

THE FRENCH GUILD SYSTEM AND ITS ABOLITION
DURING THE REVOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

The French guild system was an extremely varied institution including many types of industrial organization. They all, nevertheless, performed the common function of protecting their members against unwanted competition. The guilds were dependent on economic circumstances and flourished in times of recession and diminished in importance in periods of expansion.

During the eighteenth century, one such period of economic growth, there were attempts to abolish the guilds as part of the emerging general movements of reform. The strength and cohesiveness of Ancien Régime institutions, however, made it impossible to destroy such a privileged body. The guilds could only be abolished during the Revolution which brought about a change in the bases of power themselves. The guilds were swept away, along with other antiquated institutions, in what was both an economic and administrative reform.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER	
I. THE GUILDS.....	11
II. REFORM.....	45
III. AUGUST 1789.....	80
IV. ABOLITION.....	107
CONCLUSION.....	140
GLOSSARY.....	146
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	149

INTRODUCTION

This thesis on the French guild system and its abolition during the Revolution, attempts to do three things. The first is to respond to the historiographical literature on the question; the second is to examine the nature of the French guild system; and the third is to provide an account of and the reasons for the abolition of the guilds.

There are no detailed descriptions of the guilds during the French Revolution. Although much has been written and claimed about the economic transformations effected by the Revolution, there is a paucity of actual research carried out on the industrial legislation of the Constituent Assembly. Guild historians, who have chosen invariably to recount the history of the French guilds over a period of seven centuries, have perforce produced works which are too general, and therefore do not do justice to the complexity of the problem. These studies have also usually relied too much on administrative edicts and guild

statutes for a description of the corporative system, rather than on economic evidence per se. It is moreover unfortunate that no major study of the guilds has appeared since Emile Coornaert's book, which was written at the onset of the Second World War.

Guild historians have tended to follow either one of two approaches to the guild system. They have either condemned it for its shortcomings or even manifold evils, or on the contrary, have praised it for its fraternal spirit and the egalitarian ideal it supposedly fostered. Whatever their attitude, these historians have provided only vague accounts of the abolition itself, or of its significance.

Historians of the Revolution have not manifested a greater interest in the guilds. They have at the most devoted one or two lines to the abolition in a chapter dealing with the "reforms of the Constituent Assembly". In fact, Thiers was the only nineteenth century historian to mention them at all.

The guilds only attained significant status in revolutionary historiography with the more recent Marxist historians. These have placed a particular emphasis on the

abolition of the guilds during the Revolution. The Revolution is said to mark the passage between feudalism and capitalism, and the guilds, described as feudal institutions are viewed as hindering the development of capitalism. Consequently their abolition is considered as one of the prerequisites for such an economic transformation. This is the way in which Albert Soboul has treated the guilds in both his histories of the Revolution.¹ His analysis consists of three related assumptions: the non-capitalist nature of the Ancien Regime guilds; the industrialization of France following the Revolution (and the guilds' abolition); and finally the self-consciousness of the bourgeoisie in abolishing the guilds. In La crise de l'Ancien Régime², a more recent work, Soboul stresses the post-revolutionary aspect more fully than in his previous works. He there describes the two roads to industrial capitalism. The first, --and only "truly revolutionary" one-- consists of the victory of industrial over commercial capitalism, signifying the pre-eminence of the entrepreneur, the development of mechaniza-

¹ Albert Soboul, Précis d'histoire de la Révolution française (Paris, 1962), and La Révolution française (Paris, 1967).

² Albert Soboul, La crise de l'Ancien Régime (Paris, 1970).

tion and industrial concentration. The other road, that of merchant capitalism, merely perpetuates traditional forms of production, compromising with the old relations of production. The Revolution's achievement, according to Soboul, was to insure that France followed the first road. In this framework, the guilds are once more treated as hindrances which must be swept away in order to usher in a new age of industrialism.

Régine Robin reiterates this demarcation of pre-capitalist and capitalist organisms.¹

The French Revolution permitted the generalization of the capitalist mode of production, not on a short-term, but on a long-term basis...by the disentanglement of economic, judicial, and even political institutions which were integrated in institutional elements perpetuating the reproduction of pre-capitalist social relations which formed real obstacles to the creation of a national market, and free contract. Such were the guilds, the seigneurie, the offices, the orders.

¹Régine Robin, La société française en 1789: Sémur-en-Auxois (Paris, 1970), p.42. "La Révolution a rendu possible la généralisation du mode de production capitaliste non à court terme mais à long terme...par le désentrelacement des instances économiques, juridiques, voire politiques qui intégrées dans des éléments institutionnels pérennisant la reproduction des rapports sociaux pré-capitalistes formaient de véritables obstacles à l'instauration du marché national, du contrat libre. Tels apparaissent la corporation, la seigneurie, l'office, l'ordre."

For Robin, the guilds are unqualifiably feudal, that is, pre-capitalist: whether de jure or de facto does not especially concern her. She is particularly ambiguous in her analysis of the post-revolutionary period: The seigneurial and corporative classes have disappeared, the first destroyed by the revolt of the peasants, the second, by the edicts of 1791.¹

The elements which had made up those classes regrouped in various patterns. The seigneurs merged with the mass of large landowners; master artisans, journeymen, and apprentices swelled the ranks either of the bourgeoisie, or of wage-earners, while others still became members of a more or less independent artisanate which has succeeded in maintaining itself until now.

There is an inexplicable, unstated but implied, dichotomy between the pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods. The guilds (artisanal associations) are described as pre-capitalist in the pre-revolutionary period, but its members become elements of a capitalist economy after the Revolution. This transformation is not accounted for. Nor

¹Ibid, p. 50. "Les éléments qui constituaient ces classes se restructurent de façons diverses. Les seigneurs viennent se fondre dans la masse des grands propriétaires fonciers; maîtres-artisans, compagnons, apprentis grossiront les rangs qui de la bourgeoisie, qui du salariat, qui de l'artisanat, plus ou moins indépendant, longtemps pérennisé, encore vivace de nos jours."

is it clear what the exact difference is between the artisan of the Ancien Regime, who, as is stated in the paragraph quoted above, "perpetuates pre-capitalist social relations, and hinders the development of a free market society" and that very craftsman twenty years later who has been "relocated into an independent artisanate". This glossing over such crucial questions does much to undermine Robin's attempt to establish a framework for the transformation from a "feudal" to a capitalist society.

Marxist historians have therefore expounded two related theses. The first is that the guilds were "feudal", that is wholly pre-capitalist institutions, and the second, that the French Revolution assured the ascendancy of industrial over commercial capitalism, in which the abolition of the guilds played a significant part.

Both positions present problems. First, the stress on industrialism undermines the Marxist assertion that the Revolution constituted a bourgeois victory, because a refutation of the industrial argument can be extended to challenge the thesis of the bourgeois revolution itself. This is precisely what Alfred Cobban attempted to do. In The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution, Cobban

7

justly pointed out that the Revolution did not lead to industrial concentration.¹ He also objected to Soboul's rigid analysis of the guilds,² and the concomitant radical liberation of productive forces during the Revolution. In his view, the guild system was breaking down in the second half of the eighteenth century, displaced by free urban and rural manufacture. The guilds managed to survive until the Revolution merely because they were financially useful to the bankrupt monarchy.³ Cobban was certainly mistaken in this last assumption. Yet he did raise some important questions about the nature of economic transformations following the Revolution, questions to which Marxist historians should pay closer attention. The only concession these are willing to make, however, is of a "time-lag". The Revolution nevertheless continues to be viewed as the significant catalyst for industrialization. For these historians the expected outcome remains large-scale mechanization, and industrial concentration. This insistence is the more misguided as recent research points towards the gradual evolu-

¹ Alfred Cobban, The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution (Cambridge, 1964), p. 80.

² as expressed in the Précis...

³ Cobban, p. 68.

tion of new methods and organizations of production, even in Britain theoretically the "classic" example of industrial transformation.¹ The weight of circulating capital makes it impossible to posit a dichotomy between merchant and industrial capitalism.²

The contention that the guilds needed to be abolished in order to usher in an Industrial Revolution has yet to be proven by a thorough and systematic investigation both of the role of the guilds in the pre-revolutionary economy, and of the process of industrial organization following the abolition. It is rather surprising that the institution which has been given a central role in the transition to capitalism, has, in fact, received such light treatment. Non-Marxist studies of the Revolution, as has already been pointed out, are even less satisfactory as they hardly discuss the question at all. The main purpose of this study has therefore been to attempt to fill in some of the gaps in our knowledge of the guilds, and to refute some

¹ François Crouzet, ed., Capital Formation in the Industrial Revolution (London, 1972), "Introduction", p. 54.

² Ibid, p. 45.

of the misconceptions that have arisen about the nature of the guild system of the Ancien Régime and the significance of its abolition. This thesis will try to demonstrate that the guilds had been undermined by a developing commercial capitalism long before the Revolution began. The guilds managed to survive because they served as a protection for their members in times of recession, and because the corporative system was supported by the spokesmen for other privileged institutions and groups. The Revolution succeeded in destroying the old bases of power which sustained the guilds, and in dealing the final blow to the corporative system. The significant break with the past lay more in this institutional breakthrough than in economic transformations. The old and new pre-capitalist and capitalist forms of the nation's economy had long intermingled and continued to do so. Long after the Revolution was over, artisanal production and cottage industry continued to thrive.

Since there are few surviving documents on guild history --most were burnt in the fire of the Hôtel de Ville in May 1871-- I have had to rely largely on secondary

material for my account of the guild system. The most satisfactory material to hand arises from the recent research into the social and economic organizations of the Ancien Regime of such historians as Pierre Goubert, or Maurice Gardén. Guild histories are useful for their recapitulations of statutes and royal edicts. For my analysis of the abolition of the guilds I have drawn extensively on pamphlets of the period; on two newspapers: Le Moniteur Universel and Les Révolutions de Paris; the Actes de la Commune de Paris pendant la Révolution edited by Sigismond Lacroix; and the Procès-verbaux des comités d'agriculture et de commerce de la Constituante, de la Législative et de la Convention, edited by Fernand Gerboux and Charles Schmidt, these have been invaluable for an understanding of the last stages of guild life during the Revolutionary period.

CHAPTER I

THE GUILDS

When the National assembly voted to abolish the corporations in March 1791, it was with the intention of eliminating a half-bankrupt institution, filled with corruption, rigidity, and stifling regulation. D'Allarde, the speaker on the question, while stressing some fiscal aspects of the abolition, stormed against the evils of this monopolistic system which set up cabals, kept prices high, attacked initiative, and denied the benefits of free competition.¹ The leaders of the National assembly regarded the guilds from the standpoint of a laissez-faire philosophy. For them, as for Adam Smith, industry and commerce would thrive best under liberty, when the laws of supply and demand could operate freely.

Guild historians suffer from a double curse. On the one hand, they have to describe a system to which most

¹Réimpression de l'Ancien Moniteur, 72 vols., (Paris, 1858-63), VIII, 393.

economists have given a very bad name, except when, by a misunderstanding of its nature some authors in the 1930s and forties approved of the corporative system as the forerunner of modern syndicalism.¹ On the other hand, guild historians have to contend with myths nurtured by school texts which are seldom corrected, for no one much bothers with guild history. This model, taught to schoolchildren, describes a three-tiered hierarchy of apprentice, journeyman, and master, the first two stages lasting seven years and terminating in some form of examination. Masters were said to have gathered in associations in order to limit competition and for mutual aid, and here there is often inserted a touching example such as the pensions afforded widows and orphans. Each craft was clearly delineated, and masters of the same trade worked in the same vicinity which explains the origin of street names in many old-world cities. The truth, however, is that there never existed such a clearly-defined guild system. It is in fact very difficult to express the complexity of industrial structures in pre-modern times, and this explains why the textbook model is so

¹Emile Coornaert, Les corporations en France avant 1789 (Paris, 1968) and Edouard Dolléans, Histoire du travail (Paris, 1943), prefaces in both cases.

enduring.

As Coornaert so aptly put it, there is no guild system, there are guild systems.¹ One could go further and claim that there existed a distinctive organization for each guild in each town. The guild was dependent on its economic milieu. It was formed as a protective association for members of the same trade. Depending on the situation, however, the need for protection, the severity of the monopoly and the regulations binding masters all differed. A guild also underwent changes. In periods of expansion, regulation tended to be loosened and more masters were admitted to the trade. In times of recession, on the other hand, the regulations would be tightened or increased and masters would guard their privileges more jealously.

Emerging in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the guilds were a product of the urban resurgence, developing as both religious and professional associations. We shall only deal with their economic function, since it dominated all others and was the raison d'être of the institution as a whole. The guilds corresponded to a pre-indus-

¹Coornaert, p. 277.

trial economy with ceilings on production, and an artisanal form of manufacture.¹ Craftsmen laboured with unsophisticated machinery, in small workshops, aided by one or two workers. They produced generally for a local market. Export industries, whether textiles or luxury items, were controlled by capital-owning merchants who were able to organize the labours of more craftsmen, either by gathering them in large workshops or by putting-out work in both urban and rural areas. Tapping a larger market, better able to respond to new opportunities, and expand his control over manufacture, the merchant represented one of the gravest threats to guild independence. The other threat was internal. Working for a limited population, the individual craftsman had to insure his subsistence by obtaining some share of the market. The entrepreneur within the trade, who accumulated shops, tools, and workers, and who cornered the supply of raw materials, was as dangerous to the guild as the merchant. Competition between masters was therefore whittled down to an almost insignificant level through a series of regulations. The purpose of the guild

¹Robert S. Lopez, The Birth of Europe (London, 1971), p. 143. See also Coornaert, p. 263.

was to protect its members from infringements both from within and from outside the organization.

Guilds appeared almost simultaneously in most towns, both in France and in adjoining kingdoms. They emerged as more or less independent institutions, securing their independence from the local seigneur on the questions of internal policing and legislation, at the same time as the municipalities were obtaining their own charters. There were, nevertheless, important variations. Not all guilds enjoyed the same degree of independence. The métier juré was the most independent, regulations being devised and administered by the jurés (wardens). A second group, the métier réglé, was not self-regulating but depended on the municipal jurisdiction. These bodies generally had an internal organization resembling that of the métier juré. Masters of the métier réglé could be forced to pass a test devised by the municipality and similar to that of the independent corporation. A difference between the métier juré and the métier réglé was that in the latter the professional monopoly, the dues and so on, did not benefit the master artisans but the municipality. Some trades, however, were not organized in guilds. Known as the métiers libres

they were characterized by free competition in a sector where no group held a monopoly and by the fact that any one who so desired could practice the profession. The métiers libres, though, were not totally free from control, they were under police supervision. Nevertheless, as Coornaert points out, the great division was not between the three types of organization, but between the métiers jurés and réglés and the métiers libres.¹ In fact, the history of the guilds is an attempt to swallow those areas not yet under corporative control. For the métier libre was not confined to free urban trades, but also prevailed in the countryside where production was unconstrained.

It is difficult to assess the extent of the guild system. C.W. Cole estimates that there were 20,000 guilds in France in the eighteenth century when the system was most widespread.² In Poitiers there were 18 guilds in the fourteenth century, 22 guilds in the fifteenth, 25 guilds in 1555, 35 guilds in 1708 and 43 guilds in both 1717 and

¹Coornaert, p. 32.

²Charles Woolsey Cole, Colbert and a Century of French Mercantilism (Hamden, Connecticut, 1964), II, p. 445.

1777. In the rest of the province, however, the métier libre predominated.¹ Trades which had been free succumbed to regulation in the seventeenth century.² The provinces of Provence, Auvergne, and Dauphiné, though, remained on the whole unregulated.³ If Grenoble listed 41 guilds in 1699, 1703, 1708 and 1721 and 56 in 1756, a survey taken in 1752 showed that of Romans' thirty trades, only five were organized in métiers jurés, twelve appeared to be libres, while the rest were mere religious associations.⁴ Of the 33 guilds in Beauvais, 14 were unregulated.⁵ In Chartres, in mid-eighteenth century, there were 42 guilds and 27 métiers libres. The latter included such professions as those of inkeeper, wheat merchant, furrier, jewel-

¹Paul Boissonnade, Essai sur l'organisation du travail en Poitou depuis le XI^e siècle jusqu'à la Révolution, 2 vols. (Poitiers, 1898-99), II, 6.

²Coornaert, p. 142.

³Maurice Agulhon, La vie sociale en Provence intérieure au lendemain de la Révolution (Paris, 1970), p. 150, and Pierre Léon et al., Histoire économique et sociale de la France (Paris, 1971), II, 252.

⁴Pierre Léon, La naissance de la grande industrie en Dauphiné, 2 vols. (Paris, 1954), I, 54 and 144.

⁵Pierre Goubert, Cent mille provinciaux au XVII^e siècle. Beauvais et le Beauvaisis de 1600 à 1730 (Paris, 1968), p. 338.

ler, and armorer.¹ The millers were independent, but the bakers had a guild.² (It was, in fact, usual for such essential services to come under control.)

Production was unregulated in the countryside. Guilds had emerged as urban associations functioning within an urban economy. Based on co-operation and regulation, controlled by frequent inspection, the system was theoretically extended to, but could only function with great difficulty in, the countryside. Local seigneurs, government and guild officials, found it hard to enforce legislation. In fact, the only people who reached the dispersed workers were the merchants, who dared the elements, could afford transportation, provided raw materials, picked up finished products, and either evaded or submitted to inspection at a local bureau.

