The Memory of Opposition: The Collective Identity of Louis-Napoleon's Political Prisoners

Stacey Renee Davis
Evergreen State College

On 26 March 1852, Saône-et-Loire café owner Claude Chaseau sent a letter dripping with repentance to President Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte. "He very humbly asks for a pardon for his faults from God and his Emperor," it read in part, concluding, "He and all his family will be eternally thankful" for any executive clemency.[1] Chaseau, who had been sentenced months earlier to official police "surveillance" and forbidden from leaving his home town, was one of 26,000 republicans punished for opposing Louis-Napoleon's 2 December 1851 *coup d'état*. Vanquished insurrectionaries like Chaseau came from all across France, but especially the east-central and southern regions, which had seen the most armed resistance to the coup. From 1852 until 1856 Louis-Napoleon received similar pleas from men who had been forcibly relocated far from their homes, exiled, or deported to penal colonies in Algeria and French Guiana as punishment.

While the history of the failed 1851 insurrection and the prior networks of political clubs, circles, and secret societies which introduced small-town artisans, merchants, and farmers to republican notions have been documented in a series of superb monographs, few scholars have deemed

[1] BB30 474, Archives nationales, Paris [hereafter AN].

the subsequent pardons and the political prisoners' return home of much interest.[2] After all, there is little evidence that many punished insurgents resumed political activities either during the repressive 1850s or later under the "liberal Empire."[3] Given the regime's penchant for constant police surveillance of former political prisoners and its zeal for arresting suspected members of illegal political associations, each pardoned insurgent had good reason "never to meddle again with politics and to concentrate only on caring for my family" as so many pledged.[4] Indeed, at first glance the very existence of the written "submissions" seems proof enough that former insurgents, vanquished both in fact and in spirit, abandoned their political identities as they penned groveling pleas to their erstwhile adversary.

But overt political action is not the only benchmark of the vanquished 1851 insurgents' importance for the history of French republicanism after the coup. In their attempts to

---

[2] Maurice Agulhon, *The Republic in the Village: The People of the Var from the French Revolution to the Second Republic*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Ted W. Margadant, *French Peasants in Revolt: The Insurrection of 1851* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); and John M. Merriman, *The Agony of the Republic: The Repression of the Left in Revolutionary France 1848-1851* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

[3] Roger Price, *The French Second Empire: An Anatomy of Political Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Sylvie Aprile, "La Prison agrandie: La practique de l'internement aux lendemains du coup d'Etat du 2 décembre 1851," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 46 (Oct.-Dec. 1999): 658-79.

[4] Antoine Malot, Pierre Mathonat and Charles Vassy files, BB30 463, AN; Howard Payne, *The Police State of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, 1851-1860* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966); and BB30 414 and 415, AN. Pardoned insurgents had special reasons for avoiding re-arrest; after 8 December 1852, any new conviction for political activity could lead to their deportation to Algeria.

understand how France moved in a single generation from the repressive but widely popular Empire to a relatively open and deeply rooted moderate Third Republic, recent scholars have focused attention on the role of national myth, collective identity, and republican propaganda during the first decades of the new regime.[5] A closer look at the activities of political prisoners during the Second Empire as they served out their sentences and at the specific contents of the very letters of submission they wrote to obtain clemency in the first place reveals that by 1881 insurgents had fashioned a strong collective image for themselves despite their seemingly apolitical post-coup lives. Examined in this light, the role of the punished insurgents becomes integral to the history of the early Third Republic, precisely because their constructed memory of the insurrection and shared identity became key elements in the founding myth of that regime.

