (Paris: A. Michel, 1998); J. Beecher, *Victor Considérant and the Rise and Fall of French Romantic Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); T. Bouchet, V. Bourdeau, E. Castleton, L. Frobert, and F. Jarrige (eds.), *Quand les Socialistes Inventaient l'Avenir: Presse, Théories et Expériences : 1825–1860*, (Paris: La Découverte, 2015).

²⁹ R. Gossez, 'Presse parisienne à destination des ouvriers, 1848-1851', in J. Godechot (ed.), *La Presse Ouvrière, 1819-1850: Angleterre, États-Unis, France, Belgique, Italie, Allemagne, Tchécoslovaquie, Hongrie* (Bures-sur-Yvette, Essonne: Société d'histoire de la Révolution de 1848, 1966), pp. 123–90; P. H. Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy: The Paris Club Movement in 1848*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975).

³⁰ T. Menuelle, *Le Charivari contre Proudhon* (Paris: Publications de la Société P.-J. Proudhon, 2006).

only in the most working-class urban neighbourhoods such as la Croix-Rousse in Lyon or the centre of Paris. If we also consider the votes for the democratic-socialist Ledru-Rollin, who started claiming he was a socialist in September 1848, it adds up to 15 per cent in Paris and in Lyon.³¹ In a few months, from a fringe movement, socialism became a legitimate part of the new political field.

Secondly, this new familiarity of workers with socialism was multiplied for organised workers, especially in Paris. Indeed, from March to May 1848, workers were represented at the Luxembourg Palace, the former High Chamber, by elected representatives of each trade in the *Commission de Gouvernement pour les Travailleurs*, known as the Luxembourg Commission.³² This Commission was created after demonstrations of workers on 28 February demanding a Ministry of Labour. The Provisional Government did not want to grant the workers such a department, but it agreed to create a Commission that was supposed to debate social reforms to be presented to the Constituent Assembly after its election. The Commission was chaired by the two most radical members of the Provisional Government, the socialist writer Louis Blanc and the worker conspirator Albert. Even if the aim of the government was to satisfy the workers quickly and to get rid of these two cumbersome colleagues, the Luxembourg Commission constituted a major site for the politicisation of the Parisian workers. First, representatives of each trade were put in touch with socialist thinkers (Louis Blanc, but also the Fourierists Constantin Pecqueur and François Vidal) and debated social reforms with them. Second, they played a direct role in the resolution of conflicts between bosses and workers and in the launch of socialist experiments such as the tailors' co-operative settled in the former Clichy prison. Finally, after the dissolution of the Luxembourg Commission, former delegates, especially members of the bureau of the Commission such as its president, Pierre Vinçard, constituted the core of people making new attempts to build a unified working-class movement. In June, they formed a *Société des Corporations Réunies*, whose manifesto claimed the necessity of an autonomous emancipation of the proletariat, and launched a newspaper, *Le Journal des Travailleurs*, which covered news from all trades. After 1848, these former delegates participated in almost every important working-class project on the national scale, from the *Banque du Peuple* in 1848–49 to the *Société de la Presse du Travail* in 1851. During

³¹ S. Hayat, 'Se présenter pour protester. La candidature impossible de François-Vincent Raspail en décembre 1848', *Revue Française de Science Politique*, 64/5 (22 octobre 2014), 869–903. This implementation of socialism was then confirmed by the legislative election of May 1849; see J. Bouillon, 'Les démocrates-socialistes aux élections de 1849', *Revue Française de Science Politique*, 6/1 (1956), 70–95.

³² F. Bruand, 'La Commission du Luxembourg en 1848' in Francis Démier (ed.), *Louis Blanc: Un Socialiste en République* (Paris: Créaphis, 2006), pp. 107–31.

the Second Empire, some of them (for example, the typographers Georges Duchêne and Louis Vasbenter) participated in the working-class milieu from which emerged the Parisian section of the First International.