Merchants either belonged to separate merchant guilds, or were members of manufacturing guilds. There was generally a differentiation between the two professions and

¹ Géneviève Acloque, Les corporations, l'industrie et le commerce à Chartres du XI^e siècle à la Révolution (Paris, 1917), p. 18.

² Ibid, p. 94.

the aim of most merchants was to liberate themselves from the artisanal association, and to join a purely merchant organization. In many cases, however, the profession of merchant was free and anyone with sufficient capital could register with the authorities as an independent trader. There was a pattern of evolution toward full merchant status. A wealthier artisan would begin to diversify, investing some of his capital in the purchase, transport, or marketing of goods to other localities. He eventually became known as a master merchant manufacturer, having established his independence from other merchants. If he possessed sufficient resources, he would abandon manufacture altogether to concentrate on his mercantile interests, although he might retain an indirect control over production. There were several types of merchant, their status varying from that of the simple peddler, to that of the wealthy slave trader. The marchand* was differentiated from the négociant*, who was both richer and controlled vaster operations. Négociants as a rule did not belong to guilds, but rather gathered in business associations,

*See glossary for all italicized French terms.

resembling chambers of commerce.

Merchants exercised an almost complete control over manufacture in the countryside.¹ The rural artisanate's dependence stemmed from a variety of causes. Most of the workers only sought seasonal employment, returning to the fields when work could be found on the land. They were too poor to pretend to any sort of independence, relying on the merchants to provide them with work, raw materials, and wages. One needed capital resources to acquire and more significantly retain economic independence. Only those with sufficient funds were able to sustain momentary losses, function with credit, hold enough reserves to purchase raw materials, pay wages before the final sale of the goods, and often to supply machinery as well as transport products.

The royal government encouraged the spread of the guild system as long as it was under its control. From the time of their establishment, the guilds had found it useful

¹ François Dornic, L'industrie textile dans le Maine et ses débouchés internationaux (1650-1815) (Le Mans, 1955), pp. 102-03, and Paul Bois, Paysans de l'Ouest (Paris, 1971).

to turn to the royal authorities for confirmation of their statutes, using this as a weapon against merchants and rival guilds. The guilds had to pay a fee for this grant of privilege, and the monarchs were quick to seize the chance to improve their finances. Edicts urging the formation of guilds were passed periodically, beginning with Jean le Bon's Grande Ordonnance of 1351.¹ In Paris, monarchs took advantage of the popular revolts that broke out under Etienne Marcel (1357) and continued up to the Fronde (in the middle of the seventeenth century) to strengthen their hold over the guilds, by revoking and reinstating their privileges under terms favourable to the central authority.² This, of course, accordingly diminished the guilds' control over their own affairs.

In 1581, Henri III declared the guilds the perfect prototype of industrial organization; transformed them into state institutions, and ordered all trades to establish métiers jurés. His successor, Henri IV, repeated the

¹ Etienne Martiñ Saint-Léon, Histoire des corporations de métiers depuis leurs origines jusqu'à leur suppression en 1791 (Paris, 1922), p. 244.

² Ibid., p. 249 and p. 388.

ordinance in 1597. Both measures, however, proved fruitless. At the Estates General of 1614, the Third Estate protested publicly against the edicts of 1581 and 1597, asking that all guilds established since 1578 be abolished and that the exercise of a profession be left free. But it should be noted that the Third Estate was protesting the growing encroachment of its liberties by the royal government and its desire for independent guilds, rather than making a plea for economic freedom.¹

In March 1673, Colbert, the Comptroller General, ordered all trades to form guild organizations. Colbert's industrial code derived from the theory that the French balance of trade could best be improved by a higher quality of products. Such a system would necessitate stiff regulation and thorough inspection. The guild system, which Colbert believed to be the best suited to promote such an aim, would be extended and industry encouraged through grants and special privileges.² All guilds would have to submit their statutes for royal confirmation and pay the corresponding fees. Colbert's legislation had indeed fiscal

¹Ibid, p. 375.

²Cole, vol. II, chapter XII.

origins. In fact, no guild would be recognized unless it had obtained royal certification. Colbert also increased the government's internal control of the guilds. Technical operations were supervised by state inspectors who were present at all guild meetings.¹

Guild regulations covered two main aspects: that relating to production and trade monopoly and that to rulings dealing with the internal organization of the trade. The latter concerned apprenticeship laws, masterpiece requirements, the collection of dues, the stratification of masters, and the composition of decision-making bodies.

All guilds, whether self-regulating or dependent on the municipality possessed a hierarchy of apprentices and masters with an intermediary stratum of wage-earners. A gradual transformation occurred in the relations between masters and journeymen. In earlier times, most youngsters had begun their apprenticeship with the prospect that they too would eventually set up their own shops. Of course it was expensive to establish oneself independently and many

¹Ibid, II, 446.

apprentices found that they needed to work for several years to accumulate sufficient funds. Many, however, remained too poor and were forced to labour as wage-earners for the rest of their lives.¹ The journeyman stage did not become a requirement for mastership until the sixteenth century. Apprentices with "money and connections", however, could rise swiftly to the rank of master.² This custom, which was applied to sons and sons-in-law of masters, caused much bitterness among the journeymen (or compagnons). A compagnon could still aspire to mastership, however, with the passage of time access was made progressively more difficult. It would, of course, have been economically suicidal to allow all apprentices and compagnons to compete as masters in a limited market. Yet, in times of plenty, small-scale fabricants would crop up everywhere, disregarding guild injunctions, only to totter and vanish during a depression.

The masterpiece examination was introduced in the

¹Bronislaw Geremek, Le salariat dans l'artisanat parisien aux XIII^e-XV^e siècles (Paris, 1968), p. 32.

²In some trades, sons of masters would be admitted to mastership at the ages of eight or nine.

late fourteenth century, at first as a simple test, but in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it was transformed into an instrument of deferment and exclusion.¹ Tasks to perform became ridiculously complicated, and materials were often tampered with to insure the failure of the aspiring worker.² Another way to restrict entry into the guilds was through the entrance fees. A master's son was only expected to pay the legal fees which would average around twenty or twenty-five livres at the close of the Ancien Regime. The compagnon on the other hand was charged exorbitant dues varying from a hundred to a thousand livres depending on the trade.³ The royal authorities tried to reform the more blatant of these injustices, but their own growing interest in the guilds as fiscal resources led them to forego their concern.⁴

¹ Martin Saint-Léon, p. 260.

² Geremek, p. 48.

³ François Olivier-Martin, L'organisation corporative dans la France d'Ancien Régime (Paris, 1938), p. 137.

⁴ Aside from the confirmation of statutes, the government also sold masterships to the guilds. Supervisory posts were created and the government threatened to sell them to the highest bidder if the guilds failed to repurchase them. They, of course, complied. Since this was in fact a forced contribution, recalcitrants were persuaded to discharge their duty. See René Nigeon, Etat financier des corporations parisiennes d'art et métiers (Paris, 1934).

It was extremely difficult for a simple compagnon to save sufficient money from his wages to meet the rising cost of masterships. Wages were generally low, since they were supplemented in kind, with or without room and board. In Beauvais, the bailiff had to pass laws forbidding the payment of workers with pieces of cloth, shoes, wine or other wares in order to protect the wage-earners from the obvious exploitation this entailed.¹ A journeyman might try to supplement his wages by taking extra work or by training an apprentice.² Both practices were prosecuted by the guilds which suffered from such competition. Meanwhile the grievances against the chambrelans, workers who took work into their rooms, continued to be voiced.

It is not surprising, therefore, to observe that the number of compagnons and outsiders admitted to the guilds diminished while the proportion of sons of masters increased. In Amiens, for example, before 1636, one third of the masters were sons of masters; in 1700 the ratio had risen to two thirds.³ In Chartres, 6 journeymen and 6 sons

¹Goubert, p. 338.

²Geremek, p. 64.

³Pierre Deyon, Amiens capitale provinciale (Paris, 1967), p. 218.

of masters received masterships in 1702. In 1750, 13 of the former and only 7 of the latter became masters. In the second half of the eighteenth century the balance shifted towards the privileged elements. In 1759, 96 sons of masters and only 5 journeymen were received. By 1776 most trades had become closed to outsiders.¹ In Elbeuf, between 1717 and 1757, only sons of masters could become woolen manufacturers. In that year, the government, opposed to masters' cabals, repealed the provision.²

As in the relations between masters and workers, an evolution also took place in the relations between the masters themselves. At first all decisions affecting the guild had been taken democratically in periodic assemblies of all the masters. By the seventeenth century, however, masters had become differentiated according to their seniority -- thus the jeunes were all new masters; the modernes held their masterships for ten to twenty years; the anciens were masters for more than twenty years; while finally, there were the bacheliers who had served as guild officers--

¹Acloque, p. 48.

²Jeffrey Kaplow, Elbeuf during the Revolutionary Period: History and Social Structure (Baltimore, 1964), p. 80.

with power gradually devolving to the older masters.¹ Finally only the wardens, whether they worked in conjunction with the authorities or not, initiated all decisions. These wardens, the jurés, had also been at first elected (for a term generally lasting two years) by all the masters, but ultimately they came to choose their own replacements. The oligarchy was known by the name of jurande, that is, wardenship. It handled all the business of the guilds, making the rounds of inspection, overseeing production, and verifying that all regulations were being followed.

The economic regulations of the guilds derived from their economic circumstances. Fearful of a monopoly by either a successful master or the exploitation of wealthier merchants, the guilds established monopolies and legislated an "equality" between their members. A master was only allowed to keep one shop at a time. He was restricted in the number of looms and machines he could use. Night work was forbidden to prevent fraud and unfair competition.² Places at fairs were drawn by lot.³ A master

¹ Martin Saint-Léon, p. 430.

² Ibid, p. 154.

³ Acloque, p. 125.

could not compete with fellow guildmembers by lowering the quality of the products, by adulterating or stretching and therefore cheapening materials. Guild regulations assured a uniform quality and method of manufacture, which also served to insure a reputation and market for the product. All innovations were to be shared. A master could only train one apprentice at a time, and although he could hire as many journeymen as he wished, it was usual for the labour pool to be divided almost equally.¹ The only unavoidable means of enrichment which regulation could not prevent was either an advantageous marriage or natural dexterity, which would provide an enlarged clientele and a growing income. Regulations were also designed to identify a particular trade. Some dyes, for example, belonged to one guild, others to a second --the petit and grands teints-- and wool, linen or silk could not be mixed. Similarly, vinegar sellers fought lemonade sellers; and tailors forbade old-clothes dealers to sew new garments. The examples are countless and much of the life of the guilds consisted in squabbling over long-standing monopo-

¹Olivier-Martin, p. 131.

lies, dragging offenders to court, and spending much money in never-ending lawsuits. The royal government tried to resolve these problems by uniting similar trades into a single unit, which merely created internal conflicts.

Although the guilds regulated all other economic aspects, two important sectors remained outside their controls: wages and prices. Wages were decided between master and compagnon and a contract was agreed to verbally usually for the duration of a year.¹ Wages followed supply and demand and a worker would ask and receive a higher wage when labour was short and work plentiful. Maxima on wages were declared in bad times, but as soon as conditions improved "natural laws" took over.² The apprentice did not receive a wage and the master obtained payment for the so-called training he gave and for the upkeep of the child. There was widespread exploitation of this cheap labour as training periods lasted from three to twelve years.³

¹Compagnons did hire themselves out by the week and by the day.

²Goubert, pp. 334-35.

³Geremek, p. 91.

Prices of staple items such as bread, wine and even shoes were regulated by local and royal officials. Guilds were accused by all eighteenth century reformers of forcing up prices. They mostly did so indirectly by forbidding extended competition which would bring them down. Whenever they tried to raise prices more directly, they were prevented by the local authorities acting in the interest of the consumer. Masters' attempts to raise prices were looked on with as great disfavour as were workers' cabals to raise wages.¹

Prices of goods were arrived at by bargaining. Customers had to argue and were often swayed by near-by vendors who made more attractive offers. This kind of interference by artisans with someone else's customer was eventually proscribed. Yet under-cutting was never forbidden. It was merely prohibited to advertise lower prices either through handbills or town-criers.²

Regulations of industry reached its apotheosis under Colbert. His best-known legislation dealt with the

¹ Martin Saint-Léon, p. 153; Olivier-Martin, p. 153; Kaplow, p. 80.

² Martin Saint-Léon, p. 152.

textile industry. The methods of production of each type of cloth were delineated in extreme detail. Deviations from the regulations were prohibited and fined. Pieces were to be inspected and marked with special seals and fraud was to be severely prosecuted. Inspectors of manufacture and marking stations were established throughout the kingdom, including the countryside. Others before him had devised legislation, but Colbert's originality lay in the creation of a system of inspection to accompany his regulative ordinances.¹

Fraud, of course, continued on a grand scale, particularly in rural areas. Despite the government's efforts, it was almost impossible to inspect goods outside the towns. Workers were dispersed and inspectors, who were not numerous and had to pay travel expenses out of their salaries, were not eager to criss-cross the country in search of fraud.² Communications were poor and most of the roads impracticable during the winter months, which

¹Cole, II, 368.

²Franc Bacquié, Les inspecteurs des manufactures sous l'Ancien Régime (Paris, 1927).

was the major manufacturing period. Inspection posts were distant from one another and artisans were unwilling to walk miles bearing heavy loads only to have to submit to an inspection which cost them money. Since most were illiterate and could not follow the complicated regulations, they would furthermore often be fined.¹ The artisans preferred to cede their cloths to the merchants and let them worry about inspection. Since the latter had turned to the rural areas in search of both cheap labour and an evasion of regulation, they were not at all happy with Colbert's extension of inspection, and continued to avoid it whenever possible. Since the inspection of goods was one of the prerogatives of the guilds, and the only way to insure their monopoly over production, any evasion, particularly when so widespread, was bound to undermine their authority and their vitality.

Much of Colbert's legislation became entrenched. By the eighteenth century many guilds used their statutes to stifle all dynamism and discourage innovations. They

¹Bois, p. 238 and pp. 150-51.

clung to their monopoly the more tightly as it was being challenged by merchants and entrepreneurs who evaded regulations and disregarded traditional privileges.

The eighteenth century was a period of expansion for France. External trade tripled in value between the end of the War of the Spanish Succession and the Revolution.¹ Crouzet estimates that industrial production rose at a yearly rate of 1,2%,² while Léon believes it to lie somewhere between 1,5 and 1,9%.³ Industrial enterprises brought solid returns. The turnover of Sedan linens quintupled between 1732 and 1788, and Oberkampf's dyeworks and the Anzin mines showed a yearly profit of 6,6 and 6,7% respectively.⁴ Ground-rent doubled and even tripled during the century. In the cotton and mining sectors profits doubled and even tripled every thirty years, while within

¹ François Crouzet, "England and France in the Eighteenth Century: A Comparative Analysis of Two Economic Growths", in R.M. Hartwell, The Causes of the Industrial Revolution in England (London, 1967), p. 146.

² Ibid., pp. 149-50.

³ Léon, Histoire économique et sociale... p. 521.

⁴ Ibid., p. 525.

that same period, and some banking houses increased their profits six- and seven-fold.¹

This expansion of the French industry in turn wrought changes in industrial structures. The accumulation of capital in commerce stimulated vertical integration as merchants invested in manufactories and refineries, bottling, candle-making and armoring industries.² These beginnings of industrial concentration drew upon a mixed pool of labour. Both rural and urban putting-out networks were extended. Workers were also assembled in large workshops, particularly in the new industries. The merchants did not turn to the more costly guild products, and this expansion, in fact, worked to the detriment of the guild system. The traditional sectors, such as wool, also underwent a degree of concentration. In Sedan; there had only been four masters who owned more than 20 frames in 1721, whereas, in 1774, four masters owned between 51 and

¹Labrousse, Histoire économique et sociale... p. 521.

²See François-Georges Pariset, ed., Bordeaux au XVIII^e siècle (Bordeaux, 1968), and Pierre Dardel, Commerce, industrie et navigation à Rouen et au Havre au XVIII^e siècle (Rouen, 1966).

100 frames, and two masters more than 100.¹ The same pattern of concentration could be observed in Beauvais, Elbeuf, and Reims,² while, at Montauban, there were 235 master manufacturers in 1709, 170 in 1745, and 60 factories in 1779 with no diminishing volume of trade.³

Concentration could not take place without the concomitant effect of masters enriching themselves at the expense of other masters. This was the very point which regulation had attempted to prevent. Yet whenever possibilities of enrichment existed, generally within the reach of already favoured masters, these would not hesitate to pursue them. Solidarity with fellow craftsmen never exercised a very powerful restraint. The wealthier masters would provide their less lucky counterparts with work, in fact subordinating them to the position of paid workers. Yet the lot of the dependent masters rarely resembled that of the proletarian. They owned their shops and tools and

¹Léon, Histoire économique et sociale... p. 259.

²Ibid., p. 259.

³Daniel Ligou, Montauban à la fin de l'Ancien Régime et aux débuts de la Révolution 1787-1794 (Paris, 1958), p. 107.

could cling to the illusion of a possible liberation from their subjection. This process of subordination was, however, more current between masters and merchants than between masters within the same trade.

