

**A Manifesto of Impossibilities?
Workers, Politics, and the History of the Luxembourg Commission, February-May 1848**

by

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Abstract

The Luxembourg Commission was the response of the provisional government of France during the Revolution of 1848 to demands by workers of Paris that the government do something to help alleviate the harsh conditions under which they labored. The Commission was a step short of the full government ministry of progress that many workers called for. However, during the few months it existed, the Luxembourg Commission gave impetus to grassroots workers' organization and successfully began to act as an arbitrator in disputes between workers and bosses.

The elections of April 1848 were disastrous for worker candidates, and the Commission itself winked out of existence in May. Workers' frustration led to them storming the National Assembly and successfully suspending it on May 15. An analysis of May 15 shows how volatile the allegiances of the National and Mobile Guards were on the day. Both the Luxembourg Commission and the *journée* of May 15 were sidelined in histories of the Revolution written during the nineteenth century because these items did not support the political narrative of the authors of these histories. This thesis will make the case for the re-inclusion of the Luxembourg Commission as an important topic of study in the history of 1848 as a social revolution.

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Introduction

On April 12, 1848, the moderate journal *L'Atelier* published an article criticizing the list of candidates proposed by the Luxembourg Commission for election to the National Assembly. The Commission only included four members of the provisional government on their list. "It would be a sad inspiration for the delegates to exclude seven members of the Provisional Government from their list; propriety, if not gratitude, commands that they should not be excluded."¹ *L'Atelier* was not in support of the candidates the Luxembourg Commission had selected and thought the more moderate members of the Provisional Government would have been a better choice. On 16 April, the more radical *Le Représentant du Peuple* responded to this critique with a sarcastic critique of *L'Atelier*. "Exquisite good tone and propriety! O Journalists with kid gloves, workmen of good manners, it is time, in truth,- high time for the safety of the Republic,- to give lessons of good behavior and propriety to those workers who are frank enough to call things by their names."² *Le Représentant du Peuple* did not share *L'Atelier's* opinion. *L'Atelier* then suggested that Louis Blanc, a member of the provisional government helped craft this list and the exclusion of certain members of the government from the Luxembourg's candidate list evidenced division within the government. *Le Représentant du Peuple* again rose to the defense of the Luxembourg Commission, "Have you not heard... that this slander, which

¹ *L'Atelier: Organe spécial de la classe laborieuse*, April 12, 1848.

² *Le Représentant du Peuple: Journal des Travailleurs*, April 16, 1848.

the *Constitutionnel* [a conservative journal] had recently brought against the citizen Louis Blanc, provoked a formal denial on the part of the delegates [of the Luxembourg Commission]?... Editors of *L'Atelier*, you are very perfidious.”³

The early days of the Second Republic in France were full of such to and fro, debating how and to what extent workers had the right to represent themselves and what giving power to workers would mean for the establishment of government. When *L'Atelier* proposed its own list of candidates for the National Assembly, which only included five workers, three of whom were employed by *L'Atelier*, and several clergymen, the *Représentant du Peuple* submitted its own stinging criticism of the candidate list, “Enough abbots! Don’t you know the proverb: The company you keep... Hush! The propriety!”⁴

Despite, or perhaps, due to the divided opinion of the journals, Louis Blanc and the Luxembourg Commission were topics of great interest from February through May of 1848. The Luxembourg Commission was the provisional government’s response to demands made by the workers of Paris that the government do something to help alleviate the harsh conditions under which they labored. Louis Blanc stood as a symbol of socialism and his Luxembourg Commission represented a tangible shift in government policy that many hoped could lead to the realization of a social republic. The Commission for its part took an active role in the political process through its proposed candidate list in the April elections. Blanc’s Commission was not just at the center of the political discussion of the day, however. Set up as a congress where delegates from each profession could be represented, it investigated issues relevant to workers and proposed practical solutions. Although the power of legislation remained with the provisional government, and the Commission was a step short of the full government ministry of

³ *Le Représentant Du Peuple*, April 16, 1848.

⁴ *Le Représentant Du Peuple*, April 16, 1848.

progress that many workers called for, the Luxembourg Commission took the initiative to act as arbitrator in a number of disputes between workers and their bosses during the few months it existed.

As the spat between *L'Atelier* and *Le Représentant du Peuple* illustrates, there was significant difference between the political loyalties of various newspapers. Newspapers make up a significant source base for this thesis. They provide important insight into the day to day happenings of the Revolution of 1848 and allow us to see powerfully worded arguments from many sides of the political spectrum. Newspapers at this time – with the exception of *La Presse* and *Le Siècle* who adopted an alternative business model, concentrating on selling advertisements rather than subscriptions – were “journaux d’opinion,” each with a particular political allegiance. They made no show of neutrality or attempt to be unbiased in their reporting of the news (and historians have largely dismissed the truth of *La Presse* and *Le Siècle*’s claims to be depoliticized).⁵ Journalists and newspaper editors, moreover, were active participants in the events of the Revolution. In using these sources, I have therefore determined not only their politics, but also, where possible, who wrote for and edited each paper. *Le Constitutionnel*, edited by Louis Véron was an important liberal newspaper. The paper supported the Orleanist regime before the revolution and backed the more conservative members of the government during the revolution. Thus it was well-established by 1848 and provide extensive coverage of the events of the revolution. *Le Siècle*, *La Patrie* and the *Journal des Débats*, like *Le Constitutionnel*, were supporters of the liberal republican government majority. The latter two provided less coverage of the Luxembourg Commission.

⁵ Richard Terdiman, *Discourse / Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 127-32.

Le Représentant du Peuple, edited by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, appealed to a more radical readership. This paper was unashamedly socialist and provides important insight into the political left. The papers of the left themselves differed significantly in their editorial lines, from the more radical, like *Le Représentant du Peuple*, to the more moderate, like *L'Atelier*, originally established in September 1840 by a printer's workman and pitched to a readership of intelligent artisans.⁶ In 1848, *L'Atelier* was edited by Philippe Buchez. Buchez was briefly president of the National Assembly and had the distinction of being thrown out of his chair by protesters when the Assembly was stormed on May 15, as we will see in chapter two. Of the socialist papers, the least radical was *La Réforme*. It was edited by Alexandre Ledru-Rollin and Ferdinand Flocon, both members of the Provisional Government who avoided involvement in the events of May and June. Other socialist journals pursued more specific agendas, such as *La Voix des Femmes*, but this did not provide extensive coverage of the Luxembourg Commission.

The thesis also draws on statements and declarations published in a range of other newspapers and in particular in the "official" newspaper, *Le Moniteur*. *Le Moniteur* was the C-SPAN of its day. It published official documents originating both from the provisional government and from the Luxembourg Commission during its existence as a government body, as well as the minutes of the National Assembly after that body was elected. *Le Moniteur* did not provide the same coverage to socialist clubs and oppositional political organizations.

When looking for accounts of what happened in the Luxembourg Commission, and especially of its work in terms of arbitration, newspapers, especially *Le Moniteur*, were very helpful. The thesis also made use of a compilation of records of the Commission's arbitration work: *De la conciliation et de l'arbitrage dans les conflits collectifs entre patrons et ouvriers en*

⁶ Irene Collins, *The Government and the Newspaper Press in France, 1814-1881* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 92-3.

France et à l'étranger, published in 1893. Similarly, it benefited from the existence of Gaëtan Delmas and Alfred Delvau's edited compilations of placards/affiches posted around Paris during the revolution. While both authors focus on providing revolutionary affiches and are weak in their treatment of reactionary documents, this means that they serve as a strong counterpoint to the official statements published in *Le Moniteur*.

The thesis mobilizes a range of other documents printed during the events of 1848. Its account of the events of May 15 draws deeply on the transcript of the trials of the men accused of playing an organizing role: Alexandre Martin (Albert), Armand Barbès, Louis Blanqui, François-Vincent Raspail, Aloysius Huber, Marc Caussidière, Amable de Courtais, etc. in March of 1849 and of Aloysius Huber in October of 1849. The trials are full of confused and even conflicting testimony and if they demonstrate anything at all, it is that the events of May 15 were equally confused.

The other major source for any history of the 1848 Revolution is the large number of memoirs published by participants and spectators. Chapter three looks deeper into the works of Alphonse de Lamartine, Louis Blanc, and Alexis de Tocqueville, but the thesis draws on several memoirs besides in reconstructing the political events surrounding the Luxembourg Commission and the early months of the Revolution of 1848. As with the newspapers, these sources are highly subjective. For politically active individuals, such as Lamartine and Louis Blanc, who took a leading role in the government and the Luxembourg Commission, it is not particularly difficult to identify this bias and we see numerous instances where these accounts play up the role of the narrators. Other memoirs require a similarly hostile interrogation, however. Odilon Barrot, the patron of *Le Siècle*, offered his own account of the revolution, and as might be expected, he looked to justify the actions of the right-wing majority in the provisional

government. Daniel Stern, the comtesse d'Agoult, offered an account of the revolution which was highly ungenerous to socialist politicians and programs. More moderate was the account of Louis-Antoine Garnier-Pagès, a member of the provisional government and a moderate republican. Perhaps most sympathetic to the socialists were the memoirs of Marc Caussidière and the stonemason, Martin Nadaud. This thesis has tried to navigate the distortion effect of the memoirs' various political agendas by looking for points of agreement between sources, where they corroborate one another despite their political differences.

Another consideration with the use of memoirs is that, unlike newspapers, many of these accounts were published years after the events took place, often looking to justify actions in hindsight. Louis Blanc's *Historical Revelations*, published in 1858 as a riposte to the English diplomat Lord Normanby's *A Year of Revolution* is one such work. Meanwhile, as Jonathan Beecher has pointed out, Lamartine used his memoirs as an opportunity to heap praise on anyone he thought might help him make a political comeback.⁷ In this way, his account may speak more to the situation of 1849 than of 1848. The thesis has used these sources, but, as with the issue of political bias, has sought to separate fact from fiction by looking for corroboration in other sources.

The most famous and influential histories of 1848, penned during or immediately after the Revolution, are Karl Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and Alexis de Tocqueville's *Recollections*. Tocqueville's in particular blurs the lines between histories and memoirs as it is written in the first person. Due to their particular significance in terms of the historiography of 1848, both in the later nineteenth century and up to the present day, the thesis has treated these works separately, purposefully not using them in constructing the story of

⁷ Jonathan Beecher, *Lamartine, the Girondins, and 1848*. in Gareth Stedman Jones and Douglas Moggach, *The 1848 Revolution and European Political Thought* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2018), 28.

political events in February – May 1848, in order to forge an alternative narrative of the Commission’s existence.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will explore the creation of the Luxembourg Commission both in terms of politics and the practical establishment of its institutions. In February of 1848, after Louis-Philippe abdicated the throne, workers in Paris hoped for a government that would be responsive to their needs. In the first days of the Provisional Government, workers saw the creation of government bodies that were aimed at courting their support: the National Workshops, the Mobile Guard, and the Luxembourg Commission. The Commission was unique among these new institutions in that it sought not primarily to appease workers, but to provide an impetus for the organization of labor in societies that provided mutual support for workers and allowed them to build a sense of community with workers across the city that they might not otherwise come into contact with. As such, it was an effort to articulate the demands of workers as a whole.

The second chapter will examine the disappointments and ensuing fall-out of the elections of April 15. The losses of the socialists at the polls combined with the Luxembourg Commission’s slow work and lack of real power led many workers to become dissatisfied with the course the new republic was taking. The refusal of the government to create a ministry of progress on May 10 led to demonstrations by workers and contributed to the *journée* of May 15 (the word “*journée*” has no exact equivalent in English, but is used in French to reference a day of rebellion). Although the events of June 1848 often overshadow those of May 15 in the study of the French Revolution of 1848, May 15 is worthy of study in its own right, not least because the chaos of the events of the day, and the unpredictability of the allegiance of Mobile and National Guard units, might have allowed it to be successful. May 15 was a disaster for the

Luxembourg Commission. With its important leaders arrested and Louis Blanc forced into exile, the Commission was cut adrift by the new government.

The final chapter will examine the way in which the Luxembourg Commission was and was not included in histories of 1848 written in the nineteenth century. Despite the important role that the Luxembourg Commission played in the Revolution of 1848, it was sidelined by historians both of the left and of the right because it did not fit their political narrative.

As a consequence, despite being relatively well known, the Luxembourg Commission occupies a relatively small place in the current historiography of 1848. Also, where it is examined, it is looked at in terms of longer-term shifts in nineteenth-century labor identity and organization. William Sewell, in *Work and Revolution in France*, saw the Luxembourg Commission as part of a story of the evolution of the language of labor stretching back to before the Revolution of 1789.⁸ Roger Gould, in *Insurgent Identities*, agreed the Luxembourg Commission played into the ways in which workers identified themselves as a group but argued that Hausmannization radically changed the landscape of workers' collective identities in the decades leading up to the Commune of 1871.⁹ Remi Gossez, in *Les Ouvriers des Paris*, however insisted that the Commission was central to the story of democracy and enfranchisement as France moved through the nineteenth century.¹⁰ For all these historians, the Commission is significant only in terms of what it tells us about other developments during the nineteenth century.

⁸ William H. Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁹ Roger V. Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹⁰ Remi Gossez, *Les ouvriers de Paris. L'organisation 1848-1851* (La Roche-sur-Yon: Imprimerie Centrale de l'Ouest, 1967).

The Luxembourg Commission, however, is a phenomenon that is worth studying in its own right. This thesis will explore the Commission, not in terms of its origins, or its relationship to the politics of labor later in the nineteenth century, but in terms of what it did (and did not do) during its operation in March, April, and May 1848. It will rethink the importance of events and activities are often overlooked and seek to move past the myths told about the Commission by prominent socialists such as Louis Blanc and Karl Marx, in order to show the complexity of labor politics in mid nineteenth-century France.

Chapter 1

The Force Awakens: The Luxembourg Commission, 1848, and the Promise of Association

In February of 1848, a stone mason named Martin Nadaud gathered with his fellow masons near the Hôtel de Ville in Paris. As he later recalled:

There... took place a meeting comprising no less than two to three thousand construction workers. Excited, electrified in a way, by the recent triumph of the Republic, they therefore had the greatest desire to begin their progressive work of economic and social emancipation... Two questions were going to preoccupy us that day: the first was the nomination of a member to the prud'hommes charged with representing our corporation. It was in the middle of this great crowd of construction workers that I was designated to fill this function unanimously... The second question which we took to heart was the nomination of a delegate to the Luxembourg Commission... My comrades invested me with their confidence a second time.¹

As Nadaud said, the crowd was electrified. It was excited by the business at hand. The size of the crowd demonstrated the widespread belief that things would not continue as they had under the July Monarchy of Louis-Philippe. Change was coming, and the people assembled near the Hôtel de Ville were determined to take part in it and guide it. The Luxembourg Commission, to which Nadaud had been selected as a delegate, would play a pivotal role in seeking to transform hope into practical change. This chapter will investigate the initial establishment of the Luxembourg Commission, officially the *Commission du gouvernement pour les travailleurs*. It

¹ Martin Nadaud, *Mémoires de Léonard, ancien garçon maçon* (Bourganeuf: A. Duboueix, 1895), 313–314.

will show the importance of the commission as a forum where workers, in both traditional and new industries, could express their grievances and move to control their own conditions, as a catalyst for labor organization, and as an institution for facilitating compromise and solving labor disputes. It came into being in a rush and only operated from the beginning of March until the beginning of May 1848; nevertheless, it succeeded not just in articulating a social revolution but in turning words into action.

Setting Up a Revolution

The Revolution of February 1848 was not planned. Events escalated so quickly that they took the country by surprise. Protests over the banning of a political banquet on February 22 and 23 grew in size and pitch to the point where the government had to contemplate using force to suppress them. However, the National Guard was unreliable when it came to their suppression. Many of its members refused to use force against the protestors. Some were even eager to join the demonstration.

The king, Louis-Philippe, decided to appease the demands of the demonstrators for reform by dismissing his unpopular prime minister François Guizot. The dismissal of Guizot was not enough to calm the demonstrations however. The crowds continued marching through the streets of Paris. On the afternoon of February 23, there was a clash between the military and the protestors on the Boulevard des Capucines in front of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A rifle was accidentally discharged from an unknown quarter, and the fourteenth regiment of the line began to fire into the crowd in their apprehension. Over fifty people lost their lives in the

ensuing chaos.² The violence in the streets continued to grow through February 23 and 24, and Louis-Philippe was unwilling to use the military to crush the revolt. By the evening of February 24, protestors had surrounded the gates of the Tuileries. Louis-Philippe, realizing that his situation was untenable, determined to abdicate the throne in favor of his grandson. His abdication however, left a void in authority and provided an opportunity for various opposition groups to make a claim on the reins of government.

The provisional government was established on February 24, 1848. It underwent considerable changes over the next several weeks, but at the time, it consisted of seven members and three secretaries. The seven members of the government were the moderate republicans, Alphonse de Lamartine, and Pierre Marie de Saint-Georges; true republicans, Jacques Charles Dupont, Adolphe Crémieux, and Louis-Antoine Garnier-Pages; the radical republican François Arago; and the socialist Alexandre Ledru-Rollin. The socialists, Ferdinand Flocon, Louis Blanc, and Alexandre Martin (Albert), were made secretaries of the new government and were therefore not given ministerial portfolios.³

On February 25, 1848, large crowds surrounded the Hôtel de Ville in Paris, the seat of the new provisional government. In the wake of the king's abdication, there was much confusion as different groups jockeyed for power in order to create a government of their own design. The crowds outside the Hôtel hoped to have their say as well. They forced their way into the building and demanded that the provisional government hear their grievances. Some members of the provisional government, and in particular the liberal Lamartine, were not pleased. "The members of the government, and the small number of ministers and friends who surrounded them... heard these injunctions to the end without interruption, as one listens to delirium, for fear

² Mark Traugott, *Armies of the Poor* (New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 15.

³ *La Réforme*, February 25, 1848.

of aggravating it by contradiction.”⁴ They were cornered and therefore they had little choice but to respond. Over the previous days, the military and the National Guard had proved ineffective in their ability to control the crowds of Paris. The provisional government found that it was also at the mercy of this mass of people that had stormed their meeting hall. Lamartine described how, “the government, despairing of the public safety under the pressure of such a tumult, bowed its head, shrunk within itself, resolving to die.”⁵ Events had reached a crisis. The provisional government was forced to take the demands of the crowd seriously. There was no other choice.

Several members of the provisional government were ideologically in favor of the demands being set forth by the crowds marching through Paris. As the crowds held aloft the red flag, a symbol of socialism, and demanded the “right to work,” Louis Blanc celebrated.⁶ Lamartine, however, described the demands as a “manifesto of impossibilities.”⁷ Although the provisional government was devoted to more liberal ideals than the previous government had been, the members of the government found themselves in an uneasy alliance with radical thinkers and revolutionary leaders as they attempted to appease the demonstrators and secure legitimacy in the eyes of the nation. The provisional government would give only as much ground as it thought absolutely necessary to achieve these ends.

