THE SOCIALIST MINORITY AND THE PARIS COMMUNE OF 1871:
A UNIQUE EPISODE IN THE HISTORY OF CLASS STRUGGLES

by

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Abstract

The Paris Commune of 1871 lasted only seventy-two days. Yet, hundreds of historians continue to revisit this complex event. The initial association of the 1871 Commune with the first modern socialist government in the world has fuelled enduring ideological debates. However, most historians past and present have fallen into the trap of assessing the Paris Commune by foreign ideological constructs. During the Cold War, leftist and conservative historians alike overlooked important socialist measures discussed and implemented by this first-ever predominantly working-class government. Communard initiatives are viewed as having failed to live up to 'proper' definitions of Soviet socialism. In my own thesis, I argue that a specific group within the Commune—the minority—did in fact legislate and discuss many important socialist initiatives in the realm of finances, culture and women’s issues. Breaking from earlier elite utopian forms of nineteenth century French socialism, and building on the anarchist theories of Proudhon, the minorité were able to bridge the gap between labour militancy and political representation. Through the newly created International Working Men’s Association, working class Parisians united, promoted and elected twenty-two socialist candidates to the Commune of 1871. This investigation aims to penetrate the socialist vision of this minorité faction within the Commune. The socialism of the minorité must be understood as a direct response to class antagonisms created from economic hardships and municipal disenfranchisement experienced by the Parisian poor under the Second Empire. Many important primary sources including memoirs of key participants, parliamentary records and contemporary journalists’ reports were consulted in order to provide a detailed analysis of the unique and culturally distinct socialist programme undertaken by the minorité in 1871.
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I. Introduction

To the astonishment and great dismay of bourgeois commentators from the West, something quite unexpected happened on March 18, 1871. A correspondent to the *Times* of London wrote from Paris:

Here are the rowdy Quarters in full possession of the whole city ... waving flags, beating drums, blowing bugles ... in the wildest flights of their imagination, the bricklayers, tailors, and day labourers ... never expected to find themselves governors of Paris.¹

After holding out for several months during the Prussian siege, Parisians felt betrayed by their National Assembly who surrendered to Germany in January, 1871. Under the Royalist leadership of Adolph Thiers, the Assembly further alienated many segments of the Parisian poor by cancelling a moratorium on all overdue rents. Military pay to the National Guards of Paris, on which thousands of families depended, was also cancelled in February. These measures provided the final spark for a deep-rooted working-class uprising initiated in the poorest sections of north-eastern Paris.

Conservative observers looked on in disgust. For them, the March 18 uprising and subsequent seizure of the *Hôtel-de-Ville* in Paris were initiated by the "riff-raff of ... both sexes, who gather in the slums"² and led by "political charlatans."³ These commentators referred to the Parisian insurgents as "the lowest depths of human ... degradation,"⁴ inspired by a "magnetic current of insanity."⁵ Communard sympathizers viewed things quite differently. Benoit Malon, an elected member of this revolutionary-

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inspired Commune, often celebrated the “enfants de la foule” of Belleville and Montmartre who supported it. Malon believed this short-lived seventy-two day revolutionary government to be something quite novel in the history of France, writing in his memoirs: “c'était la classe ouvrière au pouvoir pour la première fois.” Karl Marx, at the time in London, also noted the uniqueness of this Parisian revolutionary experiment, as “plain workingmen for the first time dared to infringe upon the governmental privilege of their ‘natural supériors.'” Unprecedented numbers of workers had power over Paris. Hatters, boilermakers, bookbinders, bohemian journalists and artists found themselves among the 81 elected members in charge of Paris from March to May of 1871.

Both conservative and leftist contemporaries associated the Paris Commune with the first ‘working-class’ government in the modern world, and this continues to attract many historians to this complex subject. From its onset, the Paris Commune has been interpreted along partisan ideological lines. As Eugene Schulkind tells us: “far more than any other nineteenth century revolution, the Commune has tended to engage the political prejudices of those who have written its history.” William Serman complains that Marxist scholars have tended to over-simplify the Commune of 1871 along Manichean terms of ‘good workers’ versus ‘evil bourgeois’. To a certain extent, one

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7 Ibid, 148 (“it was the working class in power for the first time.”)
11 Serman, *La Commune de Paris*, 568. William Serman has also noted his frustrations with historiography surrounding the Paris Commune, writing: “Depuis plus d’un siècle, la Commune a inspiré quantité ... de commentaires contradictoires, mais peu d’histoires impartiales.” (“For more than a century, the Commune has inspired many contradictory commentaries, but few impartial histories.”) (Serman, *La Commune de*
can sympathize with his criticisms. Many leftist historians have viewed the 1871 uprising from within a Marxist-Leninist theoretical straight-jacket. For example, in 1937 Frank Jellinek approached the Commune with a profound faith in scientific socialism. The 1871 Commune and the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 are portrayed to be “intimately linked.” The Paris Commune’s eventual defeat is used to prove his belief that socialism cannot be sustained until the proper industrial circumstances are in place. Jellinek’s approach is disheartening because it belittles the initiatives and devotion of many segments of the Parisian poor who fought for a better society in 1871. His dogmatic interpretation even goes so far as to reduce the Communards to Marx’s “disciples.” Lenin also approached the Paris Commune in terms of ‘lessons to be learned’ for future revolutions. For him, this first “proletarian democracy” failed because it did not “suppress the bourgeoisie” with “sufficient determination.”

William Serman is quite correct to criticize many Marxist historians for their overly-reductionist accounts of the Paris Commune. However, Serman’s liberal perspective also becomes problematic when he claims only republican scholars of the Commune are able to get at the ‘truth’ by balancing off sympathizers with opponents of the 1871 regime. His belief in “rigueur scientifique” presupposes total objectivity on behalf of liberal scholars. However, history is not a perfect science. History, like

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13 Ibid, 409.
14 Ibid, 389.
16 Serman, *La Commune de Paris*, 569. [“scientific rigor.”]
fiction, has ideological implications. Thus, Serman's satirical view of the Commune merely reflects his own liberal bias. However, his outlook is no more 'real' or viable than any other historian's.

In general, liberal Western scholars have ironically been as guilty as leftist historians of basing their analyses of the 1871 Paris Commune on Soviet definitions of socialism. Robert Tombs, for example, concludes that the Paris Commune was in no way 'socialist' because "[t]here was no attempt to round up members of the economic or social elite..." \(^\text{18}\) Many liberal historians have also linked the policies of the Paris Commune to patriotism without considering underlying social antagonisms. For example, in 1967, Edward Mason analyzed the Commune as "an incident in the Franco-Prussian War" \(^\text{19}\) and claims "the uprising ... was the product of patriotism outraged by the experience of Paris during the siege." \(^\text{20}\) Social and economic policies remain largely overlooked in studies which focus on military aspects of the civil war. One Western historian even argues that the Communard legislation does not merit any "meaningful" analysis \(^\text{21}\) since "what preoccupied the Communards was not planning Utopia but beating the Versailles." \(^\text{22}\)

The inadequacy of the majority of scholarship on the Paris Commune has provided a major impetus for my own approach to this topic. A great number of scholars have taken this event out of its historical and cultural context. Yet, as R.B. Rose tells us,

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\(^\text{21}\) Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871*, 82.
the Paris Commune was a unique event...peculiar to France in the mid-nineteenth century.”

Therefore, instead of focusing on how the Commune ‘failed’ to live up to Soviet standards of Communism, I plan to analyze the successful initiatives undertaken by this short-lived government in terms of the ‘socialism’ defined by the Parisian Communards of 1871.

In particular, I will focus on the ideas expressed by a group within the Commune most often associated with la question sociale. This faction of twenty-two elected members became known as the minorité in mid-May 1871 by opposing their Jacobin counterparts’ calls for a revolutionary five-man dictatorship. The minorité counted the largest proportion of workers and members of the newly-formed International Working Men’s Association (A.I.T.) in its ranks. They were not professional revolutionaries in the Blanquist or Jacobin tradition. Unlike the Jacobins, the minorité did not concern themselves with reliving past communes of 1793, nor did they adhere to the violent nihilist vision of Blanqui and his supporters. As Azéma and Winock note:

the minority...includes the Communards the most concerned with the social question...
it accounts for the largest number of workers...These men had an idea of the Commune almost completely opposed to that of the Jacobins and the Blanquists.”

Unlike the most recent quasi-leftist French revolutionary 1848 provisional government, which counted at most two socialist members without ministerial portfolios, the minorité of 1871 were given full reign over all aspects of the Commune’s social

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24 The following 22 members of the Commune signed the ‘declaration’ of the minority on May 15, 1871: Andrieu, Arnold, Arnould, Avrial, Beslay, Clemence, Clément, Courbet, Frankel, Gerardin, Jourde, Lefrançais, Longuet, Malon, Ostyn, Pindy, Serraillier, Theisz, Tridon, Vallès, Varlin, Vermorel.
legislation. Therefore, a study of the *minorité's* socialist vision is of prime importance since they were the first working-class group to ever hold significant power over Paris. It is certainly true that France had previously witnessed strong socialist movements. In particular, as William Sewell's brilliant work on the history of early nineteenth-century workers' corporations points out, French artisans and journeymen were able to resist some of the hardships created from oppressive articles of the Civil and Penal Code which forbade strikes and associations.\textsuperscript{26} Through mutual-aid groups and rival secret 'compagnonnage' societies, substantial organizations of working-class tradesmen were able to co-ordinate strikes and ensure that all of their members were cared for in times of sickness.\textsuperscript{27} However, in terms of political power, workers never held significant power over governmental institutions in France until 1871.