In the eighteenth century, merchants sought to formalize their hold over production in a more concrete fashion. In Lyons, for example, the merchants of the silk industry, the Fabrique, the merchant-hatters and merchant-hosiers demanded a definite separation between the marketing and manufacturing aspects in their guilds.¹ They wanted to forbid the accumulation of the functions of artisan and vendor and prohibit masters to market products. In this way, the artisans would become totally dependent on the merchants for materials and wages. This would also smash the competition of the independent master merchant manufacturers who threatened the merchant hegemony and stood as a symbol of hope for the dependent master.

The silk industry of Lyons represented the most advanced development towards the subjection of masters and

¹Maurice Garden, Lyon et les lyonnais au XVIII^e siècle (Paris, 1970), p. 582.

workers in eighteenth century France. The silk industry had been originally established in Lyons by Italian and French merchants during the fifteenth century.¹ Despite vagaries of fortune, and the expulsion of the Italians in the late sixteenth century, the French merchants never fully relinquished their control. The moment that in the early eighteenth century prosperity returned they were ready to reassert their power. By 1744, the merchants had succeeded in passing legislation forbidding masters of the Fabrique from becoming merchants.² The artisans had rebelled against this infringement of their traditional rights; but the uprising was crushed and the merchants emerged victorious.³

With the passing decades the control of the merchants over the silk industry was no longer challenged. When the artisans rose again, in 1786, it was no longer to contest the monopoly of merchants; but to demand the

¹See Richard Gascon, Grand Commerce et vie urbaine au XVI^e siècle. Lyon et ses marchands, 2 vols. (Paris, 1971).

²Garden, p. 579.

³Ibid, p. 580.

establishment of fixed rates for piece-work. This struggle for better working conditions anticipated nineteenth-century movements.¹

We can measure the extent to which the masters felt their loss of power by noting their changed attitude toward status. While the number of masters more than doubled between 1729 and 1786 (from 3,299 to 7,000), by the end of that period master artisans no longer identified their titles in marriage certificates and merely described their occupation as silk worker. It was a clear sign of the disintegration of the distinction between master and journeyman so dear to the guild. The division was no longer that between master and compagnon but between the merchants and the rest, whether masters or journeymen.²

The merchants had also come to realize the futility of guild statutes and stratifications. In a memoir written in the 1760s, they outlined some reforms for the industry, and terminated by asking that the distinction between merchant and master be abolished.

¹Garden, p. 580.

²Ibid, p. 283.

The title of merchant is useless, for there are many who purchase it, and yet remain workers. One is a merchant by deed, it is talent and fortune which determine it. 1

The regulations established in 1744 were no longer necessary. The merchants knew they were assured a de, facto control over production. Power relations within the industry did not need to be regulated; they existed by the mere interplay of economic forces whose control fell to the rich.

The merchants of the Fabrique were ready to relinquish the guild structure because they saw it as anachronistic. Not all merchants and least of all masters were ready to come to the same conclusion. Yet, during the eighteenth century, inequalities within the guilds became so acute that in some cases the alienated masters themselves opted for abolition. 2 Journeymen, who had an

¹Garden, p. 578. "Le titre de marchand est vain, car il y en a beaucoup qui l'achète, et qui restent ouvriers. C'est par le fait qu'on est marchand, c'est le talent et la fortune qui en décident."

²Marie-Françoise Benech-Hochdoerffer, "Le déclin des corporations toulousaines à la veille de la Révolution de 1789", in Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française, XLIII (1971), pp. 197-220.

increasingly diminished chance of advancement, were challenging the masters in associations known as the compagnonnages, or were disregarding guild injunctions and working outside the structure. The barriers which the guilds imposed on production and competition, and their struggles against the new industries -- particularly against the very popular calicoes whose manufacture was prohibited between 1686 and 1757-- incensed liberal reformers who preached the freedom of industry. The opposition of economists as well as the active evasion of statutes by both merchants and masters prepared the demise of the system.

One of the reasons the corporative system managed to survive for so long, despite the fetters it placed in the way of expansion, was that it provided a necessary shell in times of recession. A merchant or entrepreneur who might have sunk in a crisis if left on his own, retained a minimum share of the trade by remaining within the guild which protected him from unwelcome competition. The guild protection, which was perhaps not too significant and even harmful in periods when a merchant could

flourish unaided, became crucial during hard times. Guild legislation therefore followed a see-saw pattern depending on economic conditions which either permitted masters and merchants to expand or, on the contrary, forced them to contract their activities and retreat into monopoly.

The vagaries of legislation demonstrate the power and the limitations of the guild system. It is clear that the guilds were as unsuited to an expanding economy in the thirteenth as in the eighteenth centuries. There is also evidence from the earliest times that wealthier entrepreneurs defied guild rulings wherever they could, and if they functioned within a guild, it was to make mockery of the ideals of equality. Yet the guilds persisted practically unchanged from the time of their inception almost to the eve of their demise. Doubtless, the organization suited a limited market and those craftsmen who catered to a local population. It also corresponded to an economy directed towards the conspicuous consumption of a small elite. It provided order and protection. For even the most successful entrepreneur was prey to the limitations of a pre-industrial economy. Expansion was not

unbounded, wars, crop failures, and monetary troubles triggered crises, and at such times merchants retreated, seeking refuge in the folds of guild protection. The guilds functioned as sheltering organisms for the wealthier in times of crisis, for smaller fry practically at all times.

A major reason for the persistence of the system, however, was the interest of the royal government. The attachment was both economic and "philosophical". The guilds were milked by the authorities as frequently as other bodies in the state. Yet the commitment of the crown went beyond the fiscal aspect. First one must recall the power of privileged institutions in the Ancien Regime. The monopolies had been granted and the privileges bought. To revoke them, the monarch must first reimburse them. If the King's power came from God, it was constrained by custom, and the privileges and quasi-independence granted to various institutions. If the state managed to recuperate some of its authority, it was never by abolishing those bodies but by creating similar authorities to rival them. Privileged institutions were impossible

to dismiss or, worse, abolish under the old régime.¹

Both feudal and absolute monarchs were committed to a certain vision of the world. Each member and institution of the kingdom had a role to perform, each in his place and to the best of his ability. It was the monarch's role to supervise this commonwealth, insuring that all was functioning in an orderly fashion. Trades were differentiated and assigned particular tasks. It was also the duty of the authorities to protect the consumer, and the worker from abuse and fraud. Matters, however, became too complicated when there were too many contradictory interests to uphold. As the fiscal interests of the state in the guilds increased and as its commitments to industrial and commercial development deepened, new pressure groups arose to further stretch the unsteady foundations of the system. And this finally pushed it to its ultimate collapse.

¹Pierre Goubert, L'Ancien Régime, II, Les Pouvoirs (Paris, 1973) and Denis Richet, La France moderne: l'esprit des institutions (Paris, 1973), passim.

CHAPTER II

REFORM

The sixteenth century in France has been named the "century of the Renaissance". Similarly, the seventeenth is referred to as the "tragic" century, and the eighteenth has become known as the "age of Enlightenment". This last term brings to mind great French philosophers: Voltaire and Rousseau, Montesquieu and Diderot. If these men represented a whole spectrum of ideas, they have nevertheless come to signify the European drive for reform and for a liberation from tyranny, as well as the transformation of autocratic monarchs into "enlightened" rulers. If the term "enlightened despotism" has been more readily applied to Frederic II of Prussia or the Empress Catherine of Russia, than to either Louis XV or his grandson Louis XVI, movements of reform nevertheless emerged in France, to question traditional policies.

The mechanisms of reform in the Ancien Regime are only beginning to be studied. Till recently, the emphasis had been placed, to a great extent, on the intellectual movements of the period. In the same way, it was too readily assumed that reform was alien to the regime itself, and stemmed from outsiders whose frustration would finally topple the whole system. But recently Boshier and Egret, in their respective studies, have emphasized the rôle of administrators in reforming abuses, initiating reforms, and revitalizing the economy.¹ The fact that these officials were, on the whole, unsuccessful, reveals the endurance of the system, and clarifies the power and the methods of traditional privileged bodies in the face of reform. What remains unclear, however, is the role of lobbies, aside from court parties, the attitude and influence of merchant groups, councils and Chambers of Commerce.²

¹J. F. Boshier, The Single Duty Project. A Study of the Movement for a French Customs Union in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1964) and Jean Egret, La pré-Révolution française 1787-1788 (Paris, 1962).

²Lionel Rothkrug, Opposition to Louis XIV. The Political and Social Origins of the French Enlightenment (Princeton, N. J., 1965). Rothkrug unfortunately only follows the merchant drive for reform until 1700.

With the reform of the guild system, in particular, we are faced with disparate information. On the one hand, we know that merchants were actively undermining the guild system, and on the other, that reforms originated in the administration. Yet we have little information about communications between the two groups, or the attitude of merchants to suggested changes in the corporative structure. Although the merchants might well have expected that there would be legal repercussions to the transformations they were wielding in industry, we are ignorant of their efforts to bring about reform or, on the contrary, to oppose it.

Until the middle of the century, the government's attitude to the guilds was Colbertist, although there was some ambivalence. The Bureau of Commerce, for example, refused to grant 238 requests for guild statutes between 1729 and 1760, while accepting countless others. After 1750, the trend is clearer as the Committee granted appeals from apprentices to be dispensed from acquiring certificates.¹ Gournay noted in a letter of March 2, 1752, that

¹Coornaert, p. 167.

since his arrival in the Control General, the Bureau had regularly refused to grant, ¹ Liberal intendants as well opposed the government's rigidity by moderating legislation, only to be severely reprimanded by a conservative Comptroller General. They nevertheless persisted in waiving or reducing fines for contraventions in production.

A modification in governmental policy began in mid-eighteenth century with the ascension of men influenced by Physiocratic and liberal ideas to key posts in the administration. Between 1748 and 1755 two Comptrollers General, Machault d'Arnouville and Moreau de Séchelles, and two intendants of commerce, Daniel de Trudaine and Vincent de Gournay, showed themselves willing propagators of new ideas.² They were followed by Trudaine de Montigny, first president of the newly formed Committee of Agriculture, and Bertin, who was Comptroller General from 1755 to 1763. Although their most noted efforts were in the field of agri-

¹Olivier-Martin, p. 515.

²Georges Weulersse, Le mouvement physiocratique en France de 1756 à 1770, 2 vols. (Paris, 1910), I, 28.

culture, they also preached the need for reform in industry.

The Physiocrats opposed mercantilist neglect of agriculture and the belief that wealth was the product of industry and trade, by claiming that all wealth derived from the land. The government's policy, therefore, should be to maintain high prices for agricultural products and free trade within the country, so that a surplus in one province could compensate the dearth of another --thereby keeping prices at an equitable level. The Physiocratic critique of the guilds was centred on the theme that these maintained high prices for manufactured products, while free competition would keep them low and available to the agrarian consumer. Industry was secondary to agriculture, as it drew its raw materials from nature, and therefore its intrinsic value came from the land. Gournay, and later Turgot, held a median position between the Physiocratic stress on agriculture and the mercantilist stress on industry. They recognized the importance of land, but they admitted that industry played a role in the creation of wealth.

Gournay initiated discussion against the guilds and

suggested that the topic of their abolition be the question for debate at the Academy of Amiens.¹ This inspired Cliquot de Blervache, some think under the direction of Gournay, to publish a pamphlet entitled "Considérations sur le Commerce et en particulier sur les Compagnies, Sociétés et Maîtrises",² which appeared in 1757.

His tone was moderate and his arguments borrowed from the Physiocrats. The wealth and power of the nation lay in its productivity, and labour both agricultural and industrial must receive encouragement. Trades had to expand and competition introduced so that prices would be lowered to their just level. In his view, the guilds were exclusive privileges under the control of jealous, self-perpetuating oligarchies which excluded compagnons by means of entrance fees, and were associations of rich, and not of capable, craftsmen. They imposed ridiculous terms of apprenticeship and maintained high prices through a rejection of competition. This raised the price of French goods on foreign markets and reduced French citizens to

¹ Olivier-Martin, p. 516.

² Amsterdam, 1758, 180p. (B.N. Vz 1962).

indigence through lack of work. Regulations might maintain a high quality of goods, but cheap goods were also necessary. As to badly manufactured goods, they would simply be less marketable. Invention had to be encouraged rather than stifled and the experience of foreign artisans welcomed rather than rejected. Inspection, fines, and seizures were to be abolished for regulation ought to rest on general probity rather than on the suppression of occasional fraud. The payment of offices and the debts incurred by the guilds were a further negative aspect of the institution. The solution lay in a thorough reform of the system. Cliquot de Blervache did not advocate the abolition of the guilds, but his proposal amounted to a de facto annihilation.

Three decades later, a posthumous free trade pamphlet by Bigot de Sainte-Croix¹ appeared in preparation of Turgot's projected reforms. The author voiced more radical views regarding the concept of liberty than had been expressed by Cliquot.

¹Bigot de Sainte-Croix, Essai sur la liberté du commerce et de l'industrie (Paris, 1775). (B.N. 8°V. 6862).

The first law of political Societies must be to insure to all its citizens the full and complete exercise of that liberty, which can only appear dangerous to the ignorant and the prejudiced... Reinstatè the order of nature by restoring general freedom and there will be neither fraud, nor contraventions, nor any oversell, in commerce. 1

The benefits of liberty would be twofold: consumers would be given a freedom of choice amongst a multitude of products, and manufacturers would be permitted to produce and innovate as they pleased, relying solely on their economic interest. Bigot emphasized the benefits of competition and reiterated the criticisms of the guilds which were now common coin. The guilds, for him, represented special privileges concerned only with their own advantage. They kept prices unnaturally high, and they increased the cost of products by transferring the expenses of the guilds and the expenditures of lawsuits to the consumer. The divisions in the production process imposed by the corporative system delayed manufacture. He did not agree that

¹ ibid, pp. 2-3. "La première loi des Sociétés politiques doit être d'assurer à tous les citoyens le plein et entier exercice de cette liberté, qui ne peut paraître dangereuse qu'aux yeux de l'ignorance et du préjugé... Rétablissez l'ordre de la nature en rendant la liberté générale, et il n'y aura dans le commerce ni fraudes, ni contraventions, ni surventes."

fraud arose from a system of liberty but from regulation. Competition would provide a natural check against individual disability which found its consecration in the guilds. The government ought not to worry about fraud but to encourage all types of production, good or bad. Not all regulations were harmful, however, and here Bigot agreed with Cliquot de Blervache on the limitations of anarchic freedom, which he considered as harmful to industry as rigid regulation. In conclusion, the abolition of the guilds would bring about a reduction in prices, an increase of trade, and economies for the monarch. A Physiocratic perspective was at the base of these reforms: the abolition of the corporations would benefit producers and landowners by reducing their expenses and leaving them more capital to invest in improvements in agriculture.

While economists were advocating these reforms, some practical measures had been adopted by the administration. In 1755, a law stating that only those artisans who had been apprenticed in a town could work there was repealed. An edict of 1762 consecrated the de facto situation which existed in the countryside by permitting unregulated

textile production in rural areas. This was the edict that Tarlé viewed as sounding the death-knell of the guilds.¹ These had been fighting for centuries to circumscribe and control this independent rural production, and now it had received official recognition. There would be no more restrictions on merchants who wished to evade inspection and produce more cheaply by using rural labour. The real threat to the guilds lay in the suspicion that, once launched on a program of reform, the government was not likely to stop. In 1765, wholesale trade was declared a métier libre. The Six Corps had monopolized the trade in Paris and had insured they should have no serious competitors. Although they retained their pre-eminence after the decree, it was nevertheless seen as a defeat for the corporations and an encouragement for the Economists.² In 1767 the sale of masterships was extended to strangers. The guilds protested violently, especially against the admission of Jews.³ In 1779 an edict would be issued which

¹Eugheni Tarlé, L'industrie dans les campagnes en France à la fin de l'Ancien Régime (Paris, 1910), p. 53.

²Martin Saint-Léon, p. 532. ✓

³Ibid, p. 514.

permitted textile manufacturers to manufacture cloths without recourse either to regulation or to inspection.¹ Yet, despite those encouraging developments, the government had also carried out contrary policies. In 1716, faced with the bankruptcy of the guilds and the lack of public confidence that they inspired, the Regent had established a commission of enquiry into the finances of the guilds, with the purpose of liquidating their debts and improving their methods of accountancy.² In 1740, the commission was made permanent, and inspectorships were established whose role was to oversee the accounts of each guild. While the effort at economy was laudable, the King merely perpetuated the problems by extending the system of sale of offices, or rather of forced contribution from the guilds.³ The guilds had profited from Law's system, using the abundant paper currency to repay their debts, but were soon faced, once more, with insolvency.⁴ One of the consequences was that the guilds raised the price of master-

¹Boissonnade, II, 547.

²Nigeon, p. 146.

³Ibid, p. 145.

⁴Martin Saint-Léon, p. 507.

ships and apprenticeships.

The history of guild reform in the Ancien Regime follows a see-saw pattern. Although wholesale trade had been liberated in 1765, and free trade in grains had been established, in August 1767 the government issued a retrograde decree, ordering all trades to form corporative associations.¹ Repeating the injunctions of 1581, 1597, and 1673, all artisans and merchants whose trades had remained unregulated were ordered to acquire statutes to regulate them now. The countryside, however, remained exempt. Merchants who had hitherto benefited from freedom, refused to obey the edict, and it was necessary to extend the deadline twice to register them all.¹ Reaction was on the way, and in 1770, the grain trade was once more subjected to restrictions.

Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot was forty-seven years old at the time of his accession to the post of Comptroller General on August 24, 1774. He came from a long line of parliamentarians and his father had been prévôt des mar-

¹Martin Saint-Léon, p. 514.

chands at Paris. For twelve years preceding his arrival at the Control General he had served as intendant of the province of Limoges where he became famous for his reforms, most notably of the corvées.¹ He was associated with the circle of economic reformers, and on his arrival in the administration named his friends Du Pont de Nemours, Condorcet, and Morellet as inspecteurs de commerce.² Although Turgot's reforms ranged from a restoration of free trade in grains to an inquiry into the causes of murrain, the culmination of his efforts came with the Six Edicts of February 1776. The first four edicts prescribed reforms of various local dues and of the officialdom of the Parisian markets. The last two edicts dealt with major issues: the corvées and the guilds.³ The project of reform of the guilds was not new and had been discussed by "economists" in the past three decades. Faure even found some evidence that Terray, Turgot's predecessor at the Control General,

¹Douglas Dakin, Turgot and the Ancien Regime in France (New York, 1965), Ch. V. The corvées were forced labour on the roads which peasants owed to the seigneur.

²Edgar Faure, 12 mai 1776, la disgrâce de Turgot (Paris, 1961), p. 73.

³Dakin, Ch. XV.

had envisaged such a reform in 1773.¹ It was not until Turgot's edict, however, that the actual step was taken.

Turgot had expressed his views on the corporative system as early as 1759 in the Eloge de Vincent de Gournay,² in which he praised Gournay's support of liberty of trade and industry and his criticisms of industrial regulations and the restrictions of the guild system. Gournay and Turgot shared an attitude to industry which was a modified version of the Physiocrats'.³ The former had argued that "a worker who had manufactured a piece of cloth had added real wealth to the riches of the State."⁴ He recognized the importance of industry in providing labour, order, and prosperity to the state, but unlike the Colbertists, denied that these could be achieved by regulations. Freedom and

¹Faure, pp. 426-27.

²Gustave Schelle, Oeuvres de Turgot, I, Eloge de Vincent de Gournay (Paris, 1913), pp. 598-623.

³Georges Weulersse, La physiocratie sous les ministères de Turgot et de Necker (1774-1781) (Paris, 1950), p. 31.

⁴Schelle, p. 600. "Un ouvrier qui avait fabriqué une pièce d'étoffe avait ajouté à la masse des richesses de l'Etat une richesse réelle."

the laws of nature would insure the general good, as economic laissez-faire would provide the best prices both for the consumer and the producer.¹ This would not only profit the agrarian consumer, but the manufacturer and industry as a whole as well.

In the edict of 1776,² Turgot repeated these arguments. In the preamble to the edict, he launched into a violent denunciation of the guilds. He reproved them for being associations of the rich, excluding poor but worthy craftsmen, and forcing women into indigence and corruption by denying them membership. He deplored the monopoly and self-interest which led them to deny innovations and retard the progress of the arts by their countless seizures for so-called contraventions, and by their many lawsuits. He accused them of contriving to raise prices by their monopoly and by supporting maneuvers to that effect. Industry would best develop under a system of liberty and the case

¹Schelle, pp. 603 and 607.

²G.-C. Lavergne, "Edit de suppression des jurandes" Archives des corporations des arts et metiers (Paris, 1879).

of unregulated enclaves proved that workers were as well trained under liberty as under a system of regulation.

In fact it would be in the interest of the employer to hire craftsmen selected for their capability alone.¹

Turgot finally insisted on man's right to work and criticized the government's view that it was a privilege that should be bought or sold.

God, by giving man needs, by making it necessary for him to rely upon work, has rendered the right of work the property of all men, and this property is the first, the most sacred and the most unalienable of all. 2

The guilds were therefore to be abolished and professions to be opened to foreigners and as long as they registered with the police to all those who wished to exercise a trade. The trades were to be supervised by wardens elected by the merchants of each section of the city, and existing

¹Faure, p. 432.

²Lavergne, p. 12. "Dieu, en donnant à l'homme des besoins, en lui rendant nécessaire la ressource du travail, a fait du droit de travailler la propriété de tout homme, et cette propriété est la première, la plus sacrée et la plus imprescriptible de toutes."

regulations in most trades were repealed. Some trades were to remain regulated: the pharmacists, goldsmiths, printers and booksellers whose professions were to be the subject of a reform in the near future. Both masters and workers were forbidden to assemble for fear that they would try to re-establish the guilds. Provisions were made for the settling of the debts of the communities: these would be reimbursed by the sale of all property held by the corporations. Masters were to be compensated for the loss of privilege by receiving an income from the offices purchased from the state.

The reaction to the edict was immediate: in fact, it preceded its publication. In early January the Six Corps commissioned Delacroix, an advocate, to write a reply to Bigot de Sainte-Croix's pamphlet and to the impending edict of abolition which it was rumored had been presented to Louis XVI.¹ Delacroix's tactics have generally been considered skillful. He conceded that the guilds needed reform but not to the point of abolition.

¹Martin Saint-Léon, p. 574.

I do not defend abuses, I only defend privileges; therefore each of the times M. de Sainte-Croix will have presented only abuses which need correcting, I will join him to request their suppression, but to reform does not mean to destroy, and his pamphlet only solicits destruction. ¹

Delacroix opposed the "chimera" of liberty, especially when carried to absurd heights as when, according to the principle of multiple professions, a boot-maker must also be a baker, and one might purchase hats at a greengrocer's. ² He refuted the argument of liberty by appealing to the need for quality. French trade had been nurtured by superior products, and only rigorous training could insure such good manufacture. ³ The Economists argued that France ought to produce cheaply and poorly, but Delacroix inquired what advantage could possibly be gained from the purchase of a suit which cost

¹Delacroix, Mémoire à consulter sur l'existence actuelle des Six Corps et la conservation de leurs privilèges (Paris, 1776), 26p. (B. N. Vz 664), p. 16. "Je ne suis pas le défenseur des abus, je défends seulement les privilèges; ainsi toutes les fois que M. de Sainte-Croix n'aura présenté que des abus à corriger, je m'unirai à lui pour en demander la suppression, mais réformer n'est pas détruire, et son ouvrage ne sollicite que la destruction."

²Ibid, pp. 2 and 5.

³Ibid, p. 5.

100 sols but only lasted one year rather than buying one for six livres which would last far longer.¹ The interest of the consumer lay in buying quality goods at low prices. For the guilds kept prices down by the reproaches made to the master who tried to sell dear, and by economic circumstances which often forced a merchant to undersell. Regulations and specializations were the safeguards of high quality.² Competition would ruin most craftsmen and enrich a few, so would it not be fairer to distribute the wealth more evenly?³ In answer to the Physiocrats, he threatened that once the guilds were open to all, the land would lose its workers through an exodus to the cities.⁴

Delacroix's pamphlet was clever because by conceding the need for reform, he removed some of the ground from under his opponents' arguments. The publications of the Six Corps after the abolition were more sectarian.⁵

¹Ibid, p. 17.

²Ibid, p. 6.

³Ibid, pp. 6-7.

⁴Ibid, p. 5.

⁵Réflexion des Six Corps de Paris sur la suppression des jurandes (Paris, 1776), 22p. (B.N. Vz 665). This was the main pamphlet on behalf of the guilds following the edict.

The abuses of liberty were described in florid terms, particularly the anticipated debauchery of workers no longer under the beneficial control of masters, and the degeneration of those peasants who would flock to the city in search of work and excitement and, finding none of the former, would fall into the arms of the latter. Consumed by vice, and unable to return to their villages, they would perish in shame and degradation.¹ Moreover, freedom would bring fraud and malpractice into production, which would cheat the consumer and ruin French industry. If prices of products were to be reduced, artisans would fall into terrible misery, thereby perpetrating frauds and causing further injury to industry.²

The Six Edicts provoked intense opposition. They united powerful and organized bodies: the corporations, the Parlements and the nobility. The opposition of the Parlements represented corporative solidarity, for the privileges of one body in the state must be upheld as a support against the threats to others. The Abbé Véri,

¹Ibid, p. 14.

²Ibid, p. 7.

Turgot's friend and mentor, has estimated that the Parlements made a yearly profit of one million livres from the lawsuits between the guilds.¹ Similarly, the moribund Prince de Conti's opposition to the Edicts and his presence at the Lit de Justice of March 12, when the King forced the recalcitrant Parlement to register the Edicts, has been explained in terms of his interest in the Temple, a privileged enclave, which he leased to craftsmen for a yearly return of 50,000 livres.² Yet a strong case can be made that the Prince's hostility was that of an anti-liberal aristocrat suspicious of all reforms of the system.³

At the Lit de Justice, the Chancellor Séguier made a powerful and moving remonstrance to the King.⁴ Adopting Delacroix's position he agreed that the guilds needed reform, but opposed the anarchy of freedom and the need for

¹Faure, p. 430.

²Ibid., p. 439.

³Ibid., p. 440.

⁴Laverne, "Discours prononcé par M^o A.-L. Séguier, avocat général, au lit de justice du 12 mars 1776".

the dissolution of the institution. The guilds maintained order in the state, they produced quality goods which were envied throughout the world, and regulations ensured the glory, and the extension of French commerce. Liberty, on the other hand, would bring about the ruin of industry and of French artisans, and a threat to social order by the lack of control over compagnons driven to desperation by lack of work and high food prices.¹ Séguier warned of the dangers of abolishing one institution, threatening the destruction of the entire system,² for all bodies in the state are organically connected.

¹Ibid, p. 20.

²Ibid, pp. 15-16. "Tous vos sujets, Sire, sont divisés en autant de corps qu'il y a d'états différents dans le royaume. Le clergé, la noblesse, les cours souveraines, les tribunaux, les universités, les académies, les compagnies de finance, les compagnies de commerce; tout représente; et dans toutes les parties de l'Etat, des corps existants qu'on peut regarder comme des anneaux d'une chaîne, dont le premier est dans la main de Votre Majesté, comme chef souverain administrateur de tout ce qui constitue le corps de la nation.

La seule idée de détruire cette chaîne précieuse devrait être effrayante. Les communautés de marchands et d'artisans font une portion de ce tout inséparable qui contribue à la police générale du royaume; elles sont devenues nécessaires; et pour nous renfermer dans ce seul objet, la loi, Sire, a érigé des corps de communautés, a créé des jurandes, a établi des règlements parce que l'indépendance est un vice dans la constitution politique, parce que l'homme est toujours tenté d'abuser de la liberté."

All your subjects, Sire, are divided in as many bodies as there are different states in the kingdom. The clergy, the nobility, the sovereign courts, the tribunals, the universities, the academies, the finance companies, the trade companies; all represent, and in all parts of the State, existing bodies which may be viewed as links in a great chain, of which the first is in the hand of Your Majesty, as the chief sovereign administrator of all that constitutes the body of the nation.

The mere idea of destroying such a precious chain must frighten us. The communities of merchants and artisans form a part of this inseparable whole which contributes to the general policing of the kingdom; they have become necessary; and to confine ourselves to that sole object, the law, Sire, has erected guilds, has created wardenships, has established regulations because independence is a vice in the political constitution, because man is always tempted to abuse liberty.

The riots of the "Guerre des Farines", when the populace thought it was being starved by the government in support of producers and hoarders, was only one year old. The argument against popular agitation was therefore potent. The alternative presented to the King in the face of continued opposition to the edicts, namely the choice of reform rather than abolition, provided him with a way out.¹ Swayed by court intrigue and continued opposition to Turgot, Louis XVI agreed to remove his minister and,

¹Faure, p. 465.

on May 10, Turgot was dismissed from the Control General. The corvées were restored on August 11 of the same year, and the guilds in Paris were reinstated by an edict of August 28. In January 1777, the guilds of Lyons were similarly re-established; in April, the cities surrounding Paris were included and in February 1778 Normandy, in May 1779 Roussillon and Lorraine, and in July 1779 Metz had their guild organizations restored.¹

The preamble to the Edict of August 1776 declared the monarch's concern to grant liberty where it was warranted and restore useful regulation where it was needed. Forty-four guilds were re-created in Paris. The following professions were left free: flower-girls, brush-makers, gardeners, old-clothes dealers, dealers in second-hand goods, whip-makers, tow-dressers, dancing-masters, matters, fowlers, gingerbread bakers, prayers, rod-fishermen, machine-fishermen, cobblers, weavers, basket-makers, and scavengers.² A degree of liberty was retained: those masters who did not wish to belong to a community were not

¹Martin Saint-Léon, pp. 594-95.

²Ibid, p. 590.

obliged to do so, but they could not claim the privileges and benefits accorded to guild members. The price of masterships was significantly lowered to permit easier access, with the understanding that the King was to receive three-quarters of all fees.¹ The power of the guilds was limited and the wardens had to consult the police authorities before carrying out seizures or levying fines. All old lawsuits were suspended and the debts of the guilds were repaid through the sale of their property. Guild membership was opened to foreigners and women were allowed to become masters. Widows no longer automatically profited from their late husband's mastership, but had to apply for their own within one year of the decease. In February 1777, the Six Corps lost their case against the admission of Jews into the trades.² Once re-established, however, the guilds assumed their traditional prerogatives and perpetrated the same abuses. It was inconceivable for the organized guilds to permit masters of their trade to

¹Nigeon, p. 68. It has been estimated that, between 1776 and 1785, the King received 11,550,000 livres as revenue from masterships.

²Martin Saint-Léon, p. 590.

remain independent from the re-organized bodies and they were immediately compelled to join.¹

Turgot's defeat was caused by the united pressure of his opponents: the Court parties, the nobility, the guilds, and the Parlements. He had retained the confidence and support of Louis XVI until the King finally succumbed to the pressure of Maurepas, his powerful minister of state, and of Marie-Antoinette, and abandoned him. But Turgot had the enthusiastic supports of the Economists² and moreover his measures were popular with the masses. The peasants sang:

Je n'irons plus aux chemins,
Comme à la galère,
Travailler soir et matin,
Sans aucun salaire. ³

¹I deduce this from the petitions sent to the Committee of Commerce and Agriculture during the Revolution.

²A letter written by Diderot to the Abbé Galiani, on May 10, 1776, shows his support for the abolition of the guilds. As the son of an artisan he claimed to understand the abuses of the system, and to trust that liberty would not bring about the deterioration of production. Denis Diderot, Correspondance, XV, eds. Georges Roth and Jean Varlet (Paris, 1968), pp. 190-92.

³Dakin, p. 254. "I will no longer go to the roads, as to the galleys, working morning and night, without any salary."

And in the cities:

Chacun peut de son métier,
Vivre aujourd'hui sans payer
Juré ni maîtrise. 1

In Dakin's opinion, Turgot's popularity with the populace was dangerous.² For to initiate reforms which were so approved would be to threaten aristocratic privileges and force the opposition of the Parlements and the court at Versailles. Turgot suffered, as all other ministers of the Ancien Régime from court intrigue. And ironically his fall was brought about less from fear of his policies than as a means to bring forward the claims and the candidate of another faction.³

Turgot's reforms were less revolutionary than Maupeou's of several years before.⁴ He represented less of a threat to aristocratic privileges. Yet he failed. This brings into question the nature and problems of reform in the Ancien Régime. Too many groups united against

¹Faure, p. 458. "Today everyone can live by his trade without paying either mastership or warden."

²Dakin, p. 270.

³Ibid, p. 272.

⁴Maupeou dismembered the Parlements.

Turgot. They were powerful, they were organized, and they had the customary claim to the ear and attention of the monarch. Turgot's supporters amongst the Economists and other liberal thinkers, could be dismissed as a minority of wild reformers. He represented the aspirations of the bourgeoisie and could count on the sympathy of the dependent workers and of the peasants. He had the support of enlightened administrators, of liberal bourgeois and nobles. They were, however, unorganized and disunited elements. They were powerless before the imposing front of tradition and privilege. It was only with the Revolution that there emerged an organized party of reform and of opposition, which was powerful enough to confront and destroy the old bases of power.

Until the calling of the Estates General and the elaboration of the cahiers, the views of various groups about the guilds can only be guessed. It is logical to assume that those merchants and manufacturers who held a de facto control over production or were inhibited by guild restrictions desired their abolition. Guild masters whose title still represented an effective or potential

privilege wanted those privileges maintained. The com-
pagnons on the whole had little to profit from the guild
system. The only benefit the guilds afforded them was
the theoretical exclusion of unskilled labour. Yet this
rule was often disregarded and wherever journeyman pres-
sure was the greatest for its' preservation, one is sure
to find the greatest contravention.

