

THE CONCEPT OF THE ARMED PEOPLE:

FRANCE, 1870-1871

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THESIS ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to define the concept of the armed people and to illustrate the various applications of the concept in France, 1870-71. The nine months of French history from 4 September, 1870 (the overthrow of the Second Empire) to 28 May (the defeat of the Paris Commune) reveal a variety of incidences of the concept, from the francs-tireurs and the militia armies during the Franco-Prussian War to the revolutionary Commune movement of Paris and the provinces which emerged out of the frustration of defeat. That these manifestations of the concept came at the particular point in history which serves as the prelude to the modern era underscores the importance of the study to the discipline of International Relations. The Franco-Prussian War, together with the American Civil War, represents the first instance of modern war characterised by rapid technological innovation, the employment of mass armies, and the mobilisation of the resources of the entire state for the war effort. Similarly, the Paris Commune ranks as the 'dawn' of modern or proletarian revolution characterised by the organisation of the International, the formulation of revolutionary theory, and the accretion of proletarian power directed at the capture or destruction of the bourgeois state.

The thesis ultimately attempts to abstract the modes of military and revolutionary organisation from their political-historical context and to place them within the more specialised theory of the armed people. It is the contention of this paper that the concept of the 'armed people' is distinct from that of the 'nation-in-arms', that while the former is inherently

revolutionary in nature due to the emphasis it places on the citizen and his spontaneous, politicised reaction to the advent of war and/or revolution, the latter more readily connotes the more conservative or traditional idea of the citizen encadred in the apolitical structure of the nation's regular forces. The distinction is supported by an analysis of the contending concepts of military organisation in France, 1789-1870, and by an analysis of the successes and failures of the armed people during 1870-1871. Finally, the concept is briefly traced in socialist thought and revolutionary practice, through the Great War and the Russian Civil War, to the present day.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Acknowledgements	6
Introduction	8
I. The French Concept of the Armed People, 1789-1866	12
II. The Emperor's Army, the Emperor's War	26
A. 1866 to 19 July, 1870	26
B. The Franco-Prussian War, 19 July to 4 September	31
III. The Government of the Armed People	36
A. The Revolution of 4 September and the Government of National Defence	37
B. The Struggle to Maintain Supremacy	
1. Trochu versus the Parisian Left	43
2. Gambetta versus the Provincial Left	56
3. Keeping an Eye on the Right	74
C. The Election Controversy	85
D. Gambetta versus the Government of National Defence	88
IV. The Francs-tireurs	
A. Introduction	91
B. Models for the Francs-tireurs	94
C. The Forming of the Francs-tireurs	97
D. Areas of Operation	100
E. Types of units - terrorist, base camp, guerrilla army, partisan screen, corps d'élite, urban guerrillas	104
F. Types of Operations	132
G. Terror versus Counterterror	135
H. Successes and Failures	143
V. The Militia	
A. Introduction	153
B. Models - Valmy, Civil War	155
C. The Context: Organisational Measures taken prior to 10 October	163
D. The Organisational Measures of Gambetta and Freycinet	166
E. The Campaign in the Provinces	171
1. The Army of the Loire	173
2. The West with Chanzy	179
3. The North with Faidherbe	180
4. The East with Bourbaki	182
F. The Campaign in Paris	188
G. France's Military Resources at the Armistice	192
H. Successes and Failures of the Militia Armies	194
VI. From War to Revolution	205

VII. The Paris Commune.	220
A. The Armed People Take Command: 18 March.	220
B. The Central Committee: From Counter-revolution and Conciliation to Commune: 19 March - 28 March	226
C. The Commune: Offensive to Defensive: 29 March - 4 April	237
D. The Commune Defence by Cluseret: 5 April - 30 April	248
E. The Committee of Public Safety and Rossel: 1-9 May	263
F. Delescluze's Last Stand: 10-21 May	272
G. La Semaine Sanglante: 22-28 May	280
H. The Commune's Strategy and Tactics	289
VIII. The Provincial Communards	293
A. The Provincial Reaction to 18 March	295
B. The Provinces: 5 April to 28 May	300
C. The Peasants and the Algerian Question	304
D. The End of the Armed People in France, 1870-71	307
IX. The Concept of the Armed People	
A. The Legacy of the Armed People in France 1870-71	309
B. The Militia Challenge to the Nation-in-Arms	315
C. The Development of Insurrectionary Theory, 1871- 1917	325
D. The Day of the Guerrilla	338
E. The Armed Prophets	345
X. Appendices	
A. Intellectual Precursors of the Armed People	349
B. The German Attitude toward the Commune	355
C. The Army of Versailles	363
D. Maps	369
XI. Bibliography	
A. The French Concept of the Armed People, 1789-1870	374
B. The Franco-Prussian War: General Works, the Militia, and the Government of National Defence	375
C. The Francs-tireurs and the Zouaves	380
D. The Commune: Paris and the Provinces	388
E. The Concept of the Armed People: General Works	395

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INTRODUCTION

The period 1870-1871 has been extensively studied by historians, politicians, generals and revolutionaries with an interest that has not diminished even to the present day. The eleven months from the declaration of war by Napoleon III (July, 1870) to the suppression of the Paris Commune (May, 1871) witnessed an extraordinary series of events: the fall of the French Empire and the birth of the German Empire, the defeat of the best professional army in Europe by the German nation-in-arms, the creation of a new French Republic whose militia and guerrilla forces challenged the 'nation-in-arms' with the new concept of the 'armed people', and the emergence of the first proletarian revolution out of the bitterness of national defeat.

It would be virtually impossible for any book or thesis to discuss all the events in detail. The historian or student is thus forced to choose not only which events he will cover, but also the particular focus he will employ. Though most historians have chosen to study either the Franco-Prussian War or the Commune, this thesis deals rather with the period from the insurrection against Napoleon III and the birth of the Government of National Defence (4 September, 1870) to the last shot fired from the barricades of revolutionary Paris (28 May, 1871). It is not difficult to detach the first phase of the Franco-Prussian War from the second; not only were the two wars waged by different regimes, but the concepts of military organisation the second chose to employ qualitatively changed the nature of the conflict from one of 'army versus army' to one virtually of 'people versus people'. And out of the frustrations aroused by this 'people's war' and its defeat rose

the Paris Commune - an event more integrally linked to the war waged by Gambetta and his Government of National Defence than their war was to the one waged by Napoleon III.

The vantage point afforded by a study of the second war and the Commune sheds much needed light on the nexus between war and revolution. It further helps to eliminate the bias against the revolutionary found in the literature on the war, and the bias against the moderate 'nationalists' found in the literature on the Commune. For example, the revolutionaries' activities on 31 October and 22 January make little sense unless they are discussed in the context of the Paris Commune rather than the Franco-Prussian War. Similarly, the role of the National Guard, the activities of the provincial Ligues, and the differences in the struggle waged under Gambetta's leadership in the provinces and that of Favre - Trochu's more capitulationist efforts in Paris are not always appreciated by historians of the Commune.

This is not to suggest that excellent histories have not already been written about the period, from those written by actual participants in the War and Commune down to contemporary works by Howard, Jellinek and Edwards. Indeed, the present study would have been rendered difficult in the extreme had excellent basic histories of the period not already existed. For the present study is not a history of the events of 1870-71, but rather a study of the concepts of the armed people evolved by the French in the midst of war and revolution. It is ironic that such an important aspect of the War and the Commune, the modes of military organisation which were developed, should have been so neglected. Yet support for a military analysis of the period has come from a variety of sources. Stewart Edwards, in the preface to The Paris Commune, 1871, states that 'the revolutionary movement that

culminated in the European revolutions at the end of the First World War have [sic] given way more recently to the development of guerrilla resistance wars and of new forms of urban revolutionary experiences, which have only added to the possible readings that can be drawn from the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune'. And the French historian Jeanne Gaillard, author of Commune de Province, Commune de Paris, 1870-1871, outlines as a problem yet to be adequately resolved the lack of studies on the military problems of the period:

Aucune étude sur les armées de Gambetta, rien sur la levée des gardes mobiles, rien sur l'armée versaillaise... Les problèmes militaires - à ne pas confondre avec les faits de guerre - ne sont pourtant pas indifférents aux problèmes politiques proprement dits.

Finally, another French historian, Georges-Ferdinand Gautier, author of 'Les Francs-tireurs de la Commune', frankly states that it is time to take the Commune out of the political realm and 'de replacer cette insurrection sur son terrain essentiel, c'est-à-dire "militaire"'.

When one departs from the historical literature and studies such basic texts on French military organisation as Monteilhet, Girardet and Challener, one is struck by the lack of commentary on the role of the armed people, 1870-1871. For that period must have been the most illuminating in the history of France by virtue of the numerous applications of the concept which emerged literally on the battlefield. Further, compendiums dealing with the questions of armies in revolution and urban guerrilla warfare (especially the books by John Ellis and Martin Oppenheimer) offer accounts which, though helpful, are too sketchy to adequately portray the interplay of the concepts with the historical events of the period.

Even had earlier studies of the period dealt more adequately

with the topic of the French 'armed people', there would remain two important reasons for the present study. First, aspects of the War thought to be virtually unimportant in 1870 have become better understood due to contemporary events. For example, the francs-tireurs were ignored by the colonels and generals who wrote military histories of the war; only after the experiences of the Maquis, Indo-China and Algeria have French regular officers shown renewed interest in 'résistants de 1870' and their guerrilla activity against the German lines of communication. And secondly, while the Commune represents the key to Marxist-Leninist, as well as Anarchist, revolutionary theory, the role of the armed people in that revolution has never been extensively analysed within the framework of revolutionary theory.

Finally, within the discipline of International Relations, there is an acute lack of interest in the concept of the armed people, despite the fact that guerrilla conflicts, military coups, and revolutions have become central features of the international political system. Not only do traditional texts in the field generally ignore such questions, even works in strategic studies, from Quincy Wright's A Study of War through Brodie's War and Politics offer too little analysis of the 'politics of civil wars and of guerrilla methods of combat' (Adam Roberts in The Sunday Times, 25 August, 1974).

I. THE FRENCH CONCEPT OF THE ARMED PEOPLE, 1789-1806

A military force never exists in isolation, nor is the particular force in being ever the only type which the state might have developed. Rather, each state has the choice, within certain political and socio-economic limits, of a variety of modes of military organisation, each based on a different concept of the state, the role the people ought to play in relation to the government, and the offensive/defensive needs and capabilities of the polity. The mode of military organisation which the state ultimately evolves is thus the reflection of a number of factors, not all of which can be controlled by the state. The concept upon which the army is based usually persists until challenged by another concept on the field of battle, whether externally by another state, or internally by a revolutionary organisation.

Though a variety of concepts of military organisation can be discerned throughout history, ranging from primitive tribal warfare to present-day automated atomic weapons requiring virtually no 'soldiers', and given that the modes of military organisation vary according to advances in technology, geographical vicissitudes, and cultural differences among societies, the present study deals basically with three concepts of armed power which contended one with another throughout the period 1789 to the present: the armed people, the nation-in-arms, and the regular professional army (l'armée de métier).

The regular army is perhaps the easiest to describe. Whether the term is used to label the soldiers of Louis XVIII's Restoration Army or Britain and America's 'professionals' of

today, the regular army has been criticised as a force of men whose allegiance is to the army first, the government second and the people third - a force which, by virtue of its isolation from the civilian society it theoretically defends, becomes a nation within the nation fully capable of developing its own values and political opinions. In short, the regular army, while it may remain apolitical, always threatens to become the praetorian guard and to utilise its power to intervene in politics through the coup d'état to ensure that its own vision of the nation retains power.

At the other extreme of military organisation stands the concept of the armed people. Where before only the regular soldiers had the right and duty to bear arms in the defence of the country, now every citizen has the inalienable right to bear arms. Neither the purpose to which these arms will be put nor the exact manner of their employment is specifically defined: for the justification for the armed people is two-fold in nature. First, justification comes from the political principle that if only a few men in the society have the right to bear arms, they might 'enslave' the others or force their political opinions on them; on the other hand, if every man bore arms, no one could play the role of enslaver and no unpopular regime could hope to attain and retain power. Secondly, the concept is justified through the idea that once the nation is invaded, to ignore any means for its defence is a 'criminal' act; only if every citizen is employed in the defence effort can the full resources of the nation be tapped; once total defence is achieved no aggressor would dare attack because of the likelihood of the fierce popular resistance which he would encounter, whether from guerrillas or from militia

armies numbering in the millions.

In between these two alternatives comes the concept of the nation-in-arms - a concept which varies between the militarised Prussian mass conscription system, by which every citizen becomes virtually a regular soldier, and the Swiss militia system with almost no standing army, which approximates the armed people. That the concept of the nation-in-arms covers such a wide scope of military organisations is due to its departure from the more concrete emphases on the army or the people to an emphasis on something more intangible and hence more open to definition by varying elites - the nation.

While the nation-in-arms as originally conceived represented a revolutionary departure from l'armée de métier, it nevertheless fell far short of the concept of the armed people. While every male citizen of a certain age was guaranteed the right to bear arms in the defence of the nation, few would have the right to determine the manner of their use. Though he is neither a 'soldier' nor a 'citizen', the soldier-citizen of the nation-in-arms inclines towards the regular once he is in uniform and subjected to military discipline and law. Thus, while the nation-in-arms is theoretically a more democratic concept than that of the 'praetorian guard' regulars, the concept always risks subversion into simply a large regular force rather than a truly democratic force. Instead of 'nationalising the military', it risks to 'militarise the nation'.

France during the period 1789 to 1870 illustrates particularly well the three contending concepts of military organisation, as well as the political and socio-economic factors upon which each rests. In the years before 1789 France had for its military force

a small regular army, controlled by a monarchy which had been absolute since the days when the centralised kingdom had displaced a feudal system in which great lords had often had power in excess of that of the king. But the France of 1789 saw the interplay of new socio-economic factors and their accompanying political perspectives which were creating a new concept of the state. The new 'state' envisaged a different role in the relationship between governor and governed, and it called into question the King's army as arbiter of internal politics. With the storming of the Bastille the new force would shatter the King's plan to stop the clock and occupy Paris with his outmoded army. A new consciousness that France was a nation and that its people were citizens with certain rights would further destroy the concept upon which the King's authority and armed power had been based. Almost unconsciously, a new mode of military organisation would be created, based on the political and socio-economic conditions of the revolution: the armed people of the National Guard.

The first fully-fledged manifestation of the French concept of the armed people was that of a disorganised, insurrectionary force formed more in self-defence against Royalist forces in Paris who were preparing a coup d'état against the Assembly rather than in a conscious effort to create a new armed authority. This National Guard was formed on the 13th of July, after arms had been obtained from raids on local gunshops and military arsenals. On the 14th the crowd advanced on the Bastille to secure more arms. Commander Launoy, confronted by the crowd, lost his head and ordered his troops to fire, killing 98 and wounding 73. This unwarranted action prompted two units of Royal Household troops to join with the people, and when they trained cannons on the gate

of the Bastille, Launoy surrendered. Through the double blunder of the massacre of citizens and surrender of the fort, Louis XVI not only faced a hostile Paris, but he no longer had a centre in Paris from which to launch a coup d'état. Paris was in the hands of the Revolution, and Lafayette was elected commander of its armed forces, now formed as a regularised National Guard. The Revolution in power at Paris spread to the provinces on the strength of the new concept of the armed people, as 'newly formed National Guards all over the country took possession of local citadels and armed themselves against any aristocratic counter-revolution.'¹

But the concept of the armed people was too radical for the bourgeois character of the revolution. The National Guard, far from remaining the people armed, became rather a 'class in arms'.² In the provinces the Guard moved against the peasantry, whose spontaneous risings were creating chaos. And in Paris, where the National Guard leadership worried about the bands of citizens who retained arms and had in the sans-culottes a rival power base, it was proclaimed that only the National Guard could have arms. Then, to ensure bourgeois control over that body, age, residency, employment and tax qualifications were established which forced members of the lower classes out of the Guard. By the 19th July, the force was actively disarming all citizens not enrolled in the Guard, despite the fact that many of them had fought for the revolution in the insurrectionary period 11-14 July. The concept of the armed people had thus been forestalled by the 'class-in-arms', as the bourgeoisie consolidated its triumph against the

1. R. Ben Jones, The French Revolution, (London, 1909), p.55.

2. John Ellis, Armies in Revolution, (London, 1973), p.77.

aristocracy by excluding the poor from a share in the power. When 100,000 volunteers were taken exclusively from the National Guard to fill out the ranks of the Army in 1791, bourgeois control of that arm of the state was assured as well.

The situation would have remained stable had not the allied intervention shown France's leadership that the class-in-arms was too few in number to defend the revolution. In 1792, France adopted the concept of the nation-in-arms as the only force capable of defeating the professional armies marching against them:

The General Council ordered all the citizens in the sections to form themselves into companies. All suffrage qualifications were abolished and all were accorded the right to arm themselves. Now both internal and external defence had been taken out of the hands of just one section of the population, and had been handed over to the nation at large.¹

Aristocratic privilege in the officer corps was thrown to the winds, and the election of officers was proclaimed to choose leaders for the nation-in-arms. After the victories at Valmy and Jemmappes,² popular acclaim greeted the concept. The levée en masse, which should in theory have swept the people to power over the bourgeois elite, gave France an army of 700,000 men. Despite the utilisation of 'armed people' rhetoric, the nation-in-arms was already tending towards the establishment of simply a large quasi-professional army. 'But by the time of the levées France had in fact ceased to be a nation-in-arms, and was starting toward administrative centralisation and the suppression of dissent.'³ As battalion after battalion of French citizens marched off to become citizen-soldiers, the original concept became

1. Ibid., p.88.

2. The organisation of the French armies and the details of these battles are discussed in greater detail in the chapter dealing with the Militia.

3. Ibid., p.95.

obscured. France was caught up in the process of militarisation, and dissent and discussion in the army were soon prohibited; the citizen-soldiers became no more than ordinary soldiers, as disciplined armies began to pour over the borders of France preaching concepts they no longer practised themselves. The rise of Napoleon based on military glory was thus but a tiny step from the nation-in-arms already subverted into a large regular force.

Ellis has described the transition from the revolutionary to the obligatory military commitment incumbent upon the French citizenry:

In a nation-in-arms the desire to fight originates with the people themselves, on behalf of a genuine collectivity of interests and mutual obligations. In a state-in-arms the desire to fight is not a necessary precondition; military service becomes an obligation decreed by those in power...¹

While his basic point is valid, this distinction is better made through substituting the terms the 'armed people' and the 'nation-in-arms', where he uses the 'nation-in-arms' and the 'state-in-arms'. The outmoded armée de métier based on royal absolutism had been smashed by the new concept of the armed people. But the bourgeoisie had managed to throttle the armed people by establishing its class-in-arms. Only when the revolution was endangered by allied intervention had the bourgeois leadership adopted the concept of the nation-in-arms - the only concept through which it could control the tremendous military forces furnished by the sans-culottes without jeopardising the basis for its own class rule. The nation-in-arms thus represented a compromise between the revolutionary rhetoric of the armed people and the necessity of military centralisation and control.

1. Ibid., pp.95-6.

Ironically, it was left to France's opponents in the Napoleonic Wars, the Spanish guerrilleros and the Prussian Freikorps of 1813-14, to develop the concept of the armed people in its guerrilla mode, and to the Prussian Landwehr to develop a militia system based on the armed people. Only when Napoleon's armies lay shattered did some Frenchmen turn again to the concept of the armed people. Spontaneously, and without official encouragement, partisans in eastern France rose to harass the invading allied armies in 1814. But their efforts were too little and too late to save France from defeat; their actions were not imitated by the rest of France, which chose rather to accept defeat and the restoration of the monarchy.

From 1814 to 1871 the political battle for control of France often centred on the question of who controlled the army; and the issue of who controlled the army very often depended on the underlying concept upon which the force was founded. It is therefore not surprising that Louis XVIII's most important task in the process of Bourbon Restoration was the development of a different concept of the military - one not tainted by revolution or Bonapartism. Louis XVIII, searching for the system most similar to that of France before the Revolution, opted for a small professional army. The force was to be recruited directly to ensure that loyalty would be owed only to the crown; conscription was considered too dangerous to the stability of the regime. The King further wished to abolish immediately the National Guard; however, his advisors warned him that the Guard was necessary to maintain order (as it had done for Napoleon) until a sufficient professional force could be built. The policy was an error; when Napoleon returned from Elba, the Guard refused

to move against him. The King had lost the battle for the army, and he had temporarily lost France as well. It was only after the Second Restoration that Louis XVIII managed to weaken the National Guard. But by 1817 the army already suffered for lack of volunteers; a system of selective conscription would have to be developed. The resultant military law of 1818 established a six-year period of service for the draftees, and the law was amended in 1824 by increasing the commitment to eight years. The long period of service was thought necessary to ensure the isolation of the army from the people. The army was to become a 'nation within the nation', and in this manner the armée de métier was provided with a base which politics would hopefully not destroy or disorganise. The professional army, conceived in 1818, amended in 1824, and reaffirmed in 1832, reigned supreme as the concept upon which French military power was based until 1868, when the challenge of the German concept of the nation-in-arms forced belated revision of the French armée de métier concept.

The reasons for this attachment to the professional army were basically political. Charles X, who succeeded Louis XVIII in 1824, was more suspicious of the National Guard than his predecessor had been. He recalled Lafayette's words from 1814 when the Guard had refused to halt Napoleon's advance to power:

Le sentiment raisonnable qui m'a paru dominer en France, c'est qu'il n'y avait pas là de quoi faire battre des citoyens les uns contre les autres.¹

Charles X was not content to have a force over which he had less than absolute control; nor was he willing to simply let the National Guard slowly atrophy as Louis XVIII had done. In 1827 he summarily dismissed the Guard; however, he allowed them to

1. Louis Girard, La Garde Nationale, 1814-1871, (Paris, 1904), p.43.

retain their weapons - a surprising oversight by a man seeking to disenfranchise the opposition. For in the Revolution of 1830, 8,000 insurgents, many of whom were ex-Guardsmen or who at least obtained arms formerly belonging to the Guard,¹ proved more than enough to defeat the King's household troops. Charles X called upon the army to restore order; but when two regiments went over to the people, the King's authority crumbled. A collection of ex-Guards, students, workers and bourgeois, fighting spontaneously as the armed people, had again invalidated the professional army concept on the interior battlefield.

The armed people, though skilled in the spontaneous art of insurrectionary warfare, nevertheless had yet to find an enduring organisation with which to consolidate their victories. Though overnight the National Guard swelled to 47,000 men and again chose Lafayette as their commander, the more moderate bourgeoisie retained control. Thiers' machinations behind the political scenes pushed the idea of a 'Citizen-King' in Louis-Philippe, and even Lafayette favoured the idea of a constitutional monarchy. When the popular commander met the Citizen-King at the Hôtel-de-Ville, any hope for revolution was quickly dispelled:

The crowds went mad with enthusiasm when Louis-Philippe appeared on the balcony holding the tricolour flag and publicly embraced the venerable Commander of the National Guard. This was the famous kiss that made the July Monarchy. Republican opposition was stilled by a gesture which momentarily made the Duke of Orleans appear the best of Republicans.²

Once the constitutional monarchy was safely established, Louis-Philippe faced the same question that had confronted Louis XVIII: what kind of military organisation could be built

1. Ibid., see pp.159-63.

2. J.P.T. Bury, France, 1814-1940, (London, 1909), p.46.

to safeguard his regime on both the interior and the exterior battlefields? Though the armed people had brought him to power, he had successfully stilled the forces of revolution and the military concept upon which they were based. Lafayette favoured the development of the 'nation-in-arms', but Louis-Philippe more readily agreed with his advisor Remigny:

Cela est bien sur le papier afin de montrer aux étrangers quelle force on peut leur opposer en temps de guerre; mais armer les ouvriers, c'est amener l'émeute et enfin rénouer 1793 et ses mille horreurs.¹

L'armée de métier was again chosen as the best mode of military organisation; and the Soult Law of 1832 virtually copied that of 1824, while changing the length of service from eight to seven years.² Though Louis-Philippe now had his professional army, he could not overtly disavow the National Guard, to whom he owed his throne. The Guard was rechartered, and its mission now read to 'défendre la royauté constitutionnelle'³ - a far cry from the original mission of the armed people to guard against the royalists' counter-revolutionary activities. However, the insurgencies at Lyon in 1831, and in Lyon and Paris in 1834, convinced Louis-Philippe that the Guard could still not be trusted, and he determined to let it atrophy as Louis XVIII had done.

Louis-Philippe's lack of confidence in the National Guard was justified by the events of 1848. Though he hoped to weather the crisis by replacing the unpopular Guizot with Molé and then Thiers, events soon overtook him. Troops at the Ministry of

1. Girard, op. cit., p.181.

2. Porch disagrees in his book Army and Revolution; he considers the Law of 1832 a significant revision of the French military system. His evidence is less convincing than that provided by Monteilhet (Les Institutions Militaires de la France) who argues that the legal change was insignificant.

3. Girard, op. cit., p.190.

Foreign Affairs fired on demonstrators, killing several; the act discredited the regime, and barricades were thrown up in East Paris. Louis-Philippe rode out to review the National Guard troops, but he received a stony reception from the body which had acclaimed him in 1830. Though Thiers urged him to retire to the provinces, form an army and reconquer Paris,¹ the disheartened monarch realised that his military situation in Paris had become impossible:

L'armée s'était trouvée diluée dans la garde, la garde à son tour absorbée par le peuple.²

For the third time in 59 years, the armed people had overthrown the monarchy. But by 1848 the Guard was no longer the overwhelmingly bourgeois force it had been in 1789, nor would a 'kiss' be sufficient to lift a constitutional monarch to power as in 1830. The Second Republic was proclaimed, and only Lamartine's oratorical ability saved the tricolour from being replaced by the red flag of revolution. As the revolutionary situation deepened, no-one seemed to be in complete control. The Provisional Government could not be all things to all people, and the division between moderate Republican leaders and socialists such as Louis Blanc, Arago, Ledru-Rollin and Crémieux was already deep. Radical attempts to forestall elections for a National Assembly only partially succeeded; postponed once, the elections yielded a crushing majority to the Orleanists, Legitimists and conservative Republicans. This threat from the Right was more than matched by the threat from the Left; armed bands invaded the Palais Bourbon and Hôtel-de-Ville on 15 May 1848 in an attempt to establish a workers' government. At the centre of the crisis stood the National

1. Thiers would implement his own plan 23 years later against the Communards.

2. Girard, op. cit., p.287.

Guard of Paris, which had nearly 300,000 members. This body of men, drawn from all segments of the populace, was out of control by April, furnished limited support to the insurgents in May, and by June stood solidly behind the 110,000 men thrown out of the National Workshops by the Assembly. The anarchic situation could not endure. Cavaignac, with 29,000 regulars and gendarmes, 10,000 gardes mobiles, and the support of 100,000 provincial National Guards, struck to restore the government's authority. In Paris, Clément Thomas tried to assemble as many bourgeois Guardsmen as possible; but out of 237,000 men, only 8,000 answered the call to arms. While many remained neutral, perhaps as many as 100,000 fought for the revolution in les Journées de Juin. Several thousands were killed, and thousands more were arrested or deported. It had been as the armed people that they had fought, in de Tocqueville's words, 'without a war-cry, without chiefs, or a standard, and yet with cohesion and a military skill which surprised the oldest officers.'¹

Though the armed people had been crushed in June, there was still turmoil in the French military and political circles. Into the void stepped the virtually unknown Louis Napoleon; the magic of his name proved sufficient to win him the Presidency of the mortally-wounded Republic. As he rode out to review the troops now under his command, cries of 'Vive la République' gave way to 'Vive le Président' and to the inevitable 'Vive l'Empereur'. By 2 December, 1851, the Army was sufficiently prepared to launch the equally inevitable coup d'état; and the Left, not yet recovered from the repression of June, 1848, could offer only sporadic resistance.

1. Bury, op. cit., p.79.

Napoleon III quickly adopted the professional army concept, though one enlarged through selective conscription and supported by proper reserves composed of all citizens 25-50. Though the National Guard was virtually dissolved, selected units could be organised in the provinces by Imperial decree, and in Paris and the Seine region, 22 and 52 battalions were kept, primarily to help maintain order. Even without many organised reserves, the French Army was by all standards a powerful force, numbering over 200,000 trained regulars at any given time. An adventurous military policy, which saw French troops in combat from the Crimea and Italy to Vietnam and Mexico, soon gave the French Army the reputation of being the mightiest in Europe. But by 1890, the rise of Prussia and its particular form of the nation-in-arms appeared to threaten French hegemony in Europe; and after Sadowa, 1866, Napoleon III recognised the need for rapid military reform. The debate over which concept of the military would be required for France - the armed people, the nation-in-arms, or the professional army - had been reopened. The answers would be provided not in the corridors of the Ministère de la Guerre, not in the Chambers of the Corps Législatif, nor even in the streets of radical Paris, but rather on the field of battle against the German nation.

II. THE EMPEROR'S ARMY, THE EMPEROR'S WAR

A. 1866 to 19 July, 1870

To a man whose regime, fame and destiny rested solely on the perpetration of the myth of military glory, the sudden realisation that the Imperial Army was only second best must have come as quite a shock. But Napoleon III, more than any of the entourage of politicians and generals who surrounded him save perhaps Niel, realised the meaning of the battle of Sadowa and determined in earnest to reform the now outmoded French Army. Proper reforms, as he would discover, would require more than new laws or improved weapons; for war had undergone a qualitative change. Just as the French nation-in-arms had destroyed the old European armies in the years 1792-1812, the first modern European war would destroy the small professional army concept and enthrone a new version of the nation-in-arms.

As Howard notes, 'France had given birth to the ideal of the Nation in Arms, but in the nineteenth century she continually refused, for reasons political, military and economic, to base her military organisation on the pattern of her revolutionary armies.'¹ Ironically, it was left to France's growing rival, Prussia, to adapt the concept of the nation-in-arms to modern warfare. The process had begun after Napoleon I's shattering victories at Jena and Auerstadt in 1806. By 1807 a Military Reorganisation Commission under Scharnhorst was already attempting to devise a military system capable of tapping Prussia's manpower

1. Michael Howard, The Franco-Prussian War, (London, 1901), p.13.

resources. But the reformers had difficulty passing a comprehensive system over the entrenched power of the nobility, and a militia based on property qualifications was the most that could be obtained. Only after the defeat of Napoleon in Russia did the Prussian reformers gain the upper hand, and it was the concept of the armed people they sought to implement. Through the creation of the Landwehr or national militia and the use of guerrillas or Freikorps, the Prussians were able to augment their small regular army and to smash Napoleon's occupation structure with the campaign of 1813-14. Guerrillas commanded by Platow, Czernichef, Benkendorf, Tettenborn, Marwitz and Lutzow¹ raided deep behind Napoleon's lines of communication, creating panic and disorder among Napoleon's troops. Continually harassed and cut off from each other, the French troops became easy prey for the Landwehr and regular forces. Popular insurrections completed the military programme launched by the Prussians, and the spontaneous risings helped to liberate large sections of the country from the French occupation forces. As the reforms took hold the serfs were freed, the nobility was disenfranchised as the sole source of officers, and an egalitarian system in which all men aged 17 to 40 owed military service to the state was decreed. But after the collapse of the Napoleonic system, the regulars gradually reasserted control; and when the army marched into France, the Landwehr troops lost their independent character and were either encadred into regular formations or were used as 'fillers' to replace casualties. The guerrillas proved ineffective during operations away from the support of their popular bases² and were disbanded.

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1. See Chariton, Les Corps Francs dans la Guerre Moderne for a full account of the Freikorps' activities.
 2. Several units were actually defeated by French guerrilla activity in Eastern France; like the American Green Berets in Vietnam, they had found that guerrilla tactics cannot be used on foreign soil, where support of the people is lacking.

The armed people had been subverted into the nation-in-arms; yet even that concept proved too radical once the counter-revolution set in after the Napoleonic Wars. By 1819 the old-style army of Frederick the Great was restored; the distinction between the regular army and the now neglected Landwehr was heightened; and the officers were once again drawn from the nobility. By 1858 the Prussian Army was one of the weakest in Europe, and France's regular army was the envy of the Prussian officer corps.

The situation might have remained unchanged had not the new Regent, Prince William, taken an extraordinary interest in military affairs. To aid him in the task of military reform he had a brilliant Chancellor (Bismarck), a capable Minister of War (Roon) and an excellent Chief-of-Staff (Moltke). Roon advocated the system which Prussia had abandoned after her victories in 1813-15 - the rigidly controlled nation-in-arms. Under the new system every Prussian owed three years service in the regular army, four years in the reserve and a further five years in the Landwehr militia. Even the Landwehr was kept on such a war-footing that it offered an effective second reserve. Despite a constitutional crisis that would have crippled weaker men, Bismarck and William I used Roon's military machine to fight victorious wars against Denmark in 1864 and Austria in 1866. The legislature was suitably impressed, and the constitutional crisis was virtually resolved on 3 July 1866 on the battlefield of Sadowa.¹ In eight years Prussia's military system had been completely transformed, and she was capable of fielding an army of over a million men. Roon's machine had been tested and perfected; Bismarck was busy searching for an excuse to involve

1. Howard, op. cit., p.21.

France in a war; and Moltke, his genius proved in the latter half of the Danish campaign and by the victory of Sadowa, was occupied with working out the details of his plan which would bring the defeat of Imperial France.

This was the challenge which faced Napoleon III - an army of over a million Germans, veterans of two victorious campaigns, capable of deployment in a matter of days, using modern weapons such as the needle gun and Krupp's steel cannon, taking advantage of modern means of communication (railways and telegraphs) to concentrate and control large forces over extended distances, and welded into a disciplined fighting force by a General Staff of legendary efficiency. In short, the challenge was that of the militarised nation-in-arms which had mobilised the resources of an entire nation for war. It was as if the French Empire had slumbered for ten years only to awake to a Rip Van Winkle nightmare; a new military age had dawned, and the French were totally unprepared to enter it.

Napoleon III called the Compiègne Conference in 1866 to discuss the best means available for matching the Prussian juggernaut. Though his only interest was how to obtain a million soldiers, he was forced to re-open the political debate concerning the type of military organisation best suited to the French nation. Niel, who soon became head of the Ministère de la Guerre, devised a plan based on the idea that every Frenchman owed nine years service to the state. There would be three categories of service: the active or regular army, their immediate reserves, and the garde mobile, which was a catch-all for those men who had escaped service by obtaining a 'bon numéro' in the draft or who had purchased a replacement. It was reckoned that the system would in ten years' time furnish an army of more than a million

men. But the scheme ran into heavy political opposition in the Corps Législatif of the now 'liberalised' Empire. The Right feared that the regular army would be weakened and that the masses would turn their arms against the government, while the Left feared that the Niel plan would lead to a militarised state. They argued rather for the creation of a 'genuine' citizen army - one which, in the words of Favre and Simon,¹ would be 'an army, but an army of citizens and soldiers, invincible at home and incapable of waging war abroad; an army without military spirit...'²

The resultant military law of 1868 was a compromise; it was the most that Niel and Napoleon III could push through the reluctant Assembly. As such, it was a half-measure incapable of fulfilling the military needs of France. The regular army numbered only 288,000 men, who were scattered throughout France, her colonies, and Rome. Though the principle of five years' active service and four years' reserve had been accepted, the annual class was divided into two contingents, of which the second had to serve only five months. And though the creation of the Garde Mobile brought a five-year obligation for all those who escaped conscription, they trained for only two weeks every year.

If the manpower situation had not been remedied, at least Napoleon III was able to equip his regulars with modern weaponry. The chassepot was developed, and it proved to be superior to the Prussian needle-gun. Although the French did not buy Krupp's new steel artillery pieces, their cannon were better than those employed by the Austrians in 1866; further, great faith was placed in the mitrailleuse, a prototype machine-gun. France's

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1. They would later betray their own concept during their period in power with the Government of National Defence.
 2. Richard D. Challener, The French Theory of the Nation in Arms, (New York, 1955), p.27.

railway network was not as good as Prussia's, but she could nevertheless count on the reasonably speedy transport of men and material. The real problems lay with the general organisation of the French forces. The reserves existed only on paper; in a quick war, France would have no time to call them up and train them. Secondly, there was no equivalent of the German General Staff to co-ordinate, supply, and direct the actions of large forces. While the French Army had adopted the trappings of a modern army, its organisation, strategy and logistics system remained mired in traditional thought.

Thus in July, 1870, when Niel's successor Le Boeuf assured Napoleon III that the French Army was ready 'down to the last gaiter-button' the Emperor allowed the French to declare a war for which they were totally unprepared. He expected to command a regular force of 492,585¹ (of which 300,000 could be mobilised in three weeks) and a reserve Garde Mobile of 417,366 (of which 120,000 were immediately available). Had it been true, the force might have proved sufficient to offset Germany's numerical advantage with a lightning offensive into South Germany; the German mobilisation, once thrown off balance, might have collapsed and given the French regulars the advantage.

B. The Franco-Prussian War, 19 July to 4 September

By 31 July, a full twelve days after the declaration of war, the French Army had mobilised only 238,000 men, and of these 50,000 were not available for offensive operations. Napoleon III had the choice of two strategies for which these forces would be suitable.

1. All figures in this chapter come from Howard's The Franco-Prussian War.

First, he could await the German attack in the fortresses of eastern France and hope to hold the enemy at bay until new armies could be mobilised. Second, he could attack and hope for initial victory and the advent of allies to demoralise and destroy the Prussian forces. Confident that his regulars were the finest soldiers in the world, and fully aware that only an offensive could bring the military glory necessary to prop up his regime, he ordered the attack into Germany. On 2 August the French took Saarbrücken and advanced to the heights of Spicheren; though the victory had been won over a token border force, the Parisian press went wild.¹ The French Army then halted to re-organise and to gauge the Prussian reaction - a crucial mistake, considering that the purpose of the offensive was to disrupt the German mobilisation. The Prussian Army was not far away, for 'within eighteen days 1,183,000 men, regular and reservist, passed through the barracks in Germany and were embodied in the wartime army; and 462,000 were transported to the French frontier to open the campaign'.² By 3 August the German Army was ready to advance; although the French Army had been reinforced to 270,000, they were about to be overwhelmed.

On 6 August, at the twin battles of Spicheren and Froeschwiller, the first French units to meet the onslaught fought ably but were outmanoeuvred due to the sheer numbers of their opponents and their own lack of reinforcements. Though soldier to soldier the French were the match for their opponents, their faulty military system was already no match for the German nation-in-arms. The French Army began the long retreat which

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1. Such exaggeration made the later defeats appear all the more incredible, and cries of 'A Berlin!' changed to 'Trahison!'
 2. Howard, op. cit., p.60.

would end in the disasters at Sedan and Metz. To their astonishment, the German armies were in close pursuit; they had not halted to reorganise, as was the European military tradition, but had been immediately resupplied and reinforced by a General Staff that accepted no excuse for delays. Bazaine led the bulk of the French Army toward Metz; MacMahon's shattered forces headed north toward Sedan; and Douay's corps became detached completely and had to fall back on Belfort. The French retreat was quickly becoming a rout, as their armies were now divided by the speed of the German advance. While Napoleon III was busy organising a new army at Châlons, Bazaine was already in trouble at Metz; instead of retreating rapidly he had allowed himself to be drawn into battle, first east, and then west of the fortress-city. Though the French twice inflicted greater casualties on the Germans, first at Vionville-Mars-la-Tour and then at Gravelotte-St.-Privat, they were forced back to Metz; where they were promptly encircled.

It was a disaster for French arms and an unexpected coup for the Germans. For while Napoleon III could have fortified Paris with his new army and waited for more reserves to be mobilised, he determined to rescue Bazaine. The strategy might have worked against a lesser military opponent; but Prussia had more than enough troops to encircle Bazaine and to deal with Napoleon's challenge.

On 29 August, Napoleon III's advance guard was decimated at Beaumont, and on 1 September the Emperor found himself and his army surrounded at Sedan by a force nearly twice his size. Artillery fire and battles on the periphery reduced MacMahon's army to a mere 80,000; and on 3 September, the Emperor surrendered. At the derisory loss of 9,000 killed and wounded the Germans had

destroyed the French Army, sent the Emperor into captivity, and assured the eventual surrender of Bazaine.

The completeness of the Prussian success in 1870 thus astounded the world. The incompetence of the French high command explained much; but the basic reasons for the catastrophe lay deeper, as the French themselves, in their humiliation, were to discern. The collapse at Sedan, like that of the Prussians at Jena sixty-four years earlier, was the result not simply of faulty command but of a faulty military system; and the military system of a nation is not an independent section of the social system but an aspect of it in its totality. The French had good reason to look on their disasters as a judgment. The social and economic developments of the past fifty years had brought about a military as well as an industrial revolution. The Prussians had kept abreast of it and France had not. Therein lay the basic cause of her defeat.¹

In German eyes the war had been won: there were no more Imperial forces with which to contend; in fact, there was no more Empire. For on the 4th September, insurrectionists led by Gambetta proclaimed the Third Republic under their Government of National Defence; the situation confronting Moltke and Bismarck had changed overnight. To the utter amazement of the German leaders, France had paused in the middle of a war, had undergone a revolution, and now stood fully prepared to renew the conflict despite the fact that almost the entirety of her regular forces had been destroyed, captured, or encircled.

The first hint that 'France the Nation' had not yet been defeated had been given at Bazeilles, a tiny village on the outskirts of the Sedan perimeter. There, as disaster swallowed the remnants of Imperial France, a new form of military organism began to emerge. The local inhabitants joined the Marines in a bitter defence of their homes. The enraged attackers, after success was finally theirs, responded by shooting all civilians found with rifles and by burning 363 houses. This conflict served

1. Ibid., p.1.

as a microcosmic example of what was to become an entirely new war. 'Had Moltke realized it, there was emerging, out of the funeral pyre of the Imperial French Army, a far more formidable enemy which was to try his talents even more highly: the French People in Arms.'¹

The challenge which now faced the German Army was that of the armed people - a challenge for which they were not prepared, and a challenge the consequences of which they could not effectively gauge. For

...if in the course of the invasion, the population outside the organized army throws itself into the fray, there comes in a disturbing element, the composition of which is unknown to the invader, and of which the resisting value cannot be ascertained except by practical experience...This sort of war is a war of defence carried on by the whole people of the country, and is therefore denominated a 'people's War'.²

The militarised German nation-in-arms had defeated the French regular army of Napoleon III. It had now to deal with the armed people of the Government of National Defence.

1. Ibid., p.208.

2. Sir Lonsdale Hale, The 'People's War' in France, (London, 1904), p.3.

III. THE GOVERNMENT OF THE ARMED PEOPLE

The concept of military organisation upon which Napoleon III had based the French Army had been overwhelmingly defeated; the new French leadership thus faced the problem of devising a different concept which would be capable of tapping the remaining military potential of the nation. The regulars had been defeated; nor would there be time, in the midst of war, to build a nation-in-arms. France was reduced to its last military option - the armed people, for which patriotic sections of the French populace were already calling. The workers in Paris in particular demanded the levée en masse and demonstrated that the spontaneous, politicised popular action required to implement the concept was present. Though probably there existed the minimal consensus among all Frenchmen that France ought to fight on, there would never exist, from 4 September to the end of the war, any consensus at all as to who should govern France. This lack of consensus on the regime further endangered the fragile consensus required to implement the revolutionary measures of the armed people.

The potential for fratricidal political conflict was implicit in the very ascension to power of the Government of National Defence, for the revolution that the eleven opposition deputies came to head went only half-way. Though Napoleon III was overthrown, there existed no sweeping mandate to initiate revolutionary measures to save France. The 'Government of the Armed People' found itself trapped between Right and Left, reaction and revolution, acceptance of inevitable defeat and illusions of potential victory. Though the moderate leadership evoked the concept of the armed people, it proved powerless to

control the forces it had summoned. And when the attitudes of the men in power were viewed by other elites as prejudicial to their political principles, the debate on the wisdom of revolution in time of war, begun on 4 September, would be reopened with vengeance.

A. The Revolution of 4 September and the Government of National Defence

Comte de Palikao, Minister of Defence and chief advisor to Napoleon III and the Empress Eugénie, was confident that no revolution would occur in Paris despite the tragedies which had befallen the Imperial Armies. Though the Emperor was in exile after his surrender at Sedan, a caretaker regime supported by the Bonapartist Assembly would continue in power and would prosecute the war against the Germans until negotiations could be undertaken to provide peace. Enmeshed in these parliamentary problems and in the difficulties of garrisoning Paris against imminent German attack, Comte de Palikao gave less thought to the hostile Paris populace than was advisable.

Warned of the danger by sources in touch with the mood of Paris, Palikao replied: 'Rassurez-vous, j'ai dans Paris 40,000 hommes.'¹ In fact, Palikao was grossly over-confident:

Cette confiance l'a perdu! Il se croyait prêt, il ne l'était pas. Il n'avait pas fait entrer dans ses calculs la chance, toujours si grande, de l'imprévu; un chef qui hésite, un régiment qui met la crosse en l'air, un bataillon qui prête la main à l'émeute, un coup de fusil qui part, un cadavre que l'on promène, il n'en faut pas davantage à Paris pour qu'une manifestation devienne une révolution.²

1. Enquête Parlementaire sur les Actes du Gouvernement de la Défense Nationale: Rapports III, M. Daru, (Paris, 1872).

2. Ibid., p.52.

'L'imprévu' was already present: for among the 40,000 defenders upon whom Palikao counted so heavily were National Guard troops drawn from the Parisian populace itself. General Thoumas described the scene as follows:

Le lendemain 4 septembre, je dus franchir pour parvenir au ministère, le cordon de troupes qui, malgré l'heure matinale, gardaient les abords du Corps législatif. En apparence, le cordon militaire était formidable et il ne semblait pas que le local où siégeaient les députés pût être violé par l'émeute, mais ce cordon avait son point faible, la garde nationale qui, depuis 1830 jusqu'en 1870, a toujours fait triompher le parti du désordre.¹

When in the afternoon a huge crowd gathered outside the Chambre des Députés, the National Guardsmen joined in or simply melted away. The road to revolution had been cleared of its only barricade.

As so often before, the people of Paris had paralyzed the government of France; and the deputies of the Left, breathing again the heady air of 1848 knew their cue. They broke up proceedings in the Chamber of Deputies and forced their way through the crowds to the Hôtel de Ville, to proclaim yet another republic, and like their predecessors of 1848 they found at the Hôtel de Ville their sinister cousins of the Paris Clubs, Rochefort, Félix Pyat, Delescluze in the process of forming a rival government. As in 1848, a modus vivendi had to be found between the extremists and the rallied; but the deputies of 1870 were more skilful than their predecessors in excluding their rivals. It was agreed that a new Government of National Defence should be formed out of the deputies elected by the Department of the Seine - a decision which had the advantage not only of asserting the primordial Parisian right of governing France, but of placing power firmly in the hands of the moderate Left. The old Ministers, also well learned in revolutionary traditions, melted away. The Empress was smuggled out of a side door of the Tuileries and set out on the road to England which French sovereigns now knew so well. There had been no violence; nothing which could be described as a riot: the Second Empire dissolved, as the monarchies of Charles X and Louis-Philippe had dissolved before it, leaving a vacuum of power to be filled by the first comers.²

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1. Charles Antoine Thoumas, Paris, Tours, Bordeaux: souvenirs de la guerre de 1870-1871, (Paris, 1893), p.40.
 2. Michael Howard, The Franco-Prussian War, (London, 1961), p.225.

The Revolution of 4 September had been accomplished with such ease that it looked more like a public holiday than an insurrection. That few people supported the Empire had been dramatically demonstrated: 4 September was less a revolution than a massive Parisian vote of no confidence in a regime which had in reality already fallen. But exactly who should replace the fallen regime, and what authority they had to do so, was quite another question. Into the void stepped the eleven deputies of the moderate Left who had proclaimed the Republic. They believed that they had the right to govern. Had they not been the political opposition to Bonapartism in the Legislature? Were they not the only experienced politicians left in France who had not been tainted by association with the discredited Empire? It was an elaborate trick; but as there was literally no other group capable of assuming control, it sufficed for the moment, and the deputies set about the task of parcelling out the ministries among themselves. Favre became Foreign Minister when his rival Gambetta engineered his own selection as Minister of the Interior; Arago gained the position of Mayor of Paris over cries for Rochefort from the extreme Left. Among the other important positions, Crémieux became Minister of Justice, Picard Minister of Finance, and Kératry Chief of Police. In order to placate the Right and especially the military, General Trochu was asked to assume the Presidency of the Council which would govern Paris and, by extension, France; after ascertaining that the new Republic would continue to safeguard 'Dieu, la famille, la propriété',¹ he accepted. The head of the government was thus acceptable to the Right, and its foundation was acceptable to

1. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports III, p.50.

the Left; but this situation was not viewed by all concerned as a permanent arrangement. For France was undergoing its usual political fragmentation along lines, which, existent even before 1789, had clearly been intensified by 1830 and 1848. Though the Government of National Defence, as it came to be known, represented the least common denominator - the government which most could accept, given the necessity of renewing the national defence against the continued advance of the German Armies across France - it was not immune to political challenge.

Further, Paris had not been alone in making the revolution. The Republic was first proclaimed in Lyon and Bordeaux, and there was widespread rioting in Marseille and Saint-Etienne before the news arrived from Paris that authority had been overthrown. Unlike their Parisian brothers, the provincial Left could make no claims to national power; yet the independence of their ascension to local authority was to give the Gambetta regime much trouble. Already in Lyon,

un comité de salut public s'était installé dans le palais municipal. L'Internationale y siégeait [Bakunin was to arrive eleven days later.] ; le Préfet était emprisonné; on avait proclamé la République, décrété la Commune et arboré le drapeau rouge.¹

Just how many people really supported the Government of National Defence in September or at any point in its five-month rule cannot be ascertained. Gambetta and his colleagues feared the results of a plebiscite or nation-wide election, in which the Right might carry the provinces and the Left Paris and the larger provincial cities. In the chaos which would surely follow such an election result, France would be left ungovernable; there would be no-one to carry on the united war effort against

1. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports I, M. Chaper, p.2.

the Germans. Gambetta instead hit upon another quite ingenious solution to the question of the legitimacy and acceptance of the regime. In his first proclamation he declared:

Nous ne sommes pas au pouvoir, mais au combat.
 Nous ne sommes pas le gouvernement d'un parti, nous sommes le Gouvernement de la défense nationale.
 Nous n'avons qu'un but, qu'une volonté: le salut de la Patrie par l'Armée et par la Nation groupées autour du glorieux symbole qui fit reculer l'Europe il y a quatre-vingt ans.
 Aujourd'hui, comme alors, le nom de République veut dire: Union intime de l'Armée et du Peuple pour la défense de la Patrie.¹

The ploy was thus to equate the national defence with the new Government of National Defence. Whoever, Left or Right, acted against the new regime acted in favour of the German aggressors; whoever impeded or criticised the new regime prejudiced the effort to save France. Acceptance of the Government meant acceptance of renewed war; rejection would mean surrender. Implicit in the rise of Gambetta and his colleagues was the politics of 'la guerre à outrance'; it was also the key to their survival in office.

Though the Revolution had been easily accomplished, the task of remaining effectively in power was to be a difficult one. In a time of revolution such as 4 September,

...on se trouve fatalement placé en face de deux politiques, de deux manières de procéder contraires, qui vous enserrant et vous somment impérieusement de passer sous leurs fourches caudines.

Les uns possédés par un idéal longtemps caressé, et d'autant plus dominateur, qu'il a plus longtemps attendu, voudraient profiter de l'occasion pour tout refaire sur le modèle qu'ils ont conçu, et demandent pour les choses nouvelles des hommes nouveaux. Les autres, par une plus juste appréciation des réalités, quelquefois aussi par scepticisme, par calcul de prudence

1. Joseph Reinach, Dépêches, Circulaires, Décrets, Proclamations et Discours de Léon Gambetta, Vol. I, (Paris, 1886), p.5.

et préoccupation d'avenir, résistent et tiennent pour le status quo.¹

Gambetta and his colleagues of the Government of National Defence had placed themselves squarely in the middle of these two opposing political trends. The Right could never forgive them for having sanctioned the revolution by proclaiming a Republic; the Left could never forgive the new regime for not having really followed through with the revolution, and for instead utilising officers, policies, and administrators from the preceding regime. The trick of half-revolution and the ploy of national defence would not be sufficient to prevent the occurrence of three great challenges to the new regime: the Ultra-Left in Paris against Trochu, the provincial Left against Gambetta and the Tours regime, and the ubiquitous provincial Right against the Government of National Defence. Caught between Left and Right, the moderates' struggle to maintain power was a continual balancing act of placating one side and then the other.

The dangers of this course were implicit. In the words of the Commission d'Enquête, 'tout Gouvernement d'armée, tout Gouvernement de nation qui a pour point de départ une préoccupation, la popularité, se perd et perd la nation et l'armée.'² Where strength was required to inspire the French people and to defeat the German invasion, the Government of National Defence had a glaring weakness. Just as it was difficult to be popular in a futile war effort, so was it impossible to claim legitimacy without an election or plebiscite proving popular support. The half-revolution of 4 September had given the new regime no

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1. François F. Steenackers and François Le Goff, Histoire du Gouvernement de la Défense Nationale en province, 21 septembre 1870 - 8 février 1871, Vol.I, (Paris, 1884), p.102.
 2. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports III, p.359.

extensive mandate to reform French society, but rather a mandate to appease and unite that society behind the national defence. But without sweeping powers, the government of the armed people had little chance to organise effectively the popular resistance which alone could save France after the destruction of the entirety of her regular forces. That such a government accomplished anything at all for the national defence is remarkable; that it carried on a war for five months against the finest army in Europe while struggling to maintain itself in power was miraculous indeed.

B. The Struggle to Maintain Supremacy

1. Trochu versus the Parisian Left

The Ultra-Left of Blanqui, Flourens, Pyat, Delescluze and Millière had missed their chance for power on 4 September; they were certainly not placated by the fact that Gambetta and his colleagues of the moderate Left were in power in a government presided over by General Trochu. Their actions throughout the Franco-Prussian War were part of a revolutionary process which had preceded the war and would extend beyond it as the Paris Commune. The moderate and extreme wings of the Republican party had been united in opposition to Napoleon III, but after 4 September it was clear that the factions were operating under two entirely different definitions of the Republic.

Les uns veulent l'établir avec le consentement de la nation, et pour appliquer les principes de 1789 à l'aide d'un chef, non plus héréditaire, mais élu. La République n'est pour eux, selon une expression de M. Droz, qu'une Monarchie constitutionnelle dont le trône est vacant.

Les autres, imbus des traditions de 1793, veulent sous le nom de République, imposer un régime dans lequel les formes autoritaires prévalent, et ils repoussent, au

moins momentanément, toute intervention réelle du pays dans ses affaires. Ce dernier système n'est autre chose au fond, quelque nom qu'on lui donne, qu'une dictature plus ou moins déguisée, sous laquelle ambitieux, intrigants, fanatiques, ont beau jeu.

Au milieu des passions que la révolution et la guerre avaient soulevées, il était difficile, que de ces deux manières de comprendre la République, la première l'emportât sur la seconde.¹

Such differences could not easily be reconciled. The moderate Left was now content; the Ultra-Left would continue to struggle for their revolutionary ideals which had nearly triumphed on 4 September.

Trochu, with Kératry as his Chief of Police, was not unaware of the attitude of the Ultra-Left. 'Ils savaient bien qu'ils auraient à combattre à la fois l'ennemi étranger et l'ennemi intérieur; à défendre Paris contre l'armée allemande et contre l'insurrection; à faire face aux armées de M. de Moltke et aux bataillons de Gustave Flourens.'² Trochu's government was, in a certain sense, held prisoner by the Ultra-Left which had helped in the overthrow of the Empire; the Government of National Defence, without legitimacy, was as vulnerable to an insurrection from the Left as Napoleon III had been. The attempts were not to be long in coming.

On the evening of 4 September, workers' federations, assisted by members of l'Internationale, met to discuss the situation. After a lengthy discussion, their strategy for the interim period was decided upon, and the following propositions were passed:

1^o Le gouvernement provisoire ne sera pas attaqué, attendu le fait de guerre et attendu l'insuffisance de préparation des forces populaires encore mal organisées.

1. Ibid., p.466.

2. Amaury Prosper Dréo, Gouvernement de la Défense Nationale; Procès verbaux des séances du Conseil, (Paris, 1906), p.42.

2° Sont réclamés d'urgence:

La suppression complète de la préfecture de police et l'organisation d'une police municipale; la révocation immédiate de tous les magistrats; la suppression de toutes les lois restrictives du droit d'association, du droit de réunion, de la liberté de la presse.

L'élection de la Municipalité parisienne.

L'annulation (et non l'amnistie) de toute condamnation et poursuites concernant les faits qualifiés crimes ou délits politiques, se rattachant aux mouvements populaires sous l'Empire.¹

One wonders whether, on the first proposition, the state of war was really more important for the postponement of attacks on the government than the unprepared state of the populace. That attacks, initially in the form of demonstrations, began less than three weeks later proves that the party was playing a deadly game for power with no holds barred, war or no war. The second proposition, which called for the suppression of the police, the magistrates, and laws against freedom of association and of the press, as well as freedom for political detainees, was a blow at the fetters which continued to hamper the development of the revolutionary party. The call for elections would give them control of certain sections of the city which could then serve as a foyer for revolution. Even without elections, a parallel revolutionary regime was in the process of formation alongside the Trochu government.

Avant de se séparer, la réunion décide en principe la 'formation d'un comité central, indépendant de l'Internationale et des fédérations ouvrières, composé de délégués d'arrondissements'; autrement dit, la formation d'un gouvernement révolutionnaire, placé en face du gouvernement de la défense.²

On le voit...dès le 4 septembre, il se forma dans les Municipalités, à côté des maires, des adjoints, des comités d'arrondissements qui s'arrogeaient le droit de peser sur les décisions des maires, se substituaient à leur action, donnaient des ordres, visitaient les maisons,

1. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports III, pp.85-6.

2. Ibid., p.86.

et faisaient des arrestations, des perquisitions, surtout sous prétexte d'espionnage.¹

Demonstrations were the chief means the revolutionary party had to use against the Trochu regime. Four 'small' demonstrations, on 22 and 27 September, and on 7 and 8 October, served as preludes for a major attempt at the overthrow of the government. On the 8th, Flourens led six battalions to the Hôtel de Ville, where he was received by Trochu and the members of the Council. After military plans were discussed, Flourens demanded arms, the levée en masse, and communal elections; his National Guard troops formed up in the square. The government realised what was happening, but stood firm. M. Floquet shouted to Flourens 'Vous perdez la République! Elle périra de votre main'.² The officers of the units rallied to the Government and abandoned Flourens, who resigned his commission in protest, only to be re-elected a few days later.

The next demonstration was not to end so peacefully, nor could the government talk its way out. This time, a show of force would be required. The National Guardsmen had all been armed in the interim, and mayors had been elected. Combined, these facts meant that Flourens' battalions would come armed to the Hôtel de Ville from their revolutionary base in northern Paris, where Delescluze was now the elected head of 180,000 people, 'avec les pouvoirs énormes qui lui étaient attribués, agissant souverainement, s'appuyant à gauche sur Belleville, à droite sur Montmartre, devait être et a été un agent puissant de désordre et de démoralisation politique'.³ Cresson, the chief of police who had succeeded Kératry after the latter's departure to the provinces,

1. Ibid., p.87.

2. Dréo, op. cit., p.194.

3. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports III, p.112.

called the area 'un foyer insurrectionnel; c'était là que se réfugiaient tous les hommes que nous devions arrêter. Blanqui, Flourens, ...'¹ The list would soon be much longer. For with a secure electoral base and arms for the National Guard battalions, the revolutionary party was now organised in such a manner that it could effectively challenge the government. To make sure that the troops would not desert him a second time, Flourens formed his own compagnies franches with government funds, 'véritables troupes insurrectionnelles, qui, comme les Tibaldiens, les vengeurs et les francs-tireurs de Flourens, étaient aux ordres de ceux qui les soldaient.'²

'Les choses étaient ainsi organisées, les comités de vigilance formés, la population de Paris armée, alimentée et soldée, le comité central jugea que le moment était venu de se mettre à l'oeuvre.'³ All that was needed was the revolutionary spark to set the Paris population ablaze. The Left was provided with three key issues: first, the failure to maintain the village of Le Bourget which had been captured by francs-tireurs in an insignificant military engagement but one which had been 'transformé par la presse en un désastre affreux et produisit une consternation générale';⁴ second, the news of the capitulation of Bazaine at Metz; and third, news that Thiers was conducting negotiations with the Germans. The first of these, though it showed that Trochu would have to conduct a more aggressive defence of Paris if he was to maintain the support of the people, was of little real importance; the second had little or nothing to do with the Government of National Defence in Paris. But the third,

1. Ibid., p.112.

2. Ibid., p.109.

3. Ibid., p.125.

4. Ibid., p.175.

ironically placarded throughout Paris as 'good news' to counter-balance the other two incidents, seemed to prove the contention of the Left that the moderates, far from trying to win the war were actively conspiring to lose it by suing for an early peace. When on the 31st of October, the inevitable crowd began gathering at the Hôtel de Ville, Trochu had been caught even more unawares than his predecessor Palikao.

