CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Harbingers or Entrepreneurs? A Workers' Cooperative during the Paris Commune
Author(s): Robert Tombs
Source: *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Dec., 1984), pp. 969-977
Published by: Cambridge University Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2639037
Accessed: 19/02/2010 11:00

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=cup.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Historical Journal.*

http://www.jstor.org

The Historical Journal, 27, 4 (1984), pp. 969–977
Printed in Great Britain

HARBINGERS OR ENTREPRENEURS? A WORKERS' COOPERATIVE DURING THE PARIS COMMUNE*

ROBERT TOMBS
St John's College, Cambridge

'Working men's Paris, with its Commune', wrote Marx in the closing paragraph of his *Civil War in France*, 'will be for ever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society.'[1] This paper examines one group of those working men – those 'harbingers' – which was at the centre of one of the most important of the Commune's social reforms. The list of these reforms is short. Its 'great social measure', argued Marx, 'was its own working existence'. Its other measures 'could only be such as were compatible with the state of a besieged town'.[2] The survival of the Commune, even for only two months, demanded a vast and unceasing military and administrative effort which had to be improvised in a few days by men with little experience of exercising high authority. This is the context in which the social measures of the Commune, including that concerning workers' cooperatives, must be understood.

Evidently, these measures cannot be considered as the Commune's final word on social organization, or indeed as its principal preoccupation. Apologists for the regime – Marx foremost among them – have rightly pointed out that 'its special measures could but betoken the tendency' of the movement. Behind them, we must seek the intentions and aspirations of the revolutionaries, some of whom were perfectly aware of the historic role they were playing. What 'the Commune and the people of Paris understood perfectly', wrote Arthur Arnould (journalist and member of the Commune), was that 'both had laid a foundation stone upon which sooner or later the final building would rise...In seventy-two days of continuous battle, the Commune could hardly do more than set out a principle, indicate one or two outlines.'[3]

The decree of 16 April 1871, under which abandoned factories were to be handed over to 'the cooperative association of the workers who were employed in them', has ever since its promulgation been considered one of the most significant of these principles or outlines. The Communard paper *Le Vengeur* greeted it as 'the most serious claim of the Commune to the gratitude of working men'.[4] Although the

* An earlier draft of this paper was given to the Cambridge Historical Society in October 1982.

[1] *The Civil War in France* (Peking edn, 1966), p. 78. [2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.; Arthur Arnould, *Histoire populaire et parlementaire de la Commune de Paris* (Lyon, 1981), p. 258.

[4] Text of decree in *Journal Officiel* of the Commune, 17 April 1871. *Le Vengeur* quoted in Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871* (London, 1971), p. 259. For a modern endorsement of this judgement see Bernard H. Moss, *The origins of the French labour movement 1830–1914* (Berkeley and London, 1976), pp. 61–2.

rather cumbersome machinery set out in the decree seems not to have functioned, some factories were indeed handed over to workers' cooperatives, though they were not necessarily composed of workers previously employed in the factories concerned, as the decree had specified.

Workers' cooperatives in 1871 had already a long history in France; they were the essence of French socialist aspirations for most of the nineteenth century. The idea of cooperation as a means of escaping the undesirable consequences of capitalism and industrialization had been widely propagated in the 1830s, and indeed it inherited something of a much older corporate tradition.[5] Elaborated in a variety of ways by Buchez, Fourier, Proudhon and Blanc, by the 1840s ideas of 'association' as a solution to social problems had become commonplace even among moderate republicans. Consequently, the 1848 Revolution saw attempts to put them into practice, including the ill-fated National Workshops. Their closure, and the June insurrection, were by no means the end of cooperatives. Nearly 300 were set up in Paris during the Second Republic, from 120 trades, and they had perhaps 50,000 members; there were still about 200 in existence in the harsh climate of 1851.[6]

