

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE GRAIN SUPPLY: NATIONALIZATION PAMPHLETS IN THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY

By R. B. ROSE, M.A.

“THE Trade and Finance of Sansculottism”, observed Carlyle in 1837, “and how with Maximum and Baker’s Queues, with Cupidity, Hunger, Denunciation and Paper-money it led its galvanic-life, and began and ended, remains the most interesting of all chapters in Political Economy: still to be written.”¹

With the publication, in the present century, of Jean Jaurès’ *Histoire Socialiste*,² and Albert Mathiez’ *La Vie Chère et le Mouvement Social sous la Terreur*,³ the major part of this “most interesting of all chapters” may be said to have been at least sketched; the details still continue to prove of absorbing interest to historians of the Revolution. It has already been made plain, however, that to a large section of the French people, the Revolution was as much a revolution for bread as for the political rights of man. “Ce n’est pas assez, citoyens représentants, de nous avoir donné la République” a delegation of the Paris Sections warned the triumphant Convention in February 1793, “Il faut encore nous donner du pain.”⁴ Nearly all the significant insurrectionary movements between 1789 and 1795 were given their force by the merging of the political demands of the *bourgeoisie* and the economic demands of the *sans-culottes*, a marriage epitomized succinctly in Babeuf’s slogan of 1794: “La liberté, du pain, et du bon pain.”⁵

The overriding economic preoccupation of the French labourers, artisans and petit bourgeois in the eighteenth century

¹ T. Carlyle, *The French Revolution* (London, etc., 1902), Part 3, Book 3, Chap. 5, p. 678.

² Paris, 1903-10.

³ Paris, 1927.

⁴ Claude Fauchet, *Journal des Amis*, no. 8 for 23 February 1793.

⁵ G. Lecoq (Ed.), *Un manifeste de Gracchus Babeuf* (Paris, 1885).

was the ensuring of an adequate supply of good quality, reasonably priced bread. While the potato was despised or distrusted, and meat too expensive for a regular item of diet, bread, and generally rye bread, remained the indispensable staple, on whose fluctuating supply and price the standard of living largely depended. Thus the economic dislocation of the revolutionary period merely presented in crisis form the perennial problems of the *Ancien Régime*.

Although France was predominantly an agricultural nation, some 11 per cent. of her twenty-five million population did not work on the land.¹ The primary industry had to provide a surplus, if only to cater for this, largely urban, population.

Due to the persistence of the backward economic and agricultural practices, summarized by Octave Festy in *L'Agriculture pendant la Révolution Française*,² France's agricultural surplus was, in the best years, barely sufficient for home needs. When production was affected by natural catastrophes, such as the drought of 1785 and the hailstorms of 1788 (which halved the wheat crop for that year), there were often insufficient stocks to prevent the development of a very dangerous situation. There was famine, or partial famine in 1709, 1725, 1749, 1775, and 1785.³ As a result there was a virtual tradition of popular riots in the main towns. The Paris women who marched to Versailles in 1789 were only emulating the example of their great grandmothers who were stopped by hastily called out troops on the Sèvres bridge in 1709.⁴ Reims was the scene of riots in 1709, 1770, 1771, and 1775.⁵ The detailed history of other provincial cities suggests similar evidence.

The supply and price of bread was, of course, only one half of the social question. The reverse half was the problem of poverty, of the ability to pay. The fact that both these problems achieved crisis proportions in 1789 was of great significance in the events of that year.

¹ H. Sée, *Histoire Economique de la France* (Paris, 1948), p. 39.

² Paris, 1947.

³ Ibid.

⁴ L. Romier, *A History of France* (translated and completed by A. L. Rowse) (London, 1953), p. 270.

⁵ G. Boussinesq and G. Laurent, *Histoire de Reims* (Reims, 1933), p. 270.