This then was the first real test of the unity of the provisional government. The members of the provisional government now found themselves in a position where they were opposed to each other, where, up to the abdication of the king, they had been working as allies. In the months leading up to the Revolution of 1848, oppositional political banquets had drawn support from wide ranges of the public who were united in their dissatisfaction with the current regime,

⁴ Alphonse de Lamartine, *History of the French Revolution of 1848*. (London: Bell, 1888), 220.

⁵ Alphonse de Lamartine, *History of the French Revolution of 1848*, 220.

⁶ Louis Blanc, *1848, Historical Revelations, Inscribed to Lord Normanby*. (New York: H. Fertig, 1971), 81.

⁷ Alphonse de Lamartine, *History of the French Revolution of 1848*, 219.

but in little else. These banquets provided an opportunity to make speeches, give toasts, and confirm a sense of solidarity among the disparate parts of the opposition. The working-class journal *L'Atelier* stated, “While we were divided on a question of simple politeness towards the Head of State, there was unanimity on the necessity of expressing more or less ardent wishes for the improvement of the lot of the working class. Every banquet had its toast to the workers, signifying that the political question was growing into a social question.”⁸

In many respects though, the nice words that were said about the smaller groups in the largely republican opposition were only lip service. So long as the opposition was out of a position of power, there was nothing they could do, or would have to do, for their unsatisfied allies. In the January edition of *L'Atelier*, the editors had begun to suspect their republican allies as being reluctant to go the necessary distance to help the working people of France. They declared,

If the generous sentiments manifested in the reformist banquets call for working people to be taken into consideration in the interest of public opinion, the wishes formed are still too general, and too nebulous to pass from ideas into facts, from theory to practice... We started with vows for the improvement of our lot, that's good; warm words have been said, generous sentiments have been shown, it is very good. But we need more than that... [The] leaders and directors of the [opposition] party, who are the hope of the people, are silent or express themselves in this respect in vague or insignificant terms. This silence is abdication! Will we not understand it?”⁹

For *L'Atelier* “vague” and “insignificant” words were not enough. Action was needed. The leaders of the opposition, such as Lamartine, may have been the hope of the people, but the hopes of the workers were not necessarily the dreams of the leaders.

⁸ *L'Atelier: Organe Spécial de La Classe Laborieuse*, January, 1848.

⁹ *L'Atelier*, January, 1848.

Now that the republicans were in a position of power, it remained to be seen how serious they had been in their overtures to their socialist allies. It was in this context that *L'Atelier* began to paste posters up all over Paris encouraging workers to demand reform. “Workers! Stay strong. Keep your weapons. We will join with the National Guard and demand: Reform! Complete reform.”¹⁰ This was the context in which Lamartine looked with terror out over the crowds that surrounded the Hôtel de Ville on February 25. “Looking now upon the heads of the people which waved to and fro on the square, and now upon the smoke, which floating over the thousands of faces, formed a sort of halo to the red flag, he saw the efforts of his colleagues powerless against the obstinacy of these envoys of the people.”¹¹ The provisional government truly was at the mercy of this crowd and had to take their demands seriously.

In the days that followed, the provisional government was forced to include both republicans and socialists in its ranks in order to appease the crowds that were demonstrating on its doorstep. It is notable though, that ministerial positions went only to republicans, with the exception of Ledru-Rollin, who was named Minister of the Interior on February 24.¹² In this way, the republican members of provisional government secured their power over the executive.

For workers such as Nadaud, however, the presence of Louis Blanc bolstered hopes. Blanc’s ideas captured the imaginations of the workers of Paris in the years leading up to 1848. Blanc envisioned a French government that was tied inextricably to industrial labor. He advocated a national bank that could leverage capital on behalf of the workers. In his work *L'Organisation du travail*, first published in 1840 but appearing in multiple editions including one in 1848, he had proposed a series of national workshops. These workshops would be

¹⁰ Gaëtan Delmas, *Les affiches rouges; reproduction exacte et histoire critique de toutes les affiches ultra-républicaines placardées sur les murs de Paris depuis le 24 février 1848* (Paris: D. Giraud et J. Dagneau, 1851), 12.

¹¹ Alphonse de Lamartine, *History of the French Revolution of 1848*, 221.

¹² *Gazette nationale ou le Moniteur universel*, February 25, 1848.

organized along the lines of established industries and would encompass all members of a particular profession into a single entity where they could be represented on a national level and could support one another. They would standardize the regulations of their industry and provide for sick pay for their members. Most importantly, though, he argued that they should be endorsed by the government. This would effectively guarantee the right to work.¹³

Louis Blanc's brand of socialism, therefore, promised workers a degree of agency that they had not previously known. That they might, in a way, control their own destiny must have been a proposition that held a great deal of appeal. The years leading up to 1848 had seen an economic recession as well. Many workers were unemployed and were struggling to make ends meet.¹⁴ The events of February gave the discontented elements of Parisian society reason to hope. This governmental crisis could be the long-awaited opportunity to establish a system that would endorse the socialist ideas proposed by men like Louis Blanc.

On the morning of February 28, thousands of workers showed up at the Hôtel de Ville demanding the creation of a Ministry of Progress. This ministry would be imbued with the power to decree certain types of legislation in regard to workers and labor. Louis Blanc would be the natural choice to head the ministry. As a government minister, Louis Blanc would have the power to implement his plan for the organization of labor. The declaration of the right to work on February 25 and the creation of the National Workshops on February 26 had fueled the hunger of the workers of Paris. They wanted a concrete government ministry devoted to the

¹³ Louis Blanc, *Organisation du travail*, 5th ed. (Paris: Bureau de la Société de l'industrie fraternelle, 1848) 15.

¹⁴ Rémi Gossez, *Les Ouvriers de Paris*, 33.

amelioration of their problems. Louis Blanc took up their demands before the Provisional Government.¹⁵

Knowing exactly what happened as Louis Blanc argued in favor of the Ministry of Progress is limited by the nature of the sources which are available.¹⁶ Several of the members of the government, and those closely related to the government, left memoirs and accounts of the February Days. These accounts are all colored by the politics of their authors. Socialist accounts tend to attribute a large role to Louis Blanc, whereas moderate and more conservative accounts often leave him out of the narrative entirely. Many of these accounts were written many years after the fact and therefore are undoubtedly influenced by events that would unfold later in the revolution. It is left to the historian to do his or her best to piece together a narrative of what happened from a combination of these accounts.

According to Republican historian and Ledru-Rollin's secretary, Elias Regnault, the Provisional Government was reluctant to create an entire government ministry which would, in effect, be devoted to the ideals of socialism. Lamartine argued that a Ministry of Progress was a redundancy. He argued that every government ministry was, at its core, devoted to progress, and that any progress that was needed could be accomplished simply by expanding the prerogative of the existing ministries.¹⁷ The majority of the members of the Provisional Government took up in favor of this argument. The republicans were unwilling to give ground to the socialists unless they deemed it was absolutely necessary.

¹⁵ Alfred Delvau, *Histoire de La Révolution de Février*, (Paris: Lacour et C^e, 1850), 338.

¹⁶ A relevant source might be the "Procès-verbaux des délibérations du gouvernement provisoire n°1" (non authentifié, 201 pages écrites), 24 février-6 mars, 1 reg. 288 p., located in the Fonds Pagnerre, AN 67/AP/9. I have not had the opportunity to explore this source, however.

¹⁷ Élias Regnault, *Histoire Du Gouvernement Provisoire*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Victor Lecou, 1850), 122.

With a crowd of angry workers numbering in the thousands on the doorstep of the Hôtel de Ville, and no governmental force available to suppress them, some measure of appeasement was necessary, however. According to the novelist and liberal republican Daniel Stern (the comtesse d'Argoult), Louis Blanc, realizing the situation the government was in, decided to press his advantage. He tendered his resignation, knowing that if the government were to accept it, the crowd outside would never stand for it, and rioting would ensue. In an effort at compromise, Garnier-Pagès, a moderate republican, proposed the idea of a government commission on labor, rather than a full-fledged ministry.¹⁸ Marrast, trying to flatter Louis Blanc, took the idea a step further and suggested that the commission be housed in the Luxembourg Palace.¹⁹ The account of Daniel Stern written immediately after the revolution had ended noted Louis Blanc's dissatisfaction and quoted him thus, "What shall I do...without power, without budget, without any means of achieving my ideas? What shall I say to the people who love me if they reproach me for having deceived them?... My honor refuses this as much as my conscience."²⁰

It has been suggested by historians, dating back to Donald McKay in his 1933 book on the National Workshops, that the creation of the commission on labor in place of a ministry of labor was a concerted attempt on the part of more conservative elements in the government to tie Louis Blanc up and create tension between him and the workers.²¹ Louis Blanc himself accused the provisional government of conspiring against him.

¹⁸ Daniel Stern, *Histoire de La Révolution de 1848*. vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Paris: Charpentier, 1862), 384. Garnier-Pagès also reports Louis Blanc's threat to resign and the creation of the Luxembourg Commission as an effort at "conciliation." Louis-Antoine Garnier-Pagès, *Histoire de la Révolution de 1848*. (Paris : Degorce-Cadot, 1868), 369.

¹⁹ Daniel Stern, *Histoire de La Révolution de 1848*, 384. Lamartine agrees with Stern that Louis Blanc was given the commission as an attempt to appease the protesting masses of Paris. Lamartine, *History of the Revolution of 1848*, vol. 2, (Boston: Phillips, Samson, and Co. 1849). 53

²⁰ Daniel Stern, *Histoire de La Révolution de 1848*, 385.

²¹ Donald C. McKay, *The National Workshops; a Study in the French Revolution of 1848*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1933), 15.

[It] was the determined intention of the Government to allow that experiment (of the Luxembourg) to have its run; that in itself it would have the good result of convincing the workmen of the emptiness of Louis Blanc's inapplicable theories...that, in this manner, the working classes would be disabused by experience; that their idolatry of Louis Blanc would of itself crumble to pieces, and that he would lose for ever all his influence, all his prestige, and cease to be a danger."²²

Clearly, Louis Blanc was dissatisfied with the decision of the Provisional Government and, at least in retrospect, he saw their decision as a plot to discredit him. Louis Blanc also cited the creation of the National Workshops on 27 February as a plot to discredit him. He had proposed a system of National Workshops in his work on the organization of labor, but the workshops that were given over to Pierre Marie, the Minister of Public Works, resembled Louis Blanc's proposition in name only. The decree placing the workshops under his direction explained how, in Blanc's words, they "became the exclusive affair of the most animated adversary of socialism" and why he felt they were intentionally driven to failure.²³ According to Louis Blanc years later, the association of the National Workshops with his name was "certainly the most extraordinary example of the power of slander, which [had] become the common weapon of various passions, striving in concert for the destruction of an idea, in the person of a man."²⁴

In the moment, however, Louis Blanc relented. François Arago, a radical republican who had a longstanding relationship with Louis Blanc, appealed to him not to break the unity of the government, "I, who have been your father... I implore you, give up this idea of the organization of labor, and do not separate yourself from the Provisional Government. Do you want us to be slaughtered!"²⁵ According to Louis Blanc, Arago went so far as to offer to be the vice-president

²² Louis Blanc, *1848, Historical Revelations, Inscribed to Lord Normanby*. (New York: H. Fertig, 1858), 146.

²³ Louis Blanc, *Histoire de la révolution de 1848* (Paris: Librairie internationale, 1870), 219.

²⁴ Louis Blanc, *Histoire de la révolution de 1848*, 218.

²⁵ Charles-Joseph-Nicolas Robin, *Histoire de la Révolution française de 1848* (Paris: E. et V. Penaud, 1849), 389.

of the commission, thereby attaching his own name to its success, and to share in its fate in the same way as Louis Blanc.²⁶

After Arago's appeal, Louis Blanc eventually agreed to withdraw his resignation and to become the president of the government commission on labor. He took Alexandre Martin, more commonly known as "Albert, the worker", as his vice-president. The provisional government, trying to appease the crowd at its doorstep, couched the declaration of the commission in terms sympathetic to the plight of the workers, that "it is time to come to terms with the long and inequitable suffering of the workers; that the question of work is of supreme importance; that there is no higher or more dignified occupation of republican government."²⁷ Even the moderate republican Lamartine affixed his name to the decree. The declaration, however, denied Louis Blanc the position of a minister, keeping the balance of power tilted towards the republicans.

Setting Up the Luxembourg Commission

Despite Louis Blanc's lukewarm feelings towards it, the Luxembourg Commission began somewhat auspiciously. The Provisional Government gave it use of the Luxembourg Palace. This was the former house of the Chamber of Peers and therefore a symbol of power.²⁸ Over the next several days, the newspapers reported the government's call to the workers that they should select delegates to represent them at the commission's first meeting on March 1. Over the course of the next two months, hundreds of workers' groups constituted themselves formally to select delegates and participate in Louis Blanc's social revolution.

²⁶ Louis Blanc, 1848, *Historical Revelations, Inscribed to Lord Normanby*, 91.

²⁷ Emile de Girardin, *Le droit au travail au Luxembourg et à l'Assemblée nationale* (Paris: M. Lévy, 1849), 1.

²⁸ *Gazette nationale ou le Moniteur universel*, March 1, 1848.

It is significant that the Luxembourg Commission was created so early in the revolution and just how quickly it was created. The government clearly recognized that something had to be done to satisfy the demands of the discontented workers. Louis Blanc and many others would have liked to see the provisional government go further in their commitment to the workers; however, conservative elements in the provisional government were willing to go only so far in their indulgence of socialist ideas.

It was a monumental undertaking to organize all the industries of Paris in a democratic fashion, and then to organize elections of delegates in each of these various associations. After all, worker associations had been strictly limited under the July Monarchy. It was only two days before, on February 26, that the provisional government had made association a right, recognizing “that workers must associate among themselves to enjoy the legitimate profits of their labor.”²⁹ Workers’ journals such as *L’Atelier* called for workers to associate in their issue of February 27: “The Republic gives us the most precious of all the rights, the right of association. Therefore, organize yourselves; form among yourselves patriotic societies.” The newspaper even declared that it would sponsor their own association of workers, the *Société Républicaine et Patriotique de l’Atelier*. Nevertheless, the four days between February 26 and the Luxembourg Commission’s inaugural meeting on March 1 (1848 was a leap year) was hardly enough time to create an entire structure of workers’ organizations from scratch.³⁰

There were, however, other structures that workers could build on. William Sewell has highlighted the ways in which mutual aid societies provided the basis for the associations of workers that appeared in 1848. They were drawn up largely along lines of profession. These aid societies, he points out, were already concerned with tackling labor issues. They often included

²⁹ *le Moniteur universel*, March 1, 1848.

³⁰ *L’Atelier*, February, 1848.

provision for unemployment or sick pay and some even provided pensions or funeral costs. They were morally responsible to their members. They were run by the workers, for the workers. In February and March 1848, many of these aid societies simply expanded their role to become associations for the workers within a particular profession. As a result, from the earliest days of the revolution, workers were already marching through the streets behind banners bearing the names of their professions.³¹

The other underlying labor structure in Paris, as Martin Nadaud noted in his account of gathering outside the Hôtel de Ville, were the *conseils des prud'hommes*. These were labor tribunals set up for each industry and were composed of both workers and bosses. The purpose of these tribunals was to work through labor conflicts. Before 1848, the composition of these conseils was largely skewed to over-represent the bosses and under-represent the workers.

Construction workers like Nadaud, saw the overhaul of the government and the establishment of the Republic as an opportunity to reform the conseils des prud'homme into a more democratic and representative body. In the meantime, the structures that already existed before 1848 provided a structure around which workers could organize. As Nadaud explained, the meeting to elect members to the conseil des prud'hommes also became an opportunity to nominate a delegate to the Luxembourg Commission. For the stone masons, and for many other industries, these workers' organizations did not have to be conjured from thin air.

Between 150 and 200 delegates attended the first session of the Luxembourg Commission.³² Louis Blanc was determined to settle two issues of immediate concern to

³¹ William H. Sewell, "Corporations Republicaines: The Revolutionary Idiom of Parisian Workers in 1848," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 21, no. 2 (1979): 198; William H. Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848*.

³² Louis Blanc, *La Révolution de février au Luxembourg* (Paris: Michel Lévy frères, 1849) 3.

workers in this first session. He wanted to set a limit to the number of hours in the workday, and he wanted to abolish the practice of *marchandage*. *Marchandage* was a system of subcontracting that resulted in notoriously low wages for workers. An architect or a general contractor would negotiate a contract for smaller parts of his larger project with various subcontractors, or *tâcherons*. The *tâcheron* would then hire his own workers and buy his own materials to complete the part of the project that had been assigned to him. It was in his interest to minimize labor and building costs, because he was able to pocket the difference between these costs and the price he had agreed to with the general contractor, or *patron*. *Marchandage* was not just a system that took root in the older construction trades; it was also an accepted way of working in the newer machine building trades. In the machine building trades, foremen would bargain with workers to try and obtain their services at the best possible price. This had been the accepted mode of business since at least 1840.³³ Workers saw this system, in its various forms, as being exploitive and pitting workers against other workers. As something that squeezed wages, workers loathed the practice of *marchandage*.³⁴

On March 2, as a result of this first session of the Luxembourg Commission, the provisional government set the work day in Paris at ten hours and at eleven hours in the provinces. It abolished *marchandage*.³⁵ These were easy victories as the reform of *marchandage* and the length of the workday were relatively uncontroversial. There was near unanimous support among workers, and even more conservative members of the government did not take a strong position against them. By starting with these issues, Louis Blanc and the Luxembourg

³³ James M Edmonson, *From Mécenicien to Ingénieur: Technical Education and the Machine Building Industry in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York and London: Garland, 1987), 260.

³⁴ Casey Harison, "An Organization of Labor: Laissez-Faire and *Marchandage* in the Paris Building Trades through 1848," *French Historical Studies* 20, no. 3 (1997): 363.

³⁵ *Le Moniteur universel*, March 3, 1848.

Commission sought to gain the momentum they would need as they moved on to tackle more difficult issues.

The Commission was always going to find it difficult to maintain this drive, however. Although the policy of marchandage was legally abolished, in practice it continued. The government had neither the will nor the resources to enforce its decree. The abolition of marchandage thus illustrated the larger problem facing the commission: it had no real power to enforce its decisions. It was entirely dependent upon the government to act on its behalf. The mounting frustrations of the workers at the ineffectiveness of the Commission and its inability to coordinate real reform with the provisional government proved to be an insurmountable obstacle in the weeks to follow.