During the Second Empire, and especially during the 1860s, the establishment of cooperatives, both of consumers and of producers, became a central part of the organized activity of workers. *Chambres syndicales*, which were tolerated by the regime from the middle 1860s, commonly devoted part of their funds to establishing producers' cooperatives, which were regarded both as a way of employing members during strikes and as a long-term solution to the problem of wage slavery. By 1865, about 50 Parisian *chambres syndicales* were accumulating funds for this purpose; by 1868, there were over 50 producers' cooperatives in Paris and a similar number in the provinces. Their appeal was not limited to socialists and trade unionists. Prominent radicals and liberals also favoured them. Victor Hugo and Georges Clemenceau, for example, were supporters, and the leading liberal economist Léon Say was chairman of the Caisse d'Escompte des Associations Populaires. Naturally, therefore, the republican Government of National Defence encouraged the establishment of several important producers' cooperatives during the Prussian siege of Paris in the winter of 1870–1, and gave them large contracts for the making of uniforms. The tailors' cooperative gave work to some 35,000 people, mostly women working at home. A newspaper, *L'Ouvrier de l'Avenir*, 'Organe des Chambres Syndicales et des Associations Ouvrières', set up in March 1871, listed 50 producers' cooperatives that existed in Paris in the weeks before the outbreak of the insurrection which established the Commune. They were mainly small enterprises in the traditional skilled trades of the city, such as jewellery, tailoring and hat making.[7] In short, by the time the Commune was set up, the idea of producers' cooperatives was familiar and widely approved, though there were diverse interpretations of their significance – a minor element in a mixed economy or a practical step towards the eventual emancipation of labour.

[5] William H. Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France: the language of labor from the old regime to 1848* (Cambridge 1980), p. 186.

[6] B. H. Moss, 'Parisian producers' associations (1830–51): the socialism of skilled workers', in Roger Price (ed.), *Revolution and reaction: 1848 and the Second French Republic* (London 1975), pp. 81–2.

[7] Jean Gaumont, *Histoire générale de la coopération en France* (2 vols. Paris, 1924), II, 6–8, 14–15. *L'Ouvrier de l'Avenir*, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Fol. Jo. 213, 'Journaux divers de mai 1871' (sic), II.

This communication is principally concerned with the Société Coopérative des Fondeurs en Fer, one of the two major industrial cooperatives – the other being that of the engineering workers (Association des Ouvriers de la Metallurgie) – set up with the encouragement of the Commune, and generally associated with the celebrated decree of 16 April. The Ironfounders' Cooperative Society was, therefore, at the core of Parisian socialism, the embodiment of one of the 'tendencies' of the Commune to which Marx referred, one of Arnould's 'foundation stones' being laid by the people of Paris. And yet it does not appear, in the two small files of papers which survive at the Archives Historiques de Guerre at Vincennes, quite as might be expected.[8]

Foundry workers took an early initiative. On 15 April 1871, the day before the Commune voted its famous decree, a general meeting of workers, previously advertised in the press, decided to set up an ironfounders' cooperative society. On 20 April, armed with a requisition order from the Commune's War Delegation, the Society moved into its first factory. On 3 May it took over a second. During the first three weeks of May it manufactured shell cases for the War Delegation, employing up to 250 workers.[9] This made it a very large concern by Paris standards, the average firm in the metal industry employing between eight and nine workers.

The general meeting on 15 April elected delegates to run the Society. One of these was Pierre Marc, aged 39, who from the beginning became the chief organizer. Eight years earlier he had inherited a foundry business from his father, but had gone bankrupt in 1867 – a common fate in those years, as two decades of economic expansion ended. Since his bankruptcy, Marc had worked as a foreman. This background was no liability in the Cooperative Society: on the contrary, he was chosen because he had been a *patron* and so knew how to run a business.[10]

The Society's first factory in the 11th Arrondissement (cité Bertrand), belonged to a certain Guillot, and had been closed since the foundrymen's strike early in 1870. Rather than use their requisition order, the Society offered to rent the factory from Guillot, who accepted with alacrity, signing a lease on the spot.[11] The Society remained throughout on excellent terms with Guillot, as with other factory owners with whom they had dealings. In April they requisitioned thirty tons of iron from Plichon Brothers (a private firm also making shells for the Commune) and in May equipment from the firm of Donzel, but in both cases they paid. When a second factory was requisitioned in the 15th Arrondissement (rue de Lourmel), rent was promised for it too.[12] The good relations between the Society and private ironfounders are reminiscent of those between the Commune itself and firms supplying it – an

[8] In the series Ly, 'Commune de Paris 1871', carton 108 contains a file of captured correspondence and documents emanating from the Société Coopérative des Fondeurs en Fer, another concerning the Association des Ouvriers de la Metallurgie, and many miscellaneous letters and reports concerning private firms involved in the manufacture of war materials for the Commune. The other principal source is the court-martial dossier of Pierre Marc, '5e Conseil de Guerre, no. 52'.