These two factors primarily concerned the direct and indirect relations between workers and socialists. But 1848 was also a moment of confrontation with the bourgeoisie and the conservatives, which played a role in the definition of the representation of the political field. As a result, a third factor in the rapid spread of socialism among the working class during the Second Republic is the common repression radical activists, socialists, and workers had to face on several occasions.³³ As early as 16 April 1848, when Parisian workers faced the hostility of the Provisional Government and the National Guard during their demonstration in favour of social reform, they were accused in both reactionary and republican newspapers of being communists, secretly conspiring for Blanqui. After the invasion of the Assembly on 15 May, club leaders were arrested, including Albert, the vice-president of the Luxembourg Commission, which was brutally shut down and had its papers seized. Finally, when people started to try to make sense of the June insurrection, socialism and radicalism appeared as the main motivation of the insurgents, both for socialists like Proudhon and for conservative republicans – the whole parliamentary investigation into the events of May and June was dedicated to proving that these events were socialist and radical conspiracies to overthrow the regime. Therefore it is no surprise that the repression that followed the December 1851 coup d'état targeted radical republicans, socialists, and working-class leaders. For this reason, during the Second Republic socialism and working-class activism started to be interpreted as one and the same phenomenon and this transformation in the representation of workers affected the political opportunity structures in which the working-class movement developed: the alliance between socialists, radical republicans, and working-class activists became an obvious necessity from 1848 onwards, both in France and in exile.

The spread of socialism, the Luxembourg Commission, and repression led to the multiplication of occasions for direct or indirect encounters between socialists and workers. However, it caused a major transformation in working-class thought because it met a profound change in the symbolic frame through which workers considered their place in society – the fourth factor of the modification of working-class experience in 1848. Alain Cottureau showed how the workers' sense of justice was modified by the idea of civil equality after 1789; William Sewell asserted that the Revolution of 1830 triggered a renewed interest for association because

³³ J. M. Merriman, *The Agony of the Republic: The Repression of the Left in Revolutionary France 1848-1851* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

of the new linguistic framework in which workers considered themselves. *Mutatis mutandis*, the Revolution of 1848 created a new context in which the meaning of being a worker was deeply transformed. It has often been remarked that for a brief period of time, in spring 1848, workers became revered as a new aristocracy, defined by work; as the song went, ‘*Chapeau bas devant la casquette, À genoux devant l’ouvrier!*’ (‘Hats off to the cap, On your knees before the worker!’). This honeymoon period did not last. However, it was the apex of a larger movement that outlasted spring 1848: the political emancipation of the male workers, i.e. universal male suffrage. The transformation of citizenship subsequent to this change had a profound impact on the way the workers saw themselves. To assess the extent of the effect of universal male suffrage on the representations workers had of themselves, one has to remember that democracy, in 1848, did not only mean the election of legislators who then could act however they pleased.³⁴ Since our present conception of democracy is almost purely electoral, we tend to forget what it entailed then. But if we consider a male worker in early 1848, we can see that the revolution turned his day-to-day political experience upside down. First, he had the right to vote for the sovereign assembly. In 1848, that meant choosing any list of names he wanted; he was not constrained by parties or lists of candidates. If he lived in a big city, he also could participate in club meetings in which potential candidates presented themselves. In Paris, 100,000 people regularly attended club meetings.³⁵ Of course, the board of the club was elected, so workers could participate in the election of club representatives. Workers also became members of the National Guard, experiencing equality with their neighbours, and they could vote for their officers at different levels (in at least three different elections in April 1848).³⁶ If a worker was in need and decided to enrol in national workshops, as tens of thousands of workers did, he also could vote for his officers there.³⁷ Workers who were members of an organised trade, a *corps d’état*, were also invited to vote for their representatives at the Luxembourg Commission. To sum up, in 1848 workers went from exclusion from all forms of collective decision to a permanent and multidimensional electoral activity. Equality in decisions, i.e. popular sovereignty, was no longer just a value: it had become an actual experience. This constituted the new framework through which workers thought of themselves

³⁴ The effects of the transformations of the meaning of citizenship and democracy on the political history of France are at the core of Pierre Rosanvallon’s conceptual history trilogy: P. Rosanvallon, *Le Sacre du Citoyen: Histoire du Suffrage Universel en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992); P. Rosanvallon, *Le Peuple Introuvable Histoire de la Représentation Démocratique en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998); P. Rosanvallon, *La Démocratie Inachevée. Histoire de la Souveraineté du Peuple en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000).