The other factor slowing momentum was that the organization of the Commission itself needed to be set up. It needed rules, including rules of who could claim to be a delegate, and a regular order of business. Thus, after the Commission addressed the issues of marchandage and work hours, the Commission turned its attention to its own organization. Louis Blanc declared that it would be difficult to continue to work effectively with such a large body of delegates. He asked that each profession select three delegates, and that professions which were similar (e.g. stonemasons would not need a corporation for each arrondissement) consider combining into one body.³⁶

This too was carried out with remarkable speed. On March 10, the Commission assembled with around 250 members. It decided that out of this larger body, a central committee of ten delegates should be selected to help facilitate the day-to-day business of the Commission. Members of the central committee were to be selected by lot and no profession would have more

³⁶ Louis Blanc, *La Révolution de février au Luxembourg*, (Paris: Michel Lévy frères, 1849), 4.

than one delegate in the central committee.³⁷ Each of the 250 delegates placed his or her name in an urn and the secretary of the Commission, François Vidal, drew out ten names: Philippe Pointard, button maker; Louis Perrin, gunsmith; Joseph Davoine, spur maker; Pierre Barré, carriage painter; Jean Célestin Legros, carpenter; Gustave Bernard, blacksmith; Charles Brémond, shawl maker; J.-B. Médéric Hobry, cooper; Xavier Chagniard, iron founder; Nicolas-Arsène-Mounton Labrat, roofer.³⁸ We can see that there were both old professions such as roofing and barrel making on this list as well as newer professions such as iron casting and gunsmithing. It is also significant that, as time went on, the number of delegates to the Luxembourg Commission continued to increase. In addition to the 250 delegates that were present at the March 10 meeting, there were 454 more delegates that would eventually become a part of the commission.³⁹ This illustrates that far from combining into larger corporations of similar industries as Louis Blanc had encouraged, there were many very specific organizations of workers divided by location and by profession. The Luxembourg Commission acted as the umbrella organization for all of these corporations.

Arbitration

The next order of business for the Commission was to begin negotiations with the owners of the factories and the labor bosses. The Luxembourg Commission put out a call for a general

³⁷ Louis Blanc, *Discours Prononcés Dans Les Séances Des 2 et 10 Mars 1848 au Luxembourg Devant Les Délégués de Tous Les Corps d'état Accompagnés Des Décrets Relatifs à l'organisation Du Travail et Des Noms et Adresses Des Délégués* (Paris : Société de l'Industrie fraternelle, 1848), 25.

³⁸ Louis Blanc, *Discours Prononcés Dans Les Séances Des 2 et 10 Mars 1848 au Luxembourg*, 26.

³⁹ Casey Harison, *The Stonemasons of Creuse in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), 155.

meeting of the *patrons* to be held at the Luxembourg Palace on March 17.⁴⁰ On March 16, Louis Blanc and Albert published a warning in *Le Constitutionnel* that bosses must abide by the decisions made at the Luxembourg in order to ensure peace and that workers should not ask the impossible from their bosses. On March 17, 231 bosses were present at the meeting at the Luxembourg representing 77 professions. They elected ten delegates to form a permanent committee within the Luxembourg Commission.⁴¹ Louis Blanc addressed the assembled bosses, “Do you know why I have declared in my heart a war to the death against the principal of antagonism? It is not only because it is often bad for the worker; it’s also because it is often bad for the boss.”⁴² One of the principal occupations of the Luxembourg over the next weeks would be to act as an arbitrator between capital and labor. It was essential that the commission take on this role of arbitrator of labor disputes if it was to keep its position of leadership among workers.

The factories of Derosne and Cail give us important insight into the success and limitations of the Luxembourg Commission’s arbitration. Charles Derosne and Jean-François Cail began their operation in 1818 as a simple coppersmith’s workshop. In 1838, they founded a branch in Brussels. In 1844, they started a factory in Denain on the border with Belgium for heavy copperwork. The next year they began a cast-iron and copper foundry in Grenelle near Paris. In 1847, they opened a branch in Amsterdam for the manufacture of equipment in sugar refining. By 1848 a significant amount of their Paris/Grenelle business was devoted to the

⁴⁰ Emile Carreey, *Recueil complet des actes du gouvernement provisoire (février, mars, avril, mai, 1848)* (Paris: A. Durand, 1848), 125.

⁴¹ Pierre Loustau, *Louis Blanc à la Commission du Luxembourg* (Paris : imprimerie Bonvalot-Jouve, 1908) 33-34.

⁴² Louis Blanc, *Pages d’histoire de la révolution de février, 1848* (Bruxelles: Meline, Cans et compagnie, 1850), 179.

manufacturing of steam engines used in the refining of sugar and they employed 800 workers in Paris and another 700 in Grenelle.⁴³

Derosne and Cail was a large company with a large workforce in the context of 1848. In the aftermath of the creation of the Luxembourg Commission, the workers organized inside Derosne and Cail to demand that the company provide basic subsistence such as bread in periods where there was not enough work in the factories. In the face of imminent layoffs, the workers of Derosne and Cail began a strike. On March 25, the workers of the Derosne and Cail factories, sent their delegates to the Luxembourg Commission. Those delegates, Jean-Pierre Drevet, Laloye, and Collin (the latter two exist in the historical record only in terms of their profession and their last names), brought a case before the Commission for arbitration. Of course, Jean-François Cail was in attendance. The hope was that the Luxembourg would be able to find an immediate compromise to put workers back to work and that they could begin to work on a longer-term plan that would satisfy both parties.

As a result of the arbitration, the workers of the Derosne and Cail factories gained limited self-governance and more equitable distribution of wages.⁴⁴ The owners would pass on orders along with a lump salary to the workers who would in turn organize the labor, allot salaries, and maintain discipline. The Luxembourg Commission monitored this situation very closely for the next three months hoping that it could be a model upon which to organize future arbitration. Indeed, in its March 29 edition, *Le Moniteur* announced that as a result of its successful

⁴³ *L'illustration*, May 12, 1849.

⁴⁴ Ministère du Commerce, de l'Industrie et des Colonies, Office du Travail, *De la conciliation et de l'arbitrage dans les conflits collectifs entre patrons et ouvriers en France et à l'étranger* (Imprimerie nationale, 1893), 577., Jeanne Gaillard, "Les Usines Cail et les ouvriers métallurgistes de Grenelle de 1848 à 1871". *Mouvement social* (October 1960): 38.

intervention at Derosne et Cail, “demands for arbitration were being sent by other workers and bosses from all parts [of the country] to Louis Blanc.”⁴⁵

Arbitration at the Luxembourg Commission was therefore a sign of its success. Despite this, historians have emphasized how the system established at Derosne and Cail wound up falling apart.⁴⁶ The extent to which this was due to the compromise facilitated by the Luxembourg Commission is highly debatable. During the Revolution of 1848, new orders for machine builders began to be suspended. The Nord railway company contemplated no new construction after February 1848. In addition to the lack of new orders being placed, there was a contraction of available credit in the uncertainty of the revolution. This made it difficult for companies to fulfill the orders that had been placed prior to the revolution as they could not acquire the materials needed to complete the jobs. The principal bank of Derosne and Cail suspended operations on March 6.⁴⁷ This was a situation that not only affected the operations of Derosne and Cail. Many others of the Paris machinist ventures struggled as well. Cail even considered coming to the aid of the Gouin establishment, another major Parisian machine building enterprise which was having financial difficulties.⁴⁸

It was not only new industries like steel works and engineering works that went to the Luxembourg Commission for arbitration. On March 31, 1848, five paving companies wrote to the Luxembourg Commission asking for their intervention in a dispute between the paving workers and the management of the various companies. They agreed in advance to whatever terms the Luxembourg Commission thought best saying, “after deliberating on the question that

⁴⁵ *le Moniteur universel*, March 29, 1848.

⁴⁶ Jeanne Gaillard, “Les Usines Cail et les ouvriers métallurgistes de Grenelle de 1848 à 1871” 38.

⁴⁷ James M. Edmonson, *From Mecanicien to Ingenieur Technical Education and the Machine Building Industry in Nineteenth-Century France*, 263.

⁴⁸ James M. Edmonson, *From Mecanicien to Ingenieur Technical Education and the Machine Building Industry in Nineteenth-Century France*, 263.

divides the paving workers and ourselves, we have resolved to refer ourselves to your arbitration... to that which in your wisdom, you would have us do.”⁴⁹ The Luxembourg Commission arranged a meeting of representatives from the management of the companies and of the workers and on April 1, negotiated a new day’s wage for those involved in the paving industry. Journeymen surveyors received 4 Fr. 50, Journeymen stone movers received 3 Fr. 75, and paving boys received 2 Fr. 50 for a day’s work.⁵⁰ It is significant to note that the pavers had greater leverage in their arbitration than did the workers at Derosne and Cail. Louis Blanc stated, “Who does not recall the aspect of Paris during the first days of the Revolution? Barricades everywhere, or their debris. The movement of commerce stopped, the means of transportation paralyzed.”⁵¹ The streets of Paris had been destroyed to create barricades of February and pavers were required to lay paving stones back in place.

Whereas the uncertainty of the revolution caused orders for Derosne and Cail to dry up, the destruction of the streets to make barricades during the revolution caused increased demand for pavers. Unlike the machinists of Derosne and Cail, pavers were an old and established profession whose organization stretched back to the guilds of Paris.⁵² Paving masters and their workers were no strangers to having to make compromises, even though they were now doing so in a new context—the Luxembourg Commission. What the Luxembourg Commission’s track record shows however is that it was able to successfully arbitrate in both old and new industries.

Among the cases in which the Luxembourg Commission acted as arbitrator, that between stone-cutters and their employers is also interesting. Stone cutters were another established trade

⁴⁹ Ministère du Commerce, de l'Industrie et des Colonies, Office du Travail, *De la conciliation et de l'arbitrage dans les conflits collectifs entre patrons et ouvriers en France et à l'étranger* (Imprimerie nationale, 1893), 579.

⁵⁰ Ministère du Commerce, de l'Industrie et des Colonies, Office du Travail, *De la conciliation et de l'arbitrage dans les conflits collectifs entre patrons et ouvriers en France et à l'étranger*, 580.

⁵¹ Louis Blanc, *Histoire de la révolution de 1848.*, 184.

⁵² Allan Potofsky, *Constructing Paris in the Age of Revolution*. (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 33.

and Louis Blanc took a direct role in this arbitration.⁵³ There had been a long-standing issue between cutters and their employers over the cost of cutting stone. After the February Days, as many groups began to take advantage of their new right to assemble and to strike, the Luxembourg Commission, the delegates of the stone-cutters, and the *Chambre des Entrepreneurs de Maçonnerie* fixed the price of the cutting of stone stating, “Considering that the means of avoiding strikes, which are always contrary to the communal interest, is in effect the fixing of the price of stone cutting... the undersigned have... declared for the future the price of... the cutting of stone.”⁵⁴ The rhetoric of the agreement emphasized the common interest of workers and employers in participating in the arbitration process.

In the years following the 1848 revolution, Louis Blanc cited arbitration as one of the remarkable success stories of the Commission. The Luxembourg Commission acted as arbitrator in disputes between ten different groups of workers and employers.⁵⁵ Even those who had a negative opinion of the Luxembourg Commission often admitted that it served an important function. *L’Ami de la religion*, a conservative journal, reported, “Admittedly, we do not want to dispute the services that, in a difficult moment, the delegates of the workers assembled at the Luxembourg have rendered to the various bodies of State to whose complaints they have listened and whose pretensions they have reconciled.”⁵⁶ Even the comtesse d’Agoult, no fan of Louis Blanc, admitted that the arbitration was of “real utility.”⁵⁷

However, in the case of Derosne and Cail, the arbitration of the Luxembourg Commission did not signal the end of the grievances of the workers or their political activity.

⁵³ Casey Harison, *The Stonemasons of Creuse in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, 155.

⁵⁴ Ministère du Commerce, de l’Industrie et des Colonies, Office du Travail, *De la conciliation et de l’arbitrage dans les conflits collectifs entre patrons et ouvriers en France et à l’étranger*, 582-583.

⁵⁵ Remi Gossez, *Les ouvriers de Paris: L’Organisation 1848- 1851*, 390–91.

⁵⁶ *L’Ami de la Religion: Journal Ecclésiastique Politique et Littéraire*, April 28, 1848.

⁵⁷ Daniel Stern, *Histoire de La Révolution de 1848*, vol. 2, 2nd ed. (Paris: Charpentier, 1862), 48.

Christian Linz, the chief of the office of design, Denis Poulot, the chief of the workshop, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the head of the workers at the Derosne and Cail factories, were all founding members of the Democratic Republican Society of the First Arrondissement. This club sought to promote socialist participation in the election of April 1848.⁵⁸ After the election, on April 16, a demonstration was organized and a number of the workers from the Derosne and Cail factory marched under their own banner.⁵⁹ Jean-Pierre Drevet, their delegate to the Commission, was implicated as an associate of two of the men who were arrested in the wake of the revolt of May 15.⁶⁰ Yet, it is far from clear that he was involved in the storming of the National Assembly. After May 15, Drevet continued to advocate the importance of arbitration or peaceful negotiation over revolution. By this point, he was working for François Cavé, a competitor of Derosne and Cail. Despite this, he nevertheless had 300 copies of a handbill describing the success of arbitration at Derosne and Cail published in June.⁶¹ Drevet remained true to the Luxembourg Commission long after its official demise.

Conclusion

Despite its short existence, there was significant buy-in from corporations of workers, not just in new industries, but also in older established industries. The ever-increasing number of delegates shows the existence of the Luxembourg Commission provoked more and more workers to organize. Between its conception in late February and its abolition as a governmental

⁵⁸ Alphonse Lucas, *Les clubs et les clubistes: histoire complète, critique et anecdotique des clubs et des comités électoraux fondés à Paris depuis la révolution de 1848* (Paris: Dentu, 1851), 30.

⁵⁹ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai 1848: Albert, Barbès, Blanqui, Raspail, Louis Blanc, Caussidière, Huber, Sobrier, le général Courtais, etc* (Paris: A. Le Chevalier, 1869), 289.

⁶⁰ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 16,47.

⁶¹ Jean-Pierre Drevet and Coiffier, *Demande Dans Un but d'humanité. Réponse Aux Objections*. Jean-Pierre Drevet, *Socialisme Pratique* in Faure and Ranciere, *La Parole Ouvriere*, (Paris: Union General d'editions, 1976).

institution in May, the Luxembourg Commission gave the laboring professions of Paris a body in which to articulate and enact a social revolution. The Commission was able to act as arbitrator in negotiations between workers and bosses in ten different professions, from bakers to mechanics.⁶² It is also clear, however, that, despite buy-in from workers and cooperation from employers and the successes of the Luxembourg Commission in terms of arbitration, the work of the Luxembourg only scratched the surface of what many workers were hoping for. Even though the failure of socialist and worker candidates in the April elections would eclipse the successes Louis Blanc was able to achieve in terms of bringing workers and employers together for arbitration, evidence of support for arbitration in the Luxembourg Commission even after May suggests that many workers felt that violent revolution was not necessary to realize their goals.

⁶² Remi Gossez, *Les ouvriers de Paris: L'Organisation 1848- 1851*, 390-391.

Chapter 2

Rebels: The April Elections to the Journée of May 15

In March of 1849, the High Court of Justice at Bourges assembled to hear the cases of those accused of inciting insurrection and storming the National Assembly on May 15 the previous year.¹ The accused were brought to the city for the trial from the various prisons they had been held in over the previous year. Albert, an alleged leader of the insurrection, brought a bird with him, his companion of the last several months.² The atmosphere was, nonetheless, solemn as the president of the court, M. Bérenger, entered, dressed in his red robes trimmed in ermine.³ After the accused were led into the court and seated, the president asked them their names and residences. Most of the accused; Louis August Blanqui, Albert the worker (Alexandre Martin), Armand Barbès, Joseph Sobrier, Benjamin Flotte, Émile Thomas, and François-Vincent Raspail, after pleading against the jurisdiction of the court, refused to answer the question. Blanqui argued that, “The declaration of my name is already a beginning to the debates.” He would have no part of the trial even in so small a matter as saying his name. Albert stated, “I will not respond to any question, I do not recognize the competence of the

¹ *Procès des accusés du 15 mai 1848: attentat contre l'Assemblée nationale* (Bordeaux: Impr. des Ouvriers-Associés, 1849), 3.

² *L'Illustration*, March 17, 1849.

³ *L'Illustration*, March 17, 1849.

court.”⁴ Albert and Barbès had to be brought to the court by armed force on the second day, and Flotte, found undressed in his cell, had to be dressed by the gendarmes before being led to the proceedings.⁵

The events of May 15, 1848 were significant on a national scale. Even a year after the events had occurred, and after the violent June Days, France was still transfixed by the trial and the accused. This chapter will show that although the events of June 1848 often overshadow those of May 15 in the study of the French Revolution of 1848, May 15 is equally important in terms of what it can tell historians about workers’ political histories in 1848. The Commission was the product of political events, and it was political events that conspired to bring it to an end. The losses of the socialists at the polls on April 15 combined with the Luxembourg’s lack of real power led many workers to become dissatisfied with the course the new Republic was taking. The refusal of the government to create a Ministry of Progress on May 10 led to demonstrations by workers and was a contributing factor to the *journée* of May 15. As the workers of Paris lost their stake in government, their dissatisfaction led them to subvert the political process in favor of more radical means. An analysis of the events of the day show that there was nothing inevitable about its failure. There was chaos as National Mobile Guard units struggled to work out what was happening and how they should respond. In the end, however, the events of May 15 swung definitively against the Luxembourg Commission, with its leaders arrested, and Louis Blanc—eventually—fleeing into exile.

The April Elections

⁴ *Procès des accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 8.

⁵ *L’Illustration*, March 17, 1849.

As the national elections of April 23 and 24 approached, the Luxembourg Commission played an important part in organizing workers to participate. On April 16, shortly before the election, the Luxembourg Commission pasted posters across Paris urging the workers to be patient. “Wait, wait, wait a few more days, with the calm that you have shown, and which is true force. Hope, because the time has come, the future belongs to us; do not encourage with your presence the popular demonstrations, do not mix with these follies of another age.”⁶ The Commission clearly had high hopes for the results of the election and wanted workers to give the political process a chance. Such an emphasis on transformative impact of an election victory meant that the fortunes of the Luxembourg Commission became closely entangled with the fortunes of socialist and worker candidates at the polls.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, the Luxembourg Commission built upon previously established structures as it called workers to organize into trade corporations and select delegates to represent them in the commission. These corporations would, in many cases, march together behind the banner of their corporation or industry as they made their demands known. For example, *La Société des Chauffeurs et Conducteurs de Machines à Vapeur* marched behind their banner on April 16 on the Champs-de-Mars.⁷ The Rail workers of the North Line demonstrated behind their flag on May 15 declaring, “We have no confidence in the [National] Assembly.”⁸

Workers also involved themselves in political clubs. After the provisional government repealed the restrictions on clubs that had been in place under the July Monarchy, a large number began to form, or, in instances where they were already established, come out from under the

⁶ Gaëtan Delmas, *Les Affiches Rouges*, 239–40.

⁷ Remi Gossez, *Les ouvriers de Paris: L'Organisation 1848- 1851*, 205.

⁸ Remi Gossez, *Les ouvriers de Paris: L'Organisation 1848- 1851*, 217.

veil of secrecy that they had been shrouded in before they were legalized. According to Peter Amann, by mid-April, there were over 203 popular societies in Paris, although he estimates that his own files are incomplete by ten or even twenty percent.⁹ Whereas the Luxembourg Commission was created to answer questions concerning labor, the clubs were formed largely around political issues. As the April elections approached it is natural that these political clubs would turn their attention toward mobilizing their members into voting blocks.