[9] *Procès-verbal d'interrogation* (2 July 1871) of P. Marc, Ly 108; *déposition* of Louis Guillot, 5e C. de G. no. 52; lists of society members, May, Ly 108.

[10] *P.-v. d'interrog.*, Marc, Ly 108.

[11] *Dép.*, Guillot, 5e C. de G., no. 52; police report, Lombard (23 June 1871), Ly 108.

[12] *Rapport* (of investigating officer), and *dépositions* of Plichon and Donzel, 5e C. de G., no. 52; inventory of Brosse & Co. factory (rue de Lourmel), 4 May, signed by Marc, mentioning that rent was to be paid, Ly 108. (Brosse later claimed that no rent had actually been paid. Letter to *major de place*, 29 May 1871, Ly 108.)

important and barely noticed phenomenon. Some of the largest and best-known firms in the city numbered the revolutionary regime among their customers: the engineering firm of Cail, which supplied cannon, machine guns and even a prototype flamethrower; the renowned gunsmiths Gévelot and Lefaucheux; the big clothing manufacturer Godillot, whose boots were literally a household name. Relations with large firms such as these, whose aim above all was self-preservation, seem to have been cool but correct. Many smaller firms, desperate for business, were far more cordial, and their owners, who often had radical sympathies, were not above signing their business letters to the Commune with the correct revolutionary formula 'Salut et Fraternité'. In some such cases, the use of requisition orders was no more than a cover to protect firms from the possible consequences of supplying arms to rebels – as one firm put it, 'a requisition order...which authorizes us to make shells'.[13] When Marc took a squad of National Guardsmen with him to remove iron from Plichon's factory, it was, he claimed later, 'at his request, because he only wanted to submit to force'.[14] Perhaps the general attitude is best summed up by a large firm of upholsterers – 'suppliers to the City Hall and the administration' – who signed a contract to supply 250 red flags to the National Guard: 'Citizen, We have remained at the service of all Administrations, and have never had other than good relations'.[15] In the case of the Ironfounders' Cooperative, the owners of the firms with which it dealt all spoke in the highest terms of Pierre Marc, even after the fall of the Commune when he was being prosecuted, and when to express such favourable opinions was a matter of some courage. Donzel found Marc 'très convenable'; Plichon said he behaved with 'beaucoup de convenance'; and Guillot found all the members of the Society equally praiseworthy – they were 'les hommes les plus tranquilles et les plus laborieux...leur conduite ayant toujours été convenable'.[16]

Many of the papers of the Society were burnt by one of its more circumspect members, and there is little evidence of its internal workings, though even this little is not without interest. At least two general meetings of members were called, both outside working hours (on Sundays), and to ensure attendance the pay-packets were distributed afterwards. The first meeting was to discuss who were to be allowed to remain as members, thus demonstrating, it would seem, the exercise of collective discipline. Expulsion would have been a severe sanction, and not only economically, as it would make those affected liable for active service in the National Guard. Those attending the meeting were told to bring their *livrets*. This is most surprising. The *livret*, the industrial worker's compulsory pass book and employment record, was greatly resented by workers and their representatives as a symbol of inferior status and an instrument of subordination – so resented, indeed, that Napoleon III had promised in 1868 to re-examine the law, and progressive imperial officials had wanted it repealed. That the delegates of the Society – or Board of Directors (*Conseil d'Administration*), as they perhaps significantly called themselves – should instruct their members to bring their *livrets* is therefore as incongruous as if the Commune's secularized primary schools should start teaching the catechism. Unfortunately there

[13] Ly 108, e.g. letters from E. Dubru or from Callebout & Sons requesting requisition, and passim. Almost alone in examining the relations between the Commune and private business (in this case, the food trade) is Madeleine Egrot, 'La question des subsistances à Paris sous la Commune de 1871' (Paris, D.E.S. dissertation, 1953 4).

[14] *P.-v. d'interrog.* (2 July 1871), Ly 108.