The conclusions drawn by the historians from a
reading of the cahiers de doléances of 1789 seem to con-
tradict this view. The cahiers were elaborated by the
nation in anticipation of the meeting of the Estates
General which were to convene in the spring of that year.¹
Impressive lists have been compiled of those cahiers which
were for or against the guilds, ambivalent, or ambiguous
about the future of the institution. In brief, it appears
that the major manufacturing centers and the large towns

¹The cahiers were lists of grievances drawn up
at each level of the electorate of representatives at the
Estates General. The third Estate compiled parish, guild,
district, town, primary and secondary bailiwick cahiers;
while the clergy and nobility had fewer electorate divisions
and produced primary and secondary bailiwick cahiers. There
were also cahiers drawn up to represent the views of each
order of a region.

stood for the maintenance of the guilds,¹ Orléans and Bayonne being the only notable exceptions.² The opposition to the guilds came from the smaller towns, the countryside and poorer provinces such as Poitou.³ Middle-sized towns were generally indifferent to the question.⁴

The cahiers drawn up by the guilds did not speak directly in favour of the system, but implied it in their requests either for reform, or for a return to greater rigidity and the organization which existed before 1776. Widows, for example, complained that they no longer bene-

¹Martin Saint-Léon, p. 611; Beatrice F. Hyslop, "French Guild Opinion in 1789", The American Historical Review, XLIV (1939), p. 257; C. Riffaterre, "Le sentiment du tiers-état sur les corporations en 1789", La Révolution Française, LXXXIII (1929), pp. 291-93.

Riffaterre compares the statistics of two cahiers historians: Picard and Petrof. Picard has found that 19 cahiers were in favour of the guilds, 25 cahiers were against, and two undecided. Petrof counted 26 city cahiers and 30 bailiwick cahiers for the guilds, 14 city and 51 bailiwick cahiers against, with fifteen undecided. Riffaterre believes Petrof's figures to be more trustworthy, and confirmed by Martin Saint-Léon's own conclusions.

²Riffaterre, p. 296.

³Ibid, p. 295.

⁴Hyslop, p. 257.

fited from their husbands' masterships.¹ The guilds had also expressed their grievances against the forains, the colporteurs, and the chambrelans.² Very few guilds demanded abolition. The cobblers who did, catered to the poor, and they could not afford to make new shoes, moreover, they had to bear the tyranny of the shoemakers' guild. As for the hosiers who demanded abolition, they were totally under the control of merchants and no longer possessed a meaningful monopoly.³

Guild cahiers were generally written by the masters and of course represented their point of view. The wage-earners expressed their grievances only on the question of unemployment and wages. The workers of Troyes protested against the excès d'aunage which they had to pay to the merchants,⁴ and the journeymen hosiers of the same

¹Martin Saint-Léon, p. 609.

²Ibid, p. 608. Itinerant merchants, pedlars, and non-guild workers.

³Ibid, p. 614.

⁴Roger Picard, Les cahiers de 1789 et les classes ouvrières (Paris, 1910), p. 107. Merchants would ask for one to four extra ells free for each twenty ells of purchased cloth. Bois, p. 253.

town complained as well against the new machinery which was ruining the artisans.¹ The cahier of La Rochelle demanded the abolition of the masterships on behalf of all the citizens, which, according to Picard, included members of the métiers libres, the compagnons, and the members of the three Orders.²

The cahiers of the first two Orders, if they dealt at all with the question, were generally opposed to the guilds as it was hoped that their suppression would bring down the price of goods.³ The third Estate debated the question to a greater extent and often leaned toward economic liberalism.⁴ There is a progression toward a greater support of abolition extending from the guilds themselves to the city and to the cahiers of the third Estate.

It is not surprising to find a general support for the institution among the guild cahiers, or to find the

¹Picard, p. 111.

²Ibid, p. 93.

³Martin Saint-Léon, p. 607.

⁴Hyslop, p. 263.

journeymen and masters subjected to merchant-control petitioning against them. What is disconcerting is to note that the greatest support for the guilds came from the prosperous manufacturing centers such as Paris, Lyons and Rouen, where merchants and industrialists were eagerly evading guild regulations and logically ought to have been the most vocal in requesting their suppression. Riffaterre concludes that the majority of the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie showed its support for regulation.¹ The petitions sent to the National assembly only a few months later, however, reveal the general desire of manufacturers to disentangle themselves from regulation.²

This would indicate that the cahiers have to be examined more closely not merely to elucidate patterns of pro and contra but to establish the economic context of each grievance and request. Demands for the maintenance of duties or the exclusion of pedlars cannot after all be given the same weight as requests for rigid legislation and a grant of absolute monopoly.

¹ Riffaterre, p. 296.

² See chapter four.

Another factor has to be kept in mind. In 1786, France had signed a free trade agreement with England. The results were disastrous for French industry as the market was flooded with cheaper English goods, and French manufacturers found no outlets for their own products.¹ There had as yet been no mitigation of the crisis and it affected the elaboration of grievances. Many cahiers expressed their dissatisfaction with the treaty and demanded its termination.² These demands were to be repeated until the establishment of a tariff in December 1790.³

The guilds had always performed the function of protecting threatened interests. It is likely that the crisis of the last years of the Regime, mingled with the realization of the disasters wrought by absolute freedom, made monopoly appear attractive.

The treaty of 1786 demonstrated the force not so

¹ Labrousse, Histoire économique et sociale...
p. 552.

² Picard, pp. 159-165.

³ Boshex, pp. 132 and 171.

much of reform as of economic ideas.¹ The treaty was obviously unsuited to the French economy, but it fitted very neatly into the schema of Physiocratic thought.² In the same way, the abolition of the guilds was to be carried out by men imbued with the ideals of the Enlightenment and economic liberalism, and who were certain that they were following the dictates of Reason and Nature in abolishing the barriers to trade and industry which had existed for the past seven centuries.

¹ Ibid, p. 171.

² Du Pont de Nemours, a leading Physiocrat, had been one of the men who had negotiated the agreement.

CHAPTER III

AUGUST 1789

The Revolution proper "began" on June 20 1789 with the famed Tennis Oath Court when the Third Estate¹ declared itself the National Assembly of the French people and vowed not to disperse until France had been granted a constitution. The Estates General had been summoned by the King to advise him on the financial bankruptcy of the state, but, in 1788, opposition to the regime had crystallized to the point where demands were being voiced for a more thorough reform of the system as a whole. In particular, the third Estate (or tiers), composed of all Frenchmen who were neither priests nor nobles, was demanding an end to privilege and a say in the governing of the

¹The term "third estate" is confusing since it can refer either to the Order as a whole or to its representatives at the Estates General. In order to clarify the meaning, Third will be capitalized when it refers to the representatives, and left in small letters when it refers to the Order as a whole.

nation.¹

In December 1788, the third Estate had won a first victory when the government had agreed to double their representation. It was nevertheless understood that each Order would meet separately and have a single vote. Since it could be expected that the first two Orders, the clergy and the nobility, would concur on all matters affecting their privileges, the numerical strength of the Third Estate would by itself be of little use.

The majority of the representatives of the tiers, therefore, supported a vote by head rather than by estate. From the opening of the Estates General on May 5 1789 they manifested their opposition to the procedures and disappointment with the scope of the proceedings by adopting stalling tactics. They requested that the credentials of deputies be examined in common --thereby challenging the separation of Orders-- and refused all attempts at conciliation. They felt that their role at this meeting of

¹Jean Egret, La pré-Révolution française 1787-1788 (Paris, 1962), and Georges Lefebvre, The Coming of the French Revolution (Princeton, 1971), passim.

the Estates was not purely advisory, but that they had received a mandate from the French people to implement far-reaching reforms of the regime. On June 17, they accordingly voted by 491 to 89 to adopt the name of National Assembly and appropriate the power of collecting taxes.¹ The first two Orders appealed to the King for action, and a general assembly was called for June 22 to admonish the Third Estate. On the twentieth, the representatives of the tiers found the doors of their meeting hall barred --it was being redecorated for the coming assembly. In defiance of the monarch, they angrily congregated in the adjoining tennis court and swore to draft a constitution.

The King attempted to disperse the representatives by a show of force, but they refused to be intimidated and invited the deputies of the other two Estates to join them. The first Order, composed of many country priests sympathetic to the aims of the third Estate, voted to accept the offer. Finally, even the nobility decided to bide its time before pressing its own claims and merged with the

¹Lefebvre, pp. 81-82.

Assembly. There was, however, no question of surrender by either court or nobility. A counter-coup was being planned and troops were called to Versailles and Paris to crush the insurrection of the tiers.

The threat of counter-revolution was met by an uprising of the Parisian populace. The spirit of rebelliousness, the hope for reform and liberation from "tyranny" had filtered down to all classes. Stirred by revolutionary leaders and fearful of rumored plots of aristocratic vengeance, the populace saved the revolution by arming the city and by reducing the military opposition, which deserted to the revolution. The search for arms had led the sans-culottes¹ from arsenal to arsenal, until, on July 14, they succeeded in occupying the Bastille, the awesome citadel at the heart of Paris, long the symbol of oppression. With the surrender of the fortress and the desertion of the troops, Louis XVI had to concede failure. On July 17, he recognized the National Assembly.²

¹An amalgam of artisans, shopkeepers, journeymen, and other labouring men.

²Jacques Godechot, The Taking of the Bastille, July 14th 1789 (London, 1970), passim, and George Rudé, The Crowd in the French Revolution (New York, 1969), pp. 45-60.

The victory of the Third Estate signaled the defeat of privilege. The radical wing of the Assembly was now ready to proceed to a transformation of the regime where sovereignty would lie with the representatives of the people. Although it had relied on the support of the populace to secure its victory, the Assembly did not view the arming of the population with a favourable eye. The Revolution would institute the legal equality of all men, but give power to the sana pars, the property-owning middle classes. A National Guard, open only to property owners, was established to maintain order in the capital and to protect the Assembly.¹ All other citizens were instructed to turn in their arms.

Both the National Assembly and the Parisian municipal authorities were concerned to contain the rising force of the sans-culottes. Food prices were rising drastically and fear of famine spread. In both July and August and with growing ferocity in September and October, there were angry shouts for bread, and repeated assaults on

¹Georges Lefebvre, The French Revolution, 2 vols. (New York, 1969), I, 131.

bakeries whose owners were suspected of "hoarding".¹ The sans-culottes also feared that the aristocrats would try to vanquish the revolution by starving the citizens. Panic spread to rural areas. Rumors which spoke of aristocratic plots to regain control of the country by supporting the ravages of "Brigands" terrified the peasantry. This Grande Peur and the desire for reform were the motives for widespread peasant uprisings. Castles and registries were burnt, and dues were left unpaid. The peasantry was carrying out its own revolution.²

Property-owners were horrified at the destruction in the countryside. The Assembly was in the midst of discussing measures to quell the uprising, when on the night of the fourth of August, liberal aristocrats took the initiative in abolishing "feudalism". Aware of the irrevocability of the peasant action, they realized that it would be useless to oppose it. Rather the Assembly ought to legitimize it, in order both to control the movement

¹Rudé, pp. 67-68.

²Georges Lefebvre, La grande peur de 1789 (Paris, 1932), passim.

and obtain the loyalty of the peasantry. In an orgy of self-sacrifice, electrified by a highly emotional atmosphere, representatives came forward, one after the other, to propose the abolition of religious and nobiliar privileges and the abandonment of provincial and corporative prerogatives. At some point in this discussion "the deputy from Beaujolais approached the platform to request the reform of the laws relating to the guilds...and their rationalization according to the principles of justice and the common good."¹

The deputy has been identified as Charles-Antoine Chasset.² He was a lawyer and mayor of Villefranche-en-Beaujolais, and the son of a merchant clothier.³ In 1788,

¹Moniteur, I, 287.. "Le député du Beaujolais se rapproche du bureau pour stipuler la réforme des lois relatives aux corporations d'arts et métiers dans lesquelles les maîtrises sont établies, et leur perfectionnement et la réduction aux termes de la justice et de l'intérêt commun."

²Albert Mathiez, "Les corporations ont-elles été supprimées en principe dans la nuit du 4 août?", Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française (1931), p. 254.

³Joseph Balloffet, Histoire de Villfranche, capitale du Beaujolais (Villefranche, 1932), p. 273.

the Duke of Orleans had nominated him as the secretary of a newly formed Philanthropic Society.¹ He had drafted the cahier of his town whose thirty-first article had demanded the abolition of the guilds, or at least their reform.² In February 1789, the guilds of Villefranche had even had to complain to the Parlement that they had been excluded from the general assemblies of the municipality which were electing the representatives to the Estates General.³ Chasset himself was definitely antagonistic to the guilds and representative of those industrialists and reformers who desired their abolition.

The proposal that the corporative system be improved --though not necessarily abolished-- was one of the last suggestions put forward on August 4. It appeared

¹Ibid, p. 273.

²Patrick Kessel, La nuit du 4 août 1789 (Paris, 1969), p. 169; n. 674. "Que l'édit des maîtrises de l'année mil sept cent soixante-dix-sept soit abrogé ou modifié et que la plus grande liberté soit laissée aux arts et métiers ainsi qu'au commerce; sauf à donner telle autre loi qu'on jugera convenable pour le maintien des corporations et pour leur police, sans taxe, ni frais quelconque."

³Ibid, p. 169, n. 673.

as one of the last items in a succinct recapitulation published in the Moniteur Universel as "la réforme des jurandes",¹ the reform of the guilds. The text of the Moniteur has been the source of most accounts of that fateful evening, being reprinted in both the Archives Parlementaires² and Buchez and Roux's Parliamentary History of the Revolution.³ Since the Moniteur, however, did not begin official publication till November 24 1789 and all earlier reports were pieced together from various sources in the Year IV (1796),⁴ it is difficult to judge the reliability of the report. Most contemporary authorities, moreover, understood the decision of the Assembly to mean the abolition rather than the reform of the institution.

The Révolutions de Paris announced in its weekly recapitulation that the eleventh reform proposed on August

¹Moniteur, I, 288.

²Madival and Laurent, Archives Parlementaires, 1st series, 30 vols. (Paris, 1867-1914).

³B. J. B. Buchez and P. C. Roux, Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution française, 40 vols. (Paris, 1834-38).

⁴Mathiez, p. 253.

fourth had been the "suppression des jurats et maîtrises des villes", the abolition of the guilds.¹ La Salle, a deputy who made a list of proposed reforms, included the "abolition of all guilds and mastership certificates".

Ménard de la Groye noted in his journal that "the guilds were to be abolished, and Maupetit, another deputy, likewise mentioned on August 5 that the abolition of the guilds was being discussed.² In fact, Barère was the only reporter who stressed reform rather than abolition when he wrote in his newspaper, Le point du jour, that "a deputy from Beaujolais had demanded the reform of the laws relating to the guilds and their improvement if they were not to be abolished".³

¹Révolutions de Paris, I, n°11, 23.

²Kessel, p. 169. "Le député La Salle écrit, énumérant les articles arrêtés à "l'unanimité": 9^e la suppression de toutes les jurandes et brevets de maîtrise." Dans son journal, un autre député, Ménard de la Groye, note "suppression des jurandes"; et Maupetit écrira le 5 août au matin: "On parle de la suppression des jurandes et maîtrises."

³Ibid, p. 169. "Un député du Beaujolais a demandé la réformation des lois relatives aux corporations d'arts et métiers, dans les quelles les maîtrises sont établies, et leur perfectionnement, au cas où elles ne seraient pas supprimées."

Whatever Chasset's real intention had been, on August 5, Fréteau, the Assembly's secretary, recapitulated the reforms of the previous evening. The abolition of the guilds appeared in the twelfth article:¹

A national constitution and public freedom being more advantageous to the provinces than those privileges which several had enjoyed, and whose sacrifice is necessary to the intimate union of all parts of the empire, ~~It is~~ therefore resolved that all particular privileges of the provinces, principalities, cities, and corporations and communities, whether fiscal or of any other nature, being merged with those rights common to all Frenchmen, are abolished with no reversion.

It was understood that the term "community" referred to the guilds as they were commonly described as: "les communautés d'arts et métiers". Yet, on August 11, when the final and official version of the decrees was announced,

¹Moniteur, I, 293. "Une constitution nationale et la liberté publique étant plus avantageuse aux provinces que les privilèges dont quelques-unes jouissaient, et dont le sacrifice est nécessaire à l'union intime de toutes les parties de l'empire, il est déclaré que tous les privilèges particuliers des provinces, principautés, villes, corps et communautés, soit pécuniaires, soit de toute autre nature, sont abolis sans retour, et demeureront confondus dans les droits communs à tous les français."

²Mathiez, p. 255.

the article had been rewritten to read specifically "villes et communautés d'habitants", all reference to the guilds having been deleted.¹

Strong pressure from some quarter or another, must have been put on the Assembly between the sixth and eleventh of August to convince it to drop the item, at least for the time being. No record has ever been found of petitions or delegations made either by guild members or corporative supporters to the National Assembly in those five days. Nor was there any public debate, nor any echoes of the violent pamphlet war of 1776. In fact, the earliest record of guild action is a petition by the Six Corps to the mayor of Paris, Bailly, in favour of the retention of the guilds, made in November.² Neither the Moniteur nor the Révolutions de Paris commented on the omission of the item relating to the guilds. Mathiez tried to find references to the subject in the diaries of Robespierre and other deputies, but found none.³ One can only surmise

¹Moniteur, I, 333.

²Martin Saint-Léon, pp. 603-04.

³Mathiez, pp. 256-57.

that powerful forces had been at work to insure the deletion of the article.