In 1848, the 'socialism' of this revolutionary government was confined to limited unofficial discussions in the Luxembourg Commission. Moreover, the 'socialism' of 1848 as advocated by Louis Blanc remained distrustful of the capacities of the French working classes. As outlined in Blanc's influential work *Organisation of Labour* (1839), cooperatives or "social workshops" were to be created and funded by the State in order to do away with competitive private industries which created poverty and moral degradation amongst the poor.\textsuperscript{28} However, rather than including workers in the development of these new egalitarian work environments, Blanc argued that only an elite within the national


government of France could be entrusted with their administration. As William Sewell points out,

Blanc's emphasis on state action fit his pessimistic assessment of the condition of the working class. If the competitive system had reduced workers to poverty and moral decay, then workers themselves could hardly be counted on to take the initiative in creating a new organization of labor.  

The 'socialism' espoused by the minorité of 1871 represented a significant break from that of the past in many respects. Certainly, it rested on similar notions of combating capitalism through the expansion of co-operatives in France. However, the 'socialism' of 1871 was to be achieved with the aid and direct intervention of the working classes. The minorité's socialist vision of 1871 drew inspiration from the specifically French anarchist theories of Proudhon. Workers were to be directly included in achieving a gradual transition towards economic equality. French workers were called upon to unite through mutual-aid societies. Banking was to be reformed in order to provide interest-free funding to co-operative initiatives. Moreover, unlike the 'socialism' of the 1840's which derived from numerous secret and often rival workers' societies, that of 1871 consisted of a more unified movement. With the creation of French sections of the A.I.T. in 1864 in most urban centres throughout France, the working class found a more united institutional form through which to organize collective anti-capitalist expressions. With perhaps 70,000 Parisian members at the time of the Commune, the A.I.T. was able to bridge the gap between grass-roots labour militancy and political representation. It

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31 For example, Sewell notes that due to rivalries within the carpentry 'compagnonnages' in early nineteenth century Paris, the 'Enfants de Père Soubise' tradesmen confined themselves to the right bank of the Seine, whereas the 'Enfants de Salomon' only worked on the left bank. (Sewell, Work and Revolution in France, 169).
promoted its own working class candidates for the 1871 Communal government. These candidates eventually formed the minorité.

Many significant social initiatives were discussed and implemented due to the diligence of minority members. Particularly, in the realm of finances, labour, culture and women’s issues, the minorité proved quite effective. My investigation focuses on both the ideas as well as the parliamentary debates surrounding the social policies of the Commune. Even if the Commune’s legislation appears on the surface moderate, underlying arguments in the parliamentary records reveal quite a radical vision favouring a new socially just Paris. If perhaps time was not on the side of the minorité, their ‘socialist’ vision remains forever alive in the records of the communal council. Memoirs of key participants such as Benoit Malon, Arthur Arnould, Gustave Courbet and Francis Jourde also provide important insights into the how the minorité hoped to resolve economic inequality. Although none of the elected members of the Commune were women, the writings of the influential Louise Michel provide some fascinating contemporary feminist perspectives on the socialism associated with this event. In addition, editorials from the official newspaper of the Commune will be examined. All of these primary sources are united in a consistent ‘class’ based analysis of Parisian society which provides us with a good indication of what ‘socialism’ meant to the minorité in 1871.

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32 Proces Verbaux de la Commune; hereafter referred to as the P.V.C.
33 hereafter referred to as the J.O.; the Journal Officiel published decrees as well as editorial contributions from all members and supporters of the Commune.
II. The Climax of Class Antagonisms

The minorité's social policies represent many initiatives taken in favour of the working people of Paris in 1871. The question arises as to who precisely were the 'working classes' that supported, elected and fought for the Paris Commune? R.B. Rose notes that categories such as 'proletarian' or 'working-class' are not static:

When participants in the Commune...in the middle of the nineteenth century...used the term 'prolétaire' they meant something quite different by it than...Marxists

The 'prolétares' of Paris were not an 'ideal type' of Marxist industrialized workers. In fact, one study indicates that the number of Parisian labourers per workshop remained relatively low at only 7.7 throughout the 1860's. Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of the Parisian working class of 1871 was its “heterogeneity.” Huge factories had not yet penetrated Paris at this time save for a few new plants on the outskirts of the city in La Chapelle. Most Parisian workers remained engaged in either skilled artisanal luxury crafts or else were employed as manual labourers in the rapidly expanding garment industries and the booming construction and building trades.

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35 Jellinek, The Paris Commune of 1871, 33-34.
38 see Jellinek, The Paris Commune of 1871, 33-34: 300,000 Parisians were employed in the garment industries—the majority being women; over 200,000 Parisian men found themselves employed in the reconstruction of Paris during the late 1860's; see Appendix 1A for further details on the “heterogeneous”
Nevertheless, the notion that Paris had a diverse and unindustrialized working class in 1871, does not mean poverty and shared economic exploitation did not exist; nor did it preclude class antagonisms from developing. E.P. Thompson’s definition of the British working class seems equally relevant to my own definition of the Parisian working class. Thompson claims that class is “a result of common experiences” amongst groups and communities of people who “feel” and “articulate” their own experiences in opposition to others. This class solidarity, while dependent on economic inequalities, does not presuppose ‘proper’ economic conditions for its formation. As Thompson so eloquently put it, “consciousness of class arises in different times and places, but never in just the same way.” Moreover, as William Sewell tells us, strong traditions within the French labour movement developed prior to the industrial revolution. Therefore, any meaningful analysis of French socialism should not ignore the contributions of nineteenth century artisan radicalism. It was precisely the artisan and largely pre-industrial Parisian workforce which contributed and supported the socialist minorité of 1871 under unique social circumstances.

Haussmann’s restructuring of the city of Paris in the 1860’s, combined with worsening economic conditions and growing frustration with the lack of municipal autonomy under Napoleon III, heightened class antagonisms and provided wide-scale support for the Paris Commune. As Robert Tombs indicates, “unprecedented transformation...created discontents and political demands that...influenced the

make-up of the Parisian working classes at this time.

40 Ibid, 9-10.
Commune’s programme.” The Parisian working-classes consisted in 1871 primarily of artisans and manual labourers. Of course, as Edith Thomas notes, the Parisian working poor must also take into account female workers: “within the proletariat itself, a distinction must be made: women were the more exploited.” The majority of women earned on average less than half a working man’s wage. Many could only afford to eat bread and milk and were forced into prostitution to supplement their meager wages. The overall economic picture for working-class Parisians was quite gloomy as from 1857 to 1867, real wages fell by over 25%

The heterogeneous workers of Paris all experienced the massive re-structuring of their city under Baron Haussmann in the 1850’s and 1860’s. The population of Paris witnessed incredible growth, increasing from 1.1 to 1.8 million people between 1850 and 1870. Eight new districts were incorporated into Paris in order to accommodate both the influx of rural migrant construction workers and the exodus of 350,000 previously centrally located artisans no longer able to afford the luxurious new developments in the centre of the city. The geography of Paris became codified along ‘class’ lines, as never before. The north-east of the city served as a ghetto of unsanitary housing for the dispossessed. While luxurious flats were created for the wealthy in the centre of the city, most Parisian workers were forced into cramped lodgings in the overpopulated eastern

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44 Ibid, 5; most Parisian women worked as seamstresses, earning only 2 francs per 13 hour workday.
46 Jellinek, The Paris Commune of 1871, 34.
47 Priscilla Ferguson. Paris as Revolution. Berkeley: University of California (1994), 133-134; see appendix 1B.
slums of Belleville and Montmartre.\textsuperscript{49} To make matters worse, rent prices nearly doubled at this time due to the recent population boom. As Edith Thomas notes, the social restructuring of Paris created two distinct worlds within one city, alienating the poor from the rich:

Two distinct classes then; the rich and the poor. This was carved into the very stones and asphalt of the city, for everyone to see....No longer were the houses divided perpendicularly ...between bourgeois and artisans. The workers were pushed back toward the north and east of Paris, to Belleville...and beyond...fortifications, toward the suburbs that were emerging into the ugliness of industrial anarchy. All along the new streets sprung up the expensive houses of the eminent banking and business families. Two different worlds, with hatred and fear of one another.\textsuperscript{50}

Roger Magraw further notes that two distinct cultural spheres emerged under the reconstruction of Paris:

Central Paris became an arena for spectacle...where the well-to-do came to stroll ...shop in department stores...It was colonized by the new capitalist leisure and consumer culture...But the wider Parisian working class had not been drawn into this culture.\textsuperscript{51}

Not only were the Parisian poor being forced to the periphery of the city, their ways of life were also subject to dislocation. Due to the fact that Haussmann’s rebuilding of Paris cost over 2.5 billion francs, a new ‘octroi’ tax was levied on all goods entering the city. This municipal tax increased rent, food and raw materials by over 20%\textsuperscript{52} In many cases, craftsmen in small workshops could no longer survive independently. Many were forced into unfavourable contracts with new department stores such as the Bon Marché, in order to avoid bankruptcy.\textsuperscript{53} The effects of the growing division and

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, 224.
\textsuperscript{50} Thomas, \textit{Women Incendiaries}, 4.
\textsuperscript{51} Magraw, \textit{A History of the French Working Class}, 225.
\textsuperscript{52} Tombs, \textit{The Paris Commune 1871}, 24.
\textsuperscript{53} Magraw, \textit{A History of the French Working Class}, 229; the Bon Marché was one such new department store created in 1852.
‘commodification’ of labour was not lost on Napoleon III’s key minister of trade Michel Chevalier, who remarked in the 1860’s:

an abyss separates the bourgeois from...the worker...The bourgeois feels nothing in common with the proletarian. It is convenient to regard him as a machine that one rents, by which one is served, and that one pays only so long as he is needed.  

Further to this, with no democratic municipal representation throughout the duration of the Second Empire, the Parisian poor felt completely alienated from their city. Therefore, the Paris Commune may be viewed as an attempt by the “victims” of Haussmann’s rebuilding of Paris to “reclaim the public space from which they had been evicted”. As Albert Boime so accurately tells us, the Paris Commune represented an attempted reversal of “social relations” and allowed for “novel” “utopian possibilities.”  