Arago, the Mayor of Paris, was much closer to the people in terms of attitude and emotion than was Trochu. Anticipating trouble he had convoked an assembly of the mayors from all twenty arrondissements at the Hôtel de Ville, where it was decided that Communal elections would be held in order to forestall the genuine chance of revolution which existed at that moment. But before the mayors could issue the statement which might have placated the Left, Flourens, leading his 'tirailleurs' and supported by the 83^e, 178^e and 249^e battalions from Belleville, arrived at the Hôtel de Ville, where

les rassemblements grossissent sur la place. Un bataillon de la garde nationale, rangé devant l'Hôtel de Ville, met la crose en l'air. Les groupes crient: 'Pas d'armistice! Les élections! La Commune!'.¹

Once again the road to revolution lay open, and no efforts by members of the government to talk their way out could hope to succeed. Trochu was at the Louvre, and Picard slipped away unnoticed to alert him about the activities at the Hôtel de Ville. Flourens was now in complete control. The defenders had signalled no resistance: Flourens' battalions now guarded the Hôtel de Ville, and inside, his 'tirailleurs' held the members of the government under armed guard. Confident that success was finally his, Flourens began reading a list of the new government: Flourens,

1. Dréo, op. cit., p.261.

Delescluze, Pyat, Blanqui, Mottu, Avrial, Ranvier, Millière, Raspail; others considered included Rochefort, Victor Hugo, Ledru-Rollin, Louis Blanc, and Dorian. The Commune was about to be proclaimed a full five months early, when troops loyal to the government appeared on the scene under Commander Ibos crying 'A bas Flourens! Vive le gouvernement de la défense nationale!'. General Ducrot, Trochu's right-hand man in Paris and never a man to temporise, urged an immediate assault on the Hôtel de Ville with troops recalled from the forts. Warned by Delescluze that such an action would mean death to the members of the government held prisoner by Flourens, Trochu refused. Instead he organised a force of ten battalions of national guardsmen, under Jules Ferry and Colonel Roger, which surrounded the building. Delescluze offered to mediate, but the situation became more aggravated. Mobs from Brittany broke through a subterranean passage and entered the palace. That not a single shot was fired in this confused situation was miraculous. The Bretons were face-to-face with their arch-enemies, the 'tirailleurs de Flourens'. Had General Le Flo, one of the members of the government, not calmed them by talking to them in their own idiom, a gun battle would probably have ensued in which casualties among the prisoners as well as the two opposing forces would have been inevitable. Outside the Hôtel de Ville, the situation was also grave. Some 30-40 battalions of national guard troops, in all some 50-60,000 men of all shades of political opinion, had gathered to participate in the dénouement. Such a situation could not endure, and the new stalemate favoured the status quo. Many of the Belleville Guardsmen had slipped away or marched back to their homes, thinking that victory had already been achieved. Flourens thus found that he had too few troops to hold the Hôtel de Ville and decided to

compromise. It was agreed to accept the original motion of the mayors for Communal elections; Flourens would release his hostages in return for amnesty and safe conduct back to Belleville. The Left was temporarily content; though Blanqui termed the affair 'un quatre septembre manqué',¹ what had not been achieved by force could now be won through the ballot box. To seal the accord General Tamisier, Commander of the National Guard, walked down the steps of the Hôtel de Ville arm-in-arm with Flourens to the cheers of all the assembled battalions.

Though the fiasco had lasted until nearly 4.00 a.m., the Government used the remaining hours of darkness to move against the Left. The proclamations calling for Communal elections were torn down and ones calling for a plebiscite on the Government of National Defence were substituted - a political trick conveniently copied from Napoleon III. On 2 November the Government moved to arrest Blanqui, Flourens and a host of other revolutionary leaders. Tamisier, furious at his colleagues' double-cross, resigned rather than have his honour stained. He was quickly replaced by General Clément Thomas, famous for his suppression of the 1848 insurrection and thus an odd choice as head of Paris's proletarian battalions.

On 3 November, the plebiscite for or against the Government of National Defence was held and the results yielded an astonishing 557,976 'oui' and 62,638 'non'.²

Flourens et Blanqui avaient été salués la veille par les applaudissements les plus bruyants; ils avaient pu s'emparer pendant quelques heures du pouvoir; et cependant ils avaient pour eux à peine la dixième partie de la population! La garde nationale envoyée pour les expulser avait mis la crosse en l'air et avait semblé

1. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports III, p.228.

2. Dréo, op. cit., p.275.

tout le long du jour retirer au Gouvernement son appui; et cette même garde nationale librement consultée le lendemain, donnait une majorité de plus de 500,000 voix au Gouvernement!¹

Backed by the plebiscite, the Government had a breathing space. The Left was still dangerous, but its strength had been clearly revealed: in any insurrection it could count on only 10% of the people - enough to start a revolution, as on 31 October, but not enough to finish it. The Government's position was further bolstered by news of the battle at Coulmiers, exaggerated by the press into a major victory for the Army of the Loire; energies were now poured into a major sortie at the end of November to join hands with the provincial army of deliverance.

Trochu thus went on with the defence of Paris, which he termed 'une héroïque folie qu'il faut faire, parce qu'elle peut seule servir nos intérêts nationaux et sauver notre honneur'.² But he was reluctant to press the sorties very far for several reasons. First, heavy casualties would be taken in any engagement against the German ring of steel around Paris. Second, had the Army broken through and provincial support been lacking, the Army would have been decimated in the open field by the regrouped Germans. The defence of Paris after such a loss might have become impossible. But there was a third reason as well. Favre asked Trochu what measures he should take as Minister of the Interior once the military forces were outside Paris.³ Trochu responded that Paris would be in the hands of the National Guard; there would remain behind only a regiment of gendarmes and a battalion of mobiles to prevent the recurrence of a situation like 31

1. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports IV, p.258.

2. Dréo, op. cit., p.305.

3. Ibid., p.256.

October. However, intelligence estimates ran from 10-30 for the number of battalions of the National Guard which followed Flourens, and the rest could not be counted on to oppose him. Trochu therefore seemed to be playing a double game of attempting half-hearted sorties against the Germans while keeping a watchful eye of the Left. Such at least was the contention of the revolutionaries, who continued to call for a sortie torrentielle for political as well as patriotic motives. Certainly the Left itself was playing a double game, as evidenced by the abortive insurrection of 31 October. Trochu and his two top generals, Ducrot and Vinoy, as well as Cresson, the chief of police, were well aware of the Left's intentions and growing power.

As the sorties of 29 November - 1 December and 21 December met with failure, and the evacuation of Avron on 28 December was announced, dissatisfaction with Trochu was spreading rapidly among the Parisians, and Trochu's base of support was ebbing noticeably. On 5 January the daily 'terror bombing' of Paris began, and the population demonstrated its frustration by a series of riots over rationing, which by now had become severe. The delegates of the twenty arrondissements,¹ meeting on 9 January, declared 'la politique, la stratégie, l'administration du 4 septembre, la continuation de l'empire, sont jugées. Place au peuple! Place à la Commune!'² Under intense pressure, Trochu agreed to one final sortie, in which the National Guard would participate for the first time. 50,000 mobiles were joined by 40,000 of the better trained Guardsmen, whom their sceptical commander, General Clément Thomas, accused of showing 'beaucoup de charlatanisme

1. The organisation, heavily influenced by the Internationale, had gained considerable support in the more radical areas of Paris.

2. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports III, p.330.

dans cet étalage de courage... Déjà, depuis qu'elle voit qu'on va l'employer, son enthousiasme a beaucoup baissé'.¹ The result was another half-hearted sortie, on 19 January, poorly planned, and executed under extreme hardships of bad weather and accurate Prussian artillery - in short, a disaster which accomplished nothing.

On 20 January the crowds again gathered, shouting 'A bas Trochu'. The Council sidestepped the issue which so obviously confronted them by suppressing the Governorship of Paris while retaining Trochu as President of the Council; Vinoy became head of the Army. But these moves were not enough to placate the Left, who continued to call for a sortie torrentielle, the Commune, and other political themes which were gaining popular support at a rate which alarmed the government. Ominously, Flourens had been released from gaol, with the complicity of the gaoler. On 22 January the Left struck a lightning blow for power in the style established on 31 October. Flourens and his followers broke into a centre for rations and distributed them to his radical supporters; Clément Thomas sent troops to drive him away. Vinoy started bringing the most loyal of his troops from the front towards the Hôtel de Ville, where already an insurrection was in progress. The Montmartre battalions arrived crying 'Vive la Commune!', and their leader Mégy demanded to see members of the government. Other bands of National Guardsmen arrived, and presently Blanqui made his appearance. Suddenly shots rang out, probably from the insurgents' undisciplined elements.² The Mobiles

1. Dréo, op. cit., p.507.

2. Louis Nichel, the historian Lepelletier and most French 'Leftists' dispute this contention and claim the Right opened fire - a position which is not altogether unbelievable.

returned fire from safe positions within the Hôtel de Ville and decimated the front ranks of the crowd. In the ensuing confusion, Vinoy arrived with his regulars to put an end to the matter. A barricade which had been set up was carried by Cresson and his police. Though the Left had initiated the affair, the Right had been fully prepared; among the dead and wounded was Left leader Sapia.

This sudden, mad little fusillade of the insurgents was like the bursting of a long-festering boil. The long-delayed appearance of force enabled the Government itself to use force, and in the show-down which occurred on 22nd January it became clear how little support the extremists really enjoyed; Vinoy's whiff of grape-shot restored the Government's freedom of action and emboldened it to do what all its members now knew to be unavoidable: to ask the Germans for terms. Paris had reached the end of her resources.¹

The 'exterior' enemy had at last succeeded in forcing Paris to her knees. The 'interior enemy', the Ultra-Left, had not succeeded in seizing power, despite two major attempts on 31 October and 22 January, as well as a host of minor demonstrations and outbursts. Yet the sullen mood of Parisians was so much in evidence that Germans dared stage only a very low-key victory celebration on 1 March at the Arc de Triomphe, followed by a hasty withdrawal the next day. The mood of Paris had been a key negotiating point on which Favre failed to score; for Bismarck wanted a stable regime to enforce his peace, and Paris was noticeably unstable.

The Left was suppressed after 22 January. Five clubs were shut down, as well as two Leftist newspapers, Le Réveil and Le Combat. Pyat and Delescluze were arrested. But these measures were of little consequence in the long run. A new basis for Ultra-Left power had been established by the disastrous war and

1. Howard, op. cit., p.370.

the dictated peace - the National Guard battalions, whose turn toward revolutionary attitudes was quickly changing the power situation within Paris. Bismarck played right into the hands of the Left. Warned of the possibility of renewed hostilities while Gambetta still maintained his hegemony in the provinces, Bismarck insisted that the total of 'gendarmes, troupes, douaniers et pompiers' should not exceed 3,500 armed men.¹ The Right had been disarmed in one stroke. Informed that riots would break out in Paris if attempts were made to disarm the National Guard, Bismarck agreed that they could conserve their arms. At least thirty-five battalions of the National Guard were, at the Armistice of 28 January, openly 'Communards', and the rest were sympathetic. Not only was the Left handed the preponderance of power in Paris, their arrested leaders were returned to them as well. Delescluze and the others stood as candidates for the elections which followed the Armistice and had therefore to be released from gaol - a measure which prompted the harrassed Cresson to resign in protest.

The National Guard, hastily organised as a kind of Parisian levée en masse in the hectic days of September, had gradually coalesced into an effective fighting force:

D'autre part, à force d'être vantés par leurs journaux, par leurs chef élus, et de s'exalter eux-mêmes, les gardes nationaux en étaient arrivés à se croire non plus égaux mais supérieurs, en valeur et en qualités militaires, aux soldats.²

The test of strength was not very far away. The armed people of the National Guard were the very heart of the Commune; the

1. German General Staff, The Franco-German War 1870-1871, (London, 1874-84), Appendix CLVI, p.229.

2. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports IV, p.214.

soldiers who would advance in the attack were the regulars of Sedan and Metz, hastily repatriated by Bismarck to form Thiers' Versailles Army. The revolutionary party spearheaded by the Ultra-Left had never been effectively vanquished by the Government of National Defence; the party was to outlast the Government, just as it had preceded it, ever in search of its revolutionary ideals.

2. Gambetta versus the Provincial Left

The challenges which Trochu and the Government of National Defence had weathered in Paris were serious indeed, but as the official government, and as the 'elected deputies of Paris', it had always commanded a certain reservoir of support. The situation in the provinces was completely different. Paris had made the revolution, but she had been preceded in that task by movements in Lyon, Bordeaux, Saint-Etienne, and Marseille. Their attitude was something to the effect of 'what authority did the people of Paris have to dictate to the rest of France what government they should obey?'. The task of the Government of National Defence was therefore not, as in Paris, to maintain its power, but rather to establish power. In many ways it was to be a far more serious challenge than that posed by Flourens, Blanqui and Delescluze in Paris.

The shape of the challenge was also different from that in Paris. In the large cities of the provinces, radical movements had swept to power in the Insurrection of 4 September and its aftermath. They were all Republicans and shared Gambetta's politics of 'la guerre à outrance' with one exception: to them, 'la guerre à outrance' meant local efforts rather than a combined national effort under the dictatorship of Gambetta and his Paris

colleagues. Gambetta initially played into their hands. In an effort to get the national defence under way despite the inertia and chaos of the provinces, he issued the circular of 6 September:

La défense du pays avant tout! Assurez-là, non seulement en préparant la mise à exécution, sans retards ni difficultés, de toutes les mesures votées sous le régime antérieur, mais en suscitant autour de vous les énergies locales, en disciplinant par avance tous les dévouements afin que le Gouvernement puisse les mettre à profit pour les besoins du pays. Toute votre administration se réduit pour le moment à déterminer le grand effort qui doit être tenté par tous les citoyens en vue de sauver la France.¹

According to Steenackers and Le Goff, 'les comités de défense et des ligues, qui ne furent que le développement des comités de défense, avaient leur principe dans cette partie de la circulaire du 6 septembre et dans le sentiment qui l'avait dictée'.² By the end of September, the Ligues covered an immense area of France, and the dangers of decentralisation, if not open secession, were extreme. The first to be formed, La Ligue de l'Ouest, was right-wing in outlook, but it soon collapsed. The real danger came from the Left: La Ligue du Midi at Lyon, La Ligue du Midi at Marseille, and La Ligue du Sud-Ouest at Bordeaux.

Though the official historians of the Gambetta regime concluded that

toutes les ligues ont été des illusions. Elles n'ont pas vécu; elles ne pouvaient pas vivre. C'est à peine si elles pouvaient naître. Elles étaient inutiles, faisant double emploi avec notre système militaire, dont le jeu régulier suffisait à la tâche, si cette tâche était uniquement l'armement du pays.³

it had to admit that 'elles pouvaient être dangereuses si le hasard les mettait entre les mains de chefs militaires ambitieux

1. Steenackers and Le Goff, op. cit., p.400.

2. Ibid., p.400.

3. Ibid., pp.402-3.

ou d'un parti puissant et hostile au Gouvernement'.¹ An analysis of Ligue activities shows that in widespread areas it was the Government's prefects, rather than the Ligue's, which were 'inutiles'. Further, though Steenackers and Le Goff were referring to the Right in their final provision, it was the Left in the provinces where the real danger centred. Nor was it by 'hasard' that the Ligues were under the influence of 'un parti puissant et hostile au Gouvernement'; the provincial Left had long been organised against Napoleon III, and that they exhibited no ready acceptance of Gambetta should have been no surprise. 4 September was their chance for power just as surely as it was Gambetta's.

The situation in the provinces by the beginning of October was alarming. Crémieux, Glais-Bizoin and Fourichon represented the Government of National Defence in the provinces, but without vigour or authority. In contrast to the chaos of the Tours regime, the Ligues were consolidating rapidly.

De plus, certains comités de défense voulurent se grouper par régions et constituer des ligues de l'Ouest, du Midi, du Sud-Ouest, les deux dernières révolutionnaires et à tendances séparatistes. La situation devint vite inextricable: les préfets luttèrent contre les ligues, chacun tirait à soi et voulait commander.²

The call for elections in the provinces, to which the Tours triumvirate acceded without first obtaining the consent of their Paris colleagues, was in effect a ploy by the Ligues to consolidate their strength. Whereas prefects could be appointed by Gambetta from Paris, the Ligues could control elections in their respective cities. Thus, although the issue which prompted Gambetta to leave Paris by balloon to travel to Tours was the

1. Ibid., p.403.

2. Henri Dutrait-Crozon, Gambetta et la défense nationale, 1870-1871, (Paris, 1914), pp.32-3.

postponement of elections,¹ there was more to it than that; as evidenced by the Council minutes from late September.

M. Gambetta donne des détails sur la situation de Lyon; elle est toujours très grave. L'idée dangereuse qui domine dans cette ville est celle de la Commune indépendante; des délégués avaient même été envoyés à Paris pour s'adjoindre au gouvernement de la défense. Ces idées ultra-décentralisatrices se manifestent dans plusieurs villes importantes. M. Gambetta croit donc qu'un gouvernement énergique doit fonctionner hors de Paris pour éviter un démembrement du pays.²

Gambetta's mission was thus threefold: to prevent the elections which would give power to the Left and Right rather than his 'centre group' from Paris; second, to stifle the Ligues by turning the Tours government into an effective centre of power in the provinces; third, to organise the provincial military effort for the relief of Paris. The three were closely related. Elections could easily have overturned the Government of National Defence, whose only real base of power was Paris; the Ligues were the alternative vehicle of power, and with Paris invested, they would rule the provinces unless the Government's power was quickly asserted; the relief of Paris had to be the strategic aim of the provincial armies under Gambetta's authority, for the loss of Paris would have meant the loss of the Government's only base of power. If any one of the three missions were to fail, then separatism in the name of the national defence would become a dangerous threat. Gambetta and his Government of National Defence alone stood for unity as well as national defence.

(a) La Ligue du Sud-Ouest

La Ligue du Sud-Ouest was the most extensive ever formed. Based primarily on Carcassonne, Toulouse, and Bordeaux, it embraced thirty departments stretching from l'Ouest to le Midi. The two

1. This is the reason given by Michael Howard and others.

2. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports I, p.17.

proposed leaders, Marcon and Duportal, had radical intentions, as revealed by M. Delshol of the Sous-Commission du Sud Ouest for the Enquête Parlementaire:

Ces extraits montrent que la ligue projetée par M. Marcon avait un caractère essentiellement politique et que son but était plutôt d'étouffer la réaction dans son berceau que de concourir à la Défense nationale, car la sanction de ses délibérations devait être 'dans la force morale contiguë aux bras robustes du peuple et dans la crainte que devaient éprouver tous les fonctionnaires de ne pas obtenir une quittance finale pour les corruptes que la République aurait à leur demander.'

On le voit, les fondateurs de la ligue confondent dans la réaction qu'il faut étouffer au berceau la délégation elle-même à la tête de laquelle se trouvait alors M. Gambetta.¹

The Ligue, though blatantly secessionist, was not very successful. It called for revolution, proclaimed the insufficiency of the Government, and declared itself 'prêt à marcher contre le Gouvernement qu'il disait incapable de sauver la République'.² The Ligue was condemned by the government at Tours, yet nevertheless gained adherents. Ultimately, it extended over too large an area and was too chaotically organised to supplant Gambetta's authority, which ascended rapidly as he formed armies, appointed préfets, and sent orders and instructions to all corners of France. Rather than resorting to repression, Gambetta simply outstripped the Ligue by utilising the tremendous organisational facilities at his command.

Yet, by the end of January, the Ligue was far from dead; in the closing weeks of the war it again gained adherents. In a Manifesto of 21 January, it declared:

D'autre part les ménagements extraordinaires de la délégation de Bordeaux envers les divers partis monarchiques, qui placent la ruine de la République au-dessus du salut du pays, nous permettent de craindre qu'aux complications

1. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports VI, M. Delshol, p.6.

2. Ibid., p.8.

extérieures viennent bientôt s'adjoindre des complications intérieures.¹

The threat of civil war was emphasised by the meeting at Carcassone on 31 January, which was attended by the largest crowd ever. At the resignation of Gambetta, 'le mouvement révolutionnaire dont le foyer principal était à Toulouse et dont la Ligue du Sud-Ouest formait l'organisation redoutable, s'étendait de plus en plus dans les départements'.²

The Government at Tours (and later Bordeaux) had at first hesitated to condemn their more radical brothers in the Ligues; only after the arrival of Gambetta was a policy of firmness adopted toward them. Even then, it was organisation rather than suppression which overcame the separatist tendencies of the Ligue du Sud-Ouest. Gambetta in fact did not wish to destroy the Ligues; to have done so might well have brought the end of local Republican support and might have ushered in its stead the provincial Right. Further, the Ligues were closer to Gambetta's politics of 'la guerre à outrance' than any other body, including his own colleagues at Tours and Paris. It is quite possible that Gambetta realised how useful the Ligues would be in his support should it become necessary to continue the war after the fall of Paris.

(b) La Ligue du Midi à Lyon

A far greater challenge than that of the Ligue du Sud-Ouest was to come from Gambetta's radical colleagues of the Midi in the key cities of Lyon and Marseille.

La ligue, ou plutôt le comité de Lyon (car la ligue ne fut jamais formée) entraînait dans une voie périlleuse..., car elle élargissait le conflit et elle énervait l'organisation de l'armée, qu'elle frappait à la tête.

1. Ibid., pp.18-19.

2. Ibid., p.23.

C'était une révolution au milieu d'une révolution et en pleine invasion!¹

Unlike the Ligue du Midi eventually incorporated at Marseille, the movement at Lyon never took on a fundamentally anti-Government of National Defence character. Probably the reason why is that Gambetta chose one of the ablest of his prefects for Lyon on 6 September, M. Challemeil-Lacour. When he arrived at Lyon, he found the red flag of revolution flying over the city. A levée en masse had been proclaimed, and Cluseret and Garibaldi had been named generals of the Republic. In a letter to Delescluze, Challemeil-Lacour wrote

Ces imbéciles mêlés d'anciens mouchards paralysent tout. Ils ont arboré le drapeau rouge, bien qu'il n'ait d'autre signification que d'être un défi à la République...²

Thanks to the tremendous prestige he enjoyed among the radical Left, Challemeil-Lacour was able to channel the energies of Lyon Republicans away from separatist Ligue activities and into activities on behalf of the Government of National Defence. By the end of September, the Ultra-Left could see the handwriting on the wall. Tacitly supported by Marseille, Cluseret³ struck on 28 September. With 40,000 men behind him, Cluseret surrounded the Hôtel de Ville and announced 'Je viens de faire la réaction prisonnière; le peuple est désormais son maître'.⁴ The timely arrival of several battalions from the Croix-Rousse under the command of General Armand saved the day (and Gambetta's prefect). Cluseret and his colleagues were swept away, and Challemeil-Lacour was firmly placed in power. Most of the insurgents, including

1. Steenackers and Le Goff, op. cit., p.407.

2. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports I, M. Séguy, p.34.

3. Later military leader of the Commune.

4. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports I, M. Séguy, p.54.

Bakunin, fled to Marseille; it was evident that trouble for the Midi was far from over.

Lyon was never really free from violence throughout the period. After they heard about the attempted insurrection in Paris on 31 October, the Lyon radicals again struck at the Government on 3 November, but they met with even less success than in their earlier attempt. General Armand, who had commanded the 'réaction' on the 28th September, was assassinated on 20 December. Gambetta himself attended the funeral, and virtually the entire population of Lyon turned out in a show of support. This time, the radicals had gone too far, and support for their extreme views had greatly diminished. By the end of the war, however, the radicals were resurgent. The red flag still flew over Lyon rather than the 'bourgeois tricolour', and Garibaldi was hailed as a conquering hero. Secession was again near at hand, but this time it would have been in support of Gambetta's 'guerre à outrance'. Gambetta once again had not destroyed the Ligue, but had instead defused it. It remained an effective alternative vehicle which he could utilise to continue the war against the Prussians should Paris and the Government of National Defence fall.

(c) La Ligue du Midi à Marseille

Challemel-Lacour, aside from holding Lyon for the Government of National Defence, also kept his eye on the more serious situation at Marseille from which the gravest challenge of all to the Gambetta regime was to emerge. On 2 October he wrote to Gambetta:

La Ligue du Midi, est donc, selon moi, le fait d'un certain nombre d'hommes voulant constituer une France méridionale, afin d'établir dans le Midi une forteresse de socialisme. Je ne me serais jamais associé à rien de pareil. La perspective de deux Frances au moment où un tiers du sol était envahi me faisait frémir. Aussi, de toutes les manières, par mes paroles publiques, et par

toute ma conduite, j'ai tout fait pour paralyser la Ligue du Midi quand elle a pris corps.

Ce n'est pas à Lyon qu'elle prit corps, c'est je crois, à Marseille.¹

Marseille had the most violent radical tradition of all.

Adolphe Crémieux,² had led a demonstration in the city on 8 August 1870, and under the pretext of demanding arms for a levée en masse, he had invaded the Hôtel de Ville. On 4 September the Marseille radicals had not waited for Paris, and had begun an insurrection against Napoleon III on their own initiative. After 4 September M. Esquiros, the new prefect at Marseille, felt that he owed loyalty to his fellow radicals rather than to Gambetta. Challemeil-Lacour, as prefect at Lyon, had been able to ride out the radical storm and to keep the Government of National Defence effectively in power; this time, the prefect's power was on the other side. The Ligue began organising in earnest.

On 9 September, the following propositions, among others, were discussed or passed by the Ligue in session at Marseille:

1^{re} Proposition - Il est évident qu'il faut des chefs militaires, mais il ne convient pas que la France et la démocratie soient livrées au militarisme. Il serait utile donc, que dans toutes les compagnies, il fût nommé un comité de trois membres, qu'ils sachent ou non manier les armes. Ce comité de surveillance, dans les cas graves, tels qu'insurrections populaires etc., aura le droit de dire à la compagnie et à ses chefs, s'il faut agir pour ou contre l'insurrection.

2^e Proposition - Pour vaincre l'ennemi, il faut une levée forcée d'hommes de 18 à 50 ans. Il est bien entendu que tous ceux qui portent un froc, séminaristes, moines, prêtres, frères ignorantins, etc., n'en seront pas exempts.

3^e Proposition - Il est urgent que l'on fonde un gouvernement du Midi, que l'on arme tous les citoyens sans exception et qu'on fixe au plus tôt l'endroit où doit siéger ce gouvernement. Cela sera surtout d'une incontestable utilité si Paris vient à être assiégé par les Prussiens.

1. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports II, M. Sugny, pp.49-50.

2. Apparently the same as Gaston Crémieux who sat at Tours. However, his radical activities in Marseille are at variance with his moderate policies as a member of Gambetta's regime.

4^e Proposition - On propose d'armer immédiatement tous les agents de police du gouvernement déchu et de les envoyer devant l'ennemi au lieu de les laisser libres dans Marseille.

Contre Proposition - Il conviendrait mieux de les garder sous les verroux et de les juger incessamment.

5^e Proposition - Il importe souverainement que l'on arme la garde nationale: la patrie est en danger. Pour faire face aux frais nécessaires, on propose de frapper la richesse d'un impôt progressif.

6^e Proposition - Un délégué de Toulon fait savoir que cette ville est toujours en état de siège, c'est-à-dire soumise aux autorités ex-impériales. Il y a dans le parc d'artillerie de Toulon des carabines, qu'on distribue au plus tôt pour la défense nationale. Il exprime le vœu que l'on envoie des délégués de Marseille à Toulon pour y organiser, comme dans cette première ville, des compagnies de francs-tireurs.

7^e Proposition - Pour résister efficacement à l'invasion, il importerait que l'organisation des forces militaires du Midi fût accomplie avant huit jours. On pourrait au besoin instituer un Directoire provençal qui ferait ce que Paris ne peut pas faire pour le Midi.

14^e Proposition - On propose d'envoyer une adresse des travailleurs de l'Internationale de Marseille aux travailleurs d'Allemagne.¹

The effect of the propositions, which were anti-military, anti-clerical, and anti-police, yet also called for the levée en masse, a Midi government, and spreading the movement to Toulon, was to cast aside the old order while quickly building a new revolutionary order, with or without the consent of Paris. At first, the secessionist overtones were veiled; with Paris invested, a government of the Midi replete with its own military forces was a plausible solution to the problem of carrying on the war. It became increasingly apparent that secession, or at least separatism, was being given precedence over the national defence.

The proclamations issued by Esquiros on 14 and 18 September illustrate the growing tendency toward separatism:

1. Ibid., pp.51-2.

On devait donc convoquer à Marseille des délégués de tous les départements limitrophes, de la Drôme, de l'Isère, et même du Rhône. On leverait ainsi, une grande armée régionale, en appelant aux armes tous les citoyens valides. On trouverait les fonds nécessaires, au moyen d'un emprunt de 20 à 30 millions solidairement garanti par les départements compris dans la fédération, et enfin on constituerait une administration civile et militaire, armée de pouvoirs dictatoriaux au nom de la patrie en danger. C'était le moyen de faire du Midi de la France le rempart de la République déjà menacée par les compromis et les trahisons, et de sauver les départements que rongeaient depuis des siècles le fanatisme religieux et monarchique.

Le Midi pourra peut-être sauver le Nord, si nous unissons les forces des départements du Midi. Si Paris venait à succomber, il faudrait qu'il y eût encore une France derrière Paris. Le Midi aggloméré serait capable de se défendre, de faire changer la fortune des armes. C'est une défense régionale et provençale que nous voulons former.¹

A civil administration armed with dictatorial powers, Le Midi as the saviour of the Nord, a rampart of the Republic, a France behind Paris - such statements, coming at a time when the Government of National Defence was trying to establish its presence in the provinces, cannot have been welcomed by Gambetta; they appeared as defiant gestures to the moderate Republicans whose task was to unite the radicals of Lyon and Marseille with the departments of 'fanatisme religieux et monarchique'. As the situation of the French defensive effort in September worsened, the proclamations from Esquiros became even more radical, with criticism levelled directly at the Tours Delegations. Examples include the following excerpts:

Il remplace les fonctionnaires de l'Empire par d'autres qu'il ne connaît pas et qui souvent ne sont pas républicains; il place à la tête de nos armées des généraux qu'ont vieilli sous la monarchie qui pour la plupart, ne comprennent rien aux aspirations républicaines des troupes qu'ils ont sous leurs ordres, qui prennent pour des actes d'indiscipline les manifestations patriotiques de leurs soldats.

Nous ne pouvons vivre plus longtemps dans cette situation. Nous ne pouvons accepter plus longtemps que 500,000 Prussiens dictent des lois à 40 millions de Français; nous voulons

1. Ibid., p.54.

venir en aide au gouvernement de Tours, impuissant à prendre des mesures énergiques; nous voulons nous sauver nous-mêmes.

Nous sommes résolus à tous les sacrifices et si nous restons seuls, nous ferons appel à la Révolution, à la Révolution implacable et inexorable, à la Révolution avec toutes ses haines, ses colères et ses fureurs politiques.

Ces mesures extrêmes, imposées par la gravité des circonstances, peuvent être évitées si les municipalités, comprenant notre but patriotique, nous prêtent loyalement leurs concours. C'est pourquoi nous supplions, au nom de la patrie, au nom de la République, les municipalités et les républicains des communes d'envoyer des adhésions énergiques et effectives à la Ligue du Midi, de se grouper pour répondre utilement à ses appels patriotiques.¹

The first excerpt displays the theme that the revolution has not gone far enough, that Imperial officials and generals are incapable of implementing the levée en masse and of understanding the patriotic citizen-soldiers such a measure would provide. The second shows frustration with the general war effort and the 'impuissant' Tours government and calls instead for 'Révolution implacable et inexorable' as the saving grace for France. The third is an appeal for support on a patriotic basis, with the Ligue du Midi viewed as the proper channel for Republican forces of the Midi rather than the Government of National Defence.

A conflict between the Government and the Ligue was now inevitable; both viewed themselves as the proper organisational mechanism for the national defence. To the Tours regime, the radical proposals of the Ligue would jeopardise the defensive effort in the more conservative West and North; to the Ligue du Midi, the Government was too impotent, too given towards appeasing the monarchists, and too afraid of revolution to ever be capable of saving France from the German invaders. Both could not remain in power. The Government challenge began even prior to the arrival of Gambetta at Tours. Challemeil-Lacour and others accused

1. Ibid., pp.60-61.

Esquiros of fomenting a separatist revolution. Stung by these accusations and the lack of support from the rest of the Midi, Esquiros issued the following proclamation on 26 September:

Cette confédération méridionale n'est pas un Etat dans l'Etat. Le Midi ne se sépare pas du reste de la France et de Paris! C'est au contraire pour le sauver, pour faire triompher la République une et indivisible, qu'il a voulu grouper ses forces et préparer à l'armée de Paris de nouveaux renforts.

Loin de s'isoler, le Midi ne demande qu'à être imité et suivi. Du Midi au Nord, de l'Est à l'Ouest, unissons-nous, liguons-nous! En avant, l'armée du Rhône, l'armée de la Gironde, l'armée bretonne et l'armée du Nord.¹

This proclamation, apparently an effort at conciliation, was double-edged. While insisting that the Midi was not inclined towards separatism, the call went out for the other regions to follow the Midi's example. The Republic 'une et indivisible' was to be divided into four Ligues, three of which already existed and two against which the government had already moved. Esquiros' conciliatory gesture thus did not go very far, and it was quickly rebuffed by the Tours regime. On 30 October he returned to his original theme of revolution as the sole means by which France could be rescued:

Non, la révolution armée n'a pas encore paru. Et c'est elle seule qui sauvera la France.

Marseille a réclamé le concours des forces révolutionnaires, des pays de la Vallée-du-Rhône pour créer une vaste coalition d'où sortirait d'abord 200,000 hommes, et par la suite, plusieurs armées.²

By 18 October, Gambetta was firmly entrenched at Tours. He acted at once against the Ligue du Midi at Marseille. The immediate issue was the banning of religious congregations - an act which, had it been allowed to stand, would have lost Gambetta's Government of National Defence the support of every moderate and right-wing leader in France. Gambetta announced that

1. Ibid., p.64.

2. Ibid., p.68.

Esquiros was out and that the new prefect would be Marc-Dufraisse. It was easier said than done, for Gambetta soon discovered that his authority counted for nothing in Marseille. From a supporter in the troubled city he received the following telegram:

Marc-Dufraisse à la préfecture. Toute la population et les conseillers municipaux, départementaux, demandent son départ immédiat. Des troubles graves à craindre. Dufraisse retenu prisonnier dans la préfecture en ôtage. Esquiros restera à condition de pouvoirs illimités: Maintien d'Esquiros quand même ou guerre civile.¹

Gambetta was checked; he had no alternative but to withdraw Marc-Dufraisse. Esquiros' proclamation the next day showed the extent of his power:

Citoyens, vous connaissez le différend qui existe entre le pouvoir central de Tours et ceux qui me sont confiés: si l'administration de Tours m'abandonne, je suis certain que Marseille ne m'abandonne pas. Dans une huitaine de jours, nous partirons tous. La garde nationale sera mobilisée. Je me mettrai à votre tête, et nous irons de village en village prêcher la guerre sainte et mourir tous pour sauver la France et établir solidement la République.²

It was by far the cleverest ploy the radicals could have adopted. They had already denounced the Tours government for ~~its~~ failure to break with the regime and generals of Napoleon III and for ~~its~~ failure to bring about the revolution which alone could save the Republic. Now Esquiros openly declared that there were major differences between the Ligue and Tours. Further, it was evident that the Ligue rather than the Government would institute the levée en masse; indeed Esquiros offered to lead it. To the people of Marseille it was Esquiros rather than Gambetta who represented the national defence of Republican France.

Against the wall of support that existed for Esquiros in Marseille, Gambetta knew that he would have to rely upon an

1. Ibid., between pp.81-91.

2. Ibid., p.91.

insider - someone who knew local conditions and could compete for popular support. He first attempted to reinstate the old prefect Labadie, but the people of Marseille again revolted. Gambetta stood twice refused in a situation which now bordered on civil war. In a final attempt to reassert the Government's position, Gambetta chose as his new prefect M. Gent, one of the original leaders of the Marseille Republicans. Gent had been sent to Paris and then Tours to represent the Midi. As a Republican of immense influence in Marseille, Gent would make an excellent prefect for that troubled area. But first, Gambetta had to convince him to switch sides. After intense haggling, Gent agreed to represent the Government of National Defence and set off for Marseille. This time, Gambetta was taking no chances; he ordered General Marie and the garde nationale to surround the Hôtel de Ville in advance.

On 31 October, Delpech¹ and Esquiros quit their posts but refused to print the announcement of M. Gent's appointment. The situation in Marseille became aggravated as an immense crowd backed by the local gardes civiques invaded the Hôtel de Ville with cries of 'Vive Esquiros! A bas la Réaction'.² Marie's authority crumbled, and once again a supporter of Gambetta's had to send an urgent telegram:

Delpech a quitté la préfecture; Esquiros s'y maintient, et les gardes civiques réclament, avec quelques bataillons de garde nationale révoltés maintien d'Esquiros, dictateur et président Ligue Midi. Votre autorité inconnue, Marie malade ou disparu, on le croit prisonnier. Une commission municipale gouverne à l'Hôtel de Ville. Commune révolutionnaire. Cluseret a pris direction de tout ce mouvement, et de la garde nationale. La terreur et l'anarchie règnent; envoyez troupes.³

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1. A leading colleague of Esquiros who later fought with Garibaldi in l'Armée des Vosges.
 2. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports II, p.105.
 3. Ibid., p.106.

Marseille was substantiating its independence vis-à-vis Tours, and there appeared to be little the Government could do. But Marseille was also issuing proclamations on behalf of the Ligue du Midi, which ostensibly included other cities. The Ligue was stifled now, not by Gambetta, but by local Republicans backed by the prefects who supported the Government. Fortunately for Gambetta, Challemeil-Lacour held Lyon in line for the Government and sent the following response to Esquiros:

En réponse à votre invitation de ce matin, voici mon programme dont [je] ne me départirai pas.

Lutte à mort contre Prussiens, résistance jusqu'au bout, mais unité d'action avec Gouvernement Tours. Maintien à tout prix d'ordre et de discipline. Je recevrai des forces organisées et disciplinées, mais pas de cohue.¹

The movement at Marseille was doomed. It could not spread outside the city itself, as the other cities followed the lead given by Lyon and declared support for Tours. Even so, some way had to be found for restoring order to Marseille without risking civil war.

The situation at Marseille was still confused when M. Gent arrived at the outskirts of the city. He was met by Gambetta supporters who urged him to remain outside the city until sufficient forces had been received from other provinces to suppress the insurrection and assure his safety. Gent declined the advice and despised the use of force; he felt strong enough to triumph alone over his errant radical brothers of Marseille. At 4.00 p.m. he arrived at the station to the cheers of National Guard troops and crowds of Marseillais who disapproved of Esquiros and Cluseret. Bolstered by the reception, he went to the préfecture, but as soon as he had entered the door was slammed behind him. Confronting him were companions of Esquiros who attempted to force him to share power with their leader, but Gent

1. Ibid., pp.107-8.

held firm. Suddenly 10-12 gardes civiques under Cluseret's command rushed in, fired at Gent, and fled. Cluseret's coup d'état was in progress. Nicolas, the new commander of the National Guard, was also wounded. Cluseret tried to blame the wounding of Gent on the 'réaction', but this time, as in Lyon, he had gone too far. Esquiros disclaimed responsibility for what was happening in Marseille, thus depriving Cluseret not only of popular support but also the raison d'être for his coup - 'maintien d'Esquiros'. Nevertheless, Cluseret and Carcassone, in command of the gardes civiques and in possession of the Hôtel de Ville, vowed to fight. The wounded Nicolas arrived with battalions from his National Guard which this time would not back away from firing upon insurgents, and regular troops were reported to be en route to Marseille. It looked like civil war would erupt, when Nicolas received artillery which he ranged in front of the Hôtel de Ville. News of Gent's survival, the defection of Esquiros, the hostility of the population, as well as the balance of military force now controlled by their enemies, proved too much for Cluseret and his colleagues. The insurrection crumbled, and its leaders fled.

Esquiros resigned on 7 November and Gent assumed power with the tremendous moral authority which near martyrdom had provided. The Ligue du Midi had collapsed along with Cluseret's coup. Civil war, which had been so close, had been averted; Gambetta was now in effective control of provincial France.

(d) The failure of the Leftist Ligues

The Ligues had taken the initiative offered in Gambetta's proclamation of 6 September and had quickly surpassed its intent until they threatened, overtly or covertly, the existence of the Tours government. They had been allowed to develop their power and influence by a regime which, prior to the arrival of Gambetta,

was weak and ineffective. There was, according to Steenackers and Le Goff, one good way to stop them, and that was to govern effectively -

Les approuver était impossible; les condamner ouvertement était dangereux. Il n'y avait qu'un moyen de les supprimer ou de les paralyser, c'était de démontrer aux bons citoyens qui s'étaient laissé séduire à leur chimère, qu'elles étaient inutiles, en imprimant à la défense une impulsion énergique qui donnât satisfaction au patriotisme; c'était de gouverner - de gouverner avec son parti - de planter fièrement, aux yeux de tous, l'étendard de la défense et du Gouvernement qui le personnifiait. Malheureusement, tout le monde n'était pas à la hauteur de cette tâche.¹

Their assessment of the situation, that it was necessary only to govern, was true enough with respect to the Ligue du Sud-Ouest, which was never really effectively organised and thus could not really hope to circumvent the prefectural power of Gambetta. It is less true with respect to Lyon. Had M. Challemel-Lacour not been the respected man of the Left that he was, he would never have been able to establish the power of the Government of National Defence in a city so proud of its revolutionary tradition separate from that of Paris. Even then, had he not had sufficient force behind him to hold off the Cluseret coup, the provincial power would have passed into the hands of the insurgent radicals. The assessment is certainly false with respect to the Ligue du Midi at Marseille. There the issue was overt opposition to the Tours government, and more than 'effective government' was called for. Two of Gambetta's prefects had been unceremoniously rejected; the National Guard troops of General Marie had joined the insurgents; his third prefect was the victim of an assassination attempt in a Cluseret coup d'état which very nearly succeeded. The danger to France of the situation was thus severe. Had the coup

1. Steenackers and Le Goff, op. cit., p.420.

succeeded, and had Marseille been able to spread the movement to Lyon and other cities, what could the Tours government have done? Themselves the beneficiaries of an insurgency against Napoleon III, could they have prosecuted a civil war against their more radical colleagues who would have simply followed the same route to power as they had done on 4 September? In early October, France might well have consisted of the island of Paris in the one-third of France under German occupation, the Ligue du Midi covering the entire south-east of France, the Ligue du Sud-Ouest embracing thirty departments, and the Right-wing Ligue de l'Ouest based on the Vendée and Brittany. In such a configuration there would have been no room for a Tours regime whose sole authority and legitimacy rested on the events of 4 September in Paris.

Had the Ligue du Midi alone succeeded (and only MM. Challemeil-Lacour and Gent prevented it from doing so), then even had Gambetta remained in power in the south-west and west, the united defence of France would have become impossible. The Ultra-Left of the provinces thus came near to crippling the moderate regime of Gambetta at Tours - much nearer than Blanqui and Flourens came to dislodging the Government of National Defence in Paris. The armed people had narrowly averted civil war while the Germans consolidated their stranglehold on Paris - not an auspicious occurrence for la guerre à outrance, but perhaps an inevitable one.

3. Keeping an Eye on the Right

Gambetta found it somewhat difficult to move against his friends of the Left. He had no such qualms about the Right, and instead kept close tabs on activities in the West, the traditional area of conservative revolt against radical French republics. The

parallels he drew between 1792 and 1870 thus had an added dimension: Gambetta feared a new Vendée.

(a) The Ligue de l'Ouest

The first of the ~~ligues~~ to be formed was not Left, but Right, in its political composition. Local politicians, with the support of General Fiéreck, who commanded the scattered forces of the region, inaugurated the Ligue de l'Ouest for much the same reasons, overt and covert, for which the Ligues du Sud-Ouest and du Midi had been organised. As early as 28 September a local republican prefect warned Glais-Bizoin at Tours of the growing danger from the Right:

Ne vous laissez pas circonvenir par la Ligue de l'Ouest. Cette Ligue est fort peu républicaine. Elle va vous demander la nomination d'un commissaire muni de pleins pouvoirs civils et militaires pour treize départements; ce serait folie de l'accorder.¹

The Ligue de l'Ouest was in effect prevented from organising in a period which brought the greatest development of the Ligue du Sud-Ouest and du Midi. Steenackers and Le Goff, who were in many respects the official historians of the Gambetta regime, were more overtly hostile to this particular ~~Ligue~~ than to the leftist ~~ligues~~, though it is difficult to see how it represented a significant challenge to the Government of National Defence. The 'parti puissant et hostile au gouvernement' was more clearly the Ultra-Left than the Right; the 'chefs militaires ambitieux' were better represented by Cluseret than by Fiéreck. The Ligue de l'Ouest soon collapsed when confronted with the prefectural power of Gambetta, well before the collapse of the Ligue du Sud-Ouest and certainly prior to Gambetta's victory over the Ligue du Midi.

1. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports X, p.54.

(b) Kératry and l'Armée de Bretagne

The successor to the Ligue de l'Ouest and heir to Gambetta's fears of an 'Orléano-Légitimiste' conspiracy was l'Armée de Bretagne formed under the aegis of Gambetta's colleague Kératry. Kératry had resigned as chief of police and left Paris about the same time as Gambetta. He first went to Spain where his hope of raising an army of 80,000 Spaniards to fight for France proved to be illusory. The ambitious Kératry returned to his native province of Finistère and set about raising Republican armies, not an easy task in so reactionary an area. He talked Gambetta into giving him the command of the then non-existent Armée de Bretagne, and then set about making it a reality at a rate and by methods which shocked Gambetta. For Kératry patched up an alliance with the local right-wing leaders, and utilising 'Dieu et Patrie' instead of 'Vive la République' as his rallying cry, he received a tremendous response from the patriotic Bretons.

The format of his army was the ancient 'Armée citoyenne' pattern of Brittany, 'avec ses divisions et subdivisions territoriales où chaque Département formait une Brigade; chaque Arrondissement une ou plusieurs légions, chaque village une escouade'.¹ Although this was exactly the kind of system Gambetta might have wished for the entirety of France, it was for Brittany uncomfortably close to 'la vieille organisation traditionnelle par clans et par plons, dont les origines se confondent avec celles de la Bretagne'.² In less than six weeks Kératry had 60,000 men assembled at or en route to Camp Conlie, situated on the site of an old Roman camp once commanded by Caesar. It was too much for

1. Le Mercier d'Erm, L'Etrange aventure de l'armée de Bretagne, (Dinard, 1930), p.56.

2. Ibid., p.57.

Gambetta, who hurriedly offered Kératry any other post in France, which Kératry politely refused. There were two reasons for Gambetta's move; first, his paranoia over a new Vendée; second, his fear that someone else would save Paris and France - in this instance Kératry and his independent command in the West. Gambetta determined to stop his rival and set about on a policy, apparently deliberate, of frustrating the training, arming and organisation of l'Armée de Bretagne.

The events of the period led Le Mercier d'Erm, a Breton historian, to write that

C'est ici qu'apparaît clairement la volonté bien arrêtée du Gouvernement, non seulement de ne pas utiliser l'Armée de Bretagne pour la défense du territoire français mais encore de neutraliser le danger qu'elle représentait à ses yeux, en la maintenant, impuissante et désarmée, dans un camp de concentration.¹

Though it seems extraordinary that the man whose entire political platform consisted of the salvation of France by the armed people would hinder the development of an army which would help him accomplish his goal, the evidence against Gambetta is convincing. Kératry in early November had found sufficient stocks of chassepôts and ammunition in nearby naval and artillery stores which could be utilised to arm and train his men, but Gambetta wired to the Artillery Headquarters, 'Ne laissez prendre sous aucun prétexte les fusils et cartouches-Chassepôts'.² Instead, he promised Kératry an arms shipment at Brest which contained '30,800 armes à tir rapide, 24,300 fusils rayés à percussion, 2,000 revolvers et 5 mitrailleuses';³ neither were these arms made available to Camp Conlie. The harassed Kératry, with 60,000 men he could not

1. Ibid., p.71.

2. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports V, p.18.

3. Ibid., p.19.

arm or even train, was then promised a series of arms and shipments, none of which was ever sent.

Ainsi, on promet d'abord des fusils Remington et des fusils Spencer, puis, à la place des Remingtons, des Sniders sans bayonnettes; et enfin, par une dernière métamorphose, les fusils Spencer à bayonnettes se changent en carabines sans bayonnettes ou à bayonnettes problématiques, commandées la veille en Angleterre et que l'armée de Bretagne ne vit jamais.¹

After this mysterious series of promises, Kératry was next told to expect shipments aboard the Pereire and Avon - the fourth plan in eight days; and even this plan was amended to the Avon and the Ontario. Camp Conlie finally received 7,000 rifles to add to the 9,000 old rifles his men had brought with them. Kératry wired Gambetta:

Ce serait risible si ce n'était lugubre, quand on arme de fusils perfectionnés tous les aventuriers qui se présentent à Tours au cri de vive la République.²

Gambetta's response was to ask Kératry 'Pourquoi cette froideur entre nous?' to which his former colleague replied 'Il y a de votre part trop de préventions politiques vis-à-vis de la Bretagne'.³

How long this situation might have remained in stalemate no one could know, but suddenly Gambetta discovered that he needed troops in the West. Orleans had fallen as the Army of the Loire went down in defeat; Le Mans was uncovered and thus open to German attack. On 22 November Freycinet sent the following message to Kératry:

L'ennemi paraît vouloir nous pousser assez vivement dans la direction du Mans. Je vous congerre d'oublier que vous êtes Breton pour ne vous souvenir de votre qualité de Français et de vous concerter avec le Général Jaurès pour

1. Ibid., p.20.

2. Ibid., p.25.

3. Ibid., p.41.

opposer à l'invasion votre naissante mais vaillante armée; c'est l'occasion de lui donner le baptême du feu.¹

On the 23rd, Gambetta telegraphed to Kératry, 'Venez, nous combattons ensemble, nous arrêtrons la marche des Prussiens'.² But on the 24th, he cabled the director of artillery at Rennes, 'Je vous donne l'ordre formel de ne rien délivrer, ni en matériel ni en munitions, à M. de Kératry ou à ses lieutenants, sans une autorisation explicite de ma part, ou de mon délégué de Tours'.³

Kératry, grandson of the President of the Breton State, had been told to forget that he was a Breton, and to run to the defence of France - a defence which he had been trying to organise for more than a month. Even after his army was called to a 'baptism by fire', he was deprived on Gambetta's orders, of arms and ammunition. To add insult to injury, Gambetta chose this moment to announce that Kératry was being placed under the orders of General Jaurès - a clear departure from the independent command and rank Gambetta had conferred upon his colleague in October. Kératry, over the protests of his men, could no longer tolerate the situation and chose to resign. A 'division de marche' of 15,000 men and all of Conlie's serviceable rifles was dispatched, under the command of Gougéard, to Le Mans, where it fought bravely with Chanzy until the end of the war. That left 46,000 unarmed, untrained men at Camp Conlie under the command of Le Bouëdec. But Le Bouëdec was considered too close to Kératry, and Gambetta soon supplanted him with the more reliable Marivault.

With his rival now out of the way, Gambetta might have been expected to utilise the Bretons for the national defence. But the

1. Le Mercier d'Erm, op. cit., p.110.

2. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports V, p.36.

3. Ibid., p.36.

situation at Conlie continued to deteriorate under Marivault. The men were dispirited by the fall from power of Kératry and Le Bouëdec, and by the continued lack of arms, equipment, and training. Further, heavy rains turned Conlie into a sea of mud; and the camp, built as a temporary training facility through which the men would pass quickly became crowded and unhealthy with 46,000 men in a state of enforced idleness. Marivault became so alarmed about the morale and health of his men that he demanded the evacuation of Camp Conlie.

The week of 16-22 December, Conlie occupied an inordinate amount of Gambetta's time, as evidenced by his cables to Freycinet, who always referred decisions which 'se confinent à la politique' to him. Gambetta's position was that Conlie could not be evacuated; the reaction might exploit such a move as the abandonment of the national defence. More importantly, Conlie had been named one of his 'camps d'instruction', the permanent base upon which France's future militia armies would be built, thus enshrining Gambetta's conception of the nation in arms. The abandonment of one such camp might become valuable political ammunition in the arsenal of the Right which would be used after the war in attacks against the militia system. With these considerations in mind, Gambetta wired Freycinet on 16 December:

Il ne faut évacuer le camp de Conlie sous aucun prétexte. J'ignore de quelles conditions physiques on veut parler; s'il y a des malades, il faut les évacuer seuls.¹

But on 17 December Gambetta had to retreat. The chief doctor at Camp Conlie resigned in protest over Conlie's conditions, and Gambetta wired to Freycinet to arm the men as quickly as possible and dispatch them from Conlie. By 18 December a new thought had

1. Reinach, op. cit., p.286.

crept into Gambetta's mind:

Je ne veux pas que le Camp de Conlie puisse devenir un embarras pour nous moins que pour personne. N'envoyez à Conlie que des hommes de confiance. Enfin ne perdez pas de vue qu'il ne faut que l'on puisse quelque jour mettre en avant l'affaire de Conlie, s'il y a eu vraiment erreur, pour attaquer l'institution du camp que je considère comme l'un des actes les plus importants de notre administration.¹

The 19th of December brought yet another ploy to place the blame elsewhere by calling a commission of inquest before which Kératry and others would have to appear. Unfortunately the report, even by 'hommes de confiance', failed to place the blame for Conlie other than where it belonged. On 21 December came the ultimate solution:

Quand je vous ai envoyé le rapport sur l'affaire de Conlie je vous ai fait observer qu'il fallait une reddition de comptes pour mettre ma responsabilité à couvert.²

In one week Gambetta had gone from refusal to evacuate Conlie to the hasty armament and dispatch of all the men there, from a report by 'hommes de confiance' to an inquest and ultimate cover-up in what had become the worst scandal of his administration. Even then, it was possible that the Conlie affair might have been papered over had it not been that it ultimately led to a military disaster for Chanzy's republican army in the West. On 19 December the credits had run out for Conlie and rather than evacuate the men to better training sites in Brittany, Gambetta decided to send them forward to join Chanzy at Le Mans.

The reason for this move was obvious: if the men did fight, it would mean that they had been armed and trained; any potential scandal could be limited by pointing to the ready state of the men of Conlie. Unfortunately, it did not work. Most of the 40,000 men were given arms on the 10th of January, the day before the battle.

1. Ibid., p.289.

2. Ibid., p.309.

Even had they been able to learn how to fire them effectively in 24 hours, the arms were so rusty they were of more danger to the firer than to their German targets.¹ Incredibly, Chanzy, possibly at the insistence of Gambetta and Freycinet, put the mobilisés into the front lines. Marivault wired to Gambetta 'je ne saurais accepter aucun genre de responsabilité dans l'emploi qu'il fera des éléments qui ont fait partie de mon commandement'.² In a final effort to prevent the disaster he knew would occur, he wired to Fourichon and Glais-Bizoin at Tours to implore Gambetta to countermand the orders which would send his men to their death:

Je fais appel à votre honnêteté patriotique, pour que vous représentiez quel crime stérile ce serait de pousser en tas nos mobilisés à peine armés, sans cartouches et sans souliers, au devant d'une destruction qui anéantirait tout espoir d'une résistance ultérieure. - Leur place est à Vitré, quand ils auront tiré quelques coups de fusils, et non au devant de l'ennemi, où leur accumulation ne serait qu'un obstacle - Chanzy s'irrite qu'ils soient ce qu'ils sont, mais ce n'est pas avec ses désirs, c'est avec les faits qu'il faut compter à la guerre.³

By chance the Germans chose to concentrate their attack on the position known as Tuileries, which General Lalande and several thousand Bretons from Conlie managed to hold for almost two hours without reinforcements or support of any kind. Overwhelmed, the entire centre of Chanzy's army crumbled. In the débandage which followed thousands of mobilisés from Conlie choked the roads, making organised retreat impossible. Chanzy lost one-third of his army in a panic retreat from a battlefield where he had very nearly checked the Prussian Army. Chanzy remarked after the battle, 'if only I had had an Army of Brittany behind me...'

After the war, the Commission d'Enquête had as one of its

1. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports V, p.116.

2. Ibid., p.134.

3. Ibid., p.136.

central missions the task of finding out why there was no Army of Brittany behind Chanzy at the battle of Le Mans, despite the fact that such a force had been organised as early as October. Their conclusions are instructive:

Ils restèrent ainsi deux mois sans armes, sans moyens de s'exercer et de s'instruire; de ce manque d'armes et de cette oisiveté forcée, ils conclurent qu'on ne voulait point faire d'eux des soldats, mais les soumettre à des privations, à des souffrances, sans aucune utilité pour la défense nationale. De là un complet découragement contre lequel demeura inefficace la tardive distribution des Springfields: en voyant le mauvais état de ces fusils, le triste résultat des essais d'armes, les mobilisés bretons se crurent de plus en plus voués au rôle de victimes et même - après la Tuilerie et l'incident des dépêches - de victimes qu'on voulait déshonorer.

Telle est, aujourd'hui encore, l'opinion générale en Bretagne, et cette opinion - conséquente avec elle-même - attribue le non-armement des troupes de Conlie aux sentiments de défiance du Gouvernement de Tours à l'égard des Bretons.

Sans rien préjuger, deux points nous semblent acquis: 1^o la possibilité d'armer les mobilisés bretons, conformément aux prouesses qu'on leur avait faites; 2^o l'existence à Tours et à Bordeaux dans le monde gouvernemental, de préventions politiques défavorables à l'armée de Bretagne.

Un troisième point tout aussi certain, c'est que le non-armement des troupes de Conlie porta un grave préjudice à la défense nationale. En armant et instruisant en temps utile, c'est-à-dire en novembre et en décembre, les mobilisés bretons, on en eût tiré au moins 30 à 40,000 hommes de bonnes troupes, qui se seraient trouvées prêtes au commencement de janvier. C'était la réserve qu'il fallait et qui manqua au général Chanzy pour se maintenir dans les positions du Mans et battu les Prussiens.

Quant à l'armement en fusils Springfield donné au dernier moment, il ne fût pas moins funeste. Voici le jugement qu'en portaient dès lors les amis les plus zélés qui ne fonctionnent pas... c'est une véritable conspiration contre la défense nationale.¹

Though Gambetta had stopped the 'armée des chouans' he feared so much, he could not cover up the Conlie Affair; the disaster which his prejudice had caused to the national defence was the blackest mark against his record to emerge from the Franco-Prussian War.

(c) The New Army of Brittany

Chanzy, after his disastrous defeat at Le Mans, had two major

1. Ibid., pp.182-3.

problems: how to defend the entire West of France against German attack, and what to do with the 45,000 Bretons under his command who were part of no effective military unit whatsoever. His ingenious solution was to create an Army of Brittany of 60,000 men divided among the three famous right-wing franc-tireur commanders - Cathelineau (grandson of the Vendée leader from the 1790's), Charrette (who commanded the Papal Zouaves) and Lipowski (whose Francs-tireurs de Paris had several times saved Chanzy from defeat), - as well as General Bérenger. The four corps of 15,000 men each, spearheaded by the elite franc-tireur units, would operate in loose co-ordination, partisan-style, in defence of Brittany and the West, thus enabling Chanzy to utilise the rest of his army as a mobile striking force. Charrette was to be named overall commander of the Army of Brittany, so that his name would level prestige to the defence effort and ensure local support.

This plan, inherently rational for regional defence, represented exactly the kind of 'chouan' challenge Gambetta had been trying to avoid with Kératry and Camp Conlie. He wired Chanzy on 22 January:

Quant à l'affaire Charrette, je vous prie de faire savoir, à qui de droit, que l'idée de ce grand commandement régional ne me paraît pas réalisable.

