

# Introduction

In presenting excerpts from the autobiographies of seven nineteenth-century French workers, this volume invites the reader to enter a world to which direct access is difficult to obtain in any other way. The limited body of memoirs written by wage-earning men and women, many of them self-educated, is remarkable for the evocative quality of the narratives they present. This collection includes some of the finest examples to have survived from the early industrial age in France. Taken individually, each of these texts highlights the fascinating testimony of a person whose dual status as both worker and author gives voice to the sentiments of those who more often lived in anonymity. Taken collectively, these memoirs become a window on the world of the working class at a crucial moment in its transformation into an independent economic and political force in French society.

These authors offer a perspective on their era that is unique in at least two respects. First, drawing upon their own experience, they describe in great detail the everyday activities of ordinary workers. Second, they add a subjective dimension to the information they impart, conveying their private thoughts and often passionate reactions to the events that marked their lives. The autobiographer's act of reconstructing what his or her existence has meant lends it the coherence of a "life lived whole."<sup>1</sup> To be sure, this coherence is achieved in part through the selective embellishment or excision of certain life experiences. The result is an apparently seamless raiment of just the sort that we each weave to clothe ourselves before others. For just this reason—that it is a very human creation much

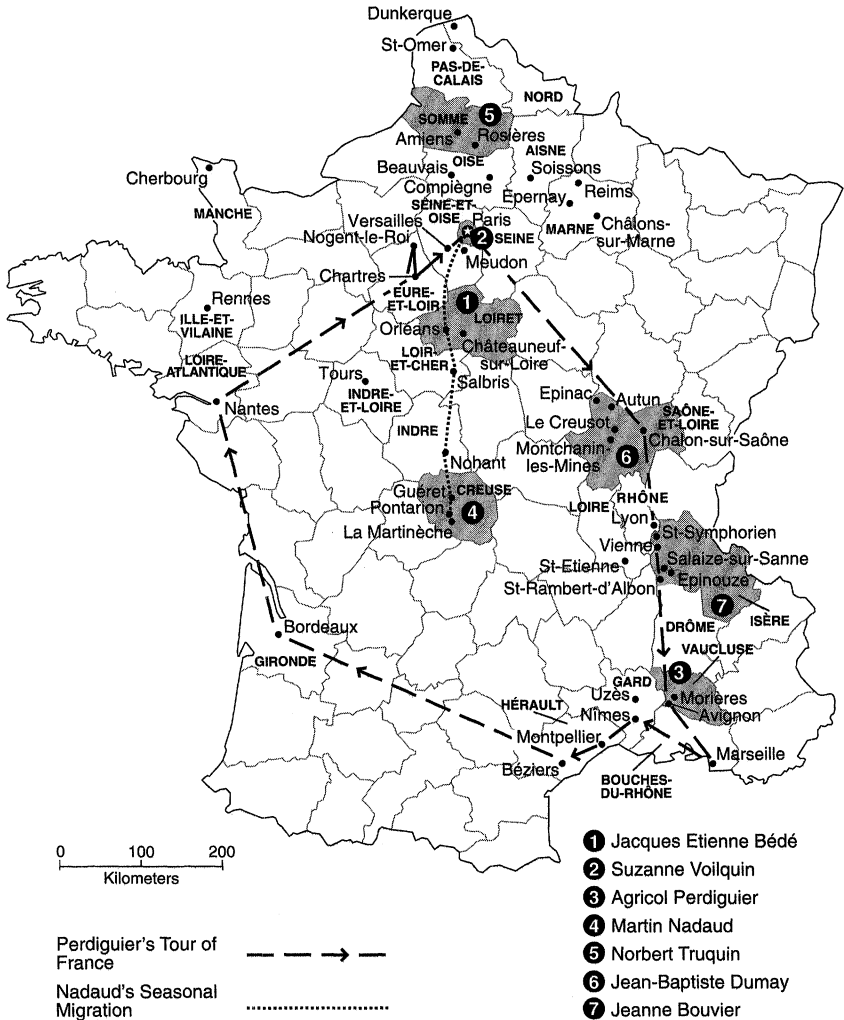
1. The phrase is borrowed from Charles Lemert, "Whole Life Theory," *Theory and Society* 15, no. 3 (1986): 431–42.

like the ones we ourselves continually fabricate and mend—the autobiographical account offers a privileged point of access, allowing us to don the apron and step into the shoes of a worker who inhabited a period and a culture both like and unlike our own. Because we meet the protagonists on a personal footing, we are better able to discern and appreciate the blend of similarities and differences.