[15] Julien Bellair & Co. to War Delegate, 20 May 1871, Ly 108.

[16] *Dépositions*, 5e C. de G., no. 52.

is no record of what happened at these general meetings. It seems a reasonable inference that at the meeting to decide who could remain as members the employment records of the men registered in their *livrets* were a criterion. The Society, in other words, was judging its members in the same way and by the same methods as private employers.[17]

Evidence does survive on the important question of wages. Society members received a uniform hourly rate – an advance, for piecework was unpopular – but a very low one, 30 centimes. Most of the men worked about fifty hours a week, which was normal in the industry. So for a ten- or eleven-hour day, the pay was 3 francs or 3.50 – something over half the normal rate.[18] In the foundry trade, therefore, as in the clothing trade, 'the Social Republic has done what those who are now besieging us did not wish to do: bring down wages'.[19] Women in the clothing trade, making uniforms for the National Guard, were earning in April and May as little as half what they had received before the Commune came to power (1 franc per day instead of 2 francs). The official report disclosing the fall in seamstresses' wages caused a stir, and the Commune decided to take steps to bring them back to pre-revolutionary levels.[20] The ironfounders were less fortunate, and no such steps were taken in their case. Perhaps no problem was perceived. Their wages, although depressed, were above subsistence level, unlike those of the women; indeed, they had double the pay of the tens of thousands of their fellow citizens conscripted as National Guardsmen. And yet the ironfounders earned only half the wages of the engineering workers at the armaments workshop in the Louvre – the normal rate for the industry of 60 centimes per hour. It seems likely that the reason was the same for the ironfounders as for the seamstresses: the need to compete with private firms for orders.[21] The Louvre workshop, working directly for the Commune, seems not to have met this problem, though a demand for pay of 85 centimes per hour for dangerous work in the front line was smartly rejected.[22]

The end of the Society is perhaps the most unusual episode of all. Pierre Marc and several other members were arrested, but only on 1 July 1871, more than a month after the Commune had finally been suppressed amid fire and slaughter on 28 May. Meanwhile Marc and his partners had, in the words of a police report, 'carried on their business in the Guillot factory, and they have the intention, if they have not already done so, of setting up a cooperative society' – that is to say, legally.[23] They still had a lot of shells on their hands, but they were able to pay Donzel for some of the material they had requisitioned, and they returned some of his other

[17] Notice of meeting (signed V. Lapuelle, secretary of *conseil d'administration*), Ly 108. For details of the *livret* see Georges Duveau, *La vie ouvrière en France sous le Second Empire* (Paris 1946), pp. 233–4.

[18] See pay sheet listing wages and hours for 153 workers at the rue de Lourmel factory, 20 May, Ly 108. The daily wage was equivalent in value to about 6 lb of cheap meat: police report on prices, 23 April, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Ba 364–5.

[19] Report on military clothing contracts by Lévy and Evette, *Journal Officiel* of Commune, 13 May.

[20] Ibid. See also report by Frankel, Labour and Exchange Delegate, to Commune, 12 May. *Journal Officiel* of Commune, 13 May.

[21] See letter of complaint on this subject in Jacques Rougerie, *Procès des Communards* (Paris, 1964), pp. 225–6.

[22] Director of Louvre workshop to Avrial (Director of Artillery), 12 May, Ly 108. See also a reported conversation with a seemingly disillusioned Avrial, formerly a metalworkers' trade-union organizer, in Roger Stéphane (ed.), *Louis-Nathaniel Rossel, mémoires, procès et correspondance* (Paris, 1960), pp. 267–8.

[23] Police report, Lombard (23 June 1871), Ly 108.

equipment, which apparently left him quite satisfied. As for Guillot, the owner of the Society's main factory, he seems to have become almost a partner – an odd role for an expropriated expropriator. When the police eventually arrived to arrest Marc and the others, they discovered Guillot with them in the Society's office. Guillot stated later that the members had been hoping to carry on normal trade –' [ils] auraient voulu continuer à travailler pour le commerce'.[24] Marc himself protested that during the Commune he had only been doing the same as the other master ironfounders in Paris – that he was merely an 'entrepreneur', so to speak, not a 'harbinger'.[25] No one seems to have thought any of this unusual except a rather scandalized police officer, who seems to have been far more aware than Marc or his business associates of the possible social and political implications of the enterprise.[26]

