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The Revolution of 1848 in the History of French Republicanism

Samuel Hayat

Abstract:

The revolution of February 1848 was a major landmark in the history of republicanism in France. During the July monarchy, republicans were in favour of both universal suffrage and direct popular participation. But during the first months of the new republican regime, these principles collided, putting republicans to the test, bringing forth two conceptions of republicanism – moderate and democratic-social. After the failure of the June insurrection, the former prevailed. During the drafting of the Constitution, moderate republicanism was defined in opposition to socialism and unchecked popular participation. Conservatives and moderates promoted the image of the “universality of citizens” as the real sovereign, acting only through the universal election of legislators and rulers.

During the first part of the nineteenth century, republicanism in France did not have a precise and consensual definition¹. Under the Restoration and the July monarchy, the memory of the First Republic was still much alive, but there was no agreement about the lessons that should be learned from it or the institutions that could be considered as really republican². In particular, the question of the role of popular participation in a Republic remained unresolved. In that respect, the revolution of 1848 was a major turning point in the history of French republicanism³. Before 1848 it was not clear whether a Republic could be based on the sole institutions of representative government, without giving any specific role to direct popular participation⁴. But the events of 1848 and the problems caused to republicans in power by unchecked popular participation led to a conceptualisation of republicanism that clearly excluded popular participation. Embodied in the Constitution voted in November 1848, this new republicanism strictly limited the expression of popular sovereignty to the election of legislators and leaders through male universal suffrage. As a result, the 1848 revolution allowed republicans to clarify their conception of what the people is, and how it should participate in politics in a Republic⁵. While it has never become entirely hegemonic, this form of republicanism has been very influential throughout the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries⁶. This could explain a major distinctive feature of French republicanism: a long-standing distrust of the people, especially the poor, leading to reluctance to accept their

¹ I wish to thank Leslie Piquemal for her careful linguistic review of this article.

² A useful history of the interpretations of the French revolution can be found in A. Gérard, *La Révolution française, mythes et interprétations, 1789-1970* (Paris, 1970).

³ M. Riot-Sarcey, ‘La république en formation. 1848 en France : une interprétation plurielle de l’idée républicaine’, in *La république dans tous ses états : pour une histoire intellectuelle de la république en Europe* (Paris, 2009), ed. Claudia Moatti and Michèle Riot-Sarcey, pp. 57–78.

⁴ The principles of representative government are well defined in B. Manin, *Principes du gouvernement représentatif* (Paris, 1996). For a more historical approach, P. Rosanvallon, *Le peuple introuvable : histoire de la représentation démocratique en France* (Paris, 2002).

⁵ S. Bernard-Griffiths and A. Pessin (eds.), *Peuple, mythe et histoire* (Toulouse, 1997); H. Desbrousses, B. Pelouille, and G. Raulet (eds.), *Le peuple, figures et concepts : entre identité et souveraineté* (Paris, 2004) and D. Cohen, *La nature du peuple : les formes de l’imaginaire social, XVIIIe-XXIe siècles* (Seysssel, 2010) all shed an interesting light on the figures of the people.

⁶ C. Nicolet, *L’Idée républicaine en France : 1789-1924. Essai d’histoire critique* (Paris, 1982).

direct participation in public affairs⁷. This has only recently been challenged by the movement of decentralization that began in the 1980s and by the emergence of new means of participation since the 1990s⁸.

In order to shed light on this transformation of republicanism during the revolution of 1848, I will focus on the way republicans dealt with the crucial question of the role citizens should play in a Republic. I will show that immediately after the February revolution, drawing on the ideas they had developed during the July monarchy, most republicans were in favour of direct popular participation, most notably through clubs, newspapers, renewed trade associations and enrolment in the National Guard. Yet a few months later, republicans had become deeply divided on this issue. After the June 1848 insurrection, most *républicains de la veille* (“republicans of the day before”, i.e. long-standing republicans) formed an alliance with *républicains du lendemain* (“next-day republicans”, i.e. former supporters of the liberal monarchy, converted to republicanism after the revolution), to deny citizens any direct role in public affairs, other than voting for their representatives. I will argue that this rupture in the republican conceptions of citizenship, participation and representation resulted from an interpretation of the events of the revolutionary period (February-June) partly constructed during parliamentary debates about the Constitution. During these debates, a connection was made by most representatives between citizens’ direct political participation, socialism and the June insurrection. The redefinition of republican citizenship that followed excluded direct participation and was centred on the election of leaders by male universal suffrage⁹.

This article will comprise two sections. In the first, I will show that the February 1848 revolution led to a double political process, located both in representative institutions and in a series of spaces open to direct participation by all citizens, especially clubs. From February to June 1848, these two loci of debate went from coexistence to conflict, and then from conflict to National Assembly hegemony. Next, I will demonstrate that during the drafting of the Constitution, the fear of citizens’ direct participation and the opposition to socialism led the majority of the constituent Assembly members to eliminate any features of the Constitution promoting popular participation and to redefine republican citizenship accordingly.

⁷ S. Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-century France* (New Haven, 1981); D. Oehler, *Ein Höllensturz der Alten Welt: zur Selbsterforschung der Moderne nach dem Juni 1848* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988).

⁸ L. Blondiaux, *Le nouvel esprit de la démocratie : actualité de la démocratie participative* (Paris, 2008); M.-H. Bacqué and Y. Sintomer (eds.), *La démocratie participative : histoire et généalogie* (Paris, 2011).

⁹ The history of universal suffrage in France has been dealt with by several classical books, including R. Huard, *Le suffrage universel en France, 1848-1946* (Paris, 1991); A. Garrigou, *Le vote et la vertu : comment les Français sont devenus électeurs* (Paris, 1992); P. Rosanvallon, *Le sacre du citoyen : histoire du suffrage universel en France* (Paris, 2001). A useful bibliographical essay centred on the Second Republic is R. Huard, ‘Le “suffrage universel” sous la Seconde République. État des travaux, questions en attente’, *Revue d’histoire du XIXe siècle* 14 (1997), pp. 51–72.

I. Participation and representation during the revolution of 1848

When the insurrection of 24 February 1848 succeeded, a Provisional Government primarily composed of radical deputies from the former Chamber took power¹⁰. Speaking “in the name of the French people¹¹”, the Provisional government was nevertheless subject to the influence of Parisian armed insurgents, including many workers¹². They demanded – and obtained – the proclamation of the Republic, but the definition of republican institutions was largely unclear. During the July monarchy, republicans had not developed a precise political program¹³. However, two major claims united them throughout the 1830’s and 1840’s, especially during the two banquet campaigns in 1838-1841 and in 1847-1848¹⁴. The first claim was the extension of the franchise to all male citizens – more specifically, to all the members of the National Guard, with the slogan “Every national guard should have the right to vote” (“*Tout garde national doit être électeur*”). The second claim was freedom of association, understood by many – especially workers, socialists and the more radical republicans of the newspaper *La Réforme* – as a way for the workers to emancipate¹⁵. Therefore the nascent republican ideology insisted on the expansion of both participation and representation. As a result, during the first few months of the 1848 Republic, participation and representation constituted the two faces of the revolutionary political process¹⁶. On the one

¹⁰ The history of the revolution of 1848 in France has given rise to many overviews, such as R. Price (ed.), *Revolution and reaction: 1848 and the Second French republic* (London and New York, 1975); S. Aprile et al., *La révolution de 1848 en France et en Europe* (Paris, 1998); M. Agulhon, *1848 ou L'apprentissage de la République: 1848-1852* (Paris, 2002); J.-L. Mayaud (ed.), *1848: actes du colloque international du cent cinquantième, tenu à l'Assemblée nationale à Paris, les 23-25 février 1998* (Paris, 2002); W. Fortescue, *France and 1848: the end of monarchy* (London, 2005); M. Gribaudi and M. Riot-Sarcey, *1848, la révolution oubliée* (Paris, 2008).