Unquestionably, economic hardships, municipal disenfranchisement and the abrupt reorganization of the social geography of Paris in the 1860’s contributed to heightened class antagonisms and helped shape the socialist vision of the minorité. The growing separation between bourgeois and proletarian Parisians in all facets of life further led to distinct class-based voting patterns in the March 26 Communal elections.

III. Municipal Elections

On March 18, as red flags flew atop the Hôtel-de-Ville, free elections were called to determine the fate of the city. Contemporary critics of the Commune claimed the

56 *Journal Officiel de la Commune.* Coeures & Valsery: Éditions Ressouvenances (1995), 22-23; the
March 26 municipal elections were “fraudulent in their execution” and would serve to deprive the leftist Parisian government of “all credit or moral force.” In particular, the voter turnout was deemed to be too low to sanction a government. According to the *Times* correspondent, only 180,000 Parisians participated out of 500,000 registered voters. Recent scholars have made similar claims that the Commune was elected by roughly 100,000 less votes than the 1870 government of National Defence. Yet, statistics on the elections vary considerably. According to official published results in the *Journal Officiel*, 222,000 Parisians cast ballots on March 26! While this total represents only 46% of registered voters, it must also be noted that thousands of wealthier Parisians fled the city at the end of the Prussian siege and many previously registered voters were killed during the Franco-Prussian War.

More recent critics of the Commune such as Georges Bourgin claim that low voter turnout on March 26, 1871 should be attributed to “l’état d’esprit des hommes et des femmes qui n’ont pas pactisé avec la sorte de dictature du prolétariat alors instaurée.” Bourgin further argues that it was not simply wealthy segments of the Parisian population who abstained on March 26, but also the Catholic and socially conservative Parisian poor revolutionaries of Paris reformed electoral procedures, basing elections on representation by population, allowing poorer over-populated districts their fair say.

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58 “The Commune of Paris.” *Times* of London. March 30, 1871, 5. The same observer further claims that only 110,000 Parisians voted for radical candidates.
60 *Journal Officiel*, 105-107.
62 Georges Bourgin. *La Commune: que sais-je?* Paris: Presses Universitaires (1965), 52. [“the state of mind of men and women who had not come to terms with the kind of proletarian dictatorship recently instituted.”]
who feared the anti-clericalism espoused by Communards. The historian Edward Mason makes the claim that “[t]here is no cosmic necessity leading the working class toward socialism ... nor is any connection of this sort visible in the revolution of the 18th of March.” Elsewhere, bourgeois observers felt that working people of Paris supported revolutionary candidates due to their “weak and unenlightened minds.” The Parisian poor had been tricked into voting for socialist candidates:

The deceived workmen...The poor devils...of limited intelligence...brutalized...by the abuse of dangerous drink...become intoxicated with the fine words with which they are deluded...promises of the future which...can never be realized.

Nevertheless, when one looks at the voter turnout and voting patterns in terms of the social geography of Paris, it becomes clear that ‘class’ was the dominant factor. For example, in the central and wealthier western districts only roughly 24% of registered voters participated. Yet, in the poorer north-eastern districts such as Montmartre, up to 58% cast ballots. Support for revolutionary candidates was also strongest in this poorest north-eastern region of Paris. Even reactionary observers at the time were forced to admit that “the sentiment of class appears for the first time as a revolutionary power.”

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63 Ibid, 52.
67 Journal Officiel, 105; in the western district #7, voter turnout was only 22.9%, and in the wealthy arrondissement #8, only 24.7% of registered voters cast ballots; see appendix 2A for further details.
68 Ibid, 106-107; in one of the poorest districts in Paris (#18), over 53% cast ballots. Another north-eastern district #10 had over 58% of registered voters participate in the March 26th Communal elections; see appendix 2A for further details.
69 Tombs, The Paris Commune 1871, 111.
IV. Formation of the Minorité

The March 26 elections returned a landslide victory for revolutionaries of many persuasions. In particular, candidates endorsed by the A.I.T. did very well.\textsuperscript{71} Although some of the elected delegates previously held professional jobs, well-off revolutionaries often associated themselves with either neo-Jacobinism or Blanquists.\textsuperscript{72} Most members of the minorité, such as Benoit Malon came from dire poverty. Born into a rural landless peasant family in the Loire region of France, Malon moved to Paris in the 1860’s.\textsuperscript{73} Eventually, he was forced to peddle books in order to eke out a living. Malon was a self-taught intellectual and helped found the A.I.T. section of Paris in 1865. He also served time in prison under Napoleon III’s oppressive regime due to his affiliation with this organization.\textsuperscript{74} Malon’s Communard colleague Gustave Courbet also lived a bohemian existence since his realist paintings did not satisfy ‘bourgeois’ artistic tastes. Courbet explains from a letter written from prison: “I have never had wealth, I don’t care to have it, or to possess anything at all.”\textsuperscript{75} Therefore, one may conclude that the minorité were not simply a “working-class elite” as Robert Tombs has argued,\textsuperscript{76} nor can one dismiss the

\textsuperscript{71} Journal Officiel, 66; the A.I.T. called on Parisians to vote for its candidates who would institute “the progressive application of social reforms” in order to “end class antagonisms by ensuring social equality.”; members of the minorité such as Arnould, Frankel, Malon and Ostyn were but a few of the A.I.T. candidates elected.

\textsuperscript{72} Azémé and Winock, Les Communards, 182-183; Serman, La Commune de Paris, 278-279; for example, the Blanquist Eugène Protot was a lawyer and Jacobin J.J. Pillott was a medical doctor.


\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, 8-23


\textsuperscript{76} Tombs, The Paris Commune, 111.
Communards as “disgruntled petit bourgeois.”

Some historians have suggested that within the Commune, one cannot necessarily derive specific groups such as ‘minorité’ or ‘Jacobins’. R.D. Price writes: “There was nothing but vague ideals...constant squabbling between individuals.” Nevertheless, by mid-May a minorité was officially formed in protest against the growing authoritarian nature of the Jacobin majority. The declaration of the minorité outlines some of the major differences which distinguished this forward-looking group from the Jacobins:

nous voulons, comme la majorité, l’accomplissement des rénovations politiques et sociales; mais, contrairement à sa pensée...sans abriter derrière une suprême dictature que notre mandat ne nous permet d’accepter.

By mid-May, the Jacobin and Blanquist majority attempted to revive the past commune of 1793 and the terror associated with it. The revolutionary calendar was adopted, and opposition newspapers were suppressed. The majority ordered the destruction of famous imperial monuments such as the Colonne Vendome. As Stewart Edwards writes: “many of the Jacobins and Blanquists were engaged precisely in trying to play the roles of their great ancestors.” Followers of Blanqui became much more violently anti-clerical

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78 R.D. Price. “Ideology and Motivation in the Paris Commune of 1871.” *Historical Journal*, xv, 1 (1972), 75; Winock and Azéma also claim that: “The ideological content of the Parisian revolution was missing a back bone...there were too many brains to make one head...the official doctrine remain blurred.” (Azéma and Winock, *Les Communards*, 71.)
79 Georges Bourgin, ed. *Procès Verbaux de la Commune: Tome II*. Paris: A Lahune (1945), 373 [“we want, like the majority, the accomplishment of political and social reforms; however, contrary to its thought...without taking shelter behind a supreme dictatorship which our mandate does not permit us to accept.”]; Robert Tombs also notes the minority’s opposition to the majority’s dictatorial tendencies, writing: “the ‘Minority’ were...conscious of themselves as democrats and socialists involved in a modern nineteenth-century movement...they feared a revolution that would merely change one oppressive regime for another.” (Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871*, 84.)
81 Ibid, 229.
by May. Raoul Rigault ordered 120 priests arrested, including the Arch-bishop of Paris. As opposed to the majority, minority members envisioned a very different revolution inaugurated on 18 March, 1871. Reliving the terror of 1793 should not be allowed to impede this new social revolution. Although the declaration of the minority did not officially appear until May 15, judging from Benoit Malon’s memoirs, this group of predominantly A.I.T. members formed an alliance from the very beginning:

Tous ces ouvriers se connaissaient; ils avaient lutté ensemble, habité ensemble les prisons impériaux: c'était un groupe d'amis...leurs convictions socialistes...les éloignaient du terrorisme...de 1793. Ils formèrent dès le premier jour...un groupe compact qui siéga à gauche et s'intitula 'socialiste'.

The differences between ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ become even more pronounced when one looks at the various delegations members served on. The minority found themselves on committees related to la question sociale. Of the ten committees, the minority concentrated themselves on ‘Finances’, ‘Public Services’, ‘Education’ and most importantly, ‘Labour’. Frankel, as head of this latter group represented the first ministry devoted to labour issues in the history of French politics On the other hand, members of the Jacobin and Blanquist majority concentrated themselves on the more violent aspects

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82 Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871*, 124; 24 priests were killed in the last week of the Commune’s existence as retribution for thousands of Communard deaths.

83 Bourgin, *Procès Verbaux de la Commune*: (II), 374; Malon writes: “I remain convinced that the reminiscences of ‘93 should never have entered in the social and proletarian Revolution inaugurated on the 18th of March.”

84 Malon, 138 [“All of these workers knew each other; they had struggled together, lived together in the imperial prisons: it was a group of friends...their socialist convictions...separated them from the terrorism...of 1793. From the first day, they formed...a compact group which sat on the left and called itself ‘socialist’. ”]

85 the contemporary journalist and Communard sympathizer Lissagaray, believed that the mere existence of Frankel’s committee of Labour during the Commune did “more for the workmen than all the bourgeois Assemblies of France...since 1789.” (Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray. *History of the Commune of 1871*. London: Fisher Unwin [1902], 233.)
of this government such as the ‘Military Committee’ and that of ‘General Security’.  

Some historians have argued that due to the factions within the Commune, fighting and disorderly conduct impeded meaningful social legislation. For instance, Winock and Azéma suggest that “there were avalanches of suggestions in a dumbfounding revue of questions...It was rare when a question was fully debated.”  