For those who read them (as for those who write them), autobiographies may serve quite different purposes. From a literary or “discourse” perspective, memoirs may constitute ends in themselves, texts worthy of study for what they reveal of cultural conventions. In this introduction, however, as in the task of editing the original book-length texts for this anthology, I have chosen to view these sources as a vehicle for deepening and completing our knowledge of how French workers of the previous century lived and labored.<sup>2</sup> The seven texts are described in summary terms in table 1 (pp. 4–5), and the map (opposite) shows places mentioned in each. Some of these texts are acknowledged classics of the literature on nineteenth-century workers; others have only recently been published or reprinted in French. Virtually all have, of course, long been available to specialists in the history of France, but this is the first time, to my knowledge, that extensive segments of any have been translated into English. For this reason, the present volume both opens these texts to a broader audience and creates the opportunity for new perspectives to emerge. Used in combination with the collections published by Burnett, Bonnell, and Kelly, the present work will be particularly useful to those who wish to undertake the comparative study of class formation in Europe by weighing the direct testimony of British, French, German, and Russian workers.<sup>3</sup>

2. The distinction between texts as means and as ends is adapted from an observation made by Philippe Lejeune, *Je est un autre: L'Autobiographie de la littérature aux médias* (Paris, 1980), p. 273. It is, of course, impossible to separate the two perspectives completely, since the form and content of a text and the conditions in which it is produced are inextricably linked. Though these issues are discussed in the third part of this introduction, mention of the particularizing circumstances under which the manuscripts were written is largely confined to the brief introductory notes to each chapter.

3. John Burnett, ed., *The Annals of Labour: Autobiographies of British Working-Class People, 1820–1920* (Bloomington, 1974), and *Destiny Obscure: Autobiographies of Childhood, Education, and Family from the 1820s to the 1920s* (London, 1982); Victoria E. Bonnell, ed., *The Russian Worker: Life and Labor under the Tsarist Regime* (Berkeley, 1983); and Alfred Kelly, ed., *The German Worker: Working-Class Autobiographies from the Age of Industrialization* (Berkeley, 1987). A useful bibliography of British working-class autobiographies can be found in David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Autobiography* (London, 1981).



Nineteenth-Century France. The shaded areas are the departments where the authors were born or raised; the numbers correspond to the chapter numbers.

This collection will also enable the reader to form a clearer picture of working-class life during France's turbulent nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> To provide a context for interpreting the authors' autobiographical accounts, this introductory essay begins with an overview of the forces at work in French society in the age of industrialization, and goes on to sketch what daily life

4. I have chosen to regard the nineteenth century as beginning with the demise of the Old Regime around 1789. This slightly elongated nineteenth century roughly

Table 1. The Authors and Their Texts

<i>Author</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Text</i>	<i>Period covered in these excerpts</i>	<i>Author's Occupation (Sector)</i>
Bédé, Jacques Etienne 1775–1830 +	M	<i>A Worker in 1820</i> wr. 1821–36; pub. 1984	1784–1820	Wood turner (furniture)
Voilquin, Suzanne c. 1798–1865 +	F	<i>Recollections of a Daughter of the People</i> wr. 1865; pub. 1866	1807–32	Embroiderer (textiles)
Perdiguiet, Agricol 1805–75	M	<i>Memoirs of a Compagnon</i> wr. 1852–53; pub. 1854	1805–28	Joiner (construction)
Nadaud, Martin 1815–98	M	<i>Memoirs of Léonard, a Former Mason's Assistant</i> wr. 1891; pub. 1895	1815–48	Mason (construction)
Truquin, Norbert 1833–87 +	M	<i>Memoirs and Adventures of a Proletarian in Times of Revolution</i> wr. 1887; pub. 1888	1833–67	Silk weaver (textiles); also various unskilled occupations
Dumay, Jean-Baptiste 1841–1926	M	<i>Memoirs of a Militant Worker from Le Creusot</i> wr. 1902–26; pub. 1976	1841–68	Metalworker (base metals); also railroad worker
Bouvier, Jeanne 1865–1964	F	<i>My Memoirs</i> wr. 1914; pub. 1936	1865–99	Seamstress (clothing); also hatmaker; domestic; silk winder