The royal intendant Tolozan maintained in 1789 that the Eden treaty for freer trade negotiated with Britain in 1785 had resulted in the unemployment of 200,000 workers in the textile towns.¹ There is evidence to support this view. At Rouen, in 1788, 7,000 women and children were without work.² At Reims, in 1789, 11,000 out of a force of 20,000 textile workers were classed as *indigents*,³ while from 1787 to 1790 there were seldom less than 20,000 out of 58,000 workers unemployed at Lyons.⁴ The researches of the Duc de Liancourt in 1790 led him to the conclusion that throughout France at least 3,200,000 persons were in need of relief,⁵ and it was estimated that Paris alone contained 118,000 paupers.⁶

In 1789, not only Paris, but provincial towns of such diversity as Rouen,⁷ Orléans,⁸ Reims,⁹ Grenoble,¹⁰ and Chartres,¹¹ were the scene of *Sans-Culotte* outbreaks directed against the high price of bread and essentials. Such riots, to whose ubiquitous distribution Arthur Young bears added testimony in the *Travels* were not the result of blind despair, but of an endemic popular hostility towards merchant and peasant profiteers. The sequence of events at Nangis, described by the English traveller, seems to have been typical of the contemporary disturbances.

“The people quarrel with the bakers, asserting the prices they demand for bread are beyond the proportion of wheat, and

¹ H. Sée, *op. cit.* p. 362.

² F. Evrard, “Les ouvriers du textile dans la région rouennaise (1789-1802)”, *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française* (1947), p. 333.

³ G. Boussinesq and G. Laurent, *op. cit.* p. 250.

⁴ M. Wahl, *Les premières Années de la Révolution à Lyon* (Paris, 1894), p. 30.

⁵ A. Mathiez, “Des notes sur l’importance du prolétariat au veille de la Révolution”, *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française* (1930), p. 497.

⁶ J. C. Alger, *Paris in 1789-1794* (London, 1902), p. 268.

⁷ F. Evrard, *op. cit.* p. 333.

⁸ C. Bloch, “Les femmes et la Révolution à Orléans”, *La Révolution Française*, xliii. 49.

⁹ G. Boussinesq and G. Laurent, *op. cit.* p. 242.

¹⁰ A. Prudhomme, *Histoire de Grenoble* (Grenoble, 1888), p. 596.

¹¹ Rabouin, “Troubles en Beauce à l’occasion du cherté du blé, Novembre et décembre 1792”, *La Révolution Française*, Vol. 43, p. 392 n.: “Déjà, le 29 juillet 1789 des émeutiers avalent forcé les officiers municipaux de Chartres à taxer à 20 sols le pain de neuf livres. Des troubles sérieux eurent lieu à cette occasion. La troupe tira sur le peuple. Huit hommes furent tués.”

proceed from words to scuffling, raise a riot and then run away with bread and wheat for nothing. This has happened at Nangis, and many other markets; the consequence was that neither farmers nor bakers would supply them till they were in danger of starving, and, when they did come prices under such circumstances must necessarily rise enormously, which aggravated the mischief, till troops became really necessary to give security to those who supplied the markets."

Such crises as that of 1789 were probably even more the result of the failure of the economic machinery for the conservation and distribution of the available supplies than of the marginal nature of production. Before turning our attention to some of the revolutionary solutions to this problem, it will be necessary to analyse the salient features of the system they were intended to supersede.

In addition to a normal "local" trade between country and town there was an extensive national trade between the more fertile northern provinces and the central and southern regions. Out of the thirty-two provinces which made up the Kingdom in 1789, ten might generally be expected to produce a surplus, ten were self sufficient, and the remaining twelve in a state of permanent, acute shortage.¹ Long distance trade was stimulated by a steep price gradient which more than made up for the exactions, under the *Ancien Régime*, of a multiplicity of customs barriers. Thus even in 1790 (when the barriers had been swept away), while the average price of corn in eleven northern provinces was 9 *livres* 17 *sous* the *quintal*, in eight southern provinces it was more than 15 *livres*. The maximum variation was between Béthune in the Pas de Calais, and Moutiers in the Mont Blanc *département*, where the same measure of corn cost 7 *livres* 8 *sous* and 18 *livres* 15 *sous* respectively.² Trade was in the hands of the *blatiers*, merchants who negotiated the import of corn as well as its distribution inside the country. In the nature of things their operations demanded the deployment of considerable capital resources, and there was a constant temptation to speculate

¹ J. Letaconnoux, "Le commerce de grains au XVIII^e Siècle", *Revue d'histoire moderne*, viii. 409-45.