A correspondent from the *Times* of London even went so far as to proclaim that “They give orders at random without knowing what they are doing.”  

It appears that there is a certain element of truth to these historians’ conclusions. However, parliamentary records indicate that debates were most unproductive only by late May. In one instance, François Ostyn of the minority, expressed his frustrations at the constant parliamentary squabbling:

> J'ai quarante-huit ans, je n'ai jamais fait partie d'une assemblée populaire. Je sors de la classe ouvrière; je ne connais pas les malices de la politique; je vois ici des choses qui m'étonnent. Je croyais trouver dans cette assemblée quelque chose de plus grand, de plus digne.  

Although there were heated debates between factions within the Commune over some petty issues, there were many more important and well-informed discussions which led to significant social legislation. Contrary to some myths, the behaviour within the Communal council was not one of wild parties and drunken behaviour. As Stewart Edwards notes, the Communards were remarkable for their “puritan application to
One of the first measures implemented reduced elected representatives salaries to 6000 francs per year. Although this wage amounted to roughly four times an average male working man's salary, considering the dedication of members of the Commune, one could say they were extremely underpaid. Many, such as Arthur Arnould noted that they rarely had time to sleep. Perhaps Gustave Courbet expressed the dedication of the minorité best in a letter written to a friend on April 30, 1871: "I preside twelve hours a day. My head is beginning to feel like a baked apple. But in spite of all this...I am in seventh heaven. Paris is a true paradise!" Outside of the Council, Communard women worked and fought with equal vigour for this new révolution sociale. Louise Michel explains: "During the entire time of the Commune...I never really went to bed...Everybody who wanted deliverance gave himself [sic?] totally to the cause."

V. The Minorité Defines Class-Conflict in 1871

William Serman has been quite critical of Marxist historians for reducing their analyses of the Paris Commune along overly-simplistic "interprétations réductrices" based on class-conflict. Yet, if we look at minorité editorial articles in the Journal Officiel, the revolution of 18 March is in fact expressed along very definite class

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92 Journal Officiel, 126.
93 Tombs, The Paris Commune 1871, 86.; Communard salaries seem quite moderate when compared with British M.P.'s who at the time earned 10,000 francs. (Jellinek, The Paris Commune of 1871, 391.)
94 Arthur Arnould. Histoire Populaire et Parlementaire de la Commune de Paris. Brussels: Librairie Socialiste (1878) Vol.2, 112. Arnould writes: "je ne me rappelle pas m'être...couché dix fois dans ces deux mois." ["I don't remember having slept ten times in these last two months."
95 Courbet in Chu, Letters of Gustave Courbet, 416.
97 Serman, La Commune de Paris, 568. ["reductionist interpretations"]
antagonisms. For example, in an April 5 editorial piece entitled *Les Rouges et les Pâles*, colours are used to symbolize social classes. “Reds” are associated with workers, while “Whites” are signified as bourgeois. While “Whites” have “tyranny in their veins,” “Reds” favour “fraternité...entre les peuples sans esprit de nationalité.” In this article ‘class’ also takes on moral dimensions as “Reds” are portrayed as fighting to end all forms of poverty “au service de l’humanité” whereas, “Whites” are associated with “moeurs frivoles,” living extravagant and deceptive lifestyles at the expense of the homeless.

While the historian Robert Tombs claims that under the Commune, “the red flag was far from incompatible with popular patriotism,” a March 30th article in the *J.O.* entitled *Le Drapeau Rouge* clearly proves his theory wrong. In this editorial the red flag symbolizes “une seule classe, celle des travailleurs.” Whereas the old tricolor flag of France in 1789 and 1848 represented an attempted reconciliation between the “white” nobility, the “blue” bourgeoisie and the “red” workers, under the Commune this is viewed to be “une contradiction avec le principe de l’égalité.” Finally, in an editorial entitled *Une Révolution Populaire*, the history of France is clearly defined in terms of class conflict:

Bourgeois society...since 89 has replaced, in authority and in privilege, the ancient aristocracy. It will be destroyed by the struggle developed by the worker against the capitalist.

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98 *Journal Officiel*, 143.
99 [“fraternity...among all people regardless of their nationality”]
100 [“in the service of humanity”]
101 [“frivolous morals”]
102 *Journal Officiel*, 142.
104 *Journal Officiel*, 11. [“only one class, that of the workers”]
105 [“a contradiction with the principle of equality”]
106 *Journal Officiel*, 189.
Clearly, the *minorité* of 1871 believed the Commune represented a definite break with the past. The red flag atop the Hôtel-de-Ville symbolized the first Parisian government completely devoted to creating a classless society.

**VI. Economic Policies**

The *minorité* also expressed itself in 'class' terms in municipal council debates as well as through actual social legislation.¹⁰⁷ Francis Jourde of the minority was appointed delegate of Finances for the Commune. Historians of all persuasions have been quite critical of his initiatives. For example, Theodore Zeldin claims that the "finances of the Commune...were scrupulously conservative."¹⁰⁸ Yet, while Jourde's financial policies may not have been radical by Soviet standards, they did reflect very daring and 'class' inspired visions at this moment in history.¹⁰⁹ Based on Jourde's parliamentary financial report of May 2, one can detect many instances of working-class inspired reforms. Although roughly 80% of expenditures were allocated to the civil war effort, a significant attempt at wealth redistribution is apparent. For instance, while the affluent second district received only 5000 francs in funding for local initiatives, the poorer north-eastern

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¹⁰⁷ Bourgin, *La Commune: que sais-je?* 571; Bourgin writes: "it [the minority] approached...workers problems with a real vigour and attempted to resolve them in an undeniable spirit of social justice."

¹⁰⁸ Zeldin, *France 1848-1945: Politics and Anger*, 378; Winock and Azéma refer to the "timidness" of the Commune with respect to private property (Azéma and Winock, *Les Communards*, 106); even Karl Marx was forced to admit the Commune's financial policies were "remarkable for their sagacity and moderation."(Marx, *The Civil War in France*, 85.)

¹⁰⁹ Bourgin, *Procès Verbaux de la Commune* (II), 77. Jourde's own consciousness and desire to serve the interests of the Parisian working-class is clearly expressed in parliamentary debates on May 2: "it is the working class that...I am happy to represent here."
20th district received 228,000 francs. Jourde aimed at implementing a progressive taxation system. He acknowledged that the city tax or “octroi,” previously introduced by Napoleon III to pay for Haussmann’s reconstruction of Paris, weighed very heavily on the poor and must be reduced by 50%. To offset these lost revenues, taxes on private enterprises were implemented. On March 29, under Jourde’s leadership, the Commune also passed legislation ordering landlords to remit the last three quarters of the year’s rent payments to tenants and placed a moratorium on repayment of all overdue bills. Critics conclude that this legislation “did nothing to attack the principle of finance-capitalism.” Yet, when one considers that these bills were to be repaid over 3 years without interest, it seems that the entire notion of what capitalism is founded on--profit--was indeed being dismantled by Jourde.

In parliamentary debates, Jourde consistently advocated policies which attacked excessive profiteering. In particular, he was quite critical of stock-market speculation. Jourde’s self-proclaimed “socialisme pratique” aimed at a gradual transformation of Parisian society towards economic equality. Jourde argued that if drastic measures were taken such as the abolition of private property, French currency would immediately be devalued, prohibiting the Parisian working classes from obtaining the necessities of life. In particular, he emphasized the dependency of the Parisian economy on world trade. He

10 Ibid, 73.
11 Ibid, 77.
12 for example, a 10% tax on privately owned railways entering Paris was enforced. (see Edwards, The Paris Commune 1871, 252.)
13 Journal Officiel, 96.
14 Jellinek, The Paris Commune of 1871, 397.
15 Journal Officiel, 300-301.
16 Bourgin, Procès Verbaux de la Commune (II), 76-77. On May 2, Jourde states: “What I wanted in Finances, was to put a stop to these scandalous stock markets.”
17 Ibid, 81. [“practical socialism”]
explains on May 2, 1871:

le pays...vit surtout de l’échange de ses produits contre les produits étrangers...avant tout il faut rassurer l’échange des produits. Ce n’est qu’en opérant de cette manière que l’on pourra donner aux travailleurs des instruments de travail de lutte et je croyais faire en agissant ainsi du socialisme pratique.\textsuperscript{118}

Contemporary colleagues of the minority such as Benoit Malon commended Jourde’s foresight and courage at finding a balance between tackling social inequalities “tout en restant dans une légalité à désespérer les ennemis de la révolution.”\textsuperscript{119} Reaction to his first initiatives of interest-free repayment of debts and rents proves how radical these policies were to contemporary bourgeois observers. The correspondent to the \textit{Times}, outraged by the economic aims of the Commune, writes:

The first step is to exonerate tenants from paying their rents; the next will be to exempt debtors from their debts...if the decrees of the Commune were to be definitively executed it would entail general bankruptcy...the complete ruin of the nation.\textsuperscript{120}

Jourde also helped to initiate other important legislation such as guaranteed pensions for injured national guardsmen as well as for widows and children of injured Parisian soldiers.\textsuperscript{121} The Commune, under the guidance of the minority, also decreed all vacant apartments and lodgings to be made available free of charge to the poor and to those whose flats had been damaged from the Versailles artillery. Based on Jourde’s underlying arguments, we can imagine in times of peace, Communards would still have ensured comprehensive standards of living for all Parisians.

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid, 81. [“the country...lives above all from the exchange of its products against foreign products...above all we must ensure the exchange of products. It is only by operating in this manner that we will be able to give work instruments to the workers, to fight, and I believe by acting in this manner to accomplish practical socialism.”]

\textsuperscript{119} Malon, \textit{La Troisième Défaite du Proletariat Français}, 161. [“all the while staying in a legality to the great despair of the enemies of the revolution.”]