¹¹ Every official act or proclamation of the Provisional Government began with this formula.

¹² At the eve of the revolution, there were 342 530 workers in Paris, including 112 891 women and 24 714 children, which amounted to a third of the total population of Paris. *Statistique de l'industrie à Paris résultant de l'enquête faite par la chambre de commerce pour les années 1847-1848* (Paris, 1851), p. 36-55.

¹³ Many books and articles have been devoted to republicanism under the July monarchy. Some of the most stimulating and informative are G. Perreux, *Au temps des sociétés secrètes. La propagande républicaine au début de la Monarchie de juillet (1830-1835)* (Paris, 1931); A.B. Spitzer, ‘La république souterraine’, in *Le siècle de l'avènement républicain* (Paris, 1993), ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf, pp. 345–69; P.M. Pilbeam, *Republicanism in nineteenth-century France, 1814-1871* (London, 1995); J.-C. Caron, ‘Etre républicain en monarchie (1830-1835): la gestion des paradoxes’, in *La France des années 1830 et l'esprit de réforme: actes du colloque de Rennes, 6-7 octobre 2005* (Rennes, 2006), ed. Patrick Harismendy, pp. 31–40.

¹⁴ A. Gourvitch, ‘Le mouvement pour la réforme électorale (1838-41)’, *La Révolution de 1848* (1914), t.XI, p.93–131, p.185–211, p.265–288, p.345–359, p.397–417; t.XII p.37–44, p.95–115, p.173–192, p.256–271; t.XIII p.62–81; John J. Baughman, ‘The French banquet campaign of 1847-48’, *Journal of Modern History* 31.1(1959), pp. 1–15; V. Robert, *Le temps des banquets: politique et symbolique d'une génération, 1818-1848* (Paris, 2010).

¹⁵ As Léo Loubère puts it, “during the July Monarchy the word association acquired the currency of a messianic formula” (L.A. Loubère, ‘The Intellectual Origins of French Jacobin Socialism’, *International Review of Social History* 4.3 (1959), pp. 415–31, at p. 422.). Several studies demonstrate the role of association in the history of early French republicanism, including A. Soboul, ‘De l’an II à la Commune de 1871: la double tradition révolutionnaire française’, *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* XLIII (1971), pp. 535–53; P. Boutry, ‘Des sociétés populaires de l’an II au “Parti républicain”. Réflexions sur l'évolution des formes d'association politique dans la France du premier XIXe siècle’, in *Storiografia francese ed italiana a confronto sul fenomeno associativo durante XVIII e XIX secolo* (Torino, 1990), ed. Maria Teresa Maiullari-Pontois, pp. 107–35; 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), pp. 493–516.

¹⁶ P. McPhee, ‘Electoral Democracy and Direct Democracy in France (1789-1851)’, *European Quarterly* 16.1 (1986), pp. 77–96.

hand, the election of a Constituent Assembly, but also of the officers of the National Guard, through universal suffrage, became the major concern for the Provisional Government and for many citizens. On the other hand, popular participation – through corporations, clubs, newspapers and the National Guard – became massive. However, this double political process was not without tensions, and it soon led to a division between advocates of popular participation, and those rather more in favour of representation. I will try to show how this division appeared, how it led to divergent conceptualisations of republicanism, and what resulted from their opposition.

1) A dual political process

When after two days of demonstrations, an unexpected and spontaneous insurrection proved successful on 24 February 1848, the first act of the self-appointed Provisional Government of 1848 – whose members were mostly former parliamentarians, but also two radical press leaders, Armand Marrast and Ferdinand Flocon, and two socialists, Louis Blanc and the worker Albert – was to announce that the Republic would be proclaimed after its ratification by the people “who were to be consulted immediately”¹⁷.

The same day, the Provisional government specified how this consultation was to take place: a national Assembly was to be summoned¹⁸ as soon as possible. Indeed, on 5 March, a decree established universal suffrage in order to elect an “*Assemblée nationale constituante*”¹⁹, a National Constituent Assembly²⁰. The wording itself was revealing: the only other national constituent assembly had been that of 1789, created by the delegates of the Estates-General of that year²¹. Contrary to the Legislative Assembly of 1791 or the National Convention of 1792, the memory of the National Constituent Assembly was not contentious in 1848. The reference to this assembly could appeal not only to republicans and moderate liberals, but also to conservative liberals and former supporters of François Guizot, such as the creators of the newspaper *L’Assemblée nationale*, founded on 29 February by Alexandre de La Vallette, whose slogan was “Everything for France and by the National Assembly”.

Soon, the call to form a National Constituent Assembly became one of the common features of discourse in the first few months of the new Republic to note the solemnity and importance of this moment. As Alphonse de Lamartine wrote in an address from the Provisional Government to the “French people” on 17 March:

“You are going to accomplish the greatest act in the life of a people: to elect the country’s representatives, to draw from your consciousness and your votes, not merely a government, but a social power, an entire Constitution! You are going to organise the Republic.”²²

This discourse about the importance of the 1848 revolution and the constituent process it had initiated had clear effects on how people related to politics. One cannot understand the massive movement of participation, both direct and electoral, without reference to the widespread feeling of the importance of this moment. While Lamartine equated the constituent process with the sole election of the Assembly, the subsequent use of this

¹⁷ *Actes du Gouvernement provisoire* (Paris, 1848), p.2.

¹⁸ *Actes du Gouvernement provisoire*, p.5.

¹⁹ *Actes du Gouvernement provisoire*, p.55.

²⁰ A. Bléton-Ruget, ‘L’anticipation du suffrage universel : autour du décret du 5 mars 1848. République, droit de vote et mode de représentation’, in *La Constitution du 4 novembre 1848: l’ambition d’une république démocratique. Actes du colloque de Dijon, 10-11 décembre 1998* (Dijon, 2000), ed. Jean Bart et al., pp. 187–201.

²¹ T. Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789-1790)* (Princeton, 2006).