<i>Occupation of</i>			<i>Region or City of</i>		
<i>Father</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Spouse</i>	<i>Birth</i>	<i>Training</i>	<i>Adult Residence</i>
Miller	—	Chair seat maker*	Châteauneuf-sur-Loire (Loiret)	Tours (Indre-et-Loire)	Paris
Hatter	—	<i>Architecte**</i>	Paris (Seine)	Paris	Paris
Joiner	Seamstress	Seamstress	Morières-les-Avignon (Vaucluse)	[Tour of France]	Paris
Mason	—	—	La Martinèche (Creuse)	Paris	Paris
Workshop owner	—	Weaver	Rozières (Somme)	Reims, Amiens, Paris	Lyon (Rhône)
Miner	Seamstress	—	Le Creusot (Saône-et-Loire)	[Tour of France]	Le Creusot
Cooper	—	—	Salaize-sur-Sanne (Isère)	Epinouze (Drôme)	Paris

\*Bédé says that his wife worked in the chairmaking shop with him; presumably she was a chair seat maker like Bédé's aunt.

\*\*Voilquin's husband worked in a firm of architects, but the precise nature of his position is not specified.

was like for nineteenth-century French workers. It then discusses the criteria and strategy employed in selecting these autobiographies, before going on to show how such sources can be used to interpret the patterns of economic and political change that took place in the period.

#### FRENCH SOCIETY IN THE AGE OF INDUSTRIALIZATION

On the eve of the Revolution of 1789–94, the members of French society had little inkling of the momentous changes in the offing. The overthrow and execution of Louis XVI represented no more than the initial phase of a century-long period of civil strife. Though the country would ultimately emerge with a heightened sense of national and cultural unity, traditional social relations were upset by new and dynamic forms of economic activity. These eventually increased the wealth of the society as a whole, but they were often introduced at the expense of the security and well-being of ordinary workers. To understand the experiences of those who lived in this eventful period, we need to examine the interrelated demographic, economic, and political influences which shaped them.

#### *Demographic Dislocation*

At the fall of the Old Regime, the size of the population of France was rivaled, among European nations, only by that of Russia. A century and a quarter later, the French population had increased from 27.5 to 40 million inhabitants. Despite this substantial increase in absolute numbers, France lagged so far behind its neighbors in its rate of growth that it had been dwarfed by Russia and surpassed by both Germany and the United Kingdom, where the population had more than tripled in the interim (see table 2).

In the 1830s, a newborn child had slightly higher than a one in six chance of dying before its first birthday, a statistic that changed little before the end of the century.<sup>5</sup> Yet French rates of infant mortality, however high

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corresponds to the period in which French society witnessed the accelerated capitalist expansion associated with early industrialization. The seven workers chosen for this book make up a group whose members were economically active across the entire period in question. My interest in the interrelationship between the realms of work and collective action led me to focus on the authors' years of childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood, corresponding to the periods in which their socialization, training, and identity formation as workers took place.

5. According to Brian R. Mitchell, there were 176.5 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in the 1830s. The comparable figure for the 1890s was 165.7 deaths. See *European Historical Statistics, 1750–1970* (London, 1981), pp. 137–38.