\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Journal Officiel}, 200.
Above all, the Commune’s economic policies have been criticized for failing to nationalize the Bank of France (located in Paris). As Eric Cavaterra tells us:

On a ... rarement vu un objet historique sur lequel pèsent tant de polémiques...On a souvent cité, parmi les grandes ‘erreurs’ des insurgés...la façon dont fut traitée la Banque de France.122

From Soviet perspectives the ‘failure’ to nationalize the Bank of France is clearly an indication of “revolutionary backwardness.”123 On the other hand, from the vantage point of moderate conservatives, it proved that the Commune was not a ‘class’ war but simply a Jacobin revolution emulating the previous anti-clerical terror of 1793. For instance, Robert Tombs writes: “Churches were occupied and vandalized; banks remember, were untouched.”124

In particular, critics blame the Commune’s delegate to the Bank, Charles Beslay, for his “scrupules” and hesitations towards this capitalist institution which in turn caused the “suicide” of the Commune.125 However, according to Beslay, reformist socialism did not mean destroying the Bank of France but simply slowly changing it towards an interest-free institution which would be used to finance worker-controlled endeavours.126 Beslay acknowledged in 1871 that “the bank...is the fortune of the country; without it, no

122 Eric Cavaterra. *La Banque de France et La Commune de Paris 1871*. Paris: L’Harmattan (1998), 17. [“One has...rarely seen an historical object on which weigh so many polemics...Many have often claimed, among the biggest errors of the insurgents, the way in which the Bank of France was dealt with.”]
124 Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871*, 123.; see also Williams, *The French Revolution of 1870-1871*, 138: “one might well conclude that the only realm in which the Commune was truly revolutionary was that of religion. No attempt was made to seize the Bank of France.”
126 Cavaterra, *La Banque de France et la Commune de Paris 1871*, 73-86; The fact that hundreds of employees of the Bank resigned upon Beslay’s arrival underscores the radical nature associated with the Commune.
more industry, no more commerce. If you violate it, all its notes will be...waste-paper.”

In line with Jourde’s reasoning, Beslay sought to gradually reform the Bank of France in the interest of sustaining a viable gradual transition towards ‘socialism’. The Parisian economy could not be sustained if completely isolated. Surrounded by a Western capitalist world hostile to the very essence of socialism, Beslay recognized that radical change required patience. Therefore, Beslay and Jourde of the minorité demonstrated ‘practical’ socialist economic policies in line with the philosophy advocated by Proudhon during the 1860’s. Rather than attempting to introduce utopian authoritarian forms of socialism such as that espoused by Etienne Cabet earlier in the nineteenth century, the minorité believed in democratic peaceful methods of sustainable reformist socialism modelled on interest-free banking and an increased social safety net.

VII. Social Reform and the Co-operative Movement

One of the most important pieces of economic legislation was spear-headed by a joint effort of the Committees of Finance and Labour. The May 6 decree on Pawn Shops included a remittance to Parisians of pawned items not totalling more than 20 francs. As Arthur Arnould explained to the municipal council, this legislation represented “la première preuve de sympathie pour la classe nécessiteuse et ouvrière...preuve matérielle

127 Lissagaray, *History of the Commune of 1871*, 188.
128 Cavaterra, *La Banque de France et la Commune de Paris 1871*, 313; Historian Stewart Edwards agrees with Beslay with respect to the Bank of France: “the very money being paid...by the Commune would become worthless if confidence in the Bank was destroyed.” (Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871*, 251.)
129 *Journal Officiel*, 486-487. The decree allowed for the remittance of articles of clothing, literature, work tools and furniture.
que nous comprenons nos devoirs à son égard.”

Underlying discussions make it clear that this social policy represented merely a first step in attacking the very capitalist institution of pawn-shops themselves. An April 30 report submitted to the Commune on behalf of the Committee of Labour led by Frankel and Malon called for the complete “liquidation” of pawn-shops. At the Hôtel-de-Ville on May 6, Frankel outlined the need to reform the capitalist structure which created these usurious institutions:

pour réformer l’état économique, il faut organiser le travail...quand on aura dégagé les objets du Mont-de-piété, au bout de quinze jours la misère sera toujours la même.

Frankel called for co-operatives to replace private enterprises in order to eventually render institutions such as pawn shops useless. While the refunded sum of 20 francs may seem moderate, this total was decided upon in order to inhibit wealthier Parisians from reclaiming items such as jewellery. Reimbursing items above the level of 20 francs would mean subsidizing “luxury items” of the rich. Therefore, by limiting the level to 20 francs, the minorité would have more money left over to help the “classes qui nous intéressent.” What Robert Tombs refers to as legislation inspired by “the economic hardships of the Prussian siege,” appears on the contrary to demonstrate a clearly planned ideological argument in favour of gradual socialist reforms.

130 Bourgin, *Procès Verbaux de la Commune* (II), 224-225. [“this is the first proof of sympathy for the needy and the working class...material proof that we understand our obligations on its behalf.”]

131 hereafter referred to as the C.T.E.

132 *Journal Officiel*, 433; authors of this report noted that pawn-shops preyed on the working poor in times of unemployment and ill-health; a contemporary reporter from the *NYTimes* claims 1500 pairs of scissors and 3000 mattresses had recently been pawned by the desperate Parisian poor. (“The Paris ‘Mont-de-Piété’.” *NYTimes* April 2, 1871, 4.)

133 Bourgin, *Procès Verbaux de la Commune* (II), 229 [“to reform the economic state, we must organize labour...for once the pawn-shop items have been reclaimed, within fifteen days the misery will remain the same.”]

134 Ibid, 238; On May 6, in the Communal Council, Jourde states: “if you raise the level to 30 francs...owners...will profit from the decree.”

135 Ibid, 222. [“classes which interest us.”]

136 Tombs, “Harbingers or Entrepreneurs,” 977.
The Communard minority's socialist tendencies become even more apparent when one analyses the initiatives undertaken by Frankel's C.T.E. A significant piece of legislation on April 16 called for all factories abandoned during the civil war to be immediately placed under the control and ownership of their previously employed workers. Liberal scholars such as Robert Tombs suggest that since previous owners of these factories were to be reimbursed, this legislation was largely a moral, patriotic prerogative rather than an anti-capitalist initiative. In a case study of the newly created Ironfounders Co-operative, Tombs distorts history by claiming that in this munitions factory of 250 workers, class hostility was “non existent” and that workers remained on “cordial relations” with their former employer. Tombs’ investigation is very problematic since his deductions are almost entirely derived from War Council interrogation trials in the aftermath of the Commune’s defeat. One could hardly expect Communard sympathizers to extol the virtues of revolution and class-hatred when faced with either death or deportation if found guilty by conservative judges.

In fact, there are many examples that the April 16 legislation proposed by Frankel did produce many favourable results for Parisian workers. For instance, in the Louvre arms factory, workers determined their own statutes and established a maximum 10 hour work day. More importantly, in Communal parliamentary discussions, we see definite

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137 *Journal Officiel*, 286; the decree itself is phrased in patriotic overtones of punishing cowardly “deserters” rather than “bourgeois exploiters.”

138 Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871*, 92-94; Tombs writes: “There was a consistent desire to reconcile the interests of workers and employers...It was aimed not at employers or owners in general, but at ‘deserters’ guilty of ‘cowardly abandon’ of their businesses to ‘escape their civic obligations.”

139 Tombs, *Harbingers or Entrepreneurs?*, 975; Tombs notes that rather than expropriating the factory, workers voted in favour of renting it from the previous owner, M. Guillot.

efforts within the minority to favour co-operatives and trade unions over private enterprises. For instance, on May 12, the C.T.E. received a petition from the women’s section of the A.I.T., the *Union des Femmes* (U.D.F.), addressing concerns on the “markets for military clothing.” The U.D.F. report noted that seamstresses in the private sector were being paid only 2.5 francs per pair of military pants whereas under the previous liberal government, women received 3.5 francs.\(^{141}\) This report prompted Frankel’s famous speech:

> Nous ne devons pas oublier que la Révolution du 18 mars a été faite exclusivement par la classe ouvrière. Si nous ne faisons rien pour cette classe, nous qui avons pour principe l’égalité sociale, je ne vois pas la raison d’être de la Commune.\(^{142}\)

In response to this troublesome news, Frankel immediately called for the creation of a co-operative to supply the Commune’s military clothing. Higher wages and an 8 hour work-day were also guaranteed to these women workers.\(^{143}\) By the end of discussions, the Commune decreed that preference was to be given to co-operatives for all future government contracts.\(^{144}\) The C.T.E. also consistently received petitions from unions.\(^{145}\)

In many instances, the *minorité* regulated labour disputes in favour of working people. Such was the case when it passed a decree abolishing night work in bakeries on April

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\(^{141}\) Bourgin, *Procès Verbaux de la Commune* (II), 348.

\(^{142}\) Ibid, 352. [“We must not forget that the Revolution of March 18 was made exclusively by the working class. If we do nothing for this class, we who have as our principle social equality, I do not see the reason for being in this Commune.”]

\(^{143}\) Ibid, 352-355.

\(^{144}\) Ibid, 355. According the Communist Billioray, this represented “le premier pas sérieux fait dans la voie du socialisme.” [“the first serious step taken on the road towards socialism.”]; there are also many examples of the *minorité* providing funding for co-operatives. For example, a tailors’ association received 20,000 francs and a metalurgical union also received 5000 francs. (Bourgin, *Procès Verbaux de la Commune* [II], 74.)