****

During the 1850s, two groups of condemned insurgents deliberately worked to shape their collective identity: the nearly 6,000 prisoners called *transportés* deported to penal colonies in Algeria and French Guiana, and their exiled counterparts living in England, Belgium, and Switzerland. Their task proved difficult precisely because the official version of their identity was so damning. Beginning with

[5] Recent examples include Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); James R. Lehning, *To Be a Citizen: The Political Culture of the Early French Third Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); and Judith F. Stone, *Sons of the Revolution: Radical Democrats in France 1862-1914* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996).

the extra-legal commissions that sentenced each insurgent, administrators condemned the insurrectionaries as deviant criminals rather than as mere republicans. Throughout the 1850s, ministers, prefects, and legal prosecutors alike described political prisoners as "dangerous anarchists," "enemies of order," "pillagers," and "conspirators." These words cast the republicans as destructive and selfish, thus denying the political legitimacy of their opposition. Alternately, when the new regime did focus on the political identities of the prisoners, it portrayed the republicans as individualistic "demagogues" whose factionalism threatened to destroy a nation united under Louis-Napoleon.[6]

Deportees in Algeria, who had received this punishment because officials believed them to be especially influential republican leaders, countered this propaganda in two ways. First of all, deportees displayed particular solidarity.[7] Since most insurgents sent to Algeria were placed in well-guarded agricultural villages-turned-penal colonies far from other habitations, they developed a camaraderie that reinforced their identities as men who had toiled for a common political goal. For example, deportees sang democratic songs together, greeted newcomers as close companions, taught each other to read, and drafted letters for their illiterate comrades.[8]

---

[6] Louis-Napoleon's "Political Reveries" and "L'Idée Napoléonienne," in *The Political Life and Historical Works of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte* (1852; repr., New York: Howard Fertig, 1972) explain his theory that Bonapartism united the nation above party politics.

[7] Stacey Renee Davis, "Turning French Convicts into Colonists: The Second Empire's Political Prisoners in Algeria, 1852-1858," *French Colonial History* 2 (2002): 93-113.

[8] Governor of Algeria to Minister of War, 20 Mar. 1852, F7 12710, AN, and Charles Ribeyrolles, *Les Bagnes d'Afrique: Histoire de la*

Second, deportees stressed their status as political prisoners. They bitterly resented even fleeting contact with *forçats*, France's galley convicts. In addition, they demanded humane treatment and adequate food specifically as "prisoners of war." The most dramatic example of this tendency occurred in August 1853, when thirty-two prisoners fled an agricultural colony because they feared a yellow fever epidemic. Rather than attempting to escape, they marched for forty-eight hours towards Algiers, intent on carrying their complaints straight to the governor, before they were caught.[9] Finally, many deportees initially refused to work building roads, draining swamps, and otherwise improving the Algerian infrastructure; as far as these men were concerned, only common criminals labored for the state.[10]

Across the Atlantic, the several hundred insurgents sent as an ultimate punishment to Guiana were even more steadfast in their refusals to work and quicker to stage group protests.[11] For example, when the governor of Guiana ordered prisoners to drain marshland and construct outbuildings for a new cattle ranch, sixty-two of the seventy-two deportees concerned "rose up in mass and protested against such a rule, saying . . . they were Citizens, free men, and that the law did not oblige them to work."[12]

---

transportation de décembre (Jersey: Imprimerie Universelle: 1853), 57, 127.

[9] JM AB 84 263, Service historique de l'Armée de Terre, Château de Vincennes [hereafter SHAT]; Oran 3060, Centre des archives d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence [hereafter CAOM].

[10] Minister of Interior to Minister of War, 23 Oct. 1853, JM AB unnumbered box, SHAT; F7 12710, AN.

[11] Minister of Marine to Minister of War, 30 Oct. 1853, H6, CAOM; 22 July 1853, BB30 955, AN.

[12] Governor to Minister of Marine, 19 June 1856, JM AB 87 279, SHAT.

When the governor punished them, these prisoners wrote to the police commissioner in Paris demanding an investigation of their treatment: "What would the world think? What would France do? If she knew all; if one knew of our horrible tortures?" concluded their letter.[13]

Back in Europe, the insurgents who had fled France or been deported as punishment worked to ensure that the world did know. Since exiles lived far from the grasp of imperial police, they could publicize the plight of their comrades with impunity. Joining forces with the well-established band of French emigrant left-wing intellectuals and journalists who had been living in London since June 1848, exiles in England published a steady stream of pamphlets and journal articles attacking the Napoleonic regime.[14] Beginning with Victor Hugo's *Napoléon le petit*, a quasi-historical essay belittling Napoleon's rise to power, exiles painted the French government as incompetent, authoritarian, and illegal, directly countering the Emperor's carefully constructed image as the natural leader of a united France. Their version of the *coup d'état* thus portrayed the insurgents as selfless heroes who had taken up arms to defend the violated constitution.