²² *Actes du Gouvernement provisoire*, p.148.

discourse in other contexts led to various forms of popular engagement in politics. In addition to massive electoral participation, other forms of popular participation can be noted. First, there was a massive enrolment in the democratised National Guard, now open to all male citizens, moving from 60 000 to 190 000 members in a few weeks in Paris²³. Second, with the adjournment of the *timbre* and the *cautionnement* that strictly limited the freedom of the press, hundreds of newspapers were launched, especially in Paris²⁴. Third, hundreds of clubs were created and tens of thousands of citizens (in Paris alone) gathered there every night to discuss the principles of the new Republic, the measures taken by the Provisional Government or the candidates to the National Constituent Assembly and to National Guard leadership²⁵. Finally, the *Commission de gouvernement pour les travailleurs*, or “*Commission du Luxembourg*”, an assembly of workers, was created by the Provisional Government on 28 February under pressure from Parisian workers who had already obtained the recognition of the right to work on 25 February, leading to the creation of National Workshops²⁶. The representatives of the workers, selected from the different Parisian trades, gathered in the Luxembourg (the former Peers’ Chamber) to prepare a vast social reform plan for the National Constituent Assembly soon to be elected, under the supervision of Louis Blanc – made famous among workers by his 1839 essay *The Organisation of labour* – and Albert²⁷. So the conjunction of such diverse avenues of citizen participation in this constituent moment created a “mass democracy”²⁸ that expressed popular sovereignty in a pluralistic manner.

As we can see, the February 1848 revolution triggered a double political process. On the one hand, a constituent process was clearly located in the National Constituent Assembly to be elected, relying mostly on representation; on the other hand, citizens’ massive direct participation also located the political initiative in a series of revolutionary institutions. Considering that situation, a number of questions arose: how should these two aspects of the political process in 1848 relate to each other? What was the role of direct popular participation to be after the Assembly was elected? What was to happen if a profound

²³ On the National Guard in 1848, one can refer to G. Carrot, *La Garde nationale, 1789-1871 : une force politique ambiguë* (Paris, 2001); S. Bianchi and R. Dupuy (eds.), *La Garde nationale entre nation et peuple en armes : mythes et réalités, 1789-1871, actes du colloque de l’Université Rennes 2, 24-25 mars 2005* (Rennes, 2006). Louis Hincker has clearly established that the inclusion of all male citizens in the National Guard had an important – but temporary – impact on the conception of republican citizenship in 1848, leading to a radical breach with the “capacity citizenship” promoted by Guizot and the principles of representative government. See L. Hincker, *Citoyens-combattants à Paris, 1848-1851* (Villeneuve-d’Ascq, 2007).

²⁴ R. Gossez, ‘Presse parisienne à destination des ouvriers, 1848-1851’, in *La presse ouvrière, 1819-1850 : Angleterre, Etats-Unis, France, Belgique, Italie, Allemagne, Tchécoslovaquie, Hongrie* (Bures-sur-Yvette, 1966), ed. Jacques Godechot, pp. 123–90; U.E. Koch, ‘La presse et son public à Paris et à Berlin (1848/49). Une étude exploratoire’, in *Paris und Berlin in der Revolution 1848: gemeinsames Kolloquium der Stadt Paris, der Historischen Kommission zu Berlin und des Deutschen Historischen Instituts (Paris, 23.-25. November 1992)* (Sigmaringen, 1995), ed. Ilja Mieck, Horst Möller and Jürgen Voss, pp. 19–78; A.-C. Ambroise-Rendu, ‘Les journaux du printemps 1848 : une révolution médiatique en trompe-l’œil’, *Revue d’histoire du XIXe siècle* 19 (1999), pp. 35–64.

²⁵ Peter Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy: the Paris Club Movement in 1848* (Princeton, 1975); J.-C. Caron, ‘Les clubs de 1848’, in *Histoire des gauches en France*, vol. 1 (Paris, 2004), ed. Jean Jacques Becker and Gilles Candar, pp. 182–8; S. Hayat, ‘Participation, discussion et représentation: l’expérience clubiste de 1848’, *Participations* 3 (2012), pp. 119–40.

²⁶ D.C. MacKay, *The National workshops, a study in the French Revolution of 1848* (Cambridge, Mass, 1933); M. Traugott, ‘Les ateliers nationaux en 1848’, *1848 : actes du colloque international du cent cinquantième, tenu à l’Assemblée nationale à Paris, les 23-25 février 1998* (Paris, 2002), ed. Jean-Luc Mayaud, pp. 185–202.

²⁷ R. Gossez, *Les ouvriers de Paris. 1 : L’Organisation, 1848-1851* (Paris 1968) ; F. Bruand, ‘La Commission du Luxembourg en 1848’, in *Louis Blanc : un socialiste en République* (Paris, 2006), ed. Francis Démier, pp. 107–31.

²⁸ Peter Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy*.

disagreement should appear between the different protagonists participating in the process that was supposed to give birth to a Republic?

2) Two conceptions of republicanism

At the beginning of 1848, republicanism provided no simple answer to these questions. With regard to popular participation, the two principles on which republicanism had been constructed during the July monarchy were the freedom of association and universal suffrage. But which of these two principles was to take precedence, if they should conflict? Events rapidly led republicans to define their answers on that matter. The day after the 5 March decree instituting universal suffrage, the *Société républicaine centrale*, led by the long-time revolutionary Auguste Blanqui, published a petition demanding a postponement of the elections in order to give republicans enough time to spread their ideas throughout the country, which was seen as still dominated by the aristocracy, the conservative bourgeoisie and the clergy. The Provisional Government ignored the petition, so several clubs, along with workers from the trade guilds, staged a demonstration on 17 March. Here, two opposing dynamics were clearly at work: if the revolutionary political process as a whole resided in the election of the Assembly, then the call for postponement could not be seen as valid. On the contrary, if the political process consisted in public debates just as much as in the election of representatives, then organising the election too soon might lead to a premature end of the popular appropriation of the process.

The majority of the government followed Lamartine and adopted the former view, insisting on holding the elections as soon as possible. But the more radical members of the government, especially Interior Minister Alexandre Ledru-Rollin, favoured postponement, fearing republicanism was not yet widespread enough to guarantee the election of a republican Assembly. The final compromise worked out by the radical minority in the government with the help of delegates of the clubs and workers' guilds, was a brief postponement of the elections. In the meantime, Ledru-Rollin favoured organising the clubs into a federation, the *Club des Clubs*, with the *Club de la Révolution* led by the revolutionaries Armand Barbès and Joseph Sobrier at its core²⁹. He then used the Ministry's funds to send republican campaigners to the four corners of the country, support the clubs financially, and publish official proclamations in support of republican candidates to the constituent Assembly.

Thus, very early on, two republican interpretations of the meaning of popular participation were already observable under the new Republic. The first was the one advocated by Lamartine, and more generally by a movement designated as "the party of the *National*", a republican newspaper of a similar political orientation to that of the majority of the Provisional Government. This interpretation was centred on the prompt election of a National Constituent Assembly which would wield all political powers. This did not mean the other institutions in which citizens participated – the National Guard, corporations, clubs and newspapers – were to disappear, but they were only to have a *discursive* function, as places where individual citizens and soon-to-be electors could discuss political matters.