Je veux bien que l'on puisse donner à M. de Charrette un corps de mobilisés à commander, mais quant à l'investir d'une autorité aussi vaste que celle dont on a parlé, voilà ce qui ne se peut admettre. Vous avez dû voir déjà certaines dépêches du préfet d'Auges qui s'effraye du commandement donné à Cathelineau, jugez de ce que seraient ses réclamations.¹

It was not the first time that Gambetta and his prefects had moved against Charrette and Cathelineau, the heroes of the right-wing Catholics of France. Charrette's Zouaves had initially been refused permission to land when they sailed back from Rome to help

1. Reinach, op. cit., p.334.

defend France. They were also hustled out of Tours when Garibaldi arrived, out of fear that the old enemies would start a civil war on the spot. Thereafter, the Zouaves were split among several commands such that Charrette commanded only about 300, known as 'Volontaires de l'Ouest'. Cathelineau was prevented from recruiting men in certain areas of France where the prefects were hostile to his name and what it stood for; his francs-tireurs thus remained a relatively small body, even though they proved highly effective. Charrette, Cathelineau and Lipowski were easily among the best commanders to emerge from the Franco-Prussian War. Gambetta, in the last days of his policy of 'la guerre à outrance', could well have utilised such men; instead he preferred to allow the war effort in the West to sag rather than to invest such an area with a 'chouan' army in the final days of the war.

C. The Election Controversy

The government of the armed people had been brought to power by an insurrection. It had never been ratified by a plebiscite or an election. Paris had simply made the revolution and then passed down the fait accompli to the provinces. Throughout the struggle to maintain supremacy against challenges from the Left and Right, Gambetta and his colleagues at Tours had never made recourse to the one political mechanism which might have given their government the legitimacy it so obviously lacked and so desperately needed.

The lack of a plebiscite, referendum or election was bitterly attacked by the Right, who knew that they might well be returned to power over the moderately Left Government of National Defence. It was also attacked by the Ultra-Left both in Paris and

in the

in the provincial cities, where the radicals hoped to carve out an electoral base in certain arrondissements and industrial areas respectively. The question of elections also caused divisions among the members of the moderate Left. Fourichon, Crémieux and Glais-Bizoin had agreed to hold elections in the provinces until Gambetta arrived at Tours to quash the notion. Gambetta's stated reason why was that certain sections of France already under German occupation would be unable to vote; the elections would therefore be incomplete and unfair. His real reason was probably that the Government of National Defence would be swept from power by the Orléano-Legitimist block from the provinces. In the ensuing chaos, France would become ungovernable and the national defence would certainly fail.

There was a certain justification for Gambetta's position. The sheer difficulty of having elections while one-third of the country was overrun and the capital invested was obvious. Further though the whole people could unite behind the idea of national defence, elections would almost certainly divide them. Who would govern if the Right carried the countryside, the Ultra-Left Marseille, Lyon and part of Paris, while the Government of National Defence carried the rest of Paris and maybe a few country seats? Yet the alternative Gambetta chose - to assume dictatorial control of the provinces by virtue of his double authority as Minister of the Interior and of War - probably in the long run was prejudicial to the national defence. The head of the Ligue du Sud-Ouest asked him, 'Qui t'a fait roi?'. And when asked to respect the 'inamovabilité de la magistrature', Esquiros replied unanswerably 'Avez-vous respecté l'inamovabilité de Napoléon III ou du Sénat?'.¹

1. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports VI, p.17.

If the case for elections in such a period of crisis was weak, that for a plebiscite was not. The plebiscite forced upon the Government of National Defence in Paris by the Ultra-Left had in fact yielded a 90% approval for the Trochu regime and had thus enabled Trochu to carry out his policies even more effectively. A similar plebiscite in the provinces would probably have supported Gambetta and given his regime a certain legitimacy. By tying his regime to the issue of national defence, Gambetta could have been assured of a majority 'oui' for the Government and the national defence; every 'non' vote would have meant chaos and surrender - the first abhorred by the Right and the second by the Left.

Even without a plebiscite, Gambetta's policies might have worked had he remained true to his original proclamation that 'nous ne sommes pas au pouvoir mais au combat; nous ne sommes pas un gouvernement de parti mais le gouvernement de la défense nationale'.¹ But Gambetta was half-forced to, and half-wanted to, play politics to ensure the survival of his regime and of the concept of the armed people he had formulated. Increasingly, his regime lost the neutral, non-partisan air of a truly united regime of national defence; in its stead, the government was taking the form of a moderate-left dictatorship under Gambetta and his appointed prefects. He had had to act against the Ligues to prevent the development of a separatist movement which could have ripped France asunder at a time when unity was required. Perhaps it had also been necessary to guard against a Rightist reaction which might have jeopardised the national defence, though lack of evidence of such a conspiracy casts a rather unfavourable light on Gambetta's policies.

1. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports X, p.97.

Politics were thus never absent from the struggles of the armed people; torn between calls for revolution and for the status quo, the moderate Left kept in power but walked a tight-rope. That Gambetta maintained his balance while juggling the opposition and consolidating his own hold was miraculous. The half-measures which emerged from his regime were a credit to a people whose entire regular force had been lost in a war which no-one really wanted, and who, by electing to fight on, earned the sympathy of most of the rest of Europe. The half-measures of the government of the armed people were not, however sufficient to save France from another more efficient concept of the nation in arms: Moltke's million civilian-soldiers.

D. The Danger of Civil War: Gambetta versus the Government of National Defence

Gambetta, by the end of January, was at the end of his tight-rope. Paris had surrendered and signed an armistice covering all of France. Gambetta's commitment to 'la guerre à outrance' was by now so great that he could not surrender nor could he understand why the loss of Paris (which had in effect been cut off since the 19th of September) necessarily entailed surrender in the provinces.

Ainsi, tous nos efforts, tout ce que nous avons fait pour l'honneur de la France aboutissait à cette capitulation de Paris et cette capitulation elle-même jetait la France sous les pieds du vainqueur! C'est là ce que M. Gambetta ne pouvait pas admettre; tout un pays dépendre d'une ville!¹

Cette idée, M. Gambetta ne pouvait la supporter; il aurait voulu forcer l'armée prussienne à nous poursuivre, à nous bloquer de cantons en cantons, la harceler, la harasser, l'obliger à reculer ou à traiter dans les

1. François F. Steenackers, Les Télégraphes et les Postes pendant la guerre de 1870-1871, (Paris, 1883), p.564.

conditions acceptables. Et à coup sûr, celles qui étaient faites à cette heure ne pouvaient être qu'inacceptables!¹

On 31 January Gambetta issued a proclamation to fight on. Although Bourbaki had gone down to monumental defeat in the East, Gambetta had Garibaldi with a guerrilla army reinforced to 40,000 men which could protect the south of France while more militia units were assembled and trained. In the West, he still had Chanzy's army, as well as the Army of Brittany which he might have used in similar fashion to Garibaldi's - as a covering force while new units were raised. Nor was political support lacking. The Right in the West could be induced to fight on under such leaders as Charrette and Cathelineau. In the South-west, the Ligue was again gaining support rapidly and announced in favour of continued war. In the Midi, M. Gent communicated his support for 'guerre à outrance' and Lyon called for a 'Commune' and vowed to fight on as well. Only in the North, where demonstrations broke out against Gambetta in Lille, was continued resistance impossible. Even in Paris where Gambetta's colleagues had deserted the war effort and signed the armistice, there was sufficient popular support for renewed hostilities; by allying himself with the Ultra-Left of Blanqui, Flourens and Delescluze, who now held the only effective armed power in the city thanks to Bismarck's ill-conceived disarmament scheme, Gambetta would thus have been assured of control of the explosive capital.

Clearly France was on the brink of civil war. Gambetta was in power in the provinces supported by the Ligues which he had subtly maintained as a kind of political reserve. The Government of National Defence of Paris had no clear base outside of Paris, and without their armed regulars, they had no secure base even

1. Ibid., p.565.

within the city. The Government in Paris sent Jules Simon to Bordeaux, the capital since the fall of Tours, to talk Gambetta into surrender. Gambetta at first refused, and he sent Crémieux to Paris to negotiate for time. En route to Paris, Crémieux met Mm. Garnier-Pages, Pelletan and Arago.¹ The four returned to Bordeaux and joined Simon and Glais-Bizoin in a solid front against Gambetta's policies. Gambetta was isolated; he no longer had any shred of official justification for further prosecution of the war effort. Left without support, he had no choice but to resign. Only at that moment, according to General Thoumas, was civil war finally avoided.² Arago became the new Minister of War. The virtual dictator and symbol of the armed people had fallen, and along with him, the politics of 'la guerre à outrance'. France was ready for new elections, for a new regime, and for Bismarck's peace.

1. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Rapports X, p.268.

2. Charles Antoine Thoumas, Paris, Tours, Bordeaux: souvenirs de la guerre de 1870-1871, (Paris, 1893), p.222.

IV. THE FRANCS-TIREURS

A. Introduction

Against the background of half revolution, political intrigue, and fratricidal infighting which swirled about the Government of the Armed People, stands the record of their accomplishments in five months of war. These accomplishments perhaps owed as much to the concept of military organisation forced on France by the events of the war as to the political leadership provided by Gambetta and his colleagues, for the armed people proved to be more potent a fighting force than even the most optimistic Republican had believed possible.

The French theoreticians and practitioners of 'people's war' had two contending traditions of the armed people from which they could draw inspiration. Firstly, the tradition of Valmy, where in 1792 the French citizenry, hastily assembled into an army, had saved the First Republic from annihilation at the hands of the European monarchs. And secondly, the partisan tradition of such disparate areas as the Vendée, Brittany, Champagne, and Alsace-Lorraine, where guerrilla warfare had long been the normal political recourse against French government and foreign invader alike.

Initially, Gambetta and his colleagues inclined toward guerrilla warfare. Fourichon encouraged French commanders to use their forces as partisans 'whose rôle is less to fight than to harass the enemy...To obstruct him in his requisitions...Above all to carry out coups de main and pointes, to capture convoys,

cut roads and railways, destroy bridges...'.¹ Gambetta similarly urged the French forces to 'harass the enemy's detachments without pause or relaxation; prevent him from deploying, restrict the area of his requisitions, make him thin out before Paris, disturb him day and night, always and everywhere...'.² Steenackers added, 'In short, I suggest the type of war which the Spaniards waged against us under the First Empire and the Mexicans under the Second...'.³

This initial enthusiasm for guerrilla warfare was short-lived. Paris was invested on the 20th September; Gambetta, once established with the *Délégation* at Tours, became preoccupied with the necessity of relieving the capital. This preoccupation forced Gambetta to choose the militia pattern of the armed people. Admittedly, the resources at his command for the task of constructing militia armies were immense. Under French military law, 626,000 men were liable for service in the active army, but had not been trained prior to ~~Sedan~~ Sedan. A further 623,000 were enrolled in the Garde Mobile, a category which included all men from 21-26 years of age who had not been called for the active army. These two forces, plus the 40,000 Marines and 8,000 men from the Customs and Forestry Departments, gave the French militia a 'paper strength' of nearly 1,300,000 men.

Though the resources available for militia units looked impressive, Gambetta's decision to opt for the militia pattern quite possibly was a strategical error. Clausewitz had earlier shown the limitations of such forces:

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1. Michael Howard, The Franco-Prussian War, (London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1961), p.249.
 2. Ibid., p.240.
 3. Ibid., p.249.

National levies and armed peasantry cannot and should not be employed against the main body of the enemy's Army, or even against any considerable detachment of the same; they must not attempt to crack the nut, they must only gnaw on the surface and the borders. They should rise in the provinces situated at one of the sides of the theatre of War, and in which the assailant does not appear in force, in order to withdraw these provinces entirely from his influence.¹

Gambetta's militiamen had not been trained; most had no previous military experience; yet they were called upon to engage the army which had just decimated the finest trained regulars France had to offer. Though the militia units might fight bravely and win some victories (Coulmiers, most notably), they represented the type of challenge with which the Germans could still deal in the conventional military style in which they had proved their supremacy vis-à-vis the Imperial Army.

As Howard notes, the alternative pattern represented by the francs-tireurs 'might have been a more effective way of organizing the manpower available than the attempt to form it into armies which never stood a chance against the Prussians in the open field'.² However, once the militia tradition had gained official support over the partisan tradition, the francs-tireurs were viewed as an adjunct to the militia units; hence they were unable extensively to pursue their partisan war. Contrasted with the militia pattern of the armed people, the guerrilla pattern represented a challenge which would force the Germans out of the safety of conventional operations and into the maelstrom of a people's war. There might be 1,300,000 militiamen, but there

1. Karl von Clausewitz, On War, Vol.II, (London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1911), p.344.

2. Howard, op. cit., p.250.

could be 38,000,000 guerrillas.¹ Moreover, while the partisans harassed German detachments, communications, and garrisons, the militia units could be given time to train and to prepare for later, large-scale engagements.

The French strategy, once firmly fixed on the militia pattern, determined to a large extent the scope and operations of the second conflict. Where one month had sufficed to annihilate the Empire, the second war was to endure five long months, with a bitterness and a desperation unknown in the first war. The people's war came to represent a downward spiral of terror and counterterror, until general frustration and the fall of Paris induced the French authorities to capitulate. Even then, the Germans physically occupied only one-third of France, leaving part of the industrial North, as well as the key regions around Bordeaux, Lyon, and Marseille untouched; even in defeat France's resources were awesome. In this struggle, the militia had by design borne the brunt of the fighting. Yet the francs-tireurs, despite official neglect, had played an important though subsidiary role. The examination of the franc-tireur movement which follows should offer ample justification for their efforts, and for the partisan pattern of the armed people as it emerged in the Franco-Prussian War.

B. Models for the Francs-Tireurs

The idea for conducting guerrilla warfare against the German invasion force was not, of course, conceived in a vacuum. The

1. A few extremists urged that the entire population of France (38 millions) wage a guerrilla struggle: 'Qu'aurait fait la Prusse contre trente-huit millions Français résolus?'. Though such an attitude was inapplicable in the France of 1870-71 it did foreshadow such 'people's wars' as Vietnam, where one might ask 'What could the United States do against 30 million resolute Vietnamese?'.

partisan tradition of the Legitimist¹ regions of the Vendée and Brittany, linked with the experience of guerrilla defence in Champagne and Alsace-Lorraine during the periods of Napoleonic collapse, provided France with an indigenous model for the conduct of guerrilla operations. A somewhat indirect, but possibly more important source of inspiration can be found in the rather frustrating counter-guerrilla campaigns of the regular Army. French failures against the Spanish partisans, 1809 to 1814, and against the Prussian partisans, 1814, were of equal strategic significance to Napoleon's invasion of Russia. In the post-1815 period, the numerous small conflicts in Africa (particularly Dahomey) had provided the French Army with further experience in guerrilla conflicts. Further, the weaknesses of the Second Empire were graphically revealed by the major counter-guerrilla operations which were attempted but not successfully concluded. The French intervention in Italy against Garibaldi was unable to prevent Italian unification (although the Vatican was defended). The disastrous campaigns in Mexico against Juarez and Diaz debilitated the Empire, frustrated the Army, and reduced French prestige. Many of the regular officers were impressed by the successes of their 'weaker' opponents; they were eager to try this new style of war when the opportunity arose against the German invaders. Indeed, to some of the officers who saw all too clearly the demerits of the untrained militia, the guerrilla pattern seemed to be the only type of warfare likely to bring success to the French armed people.

Nor could the French have been indifferent to examples of

1. The Legitimists were those Frenchmen who supported the House of Bourbon rather than the House of Orléans as the rightful pretender to the French throne.

heroic popular resistance elsewhere. When Garibaldi arrived in France, he came as the foremost revolutionary of his age - the 'Che Guevara' of a century ago. Besides his successes in the wars for Italian unification, Garibaldi brought with him a wealth of experience from South American movements, most notably the defence of Montevideo. Another example of heroic resistance was that of the Polish partisans during the insurrection against the Russians, 1863-1864. The Polish community in Paris was noted for the revolutionary exiles it shielded, and some of the Poles became officers in franc-tireur units (most notably Wolowski, who fought with Bourras in the Vosges).

These four sources of inspiration (the Legitimists, the indigenous partisan tradition, the counter-guerrilla experiences of the regular Army, and the foreign popular resistance movements) were all clearly in evidence in the people's war. Cathelineau's Vendéen francs-tireurs and the Légion Bretonne were both exemplary of the first; the Avant-Garde de la Délivrance who united around Michelet's 'chêne des partisans' in the Forêt de Bœene, as well as the first corps of francs-tireurs formed prior to the war in 1868, represented the second. Regular officers and old soldiers could be found in almost all the units, most notably in Lipowski's corps d'élite. Garibaldi of Italy, Wolowski and Bossak-Hauké of Poland were all representative of the fourth source of inspiration towards guerrilla warfare.

The idea, once conceived, or rather, inspired by these four sources, did not leap immediately into actuality; the intervening stage of organisation was required. Though the idea for forming the francs-tireurs might have come easily to numerous French government, military, and local leaders, the difficulties of forging effective units from a populace wholly unprepared for

guerrilla resistance were manifest. Moreover, the mode of organisation would affect the manner of operations of the various units.

C. The Forming of the Francs-Tireurs

It is important to note that, while the francs-tireurs were important only in the second phase of the Franco-Prussian War, the first so-called franc-tireur units were formed even prior to the first phase. The term itself means literally 'free-shooter', best translated as sniper. The first franc-tireur units were not really military in nature, but may rather have been an outgrowth of hunting clubs and shooting societies which were also popular in England during that period.¹ The first units, according to Dumas,² were formed several years before the war as shooting societies in the Vosges and were useful for teaching youth how to handle weapons. They also appeared at local parades and celebrations, where they were enthusiastically welcomed by the crowds. However, attempts by the Empire to impose upon them more of a military obligation caused them to decline in popularity and eventually brought their dissolution.

The Luxembourg Crisis of 1867 brought a renewed interest in franc-tireur units; in response to perceived German threats, some units were formed in 1868. Dumas lists ten such units, totalling 30 officers and 598 men³ - hardly impressive for the defence of

1. Michael Howard, private conversation, on 23 February, 1973. At least one société de tir, as the hunting and shooting clubs were known, took part in the war. The Société de Tir de Troyes marched off en toto as the Francs-tireurs de l'Aube.

2. Noël Jean B.H.A. Dumas, Guerre sur les communications allemandes en 1870, (Paris, 1891), p.8.

3. Ibid., Appendice, pp.302-26.

the vast area of Eastern France against German invasion. Nor is it clear whether, in the chaotic month of Imperial France's military disasters, these units were actually mobilised to play any role whatsoever in the defence of French soil.

This proviso aside, the real impetus for the formation of franc-tireur units and the actual organisation of widespread partisan activities can be attributed to the Gambetta Regime. His proclamation of 14th October lifted the countryside from its torpor and chaotic inactivity by declaring all departments within a hundred kilometres of the German forces to be in a state of war. Local military committees were called upon to organise resistance by whatever means possible; this resistance was normally cast in the partisan mould. Under the aegis of Gambetta, the prefects were able to form 301 units in the various departments, totalling 1,584 officers and 33,500 men.¹ A further 77 units were formed as artillery auxiliaries, totalling 409 officers and 11,674 men. Beyond these units, a further 111 units were formed which were organised separately from the departments, of which 40 fought with Garibaldi's Army of the Vosges. These 111 units totalled 807 officers and 27,651 men, bringing the total for all the units listed by Dumas to 489 units served by 2,800 officers and 72,825 men.

It would be as impossible for a researcher to cover all the franc-tireur units as it proved impossible for Gambetta to control them. There is no official agreement on the number of units which were formed as francs-tireurs² nor is it clear precisely how many of these units fought as francs-tireurs rather than allowing

1. The figures are all from Dumas' appendices. See previous footnote.

2. Howard cites French army sources which total 300 units, 57,600 members. See Howard, op. cit., p.252.

themselves to be absorbed into conventional militia formations. For example, the *Francs-tireurs de la Sarthe* grew in strength from 338 to over 3,000 in two months, and fought as a regular column with the Army of the Loire.¹ The initial proclamation of 14th October proved insufficient to control the widely-scattered francs-tireurs, so

...on 4th November Gambetta placed them under the authority of the regular military commander within whose area they were operating, demanding at the same time that the commander of each unit should submit a regular report on the strength and achievement of his men. Any unit deemed not to have acquitted itself with honour in the face of the enemy was made liable to dissolution...²

That many of these units ought to be dissolved or at least grouped under acknowledged regional military authorities was an opinion held by most of the more able franc-tireur leaders as well. Bourras was given the task of dissolving ineffective units in the Vosges. And Bordone, Garibaldi's chief-of-staff, stated that

On ne saurait croire en effet tous les mécomptes que nous ont procurés ces bons préfets qui, après avoir organisé, équipé et armé à grands frais une compagnie plus ou moins bizarrement dénommée, croyaient avoir rendu un service très grand à la patrie en lâchant sur les Prussiens ces corps sans liaison aucune, mais surtout sans discipline.³

The amount of damage and general 'dissolution' accomplished by some soi-disant franc-tireur units was so great that it led one Frenchman to quip 'we would have preferred the Prussians; at least we would have been regularly pillaged'.⁴ Similarly glaring incidents led the war correspondent for the Daily News to

1. See Comte de Foudras, Une page d'histoire: Les francs-tireurs de la Sarthe, (Châlon-sur-Saône, 1872).

2. Howard, op. cit., p.253.

3. J.P.T. Bordone, Garibaldi et l'Armée des Vosges, (Paris, 1871), p.428.

4. G. Theyras, Garibaldi en France, (Autun, 1888), p.119.

conjecture that misdeeds attributed to the francs-tireurs might be 'due to the Prussians who, according to a letter addressed to the Moniteur by an eye-witness, an American gentleman, are in the habit of disguising themselves as francs-tireurs, and in that costume committing all manner of atrocities'.¹

The general picture of these four-hundred-odd units is destined to remain blurred, hopelessly out of focus. Some were absorbed into the militia; some indisciplined bands were the bane of the countryside they were organised to defend; some units remained 'on paper' but never actually saw combat; finally, some units conducted the most brilliant operations of the entire war, were noted for their extreme bravery, and were saluted by German and French authority alike for their isolated accomplishments in an otherwise futile war.

Once the proviso has been made that guerrilla units, like all other military forces, can be good, bad, or indifferent, it is perhaps advisable to focus on those units which functioned well. For they represent the concept of the armed people in its clearest possible context. Therefore, an effort will be made to discuss mainly the better known, effective units of francs-tireurs, rather than to discuss the incomprehensible overview.

D. Areas of Operation

A guerrilla strategy presumes that certain prerequisites are present, of which terrain suitable for guerrilla operations is one of the most important. It is one of Clausewitz's five conditions for people's war:

1. Daily News, War Correspondence of the Daily News, 1870-71, Vol.II, (London, 1971), p.302.

The conditions under which alone the people's war can become effective are the following:

1. That the War is carried on in the heart of the country.
2. That it cannot be decided by a single catastrophe.
3. That the theatre of war embraces a considerable extent of country.
4. That the national character is favourable to the measure.
5. That the country is of a broken and difficult nature, either from being mountainous, or by reason of wood and marshes, or from the particular mode of cultivation in use.¹

Boguslawski, a German Regimental Commander, apparently used a Clausewitzian analysis to determine that guerrilla strategy was not effective in France:

In general, France is not adapted to this sort of warfare. Extensive ranges of mountains and large forests are wanting, localities particularly favourable to a partisan war. But very broken countries, like La Vendée and Brittany, are also suitable. In the parts of France which were theatres of war, the districts most suited to the purpose are the Vosges, the Jura, a part of the Côte d'Or, the wooded country about Orléans, and, as above mentioned, Vendée and Brittany.

The French nation, as a whole too, does not furnish very serviceable materials for the formation of partisan corps, because good living and luxury have deprived the people to a great extent, of the power of bearing hardships and fatigue.

The French 'Francs-tireurs' of 1870-71, cannot, therefore, be compared with the Tyrolese sharpshooters of 1809, the Spanish guerrillas of 1809-14, or the Polish insurrectionists of 1863-64.

That the French nevertheless gained many successes in 'la petite guerre', and that the Germans were much annoyed by the Franc-tireur corps, is true.

They made many attacks by surprise upon our lines of communication, as at Vaucouleurs, Ham, Châtillon, the blowing up of the bridge near Toul; but, when one reflects that the principal field of action for partisans must always be in rear of the operating armies, one can only consider these successes as of a very limited nature. The reason of this was to be found, not only in the abovementioned circumstances, but in the strength of the garrison troops with which the Germans were always able to protect their communications with the rear. The francs-tireurs were never able to maintain themselves in the Vosges. They always came out strongest where they had fortified posts, as for instance Langres, to fall back upon. Their activity in front of our armies was still smaller. The promotion of popular risings against us was an accompaniment of the Franc-tireur system.²

1. Clausewitz, op. cit., p.343.

2. Lt.-Gen. A. von Boguslawski, Tactical Deductions from the War of 1870-1871, (London, 1872), pp.45-6.

Boguslawski is, on the whole, heavily critical of the franc-tireur movement. His analysis possibly reflects what Hale terms 'the maintenance of prestige'¹ factor, whereby after the war the Germans perpetuated the myth that they made no errors and that they had easily handled all challenges the French mounted against them. Nor is Boguslawski's account entirely accurate. The strong garrison at Langres, which the francs-tireurs had 'to fall back upon' in fact was characterised by its refusal to aid in any substantial way the aggressive franc-tireur units in its region; it offered neither arms, logistics nor operational support, and was instead known for its general inactivity against the German invaders. Nor is it true that the activity in front of the German armies was slight. Garibaldi and Bourras fought numerous engagements against the Germans in eastern France and were a constant source of alarm to the German lines of communication leading to invested Paris. Franc-tireur units continually harassed German forces west of the invested capital and they were invaluable assets as screening forces for the Army of the Loire in its offensive and defensive efforts around Orleans. The very strength of the garrison troops cited by Boguslawski pays tribute to the effectiveness of the francs-tireurs. In the first phase of the war Germany had not been required to garrison occupied areas of France; but during the second phase, the necessity of garrisoning cities and villages, as well as protecting the railway and telegraph lines, meant that increasing numbers of German troops were being kept out of the fight against the militia by a people which 'does not furnish very serviceable materials for the formation of partisan corps'.

1. Sir Lonsdale A. Hale, The 'People's War' in France, (Pall Mall, London, 1904), p.6.

Returning to Clausewitz, it is clear that all five of the conditions he named were present for the conducting of partisan operations by the francs-tireurs. The war was being fought in the heart of France, with besieged Paris the object of German invaders and French relievers (from the south, west, north, and southeast) alike. Nor could the war be decided by a single catastrophe; it took numerous military catastrophes, none of which were caused by or rebounded against the francs-tireurs, to convince the French nation to submit. The theatre of war was extensive. The massive German Army of 850,000 troops, though it physically occupied only one-third of France by the armistice, was often stretched so thin that one is tempted to argue that the Germans could never have occupied and pacified all of France no matter how long the war might have lasted.¹ Though Boguslawski does not concur, even most German strategists give high praise to the French national character for its determined resistance after the collapse of the Empire. Von der Goltz stated that 'there is no Gambetta, even greater than was he of 1870, who could have engaged Germany to pursue with such unity a resistance so desperate'.² And Hoenig based Volkskrieg am der Loire largely on the supposition that the French 'people's war' had been a heroic response to the German invasion. The final characteristic, terrain, was amply cited by Boguslawski. Though one might agree that such terrain was not extensive in 1870 France, the terrain

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1. The fact that both sides adopted a 'Paris' strategy meant that Moltke never had to consider the occupation of the other two-thirds of France. It is of speculative interest to ask how the war might have ended had the militia armies simply defended the provinces while the Germans were left to deal with a revolution-minded Paris populace.
 2. H. Genevcis, Les coups de main pendant la guerre, (Paris, 1896), p.3.

which did afford guerrilla operations was strategically placed, such that the francs-tireurs could at once serve as a barrier to further German advance and as a threat to German lines of communication. The principal areas of operation for the francs-tireurs were the Vosges, the forested area of the Loire, scattered forests of eastern France (Böene, for example), and the lower Seine region.¹

In short, the franc-tireur movement apparently fulfils all of Clausewitz's conditions, just as they were formulated after his analysis of Prussian partisans who fought against Napoleon. Boguslawski, and by extension the German General Staff, were guilty of ignoring their own past military history - a mistake which was to cause the German officer corps to misunderstand the nature of the new military organism which confronted them.

E. Types of Units

The guerrillas, inspired by French tradition and European experience alike, organised under Gambetta's decrees of 14th October and 4th November, and operating in extensive areas of France, achieved some notable successes in the second war. In order to understand these successes, it is necessary to analyse the various types of units which emerged and gained prominence during the second phase of the war.

It is possible to discern six basic types of franc-tireur units, aside from the old shooting societies, those units formed

1. Switzerland and Belgium, though neutral in deed, were clearly sympathetic to the French. Yet no francs-tireurs operated across the borders or attempted to obtain arms or supplies from these 'sanctuaries'. Thus, their only sanctuaries were 'among the people', in broken terrain improperly occupied by the invaders, or especially on the edges of the occupation zone.

in 1868, units which were disbanded for indiscipline, and units which were absorbed into the militia and fought in controversial fashion - all of which have been discounted for the purposes of this study. The six different types can be arranged on a scale showing the extent from low to high of their co-operation with or participation in conventional military operations.

1. Terrorist

The first type, represented by a unit known as the *Francs-tireurs de la Champagne*, operated about 100 kilometres east of Paris in the vicinity of Montmirail-Sézanne. The company was never more than about 300 strong, of which 200 knew the countryside well. Because their area of operations was in a rather sensitive location between the German lines of communication from the east and invested Paris on the west, they could never stand and fight as a unit. Rather, they remained divided into small groups which sometimes coalesced for operations but otherwise remained under the shield of sympathetic elements of the local populace. Because of the strength of the German forces in their area, they could never hope to combine with the militia for operations, nor could they expect support in terms of arms, ammunition, and money from the Government of National Defence. Their operations were therefore restricted to two forms: (1) raiding German supply lines and ambushing small patrols; (2) preventing the French populace from collaborating with the Germans. Of the two forms, they evinced a particular relish for the second: 'Ainsi, avant même que d'avoir combattu les Prussiens, nous avons obligé les Français à combattre'.¹ In the eyes of those segments of the

1. J. Germain and R. de Buxeuil, *Aventures des francs-tireurs de la Champagne, 1870-71*, (Soissons, 1909), p.34.

French population which were hostile to guerrilla warfare, the Francs-tireurs de Champagne simply created the conditions for German reprisals against villages in the area, whereas prior to their operations the people had been left in relative peace. Further, merchants who sold wine, sheep or supplies of any sort to the Germans were threatened; seven were summarily executed. Funds from confiscated goods went to buy arms, and some money was apparently given to the poor to preclude the danger of being labelled as bandits. By mid-November, they were also raiding the German lines of communication, and they had delivered 24 German prisoners to French authorities.

Conditions soon became worse for their operations, as German troops and a now hostile population manoeuvred against them, 'Abandonnés de toute protection officielle, dénués de tout appui officieux, traqués comme des bêtes fauves, non reconnus belligérants et par conséquent outragés et fusillés sans jugement, notre situation devenait critique'.¹ Because they could no longer get prisoners through the German lines, they were forced to execute them. In all they killed in ambush or executed 100 Germans.

After the war, one of the leaders, Lange, was arrested, tried, and by 1874 narrowly acquitted of charges of murder and robbery.² Even then, bitterness remained in the communities against the men who had fought as much against their fellow citizens as against the German invaders. This unit, located at the extreme lower end of the scale of co-operation with regular

1. *Ibid.*, p.47.

2. The case is not unique. Captain Sourd, who led the Eclaireurs de l'Aube, was sentenced to three years in prison 'pour s'être indûment approprié diverses sommes d'argent...'.¹

units, can be denoted as the 'terrorist' type of guerrilla unit. The terror tactics, though responsible for some successes against the Germans, failed seriously to hinder the German logistical effort toward Paris; they succeeded ultimately only in alienating a substantial part of the local populace.

2. Base Camp

A second type of unit, and one which also operated 'behind enemy lines', is represented by l'Avant-Garde de la Délivrance. Harkening back to the tradition of the Lorraine partisans of 1815, a 'patriote vosgien', M. Victor Martin and four other local representatives decided to form a franc-tireur unit. After a trip to Tours, where Gambetta's sanction was obtained, the committee started to recruit followers; their supreme effort was to be directed against the German rail communications between Paris and Strasbourg, which the capitulation of Toul on 23 September had left clear for German exploitation.

Perhaps as an accident of history, the 'patriotes vosgiens' were perfectly placed to exploit the conditions for guerrilla warfare:

Placée sur l'extrême limite des trois départements de la Haute-Marne, de la Haute-Saône et des Vosges occupés par l'ennemi, elle était par cela même assez éloignée des garnisons prussiennes d'alentour (40 kilomètres) pour que la moindre vigilance écartât toute surprise; les montagnes abruptes et les massifs forestiers qui l'entourent étaient un obstacle; pour l'Avant-Garde un rempart, un nid d'embuscades, un refuge en cas de désastre. Deux routes que l'ennemi ne pouvaient fermer sans danger et qui mettent Lamarche en communication avec la place de Langres, distante de 60 kilomètres, assuraient la retraite sur cette forteresse, de plus, le comité d'établissait au centre d'une contrée fertile, non encore ravagée, d'où il pouvait tirer d'immense ressources en vivres de tout espèce; ajoutons qu'il était placé à l'écart des routes fréquentées par les Prussiens et comptait, à force de prudence, leur dérober pour quelques temps la connaissance

de ses préparatifs militaires.¹

Gambetta had sent along Captain Bernard to help Martin's committee of five local leaders organise partisan resistance. As they had for weapons only 10 rifles and 300 cartridges, they appealed to the French Commander Arbelot at Langres for assistance; he refused them all military aid. Nonetheless, recruitment was brisk, and soon two companies of 30 men each were operating under Bernard and Lieutenant Coumés, who had escaped from Metz. The recruits were mainly old soldiers and young men in search of adventure. On 2nd December, Coumés and a patrol of seven men surprised the sixteen-man Prussian garrison at Contrexéville and took them prisoner; and on 3rd December, the francs-tireurs were raiding convoys and cattle herds destined for the Germans - the proceeds of which went to buy arms and ammunition. Though this activity upset the inactive Arbelot, the French population was moved toward greater patriotism at the sight of a French force capable of engaging the enemy. Recruitment quickened in pace, and the force was also joined by 20 forest guides - an invaluable asset as they knew the forests and countryside well throughout the entire area of operations.

By 6th December, Bernard felt strong enough to attempt a major action. In a daring night attack, his force of 60 francs-tireurs surprised the 450-man Prussian garrison at Dombrot-le-Sec. At a loss of three men killed and five wounded, he inflicted an estimated casualty total of 40 killed and 40 wounded on the Germans. This raid represented such a formidable challenge to German supremacy in the area that the 'Vosgiens' guessed it would provoke a severe reaction, which might make their base at

1. G. Adamistre, Le Pont de Fontenoy, (Paris, 1890), p.5.

Lamarche untenable. The problem was solved by again recalling the traditions of their ancestors. For two hundred years a 'mont sacré' in the Forêt de Bœene had served as a base for the defenders of Lorraine; it had been first occupied in the wars of the seventeenth century. There also was found the famous 'chêne des partisans' - 'cet arbre légendaire, dont cinq hommes réunis ne peuvent embrasser le tronc'¹ - symbolic centre for the reunion of Lorraine partisans. Construction of an elaborate base camp on the slope was aided by the fact that a forester's lodge now stood on this sacred mountain in the depths of the forest; it was a position of such natural strength that the Germans, once they learned of its existence,² launched a force of 12,000 men in order to flood the Langres-Bœene region with enough troops to end partisan activity.

The base camp method of partisan warfare was conceived just in the nick of time, for 1,300 elite German troops were heading for Lamarche to put an end to partisan warfare in the district. The francs-tireurs asked for help from Arbelot, but he again refused. A few mobiles from Haute-Savoie and local gardes nationaux joined the defensive effort, raising the total to 250 men. On 11th December, these 250 men held the 1,300 Prussians in check for several hours before being forced to retire. Their losses were five killed and ten wounded, while those of the Germans were estimated at 75 killed and 75 wounded. Had the partisans not had a new base already under preparation, they would probably have been overrun and dispersed. Instead, a few kilometres from Lamarche they were safe inside the Forêt de Bœene -

1. Baron Alfred Ernouf, Histoire des Chemins de Fer français pendant la Guerre Franco-Prussienne, (Paris, 1874), p.70.

2. Adamistre, op. cit., pp.57-8.

prepared to again raid Prussian garrisons and supplies.

But Martin decided that a new course was necessary. The support of the people had declined after l'Avant-Garde had proved insufficient to defend Lamarche; further military action in the area might succeed only in bringing the wrath of the German Army to bear upon the local inhabitants. Further, though their first operations had been successful, they had posed no threat to the German rail communications which was their primary strategic objective. Martin appealed again to Arbelot who, moved by the francs-tireurs' defence of Lamarche, agreed to let the partisans recruit from his painfully inactive garrison. Captain Adamistre and 30 volunteers agreed to serve, but they had virtually to escape from Langres after Arbelot reneged on his word to Martin. Adamistre, a 'sous-officier' in Africa and Italy, possessed an immense experience in military engineering and demolition, which was to prove an invaluable asset for the new operations to be directed against the German-controlled railways.

The little base camp in Bœene began to hum with activity. A cavalry unit was formed for reconnaissance and a military intelligence capability was developed in the surrounding villages to provide information on German movements and activities. A whole range of military services was inaugurated, including a smithy, armoury, commissary, ambulance corps, and a gendarmerie to keep order in the villages. Even the women in the villages had their function: to make clothes and to knit. The francs-tireurs now numbered 130 men. Though recruitment was still slack, their situation vis-à-vis the 'regulars' was considerably eased by the replacement of Arbelot at Langres. The new commander, Meyère, was expressly told to co-operate with the francs-tireurs; he promptly sent to Bœene a battalion of Gardes. The Avant-Garde was also

joined by the remnants of two franc-tireur companies (totalling 73 men) who had retreated after the Prussian captured Nogent-le-Roi on 6th December. The inflictions the Germans had imposed upon the village, where the wounded were shot, 84 houses burned, and 120 families left homeless, were a further disincentive to Martin against launching operations in his immediate area. Thus, the next month was spent in quiet preparation for the expedition against the rail bridge at Fontenoy, and in countering the German incursions into their area.

The concept of the operation against Fontenoy was ingenious. There were two targets in the area west of Toul, either of which, if destroyed, would bring rail traffic to a complete halt: the bridge at Fontenoy and the tunnel at Doubs. The plan adopted by l'Avant-Garde de la Délivrance was to utilise the 800-strong battalion of the Garde in a decoy attack on heavily-defended Doubs, while the elite of the francs-tireurs, some 300 men, were to pull off the coup de main against the garrison at Fontenoy and then to blow up the bridge. The targets lay at a distance of more than 60 miles from the base camp in Bèene, and several rivers would have to be crossed; the operation, in short, was a kind of long-range penetration raid into enemy-occupied territory. Meanwhile, those left behind at the camp were to make demonstrations in the area to convince the Germans that the expedition in fact had not been launched.

When the expedition reached its last shelter near to Fontenoy, the Avant-Garde learned that the Germans had been alerted by traitors. The attack on Doubs was abandoned as too dangerous, so the cumbersome Garde battalion was sent back. But for some reason, the Prussians continued to believe that Doubs was the real target. When on the morning of 22nd January the 300 francs-tireurs struck,

they found only a skeleton garrison at Fontenoy which they quickly overcame. The bridge was destroyed by miners from the Bœene area under the watchful eye of Adamistre, and the francs-tireurs hurriedly retreated as German cavalry came racing in from the direction of Doubs. The town of Fontenoy was burned to the ground by the enraged Germans.

The retreat back across German-held territory was harrowing. The Germans launched two forces consisting of 6,000 and 12,000 men respectively, to the Lamarche-Bœene area. Meyère refused to send help of any sort, but Garibaldi sent Lobbia and 1,500 men to the area to prevent the Germans from overrunning the base camp in Bœene Forest. But before the battle for Bœene could take place, the francs-tireurs were informed of the armistice on 7th February, and they were ordered by the French Government to Langres or to Châlon-sur-Saône. Now surprisingly, they chose Châlon, and on 14th February they were given an 'escorte d'honneur' by Manteuffel through the German lines.

L'Avant-Garde de la Délivrance, organised from scratch with virtually no assistance from the French military authorities, relying upon clever use of their native terrain, and building upon the partisan tradition of Lorraine, had managed to achieve one of the most spectacular coups de main of the war. Their base camp was never penetrated, yet it served as the defensive hub of the surrounding countryside as well as providing a spring-board from which offensive operations could be launched.

Unlike the 'terrorist' style, their acts were officially sanctioned; further, they constantly had the welfare of the surrounding populace at heart. Though recruitment did decline, they never alienated the people as had Lange's Francs-tireurs de Champagne. Reprisals were kept to a minimum by the timely shift

of their base from Lamarche to the Forêt de Bœene. And a locally-instituted gendarmerie proved to be a more effective tactic to reduce collaboration than Lange's summary executions. Though they never operated in conjunction with the militia, there was an implied unity of strategic purpose (Fontenoy) which Germain never considered.

The 'base camp' method provides an example of partisan warfare in its purest form, similar to the operations of the Maquis in World War II. More acceptable as a form of national defence than the 'terrorist' mode, it represents a remarkable grasp of partisan principles which have since been popularised by the resistance movements and revolutionary organisations of the post-1939 period. Characterised by independence of action within a united strategic framework, the base camp model could easily have been adapted for use in the numerous departments of invaded France.

3. The Guerrilla Army

The third type of franc-tireur unit, represented by Garibaldi and his Army of the Vosges, can be designated the 'guerrilla army'. It is the next step in a progression towards conventional operations, for the guerrilla army is too large to hide, too important to disperse, and too involved in an overall scheme of operations to disengage. It is a logical advancement over the base camp method, for the guerrillas are now strong enough to challenge the enemy for supremacy in their area of operations. Though less frustrating than the guerrillas who attack and melt away, it is inherently more dangerous; for if victorious, it can drive the enemy from the region altogether, and even in defence it can deprive the enemy of a valuable area. Nor do the large-scale

operations and strategic threats preclude the continuance of raids and patrols to disrupt enemy communications and manoeuvres.

If the pattern of guerrilla warfare adopted by the 'patriotes vosgiens' seems advanced in concept, that urged by Garibaldi upon his arrival in France in October, 1870, is even more so:

Aux batailles il préféra les coups de main et aux opérations de jour les surprises de nuit. Pressant les embuscades, descendant les cavaliers, coupant les convois, il y trouvait ce double avantage d'aguerrir les recrues et de démoraliser le bloc d'ennemis qu'il rêvait de dissoudre.¹

What Garibaldi envisaged was a process of metamorphosis in which bands of a hundred men would operate as guerrilla raiders, gain the confidence of the population and force the Germans to regroup in order to defend towns and lines of communication. Once the Germans were so restricted as to movement, their supply lines would become increasingly vulnerable. The guerrilla bands would then coalesce into larger units capable of engaging and defeating the isolated German units. The guerrilla army would continue to gain experience and to coalesce into larger units, and it would eventually force the Germans to stretch their resources thin, thus providing opportune targets for Garibaldi's coups de main.

Such at least was the theory, though Garibaldi never succeeded in implementing his own plan of action. The reasons why are furnished both by his detractors and supporters, and they conflict greatly; for Garibaldi, the foremost revolutionary of his age, was also the most controversial figure to emerge from the Franco-Prussian War.

The first of the criticisms offered by Garibaldi's detractors was that, at the age of 63, he was well past his military prime.

1. P.A. Dermoy, L'Armée des Vosges: 1870-71, Vol.I, (Paris, 1887), pp.15-16.

Mais, en 1870, il a soixante-trois ans. Sa santé, usée par sa vie tourmentée, est déplorable. Perclus de rhumatismes, il ne peut marcher qu'à l'aide de béquilles; sa vaillante épée n'est plus qu'un bâton, il monte difficilement à cheval et le plus souvent, il en est réduit à suivre en voiture ses troupes sur le champ de bataille. Ses facultés intellectuelles ne sont point évidemment sans se ressentir de ce déplorable état physique.¹

A second criticism was that his chief of staff, Bordone, had a criminal record,² and was irascible and impossible to work with; even Garibaldi's sons disliked him. Garibaldi's refusal to replace Bordone with Frapolli (Gambetta's choice) can hardly have helped to reduce the friction between Gambetta and Garibaldi. Third, Garibaldi's political opinions were embarrassing to France. His proclamations were made in the name of the Universal Republic, whereas official France and most of the population viewed the conflict as a campaign to liberate French soil rather than to build a world-wide socialist Republic. Further, Garibaldi's bitter anti-clericalism constantly exacerbated the conservative French Catholics. Delpech, one of Garibaldi's battalion commanders, seemed 'beaucoup plus empressé de guerroyer contre les prêtres et les monarchistes de toute nuance que contre les Prussiens'.³ Fourth, and probably uppermost in the mind of official France, there was the danger that Garibaldi would demand the return of his native region, Nice-Savoie,⁴ to Italy as spoils for his part

1. J.L.V. Vichier-Guerre, Operations de partisans: Les Compagnies Franches de Savoie à la 1^{re} Armée de l'Est et à l'Armée des Vosges, Octobre 1870 - Mars 1871, (Paris, 1912), p.46.

2. His criminal record was the following: 'Condamné le 13 mars 1857 par le tribunal de Chartres à dix francs d'amende pour coups et blessures, le 27 juillet 1858, par le même tribunal à cinquante francs d'amende pour détournement d'objets saisis, le 24 juillet 1860 par la cour de Paris à deux mois de prison et cinquante francs d'amende pour escroquerie...' (Theyras, op. cit., p.25).

3. Ernouf, op. cit., p.329.

4. Nice-Savoie had been acquired by France from Sardinia in 1860.

in a successful war. Finally, Garibaldi himself was thought to be difficult to work with; something of a prima donna, he desired his own command and would not work with other French commanders. Ill health, an undesirable chief-of-staff, embarrassing political and religious convictions, the danger of Nice becoming a spoil of war, and a prima donna disposition all combined to shackle Garibaldi's attempts at guerrilla warfare in the Vosges.

Garibaldi's proponents answer these criticisms while providing their own set of reasons for failure. Though he was 63 years old and suffered from ill health, Garibaldi's charisma as a revolutionary symbol was sufficient to inspire devotion in his followers, who ranged from foreign adventurers to 'a collection of revolutionaries of both sexes, survivors of 1848 and precursors of the nihilists and anarchists of the '80s and '90s'.¹ The Army of the Vosges was probably the best-led of all French armies from both phases of the war - admittedly not in itself a high compliment. Freycinet wrote to Gambetta near the end of the war that 'Garibaldi is decidedly our best general'.² Second, though Bordone was difficult to work with, it was he who had helped Garibaldi come to France in the first place. Where Frapolli was old, and was a 'free mason' colleague of Gambetta, Bordone was 'hardy, active, still young. He had a fist of iron.'³ Garibaldi trusted him completely. Third, Garibaldi's political ideas were less of a hindrance than the government presumed. France was now a Republic; whatever antipathy Garibaldi had shown to the Empire was now a bygone. The grand notion of a Universal Republic scarcely

1. Howard, op. cit., p.254.

2. P.A. Dormoy, Guerre de 1870-71. Les Trois Batailles de Dijon, (Paris, 1894), p.393.

3. Ibid., p.111.

precluded allegiance to the French Republic of Gambetta. Fourth, the religious problems were exacerbated as much by the conservatives as by Garibaldi's men. Statements such as 'elle (l'Anarchie despotique) infligea encore à la patrie française l'affront suprême du vieux Garibaldi'¹ and 'il (Garibaldi) venait en France coopérer à notre défaite'² appear as stabs in the back to the man whose chest was bared to German bullets in the defence of French soil.³ Fifth, there is no evidence that Garibaldi ever indicated to the Government of National Defence that he would ask for the return of Nice and Savoy to Italy. One may well ask whether France was more content to lose Alsace-Lorraine to the Germans than to risk even the remote possibility of the loss of Nice-Savoy to Italy. Sixth, that Garibaldi asked for a separate command was possibly due less to his prima donna character than to the special nature of the warfare he envisaged. Garibaldi as a militia leader under the command of a conventionally-minded French general would have been of little help; Garibaldi as the leader of a guerrilla army poised to strike against German lines of communication represented a far more formidable challenge, and one more conducive to his talents.

That Garibaldi was unable to wage guerrilla warfare exactly as he planned when he first arrived in France is, in the eyes of his proponents, less attributable to the shortcomings of his plan and his men than to the failures and shortcomings of those French who ought to have co-operated with him. To begin with, he was

1. Theyras, op. cit., p.21.

2. Ibid., p.24.

3. The fact that Papal Zouaves, decorated with ribbons commemorating their victory over Garibaldi at Mentana, fought well with Ricciotti's 4^e Brigade seems to confirm the fact that 'old hatchets' could have been buried for the common cause of national defence.

seriously impeded by conservative Catholics:

L'attitude des conservateurs en septembre 1870 fut sensiblement plus digne qu'en septembre 1792. Aucun d'eux ni passa cyniquement aux Prussiens comme avait fait les Emigrés. Cela seul dénotait un progrès du patriotisme.

De groupes entiers de conservateurs comme les zouaves de Charette ou ceux de Cathelineau combattirent avec nous et même combattirent en braves. Mais, pour une minorité de patriotes sachant vaincre leurs préjugés, quelle majorité d'adversaires mal disposés, blamant tout, se battant à regret!¹

More importantly, official France constantly manoeuvred against him. Gambetta's statements are here most edifying:

'(Jamais) je ne donnerai une armée au général Garibaldi. Jamais je ne mettrai un général français sous ses ordres'.² Gambetta's fear of Garibaldi, an odd parallel for his fear of Kératry, meant that the Army of the Vosges would never be given enough support or equipment to become an effective fighting force. Intrigues with Frapolli, the disunity of command in the East (where Garibaldi, Cremer, Bourras and later Bourbaki all operated separately), the conventional militia-style missions imposed on Garibaldi by the Government of National Defence - all these factors, coupled with the lack of popular support among conservative Catholics, meant that Garibaldi's army was too encumbered to operate in the guerrilla style which he wanted to adopt.

The idea that Garibaldi was hindered gains credence when viewed through the more neutral eyes of the war correspondent of the Daily News:

When I left Autun, there was a perfect understanding between General Cremer and Garibaldi. How was it that General Garibaldi was not called upon to assist General Cremer? Why is it that M. Gambetta - this advocate who has taken upon himself the responsibility of directing the military operations - leaves Garibaldi with only

1. Dormoy, op. cit., p.4.

2. Bordone, op. cit., p.244.

three batteries of 8-pounders, one of which is a small mountain battery drawn by mules? Why is it that our soldiers are without overcoats and shoes and our paymaster without money? Probably because M. Gambetta, who passed as a just and honest man during the Empire, intends continuing the system he adopted with regard to Garibaldi when the Government first accepted his service - namely, that of tying him hand and foot and telling him to walk, for fear that people should say afterwards, 'Garibaldi saved France.'¹

The chances of building an effective fighting force from such slender resources were themselves slender. Dormoy, who fought with Garibaldi, sums up the problem thus:

Du 8 au 21 novembre, elle atteignit peu à peu l'effectif de seize mille hommes. Lambeau par lambeau, pendant cette deuxième organisation elle aggloméra huit à neuf mille mobiles, deux mille cinq cent francs-tireurs, seize cent chemises rouges, mais pas un bataillon de troupes régulières. Des charrettes à échelles remplaçaient les fourgons d'ambulances. Pour génie des ouvriers mineurs. Pour cavalerie, quarante-sept chasseurs à cheval. Pour artillerie douze canons de montagne qui portent à deux mille mètres, et dont plusieurs sont provisoirement attelés avec des ficelles. Pour armes, seize fusils différents. Pour vêtements, des vareuses d'été et pas de capots. Telle est l'imposante armée qui doit chasser Werder de Dijon, reconquérir les Vosges, couper les communications de l'ennemi avec l'Allemagne...²

The task of sifting through the ambiguities and controversies of Garibaldi's efforts during the Franco-Prussian War is beyond the scope of this study. Truth may not always lie in the centre, nor can we presume unlimited virtue on the part of Garibaldi's unpatriotic and jealous detractors, nor on the part of his radical proponents, who perhaps romanticise the achievements of the movement while attempting to minimise its problems. Nonetheless, an examination of the principle operations of the Army of the Vosges can at least provide an opinion concerning the effectiveness of the guerrilla army.

Ironically, Gambetta and Garibaldi arrived in Tours almost

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1. Daily News, op. cit., Vol.II, p.83.
 2. Dormoy, op. cit., pp.112-13.

at the same time on October 9th.¹ As Dormoy notes, 'il semblait impossible de trouver deux hommes que leur foi républicaine et leur vie passée eussent mieux préparé à s'entendre. Le même espoir nous vint à tous. L'un sera organisateur de la victoire. L'autre son épée'.² But Gambetta offered Garibaldi the command only of some 300 Italian volunteers at Chambéry. Garibaldi, who had been enticed to France by an offer from the 'comité de salut publique de Lyon' for a command over all the corps francs³ in the region, flatly refused this insult and prepared to return to Italy. The next day Gambetta backed down; Garibaldi was given command of a brigade of 'gardes mobiles' and all of the corps francs in the Vosges, from Strasbourg to Paris.

By 13th October Garibaldi had established a headquarters at Dôle, and the task of organising the Army of the Vosges was under way. After a month of effort, Garibaldi had forged a fighting force of 8,000 men. During this period, the conventional forces operating in the area under Cambriels and Lavalley contrived through incompetence to lose Dijon by leaving it virtually undefended. The population, aided by several franc-tireur units, put up a spirited defence for which German reprisals were harshly meted out. Garibaldi's first knowledge of the abandonment of Dijon by the conventional forces and of its defence by the people and the francs-tireurs was the sound of cannon on the morning of 30th October. He immediately sent his only trained troops to its

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1. Though Gambetta's famous balloon ride was on 7th October, he landed at Amiens, not Tours!
 2. Dormoy, op. cit., p.83.
 3. 'Corps francs' is another term for 'francs-tireurs' used by the Government of National Defence. In this study, the two terms are synonymous and are used interchangeably with the kindred terms 'guerrilla' and 'partisan'.

relief, but they arrived in time only to shield the battered remnants of Dijon's retreating defenders.

The conventional forces underwent a change of commanders and marched off to join the Army of the Loire, leaving Garibaldi's forces in the words of Freycinet, 'seuls gardiens des intérêts de la France dans l'Est'.¹ The role which Garibaldi could play was now constrained by the burden of defence imposed upon him by the retirement of the regular forces. He was called upon (1) to protect the right flank of the Army of the Loire; (2) to serve as a protective barrier against German invasions into the immensely important war-industrial area of Le Creusot, the city of Lyon and the South of France; and (3) to operate as far east as the Vosges against German communications. All of this was to be accomplished while training the new recruits and militia units which were swelling his force to 16,000 men. It was a role for which his past experience had not prepared him; for rather than operating in guerrilla style as his original proclamation clearly intended, he was now forced to operate in a rather more conventional pattern. His poor relations with the Gambetta Regime, already worsened by Frapolli intrigues against Bordone, were aggravated by the disunity of command in the Vosges region itself. Bourras, leader of some 2,500 Francs-tireurs des Vosges, patently refused to be incorporated under Garibaldi or to co-operate with him. Bourras had fought against Garibaldi in France's 1867 march on Rome; their personal enmity precluded all co-operation. And General Crémier, young, dynamic, on good terms personally with Garibaldi, represented a third command in the area. Crémier's troops fought well, but Gambetta's refusal to put a French general

1. Bordone, op. cit., p.118.

under Garibaldi's command meant that these forces as well would never act in concert with Garibaldi, but would rather be destined to fight valliant but ineffective, separate campaigns.

Nonetheless, Garibaldi responded well to the new challenge. From 11th November to 8th January, his men were to fight twenty engagements, as well as the major attack on Dijon, the capture of which was his overall strategic focus. His tactics were to distract the attention of the Germans away from Dijon by daring raids and attacks on other German garrisons. 'It was the tactic which had succeeded at Palermo at the time of the Expedition of the One Thousand'.¹ It very nearly worked again. Early in the morning of 19th November, Ricciotti, Garibaldi's son, with a force of 560 francs-tireurs, fell upon the German garrison of 800 at the vital communications centre at Châtillon. At a loss of only 26 killed and wounded, this daring raid inflicted 86 casualties on the Germans, yielded 167 prisoners, and left Ricciotti in command of the town. Moltke 'did our 600 volunteers the honour of believing them to be 6,000'.² Six thousand German troops were dispatched to retake the town. Upon their arrival, they found not a single franc-tireur and so avenged themselves on the populace by burning 5 houses, by killing or wounding 14 inhabitants, and by taking a number of hostages.

The German forces had been partly divided as planned, and on the evening of 20th November, Garibaldi's Army of the Vosges marched towards Dijon, its front and flanks screened by francs-tireurs to compensate for their lack of cavalry. Raids at Chamboeuf and Auxon were used to further befuddle the Germans.

1. Dormoy, op. cit., p.113.

2. Ibid., p.136.

On the 26th November, Garibaldi's men carried several small villages on the outskirts of Dijon - Pâques, Prénos, Darois - pushing the Bavarians back in disorder but unfortunately giving alarm to the German garrison in Dijon proper. It was 'now or never' for Garibaldi's attack, even though surprise had been sacrificed. Garibaldi launched a night attack by bayonet spear-headed by 1,500 elite francs-tireurs and chemises rouges.¹

Razetto, captain of the Genoises chemises rouges, led the attack:

Décoiffé d'un coup de sabre, la chemise déchirée par les balles, les doigts gras du sang qui descendait de sa baïonnette, la figure barbouillée de rouge et de noir, horrible et magnifique, Razetto, illuminé de temps à autre par une détonation, marchait en tête.²

The attack nearly carried the city when, facing mitrailleuse fire for the first time and panicked by fire from their rear which was in reality in their support, the poorly-trained mobiles broke and fled, leaving the attack effort too weak to hold. Werder, who was very nearly killed in the engagement, had similarly retreated with the bulk of his forces. This double panic redounded to the advantage of the Germans who, owing to superior discipline, rallied first in the morning of the 27th to regain control of Dijon. Garibaldi's mobiles, in headlong flight (some did not stop running until they reached Lyon, Marseille, or Toulouse) made further efforts against Dijon impossible. Had it not been for Ricciotti's fighting retreat with 335 francs-tireurs against Werder's cavalry, Garibaldi's forces might have been overrun. Fortunately, Werder was ordered temporarily to halt the pursuit,

1. The 'chemises rouges', or 'Red Shirts', was the name that Garibaldi always gave to the elite of his Italian volunteers in his various guerrilla campaigns. The first 'Red Shirts' were organised to help defend Montevideo, and the famous One Thousand were Red Shirts during the Italian campaigns as well.

2. Dormoy, op. cit., p.176.

for Moltke feared that another 'Châtillon' was in the making; this timely inactivity allowed Garibaldi to regroup his forces at Autun.

Werder drove against Autun on 30th November. The insubordination of a Lieutenant Chenet, who led his Guérillas de l'Orient out of the battle despite the fact that his men occupied the village which was the key to Autun's defence, very nearly led to its fall and to what would have been the utter destruction of the Armée des Vosges. Jesse White Mario,¹ who served as a nurse with the rank of captain in Garibaldi's army, summed up the situation thus: 'One read in the terrible severity of his face that at Autun the Army of the Vosges would repulse the Prussians or die'.² And so it was that the Army of the Vosges, 'repulsed at Dijon, pursued for three days, betrayed and surprised that morning, took the offensive along the entire line'.³ On 1st December it was Garibaldi who commanded the city and Werder who was repulsed; the Army of the Vosges had been saved.

The time had now come for Garibaldi to reorganise his forces. Never again would he risk the poorly-trained mobiles in an engagement (as at Dijon); never again would he be able (after Autun) to trust units of dubious leadership or conviction. Hereafter, he was to rely primarily on his own francs-tireurs and chemises rouges. While Garibaldi was regrouping his forces, the activities of Crémer and the arrival of Bourbaki with the 95,000-strong Army of the East upset the German defensive scheme.

1. Jesse White (English by birth, wife of an Italian Deputy) had been refused a place as a medical student at the University of London. She proved her talent as a nurse to Garibaldi's forces throughout his campaigns, thus obviating the need for professional qualifications.