Table 2. European Population in 1789 and 1914

	1789	1914
European Russia	28 million	140 million
France	27.5	40
Germany	20	68
Austria-Hungary	20	51
Italy	16	36
United Kingdom	14	45

Source: Adapted from Jacques Dupâquier et al., *Histoire de la population française*, vol. 3, *De 1789 à 1914* (Paris, 1988), pp. 2–3. For purposes of comparison, the territory covered (rather than the political entity) has been held constant, since Germany and Italy did not exist in unified form in 1789, and Austria (subsequently Austria-Hungary) lost some territories and acquired others.

by today's standard, do not explain the difference in population growth, for they were similar to those of other European nations. In fact, the relative demographic stagnation of France was largely the result of a rate of birth (just over 25 per year per 1,000 population, on average, during the nineteenth century) that was roughly half that of Russia and consistently remained the lowest in Europe.<sup>6</sup> France saw itself being outdistanced by its European neighbors but was unable to reverse this unfavorable demographic trend.<sup>7</sup>

Just as consequential as changes in the total population were currents of migration within the borders of France. By midcentury, with the construction of railroads, the digging of canals, and improvements in the speed and reliability of the mails, not just the number of French citizens but also the rate at which they were brought into mutual contact was rapidly increasing. Many were drawn from rural areas to the cities, where they expected to earn higher wages and take part in the brawling, vital social life of Paris,

6. Ibid., pp. 116ff. Scholarly debates over the causes of the declining birth rate have pointed to factors as diverse as the French Revolution's promulgation of inheritance laws prescribing the equal division of property among heirs, and the changing family structures associated with industrialization. Even a simple summary of this literature lies far beyond what can be attempted in this introduction.

7. Rates of emigration abroad, primarily to the New World, provide an indirect indication of the demographic pressure in various European countries. During the second half of the nineteenth century, emigrants from Germany numbered just under four million, and those from the United Kingdom (including Ireland) exceeded ten million. In the same period, just 300,000 French citizens emigrated. See Mitchell, *European Historical Statistics*, p. 145.

Lyon, Marseille, and other centers of commercial and cultural activity. The actual number of people living in the countryside remained fairly constant at about twenty million between 1789 and 1914; but whereas at the beginning of this period the rural sector represented 82 percent of the French population, it accounted for just 56 percent at the end.<sup>8</sup> Thus, virtually the entire net increase was experienced in urban areas.

The displacement of the population took various forms. A mason like Martin Nadaud fitted the pattern of seasonal migrants, workers who came to the city for several months at a time, typically at the height of the construction cycle when their skills were much in demand. During the slack season, they would usually return home to join their families in agricultural labors. Other workers made a permanent jump from the countryside to a large metropolitan area in a single move; but more frequent were chain migrations, which took the rural resident from the farm to a small town and then perhaps to a regional center, before he or she ventured on to one of France's leading cities. In a corresponding fashion, a family's transition to urban life might be undertaken in stages, with first the husband, then an older and employable son, and finally the wife and younger children arriving over a period of months or years. Disappointed hopes caused a small fraction to return home almost immediately, and a few eventually realized their long-term ambition of retiring to the village in which they had grown up; but these were merely eddies in a flow that could not be stemmed. Though many of the newly arrived city dwellers would long maintain their ties with the earth from which they sprang, thus bringing even the most isolated regions increasingly within the city's sphere of influence, the migratory currents continued virtually unchecked throughout the nineteenth century.

Those who participated in the great rural exodus, especially during the middle years of the century, commonly encountered new living conditions which we might think appalling. Because the stock of urban housing was inadequate to accommodate the flood of new residents, dense overcrowding was the rule in working-class quarters. Sanitation practices were often primitive, with no consistent provision for street cleaning, garbage disposal, or the removal of human waste. Such conditions encouraged the spread of a number of diseases—malaria, diphtheria, typhoid, smallpox, even dysentery and croup—that claimed lives on a regular basis. An epidemic of cholera in 1832, for example, killed 100,000 people in France, including 18,000 in the poorer districts of Paris alone; the disease returned

8. See Jean-Claude Gégot, *La Population française aux XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris, 1989), p. 25. He uses the traditional but relatively conservative definition of the rural sector as comprising communes of less than 2,000 inhabitants.



in still more virulent form in 1849. The public health facilities available in most cities, though superior to what was found in rural areas, were incapable of attending to the medical needs of so many impoverished people. Yet the influx continued virtually without interruption throughout the nineteenth century.