The role of clubs in selecting candidates for the April elections was, as historians of 1848 have largely agreed, significant. It was with this intention that the *Club des clubs* was created as a central committee to represent and speak for all the clubs of Paris. As Longepied, one of the founding members of the club and its first president wrote,

Once association was conquered as a right; [the people of Paris] formed popular assemblies destined to act directly and with power. Through them, the people would learn what they could demand from those who represented them. It was action of thought. It was elaboration of popular judgements. It was the word of the masses. It was of the utmost importance as the elections approached that errors be clarified and to speak to everyone, on behalf of everyone, of the rights that had to be exercised in less than a month.¹⁰

On March 18, the Club des clubs pasted posters up over Paris declaring, “The National Assembly must represent the sentiment and the will of the people. All our efforts must therefore go to nominating, as representatives of the people, republicans dedicated to the triumph of the cause of equality.”¹¹ With this statement, the Club des clubs revealed its own political agenda. It did not represent the full political spectrum: for it, the “word of the masses” and the “will of the people” was represented only by republican candidates who were open to social reform and promoting equality. The posters went on to declare the way in which this was to be

⁹ Peter H Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 33.

¹⁰ Longepied and Laugier, *Comité Révolutionnaire, Club des Clubs et la Commission*. (Paris: Garnier frères, 1850), 16.

¹¹ Longepied and Laugier, *Comité Révolutionnaire, Club des Clubs et la Commission*, 31.

accomplished, “Political reform is only the instrument of social reform. The Republic will have to satisfy the voices of the workers and the proletariat. This is why the undersigned patriots have instituted a Central Committee which calls on all true republicans, to constitute a special committee in the arrondissements of Paris.”¹² The primary goal of the Club des clubs in the election then was to ensure that the voices of “the workers and the proletariat” were heard. At its zenith, the Club des clubs claimed to incorporate into its confederation 200 clubs, all the workers’ corporations, the Mobile Guard, and the Army.¹³ This figure may be overly optimistic. Peter Amann suggests that by mid-April, the club had enrolled 150 Parisian clubs, of which two-thirds were active at the time.¹⁴

The Club des clubs claimed to represent workers. This is no doubt why the Club des clubs included workers’ corporations when making the count of its membership. If clubs were created primarily for political action and workers’ corporations were created primarily for organizing toward the amelioration of labor issues, it must have been felt that there was some overlap in their goals. Indeed, to repeat a sentence from the poster that was pasted on walls on March 18, “Political reform is only the instrument of social reform.”¹⁵ Longepied even wrote of the founding of the Club des clubs, “Had not the moment arrived to substitute individuality which isolates for fraternity which unites; to put our institutions in harmony with liberty, to assure equality, while erasing, to all possible extent, social inequalities, to guarantee to the people work which furnishes them with the resources of life?”¹⁶ The Club des clubs and the corporations of workers were largely in sympathy with each other, at least in the pronouncements of political leaders like Longepied.

¹² Longepied and Laugier, *Comité Révolutionnaire, Club des Clubs et la Commission*, 31.

¹³ Archives Nationales (A. N.), C. 942, List of Candidates selected by the Club des clubs

¹⁴ Peter H Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy*, 124.

¹⁵ Longepied and Laugier, *Comité Révolutionnaire, Club des Clubs et la Commission*, 31.

¹⁶ Longepied and Laugier, *Comité Révolutionnaire, Club des Clubs et la Commission*, 11–12.

Although leadership of political clubs rarely fell to workers, and two-thirds of club presidencies were held by members of the middle class (as Peter Amann has shown), there is ample evidence that workers participated in clubs.¹⁷ This did not necessarily include all the delegates to the Luxembourg Commission many of whom were busy each night at the Luxembourg Palace. It did include some, however. Fabric worker Gardeche and carpentry worker Vellu were both delegates to the Luxembourg and members of the *Comité électoral des libertés politiques civiles et religieuses* founded in April of 1848 in preparation for the elections (their first names were not recorded in either context, however).¹⁸ Three other members of the Commission were able to shoulder club offices in addition to leadership in their trade corporation. A. Maury was the president of the republican *Club de La Chapelle* as well as the cofounder of the *Association des employés des chemins de fer et des entreprises de messagerie et de roulage*. The head of one guild of specialized cabinetmakers was also the chair of the *Club des droits de l'homme* of the twelfth arrondissement. Benjamin Flotte was president of the *Corporation des cuisiniers* as well as the vice-president of the *Société républicaine centrale*.¹⁹ In fact, there was a *Club des Travailleurs Socialistes*, founded in March of 1848, whose sessions were presided over by a different worker delegate to the Luxembourg each meeting. This club went on to take an active part in the events of May 15.²⁰ And of course, workers who were not busy as delegates at the Luxembourg were able to participate in political clubs without conflict.

The president of the Club des clubs was Aloysius Huber. Huber was not a member of the Luxembourg Commission, although he did self-identify as a leather carrier. He was really more of a professional revolutionary. In his teens, he had joined the Society of the Rights of Man and

¹⁷ Peter H Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy*, 41.

¹⁸ Alphonse Lucas, *Les clubs et les clubistes*, 175–76.

¹⁹ Peter H Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy*, 42.

²⁰ Alphonse Lucas, *Les clubs et les clubistes*, 247.

was involved in two different plots to assassinate the king. The ten years prior to the February Revolution he had spent in prison until the revolution freed him.²¹ Even though their leaderships were distinct, the Luxembourg Commission and the Club des clubs sought to agree a common slate of candidates in the run up to the election. Neither group was particularly effective at this task, and they realized their mutual interest and the importance of cooperation too late to be of much use.

The Luxembourg Commission set about its task by first creating a *Comité central des délégués du département de la Seine* whose task was to organize the workers politically. It sent delegates to the Revolutionary Committee of the Club des clubs to see in what ways cooperation would be possible.²² Next, the Commission created a second committee to deal with the selection of candidates. The committee was dedicated to the idea that at least twenty of the thirty-four seats allotted to the department of the Seine should be filled by workers. However, the debate about which workers should be nominated quickly devolved into a squabble between the trade corporations. Louis Blanc, upon learning of this development addressed the committee,

Each corporation would have its candidate become the definitive candidate. From this will come the dispersal of votes, disunion in choice, and if it is thus, the people will be sacrificed... We must bring to the choice the greatest unity... We must depart from the principle that you are here as forgers, carpenters, tailors, mechanics, you are men of the people, who are brothers, and want to achieve the enfranchisement of the people. If you have the misfortune to introduce into the elections the germ of a prior division, you will arrive at nothing.²³

The Commission tried to avoid the perils of division by creating a unified slate—but it was not able to finalize it until April 17, less than a week before polls opened. The first fourteen names on the list were prominent socialists that had been involved in politics in the past. The next

²¹ Peter H Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy*, 131.

²² Peter H Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy*, 118.

²³ Remi Gossez, *Les ouvriers de Paris*, 254.

twenty names were workers from the Commission itself.²⁴ Notable among the workers on the list was Jean-Pierre Drevet, a mechanic and delegate to the Luxembourg Commission, who was involved in the Commission's arbitration of the dispute between workers and employer at Derosne and Cail. Jean-Baptiste Lagarde, a clockmaker, Benjamin Flotte, a cook, and Aloysius Huber, a leather currier, would play important roles on the journée of May 15. Flotte and Huber would be put on trial for their role in the journée.

For its part, the Club des clubs set about its task of selecting candidates by asking each member club to submit proposed candidate lists. The debates over the candidate lists dragged on as several proposed deadlines for the completion of this task came and went.²⁵ Although, in the end, the Club des clubs decided to adopt the proposal of the Luxembourg Commission that the slate of candidates include twenty workers, and voted to adopt the twenty workers nominated by the Luxembourg by acclamation, the impact of a common list was minimized by the fact that the agreement came too late to be properly publicized. The Luxembourg Commission's list wasn't completed until April 17.²⁶ It took the Club des clubs another five days to complete their list of fourteen additional candidates which they released on April 22. This was a mere twenty-four hours before the polls opened, thus denying them the necessary time to advertise the list properly.²⁷ There was even some last-minute confusion as to who was and who was not on the list: the newspaper *La Réforme* had to print a retraction the following day when they published the list incorrectly.²⁸

²⁴ *Le Représentant Du Peuple : Journal Des Travailleurs*, April 22, 1848.

²⁵ Peter H Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy*, 136-137.

²⁶ Peter H Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy*, 141.

²⁷ Peter H Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy*, 137.

²⁸ *La Réforme*, April 24, 1848.

The Luxembourg Commission and the Club des clubs were thus unable to organize effectively, even though they did eventually back a single list of candidates. William Sewell argues that Louis Blanc's warning that they needed to stick to a "single, agreed-upon list was imperative" fell on deaf ears.²⁹ According to Remi Gossez also, the Luxembourg Commission failed to impose its will on the different corporations and workers groups that existed under its umbrella.³⁰ The Luxembourg Commission was only able to agree on a unified list of candidates the day before the election, and it fell to the delegates from each corporation to publicize the list among the members of their profession. In the event, a range of obscure worker candidates siphoned votes away from the Luxembourg Commission's top choices.

In the end, the socialists were dealt a heavy defeat in the national elections of April 23 and 24. Only seven of the candidates on the Luxembourg Commission's list were elected to the National Assembly: Louis Blanc, Alexandre Martin (Albert), Alexandre Ledru-Rollin, Ferdinand Flocon, Marc Caussidière, Armand Barbès, and Agricol Perdiguier.³¹ The first four of these candidates had been a part of the provisional government. Only one of the workers was elected; Agricol Perdiguier.³² This was a major blow to the Luxembourg Commission. Louis Blanc, the head of the Commission, and one of the most popular figures among the socialists, only received 121,140 votes in the Department of the Seine. Lamartine, the leader of the Republican faction had received 259,600, over twice that number.³³

²⁹ William H. Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France*, 261.

³⁰ Remi Gossez, *Les ouvriers de Paris*, 254-259.

³¹ *La Presse*, April 29, 1848.

³² William Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France*, 262.

³³ *Le Siècle*, April 29, 1848.

After it became clear that the socialists had lost the election, *L'Atelier* was quick to declare its discontent, but wary of calls to take to the streets. In its issue of April 30, after the election results had been publicized, the leading article stated,

If you are unhappy because the popular element is not sufficiently represented in the Constituent Assembly, we are of your opinion. If you're upset because experienced Republicans, because capable socialists have not seen their names come out of the ballot box, we are of your opinion. If you are unhappy to see the narrow and impotent liberalism of the old dynastic left reappear on the Political scene with a large procession, we are still of your opinion. And not only are we of your opinion, but we are yours, if you want to act on the majority, and force them by all means of the press, speech, and of association, to recognize all the institutions that the times consist of.³⁴

Even though *L'Atelier* was making it very clear that they were unhappy with the results of the election, it was not advocating violence. It advocated peaceful ways of making it clear to the government that the results were unacceptable.

On May 4, the first sitting of the newly elected National Assembly, the workers of Paris posted copies of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* across the city as a reminder to the assembly of what it stood for and what the workers demanded. Their concerns were justified. The newly elected Assembly proved almost immediately that it was hostile to the Luxembourg Commission and Louis Blanc's agenda. On May 10, Louis Blanc once again introduced the idea of a Ministry of Progress. Speaking to the entire National Assembly, rather than just the Provisional Government, Louis Blanc emphasized the patience and order the working class had displayed. "History, which will be louder than the voice of parties, will say that for two months, at the end of a frightful storm, in the presence of a crisis with which nothing is comparable, order was maintained, and that we left you a hungry and miserable population,

³⁴ *L'Atelier*, 143.

but nevertheless a population full of confidence, peace, and generosity.”³⁵ According to Louis Blanc, the workers at the Luxembourg Commission were not a violent rabble. They genuinely wanted to work within the system to better their situations. He described the workers who came to the Commission as finding,

passionate men, seeking State intervention between the bosses and the workers to reconcile them and to render them friends; that is what they found there, it was men using their free time, their health, working each hour of the day, and, I can say, in the beginning, each hour of the night, to invite the people to peace and to maintain this peace, precisely by means of these [socialist] ideas which... gave them hope, and which... made them come back saying: today is a somber day, tomorrow will be a better day; we have men of good faith who occupy themselves with our class; we wait, we hope: we are not well off, but at least we have hope.³⁶

This speech was Louis Blanc’s attempt to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Luxembourg Commission in the arbitration of labor disputes. Louis Blanc had difficulty making it through his entire speech, however. He was interrupted multiple times by jeers from his members of the National Assembly who were not fans of his socialist program and had no time for him. The measure was voted down, and Louis Blanc was booed from the Assembly floor.³⁷

After the elections, the workers had significant reason to be disappointed with the new government. On May 11, the day after Louis Blanc was booed from the Assembly Floor, the National Assembly enacted two important pieces of legislation. The first was the creation of an executive board from among the delegates to the Assembly that was vested with the executive power of the new government. The Board consisted of François Arago, Louis-Antoine Garnier-Pagès, Pierre Marie de Saint-Georges, Alphonse de Lamartine, and Alexandre Auguste Ledru-

³⁵ *Compte rendu des séances de l’Assemblée nationale du 4 Mai au 16 Juin 1848*, vol. 1 (Paris: Imprimerie de l’Assemblée Nationale, 1848), 108.

³⁶ *Compte rendu des séances de l’Assemblée nationale du 4 Mai au 16 Juin 1848*, 108–109.

³⁷ *Compte rendu des séances de l’Assemblée nationale du 4 Mai au 16 Juin 1848*, 109, 112.

Rollin.³⁸ With two conservatives in Lamartine and Saint-Georges, one moderate in Garnier-Pagès, and two of the more conservative liberals in Arago and Ledru-Rollin, the Board was not stacked in favor of a workers' socialist agenda. The second important piece of legislation was the banning of any stranger from introducing himself into the session of the Assembly for any pretext and the stipulation that members of the Assembly should remain seated and silent during sessions.³⁹ It had become somewhat commonplace for concerned groups to come to the provisional government to read petitions. In this decree, the National Assembly made clear that there would be a change in how citizens were to address their government. The exclusion of the more radical elements of government from the executive board and the renewed rejection of the Ministry of Progress symbolized a break between the Provisional Government and the newly-elected government of the Second Republic. The new government did not appease the workers in the same way as the provisional government had.

Workers' involvement in the journée of May 15 demonstrated the extent to which hope that the new republic would prioritize social reform had collapsed. On May 10, the National Assembly also voted to table a discussion of another popular issue until Monday, May 15. The issue was whether France should intervene militarily on behalf of the creation of a Polish state. The goal of the march, as stated by advertisements and placards posted on street corners over the subsequent days, was to read a petition to the Assembly.⁴⁰ The leaders of the march called for immediate intervention on behalf of Poland, which they saw as divided and oppressed by its neighbors. The frustrations of the workers who had hoped the Assembly would react favorably to the social question became tied up in the plans for the demonstration in favor of Poland. The

³⁸ *Histoire de La Révolution de Février 1848, Du Gouvernement Provisoire et de La République* (Bordeaux: Chez Prosper Faye, 1849), 40.

³⁹ "De la police intérieure et extérieure de l'Assemblée nationale," Art. 2-3, in *Histoire de La Révolution de Février 1848, Du Gouvernement Provisoire et de La République* (Bordeaux: Chez Prosper Faye, 1849), 39.

⁴⁰ *Le Siècle*, May 16, 1848.

crowd was to be unarmed but would carry and march behind the banners of their corporations. Workers of the Railroad of the North Line for example were present on May 15 with their banner, although they met the crowd at the Palais Bourbon rather than participating in the full march.⁴¹ Joseph Sobrier, editor of *La Commune de Paris*, the journal of the Club des clubs, urged that the demonstration should be co-opted for the purposes of the workers in his edition of May 13. By that time, this tone was neither peaceful nor hopeful. “It is done. With sorrow but with conviction we must say that the time of vain hopes has passed. The day of dupes is at hand. Who knows? Will the hour of justice perhaps soon strike?... To live by working or to go down fighting!”⁴² Subsequent issues of the paper included instructions for the home manufacture of gunpowder.⁴³

Louis Blanc, as leader of the Luxembourg Commission, was coming under increasing pressure. He was forced to give a reckoning of the situation to the Luxembourg delegates.

In looking at the list of the elections, I was tested with a profound sense of bitterness; why? Because I did not see the names that I had hoped to see there in sufficient numbers: the names of workers. They have reproached me for wanting twenty workers in the chamber; if that’s a crime, this crime, not only do I avow it, but I proclaim it, I affirm it, it’s one of the most glorious titles of the passing of my business.⁴⁴

Louis Blanc, struggling to maintain the loyalty of workers in the Luxembourg Commission in the aftermath of the electoral defeat, fought against any perception that he was a stooge of the provisional government. He proclaimed his willingness to commit the crime of standing up for workers. Unlike Albert, however, there is no evidence that solidly links Louis Blanc to an orchestrating role in the events of May 15. Although he was present at the National Assembly,

⁴¹ Remi Gossez, *Les ouvriers de Paris*, 217.

⁴² *La Commune de Paris*, May 13, 1848.

⁴³ Peter H Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy*, 213.

⁴⁴ Louis Blanc, *La Révolution de février au Luxembourg*, 144.

he had a responsibility to be there as an elected representative. And although he was briefly detained on the day of May 15, he was ultimately set free.

But the end of the Provisional Government and the election of the delegates to the National Assembly, in many ways, was the official end of the Luxembourg Commission. On May 8, both Louis Blanc and Albert tendered their resignations as president and vice president of the commission respectively in protest of the poor results of the socialists in the elections. Two days later, on May 10, the National Assembly again failed to create the Ministry of Progress that Louis Blanc desired and which would be the natural successor to the Luxembourg Commission. Instead, the Assembly voted to create a *Commission d'enquête sur la situation des travailleurs agricoles et industriels* [Commission of Inquest into the Situation of Industrial and Agricultural Workers].⁴⁵ The workers of Paris undoubtedly perceived the creation of another government commission as an insult as their demands for real government intervention went unmet.

