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The Second Republic, Politics, and the Peasant

Eugen Weber

There has been debate of late, some of it explicit, some implicit, about the rate at which French country people of the nineteenth century were integrated in the national political process, about the major factors and stages of this integration, and the degree to which country people assimilated the rules and values of the political game which they were called to join.

One view of the French nineteenth-century situation was expressed by Karl Marx in 1852, who found peasants to lack political interest or initiative. Two score years later, Friedrich Engels repeated the observation,¹ and many an administrative report from the provinces confirmed their impressions during the intervening years. When the peasants were not described as indifferent or apathetic, they simply voted as their betters told them. Dependent and submissive, they were citizens in name only: savages more like cattle, to which a guidebook of the 1820s compared them; barbarians in the midst of civilization, as Engels found them at mid-century.²

A more positive impression has been advanced in our day by the authors of two seminal works: Philippe Vigier with his dissertation on *La Seconde République dans la région alpine* (1963) and Maurice Agulhon with the influential *La République au village* (1970). These works and others represent the Second Republic as chiefly responsible for the politization of simple people, not only in towns, but in the country too: the efforts of the "red" opposition to Louis-Napoleon's ambitions carrying urban arguments into village and hamlet, the success of their propaganda evident in growing governmental con-

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¹ *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* (Moscow, 1951) I; "The Peasant Question in France and Germany," *ibid.*, II.

² J. M. Amelin, *Guide du voyageur dans le département de l'Hérault* (Paris, 1827) p. 560; *Friedrich Engels auf Reisen* (Berlin, 1966), p. 141.

cern about “subversion,” and in the rural risings that followed the President’s coup of December 2, 1851.

That view is not completely new. In 1865 already, Eugène Ténot described “the peasant” on the eve of December 2 as committed to democratic politics.³ Two score years later, Georges Renard expressed the same view in his volume on the Second Republic in the *Histoire socialiste*: this was when “peasant democracy, awakened to political life by the revolution of 1848, enters the fray.”⁴ Contemporary scholars are more specific: Vigier, who quotes Ténot in a similar vein, comments that the rural populations which had mostly greeted the new regime with indifference, would rise in their thousands in December 1851 to defend “la république des paysans” against Louis-Napoleon’s *coup d’état*. Whatever their earlier unconcern, by 1851 the Alpine Southeast, at least, bore testimony to the “prise de conscience politique des masses rurales.”⁵ Better still, recent American writings have tended to argue for an ideological penetration of the countryside during that period. According to John Merriman,⁶ what began as “an urban ideology of social reform,” achieved rural acceptance and, in the guise of the Democratic and Social Republic, became “a rural as well as an urban ideal.” The repression of the 1850s would drive the new republicanism underground, but only to lie dormant and to wake again in the late 1860s or the seventies. A subtler and more encompassing interpretation is presented in Ted Margadant’s *French Peasants in Revolt. The Insurrection of 1851* (Princeton, 1979), a thorough and imaginative study where the widespread risings of December 1851 provide proof of rural integration into a “modern” model of national politics, and the details of their preparation show how this was achieved at a time and to a degree not usually recognized.

Other interpretations have run the gamut, placing crucial developments in the 1880s and after;⁷ or even suggesting, as have

³ Eugène Ténot, *Le Suffrage universel et les paysans* (Paris, 1865), p. 23. Maurice Agulhon, *1848 ou l'apprentissage de la république* (Paris, 1973), p. 130, is less vague. He finds north and northwest France impenetrable to socialism and the Mountain’s rural implantation only south of an ideal line from La Rochelle to Metz.

⁴ *La 2^e République française, Histoire socialiste*, IX (Paris, s.d.), p. 223.

⁵ Vigier, *Seconde République*, I, 9-10. For a recent statement of this view see Eric Vigne, “La nation française, une invention de la Grande Guerre?” *L’Histoire*, no. 16 (octobre, 1979), p. 99. For Vigne, by 1848, the Paris basin, eastern and southeastern France “already participated in the industrial revolution and in national political life,” while the Center and the Southwest were first to react against Louis Napoleon’s *coup d’état*, with the peasant Southeast relaying their rising. Conclusion: “les conflits politiques nationaux y sont perçus dans toutes leurs conséquences. . . .”

⁶ In Roger Price, ed., *Revolution and Reaction* (London, 1975), p. 211.

⁷ As I did in *Peasants Into Frenchmen* (Stanford, 1976).

recent contributions to the ethnologically oriented *Etudes rurales*, that (in one sense) they never took place at all, and that village politics have continued *sui generis*, with values, aims and points of reference steadfastly different from those of urban-dominated national politics.

Each of these theses carries some conviction and reflects a part of the truth. I am particularly impressed by the argument for long-lasting stability presented by Claude Karnoouh, Jean-Claude Boutron, Claude Mesliand and others, for whom "politics" in the villages, national politics that is, continues to "come from outside," while the phraseology and institutions of the central power mask the persistent reality of local concerns and "the attempt to [maintain] local autonomy."⁸ My only answer to them would be that, while their facts convince, they remain a matter of degree. Rural politics continues a question of clans and personalities to an extent incomparably greater than can be found in its urban counterpart, but it is not autonomous, nor is it perceived to be. National issues, even as camouflage for local ones, cannot be avoided; local (and personal) affairs, once largely autonomous indeed, are forced to ride on national forces. To some extent this had been always so, but for a long time that extent was so slight that a sense of autonomy was warranted and the wider world could properly be viewed as largely irrelevant. Then, at some point, village and hamlet not only lost their political "autonomy" but became aware of the fact. Such awareness would make a deal of difference, and all parts of the French countryside live with it by now.

The question just when this happened is hard to answer. In a realm where local factors loom so large and particular experience overshadows the general, no one interpretation can tell the story whole. But, since the mid-nineteenth century is the first arguable (and forcefully argued) time for which the claim is made, I shall examine the merits of the theory that explains the peasant risings of 1851 by their participants' "republican convictions,"⁹ thus holding for fairly widespread politization of rural France being achieved in the three or four years before December 2.

"Politics," of course, is an ambiguous term. Interest in, concern with, the affairs of the community have never been absent from

⁸ Claude Karnoouh, "La démocratie impossible," *Etudes rurales* (octobre-décembre, 1973), esp. p. 40; Claude Mesliand, "Gauche et droite dans les campagnes provençales sous la 3^e République," *Etudes rurales* (juillet-décembre, 1976), esp. p. 210; J.-C. Boutron, "Transformations et permanences des pouvoirs dans une société rurale, *ibid.*, esp. p. 147.

⁹ Maurice Agulhon in Etienne Juillard, ed., *Histoire de la France rurale*, III (1976), 175.

village or parish. But to the nineteenth century (as to its predecessors) politics was about the state; and politization was the awareness that national affairs were of as much concern to the individual and to the locality as those of the local community were. Indeed, more. "Politics" meant national politics, implied levels of (apparent) abstraction absent heretofore and an interpretation of specific local issues in more general terms. Politization meant first of all the recognition that village affairs were directly affected by powers and forces well beyond the village, then action in consequence: in elections, in parliament, in Paris, in a political and economic marketplace wider by far than anything the village had considered before.¹⁰

What did the events and experiences of 1848-51 contribute to a process of politization that would bring rural France closer, at least, to the attitudes just described? In March 1848, Charles de Rémusat returned from Paris to his country estate, not many miles from Toulouse: "no part of France was less politicized. . . ." Yet, even there, "without understanding anything, the peasants well knew that what had happened affected the poor, that they would count for something, and that their condition would change."¹¹ In a number of places, as we know, this impression led to attempts to accomplish that change at once, and in the most straightforward terms. Not far from Rémusat's Lafitte, a small-scale *peur* terrorized the south of the Haute-Garonne through March and April of 1848. The villagers of the Barousse, in Hautes-Pyrénées, encouraged by the change of regime, swept into the plains below to pillage the fatter lands around Saint-Gaudens and had to be chased out by troops.¹² As Agulhon observes (in another context), while the educated looked to elections to ensure social progress, the uneducated felt that "the exercise of social democracy began at once."¹³ That is one way of putting it. At any rate, since the uneducated were the vast majority, those who looked to elections faced pressing problems.

The little towns, especially the bigger little towns like Rémusat's sous-préfecture, Muret, were touched by Paris notions. The villages

¹⁰ Charles, Louise, and Richard Tilly, *The Rebellious Century, 1830-1930* (Harvard, 1975), p. 289, provide an even more stringent definition of politics, which for them "refers to the pursuit of explicit, long-range programs concerning the distribution and exercise of power at the national or international scale."

¹¹ Charles de Rémusat, *Mémoires de ma vie*, IV (Paris, 1962), 281, 283.

¹² See Jacques Godechot, ed., *La Révolution de 1848 à Toulouse et dans la Haute-Garonne* (Toulouse, 1948), pp. 152-54.