\(^{145}\) see for instance *Journal Officiel*, 381: an April 25 report from mechanics union calls for the expansion of organized labour.
20.\footnote{Journal Officiel, 332; in appreciation of this decree, 1500 members of the Bakers’ Union are reported to have marched in front of the Hôtel de Ville, waving red flags in a grand demonstration of support.; the minorité also abolished workplace fines.” (Edwards, The Paris Commune 1871, 257.)} Co-operatives represented a key socialist method used by the minorité in order to combat recent economic developments which were forcing artisans into bankruptcy as well as pushing many working poor into very restrictive work situations. Malon writes in his memoirs:

Les prolétaires savent quelle différence il y a entre l’homme de métier, travaillant dans un atelier, qu’il est libre de quitter pour un autre, et l’ouvrier...de l’usine, l’employé des grands compagnies...Ces derniers, pour un salaire, illusoire souvent, très insuffisant toujours...sous les écrasantes fatigues, sous les mauvais traitements des chefs...sont serfs d’esprit et de corps.\footnote{Malon, La Troisième Défaite du Proletariat Français, 526. [“proletarians know the difference there is between the trades-man, working in a workshop, who is free to leave for another, and the factory worker, employed in a big company. These latter, often for an illusory, always very insufficient salary, under crushing fatigue, under bad treatment from supervisors...are slaves of body and mind.”]}

For Malon, ‘socialism’ meant combating debilitating new forms of large-scale factory work-environments through collective ownership of machinery.\footnote{Ibid, 530.} Building on the traditions of the early nineteenth century workers’ corporations and secret societies (compagnonnages), Malon and the minorité sought to aid co-operative initiatives in order to battle the extreme excesses of capitalism.\footnote{Stewart Edwards writes: “The co-operative idea expressed the antagonism felt against employers, but hoped to end exploitation by the peaceful and gradual elimination of capitalist factories.” (Edwards, The Paris Commune 1871, 261.)} However, unlike Louis Blanc’s vision of state-run “social workshops” of the 1840’s, the newly created co-operatives were to be administered and created by workers rather than by elites. The very fact that a committee of Labour existed in the 1871 Commune was in itself groundbreaking since even as recently as 1848, revolutionary governments in France had rejected similar requests.\footnote{for example, in 1848, workers’ concerns could only be studied and debated ‘unofficially’ through the}
The minorité’s advocacy of co-operatives also reflected a desire for local initiatives to replace the oppression experienced under the authoritarian centralized government of Napoleon III. Since the coup of 1851, Parisians had had no municipal elections. Due to the horrors experienced under the previous dictatorial regime, ‘socialism’ had to be achieved through local democratic initiatives only. Arthur Arnould illustrates these sentiments best, stating:

La Commune...fut le premier Pouvoir...qui s’appuya sans réticence sur les principes socialistes...loin d’assumer la tâche d’organiser autoritairement l’égalité civile...elle sut rester dans la vérité, en appelant les classes travailleurs à régler elles-mêmes, directement, leurs intérêts.

For Arnould, any form of authoritarian government--socialist included--could only create despotism. Arnould’s anti-statist views are echoed in the Commune’s April 19 “declaration to the French People.” In it, the term “commune” is seen to represent an attack against the “centralisation despotique” of the Second Empire. This document was distributed throughout France, and called on all workers to rise up in their Luxembourg Commission.

151 see Edwards, The Paris Commune 1871, 275: “the Commune opened the way for experiments in trying to apply some of the ideas that had been developed in opposition to the economic and political repression of the French State.”

152 Arnould, Histoire Populaire et Parlementaire de la Commune de Paris, vol.3, 97-98 [“The Commune...was the first power...which applied itself without reticence to socialist principles...far from assuming the task of authoritarily organizing civil equality...it remained in the right by calling upon the working classes to regulate their interests directly themselves.”]

153 Ibid, vol.3, 119-120. Arnould states: “The evil is not that the State acts in the name of such and such a principle--it is that it exists...the State...can be neither democratic, nor revolutionary...since it represents Power, which is despotic...something which dominates...society...oppressing and crushing it.”

154 the April 19 declaration represents the Commune’s constitution and was chiefly written by the minorité.

155 Journal Officiel, 324. [“despotic centralization”]
communities. Through a federation of decentralized “communes,” power could be restored to the people by “[l]’intervention permanente des citoyens dans les affaires communales par la libre manifestation de leur idées.”

Many historians have understood the term “commune” as a decentralist reaction to the Second Empire devoid of any socialist program. For instance, Louis Greenberg writes that the Paris Commune was “a political reaction to the structure of the state, rather than a chapter in the history of world socialism.” While it is true that the authoritarian nature of the Second Empire encouraged the Parisian Communards towards decentralism, this anti-statist stance in no way impeded their overall objectives of obtaining social equality. As Arnould clearly indicates, “social equality” was to be predicated on “collectivist” collective ownership of the means of production. However, rather than having one dictatorial government for the entire nation of France, intervening into the economy to ensure social equality, the minorité believed in creating multiple anarchist “cells” of elected working-class communes intervening into domestic economic issues. Whereas, contemporary critics in the Western world believed communal associations advocated by

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156 Ibid, 323.
157 Ibid, 324. [“the permanent intervention of citizens into Communal affairs by the free manifestation of their ideas.”]
158 Louis Greenberg. “The Commune of 1871 as a Decentralist Reaction.” Journal of Modern History. March-Dec. (1969), 310; other historians have erroneously misinterpreted the April 19 declaration. Edward Mason claims “nowhere was there a hint of an attack on property...nor was the word socialism mentioned”(Mason, The Paris Commune, 256); Robert Tombs further concludes that “[t]he declaration is remarkable for the vagueness of its social and economic content.”(Tombs, The Paris Commune 1871, 79).
159 for instance see Louise Michel. La Commune. Paris: Bibliothèque Sociologique (1898), 165: “C’est que le pouvoir est maudit...que je suis anarchiste.” [“It is since power is cursed...that I am an anarchist.”]
161 Journal Officiel, 324; as the school teacher Edourad Vaillant of the minorité states on May 19 in the Hôtel-de-Ville: “when the State is named the Commune, it must often intervene...and...search to create socialist establishments everywhere.” (Bourgin, Procès Verbaux de la Commune [II], 426.)
Communards would lead to "disintegration and national death" and that the authors of the April 19 declaration were "destitute of common sense." Communards believed the commune to represent a first step towards the economic emancipation of the poor.

Clearly, the following passage from the April 19 declaration describes this communal insurrection along 'socialistic' class lines. We read:

La Révolution communale, commencée par l'initiative populaire du 18 mars, inaugure une ère nouvelle de politique expérimentale...C'est la fin du vieux monde gouvernemental...du militarisme...de l'exploitation, de l'agiotage des monopoles, des privilèges, auxquels le prolétariat doit son servage.

Some historians claim that the Commune of 1871 simply represented an uprising of urban Parisians frustrated with the conservatism of rural Frenchmen. Tombs feels that the Commune should be understood as a protest against rural segments of France who had betrayed the previous leftist 1848 revolution by overwhelmingly supporting Napoleon III in the 1851 national plebiscite. It does appear that to a certain extent, Parisian Communards defined their struggles in terms of bitter hostility towards this 'backwards' populace of France. For instance, on April 30, 1871, Gustave Courbet wrote: "Paris no longer wants to be led by France nor by the votes of the peasants." In the April 19 declaration, Communards demonstrated a mistrust for rural France by reserving the right to pursue their own municipal initiatives without the consent of

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162 "Is France on its Deathbed?" NYTimes March 31, 1871, 4.
164 Journal Officiel, 324. ["The communal Revolution, started by the popular initiative of March 18, inaugurates a new era of experimental politics...It is the end of the old militaristic, governmental world...of exploitation, of monopoly speculation, of the privileges, to which the proletariat owes its servitude."]
165 Tombs, The Paris Commune 1871, 118-120; Tombs writes: "This latest ordeal appeared part of a saga in which Paris had repeatedly fought for progress and been defeated and punished by...French reactionaries. Since...1848, the instrument of Paris's subjugation had been the voting power of benighted peasants manipulated by priests and nobles."
outlying regions of the country. Clearly, the Reds of Paris no longer wanted to be held hostage by the conservative countryside.

Yet, while it may be argued that leaders of the Paris Commune had bitter memories of rural France from 1851, these hostilities did not overshadow their commitment of ending economic exploitation in all its forms throughout all regions of France. For instance, in the same April 19 declaration we read:

Nos ennemis se trompent ou trompent le pays quand ils accusent Paris de vouloir imposer sa volonté ou sa suprématie au reste de la nation...L'unité politique, telle que la veut Paris, c'est l'association volontaire de toutes les initiatives locales...en vue d'un but commun, le bien-être...et la sécurité de tous.

Although members of the minorité lived in Paris at the time of the Commune, close to two thirds of them were not even born in this city. While it is certainly true that the minorité’s decentralist vision had at its heart the municipal autonomy of Paris, a commitment to the spread of anarchist egalitarianism throughout all of urban and rural France is also apparent. Building on Proudhon’s decentralist concept of ‘federal autonomous communes’, the minorité’s anarchist vision of 1871 was in large part a reaction to the municipal disenfranchisement and economic hardships experienced under Napoleon III.

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167 *Journal Officiel*, 324. We read: “Paris reserves the right to operate the administrative and economic reforms that its own population demands.”

168 *Ibid*, 324. [“Our enemies are confused or confuse the country when they accuse Paris of wanting to impose its will or its supremacy on the rest of the nation...The political unity that Paris desires, is the voluntary association of all local initiatives...in the aims of a common goal, the well-being...and safety of all.”]