While it did not advocate revolt, the Luxembourg Commission did signal to workers that it wanted them to show their unhappiness at the recent decisions taken by the Assembly and the executive board. The new government had been planning a fête for May 14, celebrating the new republic, with the members of the government and the National Assembly playing a central ceremonial role. After the new government refused to create a government ministry of progress on May 10, many outraged workers declared their intention to abstain from the ceremonies on May 14. The Luxembourg Commission published two posters to this effect. “The promises made on the barricades have not been accomplished, and the National Assembly having refused in its session of May 10 to constitute a Ministry of Labor, the delegates of the Luxembourg

⁴⁵ *Compte rendu des séances de l'Assemblée nationale du 4 Mai au 16 Juin 1848*, 112.

refuse to attend the fête called Concord, Paris, May 11, 1848”⁴⁶ In the mind of the Luxembourg delegates there was nothing to celebrate. The revolution had not delivered on the promises it had made to them. The other, from May 13, stated that the delegates of the Luxembourg, “Considering that republicans cannot indulge in joy when they carry grief in their hearts; decide in unanimity that they will abstain from attending the fête of May 14.”⁴⁷ On May 12, the workers of the Derosne and Cail factory were invited to leave their work to participate in a fête celebrating the government. After their delegates were consulted, they responded that “They have nothing to do with us and we have nothing to do with them.”⁴⁸

Whatever Louis Blanc’s intentions, as the Luxembourg delegates and workers declared their intention to abstain from demonstrations in favor of the government, the demonstration for Poland became an obvious outlet for their sense of grievance. On May 15, a large crowd marched from the Place de la Bastille toward the Palais Bourbon where the National Assembly was meeting. According to the testimony of Aloysius Huber, the leader of the Club des clubs who played a prominent role in the unfolding of the day’s events, the crowd may have numbered 150,000.⁴⁹ Joseph Sobrier, editor of *Commune de Paris*, announced the journée to his subscribers with the large title “The Resurrection of Poland!” “An imposing demonstration is preparing in favor of Poland for next Saturday... All the clubs of Paris should come together to address the National Assembly... The procession will march along the boulevards.”⁵⁰ Although staged as a demonstration calling for the liberty of Poles, the journée of May 15 was transformed into a workers’ revolt.

⁴⁶ Gaëtan Delmas, *Les affiches rouges*, 170.

⁴⁷ Gaëtan Delmas, *Les affiches rouges*, 171.

⁴⁸ *Le Constitutionnel*, May 15, 1848.

⁴⁹ *le Moniteur universel*, October 11, 1849.

⁵⁰ Gaëtan Delmas, *Les affiches rouges*, 169.

The Taking of the National Assembly

The workers of the Luxembourg were clearly upset and their participation in the events of the day offer a testament to this fact. After the crowd assembled at the Place de la Bastille, the mass of people made their way to the Palais Bourbon. As they approached the palace, there were those among the representatives who ordered that the gates be shut against the crowd. Albert demanded their introduction saying, “I have enough people today; I’m going to f... [the representatives] all through the windows.”⁵¹ A representative took him by the shoulder reminding him of the events of February 24. “I remember it well; we were patriots, and here there are aristocrats and reactionaries. Yes,” he added with more force. “I will f... them all through the windows.”⁵² Albert was making his displeasure at his colleagues in the National Assembly painfully clear. The crowd forced its way into the chamber. Alexis de Tocqueville was among the representatives of the Assembly.

I saw some drunken men among them, but the majority seemed to be the prey of a feverish excitement imparted to them by the enthusiasm and shouting without and the stifling heat, the close packing and general discomfort within. They dripped with sweat, although the nature and condition of their clothing was not calculated to make the heat very uncomfortable for them, for several were quite bare-breasted.⁵³

We might take his lurid description of worker sweat with a pinch of salt, but not Tocqueville’s portrait of the energy pervading the crowd as it stormed the assembly.

Despite protests from the Assembly, François-Vincent Raspail seized an opportunity to read the petition on behalf of Poland. He read, “That the duty of a free people is to fly to the aid

⁵¹ “Journée Du 15 Mai 1848,” *La Révolution de 1848 et les Révolutions du XIX Siècle* 25, no. 127 (December 1928-January February 1929), 244 (ellipsis in the original).

⁵² *Procès des accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 163 (ellipsis in the original).

⁵³ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*. (London, Harvill Press, 1948), 160–61.

of all oppressed people, seeing that the law of fraternity is not a national law, but a law of mankind; that all people are brothers bearing the same title of citizen between them, as children of the God of the world.”⁵⁴ After another period of loud confusion and many shouts of “Vive la Pologne!” the president of the Assembly, Philippe Buchez, demanded the crowd leave the chamber, “Once more, citizens, if you want us to deliberate upon the petition that you just brought us, leave the Assembly free to work! As President of the National Assembly, I order you to evacuate the room.”⁵⁵ His shouts were covered by the tumult of the protestors.

It was at this point that the labor politics emerged in what had to this point been a demonstration about Poland. Jean-Baptiste Lagarde, the clockmaker and the president of the commission of delegates from the Luxembourg Commission, took to the rostrum to demand that the people be heard. Huber asked that the protestors be allowed to file past the Assembly before they left. One protestor called for the promises of the provisional government to be kept. Another announced to loud marks of approbation, “We were made the promise of organized labor; it is not yet organized. We desire that a Ministry of Labor be constituted today.”⁵⁶ This was followed by cries of “Organized Labor!” and demands that Louis Blanc speak.

A fireman briefly took the floor. “We came here as a delegation for Poland. We came here...” “Speak quickly, fireman!” shouted one of the protestors as a number of other voices cut him off demanding justice for the massacre at Rouen, organization of labor, war against the oppressors of Poland, and reform of the government ministries.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Compte rendu des séances de l'Assemblée nationale du 4 Mai au 16 Juin 1848*, 189.

⁵⁵ *Compte rendu des séances de l'Assemblée nationale du 4 Mai au 16 Juin 1848*, 191.

⁵⁶ *Compte rendu des séances de l'Assemblée nationale du 4 Mai au 16 Juin 1848*, 191.

⁵⁷ *Compte rendu des séances de l'Assemblée nationale du 4 Mai au 16 Juin 1848*, 193.

As drums began to be beat *la rappel* (a call to arms for the National Guard), a fight broke out at the foot of the tribune between protestors who wished to address the assembly. Word came that the National Guard would arrive in fifteen minutes.⁵⁸ Louis Blanc, who as a representative in the National Assembly had begun the day in the assembly hall, was raised up on the shoulders of the protestors and placed upon a table where he attempted to address the crowd, but his words were drowned out. Huber, raised himself up on the tribune and made an insulting gesture towards the President, saying, “Citizens, listen; they don’t want to make a decision; oh well, I, in the name of the people who were betrayed by their Representatives, I declare that the National Assembly is dissolved.”⁵⁹

Huber turned toward the president, threatening him with his fist, saying, “You are no longer anything here. Get out of here.”⁶⁰ A number of protestors clambered up his desk and threw the president out of his chair. He was forced to leave the room as other protestors made threats against his life.⁶¹ Benjamin Flotte declared, “Do not let the Representatives flee this fight. Those who leave are traitors.” But Huber repeated his declaration that the National Assembly was dissolved.⁶²

What had initially been organized as a peaceful march to present a petition in favor of Poland to the National Assembly had been co-opted by workers, urged on by professional revolutionaries like Huber and Sobrier, into a full-on coup d’état. Workers, disappointed in the inaction of the new government on social issues, initially exhibited their displeasure through their own inaction as they abstained from the manifestation of the Fête de Concorde. As the

⁵⁸ *Compte rendu des séances de l’Assemblée nationale du 4 Mai au 16 Juin 1848*, 193.

⁵⁹ *Compte rendu des séances de l’Assemblée nationale du 4 Mai au 16 Juin 1848*, 193.

⁶⁰ *Procès des accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 197.

⁶¹ *Compte rendu des séances de l’Assemblée nationale du 4 Mai au 16 Juin 1848*, 194.

⁶² *Compte rendu des séances de l’Assemblée nationale du 4 Mai au 16 Juin 1848*, 194.

demonstration for Poland was organized, the workers saw a way to exhibit their displeasure in meaningful action by attaching themselves to that demonstration. As order slipped away during the presentation of the petition to the Assembly and other grievances were aired, Huber declared the government dissolved. One can only imagine how the Poles felt.

The National Guard: Its Sympathies and Role on May 15

The journée of May 15 was comical in some respects. It was tragic in others. Thousands of Parisians turned out in support of Poland, with workers among their ranks. The crowds were largely unarmed. The National Guard had been called up to prevent the protestors from reaching the Assembly, but many guardsmen had failed to respond. The several of hundred guardsmen posted around the Assembly were inadequate to deal with the thousands of protestors. They gave way and allowed them into the Assembly's hall. After hearing the "illegal" reading of the petition of the demonstrators, the Assembly dissolved. The protestors were left in control of the building, but without weapons they had no way of holding it in the long term. Over the course of the day, the National Guard regrouped and, as they made to retake the city, the demonstrators retreated. In the end, the only real casualties were from the National Guard when they accidentally fired into their own ranks in the dark that evening.⁶³

The testimony given during the trial of General Amable de Courtais of the National Guard shows just how important the role of the National Guard was during the journée of May 15. We see officer after officer of the Guard summoned to give their account of the events of the

⁶³ Peter H Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy*, 240.

day. Their testimony often shifts blame for the events onto the other officers as the situation spiraled out of control. Courtais, in particular, was made into a scapegoat.

Before the February Revolution, the National Guard was a volunteer organization composed of voting citizens. In February, the provisional government moved the army out of Paris. To keep order within the city, it opened the National Guard to all men and established separate Mobile Guard units, which essentially were full-time, fully mobilized battalions of the National Guard whose members received a wage and whose uniforms and accoutrements were provided by the government.⁶⁴ It was hoped, by members of the provisional government, that many of the young men who had served upon the barricades of February would find an outlet in providing civil order under the new republic.

Evidence shows that there were dramatic changes in the composition of the National Guard after enrollment was opened up to all men. Although the legions of the second, third, and tenth arrondissements on the west side of the city maintained majorities of experienced guardsmen, the legions of the eighth and ninth arrondissements, in east Paris, increased by over 300% therefore diluting the number of experienced guardsmen in their overall ranks.⁶⁵ François Arago would describe the eighth legion as the legion “least tainted with aristocracy” when explaining his selection of the unit for certain important tasks.⁶⁶ The twelfth legion also saw an increase in enrollment of over 500% and in the April election of National Guard officers, Armand Barbès, one of the leaders of the demonstration of May 15, was elected as its colonel.⁶⁷ Although House is right to warn that “it would be a gross oversimplification to draw a direct

⁶⁴ *le Moniteur universel*, February 26, 1848

⁶⁵ Jonathan Mallory House, *Controlling Paris: Armed Forces and Counter-Revolution, 1789-1848* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 94.

⁶⁶ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 165.

⁶⁷ Jonathan Mallory House, *Controlling Paris*, 94.

correlation between economic class, area of residence, and political opinion,” the involvement of specific legions in the events of May 15 corresponds closely with what we know about the legions’ makeups.⁶⁸

As well as “democratizing” the National Guard, the Assembly created the Mobile Guard. The Mobile Guard was a force designed to supplement the army or the police in maintaining order within Paris. If they were deployed outside of Paris they would receive their orders directly from the provisional government. Each arrondissement mustered two Mobile Guard battalions.⁶⁹ Lamartine later claimed that the Mobile Guard was a means to put the poor unemployed young men of Paris imbued with the revolutionary spirit to good use.⁷⁰ Although the Mobile Guard was meant to be recruited from the poor and unemployed who had served upon the barricades of February, having served on the barricades was not a formal requirement. It was unlikely that all the Mobile Guardsmen served on the barricades, especially for the second battalion of each arrondissement which would have been mustered up after the first and would have been composed of people arriving in Paris after the February Days drawn to the city by the prospect of work in the National Workshops.⁷¹

Nevertheless, joining the Mobile Guard did not require the purchase of a uniform, and because these guardsmen received wages, conservatives were afraid that these battalions would be composed of poorer, more revolutionary citizens who could not be counted upon to support the government. Daniel Stern wrote,

The Mobile Guard, fifteen to sixteen thousand men strong, inspired no confidence. They were the children of the faubourgs; Would they march against

⁶⁸ Jonathan Mallory House, *Controlling Paris*, 95.

⁶⁹ Jonathan Mallory House, *Controlling Paris*, 104.

⁷⁰ Alphonse de Lamartine, *Histoire de La Révolution de 1848*, 315.

⁷¹ Jonathan Mallory House, *Controlling Paris*, 104.

the people? Would they fire on their parents, their brothers? We knew, however, that the workers counted upon them; that they were full of factions... [The] officers of the battalions gathered on the 18 and 20 [of June], to decide together if they should fight, and on which side of the barricades.⁷²

Although Stern was writing about the role of the Mobile Guard in the June Days, the same doubts and concerns could be applied to the Mobile Guard of May 15.

Despite this, like Stern, historians have been mostly interested in the political sympathies of the National and Mobile Guards during the June Days specifically. The composition of the National Guard has thus been closely studied by historians in relation to what it might reveal about its revolutionary or anti-revolutionary character, specifically during the June Days. In his characteristic class analysis, Marx suggested the National Guard was a bourgeois institution, but being unable to suppress the proletariat on its own, “[there] consequently remained but one way out: to play off part of the proletariat against the other. For this purpose the Provisional Government formed twenty-four battalions of *Mobile Guards*, each a thousand strong, composed of young men from fifteen to twenty years old.”⁷³ Marx suggested that the Mobile Guard was composed primarily of the lumpenproletariat, or the “passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society” which was more likely to play “the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue.”⁷⁴ Peter Amann agrees with Marx’s class analysis, arguing that “The old monarchical guard, made up of taxpayers who could afford to purchase their own uniforms and equipment, really amounted to the propertied classes in arms, guarding their stores, workshops, and houses against the lapping tide of the poor. To arm these same poor, entrusting the defense of property to those who had none, was an incalculable gamble that made a mockery of the

⁷² Daniel Stern, *Histoire de La Révolution de 1848*, 381.

⁷³ Karl Marx, *Class Struggles in France 1848-1850*, 23, accessed July 14, 2018, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Class_Struggles_in_France.pdf.

⁷⁴ Karl Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 20, accessed February 15, 2019, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>.

National Guard's traditions."⁷⁵ In other words, for Amann there was a clear class distinction between the National Guard and the Mobile Guard. However, Marc Traugott, after analyzing the occupational breakdown of the different Mobile Guard battalions and comparing it to the occupational breakdown of the different arrondissements, concludes that, "within the confines of the industrial/artisanal working class, the sectoral distribution of Mobile Guard occupations was essentially identical to that of the total Parisian population."⁷⁶ This conclusion strikes a major blow to the lumpenproletariat thesis.

In the 1970 and 80s, social historians challenged Marx's too simple class analysis of the composition of the Guards. Marc Traugott suggested that the Mobile Guard "comprised a representative sample of the working class" (and not just the lumpenproletariat). Consequently, "the combatants on both sides of the barricades [of June] derived from a common pool, and the determinants of revolutionary consciousness must be sought in more complex terms than strict class identification."⁷⁷ He went on to argue, in opposition to Marx, that the composition of the Mobile Guard actually closely mirrored the composition of working Paris.⁷⁸

What does the role played by the National Guard on May 15 tell us about the political loyalties of the National Guard in 1848, and whether they sympathized with the republican government or discontented workers? As the crowd approached the Pont de la Concorde, the National Guard stood in its way. They had been slow to mobilize and, according to the commandant of the guard, General Courtais, only fifty-seven guardsmen of the supplemental

⁷⁵ Peter H Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy*, 81.

⁷⁶ Mark Traugott, "The Mobile Guard in the French Revolution of 1848," *Theory and Society* 9, no. 5 (1980): 699.

⁷⁷ Mark Traugott, "The Mobile Guard in the French Revolution of 1848," 694.

⁷⁸ Mark Traugott, *Armies of the Poor*, 68–73. Jonathon House states in *Controlling Paris*, "The traditional Marxist explanation about the Mobile being unemployed children or deprived *lumpenproletariat* has no basis in the historical record." suggesting that this is the new orthodoxy.

legion he called up had responded to the call when he arrived at the bridge.⁷⁹ The First Legion, which he had ordered to occupy the bridge, was absent. Courtais' plan of defense was designed to have force readily available without directly provoking the demonstrators. Courtais wanted each legion to assemble in their respective arrondissements and be ready to march to where they were needed once they received orders. However, he ordered a battalion of the First Legion to assemble at the Concorde Bridge to protect the National Assembly. Courtais also designated that there be troops of the line and cannon at the Champ de Mars awaiting orders.⁸⁰ As Courtais scrambled to get his defenses in place, he pleaded with the commander of the nearest Mobile Guard unit, lieutenant Bassac of the Fifth Mobile Guard, to send reinforcements, but Bassac refused.⁸¹ As the demonstration progressed towards the National Assembly, Courtais sent orders to the First, Second, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Legions to send reinforcements. They would not arrive in time.⁸² As the crowd approached the bridge where General Courtais was making his stand, it was estimated (by adjutant-major Reverdi of the third battalion of the fourth legion) that he had assembled around 1,000 men, from parts of two National Guard Legions and a Mobile Guard battalion, to resist an "innumerable mass."⁸³ As the crowd realized that their path was blocked, they cried, "No! No! We must pass. F... them into the water if they do not put their bayonets away."⁸⁴ Courtais decided to refuse to use force against an unarmed crowd, which simply wanted to read a petition to the Assembly.⁸⁵ He ordered troops to unfix their bayonets

⁷⁹ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 109. Testimony of Courtais.

⁸⁰ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai devant la haute-cour de Bourges: compte-rendu exact de toutes les séances avec leurs incidents, illustré de douze portraits* (Paris: Chez les éditeurs-associés, 1849), 111. Testimony of Courtais.

⁸¹ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 109. Testimony of Courtais.

⁸² Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai devant la haute-cour de Bourges*, 344. Testimony of Bethmont.

⁸³ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai devant la haute-cour de Bourges*, 229–230. Testimony of Reverdi.

⁸⁴ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai devant la haute-cour de Bourges*, 229. Testimony of Reverdi (ellipsis in the original).

⁸⁵ Samuel Hayat, *Quand la République était révolutionnaire: citoyenneté et représentation en 1848* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2014), 267.

hoping this would calm the situation.⁸⁶ Against such a number of demonstrators, it is doubtful that he had much choice anyway.

Trying to puzzle out exactly how the events of May 15 unfolded is complicated by the conflicting officer testimonies given during the trial of General Courtais in 1849. Courtais' orders, on multiple occasions, were apparently not delivered in a timely manner. According to Courtais' own testimony on his preparations to defend the Pont de la Révolution, "By a lapse in memory, no doubt, by M. the deputy chief of staff Saisset, this letter [to the 4th legion] was not delivered until 11:00 in the morning of the 16."⁸⁷ It is unclear exactly what time this order was written, but Courtais' irritation that it was delivered late is evident. During the trial there was conflicting testimony as to whether General Courtais had dismissed Saisset for incompetence.⁸⁸ The testimony of General Tempoure of the Mobile Guard was particularly accusatory. When asked if he had received any orders from Courtais on the 15, Tempoure replied that he had received none. Courtais quickly jumped to his own defense declaring, "The witness will recall that around two o'clock, I spoke with him in a little court with General Fouché." Tempoure replied, "I did not see General Fouché until after the dissolution [of the National Assembly]." Courtais persisted, "I affirm that you saw and spoke with General Fouché in a little courtyard at the entrance to the bridge." Tempoure had the last word, "Never in my life have I set foot in that little courtyard."⁸⁹ This exchange illustrates the conflicting accounts that were given of the journée during the trial and also speaks to the confusion that was prevalent during the day. Throughout the trial, Courtais was repeatedly accused of either incompetence or downright treason. The issue that was repeatedly brought up was his order to unfix bayonets. He argued

⁸⁶ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 109. Testimony of Courtais.