There are further possibilities. The decrees of August 11 were made primarily in response to the uprising in the countryside by confirming the abolition of feudal dues and services. It is not unlikely that in this wider context the future of the guilds appeared an insignificant item, and was set aside in favour of grander projects. Lefebvre also suggests that the reason the item was dropped was because the third Estate itself was divided on the validity of the corporative system, a confusion evident in the cahiers.¹ Moreover, the Assembly and the Paris commune continued to be concerned about popular agitation, which was increasing in this period. It is a relevant consideration as there was a school of thought, exemplified by Chancellor Séguier's warnings after the first abolition, that the guilds functioned as restraints upon the anarchy of the masses. Confronted with the restlessness of the population, it might have been thought wise not to liberate the workers from their corporative bonds.

¹Lefebvre, The Coming of the French Revolution... p. 176, also Coornaert, p. 174.

In fact, it can be argued, that the effects of the commotion of the Parisian populace in the month of August has not been given its proper weight in the assessment of the attitude of the Assembly toward the guilds. That the populace was restless in these early August days was evident enough. The dearth of provisions and rising prices, the excitement of the days of July, the atmosphere of continued agitation, all these created unrest and perpetuated a state of tension in the capital. Reading Mayor Bailly's memoirs for the period, one can sense his terror of the potential force of the sans-culotterie.¹

The Palais Royal, which had been the scene of the first (and then useful) agitation of the Revolution, was becoming an object of anxiety to an administration which sincerely wished to bring back the peace which everyone desired. We were busy establishing a good police force in order to prevent the commotions that had been set afoot by certain ill-disposed persons, and which threatened to become dangerous.

¹Jean-Sylvain Bailly, Mémoires d'un témoin de la Révolution, 3 vols. (Paris, 1804), III, 25. "Le Palais Royal, qui avait été le théâtre des premières agitations alors utiles, devenait un objet d'inquiétudes pour une administration qui désirait sincèrement de ramener la paix dont tout le monde avait besoin. Nous étions fort occupés d'y établir une bonne police, qui prévint les commotions dirigées par les mal-intentionnés, et qui désormais ne pouvaient qu'être dangereuses."

This mistrust was directed against all forms of popular agitation. On August 7, following public disturbances sparked by the export of munitions and powder from the capital,¹ the Municipality issued an order urging all commanders of the National Guard to "take effective measures to stop all seditious gatherings."² On Monday the tenth, the National Assembly itself forbade seditious "combinations" of any kind and charged the municipalities to pursue all agitators.³

These precautions affected industrial disputes and assemblies by guild members as well. On the tenth of August the women of the Halles⁴ had been at each other's throats when rival groups of orange-girls and huckstresses, both organized in guilds, had fought over their respective monopolies.⁵ The huckstresses' complaints against the

¹Révolutions de Paris, I, n°5, 10-11.

²Bailly, VIII, 38-39. "prendre...les mesures les plus efficaces pour faire cesser les attroupements séditieux...".

³Ibid, p. 60. "L'Assemblée nationale a chargé les municipalités de poursuivre les perturbateurs, a défendu les attroupements séditieux...".

⁴central market.

⁵Révolutions de Paris, I, 17.

orange-girls were submitted to the municipality, which decreed on the eleventh that both "would remain subject to the traditional regulations of their trades until the ...Municipality...should...establish general guidelines to settle the differences which might arise between various members of that useful class of citizens; and that, till that time, and furthermore to insure order and public tranquility, the Assembly orders that the old regulations shall be observed according to their present form and purport."¹

The Municipality was perhaps justifiably concerned to restrain such squabbles between guild members, which were disturbing the public peace. The reference to law

¹Sigismond Lacroix, ed., Actes de la commune de Paris pendant la Révolution, 1st series, I, 175. "L'Assemblée générale des Représentants de la Commune, arrête que les marchandes fruitières-orangères et regrattières seront tenues de se conformer aux anciens règlements jusqu'à la formation de la Municipalité...qui, en établissant les règles générales, statuera sur les différentes réclamations relatives à cette classe de citoyens si utiles; et jusqu'à ce moment pour assurer d'autant plus l'ordre et la tranquillité publique, l'Assemblée ordonne que les anciens règlements seront exécutés selon leur forme et teneur;..."

and order, which was repeated in every decision concerning labour disputes, revealed the extent of the anxiety. On August 16, we find the Municipality issuing a general decree in reply to a demand by the community of butchers that an end should be put to current abuses in the rental of stalls. The decree required all guilds to follow their traditional regulations and expressed the Commune's concern with the unrest which the deliberations of the National Assembly were inadvertently stimulating.¹

° In relating these events, Bailly made the observation:

The effects of the decrees of the fourth of August were felt particularly in the guilds: all rebelled against the privileges of the masters. The National Assembly, however, had taken no firm decision concerning the future of the guilds; and although one might expect that the liberty of commerce would necessitate their abolition, it was fitting, before permitting total freedom, to know which regulations the Assembly would wish to add to the decree, and to maintain the old regulations in force until new ones were decided. This was the spirit expressed in the National Assembly, and one I brought into the administration... The Municipality had decreed on the sixteenth that the regulations concerning the butchers' guild should continue to be respected. But resistance was general, the forces at our disposal

¹ Ibid, I, 235.

were inadequate and difficult to use, and license and breaches of the law grew daily. 1

The Municipality's decrees had also stressed such terms as "license" and "disorder". Order would be kept if the guild members obeyed their statutes. This was clearly enunciated in the decision concerning the disputes of the ladies of the Halles. If there were no guilds to send them back to, and no regulations to observe, the verdict was plain enough: anarchy was bound to increase.

The same principle was applied to workers' demonstrations taking place in the latter part of the month. On the eighteenth, masters and journeymen tailors, and jour-

¹Bailly, III, 89. "L'effet des décrets du 4 août se fit sentir particulièrement dans les corps et métiers; tout se souleva contre les privilèges des maîtres. L'Assemblée nationale cependant n'avait rien statué sur les jurandes; et quoique l'on put prévoir d'avance que la liberté du commerce nécessiterait leur suppression, il était convenable, avant de laisser toute liberté de savoir de quels règlements l'Assemblée voudrait l'accompagner, et maintenir les anciens jusqu'à ce que les nouveaux fussent faits. C'était l'esprit de l'Assemblée nationale, c'était celui que j'avais apporté dans l'administration... Les représentants de la commune avaient pris un arrêté le 16 pour que les règlements concernant la communauté des bouchers fussent exécutés. Mais la résistance était générale et universelle, la force publique n'était pas assez grande, il était difficile de l'employer, et la license et les infractions gagnaient tous les jours du terrain."

neyemen wigmakers assembled independently to petition for industrial reforms.¹ Bailly responded to the demonstrations by dispatching troops to disperse them, and although he admitted that there was some justice in their cause, he feared their assembly.² On the twenty-first, the Commune took a firmer stand, and announced that it would prosecute all those who either took part in or incited such seditious gatherings.³

In some cases, however, the Municipality responded to workers' requests. The journeymen tailors were granted a raise in wages,⁴ and the wigmakers received a partial recognition of their grievances against the clerks of their guild who abused their power in the distribution of

¹Révolutions de Paris, I, n°6, 27.

²Bailly, III, 91.

³Lacroix, I, 298. This did not stop demonstrations by guild members to achieve better working conditions. Domestic servants gathered on the twentieth of August, journeymen shoemakers assembled on the thirty-first, and the compagnons apothecaries congregated on the ninth of September. All were admonished and threatened by the Municipality. Ibid, I, 548, n. 3.

⁴Révolutions de Paris, I, n°6, 27.

work permits.¹ Yet the masters tailors were rebuffed when they petitioned for a limitation of the activities of the old-clothes dealers, and demanded monopoly over the trade. In this case, the Municipality explained its refusal by stating that the demand "was contrary to the spirit of the time".²

In refusing the tailors' request, the Municipality also revealed why it continued to insist that the old regulations should be observed. This insistence stemmed neither from a philosophical approval of the corporative system, nor from a belief in the validity of its monopolies and methods of production. It showed that its appeals to regulations were intended to contain all potential popular action, and not to uphold the old prerogatives in themselves. So it appears evident enough that both the Paris Commune and the National Assembly wished to maintain the guilds as barriers against public disorder. This

¹Ibid, I, n°6, 27. The district of the Saint-Augustins granted the request that the price of the work card be significantly reduced.

²Ibid, I, n°6, 15. "La seconde demande...heurte les opinions du jour."

attitude arose both from a general mistrust of popular agitation and a fear of the political force of the people at large. The Assembly had by now begun to discuss the royal veto, and it was clear that those deputies who favoured a "suspensive" veto¹ could count on widespread popular support, while the more conservative advocates of a total veto were fearful of the consequences of such an appeal to the sans-culottes. The "Monarchiens", in fact, even conceived of the removal of the Assembly from Versailles to Soissons or Compiègne,² where it would not be subject to public pressure. Their anxiety proved to be justified since it was through the combined action of the populace and the Breton club (nucleus of the later Jacobins) within the Assembly that the August decrees and the suspensive veto were passed, and that the King and the Assembly were brought in October to Paris, where they

¹The "suspensive" veto merely gave the King the power to reject legislation for two legislative sessions (four years). If after that delay the Assembly still requested the passage of the legislation, it would then automatically become law.

²Jean Egret, La Révolution des Notables, Mounier et les Monarchiens (Paris, 1950), p. 170.

were placed under the watchful eye of the Parisian sans-culottes.

There has inevitably, in view of the lack of clear documentary evidence, been some controversy among historians on the intentions of the National Assembly regarding the guilds. Mathiez was able to refute the argument that the guilds had either been abolished in fact or in principle on the night of the fourth of August.¹ Some earlier authors, Lacroix and Pouthas for example, had been unaware of the omission of the item relating to the guilds in the final version of August 11, or had misunderstood its import, and therefore assumed that the guilds had been abolished along with other privileges. Most other authorities have tended to agree with Mathiez,² and have discounted any intention on the part of the Assembly to destroy the guild system till its eventual dissolution by a decree of March 1791. The Russian historian Tarlé, for example, based his opinion that the guilds had been abol-

¹Mathiez, p. 253.

²Both guild historians and historians of the Revolution.

ished, in principle at least; on a misreading of Bailly.¹ What Bailly had said was that the guild regulations were being disregarded, not that the institution itself had been dissolved. In fact, it becomes a purely academic exercise to attempt to argue the point merely on the basis of parliamentary debates. In order to establish the actual status of the corporations after the August decrees, we must also consider the reaction of the guild members themselves. Generally they appeared to have been thoroughly confused as to what the position actually was. Bailly relates that, following the fourth of August debate, many workers, expecting the guilds to be abolished, had set up shop without mastership certificates. Yet, at the same time, they were assembling as guild members and petitioning for improvements to be made. The August movements made no direct mention of dissolution, and the masters themselves, if they harboured secret doubts, nevertheless acted with the utmost assurance, bickering over trade monopolies as acrimoniously as they had in the past. This confusion over the issue of the guilds only increased with the Declaration

¹Eugheni Tarlé, La classe operaia nella rivoluzione francese, 2 vols. (Rome, 1960), I, 109-10.

of the Rights of Man, which, by according individual liberty, gave rise to new misconceptions.

The Declaration of the Rights of Man was conceived as a preamble to the constitution. The discussion of the document began in the Assembly on August 17, when Mirabeau presented the first draft on behalf of his committee.¹

The eleventh article stated that

Every citizen has the right to acquire, to possess, to manufacture and to trade, and to use his faculties and skills and to dispose of his possessions as he pleases...²

In the final draft, these principles of economic liberty were limited to the protection of property (article XVII), and to a declaration of individual freedom (article IV):³

Liberty consists in the ability to do whatever does not harm another; hence the exercise of natural rights

¹The sixth bureau of the Comité on the Constitution.

²Buchez and Roux, I, 273. "Tout citoyen a le droit d'acquérir, de posséder, de fabriquer, de faire le commerce, d'employer ses facultés et son industrie, et de disposer à son gré de ses propriétés..."

³Lefebvre, The Coming of the French Revolution, pp. 221-22.

of each man has no limits except those which assure to other members of society the enjoyment of the same rights. These limits can only be determined by law.

Although the Declaration has appeared to later generations as a statement of general philosophical principles, the articles seemed to contemporaries to be relevant enough to their own experience.¹ This experience made them well aware of all those abuses against individual and collective rights of the Ancien Régime which the Declaration was seeking to correct.² It is therefore understandable that the fourth article was misinterpreted and taken quite literally by journeymen who saw it as a confirmation that they had been freed from corporative bonds and could work and set up their own shops as they pleased. As evidence of this wider belief there is a pamphlet written by a M. Jabin which appeared at about this time -- or so it would appear from its contents. It was written in response to an anonymous plea for the retention both of the privileges of priests and of the guilds. Jabin answered his opponent by claiming that the principles of the fourth

¹Ibid, p. 173.

²Ibid, pp. 173-74.

of August and the Declaration of the Rights of Man necessitated the abolition of the corporative system which had caused abominable inequalities as well as the ruin of trade.¹

So the decrees of August 4 and the Declaration of the Rights of Man could be, and indeed were, used to argue the necessity and the inevitability of the abolition of the corporative system. The decrees of August 11 had not destroyed the guilds, yet the night of the fourth of August had been decisive. It somehow came to embody the "spirit" of the revolution and to stand out in the popular imagination far more clearly than the actual decisions reached on the eleventh, which omitted several items, while watering down many others. It may be that the guilds were not abolished because the Assembly was divided on the question. But this is mere conjecture. Its attitude appears to have been closely similar to that of the Paris Municipality which upheld guild statutes in order to keep order.

¹M. de Jabin, Maitre-ès-Arts, Liberté du commerce, abolition des maîtrises et jurandes, suppression des moines (Paris, 1789?), 7p. (B. N. Lb39 7882), pp. 5-6.

in the capital, and not to protect guild privileges as such. If the guilds were not actually dissolved in the month of August, the proposal that they should be was the prelude to their eventual demise. The eighteen months which followed witnessed an increase in the pressure for abolition, as well as the last desperate attempts of the guild masters to preserve their traditional prerogatives.

CHAPTER IV

ABOLITION

The months which followed the October journées were relatively peaceful. Until the flight of the royal family and their capture at Varennes in June 1791, activity both inside and outside the Assembly was mainly focused on the recasting of old institutions and on the elaboration of the promised constitution. Economic conditions improved with plentiful crops and bread, which had cost 14½ sous for a four-pound loaf in July 1789, for some months did not rise above twelve.¹ Wages, however, remained stationary.² Meanwhile, there had been no slackening of industrial activity. Despite the steady stream of emigration following the defeat of July 14, the Assembly's twelve hundred deputies and their dependents provided a new market for goods. If the tailors clothed fewer foot-

¹Rudé, pp. 78-81.

²Ibid., p. 84.

men, they were busy sewing uniforms for the National Guard.¹ Specialized tradesmen, such as the masons and carpenters, prospered as well.² For the rest, however, conditions remained wretched and grumblings could be heard. In 1790 the workers of the royal manufactories of the Gobelins, Sèvres, Savonnerie, and Beauvais demanded better working conditions and successfully agitated for a rise in wages.³ Yet these were only partial movements and it was not until after the guilds had been abolished (in March) that a more general wages movement began in April 1791.

On September 2 1789 the National Assembly had decreed the formation of a Committee of Agriculture and Commerce. Its purpose was to deal with all matters relating to agriculture and trade, and to prepare reports for the Assembly to examine once its work on the constitution had been completed.⁴ This explains the delay in dealing

¹Grace Jaffé, Mouvement ouvrier à Paris pendant la Révolution française (1789-1791) (Paris, n. d.), pp. 91-93.

²Edmond Soreau, Ouvriers et paysans de 1789 à 1792 (Paris, 1936), p. 135.

³Ibid., p. 150.

⁴Arch. Parl., VIII, 548.

with the guilds. The Committee was composed of thirty-four members chosen according to region. The chairman was the Marquis de Bonnay, a conservative aristocrat, who emigrated in 1792.¹ The vice-chairman was another noble, Hertault de la Merville, who had served as a marine officer and administrator of the province of Berry. The Economist Du Pont de Nemours was named associate secretary, while the count of Herwynn, an agronomist, became the first secretary.² Ten members stated their profession, as négo-
ciant. They represented Alençon, Alsace, Bordeaux, Bour-
gogne, Champagne, Lyons, Montpellier, Picardy, Toulouse,
and Tours. The deputies from Auch, Barrois and Lorraine,
Bayonne and Pau, Brittany, Cambrésis and Hainault, Clermont,
the Three Bishoprics, and Metz, La Rochelle, Orléans, and
Perpignan and Roussillon, had been lawyers or members of
their provincial Parlement. The representatives for
Corsica and Saint-Domingue were both nobles, the member

¹J.-F. Robinet, Dictionnaire historique et biogra-
phique de la Révolution et de l'Empire 1789-1815, 2 vols.
(Paris, 1899), passim. All the professions and descriptions
of deputies which follow have been drawn from these vol-
umes.

²Arch. Parli., VIII, 601.

for Aix is described as a bourgeois, and the deputy for Soissons, Bailly, is termed a laboureur. The professions of the member for Gaen, Franche-Comté, Grenoble, Limoges, Poitiers, and Rouen have not been identified. In the next two years, five members had to be replaced either due to death or to resignation, and their seats were taken by M. Dauchy, landowner and farmer, MM. Hell and Sieyès, both advocates, M. de Boufflers, a liberal aristocrat, and M. Mayot, whose profession and associations are unknown.¹

Although most of the representatives of the tiers, as is known, came from the basoche,² approximately one third of the members of the Committee were wholesale merchants, and several more agronomists. The majority held progressive views and sat on the left in the Assembly.³ The Committee convened on Mondays and Fridays. On September 16, one of the members suggested that the Committee change its name, adding "and of manufactures" to its title. Since industrial activity was an important component of

¹Arch. Parl., XXXII, 543.