² L. Biollay, *Les prix en 1790* (Paris, 1886), pp. 89-98.

on future scarcity. The historian Charles C. Poisson has collected a list of such merchants and their factors, contractors to the armies of the Revolution; concerns like Clément et Geraudan of Cette, Dallande, Swann et Cie. of Paris, Vanlesbergh of Douai, Bath et Pascal of Dijon, and Fernet-Cambronne of Peronne.¹

The picture sometimes painted of a luxurious court and administration, careless of the misery of a starving populace, attractive in its simplicity, is very far from the truth. The king's government, deeply concerned with preventing the disorders consequent on the interruption of the food supply, kept a watchful eye on the manoeuvres of the *blatiers*, and regulated the grain trade most carefully.² Apart from the Parisians, who were in a privileged position, the merchants of the *Ancien Régime* were permitted to buy only in the open markets, and then only when local demand was satisfied. In times of scarcity the intendants, royal officials, would frequently fix prices to prevent profiteering, and compel proprietors to sell their stocks. As a final resort they were empowered to open the Seigniorial and ecclesiastical granaries in which the tithe was stored, the *granges dîmeresses*. When, influenced by Physiocrat propaganda for free trade, the king's minister relaxed this system of regulation, in 1763 and 1774, the immediate result was a sharp rise in prices and consequent rioting and pillage on such a scale as to force a resumption of the old regulation.³ An insistence on the paternal aspects of governmental regulation ought not to prevent us from recognizing the persistence of speculation and consequent "super profit" in which the administrators themselves frequently shared.

The *Cahiers de Doléances* of the Third Estate of 1789 were drawn up in such a way as to make inevitable the predominance of bourgeois demands and bourgeois economic views. Even so, from time to time, the popular distrust of the machinations of

¹ C. Poisson, *Les fournisseurs aux armées sous la Révolution* (Paris, 1932), p. 127.

² A. Mathiez, *La Vie Chère*, pp. 9-11.

³ On the 1774-1775 crisis see V. S. Ljublinsky "The May riots in Paris", *Voprossii Istorii*, No. 11, 1955. G. E. Rudé, *La taxation populaire de Mai 1775 à Paris et dans la région de la Révolution Française*, 1956, p. 139.

grain speculators forces itself on the attention amid the overwhelming mass of demands for the abolition of controls and for liberty of commerce. At Orléans,¹ for example, the Third Estate of Boigny and the Maîtres Cordonniers of Orléans denounced in turn those who hoarded grain to create an artificial scarcity. The Third Estate of Tivernon singled out the Church for special attack for hoarding the produce of the *dîme* and the ecclesiastical estates. It was not many months later that the granaries of the Carthusians at Orléans were sacked by an enraged mob.² Although many *Cahiers* of the Orléans district restricted their proposals to a rigid enforcing of existing regulations,³ others, notably the compilations of the Third Estate of the villagers of Marcilly en Villette and Meung, and of the *Selliers Bourreliers* of Orléans, proposed the requisitioning of grain from private individuals to provision public reserve granaries. Elsewhere in France this demand for public granaries was echoed *inter alia*, by the Third Estate of Chalons [sur Marne] which proposed that “ dans chaque ville considérable de la province, il y ait des greniers publics, fournis au compte de chaque municipalité ”,⁴ by the clergy of Laon, Dourdan and the Vicomté de Paris,⁵ and the nobility of the Vermandois, Auxerre, Reims, and Dourdan.⁶

The project for a State grain trade, thus anticipated in the *Cahiers* of 1789, was expounded, defended and popularized during the early years of the Revolution until it finally became, in 1793, a plank of the Jacobin political programme. It is this process with which the present study is concerned.

The onset of the Revolution turned France, in the words of an American visitor into “ A nation which exists in hopes, prospects and expectations—the reverence for ancient establishments gone, existing forms shaken to the foundations, and a new

¹ C. Bloch, “ Les Cahiers d'Orléans du point de vue économique ”, *La Révolution Française*, xxxix. 427, 481.

² A. Bouvier, *J. F. Rozier Fils* (Orléans, 1890), p. 110.

³ As, for example, La Chapelle Saint Mesmin and Engenville.