169 Serman, *La Commune de Paris*, 278-279; Some members were not even French. Frankel came from Hungary.
IX. Cultural Initiatives

There were also many important cultural initiatives undertaken by the minorité. Gustave Courbet seized the opportunity to apply the socialist principles of the commune to the realm of art. Under Napoleon III, an artist’s life was very insecure. In particular, creativity was severely restricted as over 54% of the annual arts budget was spent on Imperial portraiture and religious art. Yearly exhibitions, or ‘Salons’ were controlled by appointees of Napoleon III, who only tolerated ‘safe’ art in shows. As Sanchez claims, “Napoleon III used arts policies both to co-opt artists and to reflect glory on his regime.” Artists only received ‘secours’ grants of a paltry 175 francs per year, under the condition that their art did not offend the Imperial regime.\textsuperscript{170} Further to this, although the number of Parisian artists increased from 350 in 1789 to 3300 by 1863, art academies continued to only admit 120 students each year.\textsuperscript{171} Courbet attempted to reform ‘bourgeois’ imperial art by expanding both funding to artists regardless of their style and also by making art accessible to the working classes by placing museums under the collective ownership or “safekeeping of the citizens.”\textsuperscript{172} Museums were opened to the public free of charge. By April 15, Courbet outlined a declaration for a Communal Artists Federation—a sort of co-operative for all Parisian artists. In the platform of the federation, we read its core objectives:

\begin{quote}
La libre expansion de l'art, dégagé de toute tutelle gouvernementale et de tous privilèges ...L'égalité des droits entre tous les membres....L'indépendance...de chaque artiste mises sous la sauvegarde de tous par la création d'un comité élu au suffrage
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid, 65.
\textsuperscript{172} \textit{Journal Officiel}, 511.
This federation also pledged to replace capitalist promoters of art exhibitions with communal art shows whereby all artists would receive an equal re-distribution of generated revenues.\textsuperscript{174}

In the realm of education, we also see an attempt on behalf of the \textit{minorité} in favour of working-class children. One historian estimates that over 83,000 children aged 4-16 received no education whatsoever in Paris as of 1870.\textsuperscript{175} Prior to the Commune, education remained a privilege primarily for children of the wealthy. Schooling was also predominantly controlled by the Catholic Church. However, under the guidance of the Education minister Edouard Vaillant, serious attempts were discussed to grant free compulsory secular education to all. On April 2, 1871, Vaillant outlined his proposals for an \textit{"éducation nouvelle."}\textsuperscript{176} Under the Commune, former Catholic schools were to be appropriated by the \textit{"collectivity"} of the Communal government and converted into instructional facilities open to all children free of charge regardless of religious beliefs.\textsuperscript{177} The fact that girls were also to be granted free education was quite groundbreaking.\textsuperscript{178}

Sceptics of the Commune’s education programs claim that secularization and anti-

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid, 273. ["The free expansion of art, liberated from all governmental tutelage and from all privileges...The equality of rights between all members...The independence...of each artist placed under the safeguard of all by the creation of a committee elected by the universal suffrage of the artists."]; the democratic principles of the Federation aimed at ending the corrupt patronage associated with the arts under Napoleon III. (Sanchez, \textit{Organizing Independence}, 61.)

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid, 274; 400 artists sanctioned Courbet’s Federation on April 13, 1871 (Sanchez, \textit{Organizing Independence}, 61.)

\textsuperscript{175} Edwards, \textit{The Paris Commune 1871}, 267.

\textsuperscript{176} ["new education"]

\textsuperscript{177} \textit{Journal Officiel}, 129.

\textsuperscript{178} Edwards writes: “In pressing for women’s education the Communards were going against the practice of the time.” (Edwards, \textit{The Paris Commune 1871}, 271.); In the 1850’s a girls’ education was restricted to the diploma of ‘brevet supérieur’ which was granted at the age of 13; over 41% of married French women could not even sign their name as of 1867. Most were illiterate. (Claire Moses. \textit{French Feminism in the 19th Century}. New York: State University [1984], 175-177.)
clericalism were the main priorities rather than any real attempts at implementing free education.\textsuperscript{179} Some historians note that since the Education Committee received only 1000 francs, very few significant gains were achieved in this particular area of social policy.\textsuperscript{180} However, these critics fail to look at many important initiatives which were implemented under separate municipal district funds allocated independently by Jourde. In particular, under the guidance of Jules Allix, in the 8th district, several former Jesuit clerical buildings were converted into secular schools, providing free access to over 3000 children aged 7 to 15.\textsuperscript{181} In terms of educational curriculum, we see that indeed the minorité had a very socialistic agenda.\textsuperscript{182} A strong indication of its working-class roots was the emphasis placed on ‘practical’ education. Children of the Commune were to be taught both intellectual courses as well as subjects which focused on skills related to manual labour. Serman writes that Vaillant envisioned a school system favorisant l’épanouissement simultané de leurs capacités intellectuelles et de leurs aptitudes manuelles, de manière à former des hommes qui soient à la fois des citoyens éclairés, des ouvriers qualifiés...aussi à l’aise dans le domain des lettres, des sciences et des arts que dans celui de...l’atelier.\textsuperscript{183}

Education was to be reformed in order to incorporate practical skills associated with working people, which previously received very little respect in French society.

The minorité's socialist education policies aimed at emancipating working women both intellectually as well as economically. Vaillant attempted to destroy gender

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{179} Tombs, \textit{The Paris Commune 1871}, 99.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid, 99.
\textsuperscript{181} \textit{Journal Officiel}
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid, 129.
\textsuperscript{183} Serman, \textit{La Commune de Paris}, 385. [“favouring the simultaneous blossoming of their intellectual capacities and their manual aptitudes, in such a way as to shape people who would be enlightened citizens as well as qualified workers...just as comfortable in the domain of literature, sciences and arts as in that of the workshop.”]
\end{flushleft}
inequalities by including girls in previously male spheres of instruction. In particular, on May 12, a vacant building on Dupuytren street was converted into a technical industrial school for young girls.\textsuperscript{184} Vaillant, in a coordinated effort with Maria Verdure of the Commission for Girls' Education also planned on creating free nurseries for infant children.\textsuperscript{185} Women could now gain independence in the workplace without sacrificing their right to be mothers. Interestingly, for the first time, a woman became a school inspector in Paris, and Parisian women teachers were to be paid equivalent wages to men.\textsuperscript{186}

\section*{XI. Women's Issues}

Although women were prohibited from voting in the Communal elections, female Parisians were able to contribute to the Commune by direct fighting and through providing nursing aid to the soldiers of the barricades.\textsuperscript{187} Perhaps the most famous Communarde, Louise Michel, exemplified the steadfast support of women for the Commune. Michel was the daughter of a rural domestic servant, and migrated to Paris in the 1850's. She refused to take the 'oath of allegiance' to the Second Empire and was thus barred from teaching in public religious schools. After arriving in Paris, Michel along with André Leo helped found the 'Association pour le droit des Femmes' in

\begin{footnotes}{
\textsuperscript{184} \textit{La Commune et l'école}, 10; in the 8th district, a former charitable nunnery was to be transformed into an industrial school for girls. (Journal Officiel)

\textsuperscript{185} Edwards, \textit{The Paris Commune 1871}, 271; Verdure proposed that free nurseries “should be scattered throughout the working-class districts, near to the factories” complete with “gardens” and “a play-room full of toys.”

\textsuperscript{186} Moses, \textit{French Feminism in the 19th Century}, 193.

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid, 191.
}
In her memoirs, this self-proclaimed anarchist writes that a bullet grazed her wrist while fighting to defend Paris from the onslaught of French Royalist troops. Michel further notes that working women even more so than working men fought with total dedication on the barricades in defence of the Commune’s principles:

Our male friends are more susceptible to faintheartedness than we women are. A supposedly weak woman knows better than any man how to say: ‘It must be done’. Such were the women of the Commune. During Bloody Week, women...defended the barricade...till they died.

Contemporary opponents of the Commune such as the correspondent to the *Times* of London, were shocked at the agency displayed by women who defended the Commune at the barricades and through Vigilance Committees during the civil war. We read:

the wives...shame the timid...denounce the cowards who draw back from their communist duties. They go themselves to work at the barricades, and lead their husbands to the gates of the city.

Michel, along with many other women also contributed to the socialist policies of the *minorité*, through local club initiatives. Michel presided over the Montmartre Women’s Vigilance Committee which issued a successful petition to the Commune calling for all abandoned houses to be used to shelter the homeless. The fact that nearly 1100 women were tried before Councils of War after the fall of the Commune indicates that they played a very active role in defending the insurrection.

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189 Michel in Lowry, ed., *Red Virgin*, 66; Michel also claims that by the end of the Commune her hat was “riddled with bullet holes.”; Michel fought with the 61st battalion.
190 Ibid, 67; Edith Thomas claims that on one particular day, Michel both fought on the barricades and also played the organ in a nearby church to encourage Communards morale. (Edith Thomas. *Louise Michel*. Montréal: Black Rose [1980], 86.)
193 Thomas, *Women Incendiaries*, xii; Michel was deported to New Caledonia for her role in this
While it appears certain that many working-class Parisian women fought to preserve the Commune, the question remains as to how effective the male-dominated minorité promoted and addressed working women’s issues in its socialist platform. Most socialists of the Commune were also members of the A.I.T. and followers of the philosophy of Proudhon. It is important to note that Proudhon—the “Christ” of the Revolution, according to Courbet—was an unabashed misogynist. Proudhon even went so far as to write philosophical treatises outlining the many ways in which women were supposedly inferior to men. For instance, in his work entitled Amour et Mariage, he set out to prove that women were weaker than men in terms of physical, intellectual and moral points of view.

Whether or not male Communard sympathizers of Proudhon’s political-economic program adhered to this philosopher’s personal sexist views on women is debatable. The fact that French sections of the A.I.T. presented a petition aiming at excluding women from the workplace proves that many male French workers did not support economic emancipation for women in the 1860’s. Yet, attempts at excluding women from the workplace do not appear to be predicated on bigotry against women. On the contrary, as Claire Moses tells us, French feminism was closely linked to the urban socialist movement. Many Parisian feminists such as Maria Deraismes argued that women’s equality could best be achieved by increasing men’s wages, and removing revolutionary struggle. (Michel in Lowry, ed., Red Virgin, 198.)