The second interpretation was that advocated by Ledru-Rollin, the "party of the *Reform*" – by the name of another leading republican newspaper – and most radicals and socialists. To them, the political process opened by the revolution involved society as a whole, not just the Assembly -- all the more so that there was no guarantee the Assembly would be composed of "real" republicans. Thus, their conception of citizens' role was not merely discursive, but

²⁹ S. Wassermann, *Les Clubs de Barbès et de Blanqui en 1848* (Paris, 1913).

could be termed *participative*. According to them, in a true Republic, the citizens were to remain the real sovereign and the Assembly was only to be their delegate. This explained the very widespread and distinct phenomenon of renewed interest in the 1793 Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, and more generally in the 1793 Constitution, which gave an important role to the direct participation of citizens³⁰. In clubs, candidates for the Constituent Assembly were asked to swear a pledge to the Declaration, and many clubs used the text as their political manifesto. This also explained the insistence on the theme of direct popular participation in many texts issued by the *Reform* party. For example, the advice given in the official *Bulletin de la République*, published by the Interior Ministry, to help citizens vote, was very ambiguous:

“...this Assembly must work tirelessly to build a solid foundation for democratic society. (...) But this dangerous and difficult mission must only be entrusted to deputies free of any engagement with the past, above all weaknesses, prepared to incur even bloodshed for the complete triumph of the holy cause of the people! Know that the Republic does not reside in vain declarations, nor in the change of personnel. It will only exist for real when, *thanks to the intervention of all citizens in public affairs*, the will, interest and needs of the majority receive their legitimate satisfaction.”³¹

This article was very likely written by George Sand, a well-know female author and friend of Ledru-Rollin. Here, the defence of the Assembly’s constituent role went hand in hand with the promotion of permanent intervention by citizens themselves. In the 23 April issue of her own newspaper, *La Cause du Peuple* (“The People’s Cause”), on the day of the general election, she wrote even more radically:

“To elaborate the work of a new Constitution, France will give a voice to the majority. Nevertheless, this is never the expression of unanimity. [...] The February revolution was the result of a spontaneous expression of popular sovereignty, manifested by a unanimous movement. [...] If the Assembly of May 5th turns out to be the expression of a deceived majority, if it still resolves to represent the minority’s interest, this Assembly will not rule; unanimity will come and break the majority’s decisions.”³²

This text is quite clear: according to the radical republicans, the people were not to give up their political power after the election of the constituent Assembly. On the contrary, they were to be prepared to oppose any Assembly that would not write a truly republican Constitution. Therefore, in a true Republic, according to George Sand, citizens’ unanimous and direct participation was to remain the real source of sovereignty, even after the election of a national assembly.

Thus, given that freedom of association and election were the two key republican ideas under the July monarchy, the first few months of the 1848 Republic put the republicans’ preference for one or the other of the two ideas to the test. As a result, two forms of republicanism appeared. The first was centred on elections; the freedom of association still played a role in it, but only a minor discursive one. The second was centred on the freedom of association, redefined as citizens’ direct participation; the election of the constituent assembly was still significant from this viewpoint, but the representatives remained subordinated to the mobilised citizens themselves.

3) The monopolisation of the National Constituent Assembly

³⁰ J. Bart, “‘Rouvrons 93...’?”, in *La Constitution du 4 novembre 1848*, pp. 17–26.

³¹ *Actes du Gouvernement provisoire*, p.662. The italics are mine.

³² *La Cause du Peuple* 3, 23 April, 1848, p.1-2.

The composition of the newly elected Constituent Assembly, which was in session as of 4 May, partly confirmed the fears of radical republicans: many former partisans of the monarchy, and very few socialists and radical republicans, had been elected. The Assembly's centre of gravity was composed of moderate Republicans close to the *National* party, and the new body proclaimed the Republic on its first day in session. From 4 May to 12 May, the Assembly listened to the Provisional Government's reports, verified the legality of the elections, and discussed its own internal rules. On 12 May, it decided that a first draft of the Constitution should be written by a commission of eighteen Assembly members, to be elected a few days later³³. At this point, the definition of citizens' role in the future Constitution still remained unclear. Since April, the spirit of fraternity had clearly been declining, and many clubs and newspapers had closed down after the failure of a workers' demonstration on 16 April, but the direct participation of citizens had not yet been explicitly invalidated. Several proposals were even made to institute a formal means of supervision of the newly elected representatives' action, for example through a "popular Convention" of delegates of the Parisian clubs³⁴.

But on 15 May the situation radically changed. The clubs organised a demonstration in favour of Poland which led to an invasion of the National Assembly, ostensibly in order to present a petition. In the midst of the commotion, Aloysius Huber, a club member, proclaimed the dissolution of the Assembly and the nomination of a new Provisional Government. After a few hours, order was restored, several club leaders were arrested, and the National Assembly continued its work. While many contradictory explanations of this event have been given, ranging from a police conspiracy to a spontaneous escalation of the protest, its effect on the perception most republicans had on popular participation was clear. Letting the Parisian club members and workers interfere with the work of the Assembly was dangerous and could threaten the Republic itself. On 15 May, popular participation imperilled representation, showing the tension between the two ideas and forcing republicans to make a stand. Many club leaders were arrested, the Luxembourg Commission was closed, the commander of the National Guard, Amable de Courtais, who did not stop the demonstrators from entering the Assembly, was arrested, the radical chief of police, Marc Caussidière, was dismissed, etc. Many radical republicans, including Ledru-Rollin, joined moderate republicans and no longer advocated for popular participation³⁵.

As a result, when the constituent process really started at the Assembly, direct citizen participation was not a popular idea among representatives. On 17 May, the *Commission de Constitution* was elected and entrusted with the drafting of the Constitution text. Of its eighteen members, most of whom were close to the *National* party, five were *républicains du lendemain* (Odilon Barrot, Alexis de Tocqueville, Gustave de Beaumont, Jules Dufaure and Alexandre-François Vivien), and only one of them, the fourierist Victor Considerant, was a socialist. The *Commission de Constitution* worked on the draft from 18 May to 17 June, and Marrast presented it to the Assembly on 19 June. This first draft had been written under the influence of the president of the Commission, the moderate republican Louis de Cormenin. It recognised the freedom of association and the freedom of the press, as well as social rights such as the *droit au travail*, the right to work; the latter was the main demand of the organised labour movement at the time and had been a central feature of the clubs' discourse since March. The Assembly *bureaux* (small, randomly-formed groups of deputies) started

³³ J.-J. Clère, 'Les travaux de la Commission de Constitution', in *La Constitution du 4 novembre 1848*, pp. 89–126.

³⁴ This proposal was reproduced in *1848, la révolution démocratique et sociale* (Paris, 1984), vol. 7.

³⁵ J. Livesey, 'Speaking the Nation: Radical republicans and the failure of political communication in 1848', *French Historical Studies* 20.3 (1997), pp. 459–80.

examining the draft on 21 June, but then the situation suddenly changed. Indeed, the National Assembly, mostly composed of moderates and conservatives, had decided to shut down the National Workshops. According to the representatives, not only did they cost too much, but they also favoured idleness and endangered the Assembly itself by letting unemployed and unchecked workers occupy the streets of Paris. Facing an imminent closing of the workshops, on 23 June, Parisian workers started to build barricades in the city³⁶. A three-day popular insurrection followed, upon which the state of emergency was declared and full powers were given to General Eugène de Cavaignac (a veteran of the conquest of Algeria), who duly crushed the workers' movement³⁷.