⁴ L. M. Prudhomme, *Resumé général, ou extrait des Cahiers de Pouvoirs . . . ouverts à Versailles le 4 Mai 1789* (Paris, 1789), iii. 295.

⁵ *Ibid.* ii. 279.

⁶ *Ibid.* i. 248, 249.

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order of things about to take place in which even to the very name all former institutions will be disregarded".¹ In such a mental climate, while the main interest of the politically literate centred on the conquest of political liberty and the manufacture of a constitution, there were many who seized the opportunity to promote schemes for economic and social reform. One such, the Parisian De Chaillon, published, in 1790, a comprehensive plan for the nationalization of all large-scale commerce in grain, the 64-page *Moyens de prévenir la disette des grains et d'assurer la subsistance du peuple à un prix uniforme et modéré*,² one of a number of similar projects to be found among the French Historical Tracts in the John Rylands Library. De Chaillon advocated the prohibition of all private trade in grain and flour not for the satisfaction of immediate needs. The peasants were to be permitted to sell only in regulated markets and at a price fixed annually by the National Assembly, acting on reports concerning the nature of the harvest, submitted by the *Assemblées Primaires*, the basic electoral colleges of citizens. (Such reports had been submitted by the *Intendants* under the *Ancien Régime*.)

The profiteering *blatiers* were to be replaced by a network of State granaries (a useful function for emptied religious houses), which would be stocked in two ways. Firstly, the acquirers of the National Domain, the sequestered lands of the Church, would be required to pay a rent in grain for their acquisition. In addition the administrators of the granaries would be empowered to compel proprietors to sell to them at a fixed price.

Perhaps less generally acceptable in the country districts was the suggestion that the common lands be divided up amongst the propertyless poor, the "milliers de malheureux réduits à la mendicité."

Although De Chaillon described himself in some detail as a "Citizen of the District of Saint André des Arts, a member of the Patriotic societies of Sweden, Bavaria, and Hesse-Hombourg, and an Avocat au Parlement", it is not easy to establish his identity.

¹ Anne Morris (Ed.), *The diary and letters of Gouverneur Morris* (London, 1886), p. 22.

² Rue Poupée no. 6 (Paris, 1790), pp. 64. French Historical Tracts, John Rylands Library (referred to below, for brevity, as F.H.T.).

It seems unlikely that, as has been supposed, he was the Breton deputy Etienne Chaillon, although he may have been a scion of the noble De Chaillon de Jonville family.¹ A more famous revolutionary, the Franco-Irish journalist and editor of the *Creuset*, James Rutledge, published about the same time as De Chaillon's pamphlet his *Projet d'une législation des subsistances*.² Rutledge devoted more space to the consideration of the administrative machinery involved in the extension of state control. There was to be a central administrative council to take an annual census both of the harvest and of regional consumption to ensure the even distribution of supplies. Under the Central Council, on the local level, in each municipality or market town *Commissaires* would supervise municipal public granaries, mills, and the public markets, and would be empowered to fix retail prices.

An annual census was the central theme of yet another project, the work of the Paris financier and merchant Benavent. Benavent's reflections on the disturbed state of the country were published, in December 1790, under the arresting title *Clameur de haro*,³ and postulated a plan for rationing available grain according to the population of each *Département*, *District*, and municipality. The census was to be administered by a permanent bureau of twelve persons nominated by the National Assembly, which would publish the details of population and harvest to calm public disquiet. The export of grain was to be prohibited until there was an eighteen months' or two years' supply in the public granaries.

There are no direct means by which the impact of such publications may be measured; unlike some later Revolution pamphlets they do not contain a note of the numbers printed or distributed. Perhaps the fact that Rutledge was a prominent member of the Cordeliers Club may indicate that his pamphlet, at least, was in tune with the advanced revolutionary thought of

¹ Duchesne, *Dictionnaire de la Noblesse* (Paris, 1772, etc.).

² J. Rutledge, *Projet d'une législation des subsistances, composée pour M. Neckér*, published by Rozé, Imprimeur National, Rue des Postes (Paris, 1790), pp. 94 ff. (F.H.T.).