195 Thomas, Women Incendiaries, 22.
196 Claire Moses feels that “the Commune’s leaders were not misogynist. They were known to be increasingly ‘Proudhonian’ in their politics but did not appear to hold such attitudes about women.” (Moses, French Feminism in the 19th Century, 192.)
197 Thomas, Women Incendiaries, 23.
women from the workplace in order to strengthen the family unit along a more equitable relationship.\textsuperscript{198}

It does appear that the minorité within the Commune took important steps to break with these ideas of the past years. Frankel set about redefining Parisian socialism to include women’s economic emancipation in its agenda. He wrote:

‘all the objections produced against [sex] equality are of the same sort as those produced against emancipation of the Negro race...By claiming that half the human race are incompetent, man prides himself on appearing to be the protector of women. Revolting hypocrisy.’\textsuperscript{199}

Under the minorité’s socialist platform, divorces were legalized. Under the leadership of the young 20 year-old Russian emigre, Elizabeth Dmitrieff, an important committee entitled the Union des Femmes (U.D.F.) was created.\textsuperscript{200} On May 6, 1871, the U.D.F. published its manifesto expressing faith in the Commune as the embodiment of ‘class struggles’ inclusive of both sexes:

profoundly convinced that the Commune, representing the international and revolutionary principles of the people, carries in her the seeds of social revolution, the women of Paris...will give, like their brothers, their blood and their life for the defense and the triumph of the Commune, this is to say the people...workers, \textit{all interdependent}, by a last effort will destroy forever all vestiges of...exploitation.\textsuperscript{201}

As a co-affiliate of the A.I.T., the U.D.F. was most successful in promoting women’s co-operatives. Such was the case when it petitioned the C.T.E. to increase the rates paid to seamstresses for military clothing.\textsuperscript{202} Virtually all scholars of the Commune agree that at least in the realm of women’s issues, Communard ideas and legislation were

\textsuperscript{198} Moses writes: “All believed that a stable family unit fostered justice and equality in society.” (Moses, \textit{French Feminism in the 19th Century}, 177-184.)
\textsuperscript{199} cited from Magraw, \textit{A History of the French Working Class}, 267.
\textsuperscript{200} 130 women officially joined the U.D.F. and held 24 public meetings between April and May, 1871. (Moses, \textit{French Feminism in the 19th Century}, 191.)
\textsuperscript{201} \textit{Journal Officiel}
\textsuperscript{202} see Thomas, \textit{Women Incendiaries}, 79-80; Tombs, \textit{The Paris Commune 1871}, 135-137; Bourgin, \textit{Procès Verbaux de la Commune} (II), 348-355.
radically progressive.\(^{203}\) According to Louise Michel, inherited problems of sex discrimination were largely resolved under the Commune as “people didn’t worry about which sex they were before they did their duty. That stupid question was settled.”\(^{204}\)

Overall, it appears that with respect to women’s issues, the ‘socialism’ of the minorité broke away from many aspects of its exclusively ‘male’ past. Most significantly, whereas even as recently as the 1860’s, women workers had been excluded from the male sphere of workers’ corporations, during the Commune, they were embraced by the co-operative initiatives of Frankel’s C.T.E.

**XI. Conclusion**

The Paris Commune of 1871 lasted only seventy-two days. Yet, historians past and present continue to re-visit this complex event. It is above all the association of the Paris Commune with the first socialist government in the modern world by conservative and leftist commentators alike which has fuelled enduring ideological debates. Contemporary critics sensed the novelty of this working-class government, writing in 1871: “the character of this new revolution ... appears to...have no precedent in the history of any nation.”\(^{205}\) Bourgeois observers commented on the “wild and

\(^{203}\) Roger Magraw writes: “there is much evidence that the Commune made a serious effort to grapple with the women’s issue.” (Magraw, A History of the French Working Class, 267.); even the staunch critic of the Commune, Robert Tombs, is forced to admit that “measures regarding women’s work show a wish to improve opportunities.” (Tombs, The Paris Commune 1871, 104); Although women were not allowed to vote in the March 26 elections, Tombs goes so far as to proclaim that with respect to women, “the Commune’s attitude was certainly more positive than that of earlier...governments.” (Ibid, 142.)

\(^{204}\) Moses, French Feminism in the 19th Century, 192.

impracticable dreams” of the Communards, who were “seeking the unattainable.”
The Commune was viewed to be “the first outburst of a new force” and “the first muttering” of a “social storm which shall yet shake every capital of Europe.” Indeed, conservative upper-middle class observers such as these felt quite relieved when the “wild beasts” of Paris were crushed by Thiers’ National troops during the *Semaine Sanglante.* One correspondent even toured the prison cells of captive communards, commenting in disgust on the “stench and filth” of these “drunk, half mad...wild animals.” He even celebrated the impending execution of thousands of the Parisian poor who supported the Commune: “in a number of cases capital punishment will be inflicted. The exasperated public would not be satisfied with less.”

On the opposite side of the political spectrum, Communard participants and sympathizers also noted the novelty of this revolutionary government and in complete contrast, believed it to demonstrate a practical step towards achieving future utopia. Benoît Malon believed the Commune allowed for the poor to “faire entrevoir la possibilité d’un état social meilleur.” Other members such as Francis Jourde echoed these sentiments that the red flag of the Commune would inspire future class struggles and one day become “le drapeau de l’humanité.” Moreover, the *pétroleuse* Louise Michel predicted the Paris Commune to be simply the first of many future uprisings of

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208 “The Paris ‘Mont de Piete’. ” *NYTimes,* April 12, 4.
212 Malon, *La Troisième Défaite du Proletariat Français,* 536. [“foresee the possibility of a better social state.”]
213 Francis Jourde. *Souvenirs d’un Membre de la Commune.* Brussels: Kistemaecers (1877), 78. [“the flag of humanity.”]
the poor: "the greater the poverty...the more quickly the hour will come and the more numerous the combatants will be." From London, Marx appropriated the Paris Commune for his own economic theories referring to it as the "first dictatorship of the proletariat" and "the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labor." 

In the historiography of the Commune, ideological cleavages opened by the Commune have hardened into mythical interpretations. In particular, the Cold War produced many distorted analyses by taking this event out of its historical and cultural context. Leftist scholars such as Frank Jellinek have severely misinterpreted this event by filtering its social initiatives through a Marxist-Leninist lens. The Paris Commune is judged in terms of its "revolutionary backwardness," by its failures to implement 'proper' Soviet socialism such as nationalizations of private property and Banks. In the West, recent scholars have been equally guilty of analyzing the Commune's social policies from Soviet definitions of 'proper' socialism. Therefore, liberal historians such as Edward Mason note that "None of this economic and social legislation of the Commune...was socialistic" since "[n]one of it involved the expropriation...of property owners." 

In my own thesis, I have argued that the Paris Commune originated from class antagonisms relevant to 1871. Many aspects of the minorité’s socialist vision represented a direct response to new hardships faced by the Parisian poor under Napoleon III. In

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217 Mason, *The Paris Commune*, 254; likewise, Roger Magraw claims that the Commune did not represent socialism but rather "piecemeal social tinkering" since there was no "systematic assault on capitalist structures." *(Magraw, *A History of the French Working Class*, 261.)*
particular, their calls for municipal autonomy were a direct response to the municipal
disenfranchisement experienced during the Second Empire. The anarchist vision of the
minorité also represented an attempt at bringing more local control back to the working
classes. Pushed to the outskirts of the city as well as the lower periphery of the socio-
economic pyramid during Haussmann's reconstruction of Paris, artisans and manual
labourers strongly supported minorité candidates during the March 26 elections. The
minorité's social policies represented a 'socialist' vision relative to specifically French
leftist Parisian political traditions of the late nineteenth century. Building on the theories
of Proudhon, the minorité aimed at gradually reforming the economic inequalities created
by competitive capitalism through the co-operative movement. Whereas earlier in the
nineteenth century, the French labour movement remained fractured in numerous rival
workers' corporations, under the newly created A.I.T., workers of all backgrounds were
able to unite and transform labour militancy into political power. The 'socialism' of the
minorité broke away from that of the early nineteenth century by attempting to include
workers in the parliamentary process. In the realm of co-operative initiatives, education,
art, finances and women's issues, many groundbreaking socialist initiatives were
discussed and implemented under the direction of the minorité.

The bitter class antagonisms opened during the Commune have not been resolved.
Instead, due in particular to the atrocities of the 'Bloody Week' during which over 30,000
Communards, including men, women and children were brutally massacred at the hands
of Conservative national troops, the Commune has taken on mythical proportions. The

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218 For example, Lenin is said to have been buried in a red flag from the Paris Commune, and during the
Mur des Fédérés where so many Communards were executed remains a holy site of pilgrimage for socialists throughout France. By the 1930’s, the French Communist Party celebrated the Paris Commune as the “forerunner to the Russian Revolution of 1917.”

In May 1968, student and union uprisings in Paris drew inspiration from the red flags of 1871. More importantly, in Paris, people continue to vote along ‘class lines’ similar to those of 1871. Indeed, the new socialist municipal government of Bertrand Delanoe in Paris owes its support largely to the same working classes of Belleville and Montmartre who supported the insurrection of March 18.

From a cultural perspective, the Paris Commune has left an indelible legacy in the minds of many of the Parisian poor.

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Soviet Union, March 18 became enshrined in the Soviet calendar as a national holiday in respect of the Parisian insurrection.


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Appendix 1

A. Social geography of Paris in the 1860's: the working classes were largely pushed to the eastern outskirts of Paris at the time of Haussmann's reconstruction of the city.

B. In the 1850's, 8 new districts were incorporated into the city of Paris in order to house many workers who could no longer afford to live in the rebuilt centre of the city.
Appendix 2

A. In the March 26, 1871 municipal elections, Parisians voted along ‘class’ lines. The Parisian poor concentrated in the over-populated eastern and north-eastern districts supported socialist candidates to a much larger extent than did the wealthier western districts.

The Paris Commune, 1871

B. In the recent 2001 Parisian municipal elections, voter sympathies appear to be very similar to those of 1871. Once again, the poorer eastern districts of the city elected socialist candidates to the Hôtel-de-Ville.