²All those connected with the legal profession.

³Robinet, *passim*.

trade, it was agreed that the Committee ought to concern itself not only with trade and agriculture but with industrial questions as well.¹

Between September 1789 and March 1791, the Committee received about a hundred petitions regarding the guilds. Half were written by compagnons who, while frequently demanding abolition, were more concerned to eliminate the masterships than the guilds themselves. Masters sent another thirty, petitioning for the retention of the old statutes. Some guilds, it is true, accepted an eventual abolition but demanded compensation. Fifteen requests revealed the persisting confusion in which the issue stood, by asking whether the guilds had been abolished or not, while several more demanded that the Assembly decree one way or the other. Not all petitions sent by artisans or industrialists dealt with the guilds. The usual complaints were voiced against the colporteurs. Industrialists forwarded requests for privileged manufactures, as well as numerous pamphlets detailing schemes for the im-

¹Fernand Gerboux and Charles Schmidt, Procès-verbaux des comités d'agriculture et de commerce de la Constituante, de la Législative et de la Convention, 3 vols. (Paris, 1906).

provement of industry. Merchants concentrated on their particular interests, requesting the maintenance of the franchise of their cities, petitioning for the retention of slavery, or demanding that the free-trade treaty of 1786 be rescinded. On September 23 1789 the manufacturers of Abbeville even requested that all rural manufacture be prohibited.¹

On November 30 1789 the Committee received its first petition demanding the abolition of the guilds. It was sent by a négociant from Rennes.² Petitions filtered in slowly, and only in the spring of 1790 did the tempo quicken. Most of the petitions constituted almost a dialogue between masters and journeymen. The master wigmakers and compagnons of that trade were the most vocal. The journeymen forwarded twenty-one petitions, both individual and collective, expressing their opposition to mastership certificates. In most cases they had set up on their own following the decrees of August 4 and were being prosecuted by their masters. They asked to be main-

¹Ibid, I, 22.

²Ibid, I, 71.

tained in their profession, and that all masterships be annulled. Such petitions came from all over the country, demonstrating the scope of the opposition to the guilds. Three of these petitions had been sent from Angoulême, two from Grenoble, and two from Limoges, and one each from Archac, Chatellerault, Clermont-Ferrand, Cognac, Laon, Loches, Nancy, Nantes, Nevers, Niort, Paris, Poitiers, Sens, and Toulouse. The masters wigmakers of Bordeaux, Chatellerault, Dijon, Douai, Laon, La Rochelle, Marseille, Metz, Paris, Pezenas, and Saint-Quentin responded as if on cue. They protested the insubordination of the journeymen, and asked the Committee to endorse their prosecutions of wage-earners disregarding guild regulations. They also requested the Committee to issue a directive forbidding all journeymen to work outside the guilds. A parallel situation divided the masters and journeymen tailors. The masters of Montbrison reiterated the complaints against those compagnons who had set up shop on their own, while the journeymen tailors of La Flèche, Rouen and Strasbourg asked to be allowed to work without mastership certificates.

Other masters expressed their attachment to the

old guild monopoly by other means. Thus, the merchant-merciers of Abbeville, Agen, Amboise, Boulogne-sur-Mer, Honfleur, Lisieux, Nantes, Noyons, Richelieu, and Saint-Quentin, as well as the Parisian hosiers made no complaints against the compagnons, but asked for protection against the competition of pedlars and itinerant merchants. Butchers presented another set of grievances. Their guilds were controlled by powerful oligarchies who owned all the stalls and rented them to individual masters. In August 1789, as we have seen, the butchers had begun to protest the methods of rental and to set up shop independently, and had become involved in controversies with the owners of stalls. The Committee received several petitions from butchers -- from Paris, Versailles, Tours, La Rochelle, and Brittany -- who petitioned to be maintained in their new independence. The owners of the Parisian stalls, on the other hand, aired their grievances against the butchers, and won their case as the Committee decided on May 10 1790 that the old regulations regarding the rental of stalls should remain in force until they were specifically repealed by the National Assembly.

¹Gerbaux and Schmidt, I, 272.

Most other petitions were written by compagnons in various trades and various parts of France, who had also misinterpreted the decrees of August and, faced with the wrath of the masters, were petitioning for the right to work outside the guilds. These included requests from a journeyman shoemaker of the Havre de Grâce, a locksmith from Laon, a lemonade-seller from Nancy, a Parisian mason, and a compagnon hosier from Lyons. Two petitions had been sent by carpenters from Bourg and Rennes. A mercer from Saint-Quentin, who had set up shop and was being prosecuted by the merchant-mercers of that town, appealed to the Committee for support. A hairdresser from Nantes and a compagnon jeweller from Brignolles protested against the abuses of masters, while a master jeweller from Beauvais expressed his unqualified approval of the guild system as it stood.

The Committee also received several collective pleas, which were sent in the names of all journeymen or masters of a given locality. On March 26 1790, it acknowledged receipt of a petition by 3 000 compagnons of Nantes who demanded abolition.¹ The artisans of Lisieux, on the

¹ Ibid., I, 240.

other hand, petitioned for the retention of their privileges, at least until the Assembly had issued a final decree.¹

Not all the opposition to the guild system stemmed from the journeymen. Merchants and industrialists also voiced their discontent with the system of regulation. On September 22 1790 the textile manufacturers of Rouen complained against the inspection bureaux, and the stamping of cloths.² Several weeks later, the woolen manufacturers of Montauban denounced the special privileges of the royal manufactories, and their use of a special seal.³ In March 1791, the Committee received a final petition from the textile manufacturers of Beaujolais requesting that inspection and stamping be abolished.⁴

At least fifteen petitions sent to the Committee asked for advice and clarification of the status of the

¹Ibid., I, 586.

²Ibid., I, 553. December 13 1790.

³Ibid., I, 706. March 4 1791.

⁴Ibid., II, 95.

guilds. The first letter came from M. Chassey,¹ on behalf of the municipality of Villefranche-en-Beaujolais, regarding the suspension of the guilds. The chairman was instructed to tell M. Chassey that the Committee intended to deal with this question, and, until it had reached a decision, the chairman was also to suggest that M. Chassey try to restore peace and goodwill among his fellow townsmen.² In the following months the Committee was to be the repeated object of such inquiries. In March 1790, the merchants of Abbeville asked guidance on the course of action to be taken against those people who were setting up shop without taking masterships.³ The lieutenant-general of Pontoise, the Municipality of Laon, a deputy from Moulins, the guild masters of Toulouse, the merchants of Boulogne-sur-Mer, and the butchers of La Rochelle, all wished to know whether or not the guilds had been abolished, and if not, whether they would be.⁴ The Municipalities of Périgueux and Rennes went further

¹Could this be Chasset, the deputy from Villefranche? See above, p. 86.

²Gerbaux and Schmidt, I, 97.

²Ibid, I, 177.

³Ibid, I, 223, 405, 408, 511, 518.

and urged that the National Assembly reach some decision on the future of the guilds.¹ More than one address expressed dissatisfaction with the indcisiveness of the Assembly. The wardens of the guilds of Commercy and Tours, a locksmith from Laon, and M. de Cussy, the deputy from Caen all insisted that the matter be settled one way or the other.²

The initial reaction of the Committee had been to dismiss all petitions dealing with the guilds. The words "il n'y a pas lieu à délibérer" (there is no need for discussion) follows most of the summaries of the petitions within the minutes of the Committee. On July 30 1790, the chairman, nevertheless, requested the advice of his committee on the numerous petitions with which he was being bombarded. "The Committee authorized him to answer that since the National Assembly had not yet issued a decree regarding this question, the old regulations were to be observed until they were specifically repealed."³

¹Ibid, I, 503, 545.

²Ibid, I, 328, 416; II, 4 and I, 630.

³Ibid, I, 420-21. "Le Comité l'a autorisé à

On August 18, and again on September 30, the member for Orleans, Gillet de la Jaqueminière, insisted that the Committee delegate one of its members to prepare a report so that when the question of the guilds should be raised in the Assembly, the Committee would be ready to discuss it.¹ Some members objected to dealing with the matter at that particular juncture, feeling that there was a danger that emotions would be aroused amongst the population. Gillet, however, signified that he did not consider putting the matter before the Assembly before the Committee was obliged to do so, but merely suggested it should be prepared when the time arrived. The Committee adopted his proposal, and charged M. de Boufflers to draw up a preliminary report.² From that time on, all petitions relating to the guilds were handed to Boufflers.

Soon after, a question arose in the Assembly whose resolution touched the future of the guilds. On the

(cont'd) répondre que l'Assemblée nationale n'ayant rendu aucun décret sur ces objets, les anciennes lois devaient être observées jusqu'à ce qu'elle y ait dérogé expressément."

¹Ibid, I, 468.

²Ibid, I, 530.

seventeenth of October, Boufflers presented the Committee with the draft of an edict on the right of patents. The preamble stated that "the National Assembly, judging that each new idea, which can be useful to society, belongs in the first place to the one who conceived it, and that it would be a serious infringement of human rights not to consider an industrial invention as the property of its inventor; considering further that the lack of such a declaration up to now has served as an impediment to French industry by driving away its most distinguished technicians who by emigrating have provided foreign nations with new inventions from which this kingdom ought to have been the first to profit...".¹ The Assembly, therefore, decreed that each new invention should remain the property

¹Ibid, I, 656. "L'Assemblée nationale, considérant que toute idée nouvelle, qui peut devenir utile à la société appartient primitivement à celui qui l'a conçue; en conséquence, que ce serait attaquer les droits de l'homme dans leur essence que de ne pas regarder une découverte industrielle comme la propriété de son inventeur; considérant aussi bien le défaut d'une déclaration positive a contribué jusqu'à présent, à décourager l'industrie française en éloignant du royaume les artistes les plus distingués et en faisant passer à l'étranger un grand nombre d'inventions dont cet empire aurait dû tirer les premiers avantages..."

of its inventor, for a period which was yet to be determined, as long as the invention had been properly described and duly registered. The Assembly discussed and adopted the proposal on December 30 1790. This recognition of an individual's right to profit from his own invention had, of course, been denied by the guilds. So, piece by piece, guild privilege was being eroded.

On September 15, the Committee received a petition from a ladies' hairdresser who, three weeks previously, had established himself in Nantes by permission of the Mayor. The masters of his trade, however, had seized all his belongings. His wife had fallen ill from fear and, as he had two small children to support, he asked that his goods be restored.¹ On November 29, Boufflers recommended that a letter be sent to the Municipality advising it to deal kindly with this man, until the Assembly had legislated on the guilds.² The Committee, anticipating an imminent decree on the corporations, was thus edging away from any categorical support of the old regulations.

¹Ibid, I, 546.

²Ibid, I, 679.

On the fourth of February 1791, d'Allarde appeared before the Committee of Agriculture, Commerce, and Manufactures, to present the draft of a decree which had been drawn up in his own Committee of Public Contributions.¹ He submitted that the duties on drinks, except those levied by the towns, ought to be annulled, and that the guilds should be abolished too.² He was to make the same proposal in the National Assembly on the fifteenth of the same month.

The impression one gains from reading the minutes of the Committee of Agriculture, Commerce, and Manufactures, is that the abolition, or reform, of the guilds, was taken for granted. It was understood that it was merely a question of time before the Assembly would legislate on the question. Until that time, however, the Committee would

¹The members of that Committee were Dupont de Nemours, the Physiocrat, the Duc de la Rochefoucault, a liberal aristocrat, Adrien Duport, counsellor in the Paris-Parlement, Talleyrand, former bishop of Autun, Moneron l'Ainé d'Annonay, a négociant, Laborde de Méréville, former keeper of the royal treasury, Fermond des Chapellières, d'Allarde, a one-time captain, and Roederer, former counsellor and known for his liberal leanings. Arch., Parl., XXXII, 556.

²Gerbaux and Schmidt, II, 23-28.

uphold the old statutes, and try to restore order amongst artisans by appealing to existing regulations. The petitions themselves had little effect. Most not only remained unanswered, but were totally disregarded. The only time the Committee seemed to hesitate and was stirred to action was when it received enquiries from officials about the future of the institution and the course of action to be taken regarding the privileges of masters. Rather than any individual petition, it was the crescendo of such requests that finally spurred the Committee to prepare a report. The situation seemed to be getting out of hand; it was no longer enough to wait for an Assembly decree. And it looks as if Boufflers was already in the act of devising such legislation when d'Allarde appeared with a proposal of his own.

Even though they received such cavalier treatment in the Committee, the petitions themselves are revealing. The opinions of artisans on the guilds have generally been assessed from the cahiers. These, however, were drafted by the masters and contain very little direct information about the attitudes of compagnons. The Committee, on the

other hand, received at least fifty petitions from journeymen who requested to be allowed to work without masterships, while five, one of which spoke for 3 000 men, specifically demanded the abolition of the guilds. The petitions also made clear that many compagnons, throughout France, had interpreted the decisions of the fourth of August to mean the abolition of the guilds, and had begun to work outside the system. The masters, on the other hand, defended their privileges. Most of the letters registered grievances against journeymen who had set up independently following the August decrees. The Committee also received petitions from manufacturers who wished to liberate themselves from guild inspection. Industrialists, however, concentrated on other aspects, requesting the abolition of dues and seals, and of internal duties, asking for financial support to establish manufactures, complaining about the ruin of commerce since the treaty of 1786, rather than complaining directly about corporative restraints.

By the winter of 1790 the guilds were nearing collapse. Their regulations were no longer observed and journeymen and industrialists ignored guild monopolies and

worked or manufactured outside their control. The Assembly had also gradually undermined the validity of the system. On December 14, 1789, the Paris Commune had decreed, in accordance with the Assembly's reorganization of municipal institutions, that the guilds would no longer assemble to elect municipal representatives. Henceforth only assemblies of citizens were to convene for such a purpose.¹ The guilds were losing their political, if not their economic, power. On March 22 1790, the National Assembly abolished the stamping of leather and iron goods, and all dues affecting the manufacture and transport of soap and oil.² In December 1790, it abolished the venality of offices, and established criteria for compensation. Since the guilds had obtained these offices, and some members actually owed their positions to the purchase of masterships, they were subject to this new law. Later that month, the Assembly adopted the law on patents for invention.

On February 15 1791, the National Assembly received

¹Martin Saint-Léon, p. 603, and Mathiez, p. 255.

²Les Révolutions de Paris, III, n°37, 51, and n°38, 42.

a petition by 2,316 Lyonnais asking that the guilds be dissolved.¹ Little did they realize how quickly their request would be answered. That very day, d'Allarde rose, in the name of the Committee of Public Contributions, to propose the abolition of the corporative system. He linked the proposed edict to the growing fiscal needs of the Assembly and to the impossibility of taxing merchants and artisans, since these merely countered by raising the price of goods. Instead a patent tax would be established which would be paid by all merchants and craftsmen and, since it would be a moderate and regularly-paid fee, it was hoped that it stood less of a chance of being transferred to the consumer. "Your committee has felt that this tax ought to be linked with a great benefit to industry and commerce, that is, to the abolition of the guilds, which, in your wisdom, you should destroy, if only because they represent exclusive privileges. The right to work is one of the primary rights of man; this right is his property, and is also without doubt, according to the expression used by the minister-philosopher who anticipated your thoughts on this matter, "the first, the most sacred

and the most unalienable of properties'.¹

D'Allarde went on to criticize the guild system, its monopolies, its treatment of apprentices, compagnons, and foreigners, its rejection of innovation and competition, its manœuvres to raise the price of goods, its lawsuits, and its debts. Since masters had purchased their privileges, they would have to be reimbursed, at least partially. They would not be despoiled, but instead would receive an indemnity which could be usefully invested in trade. "This freedom conforms to the interest of the négociants, it also conforms to their patriotism. Should one claim that it is opposed to the interests of trade? Industry is the soul of commerce, and liberty is the soul of industry."²

¹ Moniteur, VII, 396. "Votre comité a cru qu'il fallait lier l'existence de cet impôt à un grand bienfait pour l'industrie et pour le commerce, à la suppression des jurandes et maîtrises, que votre sagesse doit anéantir par cela seul qu'elles sont des privilèges exclusifs. La faculté de travailler est un des premiers droits de l'homme; ce droit est sa propriété, et c'est sans doute suivant l'expression de ce ministre philosophe qui avait deviné quelques-unes de vos pensées, c'est sans doute 'la première propriété, la plus sacrée, la plus imprescriptible'." The minister in question was Turgot. See above, p. 60.

² Ibid, VII, 396. "Cette liberté était conforme aux intérêts des négociants, elle est conforme à leur patriotisme. Dirait-on qu'elle est opposée à l'intérêt du

Instead of purchasing membership in guilds, tradesmen would acquire patents which would be paid for by an annual fee proportional to rent.