How much of this strange naivety was a pretence, adopted to escape punishment? The first police report stated that all the organizers were 'well known as belonging to the International and having been the principal instigators of strikes'. If this were true, of course, it would change everything. But the police were very free with such accusations, which prove nothing: practically everyone suspected of sympathy with the Commune was confidently described as being a notorious socialist and usually a drunkard and wife-beater to boot. Marc denied the accusation, but that proves nothing either.[27] But it is remarkable that the accusations were not repeated in Marc's indictment; that three other members of the Society arrested with Marc were not prosecuted at all (which they would certainly have been if they had had known political backgrounds); and that none of the organizers features in the Dictionnaire Biographique du Mouvement Ouvrier Français, which lists all those for whom any political or trade union activity is recorded. It would seem, in short, that the organizers of the Society had in fact no record of militancy.[28] Marc was sentenced to be transported (*déportation simple*) for having 'sciemment et volontairement fourni ou procuré des engins de guerre' and having 'fabriqué...des machines meurtrières' for rebels; but for some reason the court martial found unspecified extenuating circumstances, and the sentence was quickly commuted to five and then to three years imprisonment. Clearly, the authorities did not regard him as a dangerous revolutionary.[29]

The main points may be resumed as follows. A Cooperative Society of Ironfounders was set up under the auspices of the revolutionary regime, though apparently on the initiative of the workers themselves. They elected a former employer to manage

[24] *Dép.*, Guillot, 5e C. de G. no 52; *procès-verbal de perquisition* (1 July 1871) Ly 108.

[25] *Rapport* (of investigating officer), 5e C. de G., no. 52.

[26] Police report, Lombard (23 June 1871), Ly 108.

[27] Ibid.; *p.-v. d'interrog.* (Marc), 5e C. de G., no. 52. For a discussion of the authorities' prejudices see R. P. Tombs, 'Crime and the security of the state: the "dangerous classes" and insurrection in nineteenth-century Paris', in V. A. C. Gatrell, B. Lenman and G. Parker (eds.), *Crime and the law: the social history of crime in Western Europe since 1500* (London, 1980), pp. 218–24.

[28] Two other workers, Seine and Lemoine, were arrested with Marc, but must have been released. The police were unsuccessful in their search for other leading members: Lapuelle (ex-accountant and Society secretary), Chalon (ex-foreman), Fageol, Fray and Thomas. Duverne ('dit le Lyonnais') was later arrested, but apparently not charged. Had the matter been taken more seriously by the authorities, fugitives could have been tried in their absence, as was frequently done after the Commune. Of the above men, only Marc is listed in Jean Maitron et al., *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier Français* (*DBMOF*) (Paris, 1967–71), vols. IV–IX (1864–71).

[29] 5e C. de G., no. 52.

it. Throughout its existence, the Society enjoyed cordial relations with the owner of the factory it preferred to rent rather than requisition, and with private firms with which it had dealings. The wages it paid were extremely low, though over this it had little control. Its labour relations, over which it had complete control, were remarkably conventional: its managing delegates called themselves a Board of Directors, and its ordinary members were told to have their *livrets*. After the revolution had been suppressed, it continued to function as a normal business until the belated arrest of its organizers, who had no history of political militancy. Its brief existence is considered as one of the most important social experiments of the time. It was not, however, so considered by those involved in it, or by their capitalist associates, or even by the authorities who dealt with them so leniently. They had simply set up a partnership to supply a customer, which was at the same time a revolutionary regime. No doubt they supported the Commune, but they did not suppose that their enterprise was dependent on a new social and political environment requiring the survival of that regime. On the contrary, they had gone to great lengths to maintain links – as normal as the situation allowed – with the existing commercial system, perhaps calculating that they might thereby continue in business should the revolution fail. Perhaps Marc was hardly exaggerating when he protested that he was only doing like the other master ironfounders; and perhaps the military prosecutor was not far from the truth in concluding that he had '[profité] de cette circonstance pour tâcher de rétablir ses affaires'.[30]