It is important to appreciate the role of Paris as the primate city, one which dominated all aspects of French society. In 1811, some 623,000 people lived within the city limits, a population nearly six times greater than that of France's second largest city, Lyon. By 1851, there were one million residents of Paris proper, a figure that exceeded the combined total of the nine next largest cities of France. By the end of the nineteenth century, the greater Paris region had a population of three and a half million and accounted for over 28 percent of the urban, and 9 percent of the total population of France.<sup>9</sup> To translate the numerical preponderance of Paris into terms that fit the contemporary United States, we would have to imagine a metropolitan area of roughly twenty-five million persons. In actuality, there has never been anything comparable in the American experience to the hegemony which Paris exercised—and exercises still—in France. In addition to being by far the largest city, it was also the seat of government, the locus of all administrative and judicial control, the hub of commerce, the site of origination for most important artistic and creative activities, the focal point of the country's system of transport and communication, and the home of the nation's principal cultural and educational institutions. For all these reasons, Paris exerted a powerful attractive influence, making it the end destination for a sizable proportion of all rural migrants and ensuring that through most of the nineteenth century, persons born in the capital constituted only a minority of its population. Changes in other French cities differed mainly in degree, with the result that the urban working class, most of whose members were no more than one generation removed from their rural village of origin, underwent a phenomenal increase in size in the course of the nineteenth century.

### *Economic Expansion*

Between the time of the French Revolution and the last years of the nineteenth century, the French economy underwent a gradual but cumulatively far-reaching transformation. Impediments to the spread of capitalist relations, such as internal tariff barriers and the paternalist regulation of trades, were swept away; new domestic markets for manufactured goods

9. Georges Dupeux, *Atlas historique de l'urbanisation de la France, 1811–1975* (Paris, 1981).

were developed; and the productive capacity of the economy as a whole increased significantly. The labor force in the cities grew at the expense of a slowly contracting agricultural sector, as migrants from the countryside, including an increasing proportion of women, took jobs in workshops and factories.

France blazed its own path in pursuit of economic development. The commercialization of agriculture, the adoption of power-driven machinery, and the shift to an economy of mass production all occurred at a more deliberate pace than in England, the first nation to undergo industrialization. And unlike Germany and Russia, which would overtake it toward the end of the period in question, France relied to a very limited extent on large factories employing masses of unskilled workers.

In fact, factories in France were long restricted to a handful of industrial towns, located for the most part in the north. Skilled artisans formed the backbone of the economy, dominating the labor force in the first half of the nineteenth century and continuing to outnumber factory workers through the turn of the twentieth. Pockets of large-scale industrial production did arise in economic sectors where competition from foreign producers forced the conversion to factory organization, notably in the spinning of cotton and the weaving of some woollen goods. Yet even in textiles, small-scale manufacture like the silk-weaving trade survived into the late nineteenth century, though it ceased to dominate the economy of Lyon after 1850. Indeed, the competition engendered by industrial innovations often produced a proliferation or intensification of more traditional modes of production, especially in the countryside. Aside from Paris and a few regional centers, whose highly skilled labor forces produced luxury goods much in demand abroad, most of the French economy was oriented to domestic (and often local) markets. These and other factors led many earlier analysts to view the French pattern as backward compared to the British model of industrialization. Today, however, the French experience tends to be seen as a differentiated strategy of economic development which by 1900 had succeeded in producing a per capita income comparable to that of England, the standard by which material progress in the industrial age has traditionally been measured.<sup>10</sup>

Growth was, however, very uneven, throwing the lives of workers into frequent disruption. Real wages made halting progress, rising to an early peak in the 1820s, only to decline by 10 to 15 percent through the 1840s

10. See Patrick O'Brien and Caglar Keyder, *Economic Growth in Britain and France, 1780–1914: Two Paths to the Twentieth Century* (London, 1978).

before resuming their upward climb for much of the rest of the century.<sup>11</sup> Over the long term, the relatively privileged status of skilled workers faced a serious threat. Competitive pressure from new forms of factory organization began to render the economic prospects of artisans more and more uncertain. The introduction of power-driven machinery in certain sectors increased productivity, but at the cost of displacing workers whose skills were no longer useful. These workers were forced onto a job market which offered an increasing proportion of semiskilled and unskilled positions that required little training and paid low wages.