2. Dormoy, op. cit., p.225.

3. Ibid., p.234.

Outnumbered, they were forced to regroup, and they evacuated Dijon during the process of concentrating to defeat Bourbaki. Garibaldi was given the mission to defend Dijon, which he occupied on 8th January after a month of relative inactivity. In the Battle of the Lisaine, 15-17 January, Bourbaki was forced to retreat and the Army of the East ceased to be an effective force. The Germans turned part of their force against Dijon. In a three-day battle, 21-23 January, Garibaldi successfully defended the city, and repulsed the Germans with a counter-attack by his 6,000 elite troops while the mobiles defended the town from behind its walls. So fierce was this counter-attack that the elite force captured a German battle standard - the only standard to fall in the second phase of the war to a French unit.¹ During the battle the French had lost 1,680 men, the Germans 1,150. The collapse of Bourbaki's army, 80,000 of whom now marched to safety and internment in Switzerland, left Garibaldi isolated. The armistice, signed on 26th January, specifically left out the 'east'. Garibaldi retreated to Autun where, on 9th February, he still operated in defence of the South of France until the armistice was finally extended to the eastern region.

The guerrilla army had achieved some notable successes. Châtillon was one of the most brilliant coups de main of the war. The attack on Dijon was a daring ploy which very nearly succeeded. The defence and counter-attack at Autun and later at Dijon, sent some of Germany's finest troops reeling back in retreat. Strategically, the guerrilla army had been the primary barrier to German encroachment upon the South of France; it had never been dislodged, not even after all the other armies of France lay

1. Only one had fallen in the first phase as well: to the French counter-attack force at Rezonville.

shattered, captured or interned. 'Of the five armies of the Republic, it was the only one which never left an artillery piece in the hands of the enemy, just as it was the only one which tore from his hands a battle standard'.¹

Yet the guerrilla army had also failed. The disunity of command, the hostility of the population, and the paucity of military resources it had received had all combined to shackle what might have been the most effective force of the war. Garibaldi, unable to implement his guerrilla war and incapable of operating successfully in a conventional style, saw his dreams of victory for the Universal Republic fade beneath the power of a united Germany and the weakness of a divided France.

Garibaldi's strategic conception - to wage guerrilla warfare in order to give his troops experience, to coalesce with larger units in order to defeat the Germans in the Dijon area, and finally to drive against the German lines of communication in an effort to relieve at one stroke Paris and Belfort - was the one which was ultimately adopted by Gambetta and entrusted to Bourbaki and his Army of the East. While Gambetta 's'obstina à maintenir notre plus mauvais général à la tête de notre meilleure armée',² the man who Freycinet termed 'décidément notre meilleur général',³ was left out of the campaign he had perhaps inspired. While Bourbaki and his 95,000 men frittered away France's last desperate chance to relieve invested Paris by cutting the German lines of communication, Garibaldi steadfastly defended Dijon with 26,000 men meagrely supplied.

1. Dormoy, op. cit., p.395.

2. Ibid., p.256.

3. Ibid., p.393.

It is thus difficult to attribute the failures of the guerrilla army to its charismatic leader or to the style of campaign he desired to fight. Rather it is to the internal divisions of France, to the lack of revolutionary fervour of her people, and to the jealousy of her dictatorial leader to which one must turn for the answer. The man who risked his own life and those of his sons and friends for the cause of French Republican victory, was shouted down when he attempted to address the new assembly. As the *Enquête Parlementaire* notes, 'Ce n'est pas en effet, Garibaldi comme général que visaient toutes ces questions; c'était l'homme politique...'¹

Garibaldi as a military commander considered the Army of the Vosges to be the greatest achievement of his guerrilla career.² It was l'homme politique who had failed. As a final insult the Nice authorities were given the order to arrest Garibaldi and his sons if they ever again set foot on the French soil they had risked their lives to defend.

4. Partisan Screen

A fourth type of franc-tireur unit is represented by the Corps-francs des Vosges of Colonel Bourras. Though Bourras' franc-tireur units remained independent throughout the war (despite efforts by both Crémer and Garibaldi to incorporate them into their own forces), the operations he undertook differed significantly from the other three types discussed above. Unlike the *Avant-Garde de la Délivrance*, his unit was able to co-operate with conventional troops on joint missions (Crémer, Bourbaki).

1. Bordone, op. cit., p.422.

2. See Christopher Hibbert, Garibaldi and his Enemies, (London, Longmans, 1965), p.361.

Unlike Garibaldi, his units never coalesced into any force resembling a guerrilla army. Rather, his style of operations represented a curious blend between the conventional and the guerrilla.

A regular officer, Bourras had been given the task to coordinate the activities of the francs-tireurs in the Vosges, to put them under direct military command, to disarm those which refused to submit to regularised authority, and to form young Alsaciens and Lorrains into new companies.¹ That his mission was to conflict so directly with Garibaldi's, whose mutual enmity he already shared from France's Italian adventure against Garibaldi in 1867, can only be viewed as a grave oversight on the part of the Government of National Defence. The disunity of command which was to hinder the activities of both units was not only allowed to continue, it was officially sanctioned.

Bourras built his force into a well-disciplined partisan movement numbering 2,500 men. The forest of Citeaux, which extended roughly over the triangle formed by Dijon, Seurre and Beaune, was his primary area of operations. The units which attempted to defend Dijon on 30th October were his, and prior to that battle, his men had already fought an engagement at Brouvelieus. There 600 of his men had fought against 3-4,000 Prussians, losing 45 casualties to estimated enemy losses of 300.

Bourras was joined by a young Pole named Wolowski, who had been an officer in the Polish partisan movement which had fought against the Russians, 1863-64. Besides providing experience in partisan activities, Wolowski further organised an effective cavalry unit which could screen the movements of Bourras' force.

1. Ardouin-Dumazet, Le Colonel Bourras: Rapport du colonel sur les opérations du corps franc des Vosges, (Paris, 1892), p.12.

After spending the period throughout October-November in successful partisan activities, Bourras' men underwent a transition towards conventional operations by fighting alongside Cr mer in his December engagements. By January, partisan activity was at a standstill, as Bourras and all his units served as scouts and screens for Bourbaki's Army of the East. After the disastrous Lisaine Battle, Bourras' units served as a rearguard to keep the Germans at bay. They refused to follow the 80,000 militia into Switzerland after the collapse of the Army of the East, and instead drifted south to avoid capture.

The operations of Bourras' Corps-francs des Vosges are clearly divided into two phases: the partisan and the screen-rearguard. They thus represent another step along the scale from terrorism to conventional military operations.

5. Corps d' lite

A fifth type of unit, represented by Cathelineau's Legitimists from the Vend e and Lipowski's Francs-tireurs de Paris, can be termed the corps d' lite. Neither Cathelineau, nor Lipowski, envisaged partisan warfare as an end in itself, but both utilised partisan tactics while operating in full co-operation with the conventional forces of the Army of the Loire and the Army of the West.

Lipowski's unit was one of the most outstanding of the war. When 12,000 Germans were reported to be heading for the French village of Ch teaudun, Lipowski and 700 Francs-tireurs de Paris were sent there by the Army of the Loire to help organise the resistance. With Ch teaudun's 1,100 gardes nationaux, and another 1,000 from the surrounding villages, Lipowski would have almost 3,000 men with which to conduct his defence. To disrupt the

German advance, he sent various units on raids in the surrounding countryside. The fortuitous arrival of 150 francs-tireurs de Nantes and 50 francs-tireurs de Cannes further strengthened his forces.

On the morning of 18th October, the 12,000-man German force attacked the town. Of the National Guardsmen of Châteaudun, only 150 appeared for the battle; nor could any of the Guardsmen from the surrounding area be seen. Lipowski's defenders numbered only 1,000, yet for ten hours he conducted a heroic defence. By nightfall, 250 francs-tireurs and 70 gardes nationaux were killed or wounded; an estimated 3,000 casualties had been inflicted on the Germans.¹ No longer capable of further defence efforts, Lipowski retired. The enraged Germans, upon entering the village, burned 235 houses to the ground and killed 25 inhabitants. Two days later the city of Chartres, approached by the same German column, surrendered without firing a shot rather than face similar destruction.

Now back with the Army of the Loire, Lipowski's men covered the left flank for Aurelle's advance on Coulmiers, thus playing a role in the greatest French victory of the Franco-Prussian War. Thereafter, his units continued to serve as screens for the militia. At Varize on 26th November, only a stand by Lipowski's Francs-tireurs de Paris gave Chanzy time to construct defensive positions; otherwise, his army would have been overrun by a German force under the Duke of Mecklenburgh.

Colonel de Cathelineau, harkening back to the Vendéen partisan tradition (a Cathelineau had led the Vendéens during the Napoleonic era) led his steadfast Bretons throughout the war. His

1. Ledeuil, Châteaudun, (Paris, 1871), p.95.

units were particularly effective in defending the Forêt d'Orléans, thus screening the French forces from surprise by the advancing German Army. These Bretons, and also companies of Papal Zouaves recalled from Rome to fight for the national defence, were the heroes of the conservative Catholics, thus giving them a small stake in an otherwise 'Republican' war.

Both Lipowski and Cathelineau represent partisan tactics in conjunction with large-scale conventional operations. Effective as the 'eyes and ears' of the army, capable of playing the role of a corps d'élite in order to enable the militia to retreat, regroup, or avoid surprise, they represent a further step along the scale of partisan/conventional operations.

6. 'Urban Guerrillas'

A final category, though one which hardly differs from the preceding in terms of actions, is represented by the Francs-tireurs de la Presse, a 'literary unit raised by the novelist Gustave Aymard'.¹ It would be whimsical to label them the 'first urban guerrillas', for they fought as a corps d'élite rather than utilising guerrilla tactics.² In a daring night attack on 27th October against the village of Le Bourget, the Francs-tireurs de la Presse succeeded in forcing back the Prussian Guards and in occupying the village. To the embarrassment of the rather inactive French Commander, General Trochu, and to the delight of the Paris population, the francs-tireurs had provided a victory - 'the first since the beginning of the seige, if not the beginning

1. Howard, op. cit., p.321.

2. A total of 20,000 francs-tireurs were mustered in Paris. One famous unit, 1^{er} Escadron Franchetti, was noted for its bravery, though its members served really as cavalry messengers and guides rather than as a guerrilla band.

of the war'.¹ Despite the fact that the village itself was of no strategic value to either side, the Crown Prince of Saxony ordered its recapture. On the 30th October, at a cost of 500 German dead, the village was retaken. In the eyes of Paris, it had been the francs-tireurs' success, but it was Trochu's failure. The 'esprit' and daring nature which is more often found in irregular units rather than in conventional generals, had provided Paris with a brief moment of glory followed by an epoch of mistrust for conventional military leaders. More ominously, it imparted to certain segments of the Paris population a growing belief in the revolutionary power of the armed people, from which the Paris Commune was conceivably to spring.

F. Types of Operations

The preceding analysis reveals six different types of franc-tireur units. If placed along a scale according to the degree of their co-operation with or operation as conventional forces, the following diagram would appear (see diagram p.133). The four categories of operations which the six types of units undertook can then be contrasted. Of these four categories, the first is action against collaborators in the local populace. This type of operation presumes detailed knowledge of the community, such that only those franc-tireur units organised on a purely local basis had the capability of dealing with local collaboration problems. Only the Champagne and Avant-Garde units, of the units cited, conducted such operations. Judging by the extent of popular collaboration with the Germans, they cannot have been very successful.

1. Howard, op. cit., p.335.

	Champagne	Avant-Garde	Garibaldi	Bourras	Lipowski Cathelineau	Presse HIGH
LOW						
Activities	terrorist	base-camp	guerrilla army	partisan/ screen	corps d'élite	urban corps d'élite
Against col- laborators	X	X				
Raids and ambushes	X	X	X	X	X	
Large-scale partisan acts		X	X	X	X	
co-operation with conventional forces				X	X	X

EXTENT OF CO-OPERATION WITH REGULARS

A second type of operations is the small-scale raid or ambush conducted from a base of operations against enemy patrols, garrisons or communications. This type of operation lies at the heart of guerrilla warfare; it is the very essence of the 'war of the weak against the strong' to harass the enemy continually with many pin-pricks rather than wielding a sword which he can effectively parry. It is not surprising that all the franc-tireurs units discussed (save the Francs-tireurs de la Presse) conducted this style of operations, whether they operated independently or as part of a conventional campaign.

A third category consists of large-scale or wide-ranging partisan attacks. This type of operation presumes that there are several bands operating in strategic concert under the overall direction of one leader, such that the units can range over an extensive area, yet still coalesce to fight pitched battles when superiority can be gained over the enemy or when necessity forces them to fight in defence of a critical area. Neither Champagne nor 1^{re} Avant-Garde had the resources to operate in this manner, though 1^{re} Avant-Garde's expedition against Fontenoy shows an inclination towards wider-ranging activities. This style of operation further presumes a certain detachment from the population; for it implies constant movement over varying areas rather than determined local resistance. It is instructive that Fontenoy, Châtillon and Châteaudun were all subjected to reprisals by the German Army, which focused its wrath upon the populace despite the fact that the villagers had had nothing whatsoever to do with the partisan activity. As 1^{re} Avant-Garde discovered, it was easier to operate away from their base-camp, for the reprisals would not fall on their immediate supporters. This style of operations, which presumes mobility plus detachment, was a

favourite of Garibaldi's guerrilla army, Bourras' partisans, and Lipowski and Cathelineau's corps d'élite; it seemed to keep the enemy off balance and distracted while other operations (such as Garibaldi's attack on Dijon or Chanzy's reorganisation at Varize) of greater strategic import were undertaken.

The final type of operation is full co-operation with conventional forces. For reasons already discussed, (mainly disunity of command, but also the disparity between guerrilla and conventional strategy) Garibaldi's guerrilla army shunned (or was precluded from participation in) conventional operations in co-operation with the militia forces. Bourras, Lipowski, and Cathelineau excelled in these operations, serving as the 'eyes and ears' of the militia armies they screened. And the Francs-tireurs de la Presse, operating as a corps d'élite in their spirited attack on Le Bourget, proved that the guerrilla not only co-operates with, but can also spearhead, a conventional attack.

G. Terror versus Counterterror

~~The analysis has covered~~ the inspiration and formation of the Francs-tireurs, as well as the types of units and the operations they conducted. Prior to discussing the more general question of the successes and failures of the franc-tireur movement, it is first necessary to consider a subject which has been frequently alluded to but not yet discussed in full: the question of terror and counterterror which inevitably emerges from guerrilla conflicts.

From the very beginning of the 'people's phase' of the Franco-Prussian War, the parallel questions of reprisals against the population which shielded guerrillas and of according prisoner-of-war status to the francs-tireurs rather than acceding

to their execution as bandits, took on immense importance. At the Ferrières negotiations Favre and Bismarck discussed this irreducible conflict of opinion between France and Germany on these vital questions:

"We are hunting them down pitilessly", Bismarck told Jules Favre. "They are not soldiers: we are treating them as murderers". And when Favre pointed out that the German people had done the same in the Wars of Liberation, he replied unanswerably, "That is quite true: but our trees still bear the marks where your generals hanged our people on them".¹

The Germans and French were destined never to reach an accord. The Germans determined to answer terror with counterterror, and the bitterness between German soldier and French citizen spiralled to new depths - a bitterness which had been unknown during the war against the Empire. After Ferrières the struggle was no longer to be an affair of professional armies fighting in the interest of a balance of power: it was to be a savage war of peoples...²

The question of how to treat francs-tireurs taken prisoner from the better-known guerrilla units was quickly resolved. When Colonel Bourras learned that some of his men had been shot, he sent the following letter to Werder, the German commander:

From today I expect you to include my troops under the rules of war, as belligerents between civilised peoples; that is, if my men fall into your hands, their lives will be spared; or forced to use reprisals, I will have shot, at our forward positions, the numerous prisoners which I have taken from you.³

Werder ordered an investigation of the incident and promised that guilty junior commanders would be punished. In a similar incident,

1. Ibid., p.251. For original, see Busch, Bismarck in the Franco-German War, (London, Macmillan, 1879), pp.251-2.
2. Howard, op. cit., p.233.
3. Ardouin-Dumazet, op. cit., p.7.

Garibaldi's captain-nurse, Jessie White Mario, threatened reprisals against German wounded if the medical care for wounded francs-tireurs in German hands did not improve rapidly.

For those francs-tireurs from less well-known units or for those gardes nationaux or peasants found alone with a rifle, the outcome was less favourable. They were frequently shot on the spot as bandits. The German insistence that all soldiers wear highly recognisable uniforms redounded heavily against the 'gardes nationaux sédentaires' in the countryside, 'dont l'uniforme était assez rudimentaire; ils furent plus éprouvés encore que les francs-tireurs, portant généralement un uniforme complet, quoi que souvent fort étrange'.¹

Gigout of the University of Dijon offered the following solution to the dilemma posed by the armed people:

La guerre qui se transforme ainsi en sauvagerie est une véritable guerre d'extermination: elle suscite des haines féroces et durables. Encore une fois, l'individu qui combat loyalement un ennemi se présentant pour la première fois ou revenant sur un territoire imparfaitement occupé, a toutes les considérations sérieuses de belligérant. L'homme qui se bat loyalement pour son pays, accomplit un devoir. Qu'il porte une blouse ou un paletôt, peu importe il est Français, c'est un soldat et non pas un assassin; fait captif, il a droit aux mêmes égards que le soldat revêtu d'un uniforme. Si on le tue, on commet un crime qui mérite vengeance.²

Yet the Germans did not feel that they could exempt from punishment all those French citizens who might commit guerrilla acts; deterrence was their aim. The case which best illustrates the dilemma is that of François Debergue, an old gardener from Bougival. The ensuing dialogue between the German interrogator and the gardener:

1. Paul Gigout, Les violations des Droits des Gens commises par les armées allemandes pendant la campagne de 1870-71, (Dijon, 1900), p.98.

2. Ibid., p.113.

- Est-ce vous qui avez rompu nos fils télégraphiques?
- Oui, c'est moi.
- Pourquoi avez-vous fait cela?
- Parce que vous êtes l'ennemi.
- Libre recommenceriez-vous?
- Oui.
- Pourquoi?
- Parce que je suis Français.¹

The Germans, to the horror of the international press (particularly of Britain and Italy), decided to dismiss the arguments which the French jurists were advancing, and rather to pursue a policy of strict counterterror in order to suppress what they considered to be unacceptable acts of terrorism against their troops. Their attitude was clearly expressed in the proclamations they posted in various French cities to discourage acts of terrorism. The following proclamation from von Goeben was posted on a wall in Rouen on 5th December 1870:

1. Sera puni de mort tout particulier qui aura servi d'espion aux troupes françaises ou qui aura logé, caché ou secondé un espion français.
2. Sera puni de mort quiconque aura volontairement servi de guide aux troupes françaises.
3. La même peine sera appliquée à celui qui, servant de guide aux troupes de S.M. le roi de Prusse et de ses augustes alliés, aura été convaincu de mauvaise foi.
4. Sera puni de mort celui qui, par esprit de vengeance ou par avidité, aura pillé, blessé, ou tiré un individu quelconque appartenant aux armées alliées contre la France.
5. Sera puni de mort quiconque aura détruit des routes, ponts, canaux, télégraphes ou chemins de fer. La même peine sera appliquée à ceux qui auront incendié des édifices, arsenaux, ou magasins militaires.
6. Sera puni de mort tout particulier qui aura porté les armes contre les troupes de S.M. le roi de Prusse et ses augustes alliés.
7. La présente proclamation entrera en vigueur dans toute l'étendue du district occupé par le 8^e corps d'armée dès qu'elle aura été affichée dans une localité quelconque de ce district.²

1. Ibid., p.114.

2. Société Internationale de Secours aux Blessés, Recueil de Documents sur les Exactions, Vols et Cruautés des Armées Prussiennes en France, (Bordeaux, 1871), pp.49-50.

An even crueller policy is indicated in the bulletin posted in Boulzicourt, 10th December 1870:

Le commandant en chef de la 2^e armée allemande fait reconnaître d'office par le présent arrêté, que tout individu qui ne fait partie ni de l'armée régulière française, ni de la garde nationale mobile, et qui sera trouvé muni d'une arme, portât-il le nom de franc-tireur ou autre du moment où il sera saisi en flagrant délit d'hostilité vis-à-vis de nos troupes, sera considéré comme traître et pendu ou fusillé sans autre forme de procès.

Je préviens les habitants du pays que, selon la loi de guerre, seront responsables toutes les communes sur le territoire desquelles les délits prévus auront lieu.

Les maires des endroits dans les environs doivent prévenir le commandant du détachement prussien le plus près sitôt que les francs-tireurs se montrent dans leurs communes.

Selon la même loi, toutes les maisons et villages qui donneront abri aux francs-tireurs, sans que le maire donne la notice susdite et d'où les troupes allemandes seront attaquées seront brûlés ou bombardés.

Les communes sont en outre responsables des dégâts causés sur leur territoire au télégraphe, chemin de fer, ponts et canaux. Une contribution leur sera imposée, et, en cas de non-paiement, on les menace d'incendie.¹

This harsh policy ruled out any legalisation of almost any act by a French citizen on behalf of his government. Strict in its intent, cruel in its application, this policy directed itself increasingly against the French citizenry who were coming into frequent contact with the German troops. The French who failed to help in the defence effort were guilty of a lack of patriotism; those who did help were likely to be shot by the Germans. It was an inescapable dilemma, and one could not have blamed large segments of French society had they quietly opted out of the war.

There was very little which could be done to protect French patriots in areas of German hegemony. The village of Bazailles on the outskirts of Sedan had seen 363 houses burned to the ground, one by one, after the defence was overcome. After Lipowski's famous stand at Châteaudun, the Germans burned 235 houses and

1. Ibid., p.72.

killed 25 inhabitants. Fontenoy suffered total destruction after the expedition of l'Avant-Garde de la Délivrance succeeded in blowing up the strategic rail bridge there. And at Châtillon, the Germans took hostages from the local populace after Ricciotti's raid - a tactic which brought back this fiery reply:

On m'informe que vous menacez les habitants de la ville de Châtillon de représailles que vous dites motivées par l'attaque des francs-tireurs le samedi 19.

Je ne sache pas que jamais une victoire acquise par la bravoure d'un corps régulier puisse autoriser de pareilles exactions.

Une bonne fois, faites donc la guerre légalement et non en vandales qui se rêvent que pillage.

Menace pour menace, si vous avez l'infamie de mettre à exécution votre odieux projet, je vous donne l'assurance que je n'épargnerai aucun des 200 Prussiens que vous savez être entre mes mains.¹

The hostages were spared; the village was not burned. Yet it seemed the exception rather than the rule. The French people cannot have welcomed guerrilla operations in their vicinity for fear of reprisals. German counterterror was working, but at an incalculable price for the future. As the Morning Post noted ominously: 'One cannot exterminate the French, no matter how profound is the humiliation which one has imposed on France. There will always remain enough French for the next war'.² It was a prophetic remark on the bitterness between France and Germany, which would take two world wars to exhaust. The Daily Telegraph echoed this sentiment: 'But if there is a justice in this world or the next, the sufferings which the French have had to undergo at the hands of their invaders will be revenged one day'.³ The Evening Standard concluded that the acts committed by the Prussians 'are in direct contradiction of the agreement followed since the Crimean War, in which it was stipulated that outside of

1. Ibid., p.56.

2. Ibid., p.97.

3. Ibid., p.98.

actual combatants, as few people as possible would have to suffer even the simplest of inconveniences caused by the State of War'.¹

The commiseration of the international press did little to relieve the suffering of the population, nor could references to international law aid the beleaguered French people. The reprisals became so regular after any successful guerrilla attack that Genevois likened the experience to a four-act play:

Premier acte: accusation de complicité contre les habitants qu'on sait parfaitement étrangers à l'événement, simulation d'une violente colère, reproches sur un ton de haute déclamation, menaces effroyables.

Deuxième acte: arrestation de notables, menaces de mort, brutalités, contribution de guerre.

Troisième acte: la soldatesque à libre carrière: elle pille, vole et assassine; ce déchainement dure un laps de temps fixé, montre en main. Soldats et officiers font tout le butin qu'ils peuvent. Sauvages pour l'exécution, ils redeviennent d'excellents pères de famille pour emballer et expédier leurs prises.

Quatrième acte: étalage de la mansuétude de l'envahisseur qui fait ressortir qu'il aurait pu brûler, piller et tuer d'avantage; avertissements terrible à l'adresse des populations qui seraient tentées d'aider de façon quelconque les troupes françaises.²

That Prussia addressed her efforts against the French population is perhaps not so surprising, for it was the 'nation in arms' against which she was fighting. In the words of M. Chaudordy from the Tours government:

La Prusse n'a plus maintenant devant elle que la France. C'est donc à la France même, à la nation armée pour défendre son existence que la Prusse a déclaré cette nouvelle guerre d'extermination qu'elle pourrait comme un défi jeté au monde contre la justice, le droit et la civilisation.³

La vie humaine n'a pas été respectée d'avantage. Alors que la nation entière est appelée aux armes, on a fusillé impitoyablement non seulement des paysans soulevés contre l'étranger, mais des soldats pourvus de commissions et revêtus d'uniformes légalisés. On a condamné à mort ceux qui tentaient de franchir les lignes prussiennes même

1. Ibid., p.100.

2. Genevois, op. cit., pp.22-3.

3. Ibid., p.42.

pour leurs affaires privées. L'intimidation est devenue un moyen de guerre; on a voulu frapper de terreur les populations et paralyser en elles tout élan patriotique.¹

Intimidation as a method of war - as calculated counter-terror - exacted its toll on the armed people. Even at Châtillon, a participant named Thiébaud wrote that

...notre succès eut été bien certainement plus complet si nous eussions rencontré une population plus énergique. Non seulement les habitants de Châtillon nous ont refusé leur concours, ils nous ont encore, en bien des cas, été hostiles, favorisant l'évasion des Prussiens, ou, dans leurs maisons, les aidant à se soustraire à nos perquisitions.²

Similarly, the following official notice brought raids against German-run trains to a halt:

Plusieurs endommagements (sic) ayant eu lieu sur les chemins de fer, le commandant en chef avait donné l'ordre de faire accompagner les trains par des habitants connus et jouissant de la considération générale lesquels seraient placés sur la locomotive de manière à faire comprendre que tout accident causé par l'hostilité des habitants frapperait en premier lieu leurs nationaux.³

The commiseration of the international press, the lofty sentiments of international law, and even the threat of reprisals against German prisoners proved insufficient to protect a population which was increasingly at the mercy of the German occupiers. That the French fought as heroically as they did, and that for the most part the lives of German prisoners were spared, is commendable. Nonetheless, the awful conclusion that Germany's calculated terror had an overall strategic effect on the French war effort is inescapable. It must be considered as one reason why the armed people ultimately failed in their attempts to

1. Ibid., pp.43-4.

2. Ibid., p.75.

3. Ernouf, op. cit., pp.64-5.

drive the German invaders from French territory.¹

H. Successes and Failures of the Francs-tireurs

When asked about the chances for success in his guerrilla war against the Germans, Garibaldi drew a parallel with the defence of Montevideo (population 30,000) in which he had participated, where the defenders held out for nine years against an enemy army of 18,000.² 'Un village de France a plus de ressources que n'en avait alors Montevideo; pouvons-nous douter du succès de la défense nationale?'.³

Yet the national defence did fail. The armies of the Loire, the West, the North and the East, as well as the huge garrison in Paris, lay shattered, captured or interned. Though only one-third of France was under German occupation, the other two-thirds acquiesced. Further resistance seemed futile, though there were yet resources which could have been mobilised. The will to resist was gone; the nation was ready to stack its arms and to accept the German peace.

The will to resist had been reduced in a manner not dissimilar to Sherman's march across Georgia to the sea. In the words of General Sheridan, who accompanied the German Headquarters:

The proper strategy (he declared after Sedan) consists in inflicting as telling blows as possible on the enemy's

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1. It is instructive to note that franc-tireur leaders, regardless of their political persuasion, often criticised the lack of patriotism of certain segments of the French people. Both the right-wing Cathelineau and left-wing Garibaldi experienced difficulties due to the lack of popular support which at times verged on open collaboration with the German invaders.
 2. The conflict began as a civil war between the Blanco and Colorado factions of Uruguay. Argentina supported the Blancos during the nine-year siege of Montevideo, 1843-1851, which saw little real fighting. The Colorados eventually won the conflict, and they agreed to support Argentina and Brazil against Paraguay in the War of the Triple Alliance which ensued.
 3. Bordone, op. cit., p.424.

army, and then in causing the inhabitants so much suffering that they must long for peace, and force the government to demand it. The people must be left with nothing but their eyes to weep with over the war.¹

The weapon of terror had been effective in forcing the South to sue for peace; it likewise convinced the French populace that the war could not be won, and that their suffering was bound to increase out of all proportion to any conceivable gain in terms of better conditions for the peace. What Sheridan had already failed to perceive when he offered his advice to Moltke was that while terror might be effective in ending the war, it could not wring lasting peace from the terrorised. The name Sherman in small towns of central Georgia still evokes a bitterness which a century has done little to heal. The terror against the French population might have reduced popular support for the francs-tireurs, it might ultimately have caused Gambetta to resign, but it could not usher in a lasting peace. Forty-four years later, the bitterness created in 1870 was to reappear in the form of renewed conflict between the French and German peoples.

The failure of the national defence is not, however, synonymous with the success or failure of the francs-tireurs. The militia armies had been defeated, the people clamoured for peace out of fear and frustration, Gambetta tendered his resignation, but the francs-tireurs still held the field. The importance of this fact is evidenced by the inclusion of the following condition in the terms for the armistice in Paris that 'all the corps of Francs-tireurs shall be dissolved by ordinance of the French Government (Article 7)'.² The militia armies were to stand in place; even the National Guard could keep its arms;

1. Printed in Howard, *op. cit.*, p.380.

2. See Germany, Army, General Staff, (London, 1874-84), Part II, Vol.II, Appendix CLVI, p.229.

but the francs-tireurs were to be disbanded. To answer the question why this was insisted upon by the Germans is perhaps to discover the real effect which the francs-tireurs had upon their war effort - an effort out of all proportion to the paucity of credit given them by the regular military historians after the war.

To explain why the francs-tireurs were so effective against the German forces, Hale utilises the concept of the 'Fog of War', which obscures the vision of the enemy while it increases the vision of the armed people.

And here we come to that peculiar characteristic of all People's Wars, and strikingly so of this war - the dense Fog of War which the invader finds encompassing him all around.

And the very composition of the Fog enables the forces of the invaded country to see through it; in fact, it is one of the instruments of vision as to the movements of the invader.¹

The francs-tireurs were able to harass the Germans at every turn and then to melt away into a countryside where they knew every path, rock and tree. The Germans, forced to deploy at every shot, never knew whether they were facing a French peasant with a rifle, a franc-tireur company, or an entire militia army. The frustration of this situation is evidenced by no less a personage than Prince Frederick Charles, commander of the German Second Army:

The Francs-tireurs, aided by the country, have done the French good service. Now I am reduced to a waiting attitude...There is for a leader nothing more oppressive than a situation that is not clear, nothing more trying than bands of armed irregular troops aided by the population and the nature of the country, and relying for support on a strong army in the neighbourhood.²

1. Hale, op. cit., p.30.

2. Ibid., p.5.

The greatest success of the franc-tireur movement lies not in the few highly successful operations conducted by the better-known units, but rather in the altered character of the conflict. In the first phase of the war

...German cavalry patrols, in search of either the French Army or information as to where it was, rode miles ahead of their own troops, perfectly safe, unless they came upon French soldiers; small parties could sleep in French farm houses as safely as in their own homes; quarter-masters went forward demanding food and accommodation, which were given without resistance; and in some cases the Germans were received with actual hospitality - as for instance, at Nancy, where, dinner being ordered by a Commander for his squadron, with which he had ridden miles on in front of the rest of the German troops into the town, the dinner was prepared and laid in the square of the city, and ladies waited on the visitors.¹

In the second phase of the war, however, the armed people threw their weight into the heart of what had become an entirely new form of conflict - a people's war. That the conflict was indeed altered is perhaps best understood through the neutral eyes of the British military attachés serving with both French and German commands:

There can be little doubt that the Corps of Francs-tireurs which were formed in France hampered the movements of the Prussian Army considerably. Colonel Reilly, writing from Tours on November 12th, 1870, says that "on his way to join the army of General Aurelle de Paladine he fell in with numerous bodies of Francs-tireurs, and was much struck by their appearance, being well-armed and equipped, and serviceably clad. They would stand a fair comparison with some of the best Volunteer Regiments in England".

Captain Hozier (serving with the Germans) says that "the guerrilla warfare waged by the Francs-tireurs has lately become more annoying, and in this wooded and thickly-inhabited country, much worries the outlying cavalry, and to some extent impedes its useful action. Hardly a cavalry patrol is sent out to reconnoitre or collect information which is not fired upon by enemies hidden in copses and woods. As a rule the patrols are allowed to advance as far as they choose without discovering an enemy or finding any trace of danger; on the return journey, every defile, every road through a wood is lined by guerrilla marksmen, who not infrequently succeed in

1. Ibid., p.13-14.

reducing the patrol, which generally consists of five or six cavalry soldiers with an officer, by one or two files.¹

The francs-tireurs, by altering the character of the war, deprived the German Army of its mobility; they thickened the fog of war which enveloped the German forces while serving to increase the vision of the French forces. A further success, and one of even greater strategic potential, was the threat the francs-tireurs posed against the German lines of communication. To cite Captain Hozier again,

...the trains go very slowly, and a constant watch is maintained for fear of obstacles or destruction of the line. The Prussian Government has imported its own engine-drivers, but the French stokers and signalmen are retained, but kept under surveillance. The railway is used only in the daytime, as there would be too many opportunities afforded to the dissatisfied natives and the Francs-tireurs to wreck trains which ran at night.

To defend the line against them there are frequent patrols of Landwehr cavalry, and whenever the line passes in or near woods, infantry skirmishes of Landwehr are also posted thickly beside the line. Every station is strongly occupied by a Landwehr garrison...²

Whether the francs-tireurs had actually accomplished any destruction along the line or not, the fact that the trains had to go slowly and could not run at night, plus the fact that large numbers of German troops were required to protect the lines, meant that supply problems were magnified and that a substantial number of German troops were being kept out of the actual combat to guard against a strategic threat. Besides the estimated 120,000 troupes d'étape³ required for this guard duty, ultimately 146,000 Germans had to be detached from other theatres

1. War Office, 'Extracts from the Reports of the Military Attachés who accompanied the French and German Armies during the Campaign of 1870-1871', (A.0501, 1871), p.17.

2. Ibid., p.17.

3. See Chareton, Corps Francs dans la Guerre Moderne, (Paris, 18-), p.248. 'La seule présence des corps francs avait donc immobilisé environ le quart de l'effectif de guerre.'

to deal with the threat of Garibaldi and of the Army of the East against the German lines of communication.

The francs-tireurs did in fact accomplish numerous destructions despite the heavy German garrisons. Altogether there were 59 acts of destruction¹ against bridges, tunnels and viaducts on the Réseau de l'Est which connected invested Paris with Germany, of which the most notable was the Fontenoy bridge expedition.

The effect of the general, as well as particular, successes of the francs-tireurs movement was enhanced by the fact that they were not anticipated by the German General Staff. The war correspondent for the Daily News who travelled with the German Army evidences this transition of opinion about guerrilla warfare:

They (the peasants) are safe, quiet bodies, who could no more get up a guerrilla war than could a village full of our English rustics. We hear about francs-tireurs, and desperate deeds to be done to every foreigner who ventures out alone. But to their honour be it said, the French peasants take very slowly to such ways.²

Later, he revised his opinion of the francs-tireurs somewhat:

These Francs-tireurs 'prowl about' as cunningly as if they were in New Bond Street, and take pot-shots at sentries in the most uncivilised manner. In consequence, they are not popular on the foreposts.³

Later still,

As to the Uhlans...they affirm that they have been considerably reduced in number since the commencement of the war, a service due in great measure to certain corps of Francs-tireurs who have taken their mission seriously.⁴

The changed attitude of Prince Frederick Charles, the German commander who forced the brunt of the action against the francs-tireurs and militia while the other two German armies invested

1. Ernouf, op. cit., p.108.

2. Daily News, op. cit., Vol.I, p.178.

3. Ibid., Vol.II, pp.266-67.

4. Ibid., Vol.II, p.303.

Paris and Metz, affords perhaps the best analysis of the effectiveness of the guerrilla war.

He (the Prince) recognised at once, fully, that the whole character of the war had been altered; that it was not merely the hostile army that was his enemy, but the whole of the population also, and that from the physical nature of the country both these enemies would derive great assistance.

By this gloomy November picture the Prince was so deeply impressed that he repeatedly made remarks to those around him about the rising of the Spanish nation against Napoleon I.¹

It would be impossible to conclude that the francs-tireurs had no significant effect on the German forces and strategy in the Franco-Prussian War. Despite the fact that the franc-tireur units were subordinated to a militia strategy by Gambetta, that they provoked severe reprisals by the Germans, and that there had been no extensive previous organisation or training for guerrilla warfare, the francs-tireurs had managed to develop into an effective movement which hampered German mobility, threatened the German lines of communication, effectively screened the militia armies and accomplished the greatest coups de main of the war.

As another correspondent for the Daily News noted, 'If the Garde Mobile were a force with some years of previous exercise, and the Francs-tireurs were men who had already been obliged to serve in the army, there would be a tolerably even chance for victors and vanquished in the next round of the Franco-Prussian fight'.² Thus, significant as the actual accomplishments were, the strategic potential of the franc-tireur movement was even more so. Guerrilla warfare might have sufficed as a means of national defence where the militia armies of Gambetta's Government of National Defence failed so decisively. As Genevois

1. Hale, op. cit., p.124.

2. Daily News, op. cit., Vol.II, p.200.

concludes,

Ce qu'il y a de plus dangereux pour les armées qui se trouvent déjà atteintes dans leur énergie, c'est la guerre nationale, la guerre des guerillas. Dans les combats décisifs, isolés, le courage, la confiance et la discipline se maintiennent encore. Mais ce qui est énervant, c'est le combat continu recommençant chaque jour, l'état de tension permanent devant un peuple hardi et nombreux, qui court aux armes comme un seul homme. A mesure qu'une armée d'invasion pénètre dans un pays, tous les cadres s'affaiblissent, ses bagages deviennent plus embarrassants, les jeunes recrues montrent moins d'indépendance et le manque d'un nombre suffisant d'officiers subalternes pour la conduite des opérations de moindre importance se fait sentir.¹

What more could have been done to develop this 'danger' to the German armies - to develop the full strategic potential of guerrilla warfare as a means of national defence? Many of the participants of franc-tireur units, or those familiar with their activities, were ready to provide quite plausible answers. First, it was imperative that the rail communications should come under heavy and immediate attack. Jacqmin suggests the following procedures for French railwaymen:

Créer en dehors des villes, et avec exclusion de toute population civile, des ouvrages spéciaux protégeant soit un souterrain, soit un grand ouvrage d'art, soit une bifurcation, et comportant des dispositions qui permettent, comme complément et prolongation de la défense du territoire la destruction complète du passage longuement protégé.²

Such a policy, automatically implemented by rail personnel, would insure instant destruction of vital railway facilities, thus depriving the invasion force of an adequate logistics and transport system. The policy would have obviated such dangerous missions as the Fontenoy operation, thus freeing the guerrillas for other tasks.

Ardouin-Dumazet, a franc-tireur at 18 years of age, argues

1. Genevois, op. cit., pp.20-21.

2. F. Jacqmin, Les Chemins de Fer français pendant la Guerre de 1870-1871, (Paris, 1894), p.349.

that more coups de main using cavalry and artillery support should have been attempted. 'Les succès obtenus par Garibaldi en employant cette tactique prouvent qu'il y avait là un précieux élément qu'on a méconnu.'¹ He further notes the necessity of good leadership for the corps francs and recommends 'jeunes ingénieurs sortis de l'Ecole polytechnique, les gardes généraux des forêts, les lieutenants échappés de Sedan et de Metz',² as the best examples among the francs-tireurs. A unit which possessed both qualities (mobility with cavalry and artillery, as well as good leadership) was Garibaldi's IV^e Brigade, led by his son Ricciotti. The IV^e Brigade's coup de main at Châtillon and its effectiveness as a rear guard after the panic at Dijon were made possible because of the tactical organisation and superb leadership of the unit.

An even more daring suggestion comes from Wolowski, who considered that the francs-tireurs were too much dependent on the direction of the army, though they served well as flankers and screens. A more effective use of the partisans would have been made had they only remained independent:

Leur seul objectif est de défendre avec acharnement leur région envahie, par tous les moyens de faire le plus de mal possible à l'ennemi, de ne lui laisser ni repos ni trêve, sans jamais accepter de combat, de disparaître pour revenir sur un autre point quand la nécessité l'exige.³

What Wolowski argues is similar in nature to the type of conflict which Garibaldi envisaged when he first landed in France. It further reflects the thoughts of Clausewitz on 'Arming the Nation' to repel the invader. Independent guerrillas, defending their territory without ever fighting a fixed battle, serve as an

1. Ardouin-Dumazet, Une Armée dans les Neiges, (Paris, 1894), p.278

2. Ibid., pp.279-80.

3. A.L. Wolowski, Une Page d'Histoire, (Paris, 1893), p.169.

effective barrier to the advancing enemy forces. The enemy, once forced to concentrate, undergoes a reduction in mobility and becomes increasingly vulnerable to the coups de main of coalesced bands from several areas acting in concert as the guerrilla army.

The franc-tireur movement, a qualified success in the Franco-Prussian War, was perhaps the most misunderstood part of a much misunderstood war. The German mode of mass military organisation became the model for generations of armies to follow. Even the campaigns of Gambetta's militia armies were studied by military tacticians. The francs-tireurs, however, were very nearly forgotten, at least by the regular military historians who analysed the Franco-Prussian War. Even the battle standard captured from the Germans by Garibaldi's counter-attack at Dijon was placed in the 'salle du musée d'artillerie' at l'Hôtel des Invalides, inscribed in the catalogue 'comme provenant des campagnes du premier empire'.¹ The age of the guerrilla had not yet arrived, despite the heroics of the francs-tireurs in the defence of France, 1870-71.

1. Dormoy, op. cit., p.385.

V. THE MILITIA

A. Introduction

Though the francs-tireurs represented a novel and daring approach to the problem of arming the people against the invading German armies, the brunt of the war effort was to be borne, through Gambetta's design, by the militia armies. To the members of the Government of National Defence, it was necessary to fight fire with fire - to match the German juggernaut with an equally massive military system built, or rather improvised, from the people themselves. The era of technological wars and mass armies, incipient in the Napoleonic period, was suddenly to become the dominant feature of European military organisation.

Gambetta and his colleagues had several important reasons why the improvised militia armies should be given precedence over the francs-tireurs, who represented the alternate pattern of the armed people. Tactically, while the francs-tireurs might harass the enemy, the militia could physically oppose them; where the francs-tireurs could operate behind enemy lines, the militia could prevent the extension of those lines and thus protect large areas of France; while the francs-tireurs could delay defeat, the militia might win victory. Strategically, the fall of Paris might well bring the end of French resistance; only the militia could hope to relieve the beleaguered capital. Politically, Gambetta wanted his military system to gain permanency; the armed people would not only serve to win the war, they would also prevent the reaction from regaining power through counter-revolutionary means after the conflict was ended. But since

guerrillas would better serve other conceptions of political organisation,¹ Gambetta shied from thrusting France into the maelstrom of a 'people's war', or guerrilla conflict over which he could exercise little control. It was thus the militia armies rather than the francs-tireurs which came to represent France's commitment to total victory in 'la guerre à outrance'.

Gambetta and his colleagues of the Left were not strangers either to France's past military history or to her current military needs. They had advocated various concepts of the armed people during their period of parliamentary opposition to Napoleon III, from the reinstatement of the National Guard to the frantic calls for a levée en masse during the August disasters at the frontier. They now appealed to the emotional symbol of Valmy, where the first levée en masse had saved the First French Republic from an invading Prussian army.

To advocate the concept of the armed people or to evoke past military tradition was one thing; to actually organise an armed force from the debris of Imperial France's Army and Regime was quite another. For aid in this task, Gambetta chose as his Delegate for military affairs Charles de Freycinet, a graduate of the Polytechnique and a successful engineer. Freycinet, a keen student of the American Civil War, had grasped the fundamental similarities between that war and the one he was to help manage: that the forces which would emerge, though they were only improvised militia, could eventually prove the match of regular troops if given proper arms, leadership, and training. All they needed was time - the one commodity over which Moltke and Bismarck, rather than Freycinet and Gambetta, seemed to have complete control.

1. Such as Garibaldi's 'Universal Republic' or Bakunin's 'Anarchists'.

B. Models

There existed two models after which Gambetta and Freycinet might pattern their militia armies. The first, France in 1792, was their own tradition of Valmy; the second was the American Civil War of 1861-65. Both situations offered striking parallels with France's plight in 1870, yet it was the differences rather than the similarities that offered the real key to understanding the military needs of the Franco-Prussian War.

The myth established after Valmy was that of the citizen who could pick up a musket, run to the frontier, and prove the match of invading regulars by virtue of his patriotism and political consciousness. Like all myths, it contained an element of truth. Yet Valmy, as it came to be remembered by the French Left, led to certain misunderstandings which handicapped the Government of National Defence in its efforts to forge a viable militia army.

The armies of revolutionary France which won the battles of Valmy and Jemappes do not completely bear out the Left's image of the citizen-soldier. In the critical year of 1792, there were four different categories of soldiers. First, there were the regulars, probably the match of any troops Prussia and Austria had to offer. Second, there were troops provided by the first levée en masse in 1791, most of whom were volunteers with previous military training.

France had possessed a large and good force of Militia, which formed a reserve for the army, and which sometimes served in war. This force had been dissolved on the creation of the National Guard, which nominally amounted to two and a half millions. In the enthusiasm of the moment the National Guard furnished a great number of battalions, and the volunteers received not only a mass of men formerly belonging to the Militia, but an even more important asset, a part of the officers, sous-officiers and non-commissioned

officers of the Militia battalions. The dissolution of the Maison du Roi also furnished good material for new bodies. Again, a number of men who had served in the regulars during the war in America, and who had been discharged...now joined the force.

Placed alongside the regulars and, in the Armée du Nord, brigaded with them, these men soon became good troops, although still wanting in confidence in themselves and in their officers. They had the right to elect their officers, but a wise rule restricted the choice to those officers and sous-officiers that had served in the regulars or in the Militia. Sent at once to the camps on the frontier and in many cases being attached to battalions of regulars, these battalions had some six or eight months of preparation before they were brought into the field.¹

Some 169 battalions, totalling 101,000 men came from this first levée en masse. But soon these two categories were not enough to meet the challenges, internal as well as external, which faced the regime of revolutionary France. A new levée en masse was conducted early in 1792 for which each Department was to furnish an affixed number of men. More like conscription than a popular upsurge to volunteer, the troops obtained by this levée were poor in comparison to the first levée.

Men much too young or too infirm, were accepted, as were those of bad character. Untrained, mutinous, and prone to excess, the battalions of this...new levy were a source of weakness and danger to the armies which they joined. 'It is the indiscipline, ignorance, presumption and cowardice of the greater number of these battalions', says General Susane, 'which caused the disasters of 1792 and which used up all the Generals of the Republic and led to the scaffold commanders whose sole crime was to have written to the Convention, "Send us regular troops and disembarass us of the sans-culottes"'.²

The final category, composed of a special levée of 20,000 men known as the Fédérés (they were 'federated' at a special fête on 14 July 1792 in Paris), were the least disciplined and the most poorly-trained soldiers of all.

The battalion from Marseille, which took part in the slaughter of the Swiss Guard after the King had ordered that body to cease firing, was a part of this force. The

1. Ramsay W. Phipps, The Armies of the First French Republic, (Oxford University Press, London, 1926), p.16.

2. Ibid., p.17.

Fédérés were, as a rule, far inferior to the Departmental battalions.¹

Of these four categories of French soldiers, only the first two played an important role in the critical year of 1792. As Chuquet notes,

Heureusement, la Révolution, surprise, avait encore deux armées composées de régiments de ligne et des volontaires de 1791, qui tenaient la campagne et demeuraient intactes: celle des Ardennes, campée près de Sedan, sous les ordres de Lafayette, et celle du Centre ou de Metz, commandée par Luckner.²

But events soon overtook these armies and shook their confidence. After the Parisian insurrection of 10 August, which established the first Commune, Lafayette tried to impose 'un serment de fidélité à la loi et au roi'³ upon his troops and even attempted a march upon Paris. Deserted by Luckner, Lafayette's coup failed, and the Army's only hero of the French Revolution fled to exile. Dumouriez and Kellermann replaced Lafayette and Luckner, but the Army no longer had confidence in its leadership. Soon it no longer had confidence in itself, for on 23 August, 42,000 Prussians supported by 15,000 Austrians took Longwy, and by 2 September Verdun had fallen. Dumouriez set up defensive positions in the Ardennes which he termed 'les Thermopyles de la France',⁴ but at the skirmish of Mont Cheutin on 15 September, 1200 German hussars panicked 10,000 French soldiers into flight and the positions were lost.

The military situation of France was now grim.

1. Ibid., p.17.

2. A. Chuquet, Les Guerres de la Révolution, Vol.II, (Paris, Chailly), p.2.

3. A. Chuquet, Goethe: Campagne de France, (Paris, 1884), p.VIII.

4. Chuquet, Les Guerres de la Révolution, p.74.

La confiance régnait dans le camp des alliés. L'Argonne était tournée; Dumouriez, ou le Léonidas français comme on le nommait par ironie, avait dû quitter nuitamment ses inexpugnables Thermopyles; les coalisés allaient regagner presque sans coup férir, la route de Verdun à Paris.¹

By not offering vigorous pursuit, the allies had missed their best chance to crush Dumouriez; by the 20th he was reinforced by Beurnonville and Kellermann up to 50,000 men. Yet it was clear that one more French panic would mean the end of defence in the North against the invading Prussians. Two days before the battle of Valmy, Dumouriez's troops were so nervous that he asked Kellermann to send a contingent to his camp to prove to the men that l'Armée du Centre had actually arrived to give them support.² Dumouriez organised his position at Valmy with great skill. In the centre he placed the staunch Kellermann, whose army was composed of all regulars save two battalions of volunteers of 1791. Of the 57 battalions at Dumouriez's disposal, 21 were regulars, 29 were volunteers of 1791, and 7, which took no part in the battle, were Fédérés.³

As the Germans opened their attack on 20th September, they saw Kellermann

...calme et imperturbable forme rapidement ses troupes en trois colonnes d'un bataillon de front; il leur commande d'attendre les assaillants sans tirer un seul coup, et de les charger à la baïonnette dès qu'ils auront gravi la hauteur; il met son chapeau, surmonté du panache tricolore, au bout de son épée qu'il élève en l'air, et s'écrie 'Vive la nation!'. L'armée entière lui répond: 'Vive la nation! Vive la France! Vive notre général!'.⁴

The Prussian advance stopped dead in its tracks. This time the French were not going to run; Brunswick's men would have to

1. Ibid., p.170.

2. Phipps, op. cit., p.122.

3. Ibid., p.129.

4. Chuquet, Les Guerres de la Révolution, p.207.

assault the steep slope at Valmy. Just then the French cannonade commenced, and it would not cease for eight hours, until the Prussians were in full retreat. Goethe, who participated in the battle, described the thunder of the cannon thus, 'Le bruit qu'ils font est bizarre; on dirait à la fois le bourdonnement d'une toupie, le bouillonnement de l'eau et la voix flûtée d'un oiseau'.¹ The devastation of the cannonade caught the Prussians by surprise, and Brunswick ordered his army to retreat.

Il voyait son armée démoralisée, diminuée par la disette et par les maladies, pataugeant dans la boue et la fange, sous des averses continuelles. Tout le pays d'alentour se couvrait de partisans, sortis de Montmédy, de Sedan, de Méziers, et de cavaliers qui s'enhardissaient de plus en plus, coupaient ses communications, faisaient des courses jusqu'aux abords de son camp, harcelaient ou interceptaient ses convois.²

The military situation of France had been dramatically reversed. The invasion was halted; the Republic was saved. Goethe remarked to a friend 'de ce lieu et de ce jour date une nouvelle époque dans l'histoire du monde, et vous pourrez dire j'y étais'.³ Chuquet added, 'Il prévoyait que la France ne se bornerait pas à détrôner son roi et à chasser l'étranger, mais qu'elle déborderait sur l'Europe; il devinait la force irrésistible de la Révolution victorieuse'.⁴ A month and a half later, at the battle of Jemappes in which 30,000 French crushed 20,000 Austrians and thus liberated Belgium, the Revolutionary French armies had established themselves as the pre-eminent military force in Europe.

Precisely what the battles of Valmy and Jemappes proved is open to debate. The French right-wing parties and regular officers

1. Ibid., p.210.

2. Chuquet, Goethe: Campagne de France, p.XIII.

3. Chuquet, Les Guerres de la Révolution, pp.223-4.

4. Ibid., p.224.

maintained that the battles proved that the regulars had again saved France, whereas the Left pointed to the levée en masse and the political consciousness of the troops fighting to save their nation and revolution as the decisive feature of the battles. Chuquet in part supports this view by stating that, after Valmy, 'tout Français qui tenait l'épée ou maniait le fusil, s'envisagea comme le champion d'une cause qui devait nécessairement triompher'.¹ Rather than proving that untrained citizens, once given arms, could defeat trained regulars, the battles of Valmy and Jemappes really proved that a French Army, composed of regulars and experienced volunteers, could, if given proper leadership, confidence, and reasons for fighting, defeat a half-hearted invasion by regular troops.

By failing to comprehend this lesson of Valmy, Gambetta and Freycinet fell prey to the myth. Certainly the parallels between 1792 and 1870 were impressive. Once again a Republic had been proclaimed; once again the Prussians were invading France; once again the levée en masse was proclaimed to provide the troops necessary to save the Republic. Yet it was the differences, and not the similarities, which were crucial. In 1870 there were no regulars to stiffen the resistance; there were few trained men to answer this levée en masse; almost the entirety of the officer corps, as well as non-commissioned officers, were prisoners-of-war. War had advanced in complexity, such that training was necessary to enable men to handle rifles and artillery; yet Gambetta did not allow his militiamen the eight months of training that the volunteers of 1791 had received. Finally, where shouts of 'Vive la France!' and a cannonade had been sufficient to turn Brunswick's

1. Ibid., p.232.

Prussians at Valmy, Moltke's Germans marched and fought with a determination and skill which made them arguably the best army in the world. Thus, the first model which the French sought to copy was based on a misperception. The romantic myth of the armed people prevented Gambetta and his colleagues from dealing with the reality of forming a militia strategy which could counter the German advance.

If the first model proved to be something of a mirage, the second, the American Civil War, proved inapplicable. Freycinet in particular was convinced that the organisational efforts of the North, 1861-5, would provide insights as to how France should organise her military forces. As with the situation of Valmy, 1792, that of the North in 1861 invited comparison with the plight of France in 1870. Taken together, the Civil War and the Franco-Prussian War ranked as the first modern wars, defined by the presence of certain technological advances which increased the firepower as well as the number of troops under a commander's control. Among the more important innovations were the repeating rifle, the machine gun, the use of railways for transporting troops and supplies, the use of portable telegraphs on the battlefield, long-range artillery and the development of the general staff.¹ More than numbers of technological innovation, it was the total involvement of the economy in the war effort which proclaimed these wars to be 'modern'. Catton boldly states that

The North could win a modern war and the South could not. Clinging to a society based on the completely archaic institution of slavery, the South for a whole generation had been making a valiant attempt to reject the industrial revolution, and this attempt had involved it at last in a war in which the industrial revolution would be the

1. William H. Price, Civil War Handbook, (Civil War Research Associates, Fairfax, Virginia, 1961), p.9.

decisive factor.¹

The North had only 16,000 men in the Regular Army at the outbreak of hostilities; France had more regulars than that scattered in her depots even after Metz and Sedan. The situation facing both governments was how to tap the civilian manpower and economic resources and how to turn this abundance of 'raw material' into a fighting machine capable of winning a modern war. One of Freycinet's first moves was to adopt two measures concerning officers from the North - the first allowed anyone to obtain officer's rank, regardless of past experience, occupation or even nationality; the second doubled the size of the companies, thereby halving the number of junior commanders required.

Bury² lists five major points of comparison between the two conflicts. First, Gambetta and Lincoln, though both were civilians, showed a remarkable grasp of the war situations they faced; both called for armies of unprecedented size, thus unveiling the scope of the effort which must be undertaken. Second, the senior officers of both regular armies were found to be unfit for service; both leaders had to go through a succession of generals before such commanders as Chanzy and Grant, Faidherbe and Sherman, finally emerged. Third, Secretary of War Stanton and Delegate for War Freycinet both showed a disregard for military experience and cast blame on the generals for mistakes - an attitude not wholly unwarranted in either case. Fourth, both political regimes came to mistrust the generals and tended to interfere, or intervene, in the conduct of operations. Finally, generals like Aurelle and

1. Bruce Catton, The Penguin Book of the American Civil War, (Penguin, London, 1967), p.176.

2. J.P.T. Bury, Gambetta and the National Defence: a Republican Dictatorship in France, (London, 1936), Appendix X, pp.304-7.

McClellan seemed reluctant to fight; they exaggerated the strength of opposing forces and seemed more gifted in organising forces rather than in leading them into battle.

Yet it was the differences, and not the similarities, which again offered the key to an understanding of France's military position in 1870. Whereas the North was fighting another civilian militia based upon a limited economy, France was fighting the best armed and trained army in the world. While the North, with its tremendous industrial capacity, was completely intact and was only twice threatened by invasion, France had already seen a third of its territory overrun and its capital, along with the organisational and economic resources it commanded, completely invested. Finally, the North had had five years in which to win victory; France was given only five months to avoid defeat. While the Northern militia might prove the match of regulars after years of combat, the same could not be said of the untrained militiamen Gambetta had to send, month after month, against Moltke's soldiers. Though the quality of effort of the French militia was admirable, they could never solve the problem of how to prolong the war in order to train troops capable of winning victory.

C. The Context: Organisational Measures taken prior to 10 October

Apart from the models which Gambetta and Freycinet wanted in some way to implement, they also had to deal with the context created for them by their Imperial and Republican predecessors. In a certain sense, the nucleus for Gambetta's guerre à outrance already existed. Estimates of the number of men available in the military pipeline at the time of the Insurrection of 4 September

run as high as 750,000.¹ As with the francs-tireurs, while the idea of mass citizen armies predated the Gambetta regime, the real impetus for militia armies came after his rise to power. Even had the Empire survived 4 September it is doubtful that the national defence would have been organised along genuine militia lines. The regime of Napoleon III had loathed the idea of arming the hostile population even prior to the disastrous defeats of August; it surely would not have dared to arm the people after Sedan. Nevertheless, credit can be given to the Empire for some of the administrative procedures which Gambetta was to utilise at the inception of his Government of National Defence.

Certain figures in the regime of Napoleon III had strong enough presentiments of disaster to cause them to urge military reforms required to combat the massiveness of Prussia's build-up, although a levée en masse was categorically rejected. The first and foremost of these figures was Marshal Niel, who urged the revival of the Garde Nationale as France's answer to the Germans' Landwehr reserves. Napoleon III had dissolved that body after his coup d'état in 1851 and he was loth to reinstitute a military system which might nullify his instrument of rule - the regular forces. The compromise solution, reached in 1868, provided for a Garde Mobile composed of those who had not been called for military service and those who had purchased exemptions. Such a body, if properly organised and trained, would have furnished 500,000 more soldiers in July, 1870 - probably enough to offset the Prussian attack at the frontier, or at least enough to prevent the encirclements of Metz and Sedan. Coupled with the 800,000 strong regular forces and official reserves, this plan

1. Henri Dutrait-Crozon, Gambetta et la défense nationale, 1870-1871, (Paris, 1914), pp.19-20.

would have enabled France to match the German military build-up man for man.

The French half-measures proved ineffective. When, after the declaration of war, Germany mobilised 1,183,000 men in eighteen days and transported 462,000 to the French frontier, the French were trapped in the chaos of their own mobilisation. General Le Boeuf, who had succeeded Niel as Minister of War, fielded only 200,000 men. Disgraced by the unready state of the French Army, Le Boeuf was dismissed and succeeded by Comte de Palikao. Harassed by the Left, who urged a levée en masse, Palikao decreed drastic measures. 'All fit bachelors and childless widowers between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five were declared liable to service. The entire class of 1870 was called to the colours.'¹ Yet Palikao was able to add only the 130,000 Army of Châlons to the fray. By the 4th September, only 330,000 French had seen combat, and of these 180,000 were encircled at Metz; 150,000 were casualties or prisoners of the advancing Prussian Army. Some 800,000 paper soldiers had failed to materialise for the national defence.