The June insurrection has often been interpreted through the lens of class struggle as an event driven by purely economic factors³⁸. However, considering it within the context of the debates over the meaning of republicanism, sheds rather a different light on the event. After the 15 May, most of the clubs and the Luxembourg Commission were closed and many debates were taking place in the streets. A real movement of radicalisation of the Parisian workers took place, embodied in the creation of many *journaux rouges*, radical newspapers advocating for the emancipation of workers and the subjection of the Assembly to the sovereign people. They contrasted the moderate Republic advocated by the majority of the National Assembly with what a true Republic should be, a *République démocratique et sociale*. When the National Assembly decided to close the National Workshops and to exclude unemployed workers from Paris, it was interpreted by the most radical republicans not only as an abuse of power and a betrayal of the Provisional Government's promises, but also as a way to get rid of "real" republicans, to prevent them from exerting a revolutionary influence on the political decisions. On 22 June, one day before the barricades were built, Louis Pujol, an elected delegate of the National Workshops, had tried to convince Pierre Marie de Saint-Georges (known as Marie), a member of the Executive Commission, not to close the Workshops. Marie had responded by ordering the arrest of Pujol and fifty other delegates, leading Pujol to call workers to arms the next day on the Bastille square in the name of the Republic³⁹.

So the question of popular participation and the relationship between citizens and the elected Constituent Assembly were at the core of the June events. While pre-1848 republicanism was in favour of the expansion of both direct participation and representation by election, the events of 1848 led most republicans to focus on the latter, having become deeply suspicious of direct citizen participation to public affairs, especially after 15 May. As a result, the victory of the Assembly over the Parisian workers in June was also the victory of a certain conception of representation that we can call *exclusive*, as it prevents the citizens from participating directly to political decisions that are monopolised by representatives. This victory led to the invalidation of another interpretation of republican institutions and values, based on popular direct participation and an *inclusive* conception of representation – i.e. a

³⁶ R.V. Gould, *Insurgent identities: class, community, and protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago, 1995); J. Harsin, *Barricades: the war of the streets in revolutionary Paris, 1830-1848* (New York, 2002).

³⁷ M. Traugott, *Armies of the poor: determinants of working-class participation in the Parisian insurrection of June 1848* (Princeton, N.J, 1985); E. Fureix, 'Mots de guerre civile. Juin 1848 à l'épreuve de la représentation', *Revue d'histoire du XIXe siècle* 15 (1997) ; F. Pardigon, *Épisodes des journées de juin 1848* (Paris, 2008), ed. Alix Héricord.

³⁸ K. Marx, *Les Luttes de classes en France* (2002) ; M. Agulhon, *1848 ou l'apprentissage de la République*.

³⁹ As it has been shown in recent studies based on the testimonies of June insurgents, most of them declared to have been driven by a political goal, defending the Republic (L. Clavier, L. Hincker, and J. Rougerie, 'Juin 1848. L'insurrection', in *1848 : actes du colloque international du cent cinquantième*, pp. 123–40).

conception of representation that gives a role to the represented in political decisions between two elections⁴⁰.

II. The definition of citizenship in the Constitution of 1848

After the failure of the June insurrection, the hegemony of the Constituent Assembly in the political decisions became total, as most forms of popular participation were invalidated or strictly controlled. Republicanism itself was not criticised, but the deputies tried to redefine republican citizenship to exclude direct participation. Since the Constitution was supposed to form the basis of the new regime, the debates surrounding its drafting were of paramount importance for this transformation of republicanism. In particular, the question of whether citizens had rights that could not be questioned by the elected assembly, and which could thus justify direct protest if they were not enforced, became a central issue. The discussion of popular participation was structured by two competing images of citizenship in a Republic: on the one hand, a citizen who has several kinds of rights, including social ones, and can actively demand that the State take action in fulfilment of those rights; and, on the other hand, a citizen defined solely by his right to vote and his belonging to an abstract *universalité des citoyens*. While both images could be found in republicanism before 1848, the latter supplanted the former during the constituent debates, and thus in post-1848 majoritarian republican tradition.

1) The constituent process (July-November 1848)

The discussion of the Constitution really started after the June days⁴¹. The first draft of the Constitution was debated in the different *bureaux* of the Assembly in July; then from 24 July to 1 August, the *Commission de Constitution* and the *bureaux* held a series of meetings to discuss the draft as a whole. Moderate republicans were clearly dominant in the *Commission de Constitution* (e.g. Cormenin was president of the Commission) but during the meetings with the *bureaux*, former monarchists Adolphe Thiers and Prosper Duvergier de Hauranne, delegates of the third and the fourteenth *bureaux*, exerted a great influence over the debate⁴². They forcefully refused that the rights to work, to education and to welfare support be inscribed in the Constitution. Even though they failed to gather majority support for their position, their prediction that recognising the right to work would generate a new workers rebellion had a great impact on the representatives, as this argument was strongly supported by the memory of the recent June days.

As a result, the second draft of the Constitution preamble, proclaiming the rights of the people, was not composed by Cormenin, a “republican of the day before”, but by Vivien, a “next-day Republican”. The first draft of the preamble had established the right to work; in the second draft, the right to work was replaced with a social duty to charity to the poor. In protest against this second draft, Cormenin published a pamphlet in August⁴³ under the name

⁴⁰ S. Hayat, ‘La représentation inclusive’, *Raisons politiques* 50.2 (2013), pp. 115–35.

⁴¹ On the Constituent process and the debates that took place in the Assembly, see J. Bart *et al.* (eds.), *La Constitution du 4 novembre 1848*; A. Coutant, *1848, quand la République combattait la démocratie* (Paris, 2009).

⁴² P. Craveri, *Genesi di una costituzione: libertà e socialismo nel dibattito costituzionale del 1848 in Francia* (Napoli, 1985).

⁴³ *Petit pamphlet sur le projet de Constitution* (1848).

Timon – his famous alias as a political writer under the July monarchy – in which he denounced the betrayal of his original project. In this document, he reasserted the right to work, underlined the limited nature of the Constituent Assembly's mandate, and called for popular ratification of the Constitution, without success.

Between September and November, the second draft was debated by the National Assembly. During this period, public debate on the subject was reduced to a minimum: club meetings had been made almost impossible to hold by a new law on 28 July, the freedom of assembly was strictly limited, the *cautionnement* rule (i.e. the obligation to pay deposit money in order to publish a newspaper) was re-enacted, drastically limiting the freedom of the press, and Paris was under a state of emergency. When the press decrees were discussed in August, several left-wing deputies argued that limiting public debate during the Constituent Assembly deliberations was a denial of popular sovereignty, but to no avail. After two months of debate, on 4 November, the Constitution draft was adopted; no arrangements were ever made for its ratification by the people, as promised in February.