To ensure such writings reached the French public, expatriates smuggled playing card-sized pamphlets across the border by the thousands in false-bottom crates, in between the pages of innocuous works, and even in hollow plaster busts of the Emperor himself. Despite constant police surveillance of borders and mails and the frequent arrest of suspected refugee contacts back in France, exiles were highly successful at their endeavors; within one month of its publication 4,000 copies of *Napoléon le petit*

---

[13] 7 July 1856, BB30 462, AN.

[14] Amédée Saint-Ferréol, *Mes Mémoires* (Brioude: D. Chouvet, 1888), 3:195-96.

had made their way into France, and refugee Charles Ribeyrolles' journal *L'Homme* had more subscribers in France than in Britain.[15]

Crucially, exiles publicized the experiences of deportees in Algeria and French Guiana. Both "autobiographies" supposedly penned by escaped prisoners and Charles Ribeyrolles' 1853 *Les Bagnes d'Afrique: Histoire de la transportation de décembre*, which claimed to quote dozens of deportees' letters, gave detailed, stirring accounts of prisoners' physical and mental suffering. These works portrayed deportees as dignified comrades infused with the spirit of cooperation and resolute in their continued republicanism. Exiles bombarded British newspapers with letters exposing the Empire's inhumane treatment of deportees, a tactic which effectively brought their case to the international public in a manner quite embarrassing to the imperial administration; for example, Louis Blanc's letters to the London *Times* on the punishment Guiana prisoners received for refusing to drain marshes triggered several *Times* editorials condemning the French government and a hasty but unconvincing reply in the official Napoleonic organ, the *Moniteur universel*.[16]

****

Despite the efforts of exiles and deportees to shape a positive collective image of themselves and their fellow insurgents, the most important factor in the refashioning of that identity originated not with Louis-Napoleon's opponents, but in the offices of the imperial administration.

---

[15] Philip Stevens, *Victor Hugo in Jersey* (Shopwyke Halle: Phillimore, 1985), 72, and Payne, 156.

[16] *Times* (London), 25, 30 Aug., 7 Oct. 1856, and *Moniteur universel*, 2 Oct. 1856.

A closer look at the "letters of submission" written by punished insurgents who desired clemency reveals that the pardoning process itself actually helped redefine and rehabilitate the vanquished political prisoners' identities. Because the system of clemency affected every prisoner, not just the more ideologically-inclined deportees and exiles in close contact with their comrades, the 15,000 relatively more isolated insurgents whose punishment entailed police surveillance or relocation inside France were touched by the pardons more than by smuggled political tracts or Algerian comradeship.

Of course, the pardons were designed to reflect positively on the president-turned-emperor, not on his opponents. Louis-Napoleon, a great believer in the power of symbol and ceremony, began pardoning immediately after the coup to reinforce publicly his personal authority, his super-judicial status as ruler, and his identity as a paternal leader above the frays of political factionalism. In addition, by insisting on the personal and complete repentance of each pardoned insurgent, the Emperor wished to demonstrate that he had crushed all vestiges of republican spirit by transforming his old foes into new supporters.