³ Benavent, *Clameur de haro*, P. Ferrand (Rouen, 1790), pp. 19 (F.H.T.).

the capital. It is plain that the concept of "public granaries" would provide a ready-made, easily grasped slogan for *Sans-Culotte* pamphleteers like the anonymous author of the *Moyens sûrs et infaillibles de ne payer le pain que deux sols la livre en tous temps par l'établissement des greniers publics*,¹ who proposed to raise a loan of 50 million *livres* to finance the national system of granaries.

All the reformers were not content to wait for state action and intervention from above. More in keeping with the spirit of local self reliance so characteristic of the popular revolution was the scheme of Lawalle L'Ecuyer, himself a merchant, to by-pass the *blatiers* by direct, co-operative buying. In his brochure *Moyens de ne pas manquer de subsistances à Paris*,² Lawalle recapitulated some suggestions contained in a motion first put before the Cordeliers district on 20 October 1789. The sixty Paris *Districts* were each to appoint one or two paid deputies to purchase grain for a communal store with communal funds. Any profits were not to be distributed, but retained as a capital fund, in effect a permanent co-operative. That this plan was not merely a fugitive notion is evident from the reason which its author gave for publication: his idea had become so popular that he was not getting the credit he deserved as its originator. Lawalle himself was not an unknown; a leading member of the Cordeliers Club he served, on at least one occasion, as its president.³

The kind of ideas circulated by De Chaillon and Rutledge raised an echo in some, at least, of the major provincial centres. At Lyons, L'Ange, an officer of the *Commune*,⁴ argued that the State should buy, at a fixed price, the entire harvest, for storage in 30,000 *greniers d'abondance*, each administered by units of a hundred families, a division probably conceived as not dissimilar

¹ *Moyens sûrs et infaillibles de ne payer le pain que deux sols la livre en tous temps par l'établissement de greniers publics* (Anonymous). Imprimerie de Cailleau, rue Gallande, no. 64, n.d. pp. 4 (F.H.T.).

² Knapen fils (Paris, [1789]).

³ A. Mathiez, *Le Club des Cordeliers pendant la crise de Varennes* (Paris, 1910), p. 9, and for presidency N. Charavay, *Catalogue des Autographes et des Documents composant la collection de M. Etienne Charavay* (Paris, 1900), p. 76, no. 23.

⁴ J. Jaures, op. cit. iii. 337. On L'Ange see also F. Duhem's article in the *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française* (January-March, 1951), p. 38.

in size to the existing *Communes* of local government.¹ L'Ange envisaged his *greniers* as the economic centre of their communities, serving as co-operatives in the purchase and retail of goods, and acting as banks and insurance clubs. The link between this vision and the French co-operative movement of the nineteenth century is clear in inspiration, but there is an even closer connection between L'Ange's *greniers* and Fourier's *Phalanstères*, for the pioneer socialist himself had arrived at Lyons from Besançon in 1791, and was still living there in June 1792, when L'Ange published his pamphlet.

By contrast with L'Ange and the Paris reformers the Orléans pamphleteer Vergnaud did not set his trust in "public granaries" as a panacea for the public ills. His two widely distributed brochures, the *Cri général de 1789*² and the *Cri général de 1790*,³ mark a highly original approach to the two major afflictions of the poor: the high price of bread, and the prevalence of unemployment.

Vergnaud advocated a rigorous system of price control, according to a sliding scale based on the price of a day's labour, and maintained by enforced sale from private granaries once prices threatened to rise beyond a fixed point. This control was to be supplemented by a constant supervision of bakers and millers, and the establishment of public bakehouses.

Vergnaud's second publication was a unique attack on the problem of unemployment, which he proposed to solve partly by an extensive programme of public works, and partly by the creation of municipal workshops, for which the capital was to be subscribed jointly by the municipality and by the employers. The workshops would continue to produce goods for storing even when there was no immediate demand, and would thus be unaffected by fluctuations in the market. They were to be administered by the *Corporations* or trades guilds. But by this Vergnaud did not mean the narrow group of rich masters who

¹ L'Ange embodied his main ideas in a pamphlet entitled, typically, *Moyens simples et faciles de fixer l'abondance et le juste prix du pain*.

² *Le Cri général de 1789, seconde édition en Décembre* (Anonymous), Jacob Sion (Orléans, 1789), p. 53 (F.H.T.).