Between 4 September and 9 October when Gambetta became Minister of Defence as well as Minister of the Interior (and the virtual dictator of provincial France), the Government of National Defence in Paris, as well as its delegation in the provinces, took various measures to make the national defence a reality and to end the chaos caused by the military disasters of the Empire. Paris was provisioned prior to its complete investment on 19 September, and the best of the Garde Mobile troops were called there to garrison the forts. Although it had originally been

1. Michael Howard, The Franco-Prussian War, (London, 1968), p.122.

thought that only Paris would resist the Germans, on 12 September Crémieux, Glais-Bizoin and Admiral Fourichon were sent to Tours to act as a channel of communications between Paris and the provinces. It is difficult to estimate how much they really accomplished; some historians credit them with the formation of the Army of the Loire and with the consolidation of calls for conscription throughout the provinces; other historians point out that they had few contacts and little respect in the provinces, and that really nothing was accomplished until Gambetta assumed power. On the balance the latter view would appear to be more correct. Gambetta was sent to the provinces because the Government of National Defence felt that a young, vigorous leader was needed to represent them in the provinces. Further, there is little evidence to show what measures the Delegates took prior to 10 October, whereas the well-documented list of Gambetta's organisational measures reveal a complete revamping of France's military system, starting from scratch. Gambetta was to become the driving force, the very soul, behind the provincial guerre à outrance, whereas his predecessors, both Imperial and Republican, pale to insignificance.

D. The Organisational Measures of Gambetta and Freycinet

On 10 October, the day when Gambetta and Freycinet took effective power in the provinces, the military situation of France was grim. Freycinet described it as follows:

Paris étroitement bloqué ne communiquait plus que d'une manière intermittente et par voies extraordinaires avec la province;

Le Maréchal Bazaine enfermé dans Metz avait cessé de prendre part aux hostilités et préparait déjà sa capitulation;

Sur les bords de la Loire, vingt à vingt-cinq mille hommes, battus à Artenay et bientôt à Orléans, commençaient une retraite qui ne devait s'arrêter qu'au fond de la Sologne;

Dans l'Est, l'armée du général Cambriels, réduite par le feu, la fatigue et surtout les désertions, à vingt-quatre mille hommes, abandonnait les Vosges et cherchait un abri à Besançon;

Dans l'Ouest trente mille gardes nationaux mobiles, mal équipés, mal armés et non encore embrigadés, sans cavalerie ni artillerie, formaient de Chartres à Evreux un fragile cordon, destiné à être rompu au premier choc;

Dans le Nord, aucune force constituée; des garnisons dans les places, mais pas de corps tenant la campagne;

Au total, moins de quarante mille hommes de troupes régulières, autant de gardes nationaux mobiles, cinq à six mille cavaliers, une centaine de pièces de canon, le tout en assez mauvais état et fort éprouvé, tel était l'ensemble des moyens opposés à une invasion qui disposait déjà de sept à huit mille soldats parfaitement organisés, de deux mille pièces de canons, non compris les batteries de siège, et de puissantes réserves échelonnées sur le Rhin, pour maintenir l'armée envahissante à un constant niveau.¹

The changes instituted by Gambetta were immediate and shocking in their effect. He appointed Freycinet as his Delegate for military affairs on the first day, and this move prompted Colonel Lefort and the other regular officers of the Ministry to resign in protest. La Motte Rouge, the commander responsible for the loss of the city of Orleans, was the next regular victim: 'J'ai été destitué brutalement par M. Gambetta, qui était tombé de ballon ministre de la guerre'.² Perhaps Gambetta had discovered that, in this time of crisis and of military innovation and improvisation, the regulars were perhaps more of a hindrance than an aid. Howard concurs with this view:

Freycinet and Gambetta did however understand one aspect of modern war better than did the professional soldiers, whether French or German. The summoning of a nation to arms involved not only the conversion of civilians into soldiers but the conscription of such civilians as scientists, engineers, railway executives, telegraph operators, businessmen, doctors, and architects, to employ their own professional skills in a common enterprise in which the movement of armies was only the final result. Freycinet's comprehension of this

1. Charles de Freycinet, La Guerre en Province pendant le siège de Paris, 1870-71, (Paris, 1871), pp.11-12.

2. Wilhelm Goltz, Gambetta et ses armées, (Paris, 1877), p.58.

gave to the organisation of the National Defence an amplitude which far surpassed anything on the German side.¹

The measures² which Gambetta and Freycinet took, at the rate of nearly one a day, quickly put into practice the theory of the nation in arms which they had conceived and lifted France from the torpor and chaos which had prevailed from 4 September to 10 October. The day after they assumed power, they called for the formation of corps of gardes nationaux mobilisés in all the provinces; the election of officers was also proclaimed. The next day, laws were promulgated enabling them to buy foreign arms. On the 13th of October, factories were established to manufacture cartridges. And in order to ensure a real choice for elected officers, the rules governing officers and promotions were altered to allow anyone, civilian or foreign-born, to become an officer and to be subject to rapid promotion. Becoming an officer also entailed certain risks. On 14 October, it was proclaimed that any French commander surprised by the enemy would be taken before a council of war - a move designed more to discipline the somewhat recalcitrant regular officers who remained than to threaten the new popular officers. The same day, in order to bring some order to all the fragments of forces that existed in France, the gardes nationales, gardes mobiles, gardes nationaux mobilisés, and corps francs were grouped into the armée auxiliaire; the armée auxiliaire was then placed on an equal footing with l'armée régulière, such that officers, personnel and procedures could be standardised. By a further decree, all departments within 100 kilometres of the enemy were declared to be in a state of war. Local defence committees were to be formed, which would be responsible for the

1. Howard, op. cit., p.243.

2. For complete text of measures taken see Freycinet, op. cit.

fortification of likely points of enemy passage and for offering effective resistance to the German advance. On 19 October a civilian conseil administratif was formed in each of the 22 military districts of France to ensure civilian (i.e. Republican) control of the military. On 22 October Gambetta took virtual control over provisions, and on the 23rd, of the rail transport, in order to ensure the effective utilisation of both for his armies and to ensure their denial to the enemy. After a week long hiatus, the 2nd of November brought the long-awaited levée en masse. All men between the ages of 21 and 40 were mobilised, with exemptions only for infirmity. The next problem to confront Freycinet was the lack of French artillery to support the massive armies. On 3 November, each department was called upon to furnish a battery for each 10,000 of population under its jurisdiction. On 4 November the francs-tireurs were put under the command of divisional military commanders to ensure their military effectiveness and to reduce the chaos with which many of them had previously operated. On 5 November generals were given the power to issue combat promotions in order to fill vacancies in officer positions which occurred in their units. 8 November brought an inspection service to guarantee that the measures were taking effect. On 10 November worker brigades for the armaments industry were established - while they were exempted from the general mobilisation, they were organised to fight in the event that the Germans advanced into their region. 11 November brought the special mobilisation of architects, engineers, and public works employees to perform specialised military duties, while the previously mobilised railways were ordered to place their personnel and stations on a footing of ready defence. On 25 November eleven regional camps were established to train the men

flooding in from the levée en masse. Each was capable of training 60,000 men, while four of them were designated as 'camps stratégiques', capable of holding 250,000 men. The 26th brought the formation of new cadres to lead those men mobilised by the levée en masse. To round out the programme, on 28 November calls went out to engineers and miners for suggestions which could aid French transport systems and disrupt those of the enemy, and on the 30th, each army corps was assigned a civilian engineer as a consultant.

These measures, coupled with others concerning hospitals and provision for the wounded, provided an inspired concept of the armed people. Where before it had been thought that only Paris would offer serious resistance to the Germans, the provinces were now wholly engaged in the battle to save France; they now were to bear the brunt of the effort while Paris, besieged, resisted attack and attempted sorties against the German lines. At a stroke, Gambetta had completely altered the nature of the French Army and in the stead of a small regular army had given France a military system based upon the mobilisation of the entire population, officered by elected commanders, and supported by the most elaborate set of military services ever created for a French Army. The 'Union de l'Armée et du Peuple pour la défense de la Patrie'¹ proclaimed on 4 September had become a reality. That declaration, coupled with the bargaining position enunciated by Favre, 'ni un pouce de notre territoire ni une pierre de nos forteresses'² laid the political foundation for Gambetta's policy of 'la guerre à outrance' just as his dual ministry at Tours gave him the authority

1. Joseph Reinach, Dépêches, Circulaires, Décrets, Proclamations et Discours de Léon Gambetta, Vol. I, (Paris, 1886), p.6.

2. Ibid., p.25.

to launch his policies in earnest.

Thus conceived and implemented, the results obtained from Gambetta and Freycinet's measures were staggering. France, bereft of a provincial army on 4 September, by December supported several: two Armées de la Loire, the Armée du Nord, Garibaldi's Armée des Vosges, as well as several units in the West. Her depots were being flooded with new recruits from the levée en masse. Goltz¹ calculated that for each day of Gambetta's four months of power, 5,000 men were armed - a total of more than 600,000, which included 180,000 gardes nationaux mobilisés, 112,000 gardes mobiles, 20,000 artillery or engineers, 30,000 francs-tireurs, 37,000 cavalry, and more than 230,000 line infantry.² The build-up had matched the Prussians in terms of sheer numbers. But was it really 'numbers' that France needed in order to carry out a successful war of national defence? An analysis of the campaigns which Gambetta's armies undertook perhaps reveals otherwise.

E. The Campaign in the Provinces

The massive reorganisation of France's military system along popular lines and the attendant politics of 'la guerre à outrance' gave France a new strategic outlook. Where once simple defence for the 'honour' of France (or Paris) had been the goal, Gambetta now encouraged visions of victory. This 'strategy of victory' which he came to represent contained several possibilities. The first option was to utilise the militia armies in a war of attrition against the German forces, which were largely tied down with the sieges of Metz and Paris, with clearing operations

1. Goltz, op. cit., p.14.

2. Freycinet, op. cit., pp.28-9.

along the rail lines, and with protecting their lines of communication between Germany and Paris. Moltke was in fact finding his effort suddenly short of troops; only Bazaine's early surrender at Metz on 29 October provided him with sufficient forces to meet Gambetta's provincial challenges. Thus in October, it was conceivable that Gambetta could attack the German forces from several directions at once - the north, the west, the south and the south-east - causing their overextended forces to give up certain strategic aims, particularly the siege of Paris. Once Metz had fallen, 'attrition' was no longer a viable strategy - the forces were again equal in number. A second option, partially discussed in preceding chapters, consisted of the disruption or seizure of the German lines of communication. Francs-tireurs could have destroyed key bridges and tunnels and thus brought German supplies to a halt, while mobile striking forces from the south-east, drawing upon the resources of Lyon and Marseille, could offer support and perhaps even drive against the German units protecting the lines of communication. Such a strategy might have brought the abandonment of German strategic arms without risking the militia armies in open combat with the better-trained German forces. But this strategy was rejected in favour of one calling for the direct relief of Paris. Of the three strategies, this was the most enticing to the French leadership and the most dangerous for her newly-formed militia armies. It offered victory through the relief of Paris while it threatened defeat and demoralisation should the militia armies be destroyed. As Lehautcourt notes, in sum:

...toutes les opérations militaires en viennent à ne viser que deux objectifs: d'une part, sortir de Paris; de l'autre, y entrer. On néglige jusque dans les derniers jours de menacer les communications ennemies. D'ailleurs, l'excès des forces concentrées dans la capitale rend très

difficile l'organisation de la défense en province, et par suite la délivrance de la ville.¹

Strategically, it was an error. Instead of disrupting German concentration, the strategy facilitated it by attacking the one place where German troops were of necessity concentrated: Paris. Instead of aiming at a German weak point such as the long communications line, it aimed at German strength: trained troops manoeuvring on the open battlefield. Yet it is not so difficult to find reasons why Gambetta chose the least desirable military option and placed in its stead an option dictated by political policy. It was Paris which had put the Government of National Defence in power; if the city fell, the only real base of support for the Gambetta regime would be lost. Further, Paris was the emotive symbol of France, and as Howard notes, 'once Paris has fallen to the enemy no French government in modern times has ever yet been able to prolong a war'.² Finally, General Trochu in Paris commanded an Army of more than 260,000 men. The combination of a sortie torrentielle from Paris with an attack on the German lines of investment by a provincial army was the fabric from which national dreams are made, and it proved enticing to Gambetta and his strategists. In order to put their plans into operation, they chose a direct attack from the south by the Army of the Loire, already under formation from the administration of Admiral Fourichon.

1. The Army of the Loire

Gambetta's strategy received an initial setback when, on 10 October, Von der Tann fell upon the nascent Army of the Loire and

1. Pierre Lehautcourt, La Guerre de 1870-1871. Aperçu et Commentaire, Vol.I, (Paris, 1910), p.278.

2. Howard, op. cit., p.285.

thoroughly trounced it, thus leaving the path to Orleans unguarded. Von der Tann then occupied on the next day the city which was at once the gateway to the south of France for the Germans and the bridgehead for the advance upon Paris for the French. Its reoccupation became, necessarily, the new focal point for Gambetta's plans. From all over France units of mobiles, gardes nationaux, as well as a few regulars were assembled into a new Army of the Loire under General Aurelle, who had replaced La Motte Rouge. By the 9th of November, some 70,000 men were assembled in two forces at Blois and Gien, and the convergence of these forces against Von der Tann's 20,000 men could have but one result. Fearing that the major attack was to come from Le Mans, Von der Tann assembled his forces near the village of Coulmiers. Defeated by General Aurelle from the west, he was very nearly ensnared by General Pallières from the east. Though saved from destruction, Von der Tann's forces had suffered the first German defeat of the war.

Coulmiers had provided the French people with their first victory, and Gambetta and the Government of National Defence were not slow to capitalise on it for propaganda and political purposes. The victory, though really of little significance, was compared to Valmy; the Parisians were led to believe that the Army of the Loire would soon be on their doorsteps, while the rest of France was encouraged to think that the militia armies were already superior to the Germans, just as in 1792 when the levée en masse had stopped Brunswick's Prussians. Though the Army of the Loire was gathering strength for another assault north towards Paris, its path was now blocked by the German Second Army, fresh from the consummation of its triumph over Bazaine at Metz. On 10 November, three German Army corps under the leadership of Prince Frederick Charles headed south. From the lines of investment around Paris,

the Duke of Mecklenbourg led a detachment to the west and then south to threaten Orleans from the north-west.

This period was to bring the height of the 'people's war' in France. In Moltke's own words,

We are now living through a very interesting time when the question of which is preferable, a trained army or a militia, will be solved in action. If the French succeed in throwing us out of France, all the Powers will introduce a militia system, and if we remain the victors, then every state will imitate us with universal service in a standing army.¹

For gathering on the Loire for the advance on Paris was the largest militia army yet assembled. General Crouzat marched his 20th Corps in from the Vosges to add his forces to those of Aurelle and Pallières, leaving Garibaldi 'le seul gardien de nos intérêts dans l'Est'.² In the west, 17 Corps under General de Sonis shadowed the movements of Mecklenbourg's Detachment with the aid of Lipowski's francs-tireurs. General Fiéreck, with his 21st Corps, represented a tactical threat at Le Mans. At Gien, the 18th Corps, now commanded by Bourbaki of the Imperial Guard, reputedly one of France's greatest generals, was ready to advance. And in the centre stood the 15th and 16th Corps, victors at Coulmiers. All told, some 200,000 men began an attack northward on the 24th November. The progress was slow and disorganised, as the massive front of the advance now stretched virtually from Le Mans to Gien, and co-ordination among the poorly-trained units became at best difficult. Dissension was rife in both high commands. Freycinet kept urging the timid Aurelle to advance vigorously in the attack, as each day lost only strengthened the German forces manoeuvring in opposition. Moltke fumed at the Duke of Mecklenbourg's ill-conceived and badly-executed march in the West, and the King of

1. Ibid., p.299.

2. Freycinet, op. cit., p.108.

Prussia urged Prince Frederick Charles to be cautious: 'If Prince Frederick Charles is beaten, we must give up the Investment of Paris'.¹ As Hale notes,

The period from November 27th to December 2nd is the decisive period not only of this 'People's War', or of the campaign on the Loire, but it may also be regarded as the decisive period of the whole Franco-German campaign of the Second War, for during it the French Army in Paris made its greatest effort to break through the investing line, whilst from the south the Army of the Loire made its two great attempts to force the investing Army to release the capital from its grip.²

The prelude to the twin battles of Beaune-la-Rolande and Loigny-Poupry was the manoeuvre by the Duke of Mecklenburg against the distant left flank of the French near Le Mans. Having misjudged the true disposition of the French troops, the Duke blundered through increasingly rough country against Fiereck's scarcely-organised 21st Corps at Le Mans. Harassed by francs-tireurs, its lines of communications dangerously exposed along the entire French front, the Detachment clearly courted disaster; the exasperated Moltke urged the King to end the mission and recall the Duke to the aid of Frederick Charles. De Sonis very nearly launched a drive against the Detachment's lines of communication, but feared to disrupt the French concentration.

On the 28th, at the village of Beaune-la-Rolande, came the first major engagement of the battle for the Loire. Crouzat's 20th Corps attacked Voigts-Rhetz and had nearly forced him to retreat, when German reinforcements arrived and enabled him to consolidate his positions. Both sides claimed victory; though the French had been repulsed, the German position had become untenable and had to be evacuated during the night. The

1. Sir Lonsdale A. Hale, The 'People's War' in France, (London, 1904), p.172.

2. Ibid., p.195.

Mecklembourg Detachment, left free by De Sonis' tactical withdrawal, nearly caught Chanzy's Corps in the flank, but a stand by Lipowski's francs-tireurs at the Varize bridge enabled him to pull back to strong defensive positions. The situation was a stalemate.

But on the 30th November a balloon from Paris arrived bringing news to the Tours regime that the great Paris sortie had begun. Freycinet and Gambetta urged an immediate attack to join hands with the Army of Paris. Leaving the 16th Corps to protect Orleans and the 21st Corps at Vendôme, the attack northward was renewed with the 15th, 17th, 18th and 20th Corps - a total of 170,000 men against the 120,000 Germans of Mecklembourg and Prince Frederick Charles. The action opened with the French left flank on 1 December. Chanzy fell upon the Bavarians at Villépion and drove them from entrenched positions. The next day he renewed the attack, as all day the battle raged around Loigny. The French succeeded in capturing the town only to see it fall again to a German counter-attack. De Sonis arrived in support with his poorly trained corps. When his men refused to attack, De Sonis gathered around himself Charette's Papal Zouaves and some francs-tireurs and personally led a night counter-attack on Patay. De Sonis was wounded; Charette fell and was taken prisoner; two thirds of the force became casualties in what must have been the fiercest engagement of the war. The attack gained ground, but the Germans held; De Sonis' troops were spent, the effort was unsupported, and retreat became necessary.

Patay had been the last hope of the French for victory in the battle of the Loire, for on 3 December the tables were turned and the Germans counter-attacked all along the front. Chanzy, now leading 16th and 17th Corps, held firm on the left.

The right, consisting of Bourbaki and Crouzat's 18th and 20th Corps, had not been decisively engaged throughout the entire struggle. Rather, the main German blow came against the weakly-held centre, protected only by the 15th Corps. Although it was the most experienced corps in the French Army, it was out-gunned by Prussian artillery and only feebly supported by the weakened 17th Corps on its left and the 20th on its right. The French centre collapsed before the idle right wing could manoeuvre forward in support, and the battle was lost. It soon became a rout. Panic struck the retreating troops; in the ensuing chaos, Orleans was left virtually unprotected.

The strategic result was the loss of the city of Orleans, the end of the threat to the investment of Paris (the sortie under Trochu had also met with failure) and the division of the Army of the Loire. The Germans had won the battle, but rather than destroying the French Army, their blow had created two new armies for the hydra-headed French effort. Their major gain was the 16,000 prisoners who fell into their hands upon the hasty evacuation of Orleans.

Freycinet and Gambetta were stunned. 'How', they asked Aurelle, 'could an army of 200,000 men retreat?'. The twin disasters of Paris and Orleans meant that the status quo prior to Coulmiers had been re-established: a month of hard fighting had yielded nothing. Aurelle was made the scapegoat, but no new commander-in-chief was named. Hereafter, the militia armies would act individually under the leadership of such generals as Chanzy in the West, Faidherbe in the North and Bourbaki in the East. Disheartened, but not defeated, the French leaders set about their task of organising new efforts for the relief of Paris.

2. The West with Chanzy

The division of the French Army after the battle for the Loire brought with it a shift of theatre to the West, the East and the North. Chanzy, with the 16th and 17th Corps, joined the 21st Corps at Le Mans. His army became known as the 2me Armée de la Loire, and it soon posed a serious challenge to the German lines of investment around Paris. The western part of the encirclement had always been the weakest; and due to the numerous detachments necessary to combat the Republican Armies, the density of the investing forces fell to 2,000 soldiers per kilometre. The Germans, saved from disaster on the Loire only by the timely surrender at Metz and the subsequent shift of their entire Second Army to meet the French challenge, now faced a new troop shortage.

Chanzy engaged the Duke of Mecklembourg near Beaugency only a few days after the defeat at Orleans, and with such a vigour that the Bavarians nearly crumbled. But a tactical retreat by part of the French line brought panic and débandage at the end of the day. The German attack the next day made big gains, and Chanzy was forced to retire towards Le Mans to regroup his army. This general retreat again brought massive débandage, but the Germans could not pursue Chanzy any further owing to losses and the necessity of watching Bourbaki and the other half of the Army of the Loire.

Chanzy thus had the rest of December to refit his army. By 1 January the Germans knew that he represented a major threat. For ten days they manoeuvred for the attack. Chanzy, reinforced with militia units from 1^e Armée de Bretagne at Conlie, had prepared crude trenchlines on a strong defensive position for his 200,000 men. Chanzy's army held firm against the attack by

180,000 Germans for the entire day, and it looked as though the Germans might suffer a major setback. But at dusk, an attack was launched upon the key position of Tuileries, held by barefoot, poorly-armed, virtually untrained mobiles from Conlie. After holding without support for two hours, they broke; the entire French position crumbled during the night and early morning. Both sides had lost 4,000 casualties each, but in the débandage that followed, 15,000 men were taken prisoner by the Germans and a further 30,000 deserted en masse, choking the roads leading away from Le Mans in their flight. But the Germans were too battered to pursue Chanzy; once again he had been repulsed, not annihilated. Indefatigable, he withdrew into Brittany and once more began to refit his army, such that by the armistice at the end of January, he was once again ready to attack at the command of Gambetta.

3. The North with Faidherbe

The North had always been just out of reach of the Germans; while its industrial might continued to support the national defence, the region in itself posed no strategic threat to the Germans and thus found itself low on their priority list. The North contained only a few garrison troops. Bourbaki, prior to his departure for the battle for the Loire, had been in command of the northern region, though he had accomplished very little:

...la confiance dans l'efficacité de la prolongation de la défense lui faisait défaut; lui qui venait de voir anéantir de magnifiques armées ne pouvait fonder beaucoup d'espoir sur un ramassis de recrues de prisonniers évadés, de milices mal armés et tout-à-fait novices.¹

Bourbaki was glad to be called away to the south where the decisive action was to be fought. The new commander in the North,

1. Louis Léon Faidherbe, Campagne de l'Armée du Nord en 1870-1871, (Paris, 1871), pp.9-10.

Faidherbe, a former colonial official, was a man used to wringing organisation out of chaos. In one month, he had assembled an army of 35,000 men, consisting of the 22nd and 23rd Corps; and his force was proclaimed to be combat-ready. In a major engagement at Amiens, his army stood off an equal number of Germans and inflicted heavy casualties on them. On 23rd December, his men engaged the Germans at Pont-Noyelles and again repulsed them, though both sides claimed victory. In early January he manoeuvred his men to Bapaume, defeated the Germans, and, had he persevered, would have forced the Germans to lift the siege of Peronne. His war of manoeuvre was beginning to upset the Germans, who now had to worry about threats to the lines of investment from the north as well as the West (Chanzy) and the east (Bourbaki). The culmination of the campaign came 18-19 January, at the battle of St. Quentin. In a fierce battle, Faidherbe took 3,000 casualties and had 11,000 taken prisoner when his fatigued army came face-to-face with a much stronger German force. Having lost one third of the Army of the North, Faidherbe had to leave the field. The 22nd Corps embarked to join Chanzy, and the rest of the troops were scattered around the garrisons to defend the region until the armistice on 28 January.

Faidherbe had done remarkably well with very little resources - a conclusion supported by the Army's historical analysis of the campaign:

Quelles que soient les critiques de détail qu'aient suggérées les opérations de l'armée du Nord, il est certain que rien de plus ne pouvait être accompli par elle.

Au début l'effort des organisateurs fut immense; leur oeuvre fut magique; mais deux faibles corps d'armée ne suffisaient pas pour débloquent Paris.

On a prétendu que le général Faidherbe pouvait agir sur les lignes de communication de l'ennemi; avec des détachements isolés, peut-être, mais engager l'armée dans la région de l'Est, sans espoir de la ravitailler, en vivres et en munitions, n'aurait été qu'une entreprise chimérique.

Le général Faidherbe devait donc forcément se borner à attirer vers lui, le plus possible, les forces ennemies, pour dégager les théâtres d'opérations principaux.

Ce but il l'atteignit en livrant quatre batailles en deux mois. Elles furent acharnées, et si souvent incertaines, qu'une impression nette, indiscutable se dégage: si la garde nationale mobile avait été armée, solidement encadrée et instruite, le sort de la campagne eût été tout autre, malgré l'organisation ennemie, malgré la démoralisation causée par les premiers désastres.¹

Had other generals shared his ambition, grasp of the military situation, and skill in employing militia troops, the national defence by the armed people might have gained more credibility; it might even have won victories the match of Coulmiers.

4. The East with Bourbaki

If 'good leadership and few resources' characterised Faidherbe's northern campaign, Bourbaki's eastern campaign represented, in Freycinet's words, 'notre plus mauvais général à la tête de notre meilleure armée'.² It was to be France's last great effort to turn the tide, in the theatre which had always offered the most promise yet had somehow always been ignored. Although neglected in favour of the Loire campaign, the theatre had never been inactive. Garibaldi's guerrilla army, Crémer's corps, and franc-tireur units scattered from Langres to the Vosges had managed to cause the Germans a good deal of trouble; some 140,000 Landwehr troops had been brought in to protect the lines of communications stretching towards invested Paris. Garibaldi's coup de main at Châtillon on 14 November and the daring bayonet attack on Dijon the night of the 26th which very nearly succeeded, had given the Germans quite a scare. After holding at Autun on 1 December he was

1. France, Army, Etat-Major, Section Historique, La Guerre de 1870-1871: 'Campagne de l'Armée du Nord', Vol.IV, p.163.

2. P.A. Dormoy, Guerre de 1870-1871. Les Trois Batailles de Dijon, (Paris, 1894), p.256.

given a breathing space in which to refit his guerrilla army. The slack was taken up by Crémer and Bourras. In a bitter battle at Nuits, Crémer was repulsed, but not before each side had lost more than a thousand casualties. Garibaldi covered Crémer's flank, enabling him to disengage, and the Germans were too battered to offer pursuit. Werder, the German commander upon hearing that this region of France was known as the Côte d'Or replied, 'Surely it is the Côte de Fer!'

Gambetta and Freycinet, encouraged by the activity in this theatre, finally saw the strategic potential it held for relieving the Paris blockade by threatening the German lines of communication. Garibaldi had advocated such a blow as early as October, and now was to come the campaign he had inspired as a last desperate effort before Paris ran out of food and fuel. Gambetta quietly began to assemble the troops for the effort which would be commanded by Bourbaki. Bourbaki already had 50,000 troops. Crémer had 12,000; Garibaldi 14,000; the Besançon garrison totalled 20,000; and Bressoles had another 20,000 - more than 110,000 against Werder's 35,000 over-extended Germans.

The challenge to the Germans was the severest since the battle for the Loire. Chanzy was refitting in the West, Faidherbe was on the rampage in the North; Paris could yet afford another sortie; and now the East as well was to become a major theatre. Dijon was tactically evacuated on the 27th December as Werder regrouped his forces to the north; and Garibaldi occupied the city in early January; echeloning his men to the left as far as Langres in order to protect the left flank of the grand manoeuvre. The Army of the East, composed of the 15th, 18th, 20th and 21st Corps, Crémer's division and a reserve of 9,000 men, began its manoeuvre to the north-east. Bourbaki's mission was twofold - to

lift the blockade around Belfort as well as to drive against the lines of communication. Its accomplishment, according to Freycinet, required two features: speed, and conservation of the rail communications to facilitate troop movements.¹ The French had not really mastered rail transport co-ordination throughout both phases of the war; the slowness and chaos of this particular campaign was alarming. Bourbaki reacted with timidity and torpor to a situation which called for firmness and speed. Every day that his manoeuvres were delayed or made little headway, the Germans were able to regroup and reinforce, until by the end, they had matched the French build-up which had initially caught them napping. The last chance for France was being frittered away by inept leadership and in its stead was ushered the greatest French military disaster since Sedan and Metz.

On 9 January Werder's 35,000 men met part of Bourbaki's force at Villersexel. An all-day battle developed, for which both sides claimed victory. Had Cr mer's crack division been present to follow up the attack, the battle might well have resulted in a rout for the Germans. As it was, Werder was able to disengage and continue the regrouping operation. On the 13th the two forces met again at Arcey; while Bourbaki's force was victorious, the Germans were again able to retire in good order. On the 14th, the two armies faced each other at H ricourt; only now, Werder commanded 60,000 men as well as 20,000 troops around Belfort. The result was the three-day Battle of the Lisaine for supremacy in the East. If victorious, the French could have lifted the siege of Belfort and then driven against the lines of communication. By the 17th of January both sides were close to ordering a retreat,

1. Freycinet, op. cit., p.224.

but it was Bourbaki who lost courage first and ordered what became one of the worst retreats in French military history. The tide had been restored completely in favour of the Germans. In another three-day battle, 21-23 January, Garibaldi held Dijon against determined German attacks and managed to capture a Prussian battle standard - only the second captured from the Germans since August. But the damage had been done in another way. With Garibaldi's forces fixed at Dijon, there was no-one to protect Bourbaki's flank; the Germans were able to drive south-east under Manteuffel, to capture Bourbaki's line of retreat and supplies, and to push the French Army ever nearer the Swiss border. Disaster was not long in coming. Garibaldi at Freycinet's insistence, attacked in support of Bourbaki, recapturing Dôle; but it was too late. While the armistice was signed in Paris on the 28th of January, the East, unknown to Garibaldi and Bourbaki, had been exempted. Garibaldi stopped his advance to comply with the armistice, was attacked by the Germans, and was forced to retreat to Autun. On the 30th Bourbaki attempted to commit suicide and on the 31st his successor, Clinchant, led 80,000 men to internment in Switzerland. The German gains in the East, after the armistice had already been signed in Paris, virtually precluded the renewal of hostilities in the provinces and forced France to accede to German terms. French resistance was at an end.

Bourbaki blamed Garibaldi for the defeat; the guerrilla leader had failed to protect Dôle and his lines of communication. The French right-wing, always eager to heap abuse on Garibaldi, was quick to agree with Bourbaki's analysis. In the Parliamentary Inquest, the following conclusion was reached:

Vous en tirerez vous-même cette conclusion...c'est que si le général Garibaldi avait été un général français... ne devait-il pas être traduit devant un conseil de guerre, pour y répondre de sa conduite, comme ayant abandonné à

l'ennemi, de propos délibéré et sans combat, des positions qu'il avait reçu mission de défendre; et comme ayant par là occasionné la perte d'une armée française et amené un désastre militaire qui n'aura de comparable dans l'histoire que les désastres de Sedan et de Metz.¹

How Garibaldi was supposed to hold the area between Dijon and Bourbaki as well as the Dijon-Langres line against 45,000 troops, while he himself commanded only 15,000 men already under attack at Dijon, was not covered by the Commission. The loss of Dôle, Bourbaki's supply base, could not be directly attributed to Garibaldi, who according to Freycinet was operating on the other side of Dijon, but rather to Bourbaki himself, who failed to detach forces to guard the city. As for the non-existent co-ordination between the two generals, the right-wing again blamed Garibaldi. But in an extraordinary interview before the Commission, Bourbaki was asked

'Garibaldi a-t-il cherché à vous rejoindre?' [His response.]
'Je ne pense pas, et, quant à moi, je ne l'ai jamais désiré. Tout ce que je souhaitais, c'était que, ni lui ni ses officiers ne se trouvassent en rapport avec mon arrivée; mais j'étais en droit d'espérer que Garibaldi garantirait mon flanc gauche.'²

How was Garibaldi to co-ordinate efforts with a French General who neither desired nor solicited co-ordination?

The disaster was more attributable to Bourbaki's leadership. With speed and firmness, Bourbaki's 3 to 1 advantage over Werder should have enabled him to drive the Germans from the field. Instead the decisive battle did not come until the Germans had time to reinforce. Bourbaki then lost control over himself as well as his army, and the check at the Lisaine became a rout. He remarked to Briegère, 'J'ai vingt ans de trop. Les généraux

1. Enquête Parlementaire sur les Actes du Gouvernement de la Défense Nationale, Rapports VII, (Paris, 1872), p.187.

2. Ibid., Témoins, Vol.III, p.356.

devraient avoir votre âge'.¹ Deprived of proper leadership, even the best troops could do little to alter such a campaign.

The French Army's official analysis largely supports Freycinet's views:

Tout était consommé et la partie était perdue, sans avoir été jouée réellement. Ce qui restait des forces à l'Armée de l'est allait rapidement disparaître dans une pénible retraite, en attendant le plus affreux désastre.²

The campaign envisaged by Freycinet was never fully carried out. But their analysis also cuts deeper. The operation contained a special flaw by way of the double mission it purported to accomplish.

En un mot, agir sur ces dernières [les lignes de communication] et débloquent Belfort étaient deux opérations distinctes et difficilement conciliables. Que dans la pensée de l'auteur du plan de campagne, la première mission l'emportât en importance sur la seconde, c'est ce dont on ne saurait douter. Mais que des militaires expérimentés ait justement choisi entre les deux partis à prendre, le plus dangereux et le plus stérile, puisque la place de Belfort marquait par la vigueur de sa résistance qu'elle n'avait nul besoin de secours, c'est ce qui ne peut s'expliquer que par les circonstances vraiment étranges dans lesquelles fut communiqué et accepté le plan de campagne.³

The Austrian general, Kuhn, concurred:

Or, le déblocage de Belfort n'était pas le rôle de Bourbaki, mais bien le déblocage de Paris: celui de Belfort aurait été une conséquence naturelle.

Le déblocage de Paris ne pouvait être obtenu que par une vigoureuse offensive vers Vésoul, Troyes, Bar-sur-Aube. Tout ce qu'il y avait de forces allemandes dans cette région, y compris le corps Werder, devait être culbuté afin de couper les communications des Allemands avec leur pays. C'est Vésoul qu'il fallait atteindre, et cela, en coupant Werder de Belfort et en le battant. Ainsi on avait à sa disposition des deux lignes ferrées de Dijon et de Besançon sur Vésoul.

Au lieu de cela ce général incapable conduit son armée dans le terrain difficile entre l'Ognon, le Doubs, et la Lisaine, où le ravitaillement devait être très difficile.

1. France, Army, op. cit., Vol.III, p.396.

2. Ibid., p.396.

3. France, Army, op. cit., Vol.I, pp.54-5.

Tandis qu'un orage s'accumulait dans l'Ouest...

L'écrasement de Werder eût été facile, car, le 5 janvier, le corps d'armée était dispersé sur un front de 40 kilomètres, de Neuville-la-Charité à Villefaux...

Bien conduite, l'armée de l'Est aurait pu sauver la France.¹

Instead of saving France, the disaster with which the campaign ended virtually precluded the renewal of hostilities. While Chanzy had been pushed back into Brittany, his army was intact; Faidherbe had been driven from the field yet preserved his northern base and sent 18,000 men to Chanzy. Bourbaki had denuded the French defensive line from the Loire to the Vosges leaving only Garibaldi at Autun and a few isolated units which escaped the general disaster. True, Garibaldi might not have co-operated fully; true, the double mission was conceptually flawed. Yet Kuhn's dictum should be Bourbaki's epitaph: 'Bien conduite, l'armée de l'Est aurait pu sauver la France'.

F. The Campaign in Paris

Although the provinces carried the brunt of the fighting, the garrison of Paris was never inactive. From 19 September to 19 January, nine separate engagements were fought against the German encirclement. To carry on this struggle, Trochu had the largest of the Republican armies, really an amalgam of three separate forces. The most reliable of these forces were the nine divisions (105,000 men) commanded by Ducret, which included all the regulars left from the Imperial Army, as well as marines and naval personnel. Next came Vinoy's six divisions of Mobiles (70,000 men) brought in from the provinces prior to 19 September, during the first fortnight of the Government of National Defence's existence, when it

1. Ibid., p.71.

had been thought that Paris alone would resist on behalf of France. These men, all combat-worthy, might have been of greater use to Gambetta in the provinces as the nuclei for his militia armies. Least dependable of all were the 266 battalions of National Guard troops commanded by Clément Thoumas and drawn directly from the Parisian populace. 'No longer was the National Guard a bourgeois counter-revolutionary militia: it was the People of Paris in arms, and the Government may well have wondered against whom these arms were to be used'.¹ They were quite possibly of more comfort to the Ultra-Left of Flourens and Blanqui than to Trochu's regime and its efforts for national defence. Finally, there was a force of 100,000 men who garrisoned the forts around Paris.

The first test of strength between the French Army of Paris and their German encirclers came on the 19th September. In order to complete their investment of Paris, the Germans had to assault the heights of Châtillon overlooking the city. The French effort to defend Châtillon, which was unfortunately outside their regular fortified positions surrounding the city, was belated and somewhat disorganised. Nevertheless, a bitter battle ensued, with the French receiving by far the worst part of it due to the German artillery. Though this was not an auspicious beginning, Trochu had every reason to believe that his forces, which totalled 400,000, would be able successfully to assault the 236,000 Germans spread round a perimeter of more than 80 kilometres. In order to explore the German positions, he decided to launch offensive reconnaissances against various sections of the line. The first, on 30 September, fell at Chevilly, where Vinoy, with 20,000 regulars, stormed three villages, only to be driven back by

1. Howard, op. cit., p.321.

Prussian counter-attacks and artillery. The second, at Bagneux on 13th October, met with more success - both sides lost about 400 men, but the French captured 200 Germans which they took as prisoners back to Paris. On the strength of these two reconnaissances, and of intelligence gathered about the German lines, it was decided that the best chance for a breakout was in the Malmaison area west of Paris. In order to test the strength of the defences in the area and thus gain necessary tactical intelligence, a limited attack was conducted on 21 October. 8,000 men attacked, gained ground, were halted short of the main German position and were ultimately driven back in disorder. Despite this apparent failure, plans were begun for the grande sortie to take place in late November.

The next engagement, however, came at the Le Bourget on 27-30 October; it was not planned by Trochu but was rather the inspiration of the Francs-tireurs de la Presse. Tired of the inactivity of garrison duty and encouraged by a rival of Trochu, the unit pulled off a daring night attack which drove the Prussians from the village. To the left-wing, anti-Trochu press and the people of Paris, who were hungry for any victory, the operation took on an emotive significance far out of proportion to the actual military significance of the captured village. Trochu thought the position untenable and when, on 30 October, the Germans counter-attacked, he was proved right, though it had cost the Germans 500 dead to retake the village. His failure to maintain what the francs-tireurs had gained caused a storm of anti-Trochu sentiment in Paris; coupled with news of the capitulation of Metz, the incident almost proved a sufficient pretext for an insurgent government under Flourens and Blanqui, propped up by certain battalions of National Guardsmen, to take

power on 31 October. The entire incident, from the misdirected, isolated and unnecessary sortie to the revolutionary upheaval which nearly succeeded, took valuable time and effort away from the preparation of the major sortie planned for Malmaison on the 15th November.

But the sortie on the part of the line over which information had been carefully gathered was destined not to occur for another two months. For on the 14th November Trochu received exaggerated news of the victory of Coulmiers. Paris was jubilant; the press cried 'Ils viennent à nous; allons à eux!'.¹ Trochu had to shift the area of attack to the south against the most heavily fortified part of the line in order to link up with the Army of the Loire marching to their salvation. The attack took place on the Marne, the 29th of November, but the Germans were prepared. Eighty thousand French attacked for what became a five-day battle. The French had lost 12,000 men and gained nothing.

Trochu next tried a sortie to the north; at Le Bourget on 21 December Prussian artillery decimated the French as they tried to advance across an open plain. The morale of the troops was now declining precipitately, and when a week later the Prussians bombarded Avron, it had to be evacuated for lack of defenders. The government had lost confidence in the army; the people had lost confidence in the government. Paris' chapter in the Franco-Prussian War was drawing dramatically to a close: on 5 January the Prussians began terror-bombing the city, and food shortages were critically low. Still the people of Paris clamoured for a sortie torrentielle against the German investment. Just as Gambetta had wondered how an army of 200,000 could retreat at

1. Ibid., p.341.

Orleans, so the people of Paris wondered how an army of 400,000 could fail to break through the lines of encirclement.

Trochu agreed to a final sortie to be held on the 19th January at Buzenval - two months after it had been originally planned. The two useless attacks at Le Bourget and the great sortie attempted at the south had crippled the army and destroyed its confidence; this last desperate sortie might well have succeeded had it been carried off on schedule; 90,000 men, half of them Gardes Nationaux, went into the attack, albeit half-heartedly. 4,000 casualties as opposed to insignificant German losses of 700, decided the issue once and for all. The French Army returned to Paris, dejected and disorganised. Although the Left called for yet another sortie, 'Vinoy's whiff of grapeshot'¹ on 22 January cleared the streets of leftist opposition to Trochu. Four days later the Germans took possession of the Paris forts in return for provisions for the starving city, and on the 28th the armistice was formally concluded. Paris and the Government of National Defence had surrendered.

G. France's Military Resources at the Armistice

The armistice was signed by the Government of National Defence of Paris. Yet the man most responsible for the politics of 'la guerre à outrance' had not signed. Gambetta's power lay no longer in Paris, but rather in the local defence Ligues of the South-west and of the Midi, based upon Bordeaux, Lyon and Marseille. It was possible for Gambetta to continue the war without Paris' sanction, thus forcing the Germans to occupy every inch of France and to

1. Ibid., p.370.

destroy every French unit the national defence could throw together.

If this was Gambetta's plan, the major blow came with the defeat of Bourbaki and the internment of 80,000 men in Switzerland. That, coupled with the 'captivity' of the 400,000-man garrison of Paris, meant that the Republic had lost its two finest armies in a matter of days. Further, the Germans would now be free to manoeuvre north, west, south and south-east with the troops which had formerly encircled Paris and confronted Bourbaki. The North would have fallen quickly; Faidherbe had been driven from the field, and the North's fortresses could not have held for long against the German armies. In the south-east, Garibaldi had been reinforced to 40,000 - the largest number he had ever commanded; yet, he would have been decisively outnumbered had the Germans descended upon him. Lyon and Marseille, though still important centres, had few military preparations for defence and could not have held out long. In the West, Chanzy was refitting his army, which still had well over 100,000 men. And the Armée de Bretagne was finally coming into its own, despite Gambetta's efforts to kill it. Charette, Lipowski and Cathelineau, who had screened the Armée de la Loire throughout its entire campaign, as well as General Berenger, were each given command of 15,000 mobiles to form an army of chouans 60,000 strong capable of defending every last inch of their native Breton soil.

Had Garibaldi been given a free hand to conduct partisan operations with his 40,000 men, while the Bretons defended the West, France would have returned to the strategy it had rejected at the beginning of the war - a guerrilla defence of the countryside. Chanzy might have taken his army south, drawn upon the camps d'instruction for recruits and refitted an entire army

several hundred thousand strong, while the partisans attempted to disrupt German incursions deeper into French territory. Moltke might again have found himself short of troops in a situation more precarious than after Coulmiers or before the Lisaine. War weariness in Germany, combined with bitter partisan activity in the countryside, might have turned the tide.

Even in defeat the French were not defeated. 'La guerre à outrance' enjoyed considerable support from both the Left and the Right. The forced resignation of Gambetta prevented civil war, and peace was finally made. On the 8th of February, elections were held which returned an Orleans-Legitimist majority, and Thiers became President. The Germans, wary of the Paris populace, staged a very low-key victory celebration at the Arc de Triomphe on 1 March, but left the city the next day to avoid provoking an incident. Peace was precarious, between French and German, between Left and Right. Sixteen days later, it was shattered by the eruption of the Paris Commune - a direct outgrowth of the armed people and their frustration both with the war and their own leadership.

H. Successes and Failures of the Militia Armies

The defeats and problems of the various militia armies should not be allowed to obscure the successes and significance which they did have. The Right in France seized upon every disaster the militia suffered to show why France needed a strong regular army rather than a militia composed of the people in arms, quite forgetting the lessons of Sedan and Metz. The francs-tireurs had been equally discredited by blaming all units for the indiscipline of a few bands and by blaming Garibaldi's guerrilla army for the

defeat of Bourbaki. And the National Guard, the 'perpetrators' of 'the Paris Commune' were held to be the most dangerous of all; clearly the armed people had been an unparalleled disaster for France.

The facts do not support this myopic view born of political prejudice. Perhaps the best proof of the success of Gambetta's policies comes from the more objective accounts of his adversaries:

By the energy of his will he succeeded in animating a country without arms and already tired of resistance, and in drawing it into a struggle which for several months kept the German armies occupied, and taught us to recognise the existence of forces which, without that experience, we should still today undervalue. To him sufficed a few weeks to form out of the chaos of armed men he found available, a well-equipped army of hundreds of thousands.¹

Gambetta's plan, as Goltz saw it, was

...non seulement de former, au moyen de la nouvelle organisation, une armée plus ou moins solide, qui combattit l'invasion, mais bien plutôt de transformer tout le peuple en une armée, de soulever les éléments dans leur profondeur et de les utiliser contre l'Allemagne dans toute la mesure du possible. Il voulût subordonner tous les intérêts à un seul: le rétablissement de la réputation militaire et de la grande politique de la France.²

In this effort, he largely succeeded; where in the first phase of the war there had been virtually no popular resistance to the Germans, the second phase abounded in examples of heroism in all sections of France. The German Army was not slow to note the difference, although their official historians attempt to discount the activities of the French people as much as possible. Hoenig states that

So completely did the changed attitude of the French civil populace towards the Germans during the subsequent operations alter the conditions under which the invaders had to carry on the campaign, and so greatly did it

1. Hale, op. cit., p.44.

2. Goltz, op. cit., p.12.

contribute to the difficulties they encountered in the second war, that it is desirable to contrast the two attitudes somewhat in detail, and to show the results ensuing to the Germans.¹

The changed nature of the conflict, which affected the German operations more than they liked to admit, coupled with the magnitude of the organisational operation carried out under Gambetta's aegis, together would ensure Gambetta a place of respect in history. He armed 600,000 men in the four months of his tenure and sent them against the German invaders. Where there had been no resistance, civilian or military, he succeeded in kindling both. Where there had been no government, he succeeded in building an entire Republican administrative network - all this under the strain of a war of invasion conducted by the largest and best-organised army Europe had ever seen.

The fact that resistance was attempted at all after the military and political disasters of the Empire on 4 September was in itself a kind of success. Even more significant is the fact that the militia armies which Gambetta created caused the Germans some very close moments indeed. 'Real anxiety hardly existed during the first war; it was absent hardly a day during the second'.²

The first really anxious moment for the Germans had come during the battle for the Loire. After Coulmiers, had forces not been freed from Metz by Bazaine's rather early capitulation, it is difficult to see how Moltke could have scraped together enough troops to deal with both the advance of the Army of the Loire and Trochu's grande sortie from Paris. Had the investment been broken Germany still might not have lost the war, but she would have

1. Hale, op. cit., p.13.

2. Ibid., p.18.

suffered a tremendous military and political setback. What character the war might have taken after that is anyone's guess, with a revived French nation and an army growing daily in size, confidence, and ability.

The second anxious moment probably came with Chanzy's battle for Le Mans. Before the Tuileries position broke, the battle might have gone either way; the Germans, though victorious, were too battered to offer pursuit even after the French position had crumbled. Had the Germans been defeated, the lines of investment to the west (where Trochu was conveniently planning his last great sortie) would have been severely exposed. Coupled with the campaigns of Faidherbe and Bourbaki, the French could have once again over-extended the harassed Germans.

The third moment came from Bourbaki's eastern campaign. At one point, he had 100,000 men to Werder's 35,000. His failure to attack promptly and to follow up his attacks at Villersexel and Arcey with vigour meant that Werder was given time to withdraw, regroup, and receive reinforcements, until at the battle of the Lisaine, he was able to turn the tables. This operation, had it succeeded, would have disrupted the German lines of communication. Coupled with the Fontenoy expedition which brought the northern railway lines to a halt, German rail transport could have been completely cut off.

Aside from the organisational effort itself and the close moments the national defence caused for the German invaders, a final success can be attributed to Gambetta's conception of the militia for the defence it afforded to various areas of France. 'Malgré toutes ses victoires, il était impossible à l'Allemagne d'inonder la France de ses armées'.¹ The defensive value of the

1. Goltz, op. cit., p.35.

armies of national defence physically prevented the extension of the German areas of occupation and thus kept the investment of Paris constantly exposed to dangers from several directions at once. Faidherbe held the fortresses of the North; Chanzy was a threat in the West; Bourbaki and Garibaldi offered separate threats in the East. The area beyond the Loire was scarcely touched, although Tours was eventually occupied. The strength of this defence, with the ready availability of supplies from such centres as Bordeaux, Lille-Arras, Lyon and Marseille, meant that Gambetta's politics of 'la guerre à outrance' had real validity. Provincial France might well have continued the effort after the surrender of Paris, thus forcing 'l'armée prussienne à nous poursuivre, à nous bloquer de cantons en cantons, la harceler, la harasser, l'obliger à reculer ou à traiter dans des conditions acceptables'.¹ Such an effort might even have been beyond the resources of the million-man Prussian Army. In the words of Goltz,

Gambetta pouvait assurément être fier de pareils résultats. Il avait fait preuve de qualités éclatantes, d'organisation; il avait, en peu de temps, uni les partis; mis les masses en mouvement, leur avait soufflé un peu de l'ardeur guerrière de la vieille République, et avec sa volonté puissante, il avait dirigé toutes les forces vives vers un seul but, la guerre à outrance.²

In contrast to these successes, the failures of the militia concept of the armed people can be said to be three: historical, organisational and strategic. Gambetta, Freycinet and the French Left they represented were wrong to place so much faith in history's repetition. The Republican tradition of Valmy and the levée en masse was inapplicable in 1870, due to advances in military science from the telegraph and railways to machine guns

1. François F. Steenaekers, Les Télégraphes et les Postes pendant la guerre de 1870-1871, (Paris, 1883), p.564.

2. Goltz, op. cit., p.30.

and massed artillery. If 1870 was not 1792, neither was it 1860; for while the American Civil War matched the Franco-Prussian War in terms of military technology, the length of time the North had to forge its militia armies, the economic and population weaknesses of its opponents, meant that this model was as inapplicable as that of 1792.

The second major failure of the militia armies was organisational. The large armies, which came eventually to outnumber the German invaders, were never properly armed, equipped or led. The numerous policies and call-ups, from Niel, Le Boeuf, Palikao, Fourichon, and ultimately Gambetta, though they finally culminated in the levée en masse which took everyone, created unnecessary confusion. A smaller, more orderly build-up might have kept more within the organisational and operational capabilities of the French Republic. Poorly-trained militia were impossible to manoeuvre; once retreat was called, even though it might only have been a tactical withdrawal, panic and débandage followed. Armies often lost up to a third of their force in retreat, generally ten times the number of casualties they had actually sustained in the battle itself. Although the Mobiles fought bravely, their inability to manoeuvre meant that attacks and defences often went awry. The arms and equipment distributed to the units represented a further organisational defeat. Arms purchased abroad were frequently unserviceable, and even had they all been good, the problems of resupplying sixteen different kinds of rifle ammunition to the scattered units of the Army would have surpassed even Moltke's organisation genius. Many troops were without proper winter clothing, and some even lacked shoes, particularly units who found themselves in political disfavour, such as the Armies of the Vosges and of Bretagne. Such deficiencies

constituted a major hindrance to Republican efforts in the unusually bitter weather from November to February. Although the organisational measures of Gambetta and Freycinet surpassed those of the Germans in comprehensiveness, the implementation of those measures left much to be desired. Organisationally, the effort was too much attempted in too little time with too few resources against too great odds. Perhaps the regular officers who led the troops into combat understood this better than did Gambetta and Freycinet; their reluctance to press the troops in the attack might have come from a more balanced assessment of the troops' capabilities and deficiencies than that in which the overly-zealous Gambetta had come to believe.

Finally, the major failures of the militia concept of the armed people were strategic in nature. The adoption by both sides of a 'Paris-first' strategy served to help the Germans. The National Guard would have been sufficient to defend Paris, thus freeing 270,000 of the best troops France had left for operations in the provinces. Though the Germans did not want to assault Paris, even had they done so and captured the forts, the prospects of conquering Paris street by street against an extremely hostile population cannot have been encouraging. Had these troops been initially available for provincial armies, Paris might not even have been invested; the dangers, with two armies (including Metz) still in the field, would have been too great. The Paris-first strategy also largely determined the tactics adopted by the provincial armies formed by Gambetta. These forces always advanced towards Paris, thereby attacking German strength rather than weakness. Ironically, it was the German invaders rather than the French defenders who were able to take advantage of interior lines in the campaigns launched to liberate Paris. Further, by

adopting a Paris strategy, the war effort could be timed by the dwindling stocks of wheat in the city. Once Paris fell, it was too late, psychologically, to switch efforts to the provinces. Paris' surrender became an excuse to end the war when resources for protracted war still existed.

The tactical campaigns which came to be known as the battles for the Loire, the West, and the East all contained strategic faults. Though the Loire battle might have succeeded, it was a tremendous risk to expose the French Army to open combat with the German Second Army fresh from Metz. That the Army was split in two by the German attack rather than annihilated was a fortunate occurrence, even though it meant the fall of Orleans and the end of the threat from the south. Chanzy's campaigns in December and January were, similarly, over-ambitious; though they remain a credit to the fighting ability of the militia under enthusiastic leadership, the results obtained were not of significant value to the overall French defence effort. Finally, the campaign in the East, containing as it did the double mission of relieving Belfort and of driving against the German lines of communication, was in fact a belated and poorly-led effort which resulted in the loss of the Republic's best army at the moment when the armistice was imminent. Besides eliminating a valuable counter for negotiations, the loss of the Army of the East meant that the war could be renewed only with great difficulty should the German demands prove excessive.

It is always easy to criticise an effort that failed so obviously as the French national defence. Yet, the alternative strategies available to Gambetta which had been rejected out-of-hand cast important light on the question of the militia pattern of the armed people. Of the alternative strategies which Gambetta

might have chosen, two were still consistent with a 'Paris' strategy, though, perhaps they could be termed 'Paris second' rather than 'Paris first' strategies. The first of these would have been the slow formation of proper armies in the north, west, south and south-east, until in terms of armament, equipment and training they were more nearly the match of their Prussian adversaries. They might have then attempted a simultaneous offensive in December against the Paris investment from their bases, perhaps coupled with a Parisian sortie torrentielle in the most likely direction of success. The attackers could certainly have outnumbered the Germans by December, and it would have proved extremely difficult for the Germans to find enough troops to meet all the challenges at once. Rather, they were able to deal with the Republican challenges piecemeal in November, December and January, and thus to defeat each in detail. The second of these strategies termed 'Paris-second' would have consisted of a lightning blow at the German lines of communication in late November. Had elite units with good leadership gathered in the East and driven suddenly north, they might well have succeeded. Coupled with the shackles imposed by several small fortresses which still guarded parts of the railways and with raids by franc-tireur units (such as the later Fontenoy expedition) against key railway bridges and tunnels, the attacks would have left the Germans in a critical strategic position: without a chance of resupply, in firm control of no region of France save Alsace-Lorraine, and facing provincial armies on all sides, they would almost certainly have had to give up their investment of Paris and fight their way back to eastern France. Either of these 'Paris-second' strategies might have had a better chance of liberating the city than the 'Paris-first' strategy adopted by

Gambetta which sent militia armies into open combat against the German armies before they had been properly trained and armed.

There was one alternative which would have made the resistance of Paris a separate question from that of the rest of France. The provinces might have adopted a defensive posture more in keeping with the protracted war theme of Gambetta's 'guerre à outrance'. Had Paris held out until January, as it did, while Republican Armies were given five months to train and organise into effective units backed by solid local defence networks, the Germans would have been in an unenviable position. Though they would have controlled a third of France including the capital, they still would not have had enough troops to flood the remaining sections of France, each defended by a properly-organised militia army. Militia armies operating in the defence of their own regions would then have represented a far more formidable challenge than did Gambetta's hastily-organised armies operating on the attack.

Finally, the strategy most likely to succeed was one which utilised the francs-tireurs and the militia in combination. Urban guerrilla resistance in Paris after the surrender of the forts would have virtually precluded any pretensions of German control of the hostile capital; in the third of France already overrun, francs-tireurs could have operated in maquis-style behind enemy lines; commando raids could have continually plagued German communications; each city and town in the other two-thirds of France could have been fortified and defended by gardes nationaux sédentaires supported by elite francs-tireurs units like Lipowski at Châteaudun or Garibaldi at Dijon. Then Republican armies, given time to form behind the screen of partisan activity, could have engaged the Germans in mobile, protracted war in defence of

French soil. Moltke's million men might well have proved insufficient against 38 million resolute French, each a soldier in the national defence.

The implementation of such measures, however, would have required a truly revolutionary regime. While the moderates of the Government of National Defence had been able to unite most Frenchmen behind the war effort and had even secured temporary acceptance of their 'revolution' of 4 September, their defeat shattered the political consensus and reopened the debate over war and revolution.

As Professor Howard noted,

There were those who would prefer defeat to revolution. There were those who wanted revolution even at the price of defeat. There were those who would have accepted revolution if it could be shown it would have averted defeat. There were those who condemned the revolution because they believed it would make defeat more certain. All were understandable positions.¹

These positions, 'understandable' in the days following 4 September, had been further hardened by the events of the unsuccessful war; they could no longer exist side-by-side. Each had become identified with a political position, the strength of which would be gauged first by the ballot box and second by civil war. Ironically, had the armed people fought on, whether as guerrillas or militiamen, the conflict would almost inevitably have assumed revolutionary people's war dimensions. But although the Government of National Defence had stopped short of such measures, it had created the conditions for yet another form of revolutionary conflict. The workers in Paris had been armed but scarcely exercised in the national defence; they had not been disarmed by Bismarck; they could not now be disarmed by their own government.

1. Howard, personal correspondence, 18 February 1974.

VI. FROM WAR TO REVOLUTION

France in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War, with its territory divided and occupied by the Germans, its army embittered by defeat, and its metropolitan population frustrated by five cruel months of siege, was fertile ground for a revolutionary movement. Yet the collection of assorted Blanquists, Jacobins and Internationalists which had nearly taken power on 4 September, had been tricked into defeat on 31 October, and had been crushed after their failure on 22 January, proved incapable of providing leadership despite the issues raised by the Armistice, the Peace and the Elections. Blanqui was in hiding; the radicals' newspapers had been suppressed; the Internationale's sections were ruined and so dispersed that, 'si le public savait tout cela, il jugerait combien nous sommes faibles et l'association tomberait du coup'.¹ Instead, the revolutionary leadership was to come from a group of 'hommes inconnus' who formed the Central Committee of the Federated Battalions of the National Guard.

Throughout the war, the Right had never accepted the National Guard as a legitimate fighting force. The Parliamentary Inquest into the Insurrection of the 18 March, rather, considered the National Guard as a major factor in the defeat as well as the perpetrator of the Paris Commune:

Elle crée donc, a côté de la force régulière, une force désordonnée. Avec elle l'indiscipline s'introduit dans les rangs des soldats par le principe de l'élection des chefs; par la discussion sous les armes; par la contagion de l'esprit frondeur insubordonné, rebelle à toute autorité.