However grand the propagandistic goals behind the pardons, the reality played out differently. Quickly the social and economic consequences of the mass sentencing became clear. For example, although the governor of Algeria originally welcomed the arriving deportees as potential rural colonists, he soon realized that the republicans' unwillingness to stay in Africa, coupled with the general incapacity of these small town artisans and shopkeepers to adapt to agricultural labor and the extreme financial burden of running ill-planned penal camps, made the political prisoners a costly drain on his colony. By 1853

Governor Randon lobbied Paris to pardon old, sick, and incapacitated prisoners as rapidly as possible.[17]

Inside France, local officials realized that the price of internal punishment was just as high. *Internés*, the men forcibly relocated inside France but obliged to find work and lodging on their own, could not earn enough to support both themselves and the families they had left behind. Furthermore, many deported, exiled, or interned republicans had to abandon farms, workshops, or village stores that had taken generations to acquire. Even men given the lightest of sentences, those placed under police surveillance in their home towns, were burdened by restrictions on their movement, the stigma of punishment, and the requirement that they report biweekly to the local police, all of which impeded their ability to find and keep jobs. Across France mayors and priests alike complained that neither state nor private charities could accommodate the influx of families newly impoverished by the post-coup repression.[18]

As the economic consequences of the sentences became clearer, the administrators at the Ministry of Justice who gathered the opinions of departmental and municipal officials before suggesting pardons to Louis-Napoleon began to recommend poor men preferentially, paying as much attention to a prisoner's economic needs as to his political antecedents. For example, the 4,204 pardons issued upon the Emperor's 1853 marriage covered not only the old and sick deportees Randon wanted out of Algeria, but also every "poor husband and father of three or more

[17] Governor to Minister of War, Sept. and Oct. 1852, JM AB 83 262, SHAT.

[18] Details in BB30, AN, and departmental archives, 1M.

children" who remained in the colony.[19] This tactic made sense on a theoretical level as well: by concentrating on the present-day needs of prisoners, rather than on their political antecedents, the administration could pardon men it had labeled "pillagers," "anarchists," and "criminals" in the not-so-distant past without appearing to risk social disorder and future civil disturbances.

Condemned insurrectionaries quickly caught on: their submissions soon included tales of economic distress and misery.[20] Since republicans with families received clemency faster than did bachelors, prisoners stressed their roles as breadwinners and warned of dire consequences if they were not freed: "Deprived of the product of my labor, which is their only means of feeding themselves . . .[my wife and four children] are reduced to misery and the hard reality of having to avail themselves of public charity," wrote Allier cobbler Antoine Malot in a typical letter.[21] Even single, childless men insisted they were the sole support for aging parents, sickly siblings, or orphaned relatives. Prisoners' wives, mothers, and children attested to hunger and misery.

Thus the pardoning process itself shifted the identities of Louis-Napoleon's vanquished opponents in crucial ways. As prisoners stressed their importance as family men, hard workers, and key members of their communities, they began to portray the punishment which caused so many financial difficulties as both unwarranted and needlessly heavy. Condemned insurgents frequently characterized

---

[19] Randon to Minister of War, 24 Sept. 1852, and resulting correspondence through 22 Jan.1853, JM AB 83 262, SHAT.

[20] Results from a study of pardon requests from Ain, Allier, Gard, and Saône-et-Loire, BB30 463, 467 and 474, AN.

[21] 7 April 1852, BB30 463, AN.

their predicament as "a cruel position" or wrote of "the cruel measure with which [they have] been burdened."[22]

Louis-Napoleon's emphasis on pardons as proof of his benevolence was echoed, in a significantly modified form, by individual prisoners. Often letters emphasized the "humane" aspect of pardons so strongly that they suggested only an inhumane leader would refuse their request for freedom. A February 1852 letter from eight Cluny farmers in support of deportee Pierre Vouillon exemplified these trends. Together they vouched for Vouillon's good character and asked for "benevolence towards a father who needs to return home under the auspices of your pardon, to work and help to nourish his family." They wrote "with confidence," because they themselves had "seen the benefit of pardons already obtained by many others in the same situation."[23] When this plea produced no results, Cluny's mayor wrote to the prefect that Vouillon's "return to Cluny would be considered as a measure of justice towards a poor worker who has no other desire than to see to the needs of his wife and young child."[24]

This notion of the pardon's justice appears frequently, either explicitly, as in the Vouillon case, or implicitly, as when prisoner after prisoner indicated he expected automatic pardon in exchange for his submission. "Through the sublime trait of clemency you wish to free the political prisoners under surveillance who sincerely swear to never again attack your government, so yes, Sire, I swear," wrote Allier grocer Gabriel Passignat in an example of this

---

[22] Louis Fugier file, BB30 463; Pierre Labaume file, BB30 474, AN.