³ *Le Cri général de 1790* (Anonymous), Jacob Sion (Orléans, 1790), p. 65 (F.H.T.).

dominated most of the old guilds. He recognized for his purposes only those *Corporations* which expressed the will of the non-proprietors, the embryo trade unions of the day.

It is startling to find the projects of Louis Blanc anticipated by half a century, in a plan for workshops producing for use and not profit, run by working-class labour organizations.

Charles Vergnaud was, according to Barbier's *Dictionnaire des Anonymes*, born in 1744, and the father of five sons. One of these may well have been Colonel Amand Denis Vergnaud, born in 1791, the author of the *Souvenirs du Colonel Vergnaud*,¹ in which he relates that his father was an Orleanais merchant, with property at Perrai, near Château de Loir.

Vergnaud's fellow townsman, the *Avocat* Taboureau de Montigny concentrated his attention on the central issue of the bread supply. Like Rutledge he envisaged the creation of a national *Administration des subsistances*, in this case under the direction of a *Représentant-Général* with a corps of local *Tribunes* elected for two years and empowered, like Rutledge's *Commissaires* to regulate prices, supervise the markets and administer public granaries.²

As practical politics the campaign for a nationalized grain trade was devoid of immediate effect, and failed to find any reflection in the work of the *Legislative* or the *Constituante*. The overwhelming current of the times bore towards economic liberalism, and the middle class representatives were concerned only to sweep away all vestiges of State interference in commerce, placing their trust in the natural laws of supply and demand, whose beneficial operation they stimulated by the destruction of customs and other official barriers.

The temper of the *Constituante* was soon shown in the decrees of 29 August and 18 September 1789, which abolished the old regulations and established the absolute liberty of the grain trade within the country. The *Legislative*, dominated by the same section of the liberal upper bourgeoisie went even further. In March 1791 it voted the *laissez-faire* formula: "A compter du

¹ A. D. Vergnaud, *Souvenirs du Colonel Vergnaud* (Paris, 1937).

² A. Mathiez, "Un Enragé inconnu: Taboureau de Montigny", *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française* (1930), pp. 209 and 305.

1^{er} Avril il sera libre de faire tel negoce, ou d'exercer telle profession ou tel métier que l'on trouvera bon." On 22 July there followed a decree proclaiming the absolute liberty of all transactions, and threatening those officials who continued to regulate the prices of wine, corn, or other grains, with prompt dismissal. It was not until May 1793 that the imposition of maximum price regulation made the first fundamental breach in the liberal economic régime thus constituted.

Discouragement by the central government did not necessarily mean an end to economic experiments by local authorities, faced with the exacting day to day need to fill the bakers' shops which annoyingly persisted in making nonsense of the most aesthetically satisfying theories of political economy.

Several Rylands tracts record the *ad hoc* expedients adopted by the Lyons authorities to ensure the bread supply. There is, for example, a publication of the *Juiverie Section*, dated 13 June 1790,¹ which, after attacking by name many of the town's millers for adulterating and mixing their flour, announced the appointment of special officers to check hoarding, to inspect mills, bakeries, and butchers' shops, and to fix the price of essential commodities by a daily regulation. In the spring of the following year, another of the twenty-eight *Sections*, the *Pêcherie*, undertook a scientific survey of the practical problems involved in the making of bread, in order to establish a norm by which the machinations of profiteers might be judged. In their *Essai de panification*² the selected *commissaires* published detailed observations on the complete process of milling and baking from the original grain to the finished loaf, with a record of weights and measurements taken. The recommendations of the Lyons municipality following a similar enquiry a year later were quashed by the more orthodox *Département* administration.³

¹ *Procès Verbal des Citoyens du District de la Juiverie*. Signed: Marinier, president, Journet Secretary (June, 1790), pp. 14 (F.H.T.).

² Menard fils, *Essai de panification fait par le Citoyen Menard fils, Commissaire preposé à cet effet par la section de la Pêcherie* (April, 1791), pp. 15 (F.H.T.).

³ C. Fauchet, *Rapport fait à L'Assemblée Nationale au nom du comité de surveillance sur les griefs de la municipalité de Lyon Contre le directoire du département de Rhône-et-Loire* (17 April 1792). Imprimerie Nationale (Paris, pp. 42) (F.H.T.).