⁸⁷ *le Moniteur universel*, 12 March, 1848 Testimony of Courtais.

⁸⁸ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 172.

⁸⁹ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 148–49.

that, “Everyone wanted to save the Republic that day. I don’t know if I saved it, but I am convinced that I prevented a deplorable collision.”⁹⁰

Courtais’ own testimony before the high court of Justice on March 9, 1849 shows the ways in which he tried to play the loyalties and sentiments of the National Guard units to his advantage. “As I reconsidered the arrangements to take the Pont de la Révolution, I wrongly thought that the first legion was not sympathetic to the people; I wrote an order to the fourth legion to send 1,000 men to the Pont de la Révolution.”⁹¹ On the other hand, the fifth Mobile Guard, under Bassac, was more than willing to use force against the protestors. One of the reasons Bassac refused to respond to Courtais’s call (as the case was made during the trial by the prosecutor general) was because he did not agree with the order to unfix bayonets.⁹²

The divided loyalties of both National and Mobile Guards continued to be evident as the day progressed. As Huber began to march to the Hôtel-de-Ville, he found himself in the midst of about three hundred guardsmen. He informed them that the National Assembly had just been dissolved and shouted “Vive le gouvernement provisoire!” Some of the guardsmen took up the cry enthusiastically with him. Others echoed his cry in much softer voices, while others still abstained from declaring support for any new government.⁹³ Nearby officers of the Mobile Guard raised their kepis in the air shouting “Long live the new government.” and the battalion on the Concorde Bridge did the same.⁹⁴ Brigadier General Jacques Tempoure, commandant of the Mobile Guard, whose loyalties remained with the Assembly, would not have been pleased.

⁹⁰ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 107. Testimony of Courtais.

⁹¹ *le Moniteur universel*, 12 March, 1848 p. 822 Testimony of Courtais.

⁹² Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 109. Testimony of Courtais.

⁹³ *le Moniteur universel*, 11 Oct. 1848.

⁹⁴ *Procès des accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 209. Testimony of Joseph Douchement.

Tempoure could not establish control of the day's events any more than Courtais, however. As Huber made his way to the Hôtel de Ville, an unspecified man with Huber, seeing General Tempoure, addressed him, "General, take care what you do, your future depends upon it, the National Assembly is dissolved; I summon you, in the name of the people, to follow me to the Hôtel de Ville, where the new government is established."⁹⁵ When Tempoure hesitated, Huber declared, "General, since you hesitate, I will command the Mobile Guard. Citizens, stay behind me. If someone should be shot, it will be me."⁹⁶

Albert and Barbès, having led a contingent of about a thousand men to the Hôtel de Ville, found the guardsmen there similarly conflicted.⁹⁷ As the crowd approached the Ninth Legion, which had set up a defensive position in front of the Hôtel de Ville after the *rappel* had sounded, members of the National Guard who were marching with the crowd raised their guns above their heads in a sign of peace. The leaders among the crowd declared that the National Assembly was dissolved, that they were not insurgents, that the National Guard and Mobile Guard were with them, and they were just delegates coming to the Hôtel de Ville to report what had happened. To prove it, four of the crowd presented yellow pass cards that allowed them access to the Hôtel.⁹⁸

The four men with the pass cards were allowed to pass through; however, the Ninth Legion refused access to the rest of the crowd. One overly-enthusiastic guardsman from the Ninth Legion, a worker at the distiller Chez Gillou, began to exhort his companions to fix their bayonets. As the crowd grew agitated, it began to push against the Ninth Legion trying to remove

⁹⁵ *Procès des accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 195–96. Testimony of Tempoure.

⁹⁶ *le Moniteur universel*, October 11, 1849.

⁹⁷ "Édition Critique Des Carnets de Prison et de La Correspondance Privée d'Henri Delescluze à Belle-Île (1851-1853)," Sorbonne. <http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/delescluze/passages-rediges/passage02/page02.html>. Notes on May 15, 1848 (written on April 11, 1852), from A.N. 494/AP1, dossier 4, carnet 1, 12. See also *Procès des accusés du 15 mai 1848: attentat contre l'Assemblée nationale* (Bordeaux: Impr. des Ouvriers-Associés, 1849, 315. Testimony of Barbès.

⁹⁸ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai devant la haute-cour de Bourges*, 115. Testimony of Yautier.

the bayonets that some guardsmen had fixed to their rifles. A member of the crowd, dressed in a workers' blouse drew a pistol and shot the unfortunate guardsman in his thigh.⁹⁹ What is often portrayed as initiative in the testimony of the trial can equally be read as indiscipline. As events spiraled well outside of what had been predicted, commanders and soldiers alike found themselves at a loss for what to do.

The Republican Guard, stationed inside the gates of the Hôtel de Ville, began to distribute ammunition. People inside the Hôtel threw cartridges out the windows where the National Guard could retrieve them. This caused disorder among the National Guard as guardsmen began to break ranks to run after the cartridges. In the confusion, the crowd managed to push past the National Guard and Colonel Yautier, seeing that the battle was lost, decided to march the Ninth Legion back to the ninth arrondissement.¹⁰⁰ However, the crowd still had to move past the Republican Guard before they could gain access to the Hôtel de Ville.

By this point, the only thing that was clear was that the situation was confused. Colonel Rey, the Commandant of the Republican Guard, berated the crowd from the window of the Hôtel de Ville for several minutes before Barbès confronted him. "Rey, let us enter; neither the Chamber nor the provisional government exist any longer; we are as we were on the February 24; let me enter to save France and the Republic."¹⁰¹ Barbès wanted to gain access to the Hôtel without any bloodshed. Rey refused, saying, "I have a duty to uphold, to defend the Hotel de Ville, and you shall only enter over my dead body, or with a written order from the Pouvoir executif."¹⁰² Barbès tried again, "Rey, my friend, let us enter, I beg you."¹⁰³ Unmoved, Rey

⁹⁹ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai devant la haute-cour de Bourges*, 116. Testimony of Yautier.

¹⁰⁰ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai devant la haute-cour de Bourges*, 116. Testimony of Yautier.

¹⁰¹ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai devant la haute-cour de Bourges*, 120. Testimony of Guyon.

¹⁰² Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai devant la haute-cour de Bourges*, 120. Testimony of Guyon.

¹⁰³ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai devant la haute-cour de Bourges*, 120. Testimony of Guyon.

accused Barbès of counseling him to commit a cowardice saying, “you are no longer my friend. I repeat, you shall enter over my dead body.” Rey came down to the courtyard to lead his battalion, but some of the insurgents managed to penetrate the gate and open it. As soon as the crowd swarmed through the gate the colonel was raised up and taken up the stairs.¹⁰⁴ Barbès turned to those with him illustrating just how confused the situation was, “Do not do him harm; prevent him from acting; the wretch does not understand the situation.”¹⁰⁵

As the day progressed, more clearly conservative legions of the National Guard were used to restore order. The second legion of the National Guard eventually retook the Palais Bourbon from the revolutionaries. As noted before, this legion maintained a majority of experienced guardsmen in its ranks and was presumably less revolutionary. Other legions whose loyalty to the government was less than clear at the beginning of the day cleaved to the regime as it reasserted itself at the Hôtel de Ville. Stationed around the National Assembly, the Tenth Legion of the National Guard led by Colonel Charles Hingray, editor of the radical socialist paper *Représentant du Peuple*, seemed to accept the change in government and at least offered no opposition to the marchers.¹⁰⁶ However, after the coup failed, it was the tenth legion which, still under Hingray’s command, surrounded the headquarters of Marc Caussidière (the prefect of police) and Joseph Sobrier (the head of the paramilitary group the Lyonnais), ensuring the

¹⁰⁴ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai devant la haute-cour de Bourges*, 120. Testimony of Guyon.

¹⁰⁵ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai devant la haute-cour de Bourges*, 120. Testimony of Guyon.

¹⁰⁶ "Édition Critique Des Carnets de Prison et de La Correspondance Privée d’Henri Delescluze à Belle-Île (1851-1853)."; Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai devant la haute-cour de Bourges*, 228. Testimony of Hingray.; Jean-Claude Farcy, “Base de données des inculpés de Juin 1848,” <http://inculpés-juin-1848.fr/>, June 11, 2012, http://inculpés-juin-1848.fr/index.php?page=professions/recherche_profession_nomenclature&filtre=Ex%20Sergent%20major%20e%201%C3%A9gion. Hingray was later detained for playing a role in the June Days, though his case was ultimately dismissed.

stockpiles of guns and ammunition they contained were secured for the executive restored to power.¹⁰⁷

It is clear then that the National Guard and the Mobile Guard were not united in their sympathies and different units reacted to the events of the day in very different ways. Understanding this is an important corrective to the picture of guard units' political loyalties which have emerged in accounts of the June Days. For Marx, the Mobile Guards were the lumpenproletariat, and acted in unison to suppress the revolution based upon motivations of class. Jonathan House has little time for Marx's idea of the lumpenproletariat, but he equally stresses that "the vast majority of Parisian National Guardsmen were still loyal or at least unwilling to overthrow the regime." Mark Traugott stresses that, in June, the Mobile Guards were largely kept happy and loyal by their officer corps and were therefore loyal to the government. Up until May, morale in Mobile Guard units was weak, particularly because the government was unable to supply the men with the uniforms it had proposed. After May, however, supply began to catch up with demand.¹⁰⁸ In addition Cavaignac, leading the government forces in June, was careful to concentrate his forces – individual legions were not allowed to operate independently – even if this drew some criticism in terms of the time it took to mobilize the government's counter attack.¹⁰⁹

The response of the National and Mobile Guards was on May 15 was inconsistent. Events become confused very quickly, and, despite the somewhat ad hoc and even comic nature of the coup, it is still reasonable to conclude that there was a very real possibility that the workers could have succeeded on May 15. Parts of the National and Mobile Guards were

¹⁰⁷ House, *Controlling Paris*, 164.

¹⁰⁸ Jonathan House, *Controlling Paris*, 110, 162; Mark Traugott, *Armies of the Poor*, 102-3, 112.

¹⁰⁹ Traugott, *Armies of the Poor*, 30; Frederick de Luna, *The French Republic under Cavaignac, 1848* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 161-73.

sympathetic to the workers; their loyalty to the government was not as strong as historians agree they were in June. The political situation also changed considerably between May and June, as the government's arrest of the leaders of May 15 tied the Luxembourg Commission to the failed rebellion and sidelined its positive achievements.

The End of the Workers' Revolution

One of the protesters who stormed the National Assembly proposed a list of ten names that would constitute a new provisional government. The list included Armand Barbès, Louis Blanc, Alexandre Ledru-Rollin, Louis Blanqui, Aloysius Huber, François-Vincent Raspail, Marc Caussidière, Etienne Arago, Alexandre Martin (Albert), and Charles Lagrange. However, other lists were passed around and there was some debate as to how many socialists should be in the government and whether or not republicans should be allowed in.¹¹⁰ Albert cried, "Let's go, let's go, march to the Hôtel de Ville."¹¹¹ Huber climbed atop the palace gate and declared to the people outside the palace that the National Assembly was dissolved.

When Albert and Barbès penetrated into the interior of the Hôtel de Ville, Barbès climbed atop a table and addressed those around him, "Citizens, the Assembly is dissolved, as on the 24 of February, by the will of the people; it falls to us to constitute a new government to save the Republic; because a day without government would be chaos."¹¹² Albert and Barbès then began to make decrees, passing them out the windows on slips of paper.¹¹³ Their first decree stated that the new provisional government would consist of Louis Blanc, Albert, Ledru-Rollin,

¹¹⁰ *Compte rendu des séances de l'Assemblée nationale du 4 Mai au 16 Juin 1848*, 194.

¹¹¹ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 25.

¹¹² Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai devant la haute-cour de Bourges*, 120.

¹¹³ *Procès des accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 315.

Barbès, Raspail, Pierre Leroux, and Théophile Thoré, and that Marc Caussidière would remain the prefect of police. They also ordered the National Guard to return to their quarters.¹¹⁴

Another decree, signed by Barbès, declared war on Russia and Germany if Poland was not immediately reconstituted.¹¹⁵

However, the Revolution they were leading was rapidly coming to an end. At a quarter to five in the evening, the second battalion of the Mobile Guard stormed the chamber of the Palais Bourbon followed quickly by the second legion of the National Guard. A large number of the representatives who had fled followed these units back into the chamber. De Tocqueville recalled, “I stuck my card of membership in my hat-band and entered with them. They first cleared the platform of five or six orators, who were at that moment speaking at once, and flung them, with none too great ceremony, down the steps of the little staircase that leads to it. At the sight of this, the insurgents at first made as though to resist; but a panic seized them. Climbing over the empty benches tumbling over one another in the gangways, they made for the outer lobbies and sprang in to the court-yards from every window.”¹¹⁶ The president took back his chair declaring that the National Assembly had not been dissolved.¹¹⁷

Even though the National Assembly was restored, the new provisional government continued to operate from the Hôtel de Ville. Lamartine led a contingent of the National Guard to retake the Hôtel de Ville. When he arrived, Colonel Rey, who had managed to free himself from bondage, had placed pickets at each entrance.¹¹⁸ Portions of the Sixth and Twelfth Legions

¹¹⁴ *Procès des accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 22.

¹¹⁵ *Procès des accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 22.

¹¹⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, 170–71.

¹¹⁷ *Compte rendu des séances de l'Assemblée nationale du 4 Mai au 16 Juin 1848*, 194.

¹¹⁸ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai devant la haute-cour de Bourges*, 120. Testimony of Guyon.

were also assembled although many of the legions had returned to their arrondissements.¹¹⁹

With Lamartine's reinforcements, the National Guard stormed the Hôtel de Ville. At this point there was little structure left among the National Guard units, and it led to a certain amount of chaos as the charge was made. M. Watrin, a lieutenant-colonel of the Sixth Legion, recalled, "The stairs were encumbered by national guardsmen, republican guardsmen, and men appearing to belong to every type of corps; there were many without uniform, not knowing them, I could not trust them: I searched with difficulty to rejoin the men of my battalion. I came across them, but it cost me twenty minutes."¹²⁰ M. Houette, a captain of the Twelfth Legion, remembered, "The first person that I met [after entering the Hôtel de Ville] was a captain of my legion in uniform named Bruère; he reproached me for coming to spill the blood of my brothers. We advanced to cries of: 'Long live the National Assembly!' Bruère responded with the cry, 'Long live the democratic and social republic!'"¹²¹

When the soldiers entered the room that Barbès and Albert were legislating from, Barbès turned toward the soldiers complaining about being bothered since he was now a government minister. He was arrested nonetheless and imprisoned along with Albert, Raspail, and Huber.¹²² Later that night, Barbès, still holding out hope that the new revolution would be a success, called on his guards to ask if there was fighting in the streets after he heard a gun fire near his cell. They assured him that the gun had simply discharged by accident.¹²³

The failure of the revolt led to the suppression of key socialist figures such as Louis Blanc, and key leaders of the workers and members of the Luxembourg Commission. If the

¹¹⁹ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai devant la haute-cour de Bourges*, 126–28.

¹²⁰ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai devant la haute-cour de Bourges*, 122–23. Testimony of Watrin.

¹²¹ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai devant la haute-cour de Bourges*, 128. Testimony of Houette.

¹²² *Procès des accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 307.

¹²³ *Procès des accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 308.

election to the National Assembly was the beginning of the end for the Luxembourg Commission, it could not withstand the backlash that occurred after May 15. Of the candidates on the list of the Luxembourg Commission, eight were found guilty of taking an active role in the events of the journée.¹²⁴ Five were sentenced to deportation and three were sentenced to terms of imprisonment. These were the leaders of the socialist movement. Although one member of the Luxembourg Commission, Xavier-Victor Larger, was arrested, but later found innocent, there was no longer any question of the Club des Travailleurs Socialistes (the club which members of the Luxembourg Commission had taken turns presiding over) meeting after May 15 as many of its members had taken part in the events of the journée.¹²⁵

Over the course of the next hours, the Assembly directed its business to the creation of a commission of inquiry into the events of the day. Louis Blanc, by virtue of the fact that he was also a representative in the National Assembly, took part in this debate. Advocating for amnesty, he stated, “I profoundly regret, in foreseeing what could arrive, that you have taken into your bill an article which would seem to place the people under the burden of suspicion.” This was met with violent protests from the other members of the Assembly. One member cried, “It’s not the people, because we are all of us the people, it’s the club of the rue de Rivoli.”¹²⁶ This was the Club des clubs, of which Aloysius Huber was president. Founding members of the club also included Armand Barbès, Joseph-Marie Sobrier, and Théophile Thoré.¹²⁷ Each of these founding members identified as a socialist politically and they had played a role in the events of the day.

¹²⁴ Alphonse Lucas, *Les clubs et les clubistes*, 247; Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 202–4; Bureau de la Propagande, *Procès des accusés du 13 juin 1849: précédé du Procès du citoyen Huber (affaire du 15 mai 1848) devant la Haute cour de justice* (Paris: Chez Ballard, 1849), 48.

¹²⁵ Ernest Duquai, *Les accusés du 15 mai 1848*, 202–204.; Alphonse Lucas, *Les clubs et les clubistes*, 247.

¹²⁶ *Compte rendu des séances de l’Assemblée nationale du 4 Mai au 16 Juin 1848*, 203.

¹²⁷ Alphonse Lucas, *Les clubs et les clubistes*, 56.

The journée of May 15 signaled the immense dissatisfaction that the workers had with the new government. In the following days, the government took a reactionary course dissolving clubs and arresting those suspected of leading the would-be revolution. Albert, the vice-president of the Commission was arrested for allegedly playing a role in the demonstration. Louis Blanc, suspected of involvement, was marginalized. In the coming weeks he would flee to England to avoid the government's investigation. These events effectively ended the work of the Luxembourg Commission.

Even after the Luxembourg Commission ceased to exist as a government institution in May, the hope of the workers for a government that was responsive to their needs and incorporated them into the decision-making process did not die. Outside the Hôtel de Ville in February, Martin Nadaud had also placed his hope in the *Conseil des prud'hommes*. On May 18, Ferdinand Flocon, one of the two main socialists left in the provisional government after Albert and Louis Blanc's downfall, introduced a bill that would give a new constitution to the Conseil des prud'hommes.¹²⁸ Rather than a giant congress of all laborers on the lines of the Luxembourg Commission, the councils would be specific to each profession. The bill allowed for equal representation of workers and bosses upon the council. It also allowed universal suffrage for workers over eighteen years old.¹²⁹ In many ways, this organization would step into the role of arbitrator of labor disputes that the Luxembourg Commission had left vacant.

The Luxembourg Commission ceased to be an effective political organization after May 15, but this did not keep the former delegates of the commission from continuing to identify as Luxembourg delegates. After the official dissolution of the Commission, former delegates, led by Pierre Vinçard, a member of the central committee of the Luxembourg Commission, led

¹²⁸ *Compte rendu des séances de l'Assemblée nationale du 4 Mai au 16 Juin 1848*, 297.