The edict which followed contained twenty articles.¹ The first, which concerned the abolition of duties on drinks, was debated and approved separately. The second declared the guilds abolished, the third and fourth made provisions for the presentation of certificates from which indemnities would be determined. The fifth article stated that all those who had obtained mastership certificates after April 1 1790 should receive a full indemnity, while the rest should have one-thirtieth of the value subtracted for each year they had enjoyed the privilege. Nevertheless, the deduction would not go beyond two-thirds of the price of the masterships--as they had been determined by the edict of August 1776. The sixth article concerned the debts of the guilds which the state now took over. The seventh dealt with the transfer of guild funds, the eighth

(cont'd) commerce? L'âme du commerce est l'industrie, l'âme de l'industrie est la liberté."

¹Ibid, VII, 399-400, 404-06.

declared the freedom of work; the tenth and eleventh stated the times at which patents could be obtained, the twelfth article gave the price of patents. Those who paid up to 400 livres in rent, would spend 2 sous per livre on their patent; from 400 to 800 livres, 2 sous 6 deniers, and 3 sous for each livre above 800 livres of rent. The thirteenth article declared that all craftsmen and merchants, except for apprentices, journeymen, and those who paid less than three days work in taxes, would have to acquire patents, and, beginning April 1 1791, would not be permitted to work without them. The bakers would only have to pay half the price of the patent¹ (article XIV); street vendors and retailers in the Halles would be totally exempt² (article XV); while those who wished to sell alcoholic beverages or own taverns or inns in addition to following another profession would have to pay an added fee (XVI), or they might purchase temporary permits lasting three to six months (XVII). Pedlars both in country districts and

¹The reason for this was to prevent the price of bread from rising. Moniteur, VII, 397.

²To prevent the price of vegetables, fish and other food from rising. Moniteur, VII, 397.

cities, would also have to acquire patents (XVIII and XX). Finally, article XIX established that 2 sous of each livre paid for a patent should go to the municipalities.

On March 2, the Assembly voted ten supplementary articles describing the penalties to be applied to those who failed to acquire these certificates.¹ On the twenty-sixth, d'Allarde added provisions to reimburse the Parisian guilds the 800,000 livres still outstanding from a 1,500,000 livres "gift" they had made to the King in 1782, ostensibly for the purchase of a ship.² Provisions were also included to compensate landlords who had leased houses to the guilds. On April 20, it was agreed that masters who had abandoned their profession before April 1 1789 should not receive an indemnity. In order that no mistake be made, the wardens of the guilds were instructed to draw membership lists and have them approved and signed by municipal officers.³

¹Ibid, VII, 523-24.

²Arch., Parl., XXIV, 379-80.

³Ibid, XXV, 212.

The reaction to the edict was favourable on the whole. The Révolutions de Paris rejoiced in the abolition but regretted that the octrois¹ had not been abolished by the same stroke.² Only Marat expressed his displeasure. The abolition would impoverish the state, reduce industry and commerce, ruin the quality of goods; and destroy the discipline and training of artisans. "When each worker can work on his own, he ceases to wish to work for others; henceforth there will be no more workshops, manufacture, or commerce."³

But there were also dissenting voices. The guilds, of course, denounced the abolition. On March 30, the Committee of Agriculture, Commerce and Manufactures received petitions from the guilds of Le Havre which protested both against the abolition of their privileges and the

¹custom posts at the entry to cities.

²Les Révolutions de Paris, VII, n°84, 266-67.

³Cited by Jean Jaurès, Histoire socialiste de la Révolution française, 4 vols. (Paris, 1968), I, 872.

"Lorsque chaque ouvrier peut travailler pour son compte, il cesse de vouloir travailler pour le compte des autres; dès lors plus d'ateliers, plus de manufactures, plus de commerce."

favours accorded to the colporteurs.¹ On May 2, the masters and wardens of the guild of the weights-and-scales-makers of Rouen complained against abolition.² The National Assembly received a petition by a merchant mercer who objected to the law on patents, feeling that the indemnity accorded to masters was too small.³ Lagrénée, an agent of the Six Corps of Paris, petitioned the Assembly for a compensation or pension in recognition of his many years of service.⁴ The Assembly, however, had rejected a proposal, made by d'Allarde on April 20, that the clerks and other officers of the guilds receive financial aid.⁵ It would already have to disburse 22 million livres to the wigmakers alone, and approximately 15 million more for the other masterships.⁶

¹ Gerbaux and Schmidt, II, 133. ² Ibid, II, 210.

³ Pétition à l'Assemblée nationale par un marchand mercier sur le droit de patente (Paris, 1791) 16p. (B.N. Vp 6389).

⁴ Adresse à l'Assemblée nationale par le sieur Lagrénée (Paris, 1791) 10 p. (B.N. Ln27 11067).

⁵ Arch. Parl., XXV, 213.

⁶ Moniteur, VII, 397.

It may indeed seem curious that the National Assembly, which established patents in order to raise funds, should then disburse some forty million livres. The revenues from the patents were evidently expected to compensate this expenditure and eventually to provide a handsome return. The municipalities had been awarded one tenth of the price of patents. On August 29, the Paris municipality projected that in the next few months, that is until the first of January 1792, it would earn 60,000 livres from the patents alone.¹ The government would therefore receive the other 540,000 livres, in that same period, in Paris alone.

The Parisian municipality had been very thorough in its organization of the patent bureaux. It had plunged readily into the bureaucratic fray, quibbling over the number and payment of clerks, the inscription on the stamps, and arguing over which bureau would be in charge of what. It was finally agreed that the taxation office should handle the certificates.² The patent bureau, with head-

¹Lacroix, VI, 205.

²Ibid, III, 568.

quarters at the hôtel Soubise, opened on April 15 1791.¹ On the sixth of June, the Municipality gave its first hint that all was not going as well as expected with the distribution of patents. To ease the process, it offered artisans and merchants the option of deducting the price of the certificate from the indemnity they were to receive for their masterships.² This announcement did not have the required effect, and, on June 26, the deadline for registration which had been set for the thirtieth of June, had to be extended to July 31.³ On July 22, the deadline was moved forward once more.⁴ On September 30, the Municipality became angry. Only 20,000 patents had been issued, while it was known that there had been some 30,000 taxable guild members. Furthermore, since the abolition of the guilds, many compagnons had set up shop on their own, and professionals such as advocates and bankers, who had not been previously organized, were also required to obtain patents. Since the repeated injunctions and efforts of the Municipality had been ineffective, it would now turn

¹Ibid, III, 591.

²Ibid, IV, 497.

³Ibid, V, 179.

⁴Ibid, V, 473.

to compulsion. Lists of craftsmen would be drawn up, specifying the amount they spent on rent, and the price of their patents. They would be notified, and if they failed to register within a week, would be prosecuted in the manner prescribed by the Assembly in its decrees of March 2. The penalties included fines, seizures, as well as the payment of a triple fee for the work certificate. The officers in charge of distributing indemnities for masterships would be informed that those who had not paid their patents would be counted amongst those who had given up their professions and were therefore no longer liable for compensation.¹ This last edict must have had some effect, since the only complaints registered by the Municipality after that were against the frauds introduced in the duplication of certificates.²

The abolition of the guilds provoked some resistance to the law on patents, even if it was only a passive one. But the dissolution of the system also led to public disorders. "Ever since the news of the abolition of the

¹Ibid, VI, 536-38.

²Ibid, VII, 148.

guilds reached Montpellier", came a report, "the city has been in a state of violent agitation."¹ In Paris, the decrees stimulated worker demonstrations. The legislation of February and March 1791 may have abolished the guilds and enabled compagnons to work independently, but it was certainly not intended that wage-earners should challenge the power of employers. In April and May the journeymen carpenters,² farriers, shoemakers, locksmiths, and joiners assembled to demand raises in wages and a ten-hour working day.³ The master farriers even feared a general combination of all Parisian workers.⁴ Petitions were sent to the National Assembly, and the master carpenters specifically warned of the dangers of worker "coalitions" which would resurrect the very bodies which the abolition of the guilds had been intended to destroy.⁵ On June 14, Le

¹Nouvelles extraites des papiers publics et lettres authentiques, n°3, March 6 1791, 11p. (B. N. Lc2. 6869), p. 11. "Depuis qu' on a appris à Montpellier la nouvelle de la suppression des Jurandes, cette ville est dans un état de fermentation violente."

²Les Révolutions de Paris, VIII, n°96, 251-52.

³Jaffé, p. 99 and p. 154.

⁴Ibid, p. 154.

⁵Ibid, pp. 136-37.

Chapelier rose in the Assembly and proposed in the name of the Constitution Committee that all "coalitions" be outlawed.¹ The law which was passed and bears his name was a victory for the bourgeoisie in that it was primarily aimed at workers' movements, while employers' organizations were in practice disregarded. It was also the inspiration for the Code Napoleon's measures against unions, and, in fact, the law was not repealed until 1884.

Although, ostensibly, the guilds had been abolished for fiscal reasons, this was obviously not the crux of the matter. Since the mysterious equivocation of August 1789, the Assembly had successively abolished internal duties, many onerous and useless duties on products, had recognized the right of inventors, had reorganized the system of landownership, and had appropriated all church property and issued a paper currency based on its sale. The principle of economic freedom, the negation of exclusive privileges which had reigned in the Ancien Régime, and the mistrust of all independent and privileged bodies, had guided it in its

¹Moniteur, VIII, 661.

work. The same principles applied to the guilds. They had represented particular monopolies, and had possessed a theoretical independence (even if not always applicable in practice) in matter of policing and legislation. The new state, faithful to Rousseauian principles, would not tolerate such intermediary bodies.¹ There should not be mediators between the citizens and their government.

No fundamental debate took place on the nature of the guilds, either in the Assembly or in its committees. No further mention was made of the risk of public disorders that might result from their abolition. The unchallenged consensus was that these represented harmful monopolies and ought to be destroyed. The eighteen months which had elapsed since abolition had first been proposed had demonstrated that the institution was in a state of decay. Workers everywhere were disregarding regulations and working independently, and the guilds were quite unable to assert their old claims. If the cahiers had shown that the guilds had solid support in industrial centers, the

¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Du Contrat Social (Paris, 1962), ch. III, pp. 252-53.

petitions sent to the Committee of Agriculture, Commerce, and Manufactures proved that manufacturers and négociants rejected the regulative system. The first petition for abolition had come from a wholesale merchant. The same argument was put forth in the Assembly over and over again. Industry and commerce would thrive best under a system of liberty, and competition would provide the true price of products and labour. As d'Allarde so clearly stated, the abolition of the guilds would serve the best interests of both négociants and industrialists. The petty craftsmen and retailers were no longer important. The guilds had protected them and enshrined their virtues. The time had now come for the entrepreneur to take over.

CONCLUSION

The question of the significance or inevitability of the guilds' abolition can not really be resolved without extended research into the nature of industrial organization following the Revolution. Nevertheless one can make some observations on the basis of the information which has been gathered about the revolutionary and pre-revolutionary periods. The guilds were abolished because of the strength of alternate methods of production which challenged, and could not be incorporated into, the guild system. The corporations had suffered from this increasing pressure from without, and had been weakened by the influx of capital, the extension of markets, the introduction of new machinery, the control of merchants, and the need to compete in a world challenged by the greater efficiency of the English and the Dutch.

Although many succeeded in subverting or evading guild control, the institution represented a constant

irritant. It erected too many barriers to be perpetually challenged and overcome. Furthermore, despite its decrepitude, the corporative system retained a power real enough to enable it to survive the most ferocious attacks and to counter by denying the freedom of action necessary to the entrepreneur. The corporative system was therefore doomed because it was anachronistic, and because it obstructed the path of those who wanted to expand and modernize. Yet this does not mean that the process of destruction had not begun before the Revolution. In 1791, the bourgeoisie succeeded in finally eliminating a regulative system which it had been fighting, subverting, and manipulating for centuries. As a consequence of the abolition, the capitalist basis which already existed in certain sectors of the economy could be more easily extended. This was no mean achievement.

Although the composition of the Assembly and of various committees ought to be significant for the analysis of the abolition of the guilds, this consideration is minimized by the fact that there existed an unbroken consensus

on the validity of such a dissolution. And although the presence of négociants on the committees underlines the economic interests of deputies in the abolition, there is no evidence that merchants argued more vehemently than lawyers on the need for the system's destruction. As a matter of fact, the debate on abolition was so slight, centering on technical aspects, that the final stage of liquidation becomes somewhat eerie. It raises the question whether the deputies understood what they were doing. Surely this was an important matter which deserved serious consideration. In fact, however, the deputies acquiesced in a wholesale condemnation of the system and made no effort to assess coolly its possible advantages. For this reason the abolition has the appearance of a lesson learned by rote, a mechanical repetition of maxims. The arguments, which had been circulating for the past four decades, were repeated once more, mouthing the same concepts in a similar formulation. This lack of fundamental debate on the nature of economic development seems to demonstrate a generalized commitment to the idea of liberty and economic laissez-faire, in which the guilds had no place. "Liberty is the soul of industry", "liberty is the soul of France" were

repeated with monotonous enthusiasm. There were, however, some immediate considerations, even while the potential benefits to commerce and industry were duly stressed. The dissolution of the corporative system was expected, on the one hand, to lower the price of goods, while, on the other, the patent tax would provide revenue for the government.

The abolition of the guilds must be viewed in a further context. It can not be separated from the general effort of the Assembly to restructure and rationalize institutions. The Constituent Assembly was carrying out a general plan for the transformation of a system based on custom and privilege into one based on law and reason. The guilds represented particular privileges, based on obscure claims and lodged in the confused, complicated, and corrupt web of old regime finances. The corporative system itself was corrupt and inadequate, entangled in its manifold regulations, its perpetual quibblings and law-suits. There was something unaesthetic in the contemplation of its labyrinthian complexity which was sure to challenge the French lawmaker who prides himself on his

Cartesian qualities, his rationality, and his love of symmetry and elegant clarity.

If the abolition of the guilds was first and foremost an economic reform, it also played a role in the complex rationalizing process of the Assembly, and it exemplified its denunciation of privileged, intermediary bodies. It was in this third sense that Le Chapelier referred to it as a precedent for the outlawing of other such "intermediary bodies in the state", that is all types of combinations but, more specifically, the compagnonnages. When the abolition was challenged in later years, it was on economic ground. Yet the restoration of the Bourbons raised hopes that the guilds would be reinstated along with other of the privileges of the Ancien Régime.¹ The fact

¹I have noted the following pamphlets among those supporting the restoration of the corporative system: Soufflot de Merey, Considérations sur le rétablissement des jurandes et maîtrises (Paris, 1805), (B.N. F. 44655); Stoupe, Réflexions sur les contrefaçons en librairie, suivies d'un mémoire sur le rétablissement de la communauté des imprimeurs de Paris (Paris, 1806), (B.N. Q 6695); Levacher Duplessis, Requête au Roi et mémoire sur la nécessité de rétablir les corps de marchands et les communautés d'arts et métiers (Paris, 1817), (B.N. V 17079); Comte de Verdalle, Des corporations et de l'esprit qui s'oppose à leur rétablissement (Paris, 1820), (B.N. Vp 10206); Bénard, Mémoire sur le rétablissement des maîtrises et corporations.

that this was not to be demonstrated that the bourgeoisie was strong enough to maintain the victories won through the Revolutionary years.

(cont'd) et sur la nécessité de limiter les attributions des commissaires-priseurs (Arras, 1823), (B.N. Lf 1226).

The contrary view was expressed by the following: Vital Roux, Rapports sur les jurandes et maîtrises (Paris, 1805), (B.N. F 23333); Pillet-Will; Réponse au mémoire de M. Levacher-Duplessis (Paris, 1818), (B.N. V 49560); Des maîtrises et des corporations, ou réfutation du mémoire sur le rétablissement des maîtrises et corporations (Paris, 1824), (B.N. V 45544).

GLOSSARY OF FRENCH TERMS

Anciens: name given to those who held their mastership more than twenty years

Ateliers: workshops

Bacheliers: masters who had served as guild officers

Basoche: all those connected with the legal profession

Cahier de doléances: list of grievances drawn up for the meeting of the Estates General

Chambrelans: "those who work in their rooms"; refers to those men who worked illegally outside the jurisdiction of the guilds

Colporteurs: street vendors; pedlars

Compagnon: journeyman

Communautés d'arts et métiers: guilds

Corporations de métiers: guilds

Corvées: forced labour on the roads

Fabricant: manufacturer

Forains: foreign and itinerant merchants; pedlars

Halles: central market

Intendant: administrative officer, agent of the royal government

Jeunes: name of all new masters

Journées: name given to days of great revolutionary action

Jurande: wardenship

Laboureur: peasant proprietor with a medium-sized holding

Lit de Justice: when the King sitting in the Parlement let his will be known, overriding the objections made by the parliamentarians

Livre (Tournois): a unit of money, the livre was divisible into 20 sous (or sols) and each sou into 12 deniers. Its value was fixed by royal decree

Maîtrise: mastership

Marchand: merchant

Métier juré: self-regulated guild

Métier libre: unregulated trade

Métier réglé: municipally regulated guild

Modernes: name given to those who held their mastership more than 10 years

Négociant: wholesale merchant

Parlements: courts of law

Prévôt des marchands: elected representative of the merchants to supervise municipal functions

Sans-culottes: an amalgam of artisans, shopkeepers, journeymen, and other labouring men

Six Corps: formed in 1431 as an association of six major Parisian guilds: the drapers, grocers, jewellers, mercers, money-changers, and furriers

tiers: the third Estate

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