³⁵ Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy*, pp. 34–35.

³⁶ L. Hincker, *Citoyens-Combattants à Paris, 1848-1851* (Paris: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2007).

³⁷ D. C. MacKay, *The National Workshops: A Study in the French Revolution of 1848* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933).

and their relations to society: they were political actors, members of the sovereign body. As a result, their interpretation of socialism, discovered on the many occasions described earlier, was utterly dependent on this new representation of the working class as part of the sovereign.

III Working-Class Socialism as Democratic Political Thought

This junction between socialism and democratic capacity was the main effect of the Revolution of 1848 on working-class political thought. It determined the nature of working-class socialism as a specific socialist ideology, distinct from expert socialism, in the pre-eminence it gave to the collective capacity of the workers as part of the sovereign. Until the Revolution of 1848, the different socialist ideologies were based on the idea that socialism was a social science, designed to explain the real rules organising society.³⁸ Of course, they had normative founding principles, including an interest in the condition of the workers, but the latter were seen as people who should be educated, whose emancipation relied on learning the scientific systems produced by a few great minds. This idea did not disappear after the Revolution of 1848, but the experience of equality gave way to a new understanding of socialism. Indeed, the guarantee of political equality and popular sovereignty translated into a will-oriented relation to the economic sphere: reformulated by workers, socialism became less doctrinal and more embedded in the actual activity of associated workers.

The first aspect of this transformation of socialist thought was the renewal of the idea of association in 1848.³⁹ The necessity for workers to associate was recognised in the Decree of 25 February establishing the right to work:

The Provisional Government of the French Republic is committed to
guarantee of the livelihood of the worker through labour. It is committed to the

³⁸ P. Mercklé, *Le Socialisme, l'Utopie ou la Science ? : La 'Science Sociale' de Charles Fourier et les Expérimentations Sociales de l'école Sociétaire au XIXe Siècle*, Thèse de doctorat, Université Lumière (Lyon) (2001); L. Rignol, *Les Hiéroglyphes de la Nature : Science de l'homme et Science Sociale dans la Pensée Socialiste en France, 1830-1851*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Université Paris 8 (2003).

³⁹ M. Riot-Sarcey, *Le Procès de la Liberté. Une Histoire Souterraine du XIXe Siècle en France* (Paris: La Découverte, 2016).

guarantee of work for all citizens. It recognises that workers must associate to enjoy the benefit from their labour.⁴⁰

During the first weeks of the new regime it was commonly believed, even beyond socialist ranks, that the association would replace the wage system in the long run. Even the very moderate *National* wrote in April 1848 that ‘workers will cease sooner or later to be employees and will be both workers and masters. We think that the association is the way that should lead them to this goal’.⁴¹ This eagerness to promote the association as a peaceful way of reforming society did not stop with the June insurrection; on the contrary, the Constituent Assembly voted that a three-million-franc envelope be distributed among associations. As a result, especially when one considers the great difficulties for working-class activists to directly engage in politics after June, many associations were created.

Most of these new associations were organised following a strongly democratic model. Consider, for example, the Clichy tailors: their workshops were closed by the government in July, but only a few dozen workers (out of a total of 1,600) decided to create a new association, keeping the name *Association Fraternelle des Ouvriers Tailleurs* and settling on the Faubourg Saint-Denis.⁴² In this association, all the persons in charge (the manager, the surveillance committee, and a ‘fraternal jury’ supposed to solve disagreements) were directly elected by the biannual general assembly of the workers. Far from being an exception, this democratic form of organisation became widespread in the associations created in 1848–49, most notably thanks to the activity of former delegates of the Luxembourg Commission. They wrote a template that could be used by any association and that was published on different formats – often with modifications, preambles, and commentaries – and triggered the publication of several handbooks intended for workers who might want to create their own association. The former Luxembourg delegate Antonyn Romand published such a *Manuel des Associations Ouvrières* in 1849, claiming it had been approved by the *Conseil d’Encouragement des Associations Ouvrières* set to allocate the three-million-franc credit.⁴³ In his version of the rules of a workers’ association, it was once again the general assembly of the workers that elected the manager and the board, and Romand explicitly advised that each worker should be a member

⁴⁰ *Recueil Complet des Actes du Gouvernement Provisoire, par Émile Carrey* (Paris: Auguste Durand, 1848), p. 12.