2) Socialism and citizens' rights

During this process, the question of direct popular participation was never discussed as such. It is only through the debates about the issue of citizens' rights that direct participation appeared, making these debates crucial to the understanding of the respective roles of participation and representation in republican citizenship. Discussions of rights, especially the right to work, were the most important of all debates about the Constitution⁴⁴. As the liberal economist Joseph Garnier wrote in the preface of his compilation of parliamentary debates about the right to work, “the longest, best-argued and most solemn discussion was undeniably the one about the right to work”⁴⁵. This question gave rise to the longest debates in the Commission de Constitution (three sessions), in the *bureaux*, and in the National Assembly (of its thirty-four sessions about the Constitution, ten were devoted to the right to work). This quantitative measure of the issue's importance was reinforced by the aggressiveness of the conservatives' discourse on this matter. From May to November, they argued that the Constitution should be short and only deal with institutional design. They spoke especially virulently against any kind of declaration of rights, and above all the social rights that had been guaranteed by the Provisional Government: the right to welfare, to work and to education⁴⁶. Of these, the right to work was the most crucial. During discussion of first draft of the Constitution, Barrot had already asserted that such a right would tend to make workers lazy and was quite dangerous⁴⁷. After the June insurrection, the vocabulary used by Conservatives was harsher: Thiers called it a “heresy”⁴⁸ on 24 July; the same day, Duvergier de Hauranne claimed that it would be “a disaster for society”⁴⁹. On 26 July he insisted on this

⁴⁴ F. Démier, ‘Droit au travail et organisation du travail en 1848’, in *1848 : actes du colloque international du cent cinquantième*, pp. 159–83; J.-J. Goblot, *Le droit au travail: passé, présent, avenir* (Paris, 2003); T. Bouchet, ‘Le droit au travail sous le “masque des mots”: les économistes français au combat en 1848’, *French Historical Studies* 29.4 (2006), pp. 595–619; T. Bouchet, *Un jeudi à l'Assemblée : politiques du discours et droit au travail dans la France de 1848* (Québec and Paris, 2007); S. Hayat, ‘Les controverses autour du travail en 1848’, *Raisons politiques* 47.3 (2012), pp. 13–34.

⁴⁵ J. Garnier, *Le Droit au travail à l'Assemblée Nationale* (Paris, 1848), p. V.

⁴⁶ P. Rolland, ‘De l'art du préambule’, in *La Constitution du 4 novembre 1848 : l'ambition d'une république démocratique*, pp. 143–86.

⁴⁷ Minutes of the Constitution Commission, reproduced in Craveri, *Genesi di una costituzione*, p.121.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.226.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.228.

position, adding that “enshrining the right to work in the Constitution [...] is a call to civil war”⁵⁰, since “making promises we cannot keep is a lie, a danger and a crime”⁵¹.

What did this fear of the right to work stem from? First, affirming this right meant making promises that could not be kept unless the State itself intervened in the economy, breaking with the liberal dogma. In addition, it was reminiscent of the socialist ideas developed in the Luxembourg Commission. Finally, it would have signified to workers that they could take action to claim their rights and hold the State answerable if these rights were not respected. According to the conservatives, the events of Spring had proved that these three aspects were interrelated. The promise made by the Provisional Government on 25 February to guarantee the right to work forced the State to organise labour through the National Workshops. This in turn gave credit to those who had been advocating for State intervention for a long time, i.e. socialists, and among them Louis Blanc, the president of the Luxembourg Commission. And when finally the Assembly decided that the right to work was utopian and dangerous, it was too late: the Parisian workers took up arms, since they had been told for months that a true Republic was a social Republic, a Republic that enforced socialist doctrines.

So as we can see, according to conservatives, there was a link between guaranteeing economic rights to workers, socialism and direct unchecked participation that could potentially lead to an insurrection. Therefore the logic of rights itself, as soon as it meant that any citizen or social group could use the Constitution against the government, was perceived as a terrible danger by the majority of the Assembly. Broadly speaking, it was the potential for popular appropriation of the Constitution, especially when it could support social claims, which was seen as a threat by the conservatives and the moderates – including some “republicans of the day before”. Armand Fresneau, a conservative deputy, explained this very clearly in his argument against the preamble, on 5 September:

“What is this preamble? It is a definition of society’s goal [...], the philosophical Constitution. [...] Well then, gentlemen, there will be no end of thinkers, or men who believe they think, who will stand on the heights of this philosophy and make themselves supreme judges in the name of reason, who will criticise, censor, and maybe destroy your Constitution, article by article, at least in part. (*Very good! Very good!*)”⁵²

This speech, apparently appreciated by the Assembly, clearly appealed to the conservatives’ fear of the forms of unchecked popular participation induced by the recognition of social rights – here, the possibility for anyone to judge the Constitution and hold accountable the Assembly for its principles.

As we can see, the elimination of the logic of rights from the Constitution – and thus from majoritarian republicanism – stemmed from two different fears. First, the fear of the ideology that was considered to be the basis of the June insurrection, socialism, and in particular its call for State intervention in the economy; second, the fear of direct popular participation. Not that socialist ideology and popular participation were rejected by all moderate republicans: but their combination appeared deeply threatening. While socialism was considered compatible with republicanism as long as it was confined to discussion about how best to reform society, socialism as a basis for popular demands became unacceptable for republicans after the June insurrection. Similarly, popular participation without the influence of demagogues that wanted to destroy what was considered the basis of society – family and property – was accepted by

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.239.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.240.

⁵² *Compte-rendu des séances de l’Assemblée Nationale* (Paris, 1850), vol. III, p. 801.

most republicans. But since citizens, especially workers, had proved to be sensitive to socialist propaganda, their political activity should be strictly limited to the election of their representatives: giving them a power to directly participate in public affairs, especially when it meant claiming social rights linked with socialism such as the right to work, was out of the question. This wariness of socialism and unchecked popular participation was the result of the conservatives' interpretation of the antagonistic political process that had taken place from February to June. According to conservatives, liberals and moderate republicans, during this period, socialists had indoctrinated Parisian workers – especially through the Luxembourg Commission – and club members by giving them false hopes, which had eventually led them to rise up against the Republic.

Joseph Alcock, a liberal representative who was an active reformist under the July monarchy, gave an example of this sort of rhetoric in a speech made on 5 September, at the beginning of the debates on the second draft of the Constitution. He began by saying that since February,

“The Republic has been accepted as loyally, as frankly, as completely by the “next-day republicans” as the “republicans of the day before”; everything would have happened in a calm and orderly manner if only, alongside and behind this complete revolution (...) some had not wanted to attempt a new revolution, a so-called “social” revolution.”⁵³

This distinction between two different kind of revolutions accomplished in February was commonplace among moderates and conservatives. According to them, the two distinct movements, usually called “political revolution” and “social revolution” in 1848, were based on opposite principles:

“The first was a movement of liberty. Its components had already matured over centuries. (...) The second was a movement of violence and tyranny, against which all feelings and interests, all the instincts of family, property, liberty, rose up... (...) The Republic has no graver enemies than these fanatical innovators. Let us blame only them for the difficulties it encounters! They are the only cause of the evils we are suffering from!”⁵⁴

So the social revolution of 1848 was explicitly rejected by this representative: to him it was an unnatural movement promoted by “fanatical innovators”, which was not rooted in the thoughts and traditions of the majority. Accordingly, the cause of all evils was this “social revolution”, advocated by socialist theorists and implemented by citizens under their influence. And the core of this social revolution was the Luxembourg Commission:

“Isn't it the hideous example given by the economic saturnalia spread out at the Luxembourg, where the prestige and the boldness of talent, declaring an impious war to society, promised proletarians a better share of the products (...)?”⁵⁵

This kind of discourse was very usual during the constituent debates. There was a clear rejection of the combination of socialism and direct participation, and the Luxembourg Commission was the symbol of this “false” conception of citizenship. During the debates, the Commission was presented by conservatives and moderate republicans as the ultimate form of political evil, since it combined socialism and a form of popular participation that was based on trade associations – embodying the dreadful confusion between politics and society. The fact that this Commission used to sit in the Luxembourg Palace, the seat of the higher Chamber under former regimes, appeared as an additional transgression. But more generally, it was the kind of popular participation embodied in the Luxembourg Commission that was

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.784-785. See also Tocqueville's speech on 5 October, *Compte-rendu des séances de l'Assemblée Nationale*, vol. IV, p.656.