¹³ Agulhon, *1848*, p. 196.

were not. George Sand agreed on this with Rémusat. "How do you expect the rural populations to understand from one day to the next that their parish pump is not the center of the world? The revolution has caught us short. The elections come too fast, especially for the peasant who does not think fast."¹⁴

Something had to be done about this, and the Republicans did it on two levels. On the didactic front, special delegates were appointed or sent out as proselytizers: the minister of public instruction, Carnot, called on schoolteachers to become the propagandists of the democratic republic—some of these heeded his call¹⁵—and electoral clubs were set up wherever possible, "the better to judge the particular value of candidates."¹⁶ But the missionary delegates sent out by the Republic often sent back discouraging reports. "Most country people," wrote one from Montastruc (Haute-Garonne) in April, "know practically none of the candidates," and worse, care little about their new electoral rights.¹⁷ They had to be enlightened more directly, and the Republicans set out to do that too. As a local historian has put it, "l'on constate de la part de l'autorité une certaine pression sur les électeurs."¹⁸

The Second Republic took its governmental prerogatives seriously. The elections were postponed. Mayors and municipal councils were removed and replaced all over the place. The phrase that recurs in local studies of this period is "hecatomb of mayors"—like that of 170 of the 208 communes in the Puy-de-Dôme.¹⁹ Mayors would tell their charges how to vote; friendly mayors prepared friendly voters.²⁰ But however determined the Republicans, things did not always go smoothly. Thus, at Cusset (Allier), the destituted mayor, Arloing, a notary and a member of the General Council,

¹⁴ Rémusat, *Mémoires*, IV, 282. George Sand, *Correspondance*, VIII (1971), 349 (March 17, 1848).

¹⁵ Rémusat, *Mémoires*: some schoolteachers "transformés par la circulaire de Carnot se mirent à déclamer au hasard contre la réaction, contre la grande propriété, contre moi. . . ." According to M. Greslé-Bouignol, "La Révolution de 1848 dans le Tarn," *Revue historique et littéraire du Languedoc* (1948), no. 19, p. 298, the whole Southwest, directed from Toulouse, was being covered by official emissaries to private and public teachers, "à l'effet de leur faire connaître, pour ce qui les concernait, les ordres de M. le Ministre de l'Intérieur relativement à l'établissement de la République." For use of *instituteurs* in disseminating official propaganda, see the report of the commissaire de la République in Meuse to minister of interior, May 25, 1848, in *La Révolution de 1848* (janvier, 1910), p. 398.

¹⁶ Aimé Autrand, *Un siècle de politique en Vaucluse* (Avignon, 1958) p. 36.

¹⁷ Quoted in Godechot, *La Révolution*, p. 216.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Robert Schnerb, "La Seconde République dans le département du Puy-de-Dôme," *La Révolution de 1848* (1925), pp. 945ff.

²⁰ That, indeed, was why the voting on April 23 was set in the *chef-lieu de canton*, hoping to remove electors from the influence of their village notables.

refused to give up his post, ignoring or forcibly expelling several official messengers until a military detachment finally forced him out in mid-March.²¹ Elsewhere, things looked better. From Nohant, George Sand reported that her son, Maurice, appointed mayor by the new authorities, found only friendliness and confidence, although he had “to work to enlighten nine hundred charges and two hundred electors who all say ‘Vive la République, down with taxes,’ and will not hear anything else.” Even so, “if only every parish, like Nohant, would place absolute confidence in a tested friend!”²² But one could not always know in what notable, in what friend, the trust would in the end be placed. A year after these high hopes, George Sand was bitter: “Les gens de Nohant ont voté comme des porcs.”²³

One can think of several explanations. One is suggested by Rémusat’s comment on the 1849 elections, when it seemed that (Alsace apart) it was in the poorest and most backward areas that “un mauvais esprit de socialisme, et même de communisme, a paru infecter et dominer les populations.” True, in general, the big cities leaned towards democracy. But elsewhere, “la démagogie est loin d’avoir, en 1849, marché de pair avec la civilisation.”²⁴ So, a relatively enlightened electorate (if, *pace* Sand, that of Nohant might be so judged) could actually have voted in terms of its perceived interests.

More likely, though, what Sand had described not long before as “une population à l’état d’enfance,” because of its primitive understanding of politics, approached the situation in terms of their experience: savings exhausted, credit tight and ruinously expensive, no means to cover their backs or to repair their homes, “that does not make them love the little Republic about which they don’t understand a thing.” The little Republic, for the peasants, “c’était l’impôt et le resserrement de l’argent.”²⁵ Their reaction to this seems nowise infantile; many listened to the siren songs of those who promised them an end to all their troubles. In Creuse the procureur-général of Limoges deplored “the unfortunate influence of veillées,” where publications sent from Paris by migrant masons were read and discussed. Near Brive, in Corrèze, he reported “des

²¹ Georges Rougeron, *La Révolution de 1848 à Moulins et dans le département de l’Allier* (Moulins, 1950), p. 17. Arloing would be one of the conservative candidates in the April elections.

²² Sand, *Correspondance*, VIII, 332 (March 9, 1848).

²³ Sand, *Correspondance*, IX (1972) 148 (May 16, 1849).

²⁴ Rémusat, *Mémoires*, IV, 417.

²⁵ Sand, *Correspondance*, VIII, 727, 731.

lectures socialistes faites à haute voix au milieu d'un marché." Everywhere, an "incessant, mysterious, indistinguishable socialist propaganda."²⁶ And yet, if one believes the procureur-général, the peasants who voted in such numbers for the Reds had no real understanding of the Reds' "political" ideas. Such country folk were against the rich, they had voted against *lo listo de lo ritso* (as the *démocs-socs* had dubbed it), they hoped for a share of bourgeois property; and the accusation of being *des partageux*, so often rejected by the Reds, was taken as a promise by sharecroppers and tenant-farmers eager for property of their own. The peasants hoped, of course, to see an end to debts and taxes—their debts and taxes. Witness the fact that, when the red electoral victories became known, some sharecroppers refused to pay dues and taxes. But, above all, claims the procureur-général, "pour eux, la spoliation est au bout de tous ces systèmes prétendus égalitaires."²⁷ After all, why not? When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the *gros bourgeois*?

The fears of the *nantis* were exaggerated,²⁸ but largely because the hopes of the poor were impossible to realize, not because the hopes were not there, had not always been there (however vaguely, in the realm of fancy and folktale), and were not being fed by radical promises. In November 1850, Dr. Victorin Mazon of Largentière spoke at Laurac (Ardèche) about what the new world would entail: "the poor will pay practically no taxes, salt will be sold at 5 cents a pound, the rich who now dine on their chickens will be justly reduced to eating only the potatoes that the people eat. . . ."²⁹

²⁶ AN BB³⁰ 361 and BB³⁰ 378, procureur-général, Limoges, April 1849. Since the peasants spoke patois, articles would have to be translated. Hence many attempts to write in dialect: see *La Provence*, Limoges, 7 and 13 May, 1849.

²⁷ Jacques Bouillon, "Les élections législatives du 13 mai en Limousin," *Bulletin de la société archéologique et historique du Limousin* (1954), pp. 492-93. In *Seconde République*, II, 442, Vigier also attributes real importance to "the wide dissemination of revolt against *les Gros*."

²⁸ Sometimes very much so. In May 1848, Nassau Senior, travelling by train from Boulogne to Paris meets a gentleman who tells him that, in his village near Abbeville, the people "had decided on the impropriety of any man's being richer than his neighbor; and had expressed their intention of pillaging his house and that of his *fermier*. . . . In a short time . . . the country would be unsafe for the rich; they must live in the towns, where they could defend one another." *Journals Kept in France and Italy* (London, 1871) I (May 14, 1848). This, even though not all urban radicals respected the niceties of address like the socialists of Clermont-Ferrand who cried "Vive la République démocratique et sociale! A bas le Préfet! A bas Monsieur le Comte! A bas Monsieur le Marquis!" AN BB³⁰ 365, procureur-général Riom, March 3, 1849.

²⁹ Elie Reynier, *La Seconde République dans l'Ardèche* (Privas, 1948) p. 94. Around Paris, at least, the propaganda hewed closer to reality, though not necessarily to possibility: "Le socialisme fait des progrès dans les environs des campagnes de Paris," noted Castellane in May 1849. Its pamphlets do not oppose property, but propose that small property owners and

John Merriman has written of a radicalization of the Limousin between February 1848 and May 1849—a prelude presumably of later, similar radicalizations of other rural areas.³⁰ But what did such radicalization entail? Was it more than the liberation and encouragement of traditional and well-founded resentments against exploiting and usurious townsmen, against encroaching outsiders, against misery and unusually hard times?³¹ Was it what Charles Tilly once described as a reactionary and localized protest, or what Charles, Louise, and Richard Tilly in a later work refined into the concept of pre-political action?³² To put the question differently, how *démoc-soc* were those who voted *démoc-soc*; how much (and what) of the political ideology of their “party” did they know or care about?

I shall eventually argue that it was little indeed—nor do I consider that disgraceful. For the moment, let us search for more evidence. In August 1849 at Eaux-Bonnes in the Pyrénées, Nassau Senior asked his guide if the Republic was popular: “O yes, he said, we all voted for Louis Napoleon. . . .” In a village of the Hautes-Pyrénées he found the mayor (who had also voted for Louis Napoleon) quite indifferent to politics, quite ignorant of the departmental representatives. This in a part of France whose villages he judged “by far the most civilized I have seen on the Continent except in Holland and Switzerland.”³³ Halfway across the country, among the “fanatical and ignorant” *ardéchois*, mayors and officials were no better versed.³⁴ In Gascony one hears what to the nineteenth-century French historian will soon become a familiar litany: “The country populations are utterly indifferent to political struggles that have nothing to do with either their interests or their habits.”³⁵ Even in 1851 the procureur-général of Aix, writing about that eminently political document, the petition for a revision of the Constitution, uttered a salutary warning: many of those that signed it would as

peasants would pay lower taxes, priests would receive salaries sufficient to abandon their resented *casuel*, the *garde-champêtre* would be paid by the state not the commune, and there would be hospitals and free schools for all. “C’est avec de pareils leurres que le socialisme fait des prosélytes.” *Journal du Maréchal de Castellane*, IV (1896), 152.