⁴¹ *Le National*, 16 avril 1848.

⁴² P. A. Cochut, *Les Associations Ouvrières. Histoire et Théorie des Tentatives de Réorganisation Industrielle Opérées depuis la Révolution de 1848* (Paris: Bureau du National, 1851), pp. 28–49.

⁴³ The minutes of this committee, which ran from July 1848 to July 1850, are at the Archives Nationales, see F/12/4619.

of the board at some point during his career.⁴⁴ Even if Romand did not express a socialist ideology per se in this book, the idea of a democratic management of economic activity itself entailed a socialist transformation of society. In 1850, another former Luxembourg delegate published anonymously his own *Manuel des Associations Ouvrières*, whose preamble was much more aligned with the socialist language used in spring 1848.⁴⁵ But his proposal was remarkably similar to Romand's: a manager and different committees elected by the general assembly made up of the totality of the associated workers. The democratic experience of 1848, transposed into the economic realm, gave birth to socialist experiments in the form of democratically organised associations.

However, this in itself did not constitute working-class socialism as a distinctive ideology. What mattered in that regard is that the proliferation of associations was accompanied by new discourses that gave a socialist frame to these associative attempts. Indeed, democracy in 1848 was not only a procedure; it was also a particular spirit, a specific conceptualisation of the nature of the relations between citizens. After 1830, the emergence of class consciousness had mixed the idea of class struggle together with political inferiority: workers were subject to exploitation because the law was made by the rich. So for many organised workers, it was self-evident that with the end of political privilege in 1848, the end of exploitation should follow. The republican motto 'liberty, equality, fraternity' was understood by organised workers in a socialist way: there could be no real fraternity in a system in which some people were masters and others servants. In that sense, the abolition of the wage system was both a practical necessity in the new associations and a democratic imperative. This idea could be found in countless socialist pamphlets in 1848.⁴⁶ But more importantly, it was also present in the discourses of organised workers themselves. For example, in 1850, the bronze fitter Jacques Mallarmet, a former delegate of the Luxembourg, wrote in *Le Salut du peuple*:

Proletarians say: we won't stand usury ... we will not depend upon a capitalist for the activity or inactivity of our arms, because we have the right ... to the means of production; or for our wage ... because we have the right to all the fruits of our work; it is a violation ... of the sacred dogma of liberty, equality,

⁴⁴ A. Romand, *Manuel des Associations Ouvrières* (Paris: Guiraudet et Jonaust, 1849), pp. 18–21.

⁴⁵ *Manuel des Associations Ouvrières, par un Délégué du Luxembourg* (Paris: Michel, 1850). See also L. Hocdé (ed.), *Almanach des Associations Ouvrières pour 1850* (Paris: Almanach des Associations). Hocdé was the president of the short-lived *Union Essénienne* – a biblical name for this *Association Universelle, Égalitaire et Fraternelle des Producteurs et des Consommateurs* that mixed quotes from the Old Testament and from socialist thinkers.

⁴⁶ See, for example, the book by the former secretary of the Luxembourg Commission, the socialist François Vidal, *Vivre en Travaillant! Projets, Voies, et Moyens de Réformes Sociales* (Paris: Capelle, 1848).

fraternity to put some in the dependence of others for their material or economic conditions of existence. This one is master of his fellow being who can give or refuse the work, the salary ... There is here a question of right, of liberty, of equality, of fraternity ... The proletarian no longer wants to be, because of the social law, the associate of a boss; because there should be no more bosses, only equal workers.⁴⁷

For Mallarmet, who was part of many different projects launched after the dissolution of the Luxembourg Commission, there could be no real Republic while the system of wages still existed. According to him, political democracy relied on the existence of an economic democracy, which itself necessitated the replacement of the wage system by a system of association, based on the necessity ‘to universalise, to democratise property’.⁴⁸ After 1830, the trade organisations were already supposed to form the basis of a new associationist polity that could be capable of possessing a collective power. But after 1848, the equality of political capacity became a reality for workers, in many different aspects of their life. The authority of the boss, the merchant, the owner, was a direct breach in the logic of political equality: if workers, as citizens, had the capacity to decide, equally with any other citizen, the destiny of the country, then they certainly were able to organise the process of production themselves. Similarly, it should be noted that the authority of expert socialists also became irrelevant: the democratic experience of workers was alien to the scientific logic of utopian socialism.