[23] 16 Feb. 1852, M 134, Archives départementales [hereafter AD], Saône-et-Loire.

[24] 16 Jan. 1853, M 134, AD Saône-et-Loire.

contractual sort of reasoning.[25] In French Guiana, prisoners refused in 1856 to obey camp orders after the boats carrying their pardon requests sailed for Europe; after all, their letters of submission might technically have made them free men. Back in France, as the *Moniteur universel* published hundreds of individual pardons monthly, prisoners like Louis Dupont, a farmer from the Gard, made it clear in their letters they expected to receive pardon as quickly as had their neighbors; others, like interned Gard republican Louis Niquet, seemed frustrated when they had to write anew to remind the Emperor that "I've already asked for liberty several times, without any response."[26] Such examples demonstrate that punished insurgents came to see imperial pardons not only as a chance for freedom, but as a right they deserved due both to their important economic roles in their communities and as a matter of general justice and humanity.

Thus, long before Louis-Napoleon announced a blanket amnesty for all former insurgents in the fall of 1859, deportee solidarity, exiled authors, and the imperial pardoning system itself had all crafted an identity for the anti-coup insurgents quite different from the original official image of violent demagogues and criminals. This collective identity depicted their insurrection as a valiant attempt to defend the nation's constitution against an illegal usurper, portrayed insurgents as proud soldiers united in their determination to survive harsh punishment, and emphasized their individual vital, stabilizing roles in their families and their communities.

****

[25] 4 Jan. 1853, BB30 463, AN.

[26] 21 June 1852 from Dupont; 17 May 1854 from Niquet, BB30 467, AN.

By 1859, the refashioned collective image of the anti-coup insurgents had served its initial purpose: it allowed the 26,000 condemned men to receive pardon and reintegrate into French society with their heads held high as ordinary workers, fathers, and citizens, while simultaneously providing a solid memory of opposition for those republicans who still battled the Empire in their hearts. This powerful identity did not slip quietly into history after Sedan, however, but rather resurfaced to become a crucial component in the solidification of republican power during the early Third Republic. By 1880, after the 16 May crisis of 1877 and the resignation of conservative president MacMahon in early 1879, republican deputies wished to profit from the renewed strength of the Third Republic to spread republican values and culture among France's rural and small town voters through a series of symbolic events, celebrations, and laws expanding education and freedom of the press.[27] Crucially, they worked to build an image of an orderly, stable, moderate, and unified democracy that de-emphasized class conflict and civil strife and rejected violent revolution out of hand.[28]

Since the Third Republic had not had a very auspicious start, born as it was in national military defeat, the bloody siege of its own capital, and a first decade dominated by frankly anti-republican politicians, leaders needed to reach past 1870 to find a suitable "beginning moment" for their republican myth. But the Great Revolution of 1789 conjured up images of the subsequent Terror, while the

[27] Stone, 97; Lehning.

[28] Sanford Elwitt, *The Making of the Third Republic: Class and Politics in France, 1868-1884* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975).

Second Republic seemed tarnished by the June Days of 1848 and Louis-Napoleon's quick rise to power. Only the opposition to the 1851 *coup d'état* fit the bill. After all, the former insurgents' refashioned collective identity emphasized precisely those aspects of republicanism the 1881 deputies wished to highlight: unity, action to defend constitutional law and order, and responsible personal behavior as part of an honest and hardworking family.

Republican politicians could see no better way to tie the new regime to the memory of the 1851 insurrection than to fete former insurgents as heroes. Thus, the Chamber of Deputies overwhelmingly approved the "Law of national reparation of 30 July 1881 in favor of the victims of 2 December 1851 and the victims of the law of general security of 27 February 1858."[29] Each insurgent would receive a yearly pension of 100 to 1,200 francs; upon an ex-prisoner's death, the sum would revert to his widow or children.