³⁰ In Price, *Revolution*, p. 212.

³¹ For some wise observations on this score see Roger Price, *The French Second Republic* (London, 1972), pp. 298-300.

³² Tilly, *Rebellious Century*, p. 289.

³³ Senior, *Journals*, I, 180-81, 187-89.

³⁴ Henri Chevreau, the republican prefect of Ardèche, in April 1849; the mayors of Borne and of Saint-Etienne-de-Lugdarès, in November 1849; cited by Reynier, *Seconde République*, pp. 48, 88.

³⁵ Procureur-général, Agen, June 30, 1850. AN BB ³⁰ 370.

readily sign a petition to opposite ends. "Do not take a signature as having a political significance. They do it by amenity and political indifference."³⁶

There were the clubs, of course, and many sprang up in very small localities. In the Vaucluse, a historian of the department's politics affirms that every commune had one in 1848. But they were not consulted when it came to drawing up the republican ticket headed by Agricol Perdiguier.³⁷ Peter McPhee has shown a similar efflorescence of clubs in the Basses-Pyrénées.³⁸ We have a description of the club at Thuir, painted by the man who ran the local school, Sauveur Morer: it included "plusieurs de mes amis, presque tous propriétaires, le nouveau juge de paix, le nouveau maire et adjoint . . ."—the elite of the bourg's Republicans. Its daily meetings attracted "people of every condition: besides the members of the local administration and the judge, numerous *propriétaires* and land-workers." Morer would read the newspapers "and comment their leading articles to make them understandable to all."³⁹

Maurice Agulhon attributes much of the cultural-political development of mid-nineteenth-century Var to the most popular "clubs" there—the *chambrées*—through which national ideas filtered into the villages and whose members "opened themselves to novelty, to movement, to independence."⁴⁰ We do well to remember, however, that the villagers of lower Provence, by Agulhon's own admission, behaved more like city than like country people, and that their model of political impregnation would be more urban than typically rural.⁴¹ Besides, there is an aspect of such clubs that has attracted little or no attention, and that surely deserves a thought. In February 1850 the procureur-général of Aix, a bitter foe of *chambrées*, which he treats consistently as troughs of political perdition, reports

³⁶ Procureur-général, Aix, July 7, 1851. AN BB ³⁰ 370. Indifference melted before measures like the new hunting law of August 1851, which raised the cost of a permit to 25 francs, thus depriving most peasants of the chance to hunt legally and creating a host of poachers, fabricants of gunpowder, and smugglers, all at odds with the law.

³⁷ Autrand, *Un siècle*, p. 36. Democracy was not the strongest characteristic of these clubs. In April 1849, the republican list for Ardèche was decided in a meeting held at Privas which excluded a great many outlying supporters, much to their displeasure, and led "to divisions that will hurt the party." Felix Bonnaud, *La Révolution de 1848 à Bourg-Saint-Andéol* (Privas, 1905), pp. 11-13.

³⁸ In an unpublished dissertation: *The Seed-time of the Republic: Society and Politics in the Pyrénées-Orientales, 1846-1852*, University of Melbourne, 1977. I owe the opportunity of reading it to John Merriman.

³⁹ AN F ¹⁷ 12746. Dossier Morer. The club would be dissolved by the authorities in January 1849.

⁴⁰ Agulhon, *République au village*, pp. 208, 230, 245.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 264 and, especially, in Juillard, *France rurale*, III, 509.

on five *chambrées* of Puymoisson of which two—*la Fraternité* and *les descadaires*, “composed of men belonging to the exalted opinion”—had been ordered closed. The official inquiry would show “that local hatreds alone had dominated these gatherings where one had become red only by opposition to the commune’s administration which held the other three *chambrées* under its influence.”⁴²

It was not ideas that inspired the *chambrées* of Puymoisson, but local divisions and “local hatreds;” and the exalted opinions for which their members were denounced were simply opinions different from those of other fellow villagers. A later report from the same source provides an even clearer picture: “Les rivalités d’influences, l’ambition des fonctions municipales, établissent deux partis dans chaque village,” explained the procureur-général of Aix on June 3, 1851. “L’un de ces partis prend pour bannière les principes professés par le gouvernement, l’autre arbore ceux de l’opposition politique. Tous les mécontents s’enrolent dans les *chambrées*. . . .”⁴³ We have seen that not only *mécontents* joined *chambrées*, but the rest makes sense. So the political—ideological—coloring was incidental. Which need not mean it could not prove effective, but suggests caution in the assumptions we make.

It is hard to tell the effect of clubs (open or secret) on the politically uninitiated.⁴⁴ The humble may well have enjoyed an extension of traditional sociability, especially in the company of their social betters. But how many of the latter’s ideas rubbed off on them and in what form? One may as easily imagine that such unwonted extensions of sociability helped establish new or closer personal relations which would be simply variants of quite traditional kinds of deference and allegiance.

Pierre Joigneaux, well placed to evaluate the impact of Montagnard indoctrination efforts, did not think much of them. Looking back to those days, he saw the clubs as platforms for mediocrities, “when they could have served instruction.” In the countryside, the clubs “were cold”: a few men of good will, most of them incapable of

⁴² AN BB 30 370. Feb. 14, 1850.

⁴³ AN BB 30 370.

⁴⁴ Margadant (*French Peasants*, chaps. 6 and 7) describes in detail the organization and network of Montagnard societies in the areas where insurrections broke out in December 1851. What strikes me is their fragility, their *friability*, when not sustained by considerations of personal or collective solidarity. Such organizations are sapped by the reluctance of members to pay dues or to continue active in enterprises requiring sustained commitment. See Emile Guillaumin’s account of his own syndical adventure half a century later, in *Le Syndicat de Baugignoux* (Paris, 1912).

improvisation, limited themselves to reading official proclamations and newspaper articles.⁴⁵ The reminiscences of Morer seem to bear him out. In a village society that never saw a paper, the novelty must have been attractive. The political effects remain dubious—and certainly difficult to discern.

So, what evidence we have is hardly conclusive. Arguments have been advanced for the effectiveness of red propaganda, in clubs and elsewhere, based not only on the fact of the December risings but on the assumption that exposure to political debate must have left some mark. That, however, is not entirely certain. In mid-1851 a company of sappers suspected of republican infection, was posted in disgrace from Montpellier to Rodez. The Republicans of Rodez initiated a number of its non-commissioned officers into the Jeune-Montagne before the company was posted on to Paris, where it would take an active part in the operations of the *coup d'état*.⁴⁶ How deeply affected were the *sous-officiers* who had joined the Jeune-Montagne? More to my point, perhaps, is what happened—or what failed to happen—in the Allier, where the chief secret society was la Marianne, which recruited most heavily among the miserably exploited peasants of the western part of the *arrondissement* of Moulins. The areas of Gannat and La Palisse, where Republicans were best entrenched, were not touched by it. Yet after December 2, the lands of the Mariannes, dominated by noble landowners and by their stewards, remained quiet.⁴⁷ Their peasantry, whatever its clubability, lacked leadership. Insurrection was left to those parts of the department where republican notables led the risings.

This recalls the crucial role notables played and the frequent coincidence between the absence of republican notables and the absence of republican risings. Agulhon insists that by December 1851, in a lot of places, leaders from the common people had taken over from the bourgeoisie.⁴⁸ That depends on what we recognize as *cadres populaires*, and I would argue (and will argue subsequently in greater detail) that the leadership functions of the lower orders remained slight throughout. But Agulhon himself tells us that at La Garde Freinet (Var) most of the radical leaders were the offspring of wealthy landowners (who had made money in cork manufactur-

⁴⁵ Pierre Joigneaux, *Souvenirs historiques*, I (Paris, 1891), 173. Roger Price also has a low opinion of provincial clubs, their influence, and their possible effects on peasants. *Revolution*, p. 19.

⁴⁶ François Mazenc, *Le Coup d'Etat du 2 décembre 1851 dans l'Aveyron* (Albi, 1872), pp. 3-4.

⁴⁷ Rougeron, *La Révolution*, pp. 78-79, 92.