1. Les Séances officielles de l'Internationale à Paris pendant le siège et pendant la Commune, (Paris, 1872), p.37.

Le 18 mars a prouvé que mettre un fusil dans la main de chaque citoyen muni déjà d'un bulletin de vote, c'est, à courte échéance, décréter la guerre civile.¹

Yet during the siege the National Guard had scarcely been a mechanism for revolution. The 300,000 men, predominantly from the working and lower-middle classes, who answered the call on 6 September, did so out of patriotic motives; for as Williams notes, 'city workers were the most enthusiastic segment of the population ...for the war against Prussia in 1870'.² Blanqui's first appeal to worker battalions for support was rejected 46-19 in a meeting of their elected commanders. Until 31 October, Flourens failed to carry firm support even from his notorious Belleville battalions; and in the insurrection itself, most of the battalions, though lukewarm to Trochu and the Government of National Defence, opposed Blanqui, Flourens and their Commune. But thereafter, as Trochu's sorties met with dismal failure, the radical consciousness of the National Guard became more apparent. The Guard was finally used in the disastrous Buzenval sortie of 19 January, after Trochu had stated, 'if 20 or 25,000 men were left on the field in a great Battle beneath the walls, Paris would capitulate; the National Guard will consent to peace only after losing 10,000 men'.³ To the amazement of the regular officers, the National Guard fought well in the futilely-planned sortie. Refuting General Ducrot's slurs on the ability of the National Guard, no less a figure than Minister of War, Le Flô testified that:

Je crois qu'il y a eu de longs intervalles où la garde nationale aurait pu être employée plus fructueusement,

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1. France, Assemblée Nationale, Enquête parlementaire sur l'insurrection du 18 mars, (Paris, 1872), Vol.I, p.385.
 2. Roger L. Williams, The French Revolution of 1870-1871, (London, 1969), p.19.
 3. Frank Jellinek, The Paris Commune of 1871, (London, 1971), p.82.

qu'elle aurait été un élément militaire excellent et que, par conséquent, on a eu tort de ne pas l'employer. Je sais qu'on a voulu finir par là; mais on l'a fait avec mauvaise grâce, d'une façon presque dérisoire...

La cause principale de l'insurrection, c'est, je répète, le mécontentement résultant de nos opérations militaires et du refus qu'on avait fait d'employer la garde nationale, qui je le crois, se serait très bien battue.¹

If the insurrection of 22 January had shown 'how little support the revolutionaries really had', the Armistice of 28 January seemed to prove everything they had been saying. Into the void of revolutionary leadership created by Vinoy's suppression of the Left, stepped the popularly-elected commanders of the National Guard, whose embittered attitude was so much in evidence that Favre told Bismarck the battalions could not possibly be disarmed without provoking a revolution. Tactically, the move was an error for both sides. Favre's colleagues could not believe he had agreed to disarm the government at a stroke while leaving the dubiously-loyal Guard fully armed; and surely Bismarck must later have realised that the Commune victorious could jeopardise his plans for a stable peace by bringing the impetus for renewed war. To prove this contention that the Guard had always been an insurrectionary rather than military organisation, the Right cited an incident on 29 January, the day after the Armistice; Brunel and Piazza led 35 battalions up Voltaire Avenue before being dispersed by some of the 18,000 'forces of order' left to the Government. Yet the target of this disorganised effort had not been 'west' toward the Hôtel de Ville, but rather 'east', where the Prussians occupied the Paris forts; the critical issue for the National Guard was not really power, but rather renewal of the war.

The two issues could not long be separated, for the elections

1. Georges d'Heylli, Journal du Siège de Paris, (Paris, 1871-74), Vol.III, Appendice XXVI, p.636.

held on 8 February had been concluded and revealed a deep division in the French electorate between Left and Right, and between Paris and the provinces. Gambetta had written to Paris as early as 31 December, 'se plaignant de Thiers et ses amis qui traitaient son gouvernement d'usurpation, la guerre d'insensée'.¹ He had wanted the armistice in order to reorganise his provincial armies to carry on the struggle despite the loss of Paris. But Thiers and the 'capitulards' had gained the upper hand, forced Gambetta to resign, and called for the snap elections which consolidated their position by returning a Monarchist majority, abetted by Conservative Republicans, to the Assembly. As Bourgin notes,

Seules les grandes villes, Paris d'abord, au cours de la courte campagne qui commença tout de suite après l'armistice, manifestèrent une réelle activité politique. Joignons-y l'Est, où malgré la présence de l'envahisseur ou, plutôt, à cause d'elle, les électeurs, en grande masse, devaient favoriser les candidats patriotes. Ailleurs, partout où l'on avait moins continûment souffert de la guerre, où l'on avait seulement frissonné à son approche, le corps électoral, hébété, accueillit les rescapés de 1830, de 1848 ou de 1849, des légitimistes et des cléricaux...²

In contrast to the provinces, particularly those not touched by war, which had voted for the Royalists or Conservative Republicans and for peace, Paris voted for the radicals and for war:

Mais aux six partisans de la paix, dont J. Favre, Adolphe Thiers, s'opposèrent trente-sept radicaux gambettistes, Rochefort et ses amis de la Marseillaise, des démocrates révolutionnaires, du groupe de Gambon, Delescluze, Millière, de grands noms à titres divers, Garibaldi, Victor Hugo, Louis Blanc. En somme, Paris interrogé demandait la République et la guerre.³

The Conservative Republican Thiers, elected to the ambiguous

1. Georges Bourgin, La Guerre de 1870-1871 et la Commune, (Paris, 1939), pp.119-20.

2. Ibid., p.142.

3. Ibid., p.145.

position of 'Chef du Pouvoir Exécutif', left open the question of whether the Republic would continue to be the form of government, though he declared it to be the form 'that divides us least'.¹

But the Monarchist-dominated Assembly began what must be regarded as a virtual campaign of antagonism toward Paris, her radicals, and their conception of the Republic, thus giving a real impetus toward revolution to the leaders of the National Guard.

First, Garibaldi was shouted down by the Assembly when he attempted to speak, despite the fact that he had been a hero to the Left and had fought bravely in the defence of France throughout the war; he resigned and left immediately for Italy. Next, the Assembly ratified the Peace Treaty by a vote of 546 to 107, thus prompting the resignation of Gambetta, the deputies from Alsace-Lorraine and six Radicals from Paris over a settlement which not only gave away a large section of France but which also allowed the Prussians free entry into Paris. On 8 March Victor Hugo was shouted down by the 'ruraux' and announced 'first you refuse to hear Garibaldi...now you refuse to hear me...I resign'.² Moving nearer to key issues, the Assembly decided that firmer control over the National Guard was necessary; the anti-Parisian General Aurelle was nominated to replace Clément ~~Thomas~~ Thomas. The radical leaders Flourens and Blanqui, long popular with worker battalions in the National Guard, were sentenced par contumace to death for their role in the 31 October insurrection; further, six radical newspapers were suppressed.

It is arguable that resignations by left-wing deputies, the

1. J.P.T. Bury, Gambetta and the Making of the Third Republic, (London, 1973), p.22.

2. Frank H. Brabant, The Beginning of the Third Republic in France, (London, 1940), p.134.

naming of a new commander for the National Guard, the sentencing of Radical leaders and the suppression of their newspapers did not greatly affect the average Parisian. The measures taken were well within the authority of the new regime, and revolution may not yet have seemed the obvious course to redress grievances. However, the final set of measures cut directly to the heart of the Parisian populace and forced the petite bourgeoisie into the arms of the working class in an alliance against the monarchist-grande bourgeoisie coalition that had been elected to rule France:

Ce que n'avaient pu faire l'Internationale ni le Blanquisme ni les Républicains, le gouvernement de la Défense et l'Assemblée le réalisèrent en quelques semaines, ils gagnèrent à l'esprit de révolte les travailleurs parisiens et leur assurèrent l'appui de la petite bourgeoisie aux abois, n'espérant son salut que d'une Révolution.¹

First came the 'loi des échéances' which made all promisory notes and debts incurred prior to and during the war payable in 48 hours: a further law made all back rents on land and buildings due immediately - despite the fact that most workers and shopkeepers in Paris had suffered enormous hardships during the war and had had no source of income other than the 1.50 francs per day as a soldier in the Guard. Even this source of income was cut off by the Assembly in a move to disenfranchise the National Guard, leaving many Parisians, still out of work due to siege conditions, absolutely destitute. Charity was a concept little understood at Bordeaux, where the Assembly passed judgement on the fate of a France and particularly a Paris they did not know. Even the 100,000 Mobiles de la Seine, a very effective fighting force during the war, were released on the streets of Paris almost without a sou; the response of many was to join the insurgents of Paris.

1. C. Talès, La Commune de 1871, (Paris, 1921), p.29.

As if to crown their effort at alienating Paris from the provinces, the Assembly's last act on March 11 was to dethrone Paris as the capital of France in favour of Versailles.

As the prelude to a Monarchist restoration, the movement of the capital from Paris to Versailles was unparalleled in its implications,¹ It had added insult to injury for the Prussian victory march into Paris had been held March 1-3. The heroic five-months siege to keep the Prussians out of the French capital had been tossed away as a bargaining chip by the insensitive Thiers, who broke a series of government promises made to the people of Paris in order to placate Bismarck and the newly-crowned German Emperor. The effect of the measures, which seemed so sensible to the Assembly and so outrageous to Paris, was to provide the revolutionaries with the issues necessary to organise Paris for opposition to the Thiers regime.

By 24 February the response of the Parisian National Guard to the growing series of rebuffs by the Assembly was to federate into a Central Committee of the various elected commanders, thus providing the Guard's members and their dependents a voice in the affairs of Paris and, by extension, of France. The resolution passed at the meeting carried the concurrence of 215 of the 260 battalions:

(1) The National Guard protests through the intermediary of its Central Committee against all attempts at disarmament, and declares that it will resist these attempts by force if necessary.

(2) The delegates will submit the following resolution to the headquarters of their respective companies:

'At the first sign that the Prussians are entering Paris, all Guards pledge themselves to report immediately in arms

1. Brabant, among others, suggests that Versailles was also the perfect location for directing military operations against the capital. If this was one of Thiers' considerations, it further supports the idea that he deliberately attempted to provoke a civil war.

to their usual assembly point, from which point they will proceed against the invader.'

(3) In the present circumstances the National Guard recognises only those leaders appointed by the National Guardsmen themselves.¹

Though the patriotic element was still strongly present, the political element of the resolutions was growing; as if to reinforce the gesture, the Guard held demonstrations at Place de la Bastille in memory of February 1848 and thereby revealed the extent of the popular support they enjoyed. The Central Committee came to represent a new authority and consciousness in Paris which vastly exceeded that of the Thiers regime - a moral ascendancy that was soon substantiated by such measures as the release of Brunel and Piazza from gaol, the removal of cannons left in or dangerously near the Prussian zone of occupation, to 'safe' popular districts, and finally the decree that

Il sera établi, tout autour des quartiers que doit occuper l'ennemi, une série de barricades propres à isoler coupablement cette partie de la ville. Les habitants de la région circonscrite dans ces limites devront l'évacuer immédiatement.²

The Prussians deliberately staged a low-key celebration in order not to arouse the Parisians, and the National Guard miraculously kept order throughout the occupation of March 1-3. By its actions, 'the Central Committee had united all Paris in a great moral victory; even more, it had united it against the Government which had inflicted this humiliation'.³ Though Vinoy later claimed that the National Guard's presence was part of the regular cordon around the Prussian zone and that he had to pay

1. Stewart Edwards, The Communards of Paris, 1871, (London, 1973), pp.50-1.

2. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Vol.III, p.16.

3. Jellinek, op. cit., p.95.

the Guards double wages to get them to participate, Edouard Moreau, the 'soul of the Central Committee' reported otherwise:

J'allai directement chez Vinoy, allant prendre le boeuf par les cornes (le 28 février à 18 heures): 'Vous menacez d'arrêter les fauteurs de ce que vous appelez un désordre; je suis le plus actif de tous; écoutez mon conseil et arrêtez-moi, si vous l'osez. Pour faire respecter la convention, le seul moyen est d'établir autour du quartier occupé un cordon sanitaire de barricades formidables, élevé et gardé par la Garde Nationale; disparaissez avec vos troupes ou c'est la guerre entre nous et vous et un cordon sera fait quand même'.¹

Given that the Guard by this time obeyed only its own elected commanders, that pay had been suspended rather than doubled for the Guard, and that Thiers would never have consented to the building of barricades anywhere in Paris, let alone so close to key government areas, Moreau's account is the more credible of the two.

Thus, by the middle of March, the problem facing Thiers' regime was no longer simply the disarmament of the National Guard, but rather the re-establishment of governmental authority over Paris. The issue which was to precipitate the conflict between Versailles and Paris was the number of cannons seized by the Guard prior to the Prussian entry, which now sat in artillery parks in such popular districts as Montmartre.

Ever since the seizure of the cannons prior to the Prussian entry into Paris, conservative opinion had been demanding that the Government restore order in the nation's capital. Now, it was being asked, could business be resumed, shops opened up, credit restored in a city ruled by a Committee in declared opposition to the National Assembly and with a population that was daily arming itself, most noticeably by the 'guns levelled on the city' from the heights of Montmartre.²

Thiers had but one card left to play in his deadly game with the Central Committee - the military. Vinoy's division, plus the

1. Marcel Cerf, Edouard Moreau: l'âme du Comité Central de la Commune, (Paris, 1971), pp.99-100.

2. Stewart Edwards, The Paris Commune, 1871, (London, 1971), p.129.

gendarmes, gave him 18,000 men; support of the 'bourgeois' battalions of the Guard, as in 1848, would furnish another 20,000. On 8 March Vinoy's men made a feeble attempt to retake some of the cannons, but they were intercepted by National Guard sentries and forced to call off the attack. Yet it was a good dress rehearsal for 18 March, for by now Thiers was not only intending a coup to disarm the Paris National Guard, he was actively preparing it.¹

In a letter to Jules Simon, Thiers revealed the plans for his coup:

J'espère que la garde nationale - la nôtre - se décidera cette fois. Si elle vient en grand nombre, sa seule présence nous assure la fidélité de l'armée. Alors nous sommes très forts; les fédérés n'oseront pas même résister; nous reprendrons les canons sans coup férir, et le Comité central sera dissous. Si la garde nationale ne se montre pas, il ne nous reste qu'une chance très faible, c'est que le Comité n'ose pas recommencer la lutte; dans ce cas, nous vivrons comme nous le faisons depuis quinze jours, c'est à dire à peu près, et nous verrons venir les événements. Mais s'il y a de la résistance, et si l'armée ne montre pas de fermeté, nous n'avons qu'un moyen d'empêcher une révolution qui serait la ruine de la France, c'est de quitter Paris et d'aller refaire l'armée de Versailles. C'est le plan qui a réussi à Windischgrätz lors des événements de Vienne; c'est celui que j'avais conseillé en 1848 à l'époque des journées de juin, pour le cas où l'insurrection triompherait.²

While the National Guard was calling for 'plus d'armées permanentes, mais la nation toute entière armée, de telle sorte que la force n'opprime jamais le droit',³ Thiers was calling up 30,000 provincial troops and dispatching them to Favre to aid in the execution of his plan. Thiers' plan, a double-edged sword, cut both ways: if the Central Committee did not resist, the troops and

1. Jellinek, op. cit., p.99.

2. Jules Simon, Le Gouvernement de M. Thiers, (Paris, 1878), Vol.I, p.242.

3. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Vol.III, p.34.

bourgeois battalions would easily suffice to seize the cannons, disarm the rebel battalions, and restore order; if the Central Committee attempted resistance, the Army and 'good' battalions might win due to their greater discipline and organisation; finally, if the Central Committee proved too strong and won control of Paris, Thiers planned to retire to Versailles, reforge the army with the aid of the provinces and return to crush radical Paris once and for all. As Thiers unfolded his plan before the cabinet, the reaction was one of sheer amazement; but Thiers was not asking for opinions or even support, he was explaining the role he expected each to play. Vinoy responded, 'Ordonnez, je suis soldat et j'obéirai',¹ though he later admitted before the Enquête Parlementaire 'je n'avais jamais été partisan de l'enlèvement de canons. D'abord je n'en avais pas les moyens'.² If neither the cabinet nor even his commander supported the move, Thiers might have guessed that the bourgeois battalions would be less than enthusiastic. The night before the coup, when Aurelle summoned 30-40 commanders to ask for their concurrence, he was told point-blank 'On ne peut pas compter sur nos bataillons, la garde nationale ne se battra pas contre la garde nationale'.³ Thiers must have known that the mission would fail.

Thiers' action raises two important historiographical questions: first, was the coup really necessary? Second, given the likelihood of failure and Thiers' willingness to flee with his government from Paris, was he deliberately trying to provoke a civil war in which the Left could be crushed? Certainly the

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1. Ibid., Vol.II, p.11.
 2. Ibid., Vol.II, p.97.
 3. Ibid., Vol.II, p.435.

government had the legal 'right' to restore its authority and 'order' on Paris, though the city was not really 'disorderly' - it was only the Thiers regime, and particularly its orders to the National Guard, which were not obeyed. The insulting and threatening attitude of the Assembly to Paris had been largely responsible for the present state of attitudes in Paris, from the federation of the National Guard battalions down to the solidarity expressed by the lower middle and working classes. It is even possible to argue that the cannons, kept in an unready, non-military fashion on the Buttes Montmartre, constituted no real threat to the regime.¹ Further the cannons in a certain sense belonged to the National Guard rather than the Government, for it had been the subscriptions of the units and the people of their districts which had paid for them. But even if one considers the action legally right and strategically necessary, the means used were almost certainly at fault. The sight of regular troops in position throughout the popular quarters could not fail to arouse radical Paris. By substituting work or unemployment compensation for the National Guard's 'trente sous'² and by suppressing the harsh laws on rent and debts, Thiers could probably have defused the situation and watched the Central Committee lapse into obscurity. However, the Right in the Assembly showed little desire to offer concessions to Paris; Thiers, probably willingly, became their instrument of oppression.

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1. This view is reinforced by a report sent by Lord Lyons, the British Ambassador, to the Foreign Office on 16 March, only two days before the insurrection: 'I think the danger to be apprehended from certain corps of the National Guards having militarily established themselves in certain parts of the town, especially on the heights of Montmartre, is perhaps not so great now as when I reported...', FO 1858, Lyons Reports, no.1, 16 March, 1871.
 2. The amount of money given per day to the Guardsmen during the siege.

The second question, whether Thiers deliberately intended to provoke a civil war, similarly invites debate.

Edwards states:

Since a civil war would seem too uncertain an event to be deliberately embarked on, the Government underestimated the strength of the Paris resistance. If the attempt failed it probably expected something more like the three-day uprising of 1848 than the eight-week campaign they brought on themselves.¹

However, because a 'three-day uprising like 1848' is perilously close to most definitions of civil war, Edwards' distinction fails to prove Thiers' case. More convincing is the argument of Lepelletier:

- (1) Le Comité Central et l'Internationale n'ont été rien dans le Dix-Huit mars, ni dans l'insurrection qui en fut la conséquence immédiate;
- (2) Que l'insurrection n'a été nullement préparée par le peuple, par la garde nationale, ou par des conspirateurs; qu'elle fut une surprise et une riposte, et que M. Thiers est seul responsable des événements;
- (3) Que la Commune qui en fut le résultat logique, eut donc pour unique auteur M. Thiers;
- (4) Que les canons auraient pu être, sans danger, laissés à Montmartre et dans les autres parcs, d'où ils eussent été ensuite facilement retirés, soit par un accord avec ceux qui les gardaient, soit à la suite d'un abandon volontaire, par lassitude, par découragement d'une faction sans nécessité;
- (5) Que, la question des canons supprimée, l'insurrection n'avait plus de raison d'être, et la conciliation aurait pu se faire, sur la question principale des garanties pour la République, et sur les points secondaires des franchises municipales de Paris, des adonnissements aux lois rigoureuses sur les échéances et les loyers, de la réorganisation de la garde nationale;
- (6) Que le plan de Thiers, qui n'a échoué que par une circonstance indépendante de sa volonté, le débandage des troupes, a valu à notre malheureux pays deux mois de guerre civile;
- (7) Enfin, que le Dix-Huit mars est un crime, aussi odieux, aussi indigne d'amnistie que le Deux-Décembre, et que le seul criminel... est Thiers, donnant froidement, dans la nuit de 17 au 18 mars, l'ordre de marcher sur les parcs

1. Stewart Edwards, op. cit., p.134. See footnote.

d'artillerie de Montmartre et de Belleville, c'est-à-dire d'attaquer Paris.¹

Thiers had chosen to win, by means of a coup and civil war, a class war he could not win politically, despite the massive support he enjoyed in the monarchist Assembly. Thus, the transition from war to revolution was to be accomplished ultimately not by the professional revolutionaries, not even by the Central Committee and the armed people, but rather by an insensitive Assembly, a threatening Thiers, and a military coup directed in the early morning hours of 18 March against the lightly-guarded artillery parks in the popular arrondissements of Paris.

Yet the causes were far deeper than the precipitant issue of the cannons. Two authorities, two conceptions of the army, two class groupings and two completely different levels of political consciousness were moving irresistibly toward conflict. It was for that reason that Thiers so dramatically misunderstood the opposition he faced and the strength of the reaction which his action would provoke. For the coup united the various threads of opposition which had been latent throughout the war:

1° La tendance nationale ou patriotique, qui se manifeste très fortement chez les blanquistes et trouve sa devise dans le journal La Patrie en danger, tendance très perceptible dans les mouvements fomentés les 21 octobre 1870 et 22 janvier 1871, lors de la retraite du Gouvernement de la Défense Nationale et lors de l'entrée des Prussiens à Paris.

2° La tendance républicaine, démocratique, antimonarchiste et antibonapartiste; très puissante et active chez tous les éléments avancés de la population parisienne, prête à combattre le Gouvernement de Napoléon III et s'opposer à l'attitude des 'ruraux' de l'Assemblée Nationale.

3° La tendance prolétarienne, qui, à l'encontre de ce qui s'est passé en juin 1848, n'exclut pas les autres et qui s'exprime en termes émouvants, par l'organe de la Fédération de la Garde Nationale, dans son appel du 5 avril 1871.

4° La tendance autonomiste où s'exprime le désir des Parisiens de voir libérer la capitale du système politique

1. Edmond Lepelletier, Histoire de la Commune de 1871, (Paris, 1911-13), Vol. I, pp. 383-4.

d'exception qui l'enserme depuis le Consulat, désir qu'avait accru le siège lui-même, et qui paraissait devoir être réalisé, par la chute du Gouvernement Impérial sans mettre en péril l'unité nationale, grâce à un rapprochement plus étroit des communes françaises.¹

These four tendencies - the first, a new patriotism growing out of frustration over the war; the second, a desire to preserve the republic as the form of government for France; the third, the unresolved conflict between worker and owner; and the fourth, the conflict over the role Paris and other Republican cities were to play in the politics of France - combined to form a broad Communalist movement in opposition to the hostile Assembly at Versailles. The Commune, evoking memories of the revolutionary First Commune of 1792-3, reflecting also the Proudhonist notion of federalism, and carrying the standard of independent Paris, was yet a vague term which meant different things to its diverse proponents. Had the insurrection been consciously planned or had it been attempted without direct provocation, it would probably have failed to unite the diverse concepts into a common cause, just as 31 October and 22 January had failed to do. Instead, when Thiers and his Army struck first, the Commune developed almost unconsciously as a united reaction to the events of France crystallised by 18 March.

1. Bourgin, op. cit., p.III.

VII. THE PARIS COMMUNE

The importance of the Paris Commune to the concept of the armed people comes primarily from the fact that it seemed to confirm the suspicions of the men of order: that what, during the war, had constituted simply a vehicle for the mass military organisation of citizen-soldiers had somehow become a revolutionary organism; that, unlike the Prussian 'nation in arms' which had produced the same number of soldiers without the slightest pretence at revolutionary activity, the French 'armed people' had developed into something quite different. After the Insurrection of 18 March 1871, the Commune would have every chance to develop its own revolutionary concept of the armed people, free from the necessity of patriotic obedience to the non-revolutionary regime of 4 September. The interplay between the twin necessities of military and revolutionary organisation would be the most important contribution the Commune could conceivably make; for this interplay alone offered the potential for success and posed the dangers of failure so vital to the very existence of the Commune movement.

A. 18 March: The Armed People Take Command

Failure or success for the coup of 18 March against the Parisian National Guard was only incidental to Thiers' plan for disarming the armed people; he could win both ways, and while he hoped for success, his plans were set for the swift evacuation of Paris should resistance by the Central Committee prove too great. Initially, as the 20,000 regulars spread out to occupy Montmartre,

the Buttes-Chaumont, Belleville, Place de la Bastille, wherever guns were kept in artillery parks by the National Guard, as well as all points of strategic significance in the city, the operation looked like a success. Although only about 600 men had answered Aurelle's call for bourgeois support, by 6.00 a.m. the troops were in place and had encountered virtually no resistance; the 'revolutionaries' had been caught napping, having placed their trust in political power rather than the barrels of their guns:

Rien ne pouvait faire supposer que les choses n'allaient pas s'arranger, et les gens les mieux informés, les journalistes, les hommes politiques, les orateurs et les organisateurs de réunions pendant le siège, les militants blanquistes, comme les affiliés de l'Internationale, se couchèrent le vendredi soir, sans se douter qu'ils se leveraient, le samedi, avec Paris en insurrection.¹

Even the 171 cannons of Montmartre, which Thiers so greatly feared, were guarded only by a lone sentry, who was mortally wounded by General Lecomte's forces. Yet by 8.00 a.m. the teams of horses needed to transport the cannons down the narrow streets to 'safe' government areas had only just begun to arrive, and popular Paris was already astir. First to spread the alarm were the women of Montmartre, who under the leadership of such legendary figures as Louise Michel and Elisabeth Dmitrieff, were to play a large role in the Commune's activities:

Le matin du 18 mars, elles entourèrent les pièces d'artillerie et se mêlèrent aux soldats de la ligne en attendant l'arrivée des gardes nationaux. Le succès de la fraternisation des femmes et des gardes nationaux avec les soldats de la ligne donna le pouvoir au comité central...²

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1. Edmond Lepelletier, Histoire de la Commune de 1871, (Paris, 1911-13), Vol.I, p.316.
 2. Eugene W. Schulkind, 'Le Rôle des femmes dans la Commune 1871', 1848 et les Révolutions du XIX^e Siècle, (Paris, March 1949), pp.16-17.

Lecomte knew that such fraternisation would spell defeat. Three times he ordered his troops to open fire upon the unarmed women and children, and on the National Guardsmen who were just beginning to straggle into formation. The soldiers refused to obey such an infamous order, threw their rifles to the ground, and struck the decisive blow against Thiers' plans for re-establishing order in Paris. Not only in Montmartre, but all over Paris, the soldiers who had shared the Parisians' trials and frustrations throughout the siege refused their commanders' orders, fraternised with the people, and either passed to the side of the revolution or declared themselves neutral. Vinoy, who sat monitoring the news from the headquarters, left the following terse report:

A 9 heures 20, les soldats sont encore maîtres de la rue de Flandre et démolissent la barricade. A 11 heures 25, la situation est changée; une manifestation descend sur l'Hôtel de Ville; elle est mêlée de troupes de ligne [from Lecomte's force]. A 11 heures $\frac{3}{4}$, au Luxembourg, le 135^e de ligne se laisse désarmer; à midi, à la Villette, la troupe fraternise avec l'émeute, 20 hommes de la garde républicaine, qui gardaient la salle de la Marseillaise sont désarmés. A 2 heures 52, les insurgés sont maîtres de la barrière d'Enfer; à 3 heures 50, une compagnie de garde républicaine est désarmée et enfermée à la mairie du 18^e arrondissement. La caserne du Prince-Eugene, occupée par le 120^e de ligne, est envahie par la foule; le régiment fraternise avec le peuple, et dépose ses armes sans en avoir fait usage. A 4 heures $\frac{1}{2}$, les communications sont interrompues.¹

By late afternoon more than just Vinoy's communications had been interrupted, and the Government's forces were yielding ground to the insurgents as barricades were thrown up in a hundred places at once and as the National Guard battalions began to assemble into combat-ready units.

Isolated commanders were gathering their battalions in their districts: Faltot in the rue de Sèvres, Brunel and

1. France, Assemblée Nationale, Enquête Parlementaire sur l'Insurrection du 18 Mars, (Paris, 1872), Vol. II, p.97.

Ranvier in the XXth and Xth, Duval at the Panthéon;... Pindy in the IIIrd, Varlin...in the Batignolles, Arnould a mixed crowd of Guards and mutinied soldiers in Montmartre. But as yet the battalions refused to leave their own districts, making preparations to resist the troops who were actually retiring fast upon the Ecole Militaire from every point in the city.¹

The great strength of the insurrection (which would perhaps later prove to be its greatest weakness) was the decentralised action and individual leadership which at once deprived the government of most of Paris and enabled the insurgents to control their own bases. Only later in the day did the Central Committee as a body play a decisive role by ordering a concerted attack on the Hôtel de Ville. The counter-offensive mounted by the Guard battalions was so sudden that it nearly succeeded in trapping Thiers and his government, despite the former's well-laid plans for retreat. A battalion from Gros-Cailhou passed underneath the window at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from which Thiers was watching the ruins of his policy; the incident put an end to whatever lingering opposition Favre and Ferry had to Thiers' idea of abandoning Paris. One by one the strategic points of Paris fell into the hands of the insurgents descending from the popular districts of Paris; and at 10.30 p.m. Brunel, Pindy and Ranvier launched their final attack on the Hôtel de Ville - evacuated in the nick of time by Ferry and General Derroja, rearguard for the retreat of the Versailles forces from Paris. All that was left of the Thiers regime were two proclamations posted, almost derisively, side-by-side: the first by Aurelle announcing the success of the coup:

Les Buttes Montmartre sont prises et occupées par nos troupes, ainsi que les Buttes-Chaumont et Belleville. Les canons de Montmartre, des Buttes-Chaumont et de Belleville

1. Frank Jellinek, The Paris Commune of 1871, (London, 1971), pp. 116-7.

sont au pouvoir du gouvernement de la République.¹

and the second by Thiers calling for bourgeois support while denying that a coup had taken place:

On répand le bruit absurde que le Gouvernement prépare un coup d'état.

Le Gouvernement de la République n'a et ne peut avoir d'autre but que le salut de la République. Les mesures qu'il a prises étaient indispensables au maintien de l'ordre: il a voulu et veut en finir avec un comité insurrectionnel, dont les membres presque tous inconnus à la population, ne représentent que les doctrines communistes et mettraient Paris au pillage et la France au tombeau, si la garde nationale et l'armée ne se levaient pour défendre, d'un commun accord, la Patrie et la République.²

The National Guard, however, had its own ideas about who the real defender of the Republic was to be. The 'inconnus' of the Central Committee, on behalf of the armed people, were in undisputed control of Paris after a virtually bloodless insurrection, stained only by the death of Lecomte and Clément Thomas³ before a firing squad composed partly of their own soldiers.

The Insurrection of 18 March had been a spontaneous, virtually unco-ordinated response to the Thiers coup, which to many seemed to complete the process of revolution begun on 4 September and which invited comparison to that insurrection whose stepchild it had just overthrown. Again, as on 4 September, a regime which had failed catastrophically in war had been overthrown in an almost bloodless struggle characterised by the fraternisation of the troops with the people. Only this time, it

1. Gaston Da Costa, La Commune Vécue, (Paris, 1903-5), Vol.I, p.82.
2. Georges Bourgin, La Guerre de 1870-71 et la Commune, (Paris, 1939), p.166.
3. Thomas, already infamous for his suppression of the 1848 Insurrection, had won no friends among the Parisian populace during his tenure as commander of the National Guard, and Lecomte had earlier that morning ordered his troops to fire on unarmed civilians.

was the Ultra-Left which had triumphed in its own name; it would not surrender to the bourgeois republicans, as the mayors would soon discover. Yet the differences between 4 September and 18 March were more critical than the similarities. Paris had made the revolution; but instead of dissolving, the government had retired to the provinces which by their votes in the February elections had declared themselves hostile to Paris. Further, the triumph owed more to local conditions than had that of 4 September such that the revolutionaries' success in Paris was unlikely to be repeated in the provinces, where a population weary of war regarded the insurrection as a dangerous provocation to renewed war with the Prussians. Finally, on 4 September the Empress Eugénie had refused to add civil war to the horrors of the struggle against the Prussians; Thiers had no such scruples; indeed, civil war was now part of his plan.

Yet perhaps the greatest difference between 18 March and 4 September, although it was not readily apparent on the evening of 18 March, was that the leadership empowered by the revolutionary mandate had not sought the end they had so easily attained. Unlike the Republican Opposition in the Bonapartist Assembly composed of skilled politicians who enjoyed considerable popularity throughout France, the Central Committee now installed in power at the Hôtel de Ville was composed of 'inconnus' who had little previous political or revolutionary experience and were not prepared for the leadership role which they were forced to play. Though they had in reality held the balance of power in Paris since 3 March with the support of 215 battalions of the National Guard, they had not acted until provoked by Thiers' coup and had assumed power only as the government and its troops fled Paris.

They had never had the slightest idea that they might be called upon to act as a Government at least as legal as

that of September 4, rival to the National Assembly. Their political claims had been purely local; their activities hardly more than those of supervision. None had any political experience. A few were members of the International, notably Varlin, an efficient co-operative and union organiser. Brunel and Duval were good soldiers but not actually Committee members. The rest were a collection of mere delegates, personally vague. The only man who had some realisation of their task was a young commercial traveller, Edouard Moreau, who quite suddenly emerged from complete obscurity to lead their deliberations.¹

The leadership proved incapable of understanding that revolution carries with it a mandate all its own, that their position was no less legal than that of 4 September had been, that the Assembly they had just overthrown had no real legal basis once the peace had been made with Germany, and that the support of 215 battalions of the National Guard was mandate enough to continue the revolution to ultimate victory over Versailles. Once victory was achieved and the revolution consolidated, there would be plenty of time to hold Communal elections and write a constitution for the Third French Republic.

B. The Central Committee: From Counter-Revolution and Conciliation to Commune

The change of regimes in Paris had come so suddenly that most members of the diplomatic community were caught quite unaware that such a force for revolution had been building up throughout the siege and the interim prior to 18 March. United States Ambassador Washburne sent the following correction to earlier reports on the 'troubles' in Paris:

In my No.390 of the day before yesterday, I alluded to the insurrectionary movements in Paris, and expressing the opinion that they would not amount to much, and that no great degree of violence was probable. It was not then possible

1. Jellinek, op. cit., pp.124-5.

for me to conceive that in a little more than twenty-four hours from that time Mr. Thiers and all the members of his government would be obliged to flee from Paris, and that an insurrectionary committee of the national guard would at the moment I am writing, be complete masters of the city.¹

Though Thiers had clearly laid his plans to evacuate the city in case of strong resistance by the Central Committee, he had had no idea that the Committee could so quickly and completely consolidate its hold on the population. Thus, Thiers' position was more desperate than he had ever thought possible. Even with immediate provincial reinforcements and by recalling all the men from the forts, he could muster only about 30,000 men at Versailles, most of whom were completely demoralised and would have gone over to the Insurrection at the slightest contact with the insurgents. The retreat from Paris to Versailles had been a nightmare of cursing, straggling troops, with only the gendarmes maintaining a semblance of discipline. If the Commune were to attack with its 200,000-man army and its virtual monopoly of artillery, the Versailles Army would not have the means to resist; the Assembly and Government would be dispersed, and France would most probably follow the lead of Paris in accepting yet another revolution. The only hope that Thiers had left was to gain sufficient time to reforge his Army prior to any engagement with the Central Committee's forces.

The critical mission of gaining time was confided to two groups still in Paris: the bourgeois mayors who had been elected in November, and the 'Amis de l'Ordre', the openly counter-revolutionary forces of the Right under Admiral Saisset. That these groups were to have limited success owed much to the nature of the organisation which now 'governed' from the Hôtel de Ville.

1. E.B. Washburne, 'Franco-German War and Insurrection of the Commune', Executive Documents for the 1st and 2nd Sessions of the Forty-fifth Congress, (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1877-78), p.159.

The Central Committee was composed neither of revolutionaries, though several Blanquists and Internationalists were members, nor of politicians, but rather of men who, from many occupations, had been elected to lead their National Guard units during the war and who had advanced quickly in the hierarchy once federation was achieved. Where decisive leadership was necessary to consolidate the revolution and carry it forward to victory, their choice would be to temporise, to attempt to gain legitimacy for their actions, and to divest themselves of the power which had fallen so unexpectedly into their laps.

The only thing upon which the members of the Central Committee, and everyone else in Paris, could agree upon, was that it was time to proceed with the Communal elections for which the Left had called since 4 September. It was the one goal which seemed to mean all things for all people:

Le titre de Commune était habilement choisi. Pour la masse, il signifiait l'établissement de franchises municipales que promettait le gouvernement et l'Assemblée, que demandaient les maires issus du suffrage universel comme les députés de Paris, c'est-à-dire le rêve de la bourgeoisie parisienne depuis de longues années. Pour les Jacobins, la Commune rappelait la dictature révolutionnaire de 1792, concentrant tous les pouvoirs et s'imposant à la France entière. Enfin, pour les sectaires de l'Internationale, la Commune, dans le vague de son titre, était une première satisfaction aux aspirations des classes ouvrières, un être collectif concentrant toutes les forces sociales, possédant le sol et l'industrie et distribuant pour l'exploitation de l'un et de l'autre, les rôles et les profits entre les adeptes. La Commune, unique propriétaire, apparaissait aux yeux des communistes purs comme le but définitif.¹

The Central Committee, rather than acting upon the basis of support which existed in Paris for the elections, instead sought the legitimising concurrence of the mayors through negotiations. There was even the absurd suggestion that the Central Committee

1. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Vol.I, p.113.

cede its place, illegally-seized, to the legitimately-elected mayors; the Committee rejected the idea which would have meant surrendering the revolution to the government it had just overthrown. But the search for legitimacy put the Commune off on the wrong foot; for eight crucial days the Committee neglected its other chores in order to gain the unnecessary assent of the mayors.

The Central Committee especially, raised so unexpectedly to a power which they had never even contemplated, were terribly anxious to remain within the limits of strict legality in order not to provoke civil war. They could not see that Thiers had not only already openly contravened legality simply because his army was not yet ready. They could not see that the Assembly did not care about legality in the slightest, were in fact in their preparation for a Right coup d'état making for wider breaches in legality than they themselves could possibly have done. Above all, they could not recognise that however little they had meant to arrive at the Hôtel de Ville, their presence was, by every canon, and especially by Versailles canons, tantamount to armed insurrection...¹

Ignoring Marx's dictum that 'the defensive is the death of every armed rising',² the men of the Central Committee almost completely neglected the military realm in which lay their capabilities, as well as their only hope for success. In the chaos of 18 March they had chosen Lullier, the commander of the Guard's artillery, as head of the National Guard forces. An alcoholic of dubious revolutionary commitment, he did nothing during his four-day reign to help consolidate the revolution, and instead greatly harmed the cause. First, he failed to close the gates of Paris, thus enabling thousands of Versailles troops to stream out of the city; had the troops been challenged, there

1. Jellinek, op. cit., p.133.

2. Karl Marx, Revolution and Counter Revolution, (London, Unwin, 1971).

is little doubt that they would have surrendered their arms, disbanded and passed to the side of the revolution, instead of marching to Versailles to form the nucleus for Thiers' new army of repression. Second, he failed to insure that all the forts evacuated by the Versaillais were occupied by the Fédérés.¹ Acting under their own initiative, the Fédérés had in fact occupied all except Fort Mont-Valérien; for 36 hours the fort which was at once the key to Versailles and Paris stood empty, waiting to be claimed by the first taker. Vinoy awakened Thiers in the middle of the night to gain his permission to reoccupy the vital stronghold, which Thiers had ordered to be abandoned in the general retreat of 18 March; his troops arrived only hours before the Central Committee realised its error and sent men in a belated effort to possess it. Third, Lullier refused to use force against the counter-revolutionary elements under Saisset's leadership who threatened the stability of the Central Committee's rule. And finally, he failed to provide any leadership at all, let alone that needed for an assault on Versailles.

Leadership was by now the critical problem confronting the Committee. As Lepelletier noted, 'il ne trouva pas un Vinoy, à l'Hôtel de Ville, pour réveiller les chefs et leur arracher l'ordre d'occuper la forteresse [de Mont-Valérien]'.² The man who could have been the Fédérés' Vinoy and more, Auguste Blanqui, had been captured in the South of France on 17 March by the ever-vigilant provincial police; and Garibaldi, the other likely candidate for the post, had returned to Italy, disgusted with French politics and refusing all personal involvement unless war

1. The Commune's troops are designated 'Fédérés', short for 'Federated Battalions'; the Government's troops are called 'Versaillais' after their seat of government.

2. Lepelletier, op. cit., Vol.II, p.145.

were reopened against the Prussians.

Though Blanqui had been imprisoned, his followers gained positions of importance in the Central Committee. Eudes was head of the Commission for War, while Duval and Rigault occupied the Préfecture de la Police in the interim government of M. Assi. The Blanquists called for an immediate attack on Versailles; they were supported by Moreau, who more and more appeared to be the true spokesman for the National Guard. But the moderate majority of the Central Committee, distracted by efforts at conciliation and the perceived necessity of gaining the mayors' adherence for the elections, rejected any idea that threatened civil war.

From a strictly military point of view, there were four excuses which militated against an immediate attack on Versailles. First, many of the Fédérés' leaders feared a sudden counter-offensive by the Versaillais, similar to that of the June Days of 1848. They were thus reluctant to leave the barricades of their own areas which served as a defence line against the threat of renewed repression. Second, there was great uncertainty as to whether the Prussians would remain neutral. If the Fédérés' best forces were en route to Versailles, the city would be helpless against a Prussian attack from the north-east, where the forts were held by the Prussians until the peace treaty was fulfilled. In a letter from General Fabrice to Jules Favre, just such a threat was more than hinted at:

Nous serions obligé d'agir militairement et de traiter en ennemie la ville de Paris, si Paris use encore de procédés en contradictions avec les pourparlers engagés et les préliminaires de paix, ce qui entrainerait l'ouverture du feu des forts occupés par nous.¹

The fact that the Central Committee had been so openly hostile to

1. Ibid., p.47.

the peace treaty and so blatantly an advocate of 'la guerre à outrance' gave extra credence to fears of Prussian vengeance. Third, the National Guard battalions were badly in need of re-organisation before any military operation outside the walls of Paris could be contemplated. Though 215 battalions had 'federated', not one was at full strength after the siege, the interim departures, and the chaos of the insurrection. The armament of all the battalions during the war had proved virtually impossible, and the training and combat experience of the worker battalions in particular were very slight. Even the artillery units, where the Commune had an absolute supremacy over Versailles, lacked gunners with sufficient technical expertise to make proper use of the canons over which the coup of 18 March had ostensibly been fought. Fourth, the danger of counter-revolution in Paris itself had begun to crop up, encouraged by M. Thiers.

The mayors had done well in their negotiations by diverting the Committee into worries about elections. But even more time was gained for Thiers by the counter-revolutionary actions of Admiral Saisset and the 'Amis de l'Ordre'. Saisset, named 'commander' of the National Guard by Thiers, attempted to unite bourgeois elements around him into an organisation capable of resistance. On 21 March they demonstrated in favour of the mayors, who were still a viable alternative to Central Committee rule; they were backed by ten bourgeois battalions and by several conservative newspapers. Lullier refused to take any action against them, but fortunately his Chief of Staff Bergeret was on duty at the Place Vendôme the following day when the 'Amis de l'Ordre' held their second demonstration. They overran several guard posts en route to the Place Vendôme, and once there, they ignored ten appeals to disperse. At that point a shot rang out

and a fusillade from the Guards followed; twenty demonstrators were killed or wounded, while Bergeret's men suffered two killed and seven wounded in the mêlée. U.S. General Sheridan, who was able to observe the event from his hotel window, testified that the first shot came from the demonstrators,¹ but Thiers and the reaction made great publicity of the fact that the National Guards had fired on 'peaceful, unarmed citizens'. In fact, the small number of casualties resulting from a fusillade fired into a densely-packed mob on a narrow street attests to the probability that the Guards deliberately aimed high, while the Guard casualties, as well as the number of sword canes and revolvers the 'peaceful' bourgeois left littering the street destroys the argument that they were unarmed. Nevertheless, the incident was sufficient to put off the elections until the 26th, thus gaining Thiers a critical few extra days.

The Committee was soon forced to move against the reaction militarily. On the 23rd Saisset and the reactionary mayors of the 1st and 2nd arrondissements had established a virtual armed fortress in the centre of Paris. Lullier was finally sacked, and a triumvirate of Eudes, Duval and Brunel took power on the 24th. Brunel, with the Belleville Guards supported by companies of mitrailleuses, advanced upon the mairies and forced the surrender of the Right. Saisset and the other reactionary leaders, their influence crushed, retired to Versailles. At last Paris had been made safe for the revolution.

The dangers of a renewed attack from the west, a Prussian attack from the east, and the bourgeois counter-revolution in the centre had been largely superseded by events. None of the

1. Ibid., p.266. However, Sheridan does not specifically mention the event in his Memoirs.

risks of the immediate attack on Versailles had materialised, while the tantalising prospect that an easy victory might be won still remained. Yet the opportunity had been missed; the elections and transfer of power to the Commune now seemed to preclude any major undertaking by the Central Committee.

Il est indispensable de bien connaître les actes et la pensée du Comité Central, pour se rendre compte que la Révolution était compromise, et à peu près perdue avec ceux qui l'avaient faite, du jour où l'on interrompait le combat sans avoir victoire complète et définitive. Chefs et soldats, élus et électeurs, devaient continuer l'insurrection jusqu'au triomphe total. La Commune de Paris ne pouvait se maintenir qu'à la condition de disperser l'Assemblée nationale, comme en 1830, en 1848, en 1851, le 4 septembre, avaient été dispersées et remplacées les assemblées de la monarchie, de la république et de l'empire.¹

If it was not their only chance for victory as Lepelletier suggests, it was certainly their only opportunity for easy victory. Thiers was left with a free hand at Versailles from 18-28 March to reorganise his forces: where earlier an attack might have succeeded almost without a shot being fired, soon an attack would be a risky affair. The elections were held on the 26th; the Commune was proclaimed on the 28th; and the period of leadership for the Central Committee was terminated without the decisive blow, that alone could have assured the future of the revolution, having been struck.

As a final gesture of their authority, they issued, on the eve of the elections, the following advice to the electors:

Citizens, our mission is at an end. We will now hand over your town hall to new and rightful representatives...

Citizens, remember that the men who still serve you best are those whom you will choose from among your own ranks, who lead the same lives as yourselves and suffer the same hardships.

Beware of the ambitious and the newly rich. One and the other are only concerned with their own advancement and will always think they are indispensable.

1. Ibid., pp.8-9.

Beware, too, of wind-bags who prefer words to deeds. For them speech, a rhetorical effect or a witticism is more important than anything else. And avoid those whom fortune has favoured excessively. The wealthy are rarely disposed to considering the working classes as their brothers.

We are confident that if you follow these suggestions you will at last have achieved an authentic peoples' representation and found representatives who will never see themselves as your masters.¹

It was probably the most candid advice ever given to any electorate, and to a certain extent their advice was followed. For the first time in French history, 34 workers or petits bourgeois were elected out of a total of 86. Though not by themselves a 'proletarian' majority, when joined by 31 middle class representatives who were radical politicians or journalists, they had a clear majority over the 21 anti-Communards who had also been elected. Because only 229,167 out of a register of 485,569 voted, Thiers bombarded the provinces with propaganda about the failure of the elections. But the total represented 72% of the vote in November under the Government of National Defence, and even since then there had been some deaths and emigration, as well as a considerable flight to Versailles. The fact that anti-Communards were elected attests to the fact that the elections were free from restraints and offered a clear choice.

When on the 28th a grand ceremony was held to commemorate the proclamation of the Commune, Brunel's 215 battalions marched past declaring their allegiance to the new government. The Central Committee, 'les hommes inconnus' of 18 March, could be proud of having completed their task:

1. Eugene W. Schulkind, The Paris Commune of 1871: the View from the Left, (London, 1972), pp.107-8. Originally printed in Journal Officiel, 27 March 1871.

They could indeed 'come down the steps of the Hôtel de Ville head erect', these obscure men who had safely anchored the revolution of the 18th March. Named only to organise the National Guard, thrown at the head of a revolution without precedent and without guides, they had been able to resist the impatient, quell the riot, re-establish the public services, victual Paris, baffle intrigues, take advantage of all the blunders of Versailles and of the mayors; and, harassed on all sides, every moment in danger of civil war, known how to negotiate, to act at the right time and in the right place. They had embodied the tendency of the movement, limited their programme to communal revindications, and conducted the entire population to the ballot-box. They had inaugurated a precise, vigorous, and fraternal language unknown to all bourgeois powers.¹

It is perhaps too easy to criticise the Central Committee for its failure, first to prevent the Army from leaving Paris and second to occupy Fort Mont-Valérien. There had been a thousand things to be done by men of little previous experience. They had done well just to bring about the tremendous transformation of Parisian politics between 18 and 28 March. Yet it is unfortunately true that their failure accrued to the very notion of the armed people which had brought them victory on 18 March. The battalions of the National Guard had fought brilliantly as insurrectionary troops in their own arrondissements; they had crowned their achievement with a concerted attack on the Hôtel de Ville; they had even been useful in maintaining 'order' and in removing the last vestiges of the armed reaction once the revolution had been achieved. But the disorganised state of the Guard and the lack of disciplined cadres capable of instilling a sense of revolutionary discipline into the worker battalions meant that the movement was incapable of advancing even to easy victory against Versailles. Though Lissagaray considered that they left their successors 'all

1. H.P.O. Lissagaray, History of the Commune of 1871, (Calcutta, 1971), p.107.

the means necessary to disarm the enemy',¹ what they could not leave them was the opportunity. For Thiers at Versailles, protected by the guns of Fort Mont-Valérien, was busy reorganising his force into 'une des plus belles armées que la France ait possédées'.² The concept of the armed people evolved by chance on 18 March would no longer prove valid for a revolution in danger of being encircled and besieged in Paris; the new concept which the Commune would have to form would be the most important issue the revolution would face. While it might be too late to win easy victory, the means still existed to avoid defeat.

C. The Commune: Offensive to Defensive

In its first proclamation to the people of Paris, the Commune promised some of the fundamental social and economic reforms which were to make it the 'dawn' of proletarian socialist republics. Taking note of the harsh realities of the military situation it faced, the Commune also promised that 'The National Guard, from now on the only armed force of the city, will be reorganised without delay'.³ Yet rather than dealing immediately with the reorganisation they had promised, the members of the Commune showed a greater inclination to delve into social and political questions which left them divided: they could never seem to concentrate on the crucial necessity to ensure their existence. Eudes, Duval, Bergeret and Flourens, activist members of the Commune's War Commission, called for a 'sortie torrentielle' against Versailles, though they received little encouragement

1. Ibid., p.107.

2. Lepelletier, op. cit., p.165. From l'Officiel on 1 April.

3. Stewart Edwards, The Communards of Paris, 1871, (London, 1973), p.78.

from the Commune.

Indeed, it was difficult to ascertain who could provide the leadership necessary to carry the insurrection to victory. The Central Committee had just surrendered its power to the Commune, thereby negating (temporarily) its own influence. The 16 Central Committee members of the Commune had been elected for their radical political backgrounds and had lost all contact with the Guard and its Federation. Of the other subgroups of the Commune, only the Blanquists had any specialised knowledge of armed insurrectionary tactics; but they held only 9 of 86 seats. The 21 bourgeois moderates and anti-Communards soon resigned, and the 23 journalists, radical politicians, and old-style Jacobins had little to offer in terms of military organisation. This left the 17 members of the Internationale, whom the Enquête Parlementaire later blamed for the armed insurrection and the excesses of the revolution. Yet the Internationale was perhaps the least inclined toward leadership in military affairs of all the subgroups. In the Internationale's session of 29 March, Bertin stated that 'une des plus graves questions qui doivent nous préoccuper, c'est celle relative à l'ordre social. Notre révolution est accomplie, laissons le fusil et reprenons l'outil'.¹ Though another member thought that it was best to stay on guard, Hamet supported Bertin. 'La garde est facile à établir; le travail l'est moins; prenons nos outils; au premier coup de tambour nous saurons retrouver notre fusil'.² In short, virtually all the members of the Internationale, as well as of the Commune, shared a common set of

1. Jellinek, op. cit., p.172.

2. Les Séances officielles de l'Internationale à Paris pendant le siège et pendant la Commune, (Paris, 1872), p.157.

assumptions which precluded them from taking realistic stock of the military needs of their revolution. They could never seem to understand that all the social and political gains they made would be lost on the battlefield if they did not change their perceptions of Paris, Versailles and the provinces.

Among the misperceptions held by the Communards, first was the belief that, once the elections sanctioned by the mayors had been held, the insurrectionary period had ended and a new legal/political era had been inaugurated; second, that the provinces would follow Paris, force the Assembly to resign, and inaugurate new elections for the rest of France; third, that the Versailles Army would not dare commence a civil war against the Commune's federated battalions which stood guard in the forts and on the ramparts of Paris; fourth, that in the event of conflict, the soldiers would go over to the people as they had done on 18 March. The Insurrection of 18 March accomplished with such ease and with so little forethought either to revolutionary organisation or the tactics of the armed people, had lured first the Central Committee and now the Commune into the trap of ignoring the military questions which haunted the future of the revolution.

The rude awakening from this set of false assumptions and misperceptions was not long in coming, for the Versailles Army was ready to march by 2 April. As General Vinoy noted

Les quinze jours qui s'écoulèrent du 19 mars au 2 avril furent, de part et d'autre, employés à l'organisation des forces militaires qui allaient engager la lutte. Il fallait avant tout augmenter l'effectif de l'armée, et on ne pouvait le faire qu'avec l'assentiment des Prussiens. Les négociations ouvertes à ce sujet furent couronnées d'un plein succès. L'état-major général allemand, après en avoir référé à l'empereur Guillaume, consentit à ce que l'armée qui devait tenter de reprendre Paris sur la Commune fût portée de quarante mille à quatre-vingt mille hommes, et au moment où nous pûmes rentrer dans la capitale, l'armée dite de Versailles dépassait cent mille combattants. Elle fût reconstituée surtout au moyen des nombreux prisonniers

de guerre que l'Allemagne nous rendit, en commençant par les officiers, ce qui permit de former aussitôt des cadres nouveaux où furent renversés les soldats qui arrivèrent ensuite.¹

Separated from any conceivable contact with Parisians or their radical politics, spoon-fed with horror stories about how the Communard bandits mistreated priests and robbed the good people of Paris, and provided with excellent food, pay and living conditions, the provincial soldiers, marines and repatriated prisoners-of-war were forged into the instrument of repression that Thiers needed if he was to reconquer Paris. The troops, though veterans, were untried in civil war; thus there was the great danger that they might refuse to fight. Thiers and Vinoy were aware of the risk, but they could wait no longer; the Communards had shown themselves to be more adventurous by occupying the Rond-Point at Courbevoie on the outskirts of Paris. It was there, on 2 April, that the Versailles Army chose to open its attack.

One general officer had been so fearful to take command of the advance guard that Vinoy took personal command of the field operations. At first, the *Fédérés* fought brilliantly in defence behind barricades and from houses. The 74^e régiment de ligne, part of the advance guard, broke in panic before the Communard defence; had the rest of the army followed, it would probably have been Versailles, rather than Paris, that would have been besieged. As General Sesmaisons wrote:

La chaîne de tirailleurs tourna le dos et prit la fuite. La panique se communiqua à la compagnie, puis au bataillon; elle gagna la batterie d'artillerie. Le capitaine d'artillerie resta seul avec son lieutenant auprès des pièces. Les avant-trains des pièces, les servants, les sous-officiers même avaient fui. L'affolement était tel que les soldats faisaient feu en tournant le dos à l'ennemi,

1. Général Vinoy, Campagne de 1870-1871: L'Armistice et la Commune, (Paris, 1904), pp.9-10.

leur fusil à la hanche. Des nuées de balles passaient par-dessus nos têtes sans aucun danger.

A ce moment, le général Vinoy se porta devant un bataillon de marins commandés par le capitaine de frégate Michaud et lui dit à haute voix: 'Commandant, nous allons voir si vos marins ont un peu plus de poil que ces c...¹ de fantassins qui ont f... le camp devant l'apparence du danger. Venez avec moi!²

The decisive moment had been reached, and it was Versailles that triumphed. The marines and the 113^e régiment de ligne took the barricades under the personal leadership of Vinoy, and the Communards fled back toward Paris. Vinoy was even able to use the 74^e to take the bridge at Neuilly, thus ensuring that every unit under his command was aguerrri, ready to commence the civil war in earnest.

Paris was shocked. Louise Michel reported that at first, when the cannons were heard, everyone thought that it was just 'quelque fête des Prussiens qui entouraient Paris, mais bientôt la vérité fut connue: Versailles attaquait...'.³ Out of the cloud of misperceptions that had characterised the thoughts on military organisation emerged the realisation that Versailles, not Paris, was fully prepared to force the issue to civil war as a final solution. The Commune's official reaction was one of outrage:

The royalist conspirators have ATTACKED.

Despite the moderation of our attitude, they have ATTACKED.

Unable to count upon the French army, they have ATTACKED with the Pontifical Zouaves and the Imperial Police.

Not content with cutting our communications with the provinces and with making vain efforts to reduce us by famine, these madmen have wished to imitate the Prussians to the last detail, and to bombard the capital.

This morning, the Chouans of Charette, the Vendéans of Cathelineau, the Bretons of Trochu, flanked by the gendarmes of Valentin, covered with shot and shell the inoffensive

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1. Expletives deleted in the original.
 2. Général de Sesmaisons, Les Troupes de la Commune et la Loi de de deux ans, (Paris, 1904), pp.9-10.
 3. Louise Michel, La Commune, (Paris, 1898), p.202.

village of Neuilly and engaged in a civil war with our National Guards.

There are dead and wounded.

Elected by the population of Paris, our duty is to defend the great city against the culpable aggression. With your aid, we shall defend it.¹

The proclamation was wrong on two accounts: first, it was not the Zouaves, Vendéans or Chouans which had attacked, but a force even more formidable - the regulars of the rejuvenated line regiments. And second, mere defence of the city would no longer suffice; for the first time since Buzenval, cries for a 'sortie torrentielle' went up from every popular district of Paris. The Commune had been in power only six days and had not really even established any authority over the Fédérés, let alone carried out the reorganisation essential to placing the battalions on a war-footing. The War Commission activists - Duval, Flourens, Bergeret and Eudes - took charge of the operation and were almost independent of the Commune's authority. The crowd in Paris had reached a fever pitch. Lefrançais wrote that 'deux cents mille fédérés décidés à mourir pour la défense de la Commune, étaient réunis sous les armes, demandaient à grands cris qu'on les conduisit à l'ennemi pour venger leurs camarades lâchement massacrés'² - an exaggeration, if one compares the number who actually fought against the Versaillais the next day. But the popular feeling was not exaggerated, and soon, to the detriment of the operation, it was the crowd rather than the commanders who seemed in charge of the sortie. The women of Paris, who had done so much to gain success on 18 March, were especially involved with the events of 2-4 April:

1. Jellinek, op. cit., p.186.

2. Gustave Lefrançais, Etude sur le mouvement communaliste à Paris en 1871, (Neuchâtel, 1871), p.217.

Le 3 avril, plus de cinq cents femmes se réunissent place de la Concorde pour marcher sur Versailles, mais sans but précis; elles furent rejointes au pont de Grenelle par plus de cent autres. En raison de la brutalité dont les Versaillais avaient fait preuve la veille, on ne les laissa pas sortir.¹

The Commune closed its gates on the disorganised, unarmed mob of Parisiennes. However, it allowed the equally disorganised Commune battalions to march through en route to disaster against the well-trained, professional Army of Versailles.

Strategically, the attack made good sense. The Commune still had numerical superiority and artillery supremacy; the Versaillais regulars might have fraternised (though the actions of 2 April would seem to negate this view). But the execution was so faulty that the sortie became an even greater fiasco than those of the Government of National Defence during the war, of which the radicals had been so critical.