The experience was not wasted, however, for in the spring of 1793 the Lyons *Commune* municipalized the city's bread supply. The thirteen public bakehouses established as a result turned out, between 14 March and 16 April, ninety to a hundred batches per day.¹ But even the extremist Lyons *Commune* preferred, when the immediate crisis began to subside, to revert to the more common Jacobin practice of subsidizing the bakers to maintain prices, by a tax on the rich. The replacement of independent tradesmen by "socialist" enterprises was no part of the Jacobin political philosophy.

The Lyons *Sans-Culottes* were soon to be deprived of all protection, for after the anti-Jacobin coup of 29 May the successful party abolished the general subsidy, offering in place a charitable dole to those who cared to apply.²

The Lyons experiments of 1793 were part of an individual attempt to cope with the general economic crisis which faced the Republic: a crisis of unchecked inflation and scarcity, exacerbated by a foreign and civil war which destroyed industries, disrupted transport, and arrayed consumer against producer in a kind of class war.

The *Levées en Masse* of great new armies in March and September superimposed fresh problems of supply and distribution which could not be solved by traditional methods. Faced on the one hand with the urgent demand of the *Sans-Culottes* for bread, and on the other with the problem of organizing the defence of the Republic, the Jacobins were forced, step by step, to adopt a policy of "war communism" and economic dictatorship. After the Jacobin seizure of power in June the Girondin régime of economic liberalism was dismantled piecemeal, and State control became once more the order of the day.

Even earlier the logic of events and the inescapable popular pressure had forced the *Convention* to establish maximum price regulation for grain in each *Département*. On 27 July this measure was supplemented by a draconian decree threatening

¹ Riffaterre, *Le Mouvement anti-Jacobin et anti-Parisien à Lyon en 1793* (Paris, 1912-28), i. 14.

² *Rapport du Comité des Subsistances et Finances de la municipalité provisoire de Lyon sur le pain*, Leroy (Lyons, 1793), pp. 11 (F.H.T.).

food hoarders with the death penalty. On 19 August the *Maximum* was extended to fuels, and on the following day to oats, which had escaped earlier regulation. Finally, at the end of September, the extension of price-control to all necessities completed a régime of strict regulation based on the census, the *Maximum* and fierce laws against clandestine profiteering.

The movement towards economic collectivism was accompanied by a revival of interest in the organization of the grain trade. The adoption of a system of nationalization offered the twin advantages of solving the problem of supplying the armies, and of pacifying the *Sans-Culottes* by the creation of their beloved *greniers d'abondance*.

The pioneer of this new revival seems to have been the Parisian M. Protot who published, in December 1792 his *Vues nouvelles sur l'Administration des grains*.¹ As head of the Paris *Maison de Secours*, Protot was in an unparalleled position to observe the effects of governmental economic policy. The *Vues nouvelles* envisaged a network of *greniers nationaux*, directed by an administration elected in each municipality, and stocked by a fixed contribution from each proprietor, paid for at a fixed price. The granaries were to sell at a price sufficient to cover running costs, any incidental profits being either turned over to a hospice for the sick and infirm, or spent on public works.

The nationalization of the grain trade, a constructive measure does not appear to have appealed to the revolutionary left, the so-called *Enragés*, to the same extent as the *Maximum* and the economic terror, and the *greniers d'abondance* do not find anything like a comparable place in the political agitation of 1793.

Nevertheless we know that at the beginning of March the Paris *Section* of the *Gravilliers*, one of the most consistently *enragé* sections, discussed a project for a network of *magasins nationaux* administered by *comités alimentaires* and stocked by the tax contributions of the farmers and peasants.² A similar

¹ M. Protot, *Vues nouvelles sur l'administration des grains en France* (Paris, 1792), pp. 17 (F.H.T.).

² *Le Scrutateur Universel* (3 March 1793), quoted by A. Mathiez, *La Vie Chère*, p. 182. In 1792 *greniers d'abondance* had been advocated in a manifesto of the *Enragé* leader from the *Section*, Jacques Roux; the *Discours sur les Moyens de sauver la France et la Liberté*.

idea formed the basis of a contribution of the deputy Fabre de L'Hérault to the discussions in the *Convention* which led up to the vote of the first *Maximum*. Fabre envisaged the storing of all surplus grains, purchased by the local authorities at the current Paris price, in his *greniers d'abondance*.