¹²⁹ *Compte rendu des séances de l'Assemblée nationale du 4 Mai au 16 Juin 1848*, 297.

attempts to revive its work. In the guise of President of the *Comité central des ouvriers du département de la Seine*, he unsuccessfully requested access to the Commission's papers placed under seal after May 15 in order to continue its work.¹³⁰ In June, the former delegates to the Luxembourg founded the *Société des corporations réunies* (Society of reunited corporations) and a newspaper, *Le Journal des Travailleurs*.¹³¹ However, the newspaper collapsed after the June days after having printed only two issues.¹³² Vinçard also played a leading role in the *Club des délégués ayant siégé au Luxembourg* (Club of Delegates Having Sat at the Luxembourg), formed in the wake of Louis Blanc's flight into exile at the end of August 1848 (it named Louis Blanc as its honorary president).¹³³ As Samuel Hayat has argued, former delegates participated in almost every ambitious working class initiative in the years that followed, including the *Banque du Peuple* in 1848-9 and the *Société de la presse du travail* in 1851.¹³⁴ The Luxembourg Commission did not survive, but it left behind an active leadership cadre that continued to advance aspects of its program. The spirit of the Luxembourg lived on.

¹³⁰ Gossez, *Ouvriers de Paris*, 266.

¹³¹ Samuel Hayat, "Working-Class Socialism in 1848 in France". In Gareth Stedman Jones, *The 1848 Revolutions and European Political Thought*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 130. ; A. N., C/942. Commission d'enquête sur les événements du 15 mai et du 23 juin 1848.

¹³² Gaëtan Delmas, *Les journaux rouges : histoire critique de tous les journaux ultra-républicains publiés à Paris depuis le 24 février jusqu'au 1 octobre 1848 : avec des extraits-spécimens et une préface* (Paris: Giraud, 1848), 92–94.

¹³³ Alphonse Lucas, *Les clubs et les clubistes*, 178.

¹³⁴ Hayat, "Working-Class Socialism in 1848 in France," 130.

Chapter 3

The Phantom Menace: Historians of 1848 and their Legacy

In 1848, Marx declared that, “A spectre is haunting Europe- the spectre of Communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: Pope and Tsar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies.”¹ What Marx did not make explicit was that he was exorcizing a specter of his own. Marx’s words when writing of the revolution of 1848 sidelined the unresolved business of the Luxembourg Commission and the social revolution of February. He looked to emphasize instead the turmoil of the June Days, which he argued was the most significant event of 1848, smothering the February Revolution in the “blood of the Paris proletariat,” and the rise of Louis Napoleon, which he presented as the triumph of the forces of reaction.²

This chapter will look at how historians writing in the second half of the nineteenth century presented the actions of workers and of the Luxembourg Commission between February and May 1848, tracking its centrality for historians like Louis Blanc and Lamartine, as well as its near erasure by Karl Marx and Alexis de Tocqueville (despite their very different political agendas). Nineteenth-century historians of 1848 wrote with more regard for polemic and politics

¹ Karl Marx, “The Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in Robert Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 473.

² Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” in Robert Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 603.

than for historical truth. An analysis of Lamartine and Louis Blanc's presentation of the events of February 28 which created the Commission will show how significant the existence of the Commission continued to be for both, even while they presented polar opposite accounts of exactly what happened and why. The second half of the chapter, looking at the historical accounts of 1848 written by Alexis de Tocqueville and Karl Marx will investigate their silence on the topic of the Luxembourg Commission. It will argue that both right- and left-wing political reactions to the Revolution as the nineteenth century progressed were best served by ignoring the Commission and instead emphasizing the June Days.

This essay is not the first to look at the work of influential writers as being an important aspect of the events of 1848. Leo Gershoy explored the writings of Lamartine, Blanc, and Jules Michelet as "causes" of the Revolution of 1848.³ Rebecca Spang analyzed the ways in which the Revolution of 1848 was commemorated in France. She not only described the French tendency towards "hyperamnesia," but also the way historians of 1848 described events in which they had participated in a language of theater and farce, in a way that made them seem theatrical and staged. Unlike 1789, the Revolution of 1848 was one in which presentation mattered more than the reality of what actually took place.⁴ Jonathan Beecher agreed that Lamartine's account, the *Histoire de la Révolution de 1848*, published late in 1849 "is not only a defense of Lamartine's actions in 1848; it is also an argument for his importance, his shaping influence on the course of events." The theatrical character of Lamartine's writing was designed to accentuate his own

³ Leo Gershoy, "Three French Historians and the Revolution of 1848," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12, no. 1 (1951).

⁴ Rebecca Spang, "First Performances- Staging Memories of the French February Revolution," in Axel Körner, *1848-a European Revolution?: International Ideas and National Memories of 1848* (New York: Macmillan Press, 2000), 164-84. See also Linda Orr, *Headless History: Nineteenth-Century French Historiography of the Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

dramatic interventions.⁵ Lamartine was hoping that his political career was not yet over and that he could shape public opinion to allow him to still be politically relevant.

The first nineteenth century historians' accounts of what happened in 1848 continued to fight the battles of February through June 1848. In later historiography, 1848 turned into a restaging of 1789 or a precursor to 1871 and 1968. For example, as François Furet has argued; "the importance of the revolution of 1848 in French history stems... from... the fact that it restaged the great founding scene of French politics, the revolutionary rupture, with renewed vigor."⁶ In none of these memorializations were the "facts" of 1848 treated on their own merits.

Those Who Were There

Accounts of the origins of the Luxembourg Commission written by those directly involved are thus as often fiction as fact. Both Alphonse de Lamartine and Louis Blanc were at the Hôtel de Ville in late February. They give quite different accounts of what transpired. Lamartine writes of the mob, describing them as terrorists: "Lamartine observed this scene from a window with terror. Looking now upon the heads of the people which waved to and fro on the square, and now upon the smoke, which floating over the thousands of faces, formed a sort of halo to the red flag, he saw the efforts of his colleagues powerless against the obstinacy of these envoys of the people."⁷ He went on to describe their principal spokesperson, "In his look the electricity of a whole people was concentrated, and his physiognomy had at once the character of reflection and of error...He waved in his left hand a strip of red ribbon or cloth, and in his right

⁵ Jonathan Beecher, *Lamartine, the Girondins, and 1848*. in Gareth Stedman Jones and Douglas Moggach, *The 1848 Revolutionos and European Political Thought*, 30-31.

⁶ François Furet, "The Ancien Régime and the Revolution." in Pierre Nora and Lawrence D Kritzman, *Realms of Memory. Rethinking the French Past*, vol.1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 105.

⁷ Alphonse de Lamartine, *History of the French Revolution of 1848*, 221.

held the barrel of a carbine, the butt-end of which, at every word he spoke, he caused to ring upon the pavement.”⁸ This is an imposing image. Lamartine, the poet, showed his talent for language describing the man in powerful terms such as “electric” and describing the way the man punctuated his speech by slamming the stock of his gun into the pavement causing a ringing that we can almost hear ourselves. “He repeated, in accents of increasing energy, all the conditions of the manifesto of impossibilities, which the vociferations of the people enjoined it to accept and to realize on the instant.”⁹ If it was not already clear that Lamartine had opinions that were at odds with the assembled crowds through the negative and frighteningly powerful way in which he had already described them, he gives himself away here.

Lamartine described the demands made by the crowd on February 28 as a “manifesto of impossibilities.” In Lamartine’s words, “the overthrow of all known social order, the extermination of property, and of capitalists... the immediate installation of the destitute in the community of goods... finally, the acceptance, without demur and without delay, of the red flag, to signify to social order its defeat, to the people their victory, to Paris a system of terror, and to all foreign governments invasion.”¹⁰ Giving in to any of the crowd’s demands would, to Lamartine’s mind, inevitably lead to chaos and disaster. The language Lamartine used in describing this social program was thus far from neutral. It painted a very one sided, negative view of the policies advocated by the crowds assembled at the Hôtel de Ville. The words “overthrow, extermination, defeat, terror, and invasion” left little room for speculation on how Lamartine felt about the assembled masses.

⁸ Alphonse de Lamartine, *History of the French Revolution of 1848*, 219.

⁹ Alphonse de Lamartine, *History of the French Revolution of 1848*, 219–220.

¹⁰ Alphonse de Lamartine, *History of the French Revolution of 1848*, 220.

According to Lamartine's account, the threat of the revolutionaries were real, and the provisional government stood in serious danger of being snuffed out in its infancy. Lamartine presented himself as the hero stepping forward to address the spokesman of the people: "Lamartine then spoke to this man with that accent of persuasive sincerity, which he in his heart felt, and which the serious nature of the circumstance rendered deeper and more religious."¹¹ According to his own account, the mood abruptly changed once Lamartine began to speak. Now, instead of words evoking destructive forces, Lamartine invoked an image of the moral authority of religion. "During the address of Lamartine, there was seen struggling on the savage physiognomy of the orator of the poor the intelligence with which it seemed to be illuminated in spite of itself, and of that brutal and settled obstinacy with which it appeared to be overshadowed: it seemed like the conflicting clouds and rays reflected in a running stream under a changing sky."¹² Lamartine portrayed his words as an illuminating force, whose reason could not be denied by even the savagery of the terrorists. "At last intelligence and emotion prevailed. Letting his carbine fall to the ground, he gave way to tears... [His] comrades, still more deeply affected than himself, bore him in their arms out of the precincts... the government breathed."¹³ Lamartine resolved his story with the force of reason bringing the man to tears. In Lamartine's account of events, he very clearly played the role of hero and saved the fledgling government from the very real threat of the people.

Louis Blanc's telling of the same set of events had a completely different tone. Aside from being a little more concise in his account than the verbose Lamartine, Blanc was also much more sympathetic to the demands of the crowd. Louis Blanc's description of the spokesman of

¹¹ Alphonse de Lamartine, *History of the French Revolution of 1848*, 222.

¹² Alphonse de Lamartine, *History of the French Revolution of 1848*, 223.

¹³ Alphonse de Lamartine, *History of the French Revolution of 1848*, 223.

the people was as follows, “[A] man appeared, spectre-like. His face, savage in its look at the moment, but noble, expressive, and handsome, was of a deadly paleness. He had a gun in his hand, and his blue eye kindled, as he fixed his glance intently upon us... He presented himself in the name of the people... and making the butt of his musket ring upon the floor, demanded the recognition of the ‘*Droit au Travail*.’”¹⁴ In this description, Blanc presented an image that was also powerful, but noble in its power. Unlike the uncontrollable power that Lamartine expressed, Blanc described a man who was driven to exert force by the seriousness and importance of his demands. Unlike Lamartine, Blanc did not believe that the demands of the workers were a “manifesto of impossibilities”. He wrote that any feelings of defiance he felt toward the bullying manner of the spokesperson were suppressed, “so unjust towards one who, after all, was only demanding his due.”¹⁵

According to Blanc, Lamartine did, in fact, come down to speak to the representative of the workers: “M. de Lamartine, who is as little versed in political economy as can be, and who fears any new idea of this class as children do ghosts, advanced to the stranger, and placing one hand upon his arm in a familiar, caressing way, addressed him, and went on evidently luxuriating in the copiousness of his own eloquence, the object of which was to puzzle to man into losing sight of his demand.”¹⁶ Louis Blanc presented Lamartine not as the voice of reason but rather just a voice droning on. It is quite amusing to imagine Lamartine’s description of the facial expressions of the spokesman of the people as Lamartine addressed him, overlaid with Louis Blanc’s analysis as to the meaning of those expressions.

¹⁴ Louis Blanc, 1848, *Historical Revelations*, 81.

¹⁵ Louis Blanc, 1848, *Historical Revelations*, 81.

¹⁶ Louis Blanc, 1848, *Historical Revelations*, 82.

Unlike historians who were not directly involved in the February Revolution, both Lamartine and Blanc discussed the Commission in great detail. Lamartine's account of the Luxembourg Commission was as follows: "The congress of waged men who assembled at the Luxembourg excited alarm, and it doubtless portended danger. But history is bound to acknowledge this fact: the voice and the intervention of Louis Blanc, which had in the outset exercised a powerful influence over two hundred thousand workmen, had also a moderative effect on the passions of the people at large."¹⁷ Lamartine, for all his faults, was quick to heap praise on his colleagues in the provisional government. As Jonathan Beecher has pointed out in his analysis of Lamartine's writing on 1848, in Lamartine's depiction, "all the members of the Provisional Government (including Louis Blanc!) are talented, well meaning incorruptible, and even handsome."¹⁸ By emphasizing the virtues of the members of the provisional government, even his political opponents, Lamartine was able to raise the prestige of that body and in turn his own prestige. In the same vein, Lamartine wrote that

Louis Blanc set forth false systems, but he did not preach evil sentiments. His theories held out sickly and extravagant hopes, but they did not breathe vengeance. He promised chimeras, but he did not promote disorder, violence, or bloodshed. The Luxembourg, under his sway, contributed greatly to intimidate capital; but it also contributed to maintain order, to prevent expropriations, to depopularize war, and to cultivate the instinct of humanity among the masses of the people... Such was in their commencement the nature of the harangues delivered by Louis Blanc at the Luxembourg.¹⁹

In this passage, Lamartine emphasized that he did not bear any ill will towards Louis Blanc. In fact, he went out of his way to emphasize Blanc's good intentions. Ultimately though, he pointed out where, for all his good intentions, Louis Blanc was mistaken, and that he offered workers only "chimeras" and "sickly and extravagant hopes," not real reform.

¹⁷ Alphonse de Lamartine, *History of the French Revolution of 1848*, 318.

¹⁸ Gareth Stedman Jones and Douglas Moggach, *The 1848 Revolution and European Political Thought* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2018), 31.

¹⁹ Alphonse de Lamartine, *History of the French Revolution of 1848*, 318.

Lamartine wrote as though the Luxembourg Commission were an assembly of evil men whose malicious designs were held in check by Louis Blanc. Blanc, portrayed as an ultimately well-meaning character, was tragically misled. The ultimate desired goal of Lamartine was the moderation of the passions of the people. He praised efforts of Louis Blanc as checking “disorder, violence, or bloodshed” and of the Luxembourg Commission as contributing to “maintain order, to prevent expropriations, to depopularize war, and to cultivate the instinct of humanity.” For Lamartine, the Luxembourg was simply a way to maintain order and prevent violence. Its goals were not the sort of thing that the government ought to be working on long-term. It was a political expediency that was temporarily necessary. He went on to describe the views of the other members of the government toward the Luxembourg Commission (while simultaneously justifying his own opinions): “The other members of the government supported this congress, viewing it doubtless as an evil; but as an unavoidable evil, and one which was attended by a counterbalancing benefit.”²⁰ Lamartine’s account of the Revolution of 1848 was thus one of the competition between order and violence. The Luxembourg Commission played an important role in his narrative of the moderation of the masses, even if the opinions expressed in the Commission were fundamentally flawed.

In his justification of the February Revolution and of its program for political and social change, Louis Blanc provided a much more detailed look into the formation and operation of the Commission than Lamartine. In his account of the creation of the Commission, he spent his time describing the reluctance of the other members of the government to give into the reasonable demands of the people. Of Lamartine, Blanc wrote, “He contended that we were not a constituent power; that we had no right, in a matter of such importance, to forestall the decisions

²⁰Alphonse de Lamartine, *History of the French Revolution of 1848*, 318.

of the National Assembly about to be elected; that he did not see the necessity of the proposed department, and that, with respect to the *Organisation of labour*, it was a thing he could not comprehend nor ever would.”²¹ Eventually the Provisional Government agreed to the creation of the Luxembourg Commission, a sort of compromise between the demands of the people and the reluctance of the government. The Commission was created with the purpose of debating over the problems of labor. It would then propose solutions to the National Assembly, and the Assembly would vote on the measures. The Commission itself had no real power. In many respects it was an effort to stall the people and shield the government from their incessant demands.

Louis Blanc presented himself therefore as conflicted over the creation of the body which he was nominated to head. Although enthusiastic about the successes of the commission while he was a part of the government, he spent surprisingly little time describing its achievements in *Historical Revelations*. He preferred instead to recount how his plans were sabotaged. This is no doubt because he wrote *Historical Revelations* after the commission had already failed. He wrote of the dissatisfaction of the people with the compromise.

The members of the deputation perceived at once that mere speeches could not make up for action... and that the surest way to make the *Organisation of Labour* appear impracticable, was to deny me all practical means of realization. They cast at M. de Lamartine a scrutinizing look and then turned to me, as if anxious to hear me give utterance to their own thoughts. But I could not do it, without bringing the State to a chaos of confusion, by an aggressive disclosure of our internal dissensions. They guessed probably what I felt- what I suffered; for they had the generosity not to insist, and, after a moment of gloomy hesitation, they retired in silence.”²²

According to Blanc, it was he who was trapped and not his republican colleagues in the provisional government. In addition, the difference in the way that Lamartine and Blanc

²¹ Louis Blanc, 1848, *Historical Revelations*, 90.

²² Louis Blanc, 1848, *Historical Revelations*, 93.

described the working people of Paris as striking. Whereas Lamartine described them as a violent force, Blanc described them here as having an acute intellect and praised their generosity. He also portrayed them as a victim. Their demands were doomed to go unanswered by the provisional government and they had to retire in silence. It is clear who Blanc identified with in this passage. He did not identify with his colleagues in the government. He was clearly on the side of the working classes of Paris.

It is thought-provoking to contrast the two accounts of the Luxembourg Commission. The two authors identified with different groups and their writing painted a completely different picture of events. One cast the revolutionaries as an evil force that needed containment: the Commission was the means to do this. The other account showed worker-revolutionaries as the heroes of the story. The founding of the Luxembourg Commission was thus the central stage both of Lamartine's heroism and Louis Blanc's argument for the Revolution's significance. Other innovations like the national workshops generated less in terms of polemic. Both Blanc's and Lamartine's accounts show how the existence of the Luxembourg Commission was the most controversial and divisive issue for politicians between February and May.

New Narratives: Socialist and Reactionary

Lamartine published his account of the 1848 Revolution in 1849. He wrote it in a few months, competing with Daniel Stern (Marie d'Argoult), Léonard Gallois, Elias Regnault, Charles Robin, and Alfred Delvau to get his work out first.²³ Louis Blanc took longer to produce his account of the events of February to May: he published it in 1858 in order to "remove the

²³ Jonathan Beecher, *Lamartine, the Girondins, and 1848*, 28.

blemish” placed on the Revolution by the English writer, Whig politician, and British ambassador in Paris in 1848, Constantine Henry Phipps, First Marquess of Normanby.²⁴ Neither man published their works sufficiently quickly to save their reputations, however, as another account of 1848, written by a radical journalist named Karl Marx came to dominate the interpretation of 1848.