In that regard, the establishment of democratic associations of production was part of a larger political socialist project. Its specificity was that it would not be realised from above, by the government, following projects of social reformation, but from below, through the federation of associations. Once again, the former Luxembourg delegates were the first to promote such a socialist and democratic strategy. In the manifesto of the *Société des Corporations Réunies*, published in early June 1848, they claimed they wanted to create ‘a powerful organisation that nothing could break’ through ‘the formation of popular sections, unitarily centralised by the committee of the workers’ delegates’.⁴⁹ Their plan was simple:

In each trade there should be a committee in charge of the specific interest of the trade, whose mission would be to maintain the wage and to

⁴⁷ ‘Exigences du prolétariat’, *Le Salut du Peuple*, 5 (1850), p. 9.

⁴⁸ ‘Rachat’, *Le Salut du Peuple*, 5 (1850), p. 34.

⁴⁹ *Manifeste des Délégués des Corporations (ayant siégé au Luxembourg) aux Ouvriers du Département de la Seine* (1848), p. 1.

prepare the association ... Our role is to organise the relations among all the industries.⁵⁰

This idea of an association of associations was not entirely new in 1848. It was the result of the long process described by William Sewell: the transformation of the conception of workers as a heterogeneous social category divided by trades into the idea of a unified working class.⁵¹ But what was new in 1848 was that the individuals composing this working class were now members of the sovereign body. The associative project was no longer the expression of a class interest: it was partly the realisation of the sovereignty of the people in the economic sphere. The argumentation in this manifesto constituted a landmark in the history of the labour movement:

The State, that is the persons who govern the people, exists only thanks to the taxes paid by everyone, taxes that obviously come from the producer ... So the State is the people, the producer. That being said, why would the people wait, maybe in vain, for a social organisation that could at most refund it with a small part of what it gives voluntarily every day to the one who exploits it? No more intermediary between the people and the government! May the people organise itself without waiting any longer! Isn't it sovereign, the producer of all wealth? ... Come, proletarian, come and sign your emancipation!⁵²

Not only did the new regime imply that all men should be equal and thus there should be no division between employees and bosses; it also meant that the capacity of the united working class was unlimited. Hence the association of associations could be considered as equivalent in the economic realm to the democratic state in the political one. Even more, its realisation would render the state itself useless – a feature this working-class socialism had in common with most socialist theories, but with a distinctive element: the state would not become useless thanks to the scientific rectitude of social organisation, but because the exercise of the collective will of the workers through their association would constitute the only real expression of popular sovereignty.

However, the *Société des Corporations Réunies* was short-lived: it disappeared after those June days. The different projects that took over faced repression: they were accused by the government of being political associations, which became strictly controlled after the insurrection of June 1848. Indeed, their project was undoubtedly socialist, especially when they

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France*.

⁵² Ibid., p. 2.