It was not, however, until the aggravated crisis of August 1793th at the *greniers d'abondance* were at last taken seriously by the authorities. On this occasion their champion was the Jacobin deputy Léonard Bourdon, always closely linked politically with the Gravilliers *Section*.

Bourdon reminded the Jacobin Club and the *Convention* of the popular demand expressed in the *Cahiers* of 1789, and also of the considerable number of towns and districts which had already, independently, created local public granaries. Such granaries, competing against one another in the markets, merely added to the existing confusion, he argued, and should be integrated in a national network. Bourdon's scheme, accepted for discussion by the *Convention*, was little more than a summary of the projects of the pioneer reformers: a fixed national price for grain, powers of compulsory purchase, State monopoly of export and import and a national census to be applied by the elected central and local administrations.

The plan emerged from the hands of the governing committees considerably modified. The decree of 9 August permitted the establishment of a national network of granaries, but made no provision for a separate corps of administrators; proprietors were to be merely invited, and not compelled, to offer a portion of the harvest in the form of a tax contribution. There was no mention of compulsory purchase. On the other hand, Barère, in guiding the measure through the *Convention*, promised the construction, at the cost of the Republic, of a system of municipal bakeries to put a stop to the extortions of the private bakers. The Lyons experiment had not passed unnoticed.

It is not within the scope of the present article, nor is there probably sufficient information available to discuss in detail the history of the *greniers d'abondance* established by Barère's decree. Mathiez has argued, with force, that their successful administration was impossible in a period of revolution, war, and economic

dislocation. Certainly, the kind of economic reorganization envisaged by the more thorough-going reformers would have been an immensely difficult task for any eighteenth-century government, even in time of peace.

In the event, the attempt to force the producers to deliver up the harvest at a fixed price was all but catastrophic. It resulted in the need for rationing in the cities, and in a régime of requisitions, which soon degenerated into the kind of war between townsman and peasant which R. C. Cobb has illustrated in a recent account of the Revolutionary Army.¹

The French Revolution is usually regarded in part, at least, as a revolution for economic liberalism. Even its most Jacobin protagonists, in the majority, placed their faith in the theories of Adam Smith and the Physiocrats rather than in an outmoded *Étatisme* and in proposing the general *Maximum* of 29 September 1793 the Committee of Public Safety could not forbear to remind the Convention "In normal times prices are formed naturally, by the reciprocal interests of buyers and sellers. This balance is infallible. It is useless for even the best government to interfere." This attitude of mind was shared even by the extremist, ultra-Jacobin wing of the *Montagne*. In his apology for the Revolutionary Government, written for the benefit of the liberal bourgeoisie of the Bourbon restoration, the representative *Montagnard* Levasseur summed up the political philosophy of 1793 when he remarked: "Certes, il faut l'avouer, en thèse générale, la liberté illimitée du commerce vaudrait beaucoup mieux; il est très vrai qu'avec liberté et concurrence toute garantie est donnée que les citoyens ne refuseront pas de vendre leur denrées et ne vendront pas à un prix trop élevé, mais ces axiomes aussi simples que vrais, quoique très applicables dans un temps calme, ne trouvent point leur application dans une ère de crise comme celle nous avons eu à traverser." ²

During the revolutionary decade, 1789 to 1799, State interference in economic affairs was, in the official view, a temporary,

¹ R. C. Cobb, *L'Armée Révolutionnaire Parisienne à Lyon* (Lyon, 1953).

² Levasseur de la Sarthe, *Mémoires* (Paris, 1829), ii. 125.

regrettable aberration imposed by irresistible external circumstances. It is, therefore, the more important that we should recognize the persistence of the opposed, popular and "unofficial" tradition that economic activity by the State was a natural and a necessary phenomenon, part of a process for ensuring to all citizens a tolerable standard of life. This second tradition expressed itself not only in the pamphlet literature of the time, but also in the practical experiments of many local administrations, closer to the immediate needs of the population, perhaps, than the central government in Paris.