Mais à la date du 3 avril, comme généraux et comme forces disponibles, les conditions de la lutte n'étaient pas encore déséquilibrées. La sortie ne constituait donc pas un acte déraisonnable, ni une témérité, encore moins une faute grave. Elle était attendue, réclamée par tous les bataillons. A-t-elle été insuffisamment préparée? C'est incontestable. Les bataillons se mirent en route sans artillerie, sans prolonges ni caissons, sans ambulances ni fourgons de vivres. Les éclaireurs firent défaut, et l'on n'avait prévu ni réserves échelonnées, ni troupes de soutien pouvant remplacer à propos les combattants de première ligne.²

Though 200,000 men had been clamouring for the attack, in the end it consisted of a little more than 28,000.³ Guardsmen, whether by default of leadership or of followers, with such a small percentage of the Guard's forces mobilised, the Communards would

1. Schulkind, 'Le Rôle des Femmes dans la Commune de 1871', op. cit., p.17.

2. Lepelletier, op. cit., Vol.III, p.209.

3. The figures vary dramatically; these are taken from Stewart Edwards, The Paris Commune 1871, (London, 1871), p.198. Others vary from 17,000 (Jellinek) to 37,000 (Lissagaray).

no longer have numerical superiority over Versailles, nor would they have a reserve in support should the operation go awry. A second fault in the execution of the plan was the failure to use the artillery scattered all over Paris. It had been the artillery, not the Fédéré battalions, that had frightened Thiers into his coup on 18 March; but instead of using the cannons to assure victory, the Communards ignored them en route to defeat. Third, the sortie's already-limited forces were divided by an over-complicated, two-pronged attack plan which sent the Bergeret-Flourens column along the road past Fort Mont-Valérien, completely unprotected by any Parisian fort, while the Duval-Eudes column advanced on the Heights of Châtillon under the protection of Forts Issy and Vanves. Fourth, the problem of who controlled Fort Mont-Valérien had not been dealt with by the commanders. Rumour had it that the fort was controlled by the Fédérés or would remain neutral, and no-one bothered to check any further. The Fort not only ensured that the two forces would remain divided, and hence unable to reinforce each other, but also its artillery rendered Bergeret's mission difficult in the extreme, as the road on which his column marched could be easily swept by the fort's guns. Fifth, the Communards chose to advance in broad daylight, where they would be an easy target not only for the guns of Fort Mont-Valérien but also for the experienced artillerists of the Versailles Army. A night attack, though admittedly difficult to co-ordinate, would have ensured surprise by by-passing Mont-Valérien under the cover of darkness; the columns could have rejoined virtually on the outskirts of Versailles. Finally, the notion that the soldiers of Versailles would fraternise rather than fight still persisted, despite the clear evidence of the day before. Scouts and flankers were not sent out, nor were military

formations strictly employed. The effort came to resemble the advance of a mob rather than that of a revolutionary army capable of defeating the regulars, capturing Versailles and forcing the Government to flee. There could be only one result: failure.

On the morning of 3 April, Bergeret's column of 15,000, supported by Flourens' cavalry, set out on the road through Nanterre and Rueil en route to Versailles. However, when the guns of Mont-Valérien opened up, the carriage in which Bergeret was riding was struck; his horses and an officer at his side were killed. Lisbonne, later one of the Commune's ablest commanders, had the presence of mind to unlimber a cannon and fire back. But the damage had already been done, as 12,000 men fled back to Paris crying, 'Treason!'. Despite the efforts of Rossel (later Delegate of War) and other officers, nothing could halt the panicked troops. Though only Bergeret's own 91st Battalion and Flourens' cavalry remained, totalling scarcely 3,000, the column pressed on to within four miles of Versailles. Flourens engaged some of Gallifet's cavalry and chased them to Rueil. But Flourens was cut off from the rest of the column, and the Versaillais under Colonel Boulanger¹ surrounded the inn where Flourens and a few comrades had stopped. The dashing left-wing hero of the siege was sabred; as Bergeret had already begun to withdraw towards Neuilly, the right-half of the Commune's offensive had been effectively smashed. 10,000 Versaillais, reinforced with batteries of cannons now blocked the route taken so confidently by the Communards the morning before.

In the south-west, Duval had spent the night in occupation of Châtillon. But he had been left dangerously unsupported by

1. Boulanger, in the late 1880's, headed a right-wing movement which threatened to overturn the fledgling Third Republic.

Eudes, and the regulars of Versailles were quick to take advantage of yet another Communard mistake. Duval was cut off by the Versaillais, and on the 4th he was assailed by 8,000 regulars. After defending his position throughout the day in hope of support from Eudes that never materialised, he surrendered the remnants of his command, some 1,200 in all. He and his Chief of Staff, after digging their own graves, were shot by Vinoy. The Communard offensive had come to a quick, merciless death.

In the three days of combat the Versaillais had induced the element of bitter hatred and cruelty into the conflict by repeatedly shooting Communard prisoners. As if the actions had not been clear enough, Gallifet issued a proclamation to clarify the intent:

La guerre a été déclarée par les bandes de Paris.
Hier, avant-hier, aujourd'hui, elles m'ont assassiné mes soldats.

C'est une guerre sans trêve ni pitié que je déclare à ces assassins. J'ai dû faire un exemple ce matin, qu'il soit salubre; je désire ne pas en être réduit de nouveau à une pareille extrémité.

N'oubliez pas que les pays, que la loi, que le droit, par conséquent, sont à Versailles et à l'Assemblée nationale, et non pas avec la grotesque assemblée de Paris, qui s'intitule la Commune.¹

At the derisory losses of 25 killed and 125 wounded, the Versailles forces had completely crushed the Commune's ill-conceived, poorly-executed sortie. A military watershed had been reached. The Fédérés, their morale shattered, no longer capable of taking the offensive, were doomed to a new siege of Paris; while the regulars of Versailles, their confidence and morale restored by easy victory, now willingly advanced in the attack against revolutionary Paris.

As General de Sesmisons later wrote,

1. La Guerre des Communards de Paris, par un officier supérieur de l'armée de Versailles, (Paris, 1871), p.128.

Le sort de la Commune était fixé. Elle avait démontré que ses troupes, même avec des chefs de leur choix et possédant leur confiance, même braves, hardis et entreprenants, étaient incapables d'agir en rase campagne, que leur effort y était absolument nul, égal à zéro, qu'elles n'étaient même pas en état de profiter d'une occasion favorable, telle que la panique partielle du 2 avril, que nulle supériorité numérique ne pouvait donner une chance comme le 3 avril. Et cependant la journée du 4 avril montrait qu'il y avait là des hommes nombreux, braves, des artilleurs instruits et sachant tirer. Il était certain qu'appuyés par des forts, plus menaçants quand on les attaque qu'ils ne semblent puissants quand on les défend, ils se défendraient plus énergiquement, et qu'un effort considérable restait à faire pour surmonter la résistance.¹

The attack had been tactically a fiasco; but its consequences went far beyond the importance of the battle itself and the losses suffered by the Communards. Strategically, Paris was no longer capable of offering any support at all to the provincial movements, which were easily crushed by Versailles; nor could Paris now receive any provincial support through the stranglehold imposed by the Prussians on one side and the Versaillais on the other. Psychologically, the Fédérés were already defeated, for now it was Versailles that had 'une telle supériorité morale, un tel ascendant...',² which so often assures victory in military operations. Finally the attack had been a major setback for the concept of the armed people espoused by the Commune. No capable commander had been found; the troops lacked the revolutionary discipline needed to match the discipline of regular forces in open combat; only a tiny part of the military potential of the Commune had been brought to bear in the conflict, when all the Commune's might would have been necessary to triumph over 40,000 regulars. Clearly it was time for the Commune to reorganise its military forces and to evolve

1. Sesmaisons, op. cit., p.15.

2. Ibid., p.16.

a new concept for its armed people; insurrectionary tactics had not been enough to advance the movement to victory. Having failed 18-28 March to achieve easy victory, and from 29 March to 4 April to achieve victory at all, the Commune had now to find sufficient resources to avoid defeat.

D. The Commune Defence by Cluseret: 5 April - 30 April

The mood in Paris after 4 April was not unlike that during the first siege: there was utter consternation that the 'Army of Paris' had again failed in its great sortie. While at least 170,000 men were in the National Guard, only one-sixth of them had participated in the sortie. Where had the rest been during the battle? Why had the leadership failed to utilise the full scope of resources it had at its command to safeguard the revolution? Lissagaray, one of the Communards elected to fill the vacancies on 12 April, captured the mood of the Parisians and the problem they faced:

There was a fever of faith, of blind devotion, and of hope - of hope above all. What rebellion had been thus armed? It was no longer a handful of desperate men fighting behind a few pavements, reduced to charging their muskets with slugs or stones. The Commune of 1871, much better armed than that of 1793, possessed at least 60,000 men, 200,000 muskets, 1,200 cannon, five forts; an enceinte covered by Montmartre, Belleville, the Panthéon over-towering the whole city, munitions enough to last for years, and milliards at her bidding. What else was wanted to conquer? Some revolutionary instinct. There was not a man at the Hôtel-de-Ville who did not boast of possessing it.¹

Now confined in Paris, condemned to remain a spectator to the suppression of provincial efforts of support, and forced completely on the defensive, the Commune needed firm leadership

1. Lissagaray, op. cit., p.158.

to tap its military potential for the tremendous defensive effort which lay before it. Yet it was military leadership from Lullier to Bergeret, Eudes and Duval, that had already failed disastrously to take the revolutionary situation of 18 March from the point of successful insurrection to that of victorious revolution.

The Commune Council had already been forced to an awareness of its inexpertise on military affairs; of the activist members of the Military Commission, two lay dead and two others were disgraced. The Commission therefore appointed Cluseret as Delegate of War, hoping that centralisation of military forces in the hands of a man of military experience would help avert disasters like that of 2-4 April. Cluseret had impressive, if somewhat mixed, credentials for the post. Decorated by the Army for his bravery in actions on the 'other side' of the barricades in 1848, and a veteran of the Crimean War, he had fallen afoul of military authority in Algeria and had commenced a new life as a left-wing adventurer. He served with Garibaldi in Italy, and rose to the rank of General in the U.S. Army during the American Civil War. After a period of radical activity with the Fenians in New York City, he returned to France and joined the Internationale. During the Franco-Prussian War he had been notorious for the attempted coups against Gambetta's prefects, first in Lyon and then in Marseille, launched in co-operation with Bakunin. Cluseret brought to the Commune a wealth of military experience - a necessity for any revolutionary regime. But he admitted that he had faced three almost insurmountable obstacles upon accepting the post:

1° N'ayant pas été à Paris pendant le siège, je ne savais rien de ce qui s'était passé; 2° pas un homme capable pour me seconder; 3° les renseignements, qui

n'étaient fournis par des hommes enthousiastes et ignorants: deux conditions essentielles pour parfaire l'erreur.¹

The first obstacle was even greater than he might have imagined; for not only was Cluseret unfamiliar with the events in Paris, he had no personal base of support or rapport with the various groups contending for power within the Communard structure. So was the second obstacle: Rossel, his second-in-command, actively manoeuvred against him and was ultimately chosen as his successor. The third was more like a wall of opinion that continued the Commune's already grim tradition of poorly-placed optimism. This attitude was best typified by the Communard officer Barron, who stated that

Ne pas voir que les fédérés sont déjà logiquement organisés, que l'on ne changera rien à cette organisation-là, dût-on la trouver dérisoire et l'appeler désordre et confusion, car le désordre et la confusion sont de l'essence même des troupes volontaires sous des chefs librement élus...²

Just how 'logiquement organisés' the Fédérés were had been readily apparent to Cluseret after the military defeat of 2-4 April:

Le 4 au soir, il n'y avait plus de Garde Nationale dans Paris. Il y avait des gardes nationaux; mais qu'il y eût une organisation militaire quelconque, digne d'un nom quelconque, je le nie. Il n'y avait plus rien. Tout était à créer.³

Cluseret decided to make a thorough analysis of the strength and capabilities of the National Guard - probably the first conducted since the siege ended in January. His analysis showed further reasons for a rapid departure from the prevailing optimism:

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1. Cluseret/Rossel, 1871: La Commune et la Question Militaire, edit. Patrick Kessel, (Paris, 1971), p.103.
 2. Louis Barron, Sous le drapeau rouge, (Paris, 1889), pp.40-1.
 3. Cluseret/Rossel, op. cit., p.98.

Mon premier soin fut de m'enquérir de la situation. Voici quelle elle était: infanterie, environ 145,000 hommes, sur le papier, sans organisation, mal armés, peu vêtus et dans un état de démoralisation, surtout au point de vue disciplinaire, dont rien ne peut donner une idée.

Il y avait des comités et sous-comités de toute nature. La légion combattait la municipalité et celle-ci la légion. Le Comité Central venait brocher sur le tout et complétait l'anarchie. Quand il n'y réussissait pas, alors intervenait la Commune qui, elle, réussissait toujours.

L'artillerie comptait environ 5,600 hommes, généralement bons pointeurs...Mais volontaires avant tout, ces hommes ne voulaient faire que le service de remparts...Il était impossible de les caserner pour en faire de l'artillerie de campagne. Du reste, ils obéissaient à un Comité spécial

Clearly,

Clearly what was required was not just tighter control over the existing organisation, but a completely different military structure which could stand apart from the political chaos of the Commune and challenge the tenacity of the regulars from Versailles. Further, a new strategy was badly needed - the defensive nature of the Communards had always been reinforced by the defensive concept of the armed people they had adopted. Cluseret at first thought of changing both the structure and the concept to provide an effective fighting force capable of taking the offensive:

Ma première pensée avait été de former une petite armée mobile, de prendre l'offensive au Sud et d'opérer, autour de Versailles, coupant les voies ferrées et m'appuyant sur l'insurrection des provinces avec lesquelles je venais de faire connaissance dans l'hiver de '70-71. Je les savais pleines de bonne volonté, mais encore sous l'impression de l'étrointe impériale, timorées pour ne rien dire de plus. Un point d'appui armé et l'insurrection gagnait comme une trainée de poudre dans le midi, dont la Ligue eût immédiatement formé la base d'une assemblée constituante.²

Though the provincial Communes had already been crushed, there probably existed a reservoir of support for Paris in the 'industrial' areas and the larger cities; a Communard army might

1. Ibid., pp.98-9.

2. Gustave Cluseret, Mémoires du Général Cluseret, (Paris, 1887), Vol.I, pp.137-8.

have been able, for example, to take possession of Lyon, Saint-Etienne, Le Creusot and Marseille. Because Thiers always considered the provinces the key to ending the Communard movement, Cluseret's strategy would have upset Thiers' by widening the scope of what had now become a civil war. Nevertheless, the offensive strategy entailed great risks: if the Fédérés were caught in the open by the Army of Versailles, they could be crushed, as 2-4 April dramatically illustrated. After realising the extent of the disaster,¹ Cluseret decided that the Commune would have to remain strictly on the defensive. His major effort at structural reform consisted of a regrouping by age. All men 17-35 were to form the bataillons de marche first attempted during the war, and men 35-60 were to form a reserve, serve on the ramparts, and maintain interior order. These forces would no longer be under the control of the committees, but rather under the direct control of the Delegate of War. Though the policy offered the hope that centralisation of control would end political/jurisdictional squabbles and force some military discipline into the Fédérés, Cluseret's wide-sweeping action 'began that conflict between the Military Commission, the Commune and the Central Committee which did more than anything else to destroy the revolution'.² The Commune never gave its full support to Cluseret, and it was unable to give him full powers. For Cluseret's plan brought him into a direct confrontation with the Central Committee in a battle to decide who - Cluseret, the Commune or the Committee - really had control of the military

1. Cluseret had been appointed Delegate of War on 2 April; although he monitored the effort at an offensive, he was in no way responsible for its failure or planning.

2. Jellinek, op. cit., pp.199-200.

destiny of the revolution.

The Central Committee had been trying to carve out its sphere of influence ever since 28 March; the Commune Council had played right into their hands by waiting, with marked deference, to receive a delegation from the Committee before commencing its first session on 29 March. With conflict between the two powers imminent, the one the maker of the revolution and the other its elected Council, only one solution was really capable of avoiding a disastrous split in the revolutionary forces:

Le seul moyen de sortir de ce dilemme embarrassant, c'eût été de transformer le Comité en agent du Conseil communal et de le charger de surveiller l'exécution des mesures militaires sur l'adoption desquelles il serait préalablement consulté.¹

This was in fact what the Central Committee had already proposed in its debate of 29 March:

La Commune représente à Paris le pouvoir politique et civil. Elle est l'émanation de l'autorité du peuple. Le Comité central, conséquence directe des principes fédératifs de la garde nationale, représente la force militaire. Il faut exécuter les ordres donnés par la Commune, son autonomie est complète; il lui appartient de faire l'organisation de la garde nationale, d'en assurer le fonctionnement et de proposer à l'acceptation de la Commune toutes les mesures politiques et financières nécessaires à la mise à exécution des décisions prises par le Comité.²

Participants in the Communard movement, aware of the disasters of strife between two organisations trying to lead the same revolution, split over the wisest course to take. Some felt that the Committee had had its chance, that once the Commune had been elected the Committee should have been dissolved, or at least that it no longer had the right to meddle in the Commune's affairs. But others felt that the Commune lacked both the 'proletarian'

1. Gustave Lefrançais, Souvenirs d'un Révolutionnaire, (Brussels, 1902), p.487.

2. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Vol.II, p.51.

and the 'revolutionary' qualities necessary to carry the revolution forward, that the Committee had ceded its place to the non-militant Commune Council too early, and even that the Committee should overturn the Commune and regain power in order to revitalise the revolution. With opinion on military and political questions thus divided, a compromise 'dual authority' made a certain amount of sense. But the compromise was not achieved early enough; and after the disasters of April 2-4, the Committee, under the brilliant leadership of Moreau, had suddenly become an ascendant force in Paris politics. It was Moreau who had written most of the proclamations and who had inspired the Committee's actions during the period 18-28 March, despite the fact that he held no official post in the interim Assi government. Now Moreau was fully in charge of the Committee, and its re-entry into politics was dramatically announced to all Paris on 5 April, through the following proclamation:

Citizens of Paris, tradesmen, industrial workers, shopkeepers, intellectuals, all of you who work and who earnestly search for a solution to social problems, the Central Committee entreats you to work together for a better world; let the destiny of the Nation and its eternal genius be your inspiration.

The Central Committee is convinced that the heroic population of Paris will win immortal fame and regenerate the world.

Long live the Republic! Long live the Commune!¹

Unfortunately, the appointment of Cluseret not only complicated, but virtually precluded, effective interaction by the Committee and the Commune Council. Cluseret's reforms raised the twin issues of centralisation and militarism and seemed to imply the destruction of the federated structure upon which the Committee was based. The Central Committee's response to Cluseret's initiatives at military reform was sharp:

1. Edwards, op. cit., pp.80-1. Original in Journal Officiel, 6 April, 1871.

Pas de général en chef de la garde nationale.

Un délégué à la Guerre ayant sous sa direction tous les services militaires, mais ne commandant pas la force armée.

Quand la Commune jugera que la garde nationale doit agir ou marcher pour un service quelconque, le Comité central désignera le général qui en prendra le commandement et dirigera l'action.¹

The Committee then set out its own plan for military reorganisation, whereby men 17 to 30 would form the 'garde nationale active', men 30-40 would form the first reserve of the 'garde nationale sédentaire', and men 40-50 the second reserve. Though at face value it seemed to differ very little from the bataillons de marche of the war or from Cluseret's proposed scheme, it was designed to enable the Central Committee to retain its federated structure and to keep all military forces under its immediate control. Cluseret, unable to command the federated battalions, became little more than a glorified chief-of-staff. It had proved easy to block his efforts at military reform, as 'les délégués à la guerre, qui, au nom de la Commune, commandaient les généraux et ordonnaient les mouvements de troupes, n'eurent qu'une autorité éphémère, contestée, chicanée plutôt'.² But the Commune Council was a different story; the conflict widened into a triangular affair. Throughout the month of April, and conterminous with the period of Cluseret's appointment as Delegate for War, the Committee developed its contradiction with the political leadership of their joint revolution. In the session of the Committee held on 12 April,

Moreau pense que la Commune n'a aucune estime pour le Comité central, que la réception faite hier a été des plus humiliantes, et qu'il ne convient pas d'envoyer de nouveaux délégués. Notre rôle est d'agir sur la garde nationale, et

1. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Vol.II, p.51.

2. Lepelletier, op. cit., Vol.III, p.33.

de prouver à la Commune que nos moyens d'action sont toujours de force à mériter son attention.¹

By the session of 19 April the conflict had become even more evident, as the population in general, due to its frustration at the lack of vigour shown by the Commune, was now giving some support to the Committee:

Moreau parle sur l'amointrissement du Comité central par la Commune et par l'administration de la guerre - il croit à la nécessité de créer un antagonisme entre la Commune et la Comité central. Il y aurait même un levain dans le public qui réclamerait, de la part du Comité central, une énergie plus grande contre la Commune.²

The next day, the members of the Committee left the clear impression that, were it not for the dangers of 'civil war within a civil war', action would be taken against the Commune. As Prudhomme stated, 'Si la Commune seule était devant nous, nous agirions. Mais nous avons Versailles devant nous, et l'union est nécessaire pour vaincre'.³ And on the 23rd, Moreau gave the Committee's criticisms concrete form in a plan for renewed action:

Moreau insiste sur la nécessité, pour le Comité central, de se mettre de nouveau en relation d'idées avec la garde nationale, de reprendre notre rôle révolutionnaire. Il réclame un contrôle pour la Commune. Nous devons repousser tout établissement d'oligarchie. Nous devons refaire une assemblée générale, lui exposer nos actes, lui faire comprendre qu'elle doit nous décerner un mandat, faire reconnaître par la Commune le droit de contrôle par le Comité central.⁴

By the end of April, the Military Commission was in a state of complete collapse. The chaos was so evident that more groups joined in, ostensibly to help, but further complicating any efforts at reform. The Legion commanders, though some were members

1. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Vol.II, p.76.

2. Ibid., p.119.

3. Ibid., p.125.

4. Ibid., p.135.

of the Committee, often acted independently; the Artillery Committee formed a completely separate organisation from that of the Guard as a whole; even the municipalities joined in by pretending to have political control of the battalions from their arrondissements. On 26 April the Military Commission, acting for once with the blessing of the Commune, issued a proclamation attempting to sort out the various groups now involved into levels of authority:

En résumé,
 Pouvoir communal délégué aux municipalités;
 Intermédiaire et concours actif par les conseils de
 légion et le Comité Central;
 Ordres militaires exécutés par l'autorité des chefs
 de légion.
 Telle doit être l'action réciproque de toutes ces
 forces dans le but commun: le maintien et la sauvegarde
 des droits de la ville de Paris, et le salut de la
 République.¹

Signed by Delescluze, Tridon, Avrial, Ranvier and Arnold, the proclamation carried a lot of weight. Unfortunately, it had come too late: another month had been lost by the Commune without decisive action having been taken. The Versailles Army,² which on 2 April had numbered 40,000, had been increased to 110,000 by the end of April; thanks to Bismarck's generous consent, it would total 170,000 by the middle of May. Such a force was capable of recapturing the forts of the south and west, where a few men fought without support or reinforcement in a defensive effort which seemed completely unrelated to the squabbles at the top over control of the Commune's military forces.

Despite the failed offensive, the Communards on the ramparts

1. Archives Historiques de la Guerre, Fort Vincennes, La Commune, 'Exposé général des actes de la Commune - affiches'. Affiche du 26 avril, 1871.
2. The organisation and composition of the Army of Versailles is explained in Appendix C, while Prussian complicity is discussed in Appendix B.

fought well. On 7 April the Versailles Army had followed up its successes outside the walls of Paris by carrying the barricade at 1st Avenue de Neuilly as far as the park, thus endangering Porte Maillot and the western defence of Paris. But on the 9th, the Pole Dombrowski, arguably the greatest of all the Commune's generals, counter-attacked with two battalions from Montmartre and forced the Versaillais to retreat to Courbevoie. Though he had at the most only 5,000 men to hold Neuilly, Dombrowski fought the Versaillais to a standstill throughout the entire month of April. In the south and particularly at Fort Issy-Point du Jour, against which the Versaillais now threw the bulk of their forces, a pair of generals, La Cecilia (who had fought under Garibaldi during the war) and Wroblewski (like Dombrowski, a veteran of the Polish Insurrection of 1863-4), seconded by Brunel (the real military leader of the insurrection of 18 March) and Lisbonne (termed the 'd'Artagnan of the Commune'), set up a defence using 10,000 Fédérés and volunteers. Isolated from the chaos at the very heart of the Commune, Dombrowski, La Cecilia, Wroblewski, Lisbonne and Brunel held the periphery by developing their own tactical conception of the armed people. These generals commanded the most willing of the Guard battalions, men who were already imbued with the revolutionary tradition; they managed to instil in them a sense of military discipline as well. The Fédérés were further stiffened by the use of corps francs; composed of volunteers, these units became the real 'shock troops' of the Commune. Some corps francs had fought during the war and had joined the Commune after 18 March,¹ while others were formed from deserted soldiers, gardes mobiles and marines who had no

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1. In fact, one unit split right in two - half the members choosing to fight for the Commune, the others for Versailles.

real place in the Fédéré structure yet wanted to fight for the revolution. Other units were formed after the disastrous sortie, whether as the personal bodyguards of commanders like Bergeret and Eudes, or in remembrance of fallen heroes such as the 'Vengeurs de Flourens'. A final category consisted of foreigners - a kind of prototype for the 'International Brigades' - such as the Légion Italienne, Légion Polonaise and the Légion Fédérale Belge. Altogether, they numbered 11,000.¹

The end of April brought the fiercest fighting between regulars and Communards, with the latter scraping together the resources to hold against improbable odds. But the disorganisation at the top of the Commune was beginning to spread to its base and threatened to disrupt the defence. On 25 April, Dombrowski concluded a temporary armistice with the Versaillais which enabled the residents of Neuilly, trapped between two fires and bombarded day and night by artillery, to flee the battle area. Dombrowski, backed by armoured trains and a fleet of gunboats, had managed to solve the Commune's artillery problem by ignoring the Artillery Committee and using his own devices. But in the south, the situation had become critical. The Versaillais trenches came within a few feet of Fort Issy, Fort Vanves and the Point-du-Jour, which by now had been reduced to piles of rubble by artillery fire. On the 28th, the Versaillais captured the park at Issy, but Lisbonne immediately counter-attacked and retook it. But on the 29th, Lisbonne received an order from the Commune's War Commission to go with all his men to Père Lachaise Cemetery to render homage to the 'Morts de la République' - a useless ceremony for those

1. The number includes those formed during May for the last street battles. Many of the groups exist only as a fragmentary reference in the Journal Officiel. See Gautier, 'Les Francs-tireurs de la Commune', Cahiers de l'Académie d'Histoire, No.6, 1971.

like Lisbonne who had already proved their ability to die for the Commune. Without these and other elite units the effort fell apart. On the 29th Wetzel's division abandoned part of the trench line at Issy, and on the 30th Mégy abandoned the fort. Yet so intense was the artillery bombardment that the Versaillais did not know they had forced the evacuation of the fort. Cluseret and La Cecilia scraped together a few hundred men and re-entered the fort, which was held only by one small boy prepared to blow up himself and the fort rather than surrender. Cluseret's action of personal heroism had saved Fort Issy, temporarily, but it could not save his job as Delegate for War. The panic at Issy had thrown the Commune into a fierce debate over the creation of a Committee of Public Safety designed to save the Republic from the incompetence of its present state. Cluseret was arrested, to be succeeded by Rossel on 1 May.

Cluseret's role had come to an end without really having been played. As Rossel would soon find out, no one man cast as Delegate for War, yet given so little real power, could hope to sort out the tremendous military problems of the Commune which proliferated as defeat drew nearer. Cluseret's month of power had done little to advance the Commune's defences; and Lepelletier ably chronicled his faults:

La grande faute de Cluseret fut d'avoir conçu, a priori, un système uniquement défensif. Il ne vit pas, ou ne voulut pas comprendre, que du jour où Paris serait investi, enfermé dans ses fortifications, il serait perdu. Rossel partagea cette erreur, mais il subissait la situation déjà faite.¹

Termed by some the 'Trochu' of the Commune, Cluseret had failed to develop a force capable of relieving the defenders at the ramparts, let alone one capable of taking the offensive. Even

1. Lepelletier, op. cit., Vol.III, p.405.

then, once he had opted for a totally defensive strategy, he had failed to provide Paris with an inner defence built around the Panthéon, Buttes Montmartre, Père Lachaise and Buttes aux Cailles.

La seconde faute, également très grave, puisque Cluseret ne comprenait la lutte qu'au-dedans, fut de ne pas rendre Paris imprenable, de ne pas essayer le possible et l'impossible pour faire de la ville barricadée, partout armée, avec tous ses points stratégiques défendus, un gigantesque réduit où une armée engagée devrait infailliblement périr ou se désagréger.¹

When the Versaillais finally broke through in late May, they found Paris virtually unprepared to resist, despite the fact that the Communards had had two months to build a system of interior defence that might have checked the government's troops indefinitely. For someone who had decided on a totally defensive conflict, the mistake was inexcusable.

A ces deux fautes principales de Cluseret, il faut ajouter l'inutilisation de toutes les forces dont il pouvait disposer. Il s'est vanté, assez sottement, de n'avoir jamais employé plus de six mille hommes pour la défense totale de Paris.²

Perhaps the third mistake was not really Cluseret's fault. His plan for a great Communard army, composed of all men 17-35 placed in regular military formations rather than the 'political' formations of the National Guard Federation had been blocked; he never personally commanded more than a few thousand men; his orders were countermanded by the Central Committee, the War Commission, the Commune, and even at times by local leaders. Yet Cluseret was not alone in discovering that the tremendous gap between revolution and 'militarism' could not be breached by the Commune's forces:

La Commune avait à peine eu le temps de se reconnaître pendant cette suite d'événements foudroyants. La situation militaire était déplorable et l'inquiétude succédait à la

1. Ibid., p.407.

2. Ibid., p.408.

folle confiance du début. La garde nationale, si profondément agitée depuis la fin du siège, était complètement désorganisée.

Un état-major sans direction; des officiers improvisés, incapables pour la plupart; intendance nulle, administration nulle: tel était le côté militaire.

En outre, s'il y avait là une admirable foule armée qui savait héroïquement combattre et mourir pour une idée, il n'avait pas l'élément de discipline nécessaire à une force armée, chargée de l'oeuvre patiente et difficile de la défense d'une ville comme Paris. Comment aurait-il pu en être autrement? Socialisme, fédéralisme, fraternité des peuples, amour de l'humanité, toutes ces grandes idées dont se glorifiait chaque fédéré, ne sont-elles pas éternellement contradictoires avec la guerre et avec ce côté aussi immoral que nécessaire de l'état militaire appelé discipline ou obéissance passive.¹

Coming from Malon, one of the most intelligent of the Communards, the analysis shows the strain the socialists felt between their political ideals and the military organism they would have to develop in order to achieve them.² From the other side of the spectrum, General Bourelly wrote about how unequal the 'political model' of the Commune's forces were to the challenges posed by the regulars:

Préparée de longue main par le Comité central dans un sentiment de défiance à l'égard de l'armée, et en même temps, dans un but électoral, l'organisation politique de la garde nationale, loin de constituer une force, était une cause incessante de faiblesse dont les efforts paralysaient le pouvoir administratif, et la conduite des opérations militaires, et favorisaient, à un haut degré, le désordre et l'indiscipline.³

The question of how to link the political goals of a revolution to its military structure had not been successfully answered by Cluseret or by anyone else involved with the

1. Benoit Malon, La Troisième défaite du prolétariat français, (Neuchâtel, 1871), pp.205-6.

2. The Bolsheviks in general, and Trotsky in particular, could never understand the Communards' point of view; they viewed Communist 'humanitarianism' as a kind of weakness.

3. Général Bourelly, Le Ministère de la Guerre sous la Commune, (Paris, 1902), pp.81-2.

Commune's various military hierarchies. Oddly enough, the one force which had been summarily dismissed by Cluseret in his analysis of the Commune's forces, 'une demi-douzaine de compagnies franches qui, contrairement à la loi, sortaient des cadres de la Garde Nationale pour former des gardes prétoriennes...'¹ was exactly the type of military formation which had proved itself in the battle of the ramparts to be the best answer the Commune had to offer. The Commune's contribution to the concept of the armed people was being forged in the crucible of practice on the periphery, rather than in the cauldron of theory being stirred to no useful end at the very heart of the Commune.

E. The Committee of Public Safety and Rossel: 1-9 May

After the panic and near disaster at Issy, the optimistic belief in the triumph of the revolutionary Commune had been shattered. No-one could doubt, at the beginning of May, Thiers' intention of retaking the city by storm. The Army of Versailles was no longer commanded by Vinoy, but by MacMahon, eager to revenge his defeat at Sedan by a victory over his own people at Paris. To aid him in this task, Thiers had assembled an army of 170,000 troops, the best of which were repatriated prisoners of war - the regulars of the old line regiments - who had had no contact with events in Paris since the month of August. Thiers had also assembled a mighty arsenal of artillery, which had already nearly forced the evacuation of Issy and had turned the key Point-du-Jour area into a heap of rubble, as well as having virtually destroyed the city of Neuilly.

1. Cluseret/Rossel, op. cit., p.103.

The Versailles artillery offensive represented an act unthinkable to the men sitting at the Hôtel-de-Ville, who had continually ignored the importance of their own cannon. The bombardment of the city by the Prussians had brought crocodile tears to the eyes of the bourgeois republicans and neo-monarchists during the war; but now they seemed perfectly content to bomb their former capital into submission. Thiers' words, dredged up from his long historical record in French politics, were even more damaging to the hypocritical position of Versailles:

Someone had posted up a copy of Thiers' former appeals defending his fortifications: 'It would be calumny to suppose that any Government might one day seek to maintain itself by bombarding the capital. What! After riddling the domes of the Invalides and the Pantheon with its bombs, after devoting your families' homes to the flames, could it then present itself to you and ask you to confirm its existence?' And again, from a protest against the bombardment of Palermo in 1848. 'You had all shuddered with horror on learning that a great city has been bombarded for two days. By whom? By a foreign enemy exercising the rights of war? No, gentlemen! By its own government! And why? Because this unfortunate city demanded its rights! Permit me to appeal to the opinion of all Europe! It is to render a service to humanity to pronounce, from perhaps the highest tribunal in Europe, some words of indignation against such misdeeds!'¹

The Communards' reaction to the new situation which they now faced was to reach out for drastic measures which could pull them out of the chaos and weakness into which their revolution had sunk. On 1 May, by a vote of 34 to 20, the Commune Council agreed to form a Committee of Public Safety, a throwback to the Jacobin period of the Great Revolution. The measure, which irrevocably split the Commune into Majority and Minority factions, established a five-man committee capable of concentrating all powers and thus bringing firm action. The Blanquists Arnaud and Melliet, as well as the neo-Jacobins Ravvier, Gerardin and Pyat, were voted to

1. Jellinek, *op. cit.*, p.212. See also Karl Marx, The Civil War in France, (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1970), pp.129-30.

power - a clear reflection that the measure drew most of its support from the Blanquist and neo-Jacobin factions and very little support from the Internationalists and 'modern' socialists. Another vote, taken to show greater support, garnered a 48-23 majority; while a few more Communards had rallied to the measure rather than reveal the deep divisions in the movement, a rock-ribbed minority had been formed and emerged into open opposition to the Committee of Public Safety.

Along with the creation of the Committee of Public Safety, Rossel was appointed the new Delegate for War, thus reopening the question of military control which had been so thinly papered-over by the proclamation of 26 April. Rossel, who had been an officer under Bazaine at Metz, had been involved in a plot to overthrow the capitulationist general; he had escaped after the plot failed and the army surrendered. He served as a special assistant to Gambetta, made excellent strategic reports to the staff, and became a dedicated advocate of 'la guerre à outrance'. His belief in that strategy and the possibility of renewed war with the Prussians offered by the outbreak of the Commune led him to join the revolutionary movement. After receiving a letter from the Minister of War ordering him to Versailles, he sent the following reply on 19 March:

Instruit par une dépêche de Versailles, rendue publique aujourd'hui, qu'il y a deux parties en lutte dans le pays, je me range sans hésitation du côté de celui qui n'a pas signé la paix et qui ne compte pas dans ses rangs des généraux coupables de capitulation.¹

He was elected a Legion Commander in the Guard, took part in the offensive of 2-4 April, and then became Cluseret's chief assistant. His own experience with the Commune's 'army' had

1. Cluseret/Rossel, op. cit., p.79.

taught him to be sceptical of the National Guard's capabilities. Of the seven battalions which he had commanded in the offensive, 'il y avait au moins deux bataillons qui étaient complètement ivres; d'autres se plaignaient de ne pas avoir mangé'.¹ Unable to stop his troops from panicking and fleeing back to Paris, he and the few solid elements he had left were also forced to retreat back to the walls of Paris, where they were very nearly fired upon by the ramparts defence force. 'J'étais accablé de fatigue et profondément dégoûté de la Révolution et des révolutionnaires, de la garde nationale et des gardes nationaux.'² It was hardly surprising that his first action was to try to form a solid force of elite troops upon which he could depend:

Dès le 30 avril, je traçai le plan d'un groupe tactique et administratif de cinq bataillons, commandé par un colonel et deux lieutenants-colonels, pour servir de base à l'organisation d'une armée active. Je chargeai Bergeret de choisir cinq bataillons à lui connus, de trois à quatre cents hommes d'effectif chacun, pour en former un régiment. Eudes dut former deux régiments, également dans Paris. Dombrowski entreprit d'en former trois, puis un quatrième dans l'étendue de son commandement; La Cecilia, qui allait prendre le commandement du centre, demanda aussi à former un régiment. Chacun de ces régiments devait rendre tous les nombreux drapeaux et fanions dont les fédérés abusaient, et recevoir en échange un canon de 4 ou une mitrailleuse par bataillon. Ainsi je mis sur le chantier, dès le 1^{er} mai, huit régiments, qui étaient en réalité des brigades actives de deux mille hommes environ, et quarante pièces d'artillerie de campagne. En même temps je destinai à Wróblewski, qui commandait l'aile gauche, toute la cavalerie disponible, malheureusement très peu nombreuse.³

Rossel had not learned enough about politics to realise that he was falling into the same trap as had Cluseret; the reorganisation plan 'souleva, au sein du Comité central, dans sa séance du 2 mai à laquelle prenaient part quinze chefs de légion, les plus

1. Ibid., p.123.

2. Ibid., p.124.

3. Ibid., pp.139-40.

vives protestations'.¹ It was necessary to deal with the Central Committee before any attempt could be made to change the Commune's military structure, regardless of whether the Commune Council or a Committee of Public Safety was in power. But where Cluseret had let power slip through his fingers and into the waiting hands of the Central Committee, Rossel learned quickly how to compromise. He had very little time left to save his position, as the Central Committee had already met at the insistence of the Legion Commanders and passed the following motion on 3 May:

Nous avons l'honneur de demander à la Commune, à partir de ce jour:

- 1° La suppression de la délégation à la Guerre.
- 2° Son remplacement par le Comité central entier, chargé de l'administration et du contrôle de la garde nationale et de la défense.²

Rossel headed them off on 4 May by offering the Central Committee control of the military services; Moreau became 'chef du cabinet de délégué à la guerre'. The Commune was spared the embarrassment of having to decide the question over which it, as well as the Committee of Public Safety, had so little control; and the alliance of Rossel and the Committee, once achieved, lasted well past Rossel's brief career as Delegate for War, almost to the detriment of the Commune.

Meanwhile, the military reform which had already been initiated at the periphery was still proceeding despite the arguments which raged in the centre. The bravery of the ramparts forces and the revolutionary consciousness they had developed by the end of April continued to sustain the Communard defence despite the overwhelming odds Thiers' troops were stacking against them:

1. Bourelly, op. cit., p.116.

2. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Vol.II, p.149.

...chez eux la passion révolutionnaire l'emportait sur toute autre considération. De sorte que si les bataillons de la Commune, décimés par les projectiles versaillais et diminués par les désertions, étaient moins nombreux, ils étaient bien plus solides devant l'ennemi.

Autour d'eux se multipliaient les compagnies de volontaires...¹

La Cecilia, who had been one of the leaders of Lipowski's 'Francs-tireurs de Paris' during the war, developed his own plan of military reform by combining all the corps francs under his command into an elite corps commanded by Lisbonne. It was this force which, after Fort Issy fell to the Versaillais on 2 May, immediately counter-attacked and retook it, forcing astonished acclaim even from Général de Revières who commanded the regulars' assault. Following this success, even more corps francs were formed; by the middle of May they contained more than 11,000 men and formed the solid core of defence from the fall of Issy to the struggle of the barricades.

Once again, chaos at the top of the Commune's military structure could not help but filter through to the base. Though the corps francs had plugged the gap around forts Issy and Vanves, on the far left of the Communard defence, the redoubt of Moulin Saquet in front of Villejuif was surprised during a night attack; the Fédérés lost 250 killed and wounded, and a further 300 surrendered, making it the worst disaster since 2-4 April. The fiasco had been caused, not by Rossel or the Committee, but by the meddling of the Committee of Public Safety; Pyat had sent orders to Dombrowski and Wroblewski to go to Issy with reinforcements, despite the fact that La Cecilia's francs-tireurs had already stopped the immediate threat at the fort. This had been done without Rossel's knowledge, and the gaffe caused Moulin

1. Malon, op. cit., pp.285-6.

Saquet to be isolated and easily overrun. When Rossel was called to task for the disaster by the Committee of Public Safety, he proved conclusively that it was Pyat's error, which greatly reduced the five-man board's prestige and reactivated the concerns of the Minority¹ faction.

Once left alone, Rossel was able to establish some order in military affairs by centralising the command structure under Dombrowski, La Cecilia and Wroblewski at the ramparts, with reserve armies commanded by Eudes and Bergeret. It was the first time standardisation of command had been achieved since 18 March, despite the obvious advantages which accrued to the Commune as the result. Rossel also tried to form a mobile army capable of conducting limited offensives within the defensive structure. He ordered the National Guard of Saint-Denis to attempt a coup de main against the Versailles Army attacking Fort Issy. Though they sympathised with the Commune, neutrality seemed to them the wiser choice, and they refused. Rossel and La Cecilia next attempted to gather a force for a counter-attack to relieve the endangered fort, but troops simply were not to be found. The fort's situation was critical, as shown by the commander's journal entry for 7 May:

We are receiving as many as ten shells a minute. The ramparts are totally uncovered. All the pieces, save two or three, are dismounted. The Versailles works almost touch us. There are thirty more dead. We are about to be surrounded.²

Rossel's term was rapidly expiring. The Legion Commanders marched in, upset over yet another reorganisational programme for the National Guard. Rossel threatened to have them all shot, but then listened to their arguments. At last, exasperated, he said

1. I.e. those members of the Commune Council who had refused to sanction the formation of the Committee of Public Safety.

2. Lissagaray, op. cit., p.216.

I am fully aware that I have no forces, but officers, you have not either. You have, say you? Well, give me the proof. Tomorrow, at eleven o'clock, bring me 12,000 men to the Place de la Concorde and I will try to do something.¹

On the 9th Rossel was en route to review the troops they had assembled when he was brought word that Issy had fallen. When he arrived, he found only 7,000, which he judged as too few, too late for a counter-attack to relieve Issy. In a fit of anger, he had 10,000 posters printed which said 'The tricolour flag floats over Fort Issy, abandoned yesterday by its garrison'.² Then in a fiery letter to the Commune, he resigned, demanding only to follow Cluseret's example by being given a cell at Mazas prison, and explaining all too accurately the chaos in the Commune's military structure:

Ainsi, la nullité du Comité d'artillerie empêchait l'organisation de l'artillerie; les incertitudes du Comité central de la Fédération arrêtent l'administration; les préoccupations mesquines des chefs de légion paralysent la mobilisation des troupes.³

Rossel had been in power only nine days. Though he had achieved centralisation of command, he had accomplished little else. His dreams of a mobile army never materialised; his plans for interior defence were never carried out, leaving Paris as unprepared for a Versailles breakthrough as Cluseret had. The Enquête Parlementaire praised Rossel in a backhanded sort of way:

Rossel fut bien coupable. On peut affirmer que la Commune a duré un mois de plus, grâce à son active direction à son talent d'organisation, joints à sa grande énergie.⁴

Their view, however, to a certain extent reflects their desire to show that a 'regular officer' was required to enable the Fédérés to put up such a stiff resistance. Quite another view comes from

1. Ibid., p.219.

2. Ibid., p.220.

3. Cluseret/Rossel, op. cit., p.153.

4. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Vol.I, p.379.

Lissagaray:

No man understood Paris, the National Guard, less than Rossel. He imagined that the Père Duchêne was the real mouthpiece of the workmen. Hardly raised to the Ministry, he spoke of putting the National Guard into barracks, of cannonading the runways; he wanted to dismember the legions and form them into regiments, with colonels named by himself.¹

Rossel had also wanted to shoot some Fédérés who had lost their courage, but Lisbonne refused to give his men the order to fire. Rossel never seemed to reconcile his idea of how regular troops performed with his concept of how the Guardsmen he now commanded should fight.

Though it is impossible to reconcile the divergent views on Rossel's effectiveness during his nine-day career, the questions he raised shed much light on the Commune's forces. Most important of these questions was 'who controlled the military might of the Commune?'. The answer, provided by the Legion Commanders, when they assembled only 7,000 men to add to the 15,000 men fighting on the ramparts, was that no-one did. Two months of disorganisation had diminished the Commune's forces from the 200,000 men ready, from 18 March to 2 April, to march on Versailles, to a mere 22,000, many of whom were not Fédérés but volunteers.

Though Cluseret and Rossel had never had very many men directly under their control, it had always been assumed that the Central Committee and the Legion Commanders represented the National Guard. The painful truth was that, where before Cluseret had stated that there was no National Guard but only National Guardsmen, now there were few Guardsmen as well. Though Rossel can be criticised for not having used the 7,000 men he formed on 9 May for a counter-attack at Issy, in reality it was already too late. Even if the Commune could still have managed to pull

1. Lissagaray, op. cit., p.210.

all its forces, political and military, into a united front, it would only be a matter of time before the 170,000 regulars of Versailles took the ramparts and then the city. The Commune's meagre forces could no longer hope even to avoid defeat.

F. Delescluze's Last Stand: 10-21 May

The fall of Issy and Rossel's resignation brought about a new crisis for the Commune and the Committee of Public Safety. Delescluze burst into a session of the Commune Council and exclaimed:

You argue, and it has just been proclaimed that the tricolour floats over Fort Issy. I had hoped, citizens, that France would be saved by Paris and Europe by France. Today the National Guard is no longer willing to fight, and you discuss question of procedure!¹

Delescluze, whose health had been broken by long years spent in prison and exile, had been too ill to play much of a role in the Commune. Now that the Commune, too, was dying, he was its symbol and final hope - the last man capable of uniting the disparate elements (political and military) into a heroic stand. The Commune Council, proving to a certain extent that it was sovereign over the Committee of Public Safety, overturned the old Committee and set up a new one composed of Delescluze and Ranvier (both Jacobins), and Arnaud, Gambon and Eudes (all Blanquists). Though there had been a chance to patch up the dispute with the Minority by not proclaiming a new Committee of Public Safety at all, or by appointing one of their members to the five-man board, the Majority felt that revolutionary action was more important.

1. Jellinek, op. cit., p.259.

Delescluze became the new Delegate for War, which occupied his time so fully that he gave over his post on the Committee of Public Safety to Billioray on 12 May. Nevertheless, he remained the unofficial leader of the Commune, sovereign politically if not militarily. For greeting him as he replaced Rossel at the War Commission was yet another Central Committee proclamation:

Le Comité Central déclare qu'il a le devoir de ne pas laisser succomber cette révolution du 18 mars qu'il a faite si belle; il brisera impitoyablement toutes les résistances. Il entend mettre fin aux tiraillements, vaincre le mauvais vouloir, faire cesser les compétitions, l'ignominie et l'incapacité.¹

Moreau was quickly named 'Commissaire Civil de la Commune auprès du délégué de la Guerre' - an ambiguous title, though one which soon enabled him to play a greater role in the War Commission than Delescluze.

At that point, the Central Committee was strong enough to have overthrown the Commune; the idea had even been discussed. Rossel, though he had called for a cell at Mazas and had been 'arrested' by the Commune, was still at liberty. He had been tipped off by Gerardin, one of the dismissed members of the first Committee of Public Safety, and had gone into 'hiding' in an area so safe that he was able to play a major role in a series of intrigues that swirled around the Commune from 9-19 May. The Central Committee had first thought of making Rossel their 'military dictator' on 7 March:

Tandis que le Comité central discutait...sur la dictature mitigée mise en avant par Moreau et Lacord, et qui aurait fait de Rossel son homme lige, la Commune apprenait par Delescluze...la perte du fort d'Issy...²

While Cerf suggests that that was the real reason why Rossel

1. Marcel Cerf, Edouard Moreau: l'âme du Comité Central de la Commune, (Paris, 1971), p.162.

2. Bourelly, op. cit., p.147.

wanted the Legion Commanders to assemble a force of 12,000, and that Rossel resigned because 7,000 men were too few to carry out a coup, Bourelly and most other military historians accept that the force was to be used in a counter-attack at Issy. The latter view makes more sense - it would hardly seem prudent to attempt a coup with a group of men one had threatened to shoot the day before. Nevertheless, a coup attempted on the 9th would have had impressive support. The Central Committee had voted for a dictatorship by 19-9,¹ and the list of supporters included Rigault, Gerardin, Vermersch and the Père Duchêne, André Léo and La Sociale; Dombrowski, Wroblewski and Eudes had promised neutrality. It was a powerful, if precarious, alliance; for many of the participants felt it would be even harder to get rid of the Central Committee than the Commune if the coup succeeded. Senisse, who was a captain in the 'Enfants du Père Duchêne' corps franc, reflected the mood of many Parisians:

C'est le Comité central qui voit juste, j'ai répondu. La Commune est perdue. Dans quelques jours, les Versaillais seront à l'Hôtel-de-Ville. La dictature jacobine de Rossel, appuyée sur le Comité central, peut balayer les bavards de l'Hôtel de Ville, organiser la mobilisation révolutionnaire dans Paris, et passer à l'offensive. C'est notre dernière chance.²

Even had the Legion Commanders failed to provide sufficient forces for the coup, the corps francs could have carried it through to victory. It was Rossel's resignation, more than anything else, which disrupted the intrigue and saved the Commune.

Though the plotting was not over, the force behind it was

1. Cerf, op. cit., p.155.

2. Martial Senisse, Les Carnets d'un Fédéré, 1871, (Paris, 1965), p.109.

gone. The Central Committee had made its separate peace with Delescluze, leaving the 'Père Duchêne group' as the major source of new intrigues. A plot discussed on 13 May would have used Fédérés to overthrow the Commune and establish 'un comité de salut public ou seraient Rossel, Rigault, Eudes, Dombrowski, Vuillaume et Vermersch'.¹ On 17 May Rossel discussed the possibility of raising up Belleville and Montmartre, but in a final meeting with Vermersch on 19 May Rossel gave up and returned to reality:

Comment, tu viens me dire qu'il y a dans Paris cent mille partisans d'une révolution socialiste qui ne demandent qu'à me suivre. Mais que font-ils en ce moment? Pourquoi ne se battent-ils pas? Entre Asnières et Neuilly, Dombrowski n'a plus que deux mille hommes en ligne. Entre la Muette et Vanves, tu n'en trouverais pas quatre mille. Les portes ne sont même plus gardées.²

A coup was possible because the Commune was so weak; yet no group was capable, at this late stage, of providing the movement with leadership capable of winning victory. To the credit of the plotters, the matter was dropped, thus saving a lost cause from a dishonourable end.

While this power struggle was being quietly waged over the omnipresent question of military control, the split between the Majority and the Minority, left unhealed since 1 May and worsened by the formation of a second Committee of Public Safety after the first had failed so decisively, was brought out into the open on 15 May by the publication of a proclamation accusing the Commune of having 'surrendered its authority to a dictatorship to which it has given the name of Committee of Public Safety'.³ The

1. Ibid., p.111.

2. Ibid., p.133.

3. Schulkind, The Paris Commune of 1871: the View from the Left, op. cit., p.187.

Minority announced further that

convinced, moreover, that the war problem takes precedence over all others at the moment, we shall spend whatever time our respective arrondissement duties leave us, among our brothers of the National Guard, and will play our part in the decisive battles being waged for the rights of the people.

There, too, we shall avoid provoking in the Commune any split that we would all deplore - for, notwithstanding our political differences, we are convinced that majority and minority alike are pursuing the same objectives.¹

If the Minority did not intend to split the Commune, they certainly had no business publishing such a proclamation. Politically the Commune was already dead; even the Committee of Public Safety had little real power; local groups and their politics had again begun to predominate, as in the period before 18 March.

Fortunately, the military command and the War Commission were united for the first time ever. Though Issy had fallen, Lisbonne's corps francs had covered the retreat and, together with Brunel's Fédérés, had managed to hold a line only 700 metres from the abandoned fort, thus buying time for the Commune to endure yet another political transformation. Delescluze's political prestige, coupled with Moreau's military/political prestige, at last symbolised the concurrence of the Commune and the Central Committee - a pact which was published on 19 May as a proclamation for all to see:

Des bruits de dissidence entre la majorité de la Commune et le Comité Central ont été répandus par nos ennemis communs avec une persistance qu'il faut, une fois pour toutes, réduire à néant par une sorte de pacte public.

Le Comité central, préposé par le Comité de Salut Public à l'administration de la Guerre, entre en fonction à partir de ce jour.

Lui, qui a porté le drapeau de la Révolution Communale, n'a ni changé, ni dégénéré. Il est à cette heure ce qu'il était hier: le défenseur né de la Commune, la force qui se met entre ses mains, l'ennemi armé de la guerre civile, la

1. Ibid., p.188.

sentinelle mise par le Peuple auprès des droits qu'il s'est conquis.

Au nom de la Commune et du Comité central, qui signent ce pacte de la bonne foi, que les soupçons et les calomnies inconscientes disparaissent, que les cœurs battent, que les bras s'arment, et que la grande cause sociale pour laquelle nous combattons tous triomphe dans l'union et la fraternité.¹

Though the major source of contention within the Commune had been extended, the nearness of the Versaillais and the obvious weakness of the revolutionary movement had again emboldened the bourgeois counter-revolutionaries:

Le 14 mai, Delescluze fit faire des patrouilles sur divers points de Paris pour dissiper les attroupements de réactionnaires et arrêter les perturbateurs.²

The corps francs, under the command of Generals Bergeret and Eudes with their greater military and revolutionary discipline, proved particularly effective in this mission. But the reserve armies were beginning to be stretched thin, as well as the battered ramparts forces. There was even the fear that the Germans would hand over the north-eastern forts to the Versaillais for a surprise attack; the Commune would not have been able to find the troops to counter such a move. Nor could the Commune in reality maintain its grip on Paris. Though the patrols had disarmed recalcitrant battalions of Guards and even a group of regulars who decided to desert to the Versaillais, a series of bourgeois plots and rumours of betrayals shook the Commune to its roots and forced an intrusion of suspicion into the members' dealing even with each other and their most loyal commanders. The Versailles government made tempting offers to 'buy' Dombrowski and Lisbonne away from the Commune; despite the fact that the

1. Archives Historiques de la Guerre, op. cit., Affiche du 19 mai, 1871.

2. Bourelly, op. cit., p.175.

commanders reported the plots, the suspicion remained that Dombrowski especially would let in the Versailles and then seek refuge with the Prussians. It was completely false; Dombrowski left the front, came before the Commune, and told them 'My life belongs to the Commune'.¹ The meaning was clear: he would die in the defence of the Commune, while his detractors sat squabbling at the Hôtel de Ville.

The military situation, now so unequal, could not last for long. The Point du Jour and the area near Issy were both held by corps francs, but the total ramparts force now numbered only 6,000. They had lost 7,500 men since the beginning of April; and now large sections of the walls were virtually undefended. On the 20th a massive bombardment by the Versailles, using 300 naval guns and siege pieces, smashed Point du Jour to rubble and destroyed the Porte de Saint-Cloud. By 21 May, there were no longer enough troops to hold the ramparts, and the civil servant Ducatel chose to betray the Commune by revealing to the Versailles that the Porte de Saint-Cloud had been abandoned. By nightfall 70,000 regulars poured into Paris as the Western defence completely collapsed. Dombrowski had only temporarily checked the entry, and against such overwhelming odds he had to fall back. The Versailles Army reached Place Trocadéro, where it paused to consolidate and reorganise.

Delescluze now called for what was the Commune's first and last military option - the revolutionary war of the barricades:

Citizens.

Enough of militarism, no more staff-officers with gold-embroidered uniforms. Make way for the people, the bare-armed fighters! The hour of revolutionary war has struck. The people know nothing of elaborate manoeuvres, but

1. Stewart Edwards, The Paris Commune, 1871, (London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1971), p.315.

when they have a rifle in their hands and cobble-stones under their feet, they have no fear for the strategists of the monarchist school.

To arms! Citizens, to arms! It is a choice now; as you know, between conquering or falling into the merciless hands of the reactionaries and clericals of Versailles, those scoundrels who deliberately handed over France to the Prussians and are making us pay the ransom of their treachery.

If you are determined that the generous blood that has flowed like water these past six weeks should not have been shed in vain, if you wish to live in a free and egalitarian France, if you wish to spare your children the suffering and misery you have endured, then you must rise as one man. Faced with your formidable resistance, the enemy who flatters himself he will again submit you to his yoke will win no more than the shame of the useless crime with which he has befouled himself for the past two months.

Citizens, ^{your} mandatories will fight beside you and die beside you if need be. In the name of glorious France, mother of all popular revolutions, eternal home of those ideas of justice and solidarity which must and will be the laws of the world, we exhort you to march against the enemy! Let your revolutionary energy show them that Paris may be sold but it cannot yield or be conquered!

The Commune counts on you, count on the Commune!¹

His proclamation was seconded by the Committee of Public Safety:

To Arms, then! Let Paris bristle with barricades, and from behind these improvised ramparts let our war-cry ring out against the enemy, our cry of pride, of defiance but also of victory - for thanks to its barricades Paris is impregnable.

Let all the cobble-stones in Paris be dug up, first because enemy projectiles will do less damage if they fall on bare earth, and second because the cobbles are our new means of defence and must be stacked up at intervals on the balconies of upper stories.

Let revolutionary Paris, the Paris of the grandes journées, do its duty; the Commune and the Committee of Public Safety will do theirs.²

In reality, they had already failed to do their duty. Paris had had sixty-five days to construct an impregnable inner ring of defence built around Montmartre, the Panthéon, Père-Lachaise, and the Buttes aux Cailles. These positions, had they been connected by several lines of barricades benefiting from

1. Edwards, The Communards of Paris, 1871, op. cit., pp.160-1. Original in Journal Officiel, 22 May, 1871.

2. Ibid., p.161. Original in Journal Officiel, 24 May, 1871.

interlocked fire, as well as artillery support from the heights, would have formed a revolutionary redoubt which even the 170,000 Versailles could not have taken without unacceptable casualties. Further, though the Commune's drastically reduced ramparts force now numbered only 6,000, they would have been sufficient to staff the key positions; Fédérés fighting on their own doorsteps could have supplemented the few small ramparts forces, thus enabling the Commune to tap what was left of its military potential. But only a few positions had been prepared, and they were not connected or supported by artillery. The scattered barricades which the Committee of Public Safety had termed 'improvised ramparts' would not suffice to make Paris impregnable. Nor could Delescluze's revolutionary rhetoric achieve victory for the people. All that 'ces appels à la guerre révolutionnaire... achèvent, pour l'instant, [c'est] de désorganiser la défense régulière et [de] déterminer une sorte d'atonie militaire'.¹ The command structure established by Rossel had been thrown out of the window; now local efforts at resistance would predominate. The Commune's military and political unity lay shattered. But there was a new unity when the Parisians rose up, as on 18 March, to struggle in their own streets and homes against a Versailles Army bent on wholesale revenge. The people needed no leaders or proclamations to tell them that the hour of revolutionary warfare had struck.

G. La Semaine Sanglante: 22-28 May

Parisiens, pensez-y mûrement: dans très peu de jours, nous serons dans Paris. La France veut en finir avec la guerre civile. Elle le veut, elle le doit, elle le peut.

1. Bourgin, op. cit., p.348.

Elle marche pour nous délivrer. Vous pouvez contribuer à vous sauver vous-mêmes, en rendant l'assaut inutile, et en reprenant votre place, dès aujourd'hui, au milieu de vos concitoyens et de vos frères.¹

The Versailles Army scarcely needed any help from the bourgeois citizens, though they emerged from their houses wearing tricolor armbands to welcome the soldiers; nor was Thiers' veiled warning to the rest of Paris necessary: the Army which had not shrunk before the bombardment of the bourgeois sections of Passy and Neuilly could scarcely be expected to show any mercy at all in the revolutionary arrondissements, defended by hand-to-hand combat.

There were only two courses of action left to the Communards. A few, including Moreau, sought to avoid the slaughter of the civil populace through appeals to the soldiers and through attempted negotiations. A proclamation to the soldiers, which concluded 'Lorsque la consigne est infâme, la désobéissance est un devoir',² had little effect; this was no longer the demoralised army of 18 March, but regulars who had been trained to look upon the Parisians as only a new kind of Prussian. It was also too late for even a last minute compromise. The Free Masons had already tried; they had planted their banners on the ramparts of Issy in hopes of getting the Thiers regime to agree to a cease-fire, followed by negotiations to end the civil war. Their banners had been smashed to bits along with the ramparts, and the Versaillais now had 70,000 troops in Paris - a rather inopportune moment for compromise. But pressure in the provinces from La Ligue d'Union Républicaine et des Droits de Paris (in which the bourgeois mayors of Paris predominated) and the Alliance

1. La Guerre des Communeux, op. cit., pp.173-4.

2. Journal Officiel de la Commune, (Paris, 1872), 24 mai, 1871, p.649.

républicaine (based on the Republican factions of the larger provincial cities), coupled with the adherence of Moreau and the Central Committee as the makers of the revolution, gave the negotiation scheme a new impetus. On 24 May the following position was expressed:

Le Comité Central veut faire entendre sa voix.
 Nous n'avons lutté que contre un ennemi: La Guerre Civile, et il propose sa solution:
 Dissolution de l'Assemblée Nationale.
 Dissolution de la Commune.
 Retrait de l'Armée Régulière de Paris.
 Nomination d'un pouvoir intérimaire chargé de procéder aux élections d'une Constituante et de la Commune de Paris.
 Aucune représaille dans les deux camps.
 ...Voilà les seules conditions acceptables. Que tout le sang versé dans une lutte fratricide retombe sur la tête de ceux qui les repousseraient.¹

The ceasefire attempt was not even taken seriously by the Versailles Army, and the Central Committee bowed out of revolutionary politics. There were no more armed battalions to command or represent - just the armed people fighting a hopeless struggle against the disciplined regulars.