In industries that became mechanized, workers could no longer hope to own the equipment necessary to do their jobs. They therefore lost some of the independence that craftsmen in many skilled trades had had when they carried both the tools and the knowledge necessary to earn a livelihood with them at all times. Mechanization implied an enlarged scale of production that vastly increased the minimum investment required for efficient operation. This concentration of capital widened the gulf between employer and employee, most obviously in the factory, but even in small shops where egalitarian relations between master and journeymen had been the rule. Where large-scale manufacture was introduced, the division of labor was intensified. The need for coordination among workers performing increasingly specialized tasks reinforced the move toward stricter discipline in the workplace. This translated into a lessening of the control over the pace of work, the taking of breaks, and the patterns of sociability that elite craftsmen had formerly enjoyed. Consequently, there was a decline in the sense of autonomy that had been so central to the craftsman's self-conception.

Thus, the privileged status of highly skilled workers was under continual challenge even when the economy was in an expansive phase. In times of economic contraction, a variety of strategies for reducing labor costs—including sweated labor, putting out, and subcontracting—helped compound the effects of these long-term trends.<sup>12</sup> Most skilled journey-

11. See William H. Sewell, Jr., *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 160.

12. "Sweated labor" refers to the practice of forcing poorly paid laborers to work exceptionally long hours to earn a meager livelihood. "Putting out" was a system of production in which an entrepreneur would furnish, either on consignment or by outright sale, raw materials like unspun cotton or unwoven wool to individuals who typically worked in their own homes. When these raw materials had been transformed into a more finished product, the entrepreneur would repurchase the product, paying a modest sum for the labor invested. "Subcontracting" was an arrangement under which a lead worker or foreman assumed responsibility for the

men continued to cling to aspirations of upward mobility, but increasing capital requirements and the devaluing of skills in many trades meant that the chances of achieving master's status became more remote as the century wore on. To protect their essential skills against dilution, artisans were forced into a defensive posture. The modest success they were able to achieve can be attributed in part to the demographic and economic circumstances previously discussed, but also to the constant struggles they waged to win the rights of political expression and association that made it possible to organize in pursuit of their collective interests.

### *A Century of Revolution*

During the long nineteenth century, France experienced a level of internal conflict greater than any country of comparable size and international significance before or since. Four times in that period—in 1789, 1830, 1848, and 1871—the government of France was challenged by major revolutionary upsurges, and many additional insurrectionary events of more limited scope were interspersed between those dates. Changes of regime were so frequent that the nation was ruled by three distinct monarchies, three republics, and two empires within a one-hundred-year span.<sup>13</sup> It is little wonder that France has become the benchmark by which the contentiousness of modern politics has been judged.

The revolutionary upheavals in France were closely linked to the more active participation of the urban working class in politics. If the French Revolution of 1789 is seen as marking a watershed in world history, it is in part because the direct intervention of the Parisian crowd significantly altered the course of events at several crucial junctures, thus ending the monopoly that traditional elites had formerly exercised over the conduct of public affairs. Barely more than a half-century later, in the February Revolution of 1848, a worker was included in the provisional government that declared universal manhood suffrage and gave France the most broadly

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completion of a specified task for an agreed-upon price. That subcontractor, or "jobber," was expected to pay the workers from the proceeds, retaining any balance as his personal profit. It was therefore in the jobber's interest to use all possible means of keeping labor costs low. In general, the intended result of these practices was not only to effect labor savings but also to shift a portion of the entrepreneur's risk to the workers themselves.

13. The monarchies were the Old Regime (to 1792), the Bourbon Restoration (1814 or 1815 to 1830), and the Orléanist Monarchy (1830 to 1848). Three republics were declared: the first lasted from 1792 to 1804, the second from 1848 to 1852, and the third from 1870 through the end of the period that concerns us here. The two empires were those of Napoléon Bonaparte (1804 to 1814 or 1815) and Louis-Napoléon (1852 to 1870).

defined electorate any nation had ever possessed. Yet the progress made by the working class in its quest for political rights and economic betterment was highly uneven. Certain changes of regime—particularly the Bourbon Restoration and the Second Empire—affected workers adversely because they were accompanied by a sudden contraction of economic opportunity or by repressive social control.