⁴⁸ Agulhon, *République au village*, p. 479.

ing).⁴⁹ As for the insurgents who briefly held Digne in December 1851, Philippe Vigier has listed their leadership: Buisson, the most “popular” of them, *liquoriste*, owner of a small enterprise and mayor of Manosque; Charles Cotte, lawyer at Digne; P. E. Aillaud, *huissier* at Valensole; Ailhaud de Volx, *garde général des eaux et forêts*, who, having been fired for his political opinions, returned to his native village of Château-Arnoux and turned the wholly rural canton of Volonne (practically devoid of large estates, hence of rival notables) into a bastion of his revolutionary ideas. Among the lesser figures Vigier cites a lawyer, a landowner of Gréoux, and a goldsmith of Forcalquier. Not a very vulgar band, and not a peasant among them.⁵⁰

My point here is that even when secret societies or individual agitators were active in the countryside, one should be wary of reading too much into their activities or, indeed, of overestimating their implantation among the peasants.⁵¹ Thus, in Aveyron, in December 1851, when the Republican Casimir Moins set out from Villefranche to march on Rodez, he carried his own friends with him but could scarcely raise any peasant from the villages on the way (the one exception was a *marchand colporteur*) until Privezac, “where he had friends because he came there to hunt every year.” On the other hand, when Moins’ insurgents reached Rignac where the mayor was a notable of opposing views—Dr. Colomb—they were routed by Colomb’s “peasants and friends.” Personal relations, personal loyalties—the account has a feudal ring.⁵²

Then too, how many *peasants* did red—or republican—proselytism actually touch? The Marianne’s strategy, for instance, was to stay away from towns and *bourgs* and highways, where the gendarmes could get at them. Hence their meetings in isolated, lonely spots where risks of surveillance and surprise were small. But the recollections of a Marianne leader of the Yonne show that, in

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 138-42. He concludes, p. 142: “ces fils, en révolte contre les pères, passent dans le camp ouvrier.”

⁵⁰ *Seconde République*, II, 312, 329, 426. It seems to me that, in his contribution to Price, *Revolution*, p. 269, Ted Margadant takes the point better than Vigier when he shows that where “influential landowners, merchants and professional men” worked for the Republic, their public propaganda was effective.

⁵¹ Among urban workers too, for that matter. On December 3, 1851, Louis Caussanel, the chief republican leader in Aveyron, fails to find any support in Rodez and moves off telling those for whose support he had hoped: “Les ouvriers de Rodez, vous êtes des merdes. Nous avons voulu nous faire tuer et vous n’avez pas voulu nous suivre. Vous êtes de la canaille.” André Aucourt, *Le Coup d’Etat du 2 décembre 1851 et ses répercussions à Villefranche-de-Rouergue* (Rodez, 1953), p. 16.

⁵² Aucourt, p. 22ff.

Morvan and Puisaye at least, the society's centers of activity were still small towns and most of its members artisans or petty bourgeois. Of the six men initiated at the same time as he was (in a forest clearing), not one was a *cultivateur*: *rentier*, *propriétaire*, lumberman, carpenter, mason, hairdresser, the estates cited to show the society's diversity also suggest its urban (or sub-urban?) nature. Similarly, of thirty men at a secret meeting well away from town: "c'était l'élite des artisans établis dans la commune."⁵³

Eugène Ténot would also show the democrats spreading their views in "the small towns, the multitude of *bourgs*. . . . In these small centers, among these half-city, half-peasant folk . . ." ⁵⁴ The bourgeois and the artisans of the *bourgade* would then carry the exciting message to the country folk. The argument is plausible, when we know how many landworkers lived in sub-urban agglomerations, and imagine the relative facility of relations between peasants and "these half-city, half-peasant folk." But again, how easy were such relations? And how effectively was the democratic message carried? At Beaune, after receiving news of the *coup d'état*, the would-be insurgents sent emissaries to rouse the countryside, but without effect: "they only managed to carry with them a few inhabitants of communes very close to Beaune." These turn out to have been employed by republican militants—like the three workmen employed by him at Savigny that were brought to town by C.-M. Naigeon, a well-off tailor and *chef du comité des campagnes (en fuite)*. After all this, the only verdict I can glimpse is: not proven.⁵⁵

Without a doubt then, the revolutions of 1848 echoed throughout France, unto its remote corners. In many rural areas, though, they were perceived in archaic terms: distant doings signifying an opportunity to settle local problems—forest or pasture rights, personal or communal feuds, the burden of taxes or, sometimes, of usurious debts. Did the propaganda of 1849, and more especially of 1850 and 1851, alter this local-oriented vision of politics, open new horizons, fulfill the didactic purposes of the red activists? Whatever we hazard on this score can only be an impression based on a variety of sources, none unprejudiced. But with this warning kept in mind throughout, my answer for the countryside would be: not very much. Margadant has argued for "a basic shift from local to national

⁵³ F. Rémi (de l'Yonne), *La Marianne dans les campagnes* (Auxerre, 1881), pp. 11, 18, 23, 27.

⁵⁴ Ténot, *Le Suffrage*, pp. 19-20, 23.

⁵⁵ AN BB ³⁰ 400. Cour d'Appel Dijon, Affaires de Beaune du 3 au 7 décembre 1851, Sommaire du procureur général, Jan. 29, 1852.

symbols of group identity,” as the “reactionary” peasant disorders of 1848 and 1849 were “replaced by collective actions with a distinctively modern component of national political ideology.”⁵⁶ Based on some of the impressive documentation that he himself provides, one may well ask whether this “distinctively modern component” was perceived in its own terms, or in terms of local factions and tensions to which it contributed a fresh supply of symbols and gestures that would be assimilated only by habit and accumulated experience over time.⁵⁷ “Red,” Démoc-Soc, Montagnard propaganda was effective in one respect: it linked concrete resentments, as against taxes (and especially against the new tax of 45 centimes), with what went on in Paris; and it suggested that action on the local plane, whether by voting or in defense of the Republic or the Constitution, could bring some solution to these and other ills. But Paris remained vague and distant; Republic and Constitution continued as abstractions difficult to conceive and as oddly imagined sometimes as their defenders: *la Martine*, or *le duc Rollin*.

So what did politics mean to the peasants? Two witnesses from opposing camps agree: of course there are turbulent and ill-disposed men (Reds, no doubt), reports the procureur-général of Grenoble about the Hautes-Alpes in 1850, but their ideas cannot get very far. “Woods, pastures, flocks are the constant objects of [the people’s] thoughts.” All that they care about are the forest laws. “Politics are wholly a matter of interest and do not reach, so to speak, beyond their mountains.”⁵⁸ A Red agrees. Around Dijon, where Gustave Lefrançais was exiled in 1851, Joigneaux’s radical *Feuille de village* suited the peasants because “it treated politics chiefly in terms of cutting taxes, especially those that weigh on wines—the chief business of the area. . . .”⁵⁹ So if we leave aside their entertainment

⁵⁶ Margadant, *French Peasants*, pp. 220-21.

⁵⁷ Margadant is scrupulous in citing evidence that may appear to counter or to qualify his thesis. But when (*ibid.*, p. 314) he remarks that “counterrevolutionary rhetoric concealed political factionalism,” this can as justly be said of revolutionary rhetoric. My point is that the rhetoric of national political ideology concealed and served very local political interests and that the rhetoric itself played only a limited role compared to more immediate, local inspirations and perceptions. See for example “Le Journal de Romain Bouquet,” *La Révolution de 1848* (juillet-décembre 1911), pp. 248-49, 259.

⁵⁸ Procureur-général, Grenoble, Jan. 9, 1850. Quoted in Jacques Humbert, *Embrun et le brunais à travers l’histoire* (Gap, 1972), p. 440.

⁵⁹ Gustave Lefrançais, *Souvenirs d’un révolutionnaire* (Bruxelles, 1902), p. 151. Also AN BB³⁰ 396, procureur-général, Agen, on Republicans and Reds in Gers: “Ils cherchaient à séduire les gens des campagnes, en leur promettant la suppression des octrois et la diminution des impôts.” The men of December 2 understood this and used it to their ends when, on the heels of their *coup*, they remitted or annulled fines and sentences pending for *délits forestiers*

value, politics became interesting when connected to traditional local concerns.

This need not be a bad beginning. Self-interest, more or less enlightened, might well account for all the files that bulge with reports of subversive activities. A closer look suggests (I am not the first to say so) that these reports too need to be approached with care. Red slogans could often sound quite terrifying, replete with references to Robespierre, guillotines and shootings, but—leaving aside their anachronism—their appeal to peasants without a prior family attachment to the Jacobin cause appears slight. Red songs and slogans were bandied about by urban enthusiasts not likely to raise much echo among the peasant folk. Thus, in July 1851, at a village feast in the Basses-Alpes, we hear that Reds from nearby Barcelonnette began to sing songs like the *Marseillaise* and the *Chant du départ* in a café. When gendarmes harassed them, they appealed to the surrounding peasants for support but seem to have got none.⁶⁰

Yet the authorities were only too ready to look on traditional gang or village fights as political “rebellions.”⁶¹ When we know that hardly a village feast or fair passed without *rixes*, some very bloody indeed, we need not wonder that a participant or party in the *melée* might appeal to new-model factions or use their imprecations. Trivial incidents could easily acquire a political coloring. In July 1851 again, at the gates of Bédarieux (Hérault), a dozen drunken Reds returning from a tavern took a short cut across a private property and picked a fight with shepherds guarding it. This standard clobbering, in which one townsman was injured, immediately acquired political significance.⁶² Like personal conflicts, labor or local ones were easily painted red. At Voiron (Isère) friction between an employer and his workers led to a gang of local youths marching about brandishing sticks hung with bacon-rinds. The employer, aware of local custom, played down the incident; gendarmes (and perhaps local Reds) played it up, till it ended in a judicial file.⁶³ Zealous

and other minor offences. See AN F¹ c II 98, préfet Aude, Dec. 20, 1851; and préfet, Bas-Rhin, Dec. 22, 1851, quoted in Paul Muller, “Le Bas-Rhin de 1848 à 1852,” *La Révolution de 1848* (janvier-février, 1910), p. 363.