What is the significance of this small episode within the Commune as a whole? First, it demonstrates the persistence of traditional class relations even within what many contemporaries and historians have considered as an avant-garde social experiment. Leadership in the Ironfounders' Cooperative was provided by men of the radical lower-middle class, such as Marc and Lapuelle. Pierre Marc was a typical figure, both in his bankruptcy in the 1860s and in his participation in the Commune: there were plenty like him serving as National Guard officers and civilian officials. Such leadership was accepted, indeed solicited, by manual workers who deferred to their administrative skills. So, in the present case, Marc was chosen because he had been an employer.[31] Once in operation, the Cooperative ran on conventional business lines – a striking illustration of the unpreparedness of Parisian workers, even in the militant and politicized metal industry, to break radically with the prevailing system. In spite of the strikes and the hardening socialist propaganda of the 1860s, hostility towards employers was slight – in this case, indeed, it appears non-existent. Such hostility was not a feature of the 1871 revolution generally. Class enemies were seen as the idle rich, and as parasites who lived at the expense of all who worked productively – priests, landlords, functionaries, policemen, soldiers, bankers – but not as the 'hard working bourgeoisie', what Jules Vallès in *Le Cri du Peuple* (22 March 1871) called 'la bourgeoisie travailleuse', the 'sœur du prolétariat'.[32]

Second, the case of the ironfounders must modify the view of the 16 April decree and workers' cooperatives during the Commune as a great leap forward either in theory or in practice. Cooperation, far from being a bold experiment, was a familiar,

[30] Ibid., *rapport*.

[31] 'Comme j'avais été patron, j'ai été chargé des démarches près du Ministère [de la Guerre]'. *P.-v. d'interrog.* (2 July 1871), Ly 108.

[32] For other examples of this view, see *Père Duchêne* no. 15, '10 Germinal An 79', and verses 5 and 6 of *L'Internationale*, written during the Commune by one of its members, Eugène Pottier. The Communards' view of their enemies is outlined by Jacques Rougerie, *Procès*, pp. 198–208.

respectable, even somewhat old-fashioned idea, with echoes of the utopianism of 1848 and the forelock-tugging of Second-Empire Proudhonists. During the Commune, Parisian workers could hardly have been unaware of the significance of cooperatives, and yet although there were several expressions of approval of the idea, these were rarely translated into action. The Club de la Révolution put workers' cooperatives only sixth in its programme of demands voted on 13 May, between the suppression of brothels and the shooting of hostages.[33] It took the Commune authorities nearly a month to begin preliminary consultations concerning the application of the 16 April decree: the Labour and Exchange Delegation called a meeting of workers' representatives on 15 May to draw up statutes for future cooperatives; and on 19 May there took place at the *mairie* of the 1st Arrondissement a meeting of representatives of cooperatives adhering to the Commune. This did not amount to an upsurge of enthusiasm for cooperation: as mentioned above, 50 cooperatives had existed in Paris before the Commune began; the Labour and Exchange Delegation itself published a list of 46 recommended producers' cooperatives on 14 May; and at the meeting of 19 May only 27 cooperatives were represented.[34] It would seem, therefore, that the number of cooperatives actually fell during the Commune. The 16 April decree, in short, was of little more than symbolic importance – an importance which has grown with the passage of time.

One possible reason why so little resulted in practice from the Commune's encouragement of cooperation was that the most advanced socialists were already finding the idea outdated. As one militant public orator had put it in the 1860s, 'the most intelligent profit from the ignorance of the rest; the ignorant are always exploited'.[35] If cooperatives were already seen as a lingering symbol of an obsolescent tradition by the activist minority, this might be part of the reason why Marc and his colleagues were allowed to run the Ironfounders' Cooperative like a private business. This does not, however, seem sufficient explanation. Only a small minority had so far rejected cooperation, which was to remain an important element in French socialism for decades to come.