⁵⁴ *Compte-rendu des séances de l'Assemblée Nationale*, vol. III, p.785.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 783.

rejected, a form of direct participation described as being caused by false promises made to uneducated proletarians by talented theorists who sought to destroy society.

3) The People in the 1848 Constitution: the “universality of citizens”

Nevertheless, one must not hastily assume the constituent process of 1848 led simply to the disappearance of the image of an active citizen: what conservatives and moderate republicans feared was not the people itself, but a certain kind of popular intervention in public affairs. Hence the necessity, in their view, of combining attacks against socialism and unchecked direct participation with the glorification of another image of citizens, and the acknowledgment of rights that would not foster agitation among the people. In order to counterbalance the dangerous image of the *sans-culotte*, the Parisian socialist worker directly participating to politics, elected deputies’ power was to be founded on another incarnation of the people, already present during the 1789 revolution: the people as the *universalité des citoyens*, “universality of citizens”. The first chapter of the 1848 Constitution, called “Of Sovereignty”, discussed on 15 September, began with this article: “Sovereignty resides in the universality of French citizens.” Only the socialist Pierre Leroux attempted to defend a different view by arguing that this formulation authorised any sort of polity, including a despotic one. His suggested amendment, stating that sovereignty “belongs to each citizen, and it belongs to all only because it belongs to each one”⁵⁶, was greeted with laughter and was not even discussed. The universal character of the sovereign – and thus the illegitimacy of any individual or group claim to speak and act in the name of the sovereign people – was constantly reaffirmed during the constituent debates. In particular, conservative deputies forcefully repeated that the Parisian working class was not entitled to claim rights in the name of the people, since the people as “universality of citizens” could not be reduced to a social class. This rhetoric was used for example by the conservative Nicolas Levet on 6 September:

“The people is not exclusively [composed of] this so-very-interesting working class [...]; the people is also this more numerous and no-less-interesting class of farmers and small landowners [...]; the people is all the merchants, all the industrialists [...]. In sum, the people is the generality of citizens, all of whose rights must be guaranteed by your Constitution.”⁵⁷

This proclamation of the dissolution of classes in the universality of citizens should not be seen as unilaterally conservative. Indeed, this phrase could already be found in the democratic – but never applied – Constitution of 1793. Its 7th article stated that “the sovereign people is the universality of French citizens”. But the articles that followed gave an interpretation of this idea that clearly included not only the election of deputies (art.8), but also the indirect election of civil servants and judges (art.9) and, more importantly, the direct deliberation of laws by citizens (art.10). So the idea of universality of citizens was not itself conservative; but in 1848 it was used by conservatives, without any reference to direct popular participation, to justify the rejection of a social interpretation of the people as being the working class, the illegitimation of claims made by individuals and groups in the name of the people, and the subsequent monopolisation of power by elected deputies.

Another reason this idea had so much rhetorical strength in 1848 was that it echoed the spirit of the *printemps de la Fraternité*⁵⁸ (“springtime of fraternity”), the partially artificial euphoria of class reconciliation that followed the February Revolution, illustrated by Lamartine’s assertion on 19 March that thanks to the new electoral law, “there are no longer

⁵⁶ *Compte-rendu des séances de l’Assemblée Nationale*, vol. IV, p.40.

⁵⁷ *Compte-rendu des séances de l’Assemblée Nationale*, vol. III, p.813-814.

⁵⁸ Marcel David, *Le Printemps de la Fraternité* (Paris, 1992).

proletarians in France”⁵⁹. On 12 September, the liberal Gauthier de Rumilly endorsed this spirit to support an attack on socialism and to justify the representatives’ power:

“The great event of 24 February fostered the development of all ideas. Some of them were right and some of them were crazy. It is necessary for reason to triumph in the Republic [...]. So let us no longer try to divide the dispersed members of the same family, known as workers and bourgeois. The people is everyone, it is the universality of equal citizens, brothers endowed with the same rights, owing the same duties.”⁶⁰

According to this speaker, the nation, understood as the universality of citizens, with no consideration for social and economic specificities, was what the Assembly needed to represent. Against the image of dangerous radical workers participating directly to public affairs, the idea of the universality of citizens provided the moderate and conservative majority of the Assembly with a strong basis for their political legitimacy.

However, the idea of the “universality of citizens” as the real sovereign was not solely abstract. While it was strictly opposed to unchecked popular participation, considered as a usurpation of sovereignty, it also rested on two pillars: first, timeless values that were considered universal; second, (male) “universal suffrage” as the ultimate legitimising procedure. According to conservatives and moderates, the vast majority of French people had a “common sense” that made them respect a few timeless principles that formed the basis of society: family, property and public order. Socialism, especially when combined with direct violent participation in the streets or in the clubs, was considered as attacking these principles – and thus society itself. As a result, according to conservatives, since the universality of citizens was the basis of the new regime, these timeless principles – which were the principles of everyone – should acquire a constitutional status. One amendment to the fourth article of the preamble, adopted without discussion, epitomised the desire to remind people that these organising principles were prior to the Republic itself. The article proposed by the *Commission de Constitution* stated that the Republic’s “dogma” (this word was later replaced by “principles”) was liberty, equality and fraternity. Three conservative deputies, Jean Ducos, Evariste Bavoux and Pierre de Saint-Priest suggested adding that it was based on family, property and public order. Ducos’s argument in favour of this clearly showed that these bases were considered “pre-political”, defining features of the reality of the people and of society itself:

“What you are building will not be durable if it were not established on the eternal basis of any civilised society. Family, property and public order, are three conditions without which there is nothing but anarchy, antagonism and misery. [...] Who among you is not surprised by the turmoil disturbing public reason, at least partially? Or by the vigour with which they are trying to replace the most sacred doctrines with paradoxes and fallacies which constitute a negation of any society (*energetic approval*).”⁶¹

The recognition of these timeless bases was actively used during the constituent debates to justify the limitation of certain public liberties. In his analysis of the 1848 Constitution, Karl Marx successfully showed that the text limited every right through abstract ideas such as public order and respect of property⁶². For example, the eighth article of the Constitution, discussed on 18 September, recognised the people’s freedom of association, freedom of expression and right to hold peaceful gatherings, but set the undefined principle of “public security” as a limit to these rights.

⁵⁹ *Actes du gouvernement provisoire*, p.149.

⁶⁰ *Compte-rendu des séances de l’Assemblée Nationale*, vol. III, p.956.

⁶¹ *Compte-rendu des séances de l’Assemblée Nationale*, vol. III, p.855.

⁶² K. Marx, *La Constitution de la République française adoptée le 4 novembre 1848* (Paris, 2002).