⁶⁰ AN BB³⁰ 393, on July 8, 1851, at Uvernat (Basses-Alpes), arrdt. Barcelonnette.

⁶¹ AN BB³⁰ 394. Ministère de la Justice. Travail sur le mouvement démagogique antérieur au 2 décembre, lists numerous such occasions. *Ibid.*, procureur-général, Nîmes, September 1851, about the “serious disorders arising from the fêtes votives of Vinezac and Bastide de Virac (Ardèche),” suggests that the authorities may be overreacting.

⁶² AN BB³⁰ 393, procureur-général, Montpellier, July 1851.

⁶³ AN BB³⁰ 393, parquet de Grenoble, June 1851.

officials easily exaggerated: was that really a clandestine meeting at Saint-Romain-de-Lerps (Ardèche), in September 1851? “On a pu prendre des chasseurs pour des socialistes,” suggests the sous-préfet of Tournon.⁶⁴

Some magistrates warned against hasty (mis)interpretations. In June 1849 the procureur-général of Aix explained that the political charges brought against the mayor of Flassans (Var) were beside the point. True, the mayor had gained much influence over local peasants by promising to divide the common lands, but the ensuing disorders “avaient plutôt une couleur de coterie que de politique.”⁶⁵ We shall soon see the crucial role of factions and the political coloring some were led to adopt. But there were other ways of getting into trouble. In spring 1851 the court of Besançon spent two months investigating complaints against the parish priest of Arc-en-Gray (Haute-Saône) for his “red” sermons attacking the authorities and the respectable local bourgeoisie. It turns out that the priest, a Legitimist, resented the way local employers forced their people to work on Sundays. His critical sermons had become “red.”⁶⁶ At Saint-Barthélémy (Isère), a minor local figure was imprisoned on a charge brought by the mayor but soon released when the charge was dismissed. Back home, drinking with his friends, he began to shout “Long live the Reds! Down with the Whites!” The procureur-général believed he did it “to give himself importance and probably also in order to disguise under a political appearance the charges brought against him.”⁶⁷

The same magistrate reports another typical case: at la Cluzes-Paquier, the assistant mayor denounced the subversive remarks of a certain Duclos. Investigation revealed Duclos to be decent enough, a good neighbor, but a drunkard and a bit of a loudmouth, “sujet de plaisanterie pour toute la commune; on ne le regarde pas comme un homme sérieux et, jusqu’aux enfants, tout le monde se fait un plaisir de l’exciter.” Unfortunately for him, when the assistant mayor circulated the petition for Constitutional Revision dear to Bonapartist hearts, Duclos refused to sign, remarking that the man would do better to pay his debts than to sign petitions. “It takes little more,” commented the disabused procureur-général, “to excite

⁶⁴ Quoted in Reynier, *Seconde République*, p. 92.

⁶⁵ AN BB³⁰ 358, procureur-général, Aix, June 1849.

⁶⁶ AN BB³⁰ 393, parquet de Besançon, April-June 1851.

⁶⁷ AN BB³⁰ 393, parquet de Grenoble, June 30, 1851: “Pour se donner de l’importance, et probablement pour déguiser sous une apparence politique les poursuites qui avaient été dirigées contre lui.”

a village hatred which in private persons leads to violent recriminations and which M. l'adjoind de la Cluze has turned into official exaggerations."⁶⁸

Even if they had picked up subversive ideas (and it does not sound as if Duclos had), people like these were not likely to be taken seriously by their fellows any more than the man denounced as the chief Red of Guémenée (Loire-Inférieure), a tough and drunken timber-worker. The court report on him reads as if his fellow villagers knew his ways, while the gendarmes and their superiors took him and his windy words seriously.⁶⁹

Who then, were the true subversives: the rural leaders and their most active converts who spread political views around the countryside? A list of the president's political enemies, tried after the December 2 coup in Loir-et-Cher, gives us a classic idea. Of twenty-one men condemned to being shipped to Guyana, Algeria, and other noisome spots, three came from Blois, five were tavern-keepers, and two were millers by trade, well placed to influence their neighbors. Six were artisans (three carpenters, one shoemaker, one printer and one weaver), one was a schoolteacher (and lapsed priest), one a public works contractor, and three were farmers or farm laborers. With the list of those condemned to simple exile we come to the minor village notables: four doctors, one pharmacist, one notary, one tax collector, and a justice of the peace with the note: "Il exerce dans son canton par sa fortune, la position de sa famille et ses anciennes fonctions, une influence considérable."⁷⁰

Others have commented on the activity of militant taverners and artisans and on the unjust discrepancy of pains which visited the heavier retribution on such acolytes, leaving the leaders to the dubious comforts of an exile they could more easily afford. I would point

⁶⁸ AN BB ³⁰ 393, procureur-général, Grenoble, July 21, 1851. Similarly, at Riom, Dec. 23, 1851, is judged Antoine Batiffolier, *cultivateur à Champeix, arrondissement d'Yssoire*, arrested and charged with seditious cries for having shouted at his mayor and in the street: "A bas les blancs! A bas les blancs!" December 1851 was a bad time to step out of line, but the procureur-général found Batiffolier simply a local trouble-maker: a bit wild, already twice condemned for *tapage nocturne*, and much irritated against his village betters. AN BB ³⁰ 396.

⁶⁹ AN BB ³⁰ 393, parquet de Rennes, June-July 1851.

⁷⁰ AN BB ³⁰ 401 ² Loir-et-Cher: 1^e catégorie à transporter; 2^e catégorie à expulser de France. Of the seventeen leaders of rural rebellions who can be identified in the pages of J. Dagnan, *Le Coup d'Etat et la répression dans le Gers* (Auch, 1929), pp. 74-83, two are general-councillors, three are mayors of their village, three are wealthy millers, two are wealthy landowners, among the rest: *aubergistes, huissier, médecin, pharmaciste, épicier, horloger, étudiant*. Compare in Reynier, *Seconde République*, pp. 125-28, the lists of those condemned after the December risings. Margadant (*French Peasants*, chap. 8) devotes an impressive chapter to the democratization of political leadership in the Montagne. But his most convincing arguments bear on the role played by conspicuous and literate artisans and by fairly wealthy farmers.

out the evident hierarchic division between the two groups and suggest that the comment on the justice of the peace above states the essentials of rural leadership.

Before we tackle the leaders, let us glance at teachers, whose later political influence might make them candidates for our attention at this time. John Merriman who has examined their political role rather thoroughly concludes that "French schoolteachers did not become political men en masse during the Second Republic."⁷¹ That being so, their contribution to any politization of their neighbors would be at best sporadic and seems to me quite slight, not surprisingly so if we recall the figure of the priest-pecked schoolteacher in Buvard and Pécuchet's Normandy village. The reports of school inspectors, department by department, leave an impression less of deliberate action than of accident. As a result of their command of suddenly significant skills such as reading, writing, and sometimes rhetoric, a hitherto insignificant social category was propelled to the fore. This unexpected importance proved irritating to those who were used to treating them as menials; and heady for a few, mostly younger, dominies who seized the opportunity to give themselves importance. But nonconformist political militancy can hardly have been frequent. As the school inspector of Basses-Pyrénées reported in 1850, "most of them are Republicans as country people are Republicans, that is to say because we are in a republic."⁷² When allegiance became a matter of debate and choice, it would have been difficult, perhaps impossible, for minor public figures of this kind to escape involvement. Whatever their wishes, they would be tempted or forced to side with one local party or another. Even so, I suspect that the scant show of teachers among the proscribed of Loir-et-Cher reflects not only a general reluctance to become involved, but also the relatively low social position from which leadership would not normally flow.

Some teachers, like Gérard Basilet of Menet, near Mauriac, headed the red party in their village. But their radical proclivities, their attacks on the priest and the rich, possibly also their personal

⁷¹ Merriman, *The Agony of the Republic* (New Haven, 1978) p. 123.

⁷² AN F¹⁷ 9313. The school inspectors' reports indicate that, in any case, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for minor public figures of this order to escape involvement. They would be tempted or forced to side with one local party or another. Most of the *ardechois* teachers listed by Reynier, *Seconde République*, pp. 79-82, who got into trouble for their political activities appear to have been in unison with their localities—chiefly protestant ones. The use of teachers as electoral agents would become standard procedure, at least for the rest of the century: well developed under the Second Empire and, of course, the Third Republic.

character, had got them into trouble even before 1848.⁷³ Other teachers, perhaps less exceptional, got into hot water as the result of village feuds. The popular and influential teacher of Orignac (Hautes-Pyrénées) had been in his village for thirteen years. His standing was clearly related to “investments evaluated at about twelve thousand francs, result of his work as teacher and as *expert*.”⁷⁴ Presumably land surveyor, did he also function as village usurer? In any case, the mayor got the teacher fired, the mayor and the new teacher were subjected to violent *charivaris*, the gendarmes despatched to give them aid and comfort were ambushed under hails of stones, and a typical local brouhaha grew into a major affair whose political overtones are less clear than its local sources.

