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

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"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

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. 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, 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. 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. Reims was the scene of riots in 1709, 1770, 1771, and 1775. 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.

3 Ibid.
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

³ G. Boussinesq and G. Laurent, op. cit. p. 250.
⁷ F. Evrard, op. cit. p. 333.
⁸ C. Bloch, "Les femmes et la Révolution à Orléans ", La Révolution Française, xliii. 49.
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 avaient 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 aggra­
vated 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 conserva­
tion 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 per­
manent, 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 pro­
vinces 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 blotters, 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 XVIIIe Siècle”, Revue
d'histoire moderne, viii. 409-45.
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 Seigneurial 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

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 Maitres 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 Vicomte 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

3. As, for example, La Chapelle Saint Mesmin and Engenville.
5. Ibid. ii. 279.
6. Ibid. i. 248, 249.
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 sequestrated 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.

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

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


\(^3\) 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

² Knapen fils (Paris, [1789]).
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. 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* and the *Cri général de 1790*, 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

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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.*
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, in which he relates that his father was an Orleannais 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.

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

Après avril il sera libre de faire tel negoce, ou d'exercer telle profession ou tel métrier 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, 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 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.


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

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

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. 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. A similar


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 1793 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 Étatsisme 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 leurs 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.