The main reason, I suggest, why the social reforms of the Commune, including that concerning cooperatives, were so limited was that in 1871 social reform was not the major concern of Parisians. In a sense, 1871 was less socialist than 1848. The experiences of that year, of the coup d'état of 1851, and of two decades of the Empire had convinced the leaders of the Parisian Left that social experiment was futile unless political power had been secured. In 1871 the lesson could hardly be mistaken. Consequently, what preoccupied the Communards was not planning Utopia but beating the Versaillais and so preserving the Republic and the 'rights of Paris'. Moreover, the economic effects on the city of the Prussian war and siege and then the civil war and renewed siege, which had brought most industry to a standstill, meant that few workers' cooperatives had any chance of viability. What counted in 1871 were not National Workshops but the National Guard; and the few new workers' cooperatives that actually functioned on a significant scale were directly linked not with the consciously socialist if somewhat dilatory Labour and Exchange

[33] Jacques Rougerie, *Paris libre 1871* (Paris, 1971), pp. 213–14.

[34] Notice of meeting, *La Commune*, 11 May; list of producers' cooperatives, (circular from Labour and Exchange Delegation), Archives de la Seine, VD³ 14; report of meeting, 19 May, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, 'Commune de Paris', Ba 365–1.

[35] Alain Dalotel, A. Faure and J.-C. Freiermuth, *Aux origines de la Commune, Le mouvement des réunions publiques à Paris 1868–1870* (Paris 1980), p. 261.

Delegation, but with the utilitarian, wage-cutting War Delegation, for whom workers' cooperatives were a useful way of getting desperately needed war materials. The Ironfounders' Cooperative was actually set up before the Commune passed its 16 April decree, which had no practical effect on them: they obtained powers of requisition, funds and orders from the artillery section of the War Ministry.

In their preoccupation with fighting a war and winning a political victory, the programme of the Communards (though not their tactics) resembled that of the radicals. The similarity is strikingly visible in the Commune's most important political statement, the Declaration to the French People (19 April), which reproduces the main themes of Gambetta's Belleville Programme in 1869, one of the sacred texts of radicalism.[36] Both demanded as a priority the democratization of the machinery of the state, which involved popular control of police, judiciary, armed forces and bureaucracy, disestablishment of the Church and compulsory lay education. While firmly set on the conquest of political power, the Communards possessed no agreed social programme. They wrangled even over such elementary practical measures as the free restitution of small household items pawned during the economic hardships of the Prussian siege – a measure which the pre-revolutionary National Defence Government had been willing to take.[37] Similar confusion surrounded the significance of the workers' cooperatives. It is particularly fruitless, therefore, to speculate about what the Commune might have done if by some unimaginable turn of events they had beaten the Versaillais (and after them the Prussians). Having lost, it is quite understandable that what the survivors actually did over the next twenty years and more was to split into a variety of disputatious factions: Radicals, Blanquists, Possibilists, Allemanists, Anarchists, Boulangists, Nationalists, and even a handful of Marxists. All of them could justify a claim to part of the Communard heritage, and all had heroic veterans of the Commune prominent among their leaders.[38]

I do not know whether Pierre Marc was among these. Imprisonment may have turned him into a militant, as it did many others: he took part in a strike in Clairvaux gaol in 1872.[39] But then he fades from the pages of history. Whatever his political fate, I should like to think that he succeeded at last in his modest ambition of setting himself up in a small business.

[36] 'Déclaration au Peuple Français', in *Journal Officiel* of the Commune, 20 April; Belleville Programme in David Thomson, *France, Empire and Republic, 1850–1940* (New York, 1968), pp. 82–4. The Commune's programme was mightily approved by Marx as the political form 'at last discovered' of the future workers' revolutionary regime; it is amusing to think of Gambetta as one of the godfathers of the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The dividing line between radicals and socialists was easily straddled, even after the Commune: Clemenceau, for example, was on close terms with the revolutionary patriarch Blanqui in the late 1870s, at the same time as he was acting as Gambetta's second in a duel; soon after, he organized the Alliance Socialiste Républicaine with Marx's son-in-law, the Communard Jean Longuet. [37] See debate in the Commune, 3 May. *Journal Officiel* of Commune, 5 May.

[38] The Communard tradition became highly polyvalent. Of two of its longest-living personalities one, Camélinat (d. 1932), became in his old age a Stalinist mascot, while the other, Allemane, graced Doriot's Commune exhibition held at Saint-Denis in 1935. PCF, SFIO and Doriot's PPF literally fought to pay homage to the Communard dead at the Mur des Fédérés. During the Occupation the *Doriotistes*, taking advantage of their monopoly, were assiduous pilgrims. [39] *DBMOF*, VII, 242–3.