The second element that gave the idea of the universality of citizens its legitimacy was universal suffrage. The rejection of direct participation went hand in hand with the adoption of “universal suffrage” as the unique source of sovereignty. The conservative interpretation of the February Revolution was based on the view that it only consisted of “universal suffrage”, and was a political revolution with no ambition to modify society itself. Indeed, the article proclaiming “universal suffrage” was adopted without any discussion on 28 September. As Albert Hirschman pointed out, the adoption of universal suffrage in 1848 was seen as an antidote to direct popular participation, as much as a legitimising principle. By giving every male adult the right to vote, the Provisional Government and then the Constituent Assembly also “restricted [the people’s] participation in politics to this particular and *relatively harmless* one”⁶³. But not only did universal suffrage was used to justify the limitation to political participation; we should also add that this specific use of universal suffrage to vote for legislators was used to delegitimize other uses of the same procedure. Indeed, during the first few months of the new regime, universal suffrage had been used to elect different sorts of representatives: members of the Constituent Assembly, but also officers of the National Guards, delegates in clubs, trade associations, National Workshops, and there were projects to organise votes for almost any position of power or authority. As Courtais put it about the National Guard on 17 March 1848, “there should be no elite men, only men elected by all”⁶⁴. But after the June days, the use of “universal suffrage” outside the institutional election of State authorities was considered suspicious, possibly threatening the legitimacy of the Assembly. During the examination of the first Constitution draft, the *bureaux* rejected any proposition containing the extension of “universal suffrage” and its logic. *Juges de paix* (low-ranking local magistrates) for example were supposed to be elected by citizens themselves. As Jean-Pierre Pagès put it during the *Commission de Constitution*’s debates on 23 May, “one of the victories of the February revolution must consist in giving the people the right to choose the first administrative magistrate, the mayor, and the first judiciary magistrate, the *juge de paix*.”⁶⁵ But in the summer, the *bureaux* rejected this proposal, and the second Constitution draft had these judges directly appointed by the President. The election of the mayor of Paris was also rejected, as was the election of the supreme officers of the National Guard – which was consistent with the July monarchy practice, but not with the principles of early 1848 republicanism.

In addition, even when “universal suffrage” was recognised, the relationship between the electorate and its representatives did not differ significantly from what it had been under the Constitutional monarchy. The election of members of the National Assembly was the best illustration of this. Three constitutional articles were adopted on 4 October without discussion. Article 31 established that these representatives could be re-elected without setting any conditions for this, article 32 stated that they represented the whole nation, and not their constituency, and article 33 forbade the principle of imperative mandate. All of this quietly limited citizens’ ability to supervise, monitor and penalise their representatives. The latter could not be revoked between two elections and their accountability was limited to the test of their re-election; the expression of their constituents’ judgment during representatives’ mandates was to have no effect.

⁶³ A.O. Hirschman, *Shifting Involvements: Private Interest and Public Action* (Princeton, 2002), p. 112.

⁶⁴ *Actes ministériels* (Paris, 1848), p. 172.

⁶⁵ Minutes of the commission of Constitution, reproduced in Craveri, *Genesi di una costituzione*, p. 170.

So although “universal suffrage” was considered by moderate republicans and “next-day republicans” to be the main change brought about by the February Revolution, it was not universal suffrage in general that was considered a good thing, but a very specific use of this procedure, strictly limited to the election of leaders and legislators who should remain independent from their constituency during their mandate. Universal suffrage was the right of the universality of citizens, but only to the extent that it served the purpose of legitimising the State institutions. As a matter of fact, the proposal made by left-wing republican Hippolyte Detours on 15 September stating that citizens’ right to participate directly in the election of representatives was irrevocable and inalienable, was rejected without debate by the conservatives and most of the moderate republicans. On the same day, the idea of popular ratification of the Constitution was also rejected without debate. As later shown by the law of 30 May 1850 excluding approximately the poorer third of male citizens from suffrage, the degree of consensus in favour of universal suffrage in the 1848 constituent process was ambiguous. Moderate republicans, who sincerely believed in popular sovereignty, voted with the conservatives against the extension of the logic of universal suffrage in order to make sure the “universality of citizens” remained exclusively represented by the National Assembly and the President. Yet they did not realise at the time that some of their new allies had other plans⁶⁶.

Therefore, this definition of the people as the “universality of citizens” allowed conservatives and moderate republicans to put forward a conception of sovereignty that strictly framed citizens’ political participation. As the real sovereign, the universality of citizens existed only through the universal belief in the timeless values of public order, family and property, which the State should guarantee and protect, and through the selection their representatives by universal suffrage. Both aspects were intertwined: the notion of the “universality of citizens”, rooted in the values of family and property, was reflected in the collection of secret votes made by male heads of household.

In conclusion, the revolution of 1848 was a major landmark in the history of republicanism in France. During the July monarchy, there was an ambiguity in republicans’ position towards participation and representation, and the reform movement that led to the fall of the monarchy in February 1848 demanded both universal suffrage and the right to freely participate to public affairs through associations. As a result, the revolution led to a double political process, located in State institutions but also in diverse forms of direct popular participation – through clubs, newspapers, demonstrations, enrolment in the National Guard and participation in the labour movement, whose core was the Luxembourg Commission. The tensions that resulted between participation and representation put republicans to the test, bringing forth two distinct conceptions of republicanism. The first, moderate republicanism, wanted popular participation to be limited to the election of the Constituent Assembly and rejected the possibility that extra-parliamentary forces could exert a decisive influence on deputies. A second form of republicanism, whose watchword was the *République démocratique et sociale*, rested on the idea that the Assembly should be subordinated to the revolutionary people of Paris, especially the working class. After the *journées* of 15 May and 22-26 June, the former interpretation of the Republic prevailed. During the drafting of the Constitution, from July to November 1838, moderate republicans and the most conservative

⁶⁶ J.M. Merriman, *The Agony of the Republic: the repression of the Left in Revolutionary France 1848-1851* (New Haven and London, 1978).

deputies formed an alliance, based on their shared fear of the combination of socialism and unchecked popular participation that they thought led to the June insurrection. Against the image of the Parisian people directly participating to politics, they promoted another image of the sovereign people: the “universality of citizens”, united by a common belief in property, family and public order, and acting politically solely through the universal elections of legislators and rulers. This constituted a turning-point in the history of republicanism. During the debates, republicans were faced with a clear choice: either they were to vote with conservatives for a Constitution hostile to socialism and uncontrolled direct popular participation, or they were to join the ranks of the socialists. The choice by the majority of republicans to join conservatives, and the consecutive adoption of a Constitution that gave no place to the direct participation of citizens, had major consequences for French republicanism. This movement gave birth to two distinct republican traditions, marking the divorce of non-socialist republicanism from the participative conception of citizenship, whereas this conception had been part of republicanism, along with universal suffrage, under the July monarchy. This may be one of the major historical reasons for the mistrust of direct citizen participation among French republicans. More interestingly, this question can help indicate where an alternative French republican tradition, prioritising active citizenship over political representation, is to be found: in the history of socialism, or maybe even in the labour movement itself, which could be reread in this light⁶⁷.

⁶⁷ Many studies have been written on the relations between republicanism, socialism and the labour movement in France. Good introductions to this question are B.H. Moss, *The origins of the French labor movement, 1830-1914: the socialism of skilled workers* (Berkeley, 1976); W.H. Sewell, *Work and revolution in France: the language of labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge and New York, 1980); P.M. Pilbeam, *French Socialists Before Marx: Workers, Women and the Social Question in France* (Montreal, 2000).