intended to organise not only production, but also credit (i.e. investment) and consumption, as was the aim of the *Union des Associations de Travailleurs*. This association, which brought together 104 associations of production, was founded in 1849 by Jeanne Deroin with the aim of completely reorganising the economy following the principles of reciprocity among workers.⁵³ Some of its leaders, including Deroin and Pauline Rolland, were arrested in 1850 and sent to jail. The last of these attempts to realise socialism through the federation of associations was the *Société de la Presse du Travail*. It was founded in February 1851, and even though its existence was very brief because of the repression that followed the coup d'état, it epitomised the socialist turn in the history of working-class thought. Its board was composed of workers of different trades, and it explicitly aimed to renew trade corporations, but in a democratic manner. It was run by a Surveillance Council 'representing the totality of shareholders',⁵⁴ composed of three workers (who could not be employers) of each trade – a model clearly inspired by the Luxembourg Commission. This council then elected a Social Commission of twenty-seven members for a year, which then elected three managers. In the first (and only) Commission were the typographer Jean-Baptiste Comble, the leather currier Bernard Consigny, the carpenter Alexandre Douard, the painter Alphonse Drevet, the tailor Pierre Wahry (a long-time republican activist and promoter of association), the doctor to the poor Joseph Panet, and the teacher Auguste Desmoulins (the son-in-law of Pierre Leroux). After the coup d'état, a collective warrant of arrest was issued and many of them were deported to Algeria or Cayenne in Guyana.

The preamble to the manifesto of this association, published in its *Almanach des Corporations Nouvelles*, lengthily explained why it was necessary to rethink and renew corporatism. According to its authors, workers' associations could no longer limit themselves to the traditional insurance functions of mutual aid societies: they had to experiment and prepare the collective property of the means of production. The leaders of the *Société* conceived it as an organisation that should inherit the long tradition of corporatism, through its different evolutions. But, as they explained, the Revolution of 1848 had profoundly transformed this tradition:

The political revolution of 1848, by giving to every man, independently of any monetary condition, the right to elect and to be elected, gave back to every citizen the free disposal of [all the revenue collected from taxes]. This great act has been accomplished by universal suffrage. But from this great act

⁵³ J. Deroin, *Lettres aux Associations sur l'Organisation du Crédit* (Paris: Sandré, 1851).

⁵⁴ *Almanach des Corporations Nouvelles* (Paris: Société de la Presse du Travail, 1852), p. 41.

follows another one. Universal suffrage gave to all the taxpayers the disposal of the product of the taxes, now we need a similar institution that makes all the workers participate in the administration of the wealth they have produced. This institution ... is the Universal Association. The workers have understood that; and this is why, to the idea of a pure resistance against the lowering of wages, they added the idea of association aiming at the ownership of the means of production, association that raises them to the condition of civil servants of the corporation, and that makes progressively disappear all the distinctions of employees, bourgeois and capitalists.

In this text, the link was clearly established between political equality and economic equality realised through the organisation of workers. The *Société* aimed to translate democratic equality and sovereignty into the economic sphere, and was itself organised on democratic principles. This version of socialism was therefore both inherently democratic, as it was based on the conception of collective capacity that became the norm after the Revolution of 1848, and rooted in the distinctive history of working-class organisation. It entailed the suppression of the frontier between the political (as the reign of the collective will) and the economic (as the realm of the uncoordinated pursuit of individual interests): the workers were sovereign *as workers* and their sovereignty was affected through the organisation of labour. As such, only a centralised control of the economy by the workers themselves, now 'civil servants of the corporation', could ensure the realisation of democracy with all its consequences.

In 1848, the idea of democratic equality was experienced in the political sphere, understood not only as the election of legislators, but as the spreading of universal male suffrage in many activities. This idea of democratic equality was used to renew the principles and practices of trade organisation. Reinterpreted in the economic realm, popular sovereignty entailed a democratic form of socialism, based on the equal capacity of all workers in economic decision-making. As such, we can say that 1848 gave birth to a distinctive working-class form of democratic socialism in France, which had a great impact on the future history of the French organised workers and on the history of French political thought. Even though the restoration of the Empire and the repression prevented most workers' associations from continuing their work, this conception of socialism irrigated the organised workers' political thought after the end of the Second Republic, up to the foundation of the French section of the International Workingmen's Association. This working-class socialism is too often overlooked by historians of socialist ideas, due to an exclusive focus on great authors in the historiography of political thought. But the penetration of socialist ideas in the working class did not only take the shape

of a vertical inculcation of principles formulated by expert thinkers. It also entailed the collective creation of a working-class thought deeply linked with the actual experience of organised workers. The question of the interaction between this working-class socialism and other ideologies such as Marxism remains open, but one thing is for certain: it should be studied by granting the same intellectual agency to all the actors involved, including manual workers.