Ironically, even those governments that sought to end the hegemony of the rich and powerful sometimes enacted legislation whose unintended consequences proved disastrous for many ordinary citizens. The Le Chapelier law, passed in 1791, is the most often cited example.<sup>14</sup> Consistent with the revolutionaries' objective of striking down privilege in the name of liberty—most obviously in the case of the monopolies and exemptions enjoyed by the aristocracy and the clergy—the National Assembly also abolished "corporations." These organizations, vestiges of the ancient guild system, united the practitioners of a trade for the purpose of maintaining acceptable standards of workmanship, managing relations between journeymen and masters, and limiting the entry of apprentices so as to protect the economic and social status of members. The Revolution declared these corporations to be an illegal restraint on the individual's right freely to choose an occupation. The 1791 law prohibited such groups from naming officers, maintaining records, or adopting regulations, and prohibited any attempt to impose collective agreements on a trade. The Penal Code of 1810 went further by prohibiting the formation of "coalitions" that might attempt to reassert exclusive privileges, whether those of masters or of journeymen.

As a result of this legislation, the individual French worker immediately gained the abstract right to practice any trade at will, but in the longer term, French workers collectively lost the concrete right to organize in pursuit of their common interests. The fact that masters were similarly constrained was small consolation to the majority of workers, as masters were never scrutinized as closely and their smaller numbers and strategic position permitted them to coordinate their activities even in the absence of formal organization. The only workers' associations to survive were those that the authorities judged innocuous—mutual aid societies and *compagnonnages*—or those that operated clandestinely. Mutual aid societies were voluntary associations of workers, most often in a single trade, who made regular payments into a common fund. By thus pooling resources, workers were able to insure themselves against the unforeseeable expenses

14. On this statute and its predecessor, the d'Allarde law, as well as on the whole subject of working-class organization in the first half of the nineteenth century, see Sewell, *Work and Revolution*.

associated with the illness, injury, or death of a family breadwinner. These organizations can be seen as the distant precursors of such twentieth-century innovations as public unemployment compensation and health insurance. A *compagnonnage*, or workers' brotherhood, recruited young, unmarried journeymen (*compagnons*), most of whom had embarked on a Tour of France as a way of acquiring or polishing the skills of their trade. Such organizations helped to regulate supply and demand in skilled labor as well as to order the lives of these itinerant craftsmen-in-training by placing them in jobs, seeing to their subsistence needs, and serving as guarantor of their prudent conduct during their sojourn in some unfamiliar town. Mutual aid societies and *compagnonnages* were tolerated by public officials as long as they confined their activities to practical welfare considerations and steered clear of all "political" initiatives, explicitly defined to include any attempt to control wage levels or work conditions through labor organization or collective bargaining.<sup>15</sup>

Though it took some time for the full implications of these legal changes to become apparent, the working class soon found itself locked in a protracted struggle to win back the right to organize. During the period in which this campaign was waged, French political opinion was divided among at least four major currents: monarchism, Bonapartism, republicanism, and socialism. The politics of the monarchist camp were complicated by the existence of two distinct and sometimes bitterly opposed factions, the Legitimists loyal to the Bourbon kings, and the Orleanist supporters of the rival dynasty which had acceded to the throne in the person of Louis-Philippe as a result of the popular revolution of 1830. Neither could claim widespread and active support among workers beyond the general acquiescence it enjoyed while actually in power. Bonapartism, on the contrary, inspired enthusiastic, even fanatical adherence in a sizable segment of the working class as well as among most French peasants, at least through the first half of the century. Among its supporters were those who had served in Napoléon's conquering armies as well as the larger

15. Cooperative associations, which united either producers or consumers in an effort to increase their combined leverage over markets in labor, commodities, or credit, tended to be viewed less favorably, in part because their impact on the economy was more direct and in part because they were closely associated with certain forms of utopian socialist philosophy that flourished in the middle of the century. Political clubs, intermediate between debating societies and electoral campaign organizations, were prohibited by law except for brief interludes like the short-lived Second Republic. Political parties and labor unions were severely repressed until the Third Republic redefined the nature of civil society in France during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Under this more liberal regime, trade unionist and Syndicalist movements attempted to secure workers' control and even ownership of key industries through general strikes and direct action.

number who simply remembered with longing the days of glory when France had dominated a continent. The Emperor's legacy proved sufficiently enduring to assure a landslide electoral victory nearly half a century later for his nephew, whose primary qualification for the office of president of France's Second Republic was his last name. Louis-Napoléon went on to overthrow the republican constitution under which he had been elected and to found France's Second Empire. However, the fierce repression of workers' causes which took place in the early years of his rule brought to a rapid end the groundswell of Bonapartist sentiment within the urban working class.