Sauveur Morer of Thuir (Pyrénées-Orientales) is cited by John Merriman as one of the schoolteachers whom the revolution thrust into the limelight and who suffered in its wake.⁷⁵ Morer’s own *apologia pro vita sua* leaves a different impression. A self-made man, the *instituteur* of Thuir soon became a village notable allied with one of the local clans—that of the Aragos. His school prospered. Although involved in the usual intrigues of local politics, he did not suffer after December 2, even though his republican convictions apparently prevented him from taking the oath of allegiance to the new regime—at least for a while. In 1853 the prefect wrote to praise his educational ideas, in 1854 he was elected to the *Société agricole, scientifique et littéraire* of his department, in 1855 he began to act as *secrétaire de mairie*, and in 1857 he fell victim to typical clan intrigues unconnected with any politics but local ones.⁷⁶ Not a good example of political initiative.

⁷³ AN BB ³⁰ 396, procureur-général Riom, Jan. 27, 1852.

⁷⁴ AN BB ³⁰ 393, parquet de Pau, August 1851.

⁷⁵ Merriman, *Agony*, pp. 119-20.

⁷⁶ One of his enemies was his brother-in-law, the local justice of the peace. All this is a much condensed account of the information in some ninety manuscript pages to be found in AN F ¹⁷ 12746. In December 1851, Thuir was involved in the widespread but shortlived risings of Roussillon. But the *insurgés de Thuir* to whom Horace Chauvet refers (*Histoire du parti républicain dans les Pyrénées-Orientales*, Perpignan, 1919, pp. 110-11) were obviously from Llupia, a few kilometers to the southeast, where the leader of the local secret society, shouting “Tout est à nous!” urged his followers “to fall upon Thuir.” After the rising, the prefect took hostages among the women and children of Thuir (R. Gossez and J. Vienney, *François Arago*, Perpignan, 1952, p. 43) but not among its notables, and Morer (ill at the time) was not troubled. Chauvet (pp. 82-85) lists mayors, teachers, and other officials suspended after the coup. None come from Thuir, though quite a few come from nearby places. Of fifty-seven men of the Pyrénées-Orientales transported by Cayenne, only one came from Thuir: Tignères Oller-Joseph, aged fifty-one, *ex-commissaire de police*, very likely the Tignères fils, *ex-huissier de la justice de paix*, listed as a member of the committee of the republican Association pour la liberté de la presse under the July Monarchy (Chauvet, pp. 16, 124-28).

Rural leadership, whatever the political persuasion, was provided by local notables, almost all of them landowners. Naturally, few such figures at the grassroots were nobles (fewer still among republican sympathizers), and their prestige did not run far—just far enough to be effective. But they were honorably known, they had the means that provided the opportunity and the leisure to study, travel, read and talk; and they were personally respected. Thus in Allier, Gaspard Delarue, medical officer, landowner at Theil: “influential in the region by his position and intelligence . . . he has abused this influence to pervert not only his commune, but all surrounding ones. . . .”⁷⁷ Thus in Puy-de-Dôme the figure of Mr. Hardy, a well-known landowner in the arrondissement of Yssouire, whose comfortable circumstances enabled him to maintain connections between local enthusiasts and the Republicans of Clermont; or the wealthy ex-mayor of Ambert, Lavigne, whose family connections with the descendants of the *conventionnel* Magnet preordained his fealty.⁷⁸ Along with the landowners and generally coinciding with them went the professional and administrative cadres of the little towns or, often, their sons. Though Merriman’s *Agony of the Republic* emphasizes the activity and growing importance of the lower orders, his pages are sprinkled with notable leaders like Alexandre-René Dethou, mayor of Bleneau (Yonne), “a worthy man who tried to help the little people”; and Louis-Florent Chauvot, “a wealthy and educated proprietor” also of the Yonne and a member of its General Council, though obviously an eccentric who had married a working woman without the blessing of the church.⁷⁹ Jacques Bouillon, who like Merriman has written on the Limousin, stresses the role played by such men in the red successes of 1849—“local notables who belonged to the republican opposition under the July Monarchy and who then turned to more advanced theories, even socialist ones,” like the leading figures of the democratic movement in the little towns of Creuse, where most of Martin Nadaud’s political friends were in professions like law, medicine or teaching. At Saint-Junien, “pourtant fort ouvrière,” the red leader was a young law graduate, son of the local justice of the peace.⁸⁰

Another judge’s son appears at Antraigues (Ardèche): Firmin Gamon, son of the Justice Emmanuel Gamon. Helped by a teacher

⁷⁷ AN BB ³⁰ 396, procureur-général, Riom, Jan. 19, 1852.

⁷⁸ AN BB ³⁰ 396, procureur-général, Riom, Jan. 15, 1852.

⁷⁹ Merriman, *Agony*, pp. 204, 206.

⁸⁰ Bouillon, “Elections législatives,” p. 489.

and by a doctor from Vals, Firmin Gamon tried to raise the canton of Antraigues but succeeded only in sacking the home of the little town's mayor, Salomon, who was *en conflit d'intérêts* with his father. "Nous devons à ce misérable," railed Salomon, "tous les malheurs de notre canton. Il a tout soulevé, en se parant du titre et de l'influence de fils du juge de paix et beau-frère d'un conseiller de préfecture."⁸¹

Philippe Vigier's discussion of Montagnard successes in the Basses-Alpes also suggests that opposition to notables came from other notables. Having established that in the politics of that region, dominated by family rivalries, *la politique* played only a minor part through the 1840s,⁸² Vigier discerns a turnabout around 1850 or 1851. Yet the evidence he marshals and that the archives provide permits a different interpretation. The politics of Digne were the clan politics of two families: the Fortouls and the Duchaffauts—the latter, royalists turned republican because their rivals were Or-léanists. Local republican leaders like Charles Cotte and Julien Sauve, both lawyers of Digne, were friends of the Duchaffauts, who had come into their own in 1848. The only plebeian (and the only true personality) in republican ranks, Langomazino, a carpetbagging workingman from Toulon, had risen to leadership—as the procureur of Digne explained—"en s'appuyant sur des rivalités de famille." The Fortoul clan, for its part, would be represented by a younger son, "Hippolyte, elected deputy in 1849 and who counted on Louis-Napoleon (whose minister he would become) "to reestablish his family's power in the Basses-Alpes."⁸³

What the prefect of Hautes-Alpes wrote about his department applied to its neighbor and, certainly, to many others:

On ne rencontre dans les trois petites villes d'Embrun, de Briançon et de Gap que des notabilités de clocher dont l'influence ne dépasse pas les limites de ces villes ou du canton—il n'est pas de pays où on soit plus divisé, plus jaloux les uns des autres entre gens de la localité;—on s'y dispute l'importance et les moindres places, les plus minces faveurs avec un acharnement inimaginable; chaque village a ses *Guelfs* et ses *Gibelins*, et il est impossible de mettre jamais les notabilités d'accord sur une question de personnes.⁸⁴

This was the way things were under the July Monarchy, said the prefect, and nothing had changed since February 1848.

When one bears in mind the crucial importance of personalities

⁸¹ Reynier, *Seconde République*, pp. 116-17.

⁸² Vigier, *Seconde République*, I, 164-65; II, 277.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, I, 191; II, 175, 188, 290.

⁸⁴ AN F 1^c II 98, préfet, Hautes-Alpes, Jan. 11, 1852.

(in both senses of the term), it is interesting to reread Eugène Ténot's account of December 2 and to see how such figures stand out. Scarcely a situation he describes in which the "energy" or "influence" of a man be he of the Left or Right, does not prove temporarily decisive.⁸⁵ Saint-Gengoux, Saint-Sorlin and other communes of Saône-et-Loire are aroused by Dismier, "un démocrate influent dans le pays," who raised five or six hundred men, entered Cluny unopposed, then marched on to Macôn and defeat. In the Hautes-Alpes, "La bourgeoisie prit la part la plus active à ce mouvement. Avocats, médecins, notaires, commerçants, propriétaires, partirent le fusil sur l'épaule, à la tête de chaque bande." (In one village, the leader was the *curé*.) In the fighting at Crest: "au premier rang des insurgés, sur la digue, on remarquait un jeune homme d'une des meilleures familles du pays, M. Vernet, de Bourdeaux." To cite all relevant examples would entail re-citing most of the book. And when the expected leader does not intervene, Ténot mentions the exceptional occasion. Thus, at Bessones (Gers), northwest of Mirande, "the rising was the exclusive doing of peasants. Whilst everywhere else they had awaited the signal of some member of the bourgeoisie, [here] they rose spontaneously and, led by some of themselves, took the road to Auch."⁸⁶ Here, the exception proves the rule: a tribute to a deferential insurrection, if ever there was one.

In Bourbonnais, the only cantons that voted en masse for Ledru-Rollin as President were Bourbon, Donjon, and Lurcy-Lévy.⁸⁷ In these centers, a historian of local politics tells us, "public opinion was directed by energetic men, such as Rocheton, notary and mayor of Lurcy-Lévy, who owed their influence over their fellow-citizens to their intelligence and their strength of character." "Educated, intelligent and respected" in official eyes, Rocheton was recognized as dangerous "because of the influence he exercised on the people of the region." He would be arrested on December 3—a move that probably accounts for Lurcy-Lévy's failure to stir.