In the parliamentary debates on the law which were reported at length in newspapers across France, republican deputies honored the insurgents while highlighting the characteristics of republican citizenship they believed Louis-Napoleon's opponents had embodied: "No one has more right to ministerial aid than these devoted and courageous men who rose up, in the name of the Constitution and at the peril of their lives, . . . [these]

---

[29] Denise Devos, *La Troisième République et la mémoire du coup d'état de Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte: La Loi de réparation nationale du 30 juillet 1881 en faveur des victimes du 2 décembre 1851 et des victimes de la loi de sûreté générale du 27 février 1858* (Paris: Archives nationales, 1992), ix-xxvi. After Orsini's 1858 attempt to assassinate Louis-Napoleon, several former insurgents per department, men prefects designated as the "most dangerous," were rearrested and deported to Algeria.

indefatigable cultivators of the republican ideal," proclaimed the deputy from the Jura in a typical speech.[30] Provincial papers underscored their own republican credentials in glowing editorials praising the insurgents and in articles detailing the progress of the pensioning commissions.[31] In this way, support for pensions both acted as a conduit for images of republican patriotism and tied current republican politicians and newspapers to a clearly heroic past recounted in mythic terms.

Parliamentary debates on the pensions reinvigorated the ex-prisoners as well. Groups of insurgents formed associations in Paris, Lyon, and other republican strongholds to support early forms of the reparation bill, debate the merits of private mutual-aid efforts, plan lavish commemorative banquets, and lobby for a medal in honor of the "victims of 2 December."[32] Finally the Empire's political prisoners could exercise the right of assembly, free speech, and the democratic procedures they held so dear while communicating their interests in a strong, unified voice. Once the 1881 law passed, insurgents proved their commitment to democracy in droves: given the chance to elect three members from their own ranks to the six-man pension allocating commission in each department, they participated with enthusiasm. With only six days' notice, 369 of 502 eligible men in the Allier traveled to the prefecture in Moulins to vote during a two-hour election for that department's commissioners.[33] In the Ain, fifty-one of sixty-five voters made the trip to the polls. In both cases, some men journeyed miles and crossed departmental lines

---

[30] *Le Rappel*, 25 Feb. 1881.

[31] For example, *Reveil lyonnais*, 19 Nov. 1881.

[32] F15 3971; F15 3966, AN.

[33] Prefect of Allier, 8 Oct. 1881, 1M 1317; undated voting list, 1M 1315, AD Allier.

to return to their former residences to participate in elections.[34]

The pensioning process, like the system of clemencies thirty years before, gave erstwhile insurgents a powerful means of expressing and refining their identities. Once the law passed, ex-prisoners or their heirs had two months to mail letters detailing their suffering under the last regime.[35] Most of these 25,409 requests were remarkably similar.[36] Since the commissions determining pension amounts were instructed to take financial misery into account, many ex-prisoners chronicled their economic losses in detail. For example, in the Gard the widow of Lucien Blanc wrote that his family had been forced to sell his store while he hid from police, while Alphonse Brun, who lost his mechanic's shop, detailed years of unemployment after his return from Africa: "having no money, without credit, without resources, he could not recreate his former position, but was obliged to work a day here, a day there, to procure a bit of bread; finally old age arrived, no one would care for him, and he was obliged to enter a charity hospice, where he has lived for the last five years."[37]

Importantly for their collective image, many petitioners portrayed themselves as lifelong ardent republicans. None wrote of their long-ago submissions to Louis-Napoleon, an omission indicating their "repentance" had been merely a necessity of the moment. Indeed, now many described not their pardon, but rather their "return," thus erasing Louis-Napoleon's clemency from their version of events.[38]

---

[34] 1M 1315, AD Allier; F 15 3964, AN.

[35] Prefect to mayors, 11 August 1881, 1M 1308c, AD Allier.

[36] Minister of Interior to President of the Republic, 16 June 1882, F 15 3972, AN.