In 1848, Marx published his *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in which he declared, “A spectre is haunting Europe — the spectre of communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: Pope and Tsar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies.”²⁵ When Marx wrote *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* in 1852, his account replaced Louis Blanc and the specter of social revolution with communism. The Luxembourg Commission was a premature political solution to the social question. Indeed, everything that occurred between February and May was, for Marx, just the “prologue of the revolution” and entirely provisional, lacking any “real action.”²⁶ Although, “having secured [the revolution] arms in hand, the proletariat impressed its stamp upon it and proclaimed it to be a *social republic*,” this claim was scarcely acknowledged by the share they obtained in government.²⁷ Marx looked in 1848 not for participation in government but for the germs of a violent class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. For this reason, he glossed over the Luxembourg and Louis Blanc and focused his attention on the June Days, “the most colossal event in the history of European civil wars.”²⁸ The workers were betrayed by the foundation of “the bourgeois republic” in Marx. Thus, “while the Paris proletariat still reveled in the vision of the wide prospects that had opened before it and indulged in seriously meant

²⁴ Louis Blanc, *1848, Historical Revelations*, x.

²⁵ Karl Marx, “The Manifesto of the Communist Party,” 473.

²⁶ Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” 599.

²⁷ Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” 600.

²⁸ Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” 601.

discussions on social problems, the old powers of society... found unexpected support in... the peasants and petty bourgeois, who all at once stormed onto the political stage.”²⁹ In the end, “on the side of the Paris proletariat stood none but itself.”³⁰

The closest Marx came to discussing the Luxembourg Commission and Louis Blanc was his brief sentence about the proletariat engaging in “seriously meant discussions on social problems.” Because Marx focused on the June Days and the inevitable rise of Communism which loomed over Europe, the Luxembourg Commission and Louis Blanc were irrelevant to his narrative. In an address to the Central Commission of the Communist League, Marx stated, “Louis Blanc is the best instance of what happens when you come to power prematurely.”³¹ In *Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850*, Marx went on to explain, “The revolution made progress, forged ahead, not by its immediate tragicomic achievements, but on the contrary by the creation of a powerful, united counter-revolution, by the creation of an opponent in combat with whom, only, the party of overthrow ripened into a really revolutionary party.”³² For Marx, 1848 was not the real social revolution, it was a prelude to the future proletariat revolution.

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx suggested that Louis Blanc was a comic form of Robespierre, the mastermind of the most radical and dangerous ideas during the Revolution of 1789. By this comparison, Marx was also suggesting that the ideas of Louis Blanc, and the idea that socialism should compromise with the established system, was dangerous. It is significant to remember that Robespierre was sent to the guillotine once his sway over the people began to wane. When Marx wrote the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, he referenced many other socialists and proto-socialists (Sismondi, Proudon, Saint-Simon,

²⁹ Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” 600.

³⁰ Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” 601.

³¹ Karl Marx, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 327.

³² Robert Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 586.

Fourier, Owen) in order to explain why they were wrong or misguided. In his laundry list of “Conservative”, “Utopian,” Bourgeois”, “and “Reactionary Socialists”, he did not include Louis Blanc.³³ In the 1888 edition of the manifesto, Engels included a footnote that clarified where Louis Blanc fit into a political spectrum remade by communism. He was a “social democrat,” “a section of the Democratic or Republican party more or less tinged with Socialism.”³⁴ He was an ally against the bourgeoisie, but hobbled by its belief in “phrases and illusions traditionally handed down from the great Revolution.”³⁵ Louis Blanc and his work was thus a footnote to Communism, a useful ally but ancillary to the future proletarian revolution.

If Marx sidelined Louis Blanc and the Luxembourg Commission in his account, it follows that he also downplayed the significance of the events of May 15. Marx described the invasion of the National Assembly on May 15 as an act of the proletariat aiming “to recapture its revolutionary influence,” but he otherwise ignored it in his narrative of 1848 as a workers’ revolt. In his *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx wrote, “May 15 had no other result save that of removing Blanqui and his comrades, that is the real leaders of the proletarian party [the revolutionary communists], from the public stage for the entire duration of the cycle we are considering.”³⁶ It galvanized the National Assembly in terms of pushing the proletariat into the “divisive struggle” of June.

As the century progressed, historians of the right were no less keen to deemphasize the Luxembourg Commission and the importance of the political struggles surrounding it between February and May 1848. Lamartine came under criticism from several right leaning sources when he published his account of the revolution. In 1849, just after Lamartine published his

³³ Karl Marx, “The Manifesto of the Communist Party,” 493,496-497.

³⁴ Karl Marx, “The Manifesto of the Communist Party,” 499.

³⁵ Karl Marx, “The Manifesto of the Communist Party,” 500.

³⁶ Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” 600–601.

memoir, the Orleanist Eugène Forcade described Lamartine's account as an "incoherent improvisation" and "a perpetual hallucination" held together by "the constant praise that M. de Lamartine bestows upon himself" and Alfred-Auguste Cuvillier-Fleury stated in 1851 that "his book was not about the revolution; it was about Lamartine. It was a monument to his pride."³⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that he had "never met a mind more devoid of any thought of the public welfare" nor "a mind that had a more thorough contempt for the truth." than that of Lamartine.³⁸

Tocqueville's *Recollections*, a private journal of the Revolution of 1848 published in 1893 (after his death), was written to confirm his own lack of involvement with the reforms of the early days of the Republic. He described himself standing bewildered as Lamartine announced the names of the members of the provisional government (in which he himself was not included). As he left the Assembly he "saw that there was nothing more to be done there."³⁹

Tocqueville's account, no less than Marx's, also refused to credit the socialists of February 1848, including Louis Blanc, with any sort of coherent program. In his *Recollections*, Tocqueville did not mention the Luxembourg Commission and he dismissed socialism as a threat to public order. In his account he wrote,

It was the Socialistic theories which I have already described as the philosophy of the Revolution of February that later kindled genuine passion, embittered jealousy, and ended by stirring up war between the classes... From the 25th of February onwards, a thousand strange systems came issuing pell-mell from the minds of innovators, and spread among the troubled minds of the crowd... These theories were of very varied natures, often opposed and sometimes hostile to one another; but all of them, aiming lower than the government and striving to reach

³⁷ Jonathan Beecher, "Lamartine, the Girondins, and 1848," 34–35.

³⁸ Jonathan Beecher, "Lamartine, the Girondins, and 1848," 15.

³⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, (London, Harvill Press, 1948), 60.

society itself, on which government rests, adopted the common name of Socialism.⁴⁰

There was no room in Tocqueville's *Recollections* for an analysis of the Luxembourg Commission's efforts to operate as a unifying workers' congress.

Tocqueville's account employed two devices to discredit the social revolution of February through May. He described the agenda of the socialists in language that was unappealing. He also lumped together all the various socialists that he opposed ignoring the nuances in the groups. "Jealousy", "war", "a thousand strange systems", "pell-mell", these are words and phrases that conjure up negative and confused imagery. By lumping all the various socialist agendas together under one roof, Tocqueville portrayed many different groups as one, unorganized, fickle, unsatisfied, and perhaps insatiable mob. By portraying a mob, he subconsciously prejudiced his readers to see them as violent. Why did he not mention the Luxembourg Commission? It was just another one of the silly schemes of the socialists, doomed to fail, and not worthy of commentary.

Unlike Marx, Tocqueville did give an account of the events of May 15. He emphasizes their chaotic nature and the contradictory stances taken by the leaders of that day. He described the protestors as having "so many heads" and "chance... [playing] so great, and reason so small, a part in [their] actions that it [was] almost impossible to say... what [they] wanted."⁴¹ Once the protestors forced their way into the National Assembly he went on to say, "moreover, there was no common leader whom they seemed to obey; it was a mob of men, not a troop."⁴² Once again, he made the leaders of the rebellion as unappealing as possible. One of the most striking descriptions of the events of May 15 that Tocqueville offered was his description of Auguste

⁴⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, 78-79.

⁴¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, 133.

⁴² Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, 136-37.

Blanqui, the man whom Marx described as the real leader of the people: “He had wan, emaciated cheeks, white lips, a sickly, wicked and repulsive expression, a dirty pallor, the appearance of a mouldy corpse... he seemed to have passed his life in a sewer and to have just, left it.”⁴³

According to Tocqueville, Blanqui addressed the assembly saying just “one word about Poland; then, turning sharply to domestic affairs”⁴⁴ One of the next leaders to address the assembly by Tocqueville’s account was Armand Barbès. “I had observed and pointed out to my neighbours the distortion of his features, his livid pallor, the convulsive excitement which caused him each moment to twist his moustache between his fingers” and “I am inclined to believe that it was the madman that predominated in him.”⁴⁵ When Barbès addressed the crowd he demanded a vote on sending an army to Poland, a tax of a milliard on the rich, and the forbidding of the calling to arms of the National Guard against the assembled protestors.⁴⁶ Tocqueville thus made it clear that the leaders of the demonstration were not united in their demands. Indeed, he portrayed the leaders as literally insane. In describing a conversation he had with a physician named Trétat after the Assembly was dissolved he reported Trétat as having said, “I have treated or prescribed for each one of them. Blanqui is a madman, Barbès is a madman, Sobrier is a madman, Huber is the greatest madman of them all: they are all madmen, monsieur, who ought to be locked up at my Salpêtrière instead of being here.”⁴⁷ It would seem that doctor-patient confidentiality was not observed in the same way in the nineteenth century as in the twenty-first.

Tocqueville did not offer criticism to just the would-be revolutionaries. He also spared a few cutting sentences to describe Lamartine: “I think he must have been seized with the faintness

⁴³ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, 138.

⁴⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, 138.

⁴⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, 139–40.

⁴⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, 140.

⁴⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, 143.

of heart that overcomes the bravest... when possessed of a restless and lively imagination.”⁴⁸ He described Lamartine’s attempt to harangue the crowd as being “very badly received.”⁴⁹

Tocqueville, like Marx, argued that the major consequence of May 15 was that the leaders of the proletariat were not there in June: “The only men who could have placed themselves at the head of the insurgents had allowed themselves to be prematurely taken, like fools, on the 15th of May; and they only heard the sound of the conflict through the walls of the dungeon of Vincennes.”⁵⁰ For Tocqueville, the June Days was the event of real significance in the Revolution. Tocqueville offered two entire chapters to fully explain these events describing them as, “the most extensive and the most singular [insurrection] that has occurred in our history and perhaps in any other.”⁵¹ He went on to say that “it was not strictly speaking a political struggle... but a struggle of class against class, a sort of Servile War.”⁵² His interpretation is eerily similar to that of Marx in this regard. He stated, “These poor people had been told that the wealth of the rich was in some way the produce of a theft practiced upon themselves.”⁵³ Tocqueville did not believe that there was any possibility for negotiation in this situation: “We learnt that Lamartine had been received with shots at all the barricades he attempted to approach. Two of our colleagues, Bixio and Dornès, had been mortally wounded when trying to address the insurgents.”⁵⁴ When one member of the National Assembly, Victor Considérant, suggested making concessions to the revolutionaries, the Assembly “cried on every side, with a sort of rage, ‘it will be time to talk of that after the victory!’”⁵⁵ For Tocqueville June was the moment

⁴⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, 147.

⁴⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, 146.

⁵⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, 171.

⁵¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, 160.

⁵² Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, 160.

⁵³ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, 160–161.

⁵⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, 166.

⁵⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, 166.

when the conflict came to a head. For him the conflict in the Revolution of 1848 was between revolutionary politics and conservative politics. It was a conflict between continuity and change; one which was decisively won by the forces of continuity.

Therefore, although Tocqueville and Karl Marx came from very different ideological positions, there were aspects of their renditions of the story that are surprisingly similar. Both writers dismissed the Luxembourg Commission and Louis Blanc as being unworthy of commentary. The Luxembourg Commission's record of promoting arbitration, of bringing workers and employers together, and its emphasis on the importance of elections (at least up to the failure of its candidates in April), stands in stark contrast to the narratives woven by Tocqueville and Marx. For Marx, the Luxembourg Commission distracted from the true revolution: the revolution of the proletariat could not have a political solution. For Tocqueville, socialism was a jumble of confused programs that detracted from republicanism. The bloody events of June took center place in both their narratives.

The Historiographical Legacy of Marx and Tocqueville

Marx and Tocqueville's classical interpretations of the events of 1848 continue to shape the historiography of the subject today. François Furet, Robert Gildea, Pierre Rosanvallon, and Robert Tombs all place the revolution of 1848 within the context of the revolutionary tradition stemming from 1789, which Marx and Tocqueville also did.⁵⁶ As Maurice Agulhon put it, "In

⁵⁶ William Fortescue, *France and 1848: The End of Monarchy* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 4; François Furet, "The Ancien Régime and the Revolution." In Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press: 1992), 105.

1848 thinking about the Republic meant thinking about the French Revolution.”⁵⁷ In his interpretation of the revolution, Marx divided the timeline into three distinct sections: February-May of 1848, May of 1848- May of 1849, and May of 1849- December of 1851. For his part, Roger Price divides the timeline along very similar lines in his work on the French Second Republic. He first focuses on February- June of 1848, then June of 1848- May of 1849, and finally from May of 1849- December of 1851. The initial period was “short-lived” but full of “euphoria” before the shock of the “brutal insurrection of June.”⁵⁸ His account of the Luxembourg Commission mirrors Marx’s interpretation perfectly. Louis Blanc and Albert are “full of promises without any means of realization”⁵⁹

1848 has thus failed to generate as much controversy as might be expected between historians of the left and the right. The contrast with the Revolution of 1789 is stark. While the history of that French Revolution (as François Furet famously wrote) “bequeathed to France conflicts between legitimacies and a virtually inexhaustible stock of political debates,” 1848 did not.⁶⁰ It was, in revolutionary terms, a failure. In this there is consensus among historians. Michael Broers, in writing of the Revolutions of 1848, describes “short, sharp and usually failed revolutions.”⁶¹ Roger Price notes that, contrary to the hopes of the revolutionaries, the period of conservative monarchy was followed by a period of repression and restrictions.⁶² R. R. Palmer concurs that, “The Revolution of 1848 failed... in France... the cry had been for the freedom of

⁵⁷ Maurice Agulhon, *The Republican Experiment, 1848-1852* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1–2.

⁵⁸ Roger Price, *The French Second Republic, a Social History* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1972), 4.

⁵⁹ Roger Price, *The French Second Republic, a Social History*, 106.

⁶⁰ François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 6.

⁶¹ Michael Broers, *Europe after Napoleon: Revolution, Reaction and Romanticism, 1814-1848*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 106.

⁶² Roger Price, *The Revolutions of 1848*. (London: Macmillan, 1988), 89.

nations... but nowhere was national liberty more advanced in 1850 than it had been two years before.”⁶³

It is important, moreover, to remember that the outcome of 1848 was not pre-determined. Avoiding adherence to a teleology allows us to see the revolution with more complexity than previous historians have acknowledged. We can recognize the centrality of workers in the revolution without reducing them to pawns of history or limiting them to roles defined by Marxist theories of class.

⁶³ R. R. Palmer, *A History of the Modern World: Since 1815*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1950), 495.

Conclusion

Was the Luxembourg Commission, as Lamartine would have had it, the product of a “manifesto of impossibilities,” destined to collapse as a consequence of its impracticality? This was certainly not the opinion of Louis Blanc, nor of the worker delegates who absented themselves from paid employment to attend meetings through the months of March and April 1848. The Luxembourg Commission was at the center of a political struggle between the factions sharing power in the provisional government (as well as between rival newspapers) during the first months of the Revolution. The fact that the struggle was so tense at times, suggests that everyone was taking the potential of the Luxembourg Commission seriously.

Despite its being a hot button issue during the Revolution of 1848, the Luxembourg Commission has been largely sidelined in subsequent histories. This was due, to a great extent, to the fact that it did not fit in to the historical framework of either the left or the right. Both left and right identify class conflict as a central issue in the Revolution of 1848, but if we look at the revolution as a revolution of workers, the history of February to May is at least as significant as that of June. The story of 1848 as a workers’ revolution looks significantly differently when it revolves around the early Revolution, as opposed to the June Days. Not least, the Luxembourg Commission and its record of arbitration demonstrates that conflict between workers and the bourgeoisie (to use Marxist terms) was initially non-violent. As this thesis has shown, the failure

of the Luxembourg Commission was political rather than institutional. Even after the events of May 15 had effectively ended the commission, workers like Jean-Pierre Drevet continued to advocate for arbitration and workers like Pierre Vinçard looked to continue its work, identifying themselves explicitly as former delegates.

The Luxembourg Commission played an important part in the mobilization of a significant portion of the Parisian populace to participate in the 1848 Revolution. The Luxembourg Commission is ripe for reanalysis, not just in terms of what happened before or what happened after, but what happened during the (admittedly brief) time it operated. As this thesis has shown, the Luxembourg Commission was not a failure. It had concrete success in its arbitration and made real gains for workers during the months it was in operation. Its demise was entirely political, a consequence of the failure of socialist and worker candidates in the elections of April.

Also ripe for reanalysis is the journée of May 15, where the chaos of events (particularly within National and Mobile Guard units) suggests an outcome that was far from certain. In June, the Mobile and National Guards sided firmly with the government. In May, in contrast, the government could not necessarily depend on the Mobile and National Guards for support: their loyalties were conflicted. Behind this shift were steps taken in the aftermath of May 15 to buy the loyalty of the Guards and the development of a different strategy of mobilization once General Cavaignac took control from General Courtais. Arguably, the decisive defeat of the workers therefore occurred in the month before to the June Days. As both Marx and Tocqueville rightly pointed out, May 15 also robbed workers of some of their best political leaders. Marx and Tocqueville focused their attention on individuals, but the Luxembourg Commission as a

body could also be included in this analysis. Its official demise was one of the most significant blows to worker political organization during the Revolution of 1848.

This thesis therefore proposes that we should break from the narratives set out by both Marx and Engels and liberal commentators like Alexis de Tocqueville in the nineteenth century. We should not, however, hold the accounts of Lamartine or Louis Blanc to be the infallible and inspired gospel of the muse Clio. Both Lamartine and Louis Blanc were too involved in the events to offer unobjective accounts, and as we have seen, the theatrical nature of the poet Lamartine's account warrants particular scrutiny. Instead, although the research is potentially laborious, we need to put together a new narrative by reading newspapers and biographies of all political persuasions and seeking to find how they agree as well as how they disagree.

This thesis has sought to explore some of the complexity of the early revolution. It has looked to understand the impact of the political moment on the successes and failures of Luxembourg Commission's work in encouraging workers to organize, to take control of their work conditions, and to turn their numbers into representation in the National Assembly. It did not think of itself as part of the story of the evolution of the language of labor, or as a precursor to the politics of labor in late nineteenth-century France. The men who participated in the Luxembourg Commission thought only of abolishing marchandage, securing limits on working hours, better wages, and the guarantee that they would receive regular pay packets from week to week.

It is with some peril that historians talk about alternative histories, victories which could have, should have, or would have been won (but were not). The Luxembourg Commission is not the story of an alternative history. Nevertheless, putting it back into the history of the Revolution of 1848 – in terms of its successes as well as its failures – reveals a politics of labor far richer

than the black-and-white opposition of class against class that both Marx and Tocqueville established as the default has led us to believe.

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