The only real resistance to the *coup d'état* came around Donjon, where it was led by the Terrier clan (brothers of the representative

⁸⁵ Alternately, their absence, as in Drôme where the leaders were "men of very ordinary intelligence and energy," can prove decisive too. Eugène Ténot, *La Province en décembre 1851* (1868), p. 310.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 36, 274, 275, 332, 132.

⁸⁷ The following paragraphs are based on accounts in J. Cornillon, *Le Bourbonnais en décembre 1851. Le Coup d'Etat* (Cusset, 1903); E. Mauve, *Le Bourbonnais sous la Seconde République* (Moulins, 1909); Camille Gagnon, *En Bourbonnais sous la Seconde République* (Moulins, 1971); Simone Derruau-Boniol, "Le Socialisme dans l'Allier, de 1848 à 1914," *Cahiers d'histoire*, 1957, 2, esp. p. 134.

from Montluçon, Barthélémy Terrier) and their allies, who even briefly occupied the subprefecture at Lalapalisse. Adolphe Terrier was notary at Donjon, Felix Terrier took care of the family estates. Around them, a network of landowners and professional men—like Gallay of Neuilly-en-Donjon, unsuccessful candidate to the Assembly who would become mayor of Donjon in 1870, and the Prévérandes of Lanax and Montaiguët—brought up their peasant contingents on December 4, while Felix Terrier tried to raise Bort, “where he had a property which had permitted him to exercise a certain influence on the workers.” But once the little peasant army had taken Lalapalisse, some fifteen miles away, it found itself in alien territory. The locals refused to take sides, and when the Republicans tried to raise the surrounding countryside by sounding the *tocsin*, those peasants who came were “mostly without arms and moved rather by curiosity than by desire to support the insurrection.” Over and over, a peasant *dépaysé* proved a peasant *dérouté*; and that was almost as true of their leaders.

The court records of Riom furnish the portrait of a typical red notable: Philippe Fargin-Fayolle, known as Sommerat after one of his family properties, younger brother of a local lawyer and Montagnard representative to the Assembly. Here is the village priest, testifying about him: “M. Sommerat enjoyed immense influence in the region and could direct several communes at his will. I believe that he owed his influence to the force of his political convictions, to the disinterestedness and the generosity of his character.” Good father, good neighbor, convincing—even “seductive”—in his talk, helpful, everyone praised Sommerat’s good deeds. His “proverbial generosity” and his “thoughtless hospitality” were cited as major causes of his financial ruin, despite a comfortable inheritance. Another reason for insolvency was that his political interests left him little time to keep up his domain at La Chapelaude, not far from Montluçon. But the people loved him: “I think that on his orders they would have gladly jumped in the lake,” says the postmaster of La Chapelaude. One of his friends, Claude-Victor Vincent of Bous-sac, sounds much the same: “mauvaise tête et bon coeur.” Charitable, Vincent did not hesitate to give his clothes to the poor or spend his money to succor needy friends. He too had wasted his inheritance and lived with his mother, working her land when he could, but spending most of his time in politics.

Such types may seem utopian, highflown or simply addleheaded from our perspective—as from that of their enemies—but the im-

pression they leave is frequently that of strong, respectable characters: like Auguste Bravard, architect at Issoire, “homme doué d’une grande énergie et d’une fermeté de caractère peu commune”;⁸⁸ or the radical idealist, Paul Belougou, conseiller-général of Bédarieux since 1848: “hard on himself as on others, he lives on 1 franc 20 a day” (a poor farm laborer’s wage).⁸⁹ Some followed the rule of Saint Dominic; others, like Vincent above, or another Bravard—Toussaint—of Jumeaux-sur-Allier, also a “dangerous demagogue” of the Puy-de-Dôme, that of Saint Francis. Ferdinand Raspail testified in 1862 that while studying medicine in Paris, Toussaint Bravard had shown himself generous and spendthrift. But almost all his money went to needy friends, several of whom he put up at Jumeaux when they needed help. *Officier de santé* in his canton of Brassac-les-Mines, he treated all the poor free—a note one finds repeated in other similar cases.⁹⁰

Such are the typical virtues encountered among popular leaders, both of the Right and Left; whether in a Legitimist like Charles de Lazerme, conseiller-général of the Pyrénées-Orientales, or in his republican opponents like Arago or Pierre Lefranc, men “of absolute honesty and incontestable honorability.”⁹¹ Yet what did such decent, well-intentioned men tell the peasants when they tried to raise them? In June 1849 Fargin-Fayolle was one of the Montagnard deputies who tried and failed to defend the Republic by starting an insurrection. Wanting to help, his brother, Sommerat, briefly mobilized the peasantry of his canton—Huriel. The eight to nine hundred men who finally gathered on an Allier moor, at la Brande des Mottes on June 15, were told that Paris was in flames, that at Montluçon “on égorgeait tout le monde,” and the Mountain was fighting on the people’s side against the tyrants (the “infamous royal government”). The couriers who sought to rouse the peasants on Sommerat’s behalf told them that the fatherland was in danger, that the enemy (generally unspecified, but sometimes the Cossacks) were about to invade France, that they had to come to the aid of

⁸⁸ Robert Schnerb, “Seconde République,” pp. 717-20.

⁸⁹ F. Appolis, “La Résistance au coup d’état du 2 décembre 1851 dans l’Hérault,” *Actes du 77^e Congrès des Sociétés Savantes, Grenoble 1952* (1952), p. 494.

⁹⁰ Schnerb, “Seconde République.”

⁹¹ “Extrêmement populaire et considéré,” Lazerme “plaisait aux masses.” Good nature, competence, sound judgment, family position . . . “ayant toujours le mot aimable, mais la riposte vive et au besoin la main prompte. . . .” Charles de Lazerme, *Carlistes et légitimistes* (Perpignan, 1937), pp. 101-05. Agulhon also recognizes in passing the crucial importance of personal qualities in the choice of “popular” leaders: artisan, *petit patron*, *petit commerçant*. *République au village*, p. 480.

Montluçon and Paris, and, significantly, “that those who did not obey would be punished as traitors.”⁹²

The affair of la Brande des Mottes fizzled out. But, thirty months later, the brief December rising in nearby Limousin rehearsed similar themes: *tocsin*, revolutionary eloquence, inflammatory but confused appeals. “Your turn has come to work no longer. Let the bourgeois take your place.” “Tomorrow we shall be fifty thousand in Limoges; it will be the finest feast you’ve had in your life.” Those reluctant to join were threatened or tempted: there would be free food and drink for all. “Tomorrow we shall celebrate the great carnival; here is the peasants’ republic, tomorrow we’ll have the harvest feast!” The same report continues: “In the midst of the insurgents one notes Master Delassy, member of the General Council, ex-justice of the peace, the most influential man in the canton. He arrives on horseback. . . .”⁹³ Like Sommerat. Like Sommerat, also, we read in the later trial record: “Homme honnête aimé dans son canton mais républicain fougueux . . . soulève la commune de Chateauneuf; se met à cheval à la tête de la bande qui de Linards va marcher sur Limoges.”⁹⁴ Condemned to be transported to Algeria, his sentence was commuted to exile.

In Ardèche, on the night of 4 to 5 December 1851, the men of Chomérac and Saint-Vincent de Barrès, carrying what arms they could find, moved on Privas, following those who said: “Let’s go to Privas: we’ll burn the prefecture, the mortgage bureau, the tax collector’s office, the barracks” One of those arrested explained his motives: “We wanted to uphold the people’s rights.—What do you mean by the people’s rights?—I don’t know a thing about it.” Another was more to the point: “Nous marchions pour faire diminuer les contributions et les patentes.”⁹⁵

The prefect of Hautes-Alpes, who with three hundred men had just delivered Sisteron (Basses-Alpes), reported on “the revolt which had managed to stir up several thousand peasants who had been led to believe . . . that the authorities did not want to recognize the acts of Louis-Napoleon.”⁹⁶ Same note in the Drôme where “in many

⁹² Gagnon, *En Bourbonnais*, p. 81.

⁹³ AN BB ³⁰ 396, procureur-général, Limoges, Jan. 23, 1852.

⁹⁴ AN BB ³⁰ 401 ², commission mixte, Haute-Vienne, Jean-Baptiste Delassis (géomètre), 44 ans, membre du Conseil Général.

⁹⁵ Reynier, *Seconde République*, pp. 22, 110-11. See also in AN BB ³⁰ 396, the procureur-général, Agen, testifying how many men of the Gers were unclear why they marched in December: some believed it was to defend Louis Napoleon, others for lower taxes, others because they had been threatened.

⁹⁶ AN F ^{1c} II 98, préfet, Hautes-Alpes, Dec. 11, 1851.

communes the people had risen in the name of Louis-Napoleon; in others they believed they were fighting against the rich, who were accused of being royalists . . . ”⁹⁷ Vigier, who sees the movements he describes as above all political, nevertheless declares that most of the peasants and even the artisans who marched on Digne and Crest ignored the Constitution and “politics in general.”⁹⁸ One has to choose between the leaders of the insurrection who “insisted on giving their movement a sense that was above all political,” and the representative from the Drôme pleading in 1852 for the “simple farmers . . . incapable of clear political ideas,” who did not understand the significance of their rebellious acts. Vigier has made his choice—the wrong one in my view.⁹⁹ To attribute more limited aims and motives to the peasants who marched behind insurrectionist leaders is neither derogatory nor patronizing. On the contrary: it abandons the notion that an abstract political ideology is *ipso facto* superior to the limited, matter-of-fact interests (and loyalties) those peasants followed who knew what they were about.