[37] Lucien Blanc and Alphonse Brun files, F15 4019, AN.

[38] Jean Pierre Boudon file, F15 4019; Jean Duclous, F15 3978, AN.

Furthermore, petitioners incorporated their resistance to the coup into a larger story of continued republicanism. Thus Antony Auboyer labeled himself "a militant republican since '48, who suffered all possible persecutions" even before the insurrection, while Antoine François Cavalier's son noted that his father, who died in an Algerian penal camp, had been head of the local republican party and even a mayor during the early days of the Second Republic.[39] Other letter-writers wrote of continued police surveillance until 1861 or later prosecutions for unfounded "political agitation."[40] Such testimonies strengthened the image of the insurgent-hero by insisting that the authors' republican credentials stretched far beyond the days of the coup.

Petitioners conjured up images of a vague, inclusive republicanism that fit well both with their desire to stress their own unity and with moderate politicians' wishes in 1881 to further a mild, unthreatening brand of republicanism palatable to France's urban bourgeoisie, rural farmers, and small-town merchants alike. Throughout the pensioning process not even erstwhile exiles who had lived in the squabbling expatriate community in London referred to any divisions between republicans past or present or to left-wing social or economic goals beyond the already-established political ideals of universal suffrage, liberty of the press, and equality before the law.

In addition, the 1881 pensioning process reinforced the links between republicanism, respectability, and order that moderate politicians were so keen to forge. The six-man pensioning commissions also had the power to reject requests. Here perceived flaws in a petitioner's post-coup

---

[39] Antony Auboyer file, F15 3979; Antoine François Cavalier, F15 4019, AN.

[40] Jean Pierre Boudon and César Auguste Printemps files, F15 4019; Philibert Chastel, F15 3977; Blaise Artigaud, F15 3979, AN.

politics, morality, or reputation were often decisive. Men who had denounced their comrades while in captivity or who openly embraced the Empire after their pardon received nothing. Neither did those who had committed theft or other serious crimes either before or after the *coup*, even though this restriction often denied pensions to ex-Guiana deportees who had frequently been deported precisely because of their criminal records. Men suspected of adultery in 1881 sometimes lost the right to reparations for their political punishment in 1851.[41]

These tactics fit both with moderate politicians' vision of order and with the former insurgents' needs. Some such decisions were undoubtedly urged by the three appointed local functionaries on each commission, who had inherent interests in preserving the dignity of the Republic by reserving funds for the orderly and upright. Or perhaps the insurgent representatives elected to the departmental commissions were themselves an unusually well-connected and well-to-do subset of their peers, with a pronounced respect for order and propriety. The Allier commissioner-insurgents, for example, were a lawyer, a master blacksmith, and a prosperous farmer.[42] However, a committee of former political prisoners from the Jura openly welcomed the commissioners' culling of less-than-honorable applicants, urging their representatives to "discern and exclude false republicans . . . [and] vagabonds, former criminals who had no political leanings." The expulsion of an accused pillager from a reunion of Allier insurgents indicated that at least some of that department's former political prisoners shunned such men.[43]

---

[41] See F15, AN for each department and corresponding 1M dossiers in departmental archives.

[42] Election information, Oct. 7, 1881, AM 1320, AD Allier.

[43] *Le Rappel*, Feb. 25, 1881.

Thus, with the pensions, Louis-Napoleon's opponents filled the role of republican heroes in ways that strengthened the respectability long cultivated by deportees or exiles and gained through pardon. Indeed, this refashioned collective identity was useful to 1881 politicians precisely because it stressed the insurgents' ordinariness: as the history of the opposition to the 1851 coup became a story of fathers roused from their workaday lives to one extraordinary act, not in revolt, but in defense of the established constitution, these men became models for a republican citizenship which de-emphasized future revolution in favor of a quieter everyday patriotism. In the final analysis, then, the same bland post-coup lives which historians have written off as politically uninteresting were an integral part of the collective image former insurgents and their moderate champions in the Chamber of Deputies wished to convey to the nation in 1881.