Republicanism was the political strain most clearly in the ascendant during the course of the nineteenth century. At least through 1830, it remained a tendency embraced exclusively by the more progressive segments of the working class; but because its proponents were so actively engaged, they were able to exert an influence far greater than their sheer numbers would suggest. Republican opinion was never unified, however. During the Revolution of 1848, for example, a distinction was drawn between those who had fought for the "democratic republic," whose concerns were focused primarily on the extension of popular political rights, and those who favored the "democratic *and social* republic," which would have effected a sweeping overhaul of the productive system and of property relations in general. The latter camp, critical of the laissez-faire individualism that had led to unrestrained competition and exploitation, overlapped with the small and eclectic group of followers of such visionary Socialist thinkers as Saint-Simon, Fourier, Proudhon, Cabet, and Blanc. Most advocated workers' rights, the reorganization of the economy either along cooperativist lines or with the state assuming greater responsibility for the regulation of production, and certain limited provisions for social welfare. Despite the setback they suffered in the immediate aftermath of the insurrection of June 1848, the progressive republican and socialist factions gradually regained their strength within the working class, partly in reaction to the politics of the Second Empire. In the final quarter of the century, France turned definitively in the direction of republican government.

This equation of political forces was, in sum, an indirect reflection of the economic transformation that France was undergoing. In both the political and the economic realm, the working class had assumed a more prominent role. Yet, despite their acquisition of important individual rights, the situation of workers remained precarious through much of the nineteenth century. A brief sketch of the practical conditions which the French worker confronted on a daily basis will help relate the general trends just outlined to the experiences described in the workers' autobiographies.

THE WORLD OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY  
FRENCH WORKERS

To characterize population growth in France as stagnant makes sense only relative to the acceleration observed in other European nations of that era. The birthrate was substantially higher than today's, in part as a response to the high incidence of childhood disease. Jeanne Bouvier begins her autobiography with her earliest childhood memory, the baptism of her younger brother in 1868. Sixteen months later, he would die of measles, an illness which carried off many children in those days. Suzanne Voilquin comments almost matter-of-factly on her mother's loss of three children in infancy. Rearing several offspring was a hedge against the uncertainties that went with a high rate of infant mortality. For the many working-class households that had so recently left behind their parents' rural small-holding, each pair of hands and sturdy back continued to be welcomed for the contribution it would make to the family's well-being. In the urban context as in the rural, children often proved to be a valuable resource, for their earning power could be tapped as early as the age of ten or twelve.

More than it is today, the family in the nineteenth century was a unit of economic production. This was most obviously true in the system of domestic putting out, or cottage industry, where the spouse and children of a weaver like Norbert Truquin might all work side by side in a home that also served as workshop. Especially in small towns and rural areas, the material foundations of the institution of marriage never lay far beneath the surface. Though a tradition of romantic love was well established, the joining of two partners in matrimony was also likely to be seen as the joining of the economic fortunes of two families. Although the prospective bride and groom exercised an ultimate power of veto, their parents often assumed an active role in initiating and negotiating a marital settlement. Through the first half of the nineteenth century at least, the custom of providing a dowry for a daughter offered in matrimony remained widespread among rural families that owned real property, though it had largely died out in the cities. Nadaud's account of successive failed attempts to strike a marriage contract shows to what lengths a young woman's family might go to ensure a favorable match for its daughter, or the young man's to bring in precious resources that might help free itself from debt.

In a substantial proportion of urban workers' families—perhaps half of all those living in midcentury Paris, for example<sup>16</sup>—the wife worked

16. This rough estimate is based on the ratio of male to female workers in the Paris Chamber of Commerce's 1848 survey of the capital's labor force. Due to the limitations of that study (which does not, for example, include domestic service), to