My conclusion is that the peasants, some peasants, had indeed been brought into national politics; but they had been carried there by traditional-type leaders—men whom they respected and trusted, and whom they followed because they took their word. Local notables committed to a particular ideology or political stance mobilized their allies and their clients who trusted or obeyed them in a feudal sense. The allegiance, the personal relationship, were surely more important than any ideology that they were made to serve.

I do not mean to suggest that matters were quite so simple. For one thing, few communities were really undivided in allegiance. Vigier has sought to emphasize the contrast between regions like Isère, Vaucluse, and parts of Drôme, where a wealthy and educated local bourgeoisie is supposed to have divided into *parties*, and those where before 1848 political life came down to “rivalités impitoyables

⁹⁷ AN F¹ c III, Drôme 8, préfet, Drôme, Jan. 1852.

⁹⁸ Vigier, *Seconde République*, II, 330, 332.

⁹⁹ In January 1852, the Archpriest of Béziers, writing to his Archbishop about the bloody riots in his town, discriminated between the *workers* of the faubourg du Pont, “intelligents, doués de ce demi-savoir qui donne un orgueil effréné,” and the ignorant peasants of several other faubourgs. Gérard Cholvy, *Religion et société au XIX^e siècle. Le diocèse de Montpellier* (Lille, 1973), II, 920. Roger Price draws a similar discrimination between the leaders of the insurrection for whom “idealistic political reasons came to the fore,” and those who marched behind them. He quotes the grandiloquent proclamation of the Committee of Resistance in the Basses-Alpes and comments: “Thus in the hallowed terminology of bourgeois republicanism was an appeal made to the peasant masses of the economically most backward departments in France.” *Second Republic*, p. 296.

entre coteries de notables de faible envergure.”¹⁰⁰ In my eyes this distinction does not hold. Divisions and rivalries were the rule wherever a local monopoly of influence did not obtain;¹⁰¹ ideological or “political” divisions were the preserve of the educated minority and, to a lesser extent, of their acolytes;¹⁰² nor were the “ruthless rivalries” which Vigier tries to circumscribe in space and time left behind in 1848.¹⁰³ Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that in these divisions lay the source of “politics,” and that national politics entered the provinces and the countryside by way of local feuds whose origins lay in the recent or quite distant past.¹⁰⁴

For another thing, each local situation was a concatenation of particular factors. One look at the history of the Yonne lumber floaters and at the tangled labor relations of the Yonne waterways will show that the bitter Clamecy rising of December 1851 had little directly to do with the *coup d'état* and a lot with the long-standing griefs of lumberfloaters, whose agitation, strikes and troubles with the local lumber merchants went back almost two hundred years.¹⁰⁵ In a market town like Bédarieux (Hérault) which had been legitimist in 1848, economic conditions had shifted many working people to the Left by 1850. For Gérard Cholvy, three causes contributed to the rising that made the revolutionaries masters of the little town for nearly a week after December 2: first, the deteriorating economic situation; then, the role of the general councillor whom we have already encountered—Paul Belougou, “propriétaire aisé de sentiments franchement républicains;” last but not least, strong local

¹⁰⁰ Vigier, *Seconde République*, II, 383. Against this view, see Bouquet, “Journal,” pp. 248-49; 259, 376-77, for the “futile personal motives” that hid under political guises at La-Tour-du-Pin (Isère).

¹⁰¹ Louis Girard, *La II^e République* (1968), p. 294: in *bourgs*, “la politique se greffait sur les jalousies ou les haines privées.” These, of course, were not the preserve of the eminent alone. Arrested in December 1851, Antoine Rey, a pedlar of Saint-Symphorien, is interrogated and declares: “Le maire . . . m'accuse d'avoir insurgé le pays: mais il a une fille modiste et ma femme est marchande de dentelles. . . . L'an 1848 je penchais pour la Montagne, parce que j'avais peu de chose; aujourd'hui j'ai hérité d'une trentaine de mille francs et mes idées ont complètement changé.” (Quoted in Reynier, *Seconde République*, p. 128). As Agulhon declared in his *République au village*, p. 288: “c'est tout le problème des clans, des coteries, des partis au village qu'il faudra bien reprendre un jour. . . .” It is high time we did.

¹⁰² Price, *Second Republic*, p. 309: “Only the upper and middle classes possessed a national ideology. . . .”

¹⁰³ See AN F^{1c} II 98, préfet, Ain, March 3, 1852, concerning a by-election at Trévoux: no political problems, everyone devoted to the Prince, “mais les questions d'intérêts locaux, et par conséquent de personnes, y ont une grande puissance.”

¹⁰⁴ “Peasants and the National State,” *Proceedings of the Fifteenth International Congress on Historical Science* (Bucarest, 1980).

¹⁰⁵ Paul Cornu, “Grèves des floteurs sur l'Yonne au 18^e et 19^e siècles,” *Cahiers du Centre*, Jan. 1911.

hostility against the gendarmes who had been putting down the widespread poaching. It was the gendarmes' stupid behavior that really set off the trouble in Bédarieux, says Cholvy,¹⁰⁶ and it is well to remember that events of general significance may stem from very particular (and sometimes unexpected) causes.

The same point holds for the tendency to overestimate the mutual reinforcement of local and national politics. This is not to underrate the role of local factions and associations, but to place them in perspective by asking whether personal allegiance led as straightly to political allegiance as some like to suggest. How far—and especially how fast—did “voluntary associations and informal friendship groups” go in turning traditional loyalties “into a tenacious political movement”?¹⁰⁷

The social cohesion and (its counterpart) the social pressures that loom behind local factions represent grassroots realities: structures of socioeconomic dependence and interdependence which also govern the sociable associations whose role political historians now treat with due respect. But whilst it is clear enough that such relations could lead to politization, it is not really clear that such “voluntary associations” (taking both terms in their most encompassing sense) readily became action groups “for class-based political movements,”¹⁰⁸ or that their contribution to politics and to politization went much beyond their contribution to traditional sociability and interdependence.

When a countryman, peasant or artisan, said “I go with my patron,” or “I go with my pals,” or “I go with my family,” or “I go with my neighbors,” he said nothing new. Such traditional attitudes did indeed help usher those who shared them into the more complex world of national politics. But not consciously. The question is one of degree: like other traditional relationships, sociability was mobilized for political purposes. But, in 1848-51, these were the *political* purposes of others. It would take time and a longish *rodage* before this changed, before the supralocal political attitudes were assimilated and internalized. What the experience of 1848-51 contributed to this process was a degree of acceleration and the sort of personal experience which made certain individuals and com-

¹⁰⁶ Cholvy, *Religion et société*, I, 721-22. See also Appolis, “La Résistance,” p. 495, on December 4, 1851, at Bédarieux, when local workmen and peasants besieged the gendarmes, “odieux à cette population de braconniers.”

¹⁰⁷ Margadant, *French Peasants*, p. 138 and chap. 7 *passim*.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

munities readier to perceive the opportunities of a modern political system and its relevance to them. But only in due course.

Agulhon's own balanced account of resistance to the *coup d'état*¹⁰⁹ shows how that stemmed from essentially local issues and grievances. But Agulhon—like Vigier, like Margadant—¹¹⁰ concludes in favor of the political character of the risings. It is evident that—based on my definition of politics, which is similar to that obtaining in 1848 or 1851—I do not share his views. Not because the facts and the impressions he and his like present are not valid, but because they do not strike me as comprehensive *enough* or sufficiently qualified. Historical reality is a jigsaw which, I daresay, none can really reconstruct. But insistence on any one motif of the jigsaw tends away from its completion or comprehension. As I have indicated, it seems to be that to insist on the “modern” dimensions of the peasant movements of 1851 ignores the long survival of more archaic conditions and attitudes that governed them. Notably, it leaves aside the personal factors, hardest to trace, let alone to pin down, whose function I have tried—however superficially—to suggest. History is about people. It remains incomplete when it fails to recognize this, or to situate its characters as fully as possible in space and time. *Cherchez l'homme!* should be the slogan of political as well as social and economic historians.

Historical interpretation also falters when it sets standards inappropriate to the time. There was no particular virtue in sharing the often admirable values of Republicans, of Democrate, of Radicals. The peasant's own sense of why he acted is difficult to discern, but if he marched simply because he was from Poujols, or because neighbors or patron urged him, that too would be normal—and perfectly sensible in the circumstances of that time.

The scholar's final trap is probably that refined form of *hubris* that grows from thorough and conscientious archival research. Archives are like the yellow pages: if you know what you want to find, it would be surprising that you do not find it. Enough material, and you have made a case. *Your* case, marked by your working hypothesis and your *coup d'oeil*. But the most convincing case is incomplete; and the better documented it is, the greater the risk of forgetting this.

¹⁰⁹ In 1848, p. 179 and *passim*.

¹¹⁰ The latter in a splendid contribution to Price, *Revolution*, p. 275 and *passim*.

That is no criticism of *histoire à thèse*. Angels often rush in where fools fear to tread. Much of the best history is written from—and to assert—a particular view. That is precisely what deserves remembrance when we read it and, still more perhaps, when we write it.