There could be no compromise, for Thiers did not want one. He had set his course even before 18 March: once forced to flee the capital, he had decided to return with a force sufficient not just to occupy the key points militarily and declare martial law, but to crush the radicals of Paris once and for all. His military policy was that of the 'meat-grinder' rather than the sword, as Vinoy had already found out. Vinoy had advocated a sharp attack against the forts in the south-west, which would probably have fallen, followed by a lightning drive into Paris. With the interior of Paris so unprepared, the city would have been easily conquered. Thiers, on the other hand, insisted upon

1. Cerf, op. cit., p.171.

a slow advance which would first pound the fortifications to bits¹ and then, once entry had been achieved, would force the Communards into an ever-shrinking area until resistance was completely annihilated. Vinoy had disagreed, but he had been replaced by MacMahon, who readily accepted Thiers' plan. Meanwhile, even Bismarck had been upset at the slow progress Thiers was making; he needed assurance that the peace he had signed would remain stable and enforceable, and he could not call his programme complete until Thiers had crushed the Communards and their 'guerre à outrance'. In a letter to Favre, Thiers stated:

Que M. de Bismarck soit bien tranquille...La Guerre sera terminée dans le courant de la semaine. Nous avons fait une brèche du côté d'Issy. On est occupé à l'élargir... Je supplie M. de Bismarck au nom de la cause de l'ordre, de nous laisser achever nous-mêmes cette répression de brigandage antisocial qui a, pour quelques jours, établi son siège à Paris. Ce serait causer un nouveau préjudice au parti de l'ordre en France et, dès lors, en Europe, que d'en agir autrement. Que l'on compte sur nous et l'ordre social sera vengé dans le courant de la semaine.²

While Bismarck possibly would not have intervened with German troops, to threaten to do so was an excellent tactic to convince Thiers to carry on the social war against the Communards in the name of the 'cause of order'. It was sufficient for the Prussians to hold the north-eastern forts, blocking Communard retreat, while the Versailles Army crushed all popular resistance to the peace treaty.

If negotiations were hopeless, so was fighting - the only other alternative left to the people of Paris. It was just a better way to die: fighting for a belief which had failed yet which one day might triumph. As Jourde, a Communard leader,

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1. Cynics noted that perhaps Thiers wanted to prove how difficult it was to destroy the forts he had been responsible for constructing while serving as minister to Louis-Philippe.
 2. Jules Simon, Le Gouvernement de M. Thiers, (Paris, 1878), p.183.

attested:

Qui donc songeait à vaincre dans la semaine sanglante?
La Révolution voulait mourir héroïque et tomber ensevelie
dans les plis de son drapeau.

L'avenir, encore une fois, allait être écrasé par le
passé. Qu'importait aux champions du Progrès et de la
Justice? La chute même ne serait-elle pas un enseignement,
un exemple, un encouragement pour la génération du lendemain?¹

This, the struggle of despair, was the course decided upon by the remnants of the Commune's military structure and civilian support. It was to be an ad hoc, local struggle, characterised by the street-to-street and hand-to-hand combat of the barricades.

Dombrowski, La Cecilia, Wroblewski and Lisbonne fought effective rearguard actions back to reasonably defensible lines within Paris, one on the Rive Droite from the Tuileries to the Batignolles, another on the Rive Gauche from the Rue de l'Université to the Buttes aux Cailles. The Versaillais, who had captured Trocadéro almost without a struggle by 1.00 a.m. on the 22nd and had temporarily paused to reorganise, had taken all of the XV^e and XVI^e arrondissements by the early morning hours. Some 1,500 National Guards who were not even aware of the regulars' entry were captured. But the morning brought renewed insurrection in Paris, and the barricades erected by the people helped the ramparts force to establish the temporary line of defence: Malon was at the Batignolles, La Cecilia at Montmartre, Brunel at the Rue Royale, Bergeret at the Tuileries, Lisbonne at the Jardin du Luxembourg, and Wroblewski at Buttes aux Cailles, which became the major centres of resistance.

Fighting strength came also from an unexpected source: the women of Paris. They had played a critical role in the insurrection of 18 March, and they had provided much of the popular enthusiasm

1. François Jourde, Souvenirs d'un membre de la Commune, (Brussels, 1877), p.73.

for the sortie of 2-4 April. Since then, they had become increasingly involved in the actual defence effort. On 11 April, Elisabeth Dmitrieff and Nathalie Le Mel proclaimed the Union des Femmes pour la défense de Paris et les soins aux blessés:

Dans cette adresse, elles montrent la nécessité de la défense de la Commune à fin d'assurer 'le règne du travail', et elles posent la question de l'égalité des sexes dans le cadre de la participation à cette défense. C'est aussi une des premières fois où une organisation de femmes considère que toute inégalité et tout antagonisme entre les sexes constituent une des bases du pouvoir des classes gouvernantes. Jusqu'au dernier jour de lutte, tout ce qu'elles demandaient comme mesure égalitaire immédiate était de pouvoir participer à la défense de la Commune autant que les hommes, sans distinction de sexe.¹

Hundreds of women fought on the ramparts, as well as serving as cantinières and nurses, and by the middle of May one Legion Commander formed a company of women which he threatened to use to disarm any Fédérés who refused to fight or fled in battle.² During 'la semaine sanglante, suivant la tradition des Révolutions de 1789 et 1848, les femmes prirent des armes en très grand nombre et défendirent les barricades jusqu'à la fin'.³ Probably as many as 10,000 were arrested during and after the week of combat.

The Communards needed all the support they could get, for on the morning of the 23rd, the Versaillais attacked all along the line. General Ladmirault launched his forces in an arc to the north-east, sweeping along the ramparts and freeing the gates. The Prussians now betrayed their 'neutrality' and allowed Montaudon's division through the Porte Saint-Ouen, and the entire

1. Schulkind, 'Le Rôle des Femmes de la Commune de 1871', op. cit., p.19.

2. Archives Historiques de la Guerre, op. cit., Affiche du 14 mai, par le commandant de la 8^e Légion.

3. Schulkind, op. cit., p.27.

force took the Buttes Montmartre from the rear while General Clinchant carried the key Batignolles position in front of the Buttes. The Commune's greatest citadel, surrounded by 20,000 troops, was overwhelmed, along with many of the cannons that had so worried Thiers on 18 March and which had been counted on to provide artillery support for the Commune's defensive battle. Malon and La Cecilia were forced to fall back on the Place Blanche and Place Pigalle, where two groups of women, one commanded by Louise Michel and Elisabeth Dmitrieff numbering 120, and the other commanded by Nathalie Le Mel numbering about 50, held barricades for several hours despite the assaults mounted by the regulars. On the Rive Gauche the battle went much better for the Commune. Although the Montparnasse Cemetery was lost, there had been too few men to defend it anyway. Wroblewski, who commanded the defence south of the Seine, set up a brilliant defence based on the river, the Panthéon, the Buttes aux Cailles and the forts to the south-east still held by the Commune. He attempted to convince Delescluze to transfer the entire Communard defence to his region, which even afforded an avenue of retreat to the open countryside. But as Lissagaray noted, 'one cannot displace the heart of an insurrection, and the Federals were more and more bent on remaining in their own quarters'.¹ But the Commune was losing its heroes one by one; Dombrowski fell mortally wounded in Montmartre and his body was carried to the Hôtel de Ville, where it lay in state. Brunel was able to effect a retreat only by burning the entire Rue Royale, and Bergeret burned the Tuileries as well, which served as a wall of flames to keep the Versailles at bay. As if the burning (some of which was caused

1. Lissagaray, op. cit., p.281.

by incendiary projectiles fired by the Versailles artillerymen) and the killing were not enough, the regulars chose that moment to inaugurate firing squads for captured *Fédérés*, civilians found anywhere near the barricades, or anyone denounced by a neighbour as a 'Communard'. A special point was made of executing prisoners at the Rue des Rosiers, where on 18 March the mob had assassinated generals Lecomte and Clément Thomas.

On the 24th, the Hôtel-de-Ville had to be abandoned; it was burned by its last defenders, who refused to let the 'heart' of their Commune fall to the soldiers intact, though the destruction of the building made the defence of the 3^e and 4^e arrondissements, as well as the Rive Gauche, much more difficult. Lisbonne's brilliant defence of the Jardin du Luxembourg and the Panthéon, where for three days his 2,000 men had held an entire army division at bay, finally crumbled; he retreated across the Seine to the Château d'Eau. At the end of the day the Commune still held two important positions: Père Lachaise Cemetery and the Buttes aux Cailles, at either extremity of their lines. But they now commanded only the 11^e, 12^e, 19^e and 20^e arrondissements, as well as small pieces of the 3^e, 4^e and 10^e. The Commune's response to the Versailles-instigated massacre of prisoners was to shoot the hostages they had taken, among them the Archbishop of Paris.

Thursday the 25th, the defence of the Rive Gauche collapsed completely. Wroblewski was forced from the Buttes aux Cailles, though he retreated in good order across the Seine to the Mairie of the 11^e arrondissement. There, Delescluze offered him the command of the remnants of the Communard Army.

'Have you a few thousand resolute men?' asked Wroblewski.
'A few hundred at most', answered the Delegate.¹

1. Ibid., p.306.

Realising that the title was useless without the troops, Wroblewski refused and chose instead to fight in the ranks alongside his corps francs. At the Château d'Eau the Fédérés held against incredible odds. Lisbonne commanded 250 francs-tireurs and a battalion of Guardsmen at the key juncture. Four horses were shot out from underneath him, but still he urged his men on. Finally he took the place of a wounded franc-tireur in the line, was critically wounded, and carried away by his men, having ably earned his title the 'd'Artagnan de la Commune'. It was a hard day for the Commune. Frankel, Elisabeth Dmitrieff, and Brunel were all seriously wounded, and Delescluze, his revolutionary warfare in tatters, walked to his death on the main barricade at Château d'Eau.

By Friday morning, the 26th, the Commune held only a triangle from Gare de l'Est to Gare de Lyon, passing through Places Château d'Eau and Bastille, and then from the two Gares to Père Lachaise, where a few cannon still replied to the Versailles gunners. Ranvier, long-time leader of Belleville, took command and gave the waning defence the will to fight on. But Place de la Bastille fell, and on Saturday Père Lachaise was overrun; those defenders who had not been killed were immediately lined up against 'le mur des fédérés' and shot. By 11.00 a.m., Sunday the 28th, the last barricades around Château d'Eau fell, and by noon the final shot of the Commune had been fired from a barricade at Rue Ramponneau. On the following day the last Communard battle standard was surrendered when Fort Vincennes, invested by the Prussians on one side and the Versaillais on the other, ceased its resistance. It had been commanded by the guerrilla leader Faltot, a veteran of both the Polish Insurrection and Garibaldi's campaigns in Italy.

Though the regulars had crushed the revolutionary war of the barricades, their guns were not yet silent. The disarmed people suffered the full consequences of a failed revolution: for the 877 Versaillais who had been killed and the 6,454 wounded, as well as the 84 hostages the Commune had executed, the Army exacted a blood tribute of 25,000 men, women and children; a further 40-50,000 were taken prisoner, many of whom died from maltreatment or in exile in the overseas territories. More than ten times the number of people killed in the period of Terror of the Great Revolution had expired in defence of the first socialist republic. Official opinion, other than a sigh of relief that 'order' had been restored, was best reflected by the epitaph provided by U.S. Ambassador Washburne:

The reign of the Commune for ten weeks, pursuing its career of murder, assassination, pillage, robbery, blasphemy, and terror, finally expired in blood and flame.¹

Marx thought differently from the men of order; his epitaph showed that the Commune and the heroic defence by its armed people would not easily be forgotten:

Working men's Paris, with its Commune, will be for ever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class. Its exterminators history has already nailed to that eternal pillory from which all the prayers of their priests will not avail to redeem them.²

H. The Commune's Strategy and Tactics

The Commune, as 'the first though still pale dawn of the

1. Washburne, op. cit., pp.209-10.

2. Karl Marx, The Civil War in France, (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1970), p.99.

proletarian republic',¹ had never had the advantage either of a disciplined revolutionary party or of a highly-evolved concept of the armed people. As the dawn, it would rather serve as the crucible wherein the nascent proletarian political and military theories had been created, tested, and though found wanting, had already begun to evolve towards the body of theory and practice that would lead 'to the Finland Station'² and beyond. Though the Communards' mistakes brought about their own failure, their experience enabled the modern revolutionary movement to advance.

The Central Committee had begun as a patriotic protest against defeat in war and the capitulationist Assembly. It had only acted after the deep provocation of Thiers' failed coup on 18 March, and even then it had been spontaneity rather than any revolutionary organisation which had carried the day for the armed people. Thiers' evacuation of Paris amounted to a 'gift victory'; it fooled the Committee into thinking that the Revolution had already triumphed. Incapable of understanding that Thiers intended to return to Paris a conqueror through the vehicle of civil war, the Committee temporised and attempted to legitimise its position. The leadership failed both to march on Versailles and to smash the structure of the bourgeois state they had replaced but not overthrown (indeed, the Bank of France was left untouched, despite the fact that it was the greatest hostage the Commune had over the capitalist Assembly). With the elections of the Commune, most Parisians assumed that the revolution was over, its triumph enshrined by the ballot box as well as the rifle. The Central Committee ceded to the political Commune

1. Lavrov, in Trotsky's 'Reply to Karl Kautsky', The Defence of Terrorism; excerpt in Schulkind, op. cit., pp.293-4.

2. Edmund Wilson, To the Finland Station, (Fontana, London, 1970).

Council, though its members under the leadership of Moreau, were determined to remain the sentinels of the armed revolution.

The 'political' period of the Commune could not count for a great deal. From the moment the Versailles Army attacked, the Commune's achievements would all be judged against a single criterion: the concept of the armed people it evolved in defence against the regulars' attack. As the Commune lurched from crisis to crisis, its military structure was repeatedly altered in desperate attempts to find a response to Versailles' challenge of civil war.

By 5 April it was apparent to all that the insurrectionary tactics of 18 March were no longer applicable, and the disastrous offensive served only to show how shallow the Commune's concept of the armed people really was. It had seemed to prove the regulars' contention that,

...les troupes improvisées, fussent-elles composées de gens braves, fussent-elles commandées par des chefs entreprenants, sont hors d'état de se présenter en rase campagne, incapables d'organiser un effort offensif sérieux.¹

The Commune, now forced completely on the defensive, entrusted its military destiny to Cluseret, only to be challenged by the re-entry of the Central Committee into Communist politics. The resulting chaos sapped the Commune of its military strength. As Trotsky noted, only 20,000 of the 167,000 National Guardsmen were fighting. 'Les ouvriers russes ont montré qu'ils sont capables de se rendre maîtres aussi de la "machine de guerre". Et nous voyons ici un énorme progrès réalisé sur la Commune.'² Rossel, who inherited the impossible situation, similarly failed to master the war machine and harness the Commune's military potential,

1. Sesmaisons, op. cit., p.18.

2. Leon Trotsky, La Commune de Paris et la Russie des Soviets, (Librairie de l'Humanité, Paris, 1921), p.27.

while on the ramparts the Commune's best commanders evolved their own concept of the armed people - the corps francs. It had been the idea of Moreau and Lisbonne on 19 March to create such a force, but they had received almost no support. Now with Delescluze and Moreau in charge of the War Commission, a last desperate attempt was made to organise more corps francs. In an affiche of 17 May, the leaders called for a new phase in the Commune's defence: 'on réunira sous un seul commandement tous les bataillons de volontaires et de francs-tireurs, ce qui fournira un effectif d'au moins vingt-mille hommes, et l'on prendra une offensive vigoureuse'.¹ The best answer the Commune had evolved to its military problems, however, had come too late. The Versailles break-through disrupted the scheme and forced the Commune to take up Delescluze's revolutionary war of the barricades. The Commune's military tactics had come full circle - from insurrectionary offence to insurrectionary defence. The armed people, victorious on 18 March succumbed in the battle of La Semaine Sanglante. The 'Trente Sous'² of the National Guard, 'en combattant, en mourant, n'ont pu sauver la Commune, mais, devant la conscience humaine, devant l'Histoire, ils l'ont conservée impérissable et grande'.³

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1. Georges-Ferdinand Gautier, 'Les Francs-tireurs de la Commune', Cahiers de l'Académie d'Histoire, No.6, (Paris, janvier-février 1971), p.478.
 2. Trente Sous, 1 franc 50, was the amount of money paid to the Guardsmen during the siege, and became their nickname.
 3. Lepelletier, op. cit., Vol.III, p.420.

VIII. THE PROVINCIAL COMMUNARDS

To the horror of 'les hommes de l'ordre', the movement which had as its heart the Paris Commune had never been confined solely to the radical metropolis. Rather, as the Enquête Parlementaire revealed, the movement extended to virtually every area of France in imitation or support of the Insurrection of 18 March:

N'en doutez donc pas, messieurs, le complot que l'habile persévérance du Gouvernement et l'énergie de l'armée tout à coup restaurée ont écrasé sous Paris, ce complot couvrait la France entière, il était formé d'un bout à l'autre du territoire, mais il n'a éclaté que là où il a pu s'abriter derrière des murailles jusqu'alors imprenables.¹

The events, their repression and the subsequent inquest marked the beginning of the Red Scare - the Communist International characterised as the interior enemy lurking behind the formerly impregnable walls of the state. Yet this conspiracy theory so popular in Versailles was only partially true. Though Commune activity in its various manifestations left no corner of France untouched, the actions scarcely represented a unified plot directed by International conspirators in Paris or London. Nor would it be correct to term the activities in the provinces a movement; each event reflected the concerns of local leaders and the search for regional solutions rather than an attempt to copy wholeheartedly the Commune's programme from Paris. The very lack of preparation for revolution and of co-ordination, first between Paris and the provinces, and secondly, among the provincial radicals themselves, lends further support to the contention that it was Thiers' coup rather than a radical plot, which was chiefly

1. Enquête Parlementaire sur l'Insurrection du 18 mars, (Paris, 1872), Vol.I, p.274.

responsible for the Insurrection of 18 March.

The Commune, during the period 18 March to 2 April, had two strategies which if vigorously pursued, would have guaranteed victory. The first, purely military, was whittled away, as Thiers was allowed to reforge his Army and seize the military initiative. The second, purely political, was also lost by the Communards. Instead of appealing immediately to the provinces for support and orchestrating provincial political events in order to isolate Thiers at Versailles, the Communards in the heady days of their own victory in Paris virtually ignored the provinces. Thiers, who was already assured of the key to the military battlefield thanks to the possession of Fort Mont-Valérien, was quick to monopolise all the channels of communication with the provinces and thus to gain the key to the political battlefield as well. If either strategy pursued separately was capable of bringing victory to the Commune, a combined military/political offensive would have made success doubly certain. Had the Communard Army marched on Versailles, the Thiers regime and its motley military forces would have been easily captured or dispersed. Then had the territory encompassed by the Lignes du Midi and the Sud-Ouest (which had never been crushed by Gambetta) been encouraged to revolt, the Right in France would have firmly controlled only the 'Clerical-Legitimist' West. The North and East, yet under Prussian occupation, could not have furnished support to either side, and Thiers could probably not have received the 'gift' return of prisoners of war from Prussia. The revolution would have been the master of France.

But the Central Committee and the nascent Commune failed to take the political or combined military/political initiative in the provinces for the same reasons they had failed to pursue

the military strategy: ensconced in the search for legitimacy, the needs for elections and the transference of power, their chance for action was frittered away. The Commune failed to send a single proclamation to the provinces explaining its stance against Versailles until April, when it was too late for propaganda alone to be effective. Meanwhile, Thiers was already bombarding the provinces with statements intended to mislead the rest of France as to the nature, intent and strength of the Insurrection of 18 March. Though the Commune sent a few delegates to the larger cities, little tangible support was given. Left largely to their own devices, the provincial movements failed one by one.

A. The Provincial Reaction to 18 March

The provincial republicans had in reality been separated from Paris since 4 September. Marseille and Lyon had not only declared the fall of the Empire before Paris, by the end of the war they had surpassed Paris in terms of radical organisation. Through the vigorous war-time leadership of Gambetta and the regional Ligues, much of the South of France had achieved at least some of the planks of their radical platforms by the February elections. Though Lyon's Committee of Public Safety was forced by the new prefect to haul down the red flag which had flown there since 4 September, most local reforms were allowed to stand. Coupled with the local radical achievements was the belief, never acceptable in Paris, that the war was over. While Paris had been frustrated over the unsuccessful sorties, the refusal to employ the National Guard and the shameful capitulation, the provinces were convinced that the Government of National Defence had fought honourably.

The twin issues of local radical achievement and the desire for peace were already sufficient to create different levels of political consciousness in Paris and the provinces. The actions of the Assembly between the capitulation and the insurrection did much to further the split. The radicals in Paris, who had been suppressed but not discredited, gained the support of most citizens in a reaction against the Prussian entry, the *Loi des Echéances*, and the decapitalisation of the city. However, none of these issues deeply affected the provinces, and the fact that the provincial radicals had to a certain extent been mollified or absorbed into the governmental process assured that the events of 18 March would be received with less enthusiasm than was traditionally accorded to Paris-made revolutions:

Distrust remained inherent in the relationship between the capital and the departments. The average provincial was less susceptible to the frustrated patriotism from which the Parisian suffered. He had been spared the provocation by which a harassed citizen of the former capital justified his dislike for the newly-constituted government. Moreover the possible threat the National Assembly posed to the Republic seemed less apparent to him than to his Paris cousins. A Parisian had little faith in Adolphe Thiers, and the extremist press fed his contempt for those who had served the Government of National Defence.

The Parisian, the resident of Lyon, the townsman of Elbeuf, and the villager of Varilhes (Ariège) shared the same desire for local freedom. But Paris had come too late. When it arrived, it discovered that a majority of the provincial centres already enjoyed increased municipal liberties and were satisfied for the moment with the composition of their elected councils.¹

The Communard movement in Paris was concerned with more than just local autonomy, though autonomy did represent one of the identifiable strands of its political composition. The more revolutionary aspects of the Commune's programme went beyond the provinces' perceptions of the problems faced by France in March 1871; thus their support would have to be won over by methods too

1. Louis M. Greenberg, *Sisters of Liberty*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971), p.133.

tedious for a revolution to employ. The result was an overwhelming lack of support for the spate of violent outbursts which extremists set off in support of the Paris Commune.

Lyon was the first provincial centre to follow the lead of Paris. On 22 March 800 National Guard delegates assembled and demanded the establishment of a federation similar to that of the Central Committee in Paris. Military authority crumbled, and the radicals took over, naming Ricciotti Garibaldi as Commander of the National Guard and establishing a Communal Commission of five men. But on the 23rd the five councillors resigned, and the leaderless Commune lost the support of all but two or three battalions of the Guard. On the 24th the four leading newspapers strongly condemned the movement, and General Crouzat circulated the rumour that the Prussians camped at Dijon viewed the Commune as a provocation for renewed war and were preparing to attack. Crouzat then collected a force of regulars, occupied the city, and had little trouble restoring order.

At Saint-Etienne an insurrection began on the 24th; De l'Espée, the new prefect, tried on the 25th to use some 300 troops to restore order, but the troops refused to fire on the people. In the ensuing chaos, a madman fired into the Guard, who returned a volley that killed De l'Espée. But the movement remained virtually leaderless, and the news that Crouzat had occupied Lyon disheartened the revolutionaries. By the 28th only 100 National Guardsmen held the Hôtel de Ville and it was relatively easy for General Lavoye's regulars and Colonel Bourras' Francs-tireurs des Vosges to put down the insurrection. A parallel movement at Le Creusôt was similarly suppressed. Thus in four days all the revolutionary centres of the east, Lyon,

St. Etienne, and Creusot, were lost to the Commune'.¹

In the South of France, where Ligue activity had been more extensive, the movements lasted a little longer than those of the 'East'. Digeon in Narbonne and his colleague Marcon in Toulouse led Communard movements which were based on the Ligue du Sud-Ouest, but they were suppressed by 31 March. Limoges revolted on 4 April, but order was easily restored. It was thus left to Marseille to carry the standard of the Communard movement in the provinces, just as it had been the centre of the most radical of the Ligues - that of the Midi.

The Commune of Marseille was proclaimed on 23 March by Gaston Crémieux. Fourteen of the sixteen battalions of the National Guard offered support, thus guaranteeing Crémieux a force of 12,000-13,000 men. Also, many of the men demobilised from Garibaldi's Army of the Vosges, including 600 crack Italian Red Shirts, were in the city. But Crémieux had no conception of how to employ the military forces at his disposal. He made no effort to organise the Garibaldians into an elite unit like the Corps Francs of Lisbonne in Paris, nor did he utilise the National Guard by placing it on a war footing. Finally, he failed even to occupy strategic points of the city:

Les points stratégiques les plus importants, les forts Saint-Jean, Saint-Nicolas et Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde ne furent pas pris par les insurgés: l'absence de direction, fatale au soulèvement, en était la cause. Ces secteurs clés restèrent entre les mains de la contre-révolution qui en fit par la suite ses points d'appui.²

Crémieux fared little better on the political side of his movement. The six-man Commission he headed split between liberals and

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1. H.P.O. Lissagaray, History of the Commune of 1871, (Calcutta, 1971), p.122.
 2. E. Jeloubovskaia, La Commune de Paris, 1871, (Moscow, 1971), p.318.

extremists, and support was visibly eroding among the people of Marseille. Though Paris sent delegates to Marseille to help organise the revolution, the capable Amouroux soon left to take up his seat on the Commune Council, and the radicals Landeck and May alienated some of their more moderate provincial affiliates.

The situation in Marseille paralleled that of Paris. General Espivent retired from the city to await reinforcements, though he maintained communications with reactionary elements within Marseille. While political disputes paralysed the Marseille Commune and its military forces were allowed to disintegrate, General Espivent prepared to resume the offensive by placing the province in a state of siege. On the 3rd April, Espivent marched his troops into Marseille. When faced by the National Guard under Pelissier (who had commanded a force at Dijon along with Garibaldi during the war), the troops wavered and might have gone over to the revolution. But a regular officer was shot by a Guardsman, and the reactionaries opened fire from the Legitimist Club of the Frères Ignorantins. The soldiers joined the battle against the National Guard troops, who were forced to fall back upon the well-defended prefecture. But from the heights of Notre Dame which Crémieux had so foolishly ignored, Espivent opened up an artillery barrage. More than 300 shells struck the prefecture, and the Commune was crushed. At least 150 people were killed and hundreds more wounded, while the Versaillais lost 30 killed and 50 wounded. More than 900 prisoners were rounded up, showing Paris what fate awaited her a month and a half later.

Thus by 5 April, it was Thiers who was doubly assured of victory over the Commune: the Parisian National Guard was shut up behind its own walls, and the last important provincial insurrection had been put down. Despite numerous scattered

protests and demonstrations against Thiers' troops, as well as a bloody outburst again in Lyon, Thiers was assured of control over the provinces. Though they were now largely neutral rather than pro-Versailles, 'unlike the government at Versailles the Commune could ill afford to let the provinces sleep peacefully through the crisis'.¹

B. The Provinces: 5 April to 28 May

The provinces had seemed all along to hesitate between revolution and neutrality. Only at Marseille had the National Guard lent overwhelming support, and even there the regulars had secured a relatively easy triumph. On the whole, the Guard's attitude had been to declare 'qu'elle prendra immédiatement les armes si Versailles attaque la République'.² But Thiers was smart enough to sugar-coat his intentions before handing them down as proclamations for provincial consumption: he spoke of restoring order, rather than of civil war, of welcoming Paris back to the fold rather than of slaughtering 20,000 of her citizens. Thiers also deluged the provinces with horror stories of how the Communards violated the sanctity of the church, shot peasants, and robbed the good bourgeoisie. As the provinces were being simultaneously pushed and wooed into neutrality, Thiers blunted the only issue upon which the provinces were guaranteed to rise - the question of monarchist restoration by the Assembly. He received provincial delegations politely, commiserated with them over the Commune, implored their support for his conservative Republic, and finally, in a secret agreement, promised them that

1. Greenberg, op. cit., p.134.

2. Jeanne Gaillard, Communes de Provinces, Commune de Paris, (Paris, 1971), p.66.

he would not allow the Assembly to proclaim itself a constitutional body and move for monarchy.

Through Thiers' machinations, a triangular political pattern emerged over the dual military pattern. At the apex of the triangle was Versailles, which dealt out political favours to the provinces with one hand while using the sword in the other against Paris. The provinces, convinced that Paris' struggle was hopeless, plunged into republican activity. Though the Left claimed the provinces abandoned Paris in order to further their own interests, the provincial leadership was in reality following the only course consistent with its side of the dispute that now divided the republican party - the question of conservative versus socialist republic.

En fait, la Commune excède de beaucoup ce que veut la province. Elle est devenue, qu'elle l'ait ou non voulu, un gouvernement avec ses assemblées, son armée, son Journal officiel, et si elle consent à traiter avec Versailles, c'est de pouvoir à pouvoir.¹

The split was irreparable after the provincial municipal elections of 30 April. The Commune called on the provinces to boycott the elections, since Paris did not recognise the Versailles regime. Instead, the provincial republicans used the election to lay the groundwork for their republic: out of 298,000 councillors only 8,000 monarchists were elected, and the rest represented various shades of republicanism. It was a defeat for both the Assembly and the Commune, and a victory for Thiers and his conservative Republic. While Paris was losing her battle militarily, the provinces were thus winning their separate contest politically.

The provinces, however, did apply limited pressure against Versailles. The Freemasons, the Ligue républicaine des droits de

1. Ibid., pp.82-3.

Paris (led by Millière and the old maires of Paris), and more importantly the Ligue de l'Union républicaine (the republican alliance of the departments) all advanced schemes for cease-fire negotiations and conciliation between Versailles and Paris. But Thiers simply continued his policy of isolating Paris until his troops had forced entry into the city; then all hopes of conciliation were futile. Ever-vigilant, Thiers refused to allow the Commune to communicate with the provinces, and he arrested its delegates to the Bordeaux republican conference.

Once the provincial Left had failed them, the Commune had but one choice: to go over the heads of the local republicans and appeal directly to the people. Though almost all their dispatches and proclamations were intercepted by Versailles, a few managed to reach provincial audiences, most notably the Official Programme of the Commune published on 19 April:

The Communal Revolution set in motion by popular initiative on March 18th is the starting point of a new era of experimental, positivist, scientific politics.

It marks the end of the old governmental and clerical world of militarism, bureaucracy, exploitation, speculation, monopolies and privilege that have kept the proletariat in servitude and led the nation to disaster.

It is up to France to disarm Versailles by a formal demonstration of her invincible will.

France, who will inevitably benefit from our conquests, must proclaim her solidarity with our efforts; let her be our ally in this battle that must end either in the triumph of the Communal ideal or in the destruction of Paris.

As for us, citizens of Paris, our mission is to carry out the modern revolution, the greatest and most fruitful of all the revolutions that have enlightened history.

Our duty is to fight and win!¹

As a political document purporting to carry the message of the Commune to the provinces, the confused and uninspiring proclamation was a clear failure. What were the specific socio-economic solutions the Commune offered to France's problems? How were the

1. Eugene Schulkind, The Paris Commune of 1871, (London, 1972), p.151. Original in Journal Officiel, 20 April 1871.

provinces supposed to disarm Versailles when Paris' own Army of 200,000 men had already been forced on the defensive? Paris received the provinces' sympathies, not their action. By 28 April the Commune realised that the Versailles troops would soon gain entry to the city. Their second proclamation warned the provinces of the extremities which the restoration of order would surely mean: 'l'entrée victorieuse des Versaillais dans nos murs serait l'arrêt de mort de Paris. L'échafaud, la fusillade et la déportation en feraient un désert'.¹ A third proclamation called for at least some 'appui moral',² and when even that was not forthcoming from the muted provinces, one final appeal to the large cities was made in the desperate days of May:

Grandes villes, le temps n'est plus aux manifestes: le temps est aux actes, quand la parole est au canon.

Assez de sympathies platoniques. Vous avez des fusils et des munitions: aux armes! Debout, les villes de France!

Paris vous regarde. Paris attend que votre cercle se serre autour de ses lâches bombardeurs et les empêche d'échapper au châtement qu'il leur réserve.

Paris fera son devoir et le fera jusqu'au bout.

Mais ne l'oubliez pas, Lyon, Marseille, Lille, Toulouse, Nantes, Bordeaux et les autres.

Si Paris succombait pour la liberté du monde, l'histoire vengeresse aurait le droit de dire que Paris a été égorgé parce que vous avez laissé s'accomplir l'assassinat.³

It was too late for action. The direct appeals to the people of France failed as conclusively as had the earlier appeals to republican leaders. Thiers had already won the propaganda battle against the Commune: none of the proclamations inspired any action capable of rousing the provinces to the defence of Paris. The political preconditions for revolution, though firmly established in Paris, had been found wanting in the provinces.

1. Enquête Parlementaire, op. cit., Vol.III, p.291.

2. Ibid., p.299.

3. Ibid., pp.304-5.

C. The Peasants and the Algerian Question

An analysis of the events in the provinces affords only a limited development of the concept of the armed people. The experience proved only that a revolution which is encircled and prevented from spreading to the whole of the state is condemned to ultimate failure, and that the provinces and Paris would have to act in harmony for the revolution to succeed. But two other aspects of the Commune's relations with the provinces deserve closer analysis. They represent the first time that socialist revolutionaries attempted to bridge important gaps in revolutionary theory and practice: the role of the peasantry and the relation between metropolitan and colonial revolutions.

André Leo¹ took the lead in formulating the Commune's policy toward the peasantry - a group which had formerly been dismissed by revolutionaries as being dominated by the priests, the gentry and an insuperable backwardness. The proclamation she wrote is one of the most moving of the Commune's documents - by far clearer than the ones addressed to the 'proletarian' cities.

So you see, workers on farms - whether day labourer, mortgage-bound farmer, tenant farmer - all who sow, harvest and toil so that the best part of what you produce goes to someone who does nothing, what Paris wants, essentially, is that LAND BELONG TO THE FARMERS, THE TOOLS OF PRODUCTION TO THE WORKERS, WORK FOR ALL.

Yes, the products of farming should go to those who do the farming. To each his own. Work for all. No more rich and poor. No more work without rest and no more rest without work. It is possible to achieve this...All that is needed are good laws. Such laws will be enacted when the workers decide to be manipulated no longer by the idle classes...

You can readily see - inhabitants of the countryside - that the objectives for which Paris is fighting are yours as well, that in striving to help the worker, it is striving to help you. The generals who are at this very moment attacking Paris are the very ones who betrayed the defence of France. The representatives you elected without knowing

1. Pseudonym for Léone Champseix, the woman editor of La Sociale.

them want to restore the monarchy under a Henry V. If Paris falls, then the yoke of poverty will remain around your necks and will also be placed around those of your children. So help Paris to win. No matter what happens, remember these objectives - for there will always be revolutions in the world until they are achieved: THE LAND TO THE FARMER, THE TOOLS OF PRODUCTION TO THE WORKER, WORK FOR ALL.¹

Marx supported the Commune's stance ('the Commune was perfectly right in telling the peasants that "its victory was their only hope"'),² and went so far as to state that 'the Rurals...knew that three months' free communication of Communal Paris with the provinces would bring about a general rising of the peasants...'³ The Commune had some weighty arguments it could use to persuade the peasants to support the revolution. First, it was their sons who, when repatriated from Prussian prisoner-of-war camps, were forced to fight the civil war rather than being allowed to go home to their families. The peasants had always borne the brunt of France's foreign wars; they were forced now to provide cannon-fodder for a civil war. Second, the rural areas were extremely poor; had the workers offered land reform in return for common cause against wealthy landowner and industrialist alike, they might have achieved a mass base in the countryside capable of complementing the support they enjoyed in urban areas.

Despite the complete absence of political groundwork on the peasant question and the extremely limited means of communication Paris had with the rural areas, the policy met with a little success:

Vers le mi-avril dans plusieurs arrondissements du département de la Gironde eurent lieu des manifestations où l'on arborait des drapeaux rouges et où fusait le mot

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1. Schulkind, op. cit., pp.153-4.
 2. Karl Marx, The Civil War in France, (Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1970), p.75.
 3. Ibid., p.77.

d'ordre 'Vive la Commune!' Des troubles révolutionnaires eurent également lieu dans certains villages de la Nièvre, dont la population, composée surtout de petits fermiers et de salariés agricoles sans terre, était très sensible à la propagande révolutionnaire.¹

And Paschal Grousset confirmed that 'sur toute la ligne de Lyon, ouvriers et villageois sont de coeur pour le mouvement révolutionnaire de Paris, et ils voient bien tous les torts de l'Assemblée de Versailles'.² Though such actions were too little and too late to save the Commune, they could not help but bring a major step forward the revolutionary theory, which had been previously based solely on the city worker.

The second significant challenge to existing revolutionary theory was the question of colonialism. The Algerian republicans had been advocates of 'la guerre à outrance'; they formed a Communard movement, but on 8 April found their position threatened by an insurrection of 200,000 tribesmen of the religious order Rahmânîza. They tentatively decided that the insurrection would fit into the 'Communard' system, but referred the question to Paris.

If faut reconnaître que les dirigeants de la Commune laissèrent sans soutien la population musulmane en lutte contre le colonialisme. Pas un seul journal de la Commune de Paris n'éleva la voix en faveur des musulmans algériens. Bien au contraire certains exprimaient leur inquiétude de voir s'étendre l'insurrection algérienne.³

But certain advanced elements in Paris as well as in Algeria realised that the two insurrections were inextricably linked - that Versailles could not defeat both at once, and that revolution in the metropolis inevitably stimulated revolution in the colony. Versailles was not able to deal effectively with the Algerian

1. Jeloubovskaia, op. cit., p.310.

2. Ibid., p.311.

3. Ibid., p.359.

insurrection until June, after the Paris Commune had been crushed; she had moved against the greater danger first. But another important step had been taken in revolutionary theory: the Algerians who fought for the Commune in Paris, the Communards deported to the territories, and the Algerians deported for their own insurrection met in the penal colonies of France and formed bonds for the future. Louise Michel was struck by the plight of the Arabs she met during her exile in New Caledonia and vowed a fierce hatred for colonialism ever after. The realisation had been made that 'la méconnaissance du mouvement de libération de la population musulmane fut la principale cause de l'échec du mouvement communaliste en Algérie en 1871',¹ and further, that the failure of the Commune had enabled the same reactionary forces which had slaughtered the Paris workers to crush the Algerian tribesmen.

D. The End of the Armed People in France, 1871

The last provincial riots were suppressed at Voiron and Vienne on 24 May, and the Paris Commune succumbed on 28 May after a week of fierce fighting on the barricades. Fresh from its triumph over the people of France, the Versailles Army was able to suppress the Algerian insurrection in the Kabyle by the end of the summer. Everywhere the revolutionary movement, regardless of its particular motivating force, lay crushed; the armed people and the concepts of military organisation they had developed under fire were put out of mind. But the order restored to France was deceptive and ephemeral. The armed people, despite the massive defeat they had suffered, had been too impressive to be completely ignored.

1. Ibid., pp.366-7.

Gambetta had re-entered French politics to prevent the restoration of the monarchy and led the Republican Party to triumph after triumph in parliamentary by-elections even after the fall of Thiers from power. The trump card Gambetta held was that of armed resistance - a ploy that MacMahon, Thiers' successor, had learned to appreciate:

Several French papers, according to The Times, had spoken of 'a plan for organising popular manifestations intended to alarm the Monarchists and the Government. Nothing of the kind has yet occurred'. C. de B. went further and on 28 October wrote that the Radicals were organising centres of resistance to the Monarchy throughout France in agreement with the General Councils and municipalities in which they had a majority. The first act, he added, rather surprisingly, would be to kidnap the Marchal's niece, the Marquise de ... who lived in Saône-et-Loire.

Such reports of plans for resistance were borne out by Juliette Adam when she wrote: 'We the conspirators all knew that a large number of guns had been diverted when the National Guard was disarmed that munitions had come in across the Swiss frontier and stored near Lyon. The resistance to a restoration had been very cleverly organised, Gambetta directing the plan together with Barcloux.'¹

Though Gambetta denied any association with such proposals, it was a valuable counter in the game against the Assembly. The reactionaries, themselves divided among Legitimists, Orleanists and Bonapartists, knew that the Republic could be successfully reinstated by the moderate republicans with the support of all of France. Though the reactionaries still controlled the Assembly by their votes, the Commune had taught them a lesson:

Et derrière les urnes, la réaction savait qu'il y avait aussi des fusils'.²

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1. J.P.T. Bury, Gambetta and the Making of the Third Republic, (London, Longmans, 1974), pp.169-70.
 2. Edmond Lepelletier, op. cit., Vol.III, p.161.

IX. THE CONCEPT OF THE ARMED PEOPLE

A. The Legacy of the Armed People in France, 1870-71

The concepts of the armed people evolved on the battlefields of war and revolution had been convincingly defeated and, in the eyes of the Right, massively discredited. The militia armies had melted away after the resignation of Gambetta; the francs-tireurs had been disarmed, disbanded and hastily forgotten; the National Guard had been suppressed forever. Though the regulars from Sedan and Metz had been repatriated in order to fill the ranks of the Army of Versailles, in reality little remained either of the French military organisations which had fought the two-phase war or of the military traditions upon which they had been based:

As the moralist Ernest Renan observed, 1870 destroyed two of the most cherished of all French legends: the legend of the victorious Empire, lost in the rout of Napoleon III, and the legend of 1792, lost by Gambetta and the Commune.¹

Though the legend of 1792 had been destroyed, the armed people had left as their legacy a new 'myth of 1871' - that of the nexus of modern war and revolution which now haunted tottering European regimes. Vagts offers the following formulation of the myth:

...that an overwhelming defeat in modern warfare, in all likelihood, means a violent overturn in the regime so discredited. After Sedan the Second Empire was replaced by a republic which in turn was threatened by the uprising of the Paris Commune. Although the upheaval of the Commune was put down by the army in ferocious eagerness to restore its reputation at least at home, with an even greater torrent of blood than that in June, 1848, this memory remained with the working classes of Europe. It was

1. Richard Challener, The French Theory of the Nation in Arms, (New York, 1953), p.33.

revived in Petrograd, Moscow, Berlin, Vienna and Budapest, when society there had likewise been shaken to the bottom by defeat in the First World War.¹

The link between modern war and revolution had been forged by the conveyance of three processes. First, war had become total, involving not just the elites of the contending states and their small professional armies, but rather the entire population and economic resources of the nations engaged in the struggle. Where prior to 1870 the differences between defeat and victory might have meant the acquisition or loss of a colony or of 'interests' in another region, after 1870 defeat would entail the shattering of the state's structure. Second, total war meant arming the entire male population fit to bear arms. Though the militarised nation-in-arms offered a framework which was initially capable of controlling such vast numbers of men, there was always the danger that, in the chaos of military disaster or impending defeat, the armed people would emerge out of the debris of the army to challenge the regime which had given them arms. Third, insurrectionary/revolutionary theory had been greatly advanced by the experience of the Paris Commune. The first 'dictatorship of the proletariat', though ultimately defeated, had shown the revolutionaries what must be done to attain state power; they were now searching for the means, in a future revolution, of retaining that power against the onslaught of the counter-revolution.

Taken collectively, the three trends meant that once a state was threatened by defeat in modern war there would exist a revolutionary situation (the shattered state structure), an armed

1. Alfred Vagts, A History of Militarism, (New York, 1959), pp. 214-15.

populace (the soldier-citizens of the battered army), and a leadership and organisation (the revolutionary party cadres and their theories of action) which were capable of overturning the discredited regime and bringing to power socialist revolutionaries. The utilisation of the concept of the armed people by non-revolutionary regimes served only to accentuate the trends. The armed people would enter the struggle based on their spontaneous, politicised reactions against foreign invasion only to find that such regimes were incapable of welding them into disciplined movements required for protracted war. This was the real lesson of 1870-71: the error of the Government of National Defence had been to call for a struggle bordering on people's war while refusing to implement the revolutionary measures demanded by that type of war. The deputies of the Seine had prevented Blanqui and the Ultra-Left from attaining power only by promising to arm the people and to conduct a national defence of France. But on 31 October the Left broke its armistice with the moderates. It had become clear that Favre supported Thiers' attempts at negotiation and that Trochu would attempt only half-hearted sorties against the German encirclement. Such rhetoric as Favre's slogan 'ni un pouce de notre territoire, ni une pierre de nos forteresses' and Ducrot's promise to return from the battlefield 'mort ou victorieux', when measured against the actions of the regime Marx termed a 'Government of National Defection', served only to deepen the frustration of defeat. Faced by a similar situation in the provinces, Gambetta was able to forestall revolutionary action based on the Ligues only by organising militia armies and by fighting a creditable campaign against the Germans. Though in February he shrank before the vision of a real

people's war and resigned, his refusal to sanction the 'capitulards' of Paris saved Republican prestige and helped drive a wedge between Parisian and provincial radical opinion. That the Left was twice defeated in Paris (31 October and 22 January) and was not organised in the provinces meant that the political consciousness required to support a more revolutionary form of struggle had not been reached until after the defeat, when the contentions of the Left, particularly in Paris, gained increased credibility. In the words of Jaurès,

Si la France a succombé, si elle n'a pu maintenir, dans cette grande épreuve, l'intégrité de son sol et de sa personnalité historique, c'est qu'elle n'a eu à son service ni une suffisante force d'organisation gouvernementale ni une suffisante force d'élan révolutionnaire.¹

Thus, the Insurrection of 4 September had imposed a regime on France that had neither sufficient time to develop its own moderate policies nor the will to evolve revolutionary measures. Trapped between Left and Right, the half-revolution brought only half-measures which were incapable of winning victory for the armed people.

The fact that the Government of National Defence never inaugurated a full people's war² meant, further, that as a mode of military organisation, the concept of the armed people was never allowed full scope for development. In this sense, the Franco-Prussian War offers only a prototype of people's war, hampered not only by the lack of theory on how to wage such a

1. Jean Jaurès, La Guerre Franco-Allemande (1870-1871). Tome XI: Histoire Socialiste (1789-1900), (Paris, 1900), p.242.

2. 'People's war' here assumes the more general meaning given the term by Hale, i.e. that of conflict in which the people participate rather than leaving the war to the army, rather than the more specific meaning the term carries in the writings of Mao Tse-Tung and Vo Nguyen Giap.

struggle ~~but~~ also by the leadership's lack of enthusiasm for it. Had urban guerrillas or the National Guard been encouraged to dominate Paris after the January Armistice (thus denying the Germans political control of the capital) while Gambetta launched a guerrilla struggle based on Charette's forces in the West and Garibaldi's army in the East, then the conflict might have entered a third or people's war phase. Gambetta could have turned each village and town into a 'Saragossa', sent francs-tireurs to harass the railways upon which the Germans depended so heavily, and formed new militia armies in the training camps in the South of France. The success of isolated actions (Châteaudun, Fontenoy, Châtillon and Dijon) during the second phase of the war hint that such a policy might have brought success. Certainly during the tense period between the capitulation of Paris and Gambetta's forced resignation, Moltke feared the development of a people's war and asked for sufficient troops to pursue Gambetta to the Pyrenees. Engels was convinced that such a strategy would bring victory to the French:

By using the fleet to advantage the French might move their men in the West and North, so as to compel the Germans to keep largely superior forces in that neighbourhood, and to weaken the forces sent out for the conquest of the South which it would be their chief object to prevent. By concentrating their armies more than they have hitherto done, and, on the other hand, by sending out more numerous small partisan bands, they might increase the effect to be obtained by the forces on hand. There appears to have been many more troops at Cherbourg and Le Havre than were necessary for the defence; and the well-executed destruction of the bridge of Fontenoy, near Toul, in the centre of the country occupied by the conquerors, shows what may be done by bold partisans. For, if the war is to be resumed at all after the 14th of February, it must be in reality a war to the knife, a war like that of Spain against Napoleon, a war in which no amount of shootings and burnings will prove sufficient to break the spirit of resistance.¹

1. Frederick Engels, Notes on the War: Sixty Articles reprinted from the Pall Mall Gazette, (Vienna, 1923), p.135.

If the threat of people's war had been averted in the early days of February, 1871, the armed people nevertheless took power with the Central Committee of the National Guard on 18 March. But the political preconditions for revolution were found wanting in the provinces; and initially, the political will to advance the revolution by armed force was lacking in Paris. Bereft of a capable military/political leader, shackled by an inadequate military organisation, guided by no distinct theory of revolutionary action, and forced completely on the defensive, the Commune began to find answers to the military questions posed by revolution only toward the end of its existence. The francs-tireurs of Lisbonne and the elite battalions of Dombrowski and La Cecilia, though formed too late to win victory for the Commune, provided a model for the concept of the armed people which future revolutionaries would copy and improve. Thus for the revolutionary, '...malgré sa brièveté, malgré toutes ses faiblesses et ses fautes, la Commune eut une influence irrévocable sur l'histoire moderne'.¹

The legacy of 1870-71 left by the militia, the francs-tireurs and the Commune was that the armed people could no longer be thought of simply as another means of military organisation to be employed by a regime regardless of its political convictions. Rather, the concept in all its manifestations took on a more revolutionary connotation. What had perhaps been an intangible phrase before 1870 had been transformed by the events of 1870-71 into a new reality formed by three divergent but not unrelated trends. The militia pattern of the armed people came to figure centrally in the theories of military organisation advocated by the socialists Moch and Jaurès. The Commune's experiences, by

1. E. Jeloubovskaia, La Commune de Paris, 1871, (Moscow, 1971), p.422.

virtue of the analyses furnished by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, formed the core of insurrectionary/revolutionary theory.¹ And the francs-tireurs represented a bridge between earlier forms of guerrilla activity and that which has come to dominate the post-Second World War era.

B. The Militia Challenge to the Nation-in-Arms

The battle to decide the future form of the French Army had been won by the regulars of Versailles and lost by the armed people of the Commune. Though the Right again controlled France, the question of 1814, 1830, 1848 and 1851 - what kind of military force was required for France - was complicated by the fact that the nation had been crushed by the Germans and had further undergone the worst civil war in her history. In an Assembly so deeply divided between monarchist and republican, with Bonapartism hovering in the wings and socialism already beginning to recover from the debacle of the Commune, it would be difficult to strike the political consensus needed to forge a national military policy. But if the military strife that had followed the Bourbon Restoration and the overthrow of Louis-Philippe were to be avoided, such an accord had to be reached. For as Fustel de Coulanges noted,

Il y a un lien nécessaire entre les institutions militaires et les institutions politiques. L'accord, entre elles, quelque soit d'ailleurs le gouvernement, assure la stabilité; le désaccord amène infailliblement une révolution. Si l'armée n'est pas façonnée à l'image de l'Etat, c'est au bout de peu de temps l'armée qui façonne l'Etat à la sienne.²

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1. The Commune's experience convinced Marx to make the only change he ever made to The Communist Manifesto.
 2. J. Monteilhet, Les Institutions Militaires de la France, 1814-1932, (Paris, 1932), p.113.

France's choices were, however, severely limited after the events of 1870-71. The armed people and their threat to turn war into revolution were anathema to the Right; yet the collapse of the armée de métier after only a month of fighting had represented an unparalleled disaster for French arms.¹ Even a refurbished professional army would be unable to match the German system of the nation in arms for the sheer manpower it had produced, and the defeat of Gambetta's militia armies similarly precluded any hope for the continuation of his military policies. France thus opted for the only system which could secure political agreement at home while providing an army capable of matching her enemies abroad - the militarised nation-in-arms.

The concept proved capable of supporting a variety of definitions, as the hodge-podge of military reforms from 1872-1913 seemed to prove. The definition initially accepted was 'a sort of lowest common denominator of accepted belief [that] the nation-in-arms implies perhaps nothing more than the principle of universal and compulsory military service'.² While this definition provided a basis for acceptance of the military law of 1872, that law was really a compromise among the contending definitions of the concept:

Republican heirs of the Revolution, devoted to egalitarian principles, have consistently made the concept of the nation in arms into a moral touchstone with which to judge the virtue of all succeeding French military institutions; conservative enemies of that Revolution, no less devoted to principle, defined it as an open invitation to anarchy and the social disorders produced by indisciplined armed mobs. A generation of French military officers after 1870, impressed by both the quantity and the quality of the German army, thought of the nation in arms in purely military terms; for them it was the most rational principle on which to build the mass armies demanded by mass warfare. On the other hand,

1. Unfortunately, 1940 would provide the parallel.

2. Challenger, op. cit., p.6.

the militia-minded political reformers of the Dreyfus era, desiring to weaken the influence of the military hierarchy in French society, emphasized the role of the citizen-soldier in their definitions. In their view, a young Frenchman should be a citizen first, a soldier second, so that, through the mysterious workings of patriotic devotion, he would be a better guardian of the nation.¹

Challener is unfortunately the first person to fall victim to his own inadequate clarification of the concept by claiming that, because the number of soldiers France could mobilise had been raised from just over one million in 1872 to 3,500,000 by 1914, 'in a little more than forty years France, in terms of military statistics, had become a nation-in-arms'.² But sheer numbers do not make a nation-in-arms; nor could a consensus definition like Challener's continue to mean all things to all people. The Left Republicans and Socialists soon joined battle against the Right and the officer corps to give the concept its full intended political meaning.

The military law of 1872, the first step towards a French nation-in-arms, in fact established exactly the military organisation which Napoleon III had wanted and for which the Assembly had refused to vote:

En 1867, le service obligatoire est 'impraticable'. En 1872, il est une nécessité militaire et sociale. En 1873, il est pratiqué. Une guerre malheureuse a opéré cette métamorphose.³

Yet it was less of a metamorphosis than a long slow transition. The French Army did not suddenly become the nation-in-arms; nor did traditional French ideas of military organisation, especially those held by the officer corps, change overnight. Though the German nation-in-arms had been built in eight years, the French

1. Ibid., pp.6-7.

2. Ibid., p.47.

3. Monteilhet, op. cit., p.140.

system was far from complete even by 1913, when the spectre of war with Germany would bring renewed emphasis on the regulars. The law of 1872 imposed a five-year military obligation, though only for the first part of the contingent; the rest of the class would serve only six months, and there were numerous exemptions, particularly in those professions favoured by the Assembly. Nor was the armée de métier disenfranchised at a stroke; the regulars were retained as instructors and skeleton staff needed to keep the army on a war footing. As Monteilhet noted,

C'est encore la loi de 1868; c'est même, à peu de chose près, la loi de 1832; c'est donc le maintien de l'élément essentiel d'une armée de métier.¹

Though gradually the military ceased to be thought of as a profession (with the important exception of the officer corps) five years' service was a far cry from a citizen militia system. What France had achieved, critics noted, was not the 'nation armée' but rather 'l'armée de caserne'.²

The Republican Left, led by Gambetta's colleague Freycinet, carried the fight for a more genuine concept of the nation-in-arms against Right and Army opposition. An attempt at three-year service was overwhelmingly defeated in 1877, yet by 1888 serious consideration was given to the idea of three-year service for part of the contingent and one-year service for the rest. In 1889 Freycinet's ideas triumphed and three-year service was adopted for all, thus ensuring for the first time in French history a sort of 'military equality'. The Republican concept was en route to acceptance:

Ainsi, de 1889 à 1893, sous son [Freycinet's] impulsion,

1. Ibid., p.170.

2. Ibid., p.217.

tout notre état militaire a été orienté, non plus en paroles, mais en actes, vers la nation armée.¹

By 1905, yet another law was passed which should have been the culmination of the Republicans' struggle for their nation-in-arms. A period of two years' service was established, the minimum time thought necessary to train a soldier. But when it was discovered that the overall troop level of the army would fall, it was agreed that 'regulars' could be re-enlisted.

En 1872, les rengagés à haute paye avaient été exclus de l'armée. En 1889, dans toute proposition d'incorporer des volontaires rétribués, les vieux républicains, sans craindre le ridicule, redoutaient la menace d'une 'armée prétorienne'. En 1905, en acceptant de combler le déficit des effectifs avec des rengagés, la majorité républicaine, infidèle à ses traditions démocratiques, ouvrait inconsciemment la porte à l'armée de métier.²

The 'error' of 1905 was compounded by the events of 1913: with the shadow of war with Germany hanging over France, the officer corps called for a strategy of 'l'offensive à outrance', the conservatives were up in arms at the lack of 'regulars' for defence, and the legislature reacted by further subverting the nation-in-arms with the passage of a 'recruiting law which both in spirit and in content challenged many of the basic premises upon which earlier legislation had been based'.³

The Socialists had long been suspicious of a Republican 'sell-out' on the nation-in-arms. They were now asking important questions about the system: Would a genuine nation-in-arms have produced a Boulangist threat to the Republic? How was the Dreyfus scandal possible if France had such a concept of military organisation? And when the Socialists envisaged a system which

1. Ibid., p.235.

2. Ibid., p.150.

3. Challener, op. cit., p.67.

would be entirely defensive and which would never set foot outside of French soil, why was the officer corps advocating 'l'offensive à outrance' as the best strategy for the French Army? The Republicans, by virtue of their compromises in 1905 and 1913, had failed to secure for the nation-in-arms its intended political meaning. The Socialists under Moch and Jaurès turned to the militia concept of the armed people as their answer to the militarised nation-in-arms. The model for their system was no longer the legend of 1792, but rather the accomplishments of Gambetta's improvised militia in 1870-71:

Après Sedan, il ne restait en France, en dehors des places bloquées, que 102 canons de campagne, 350,000 fusils, 2 millions de cartouches (la consommation d'un petit combat); rien qu'en province, le Gouvernement de la Défense Nationale arma 1,200,000 hommes avec 1,460 bouches à feu. Et ces hommes, sans instruction et sans cadres, muni d'un matériel disparate, prolongèrent pendant près de cinq mois une lutte que les Allemands croyaient avoir terminée le 1^{er} septembre! Que n'aurait-on fait avec 4 millions de soldats, bien encadrés, pourvus de tout et soigneusement préparés à la tâche unique de défendre le territoire?¹

Moch's militia armies, though inspired by Gambetta's improvised version, would through prior training, organisation and equipping form a force fully capable of matching the Germans in a war of national defence. He opposed the regular remnant of the French Army, the militarised nation-in-arms built around it, and the contention that militiamen were not the match of the 'trained soldiers'. To dispel the image of incompetence so often associated with militias, Moch offered the following definition:

Une milice est une armée soigneusement instruite et préparée à tous égards en vue de la défense nationale, et dans laquelle la durée du service est réduite, pour chaque arme ou service, au minimum suffisant pour assurer cette préparation.

Elle se distingue essentiellement des armées actuelles en ce que celles-ci sont permanentes en temps de paix, mais

1. Gaston Moch, La Réforme Militaire: Vive la Milice!, (Paris, 1900), p.18.

toujours sur un pied réduit, tandis que la milice est une armée intermittente, chaque convocation d'une unité consistant en une mobilisation complète pour le temps strictement nécessaire à l'exécution des manoeuvres de guerre.¹

Though Moch's system has the advantage of seeming 'apolitical' and thus representing the type of force all Frenchmen might support, it was Jaurès' system, one more deeply rooted in socialist theory, that became better known. Like Moch, Jaurès' inspiration came from the successes of Gambetta's improvised armies:

Ces pauvres soldats d'un jour retrouvaient parfois comme à Beaune-la-Rolande, quand l'espoir renaissait à eux, une sorte d'enthousiasme sauvage qui rappelait les beaux jours de la Révolution française.²

Jaurès had no illusions about the nation-in-arms concept currently employed in France. He charged that it was a sham system - an appearance, not a reality.

Le vice essentiel de notre organisation militaire, c'est qu'elle a l'apparence d'être la nation armée et qu'en effet elle ne l'est point ou qu'elle l'est à peine. Elle impose à la nation une lourde charge, mais elle n'obtient pas de la nation toutes les ressources défensives que la nation vraiment armée et éduquée pourrait fournir avec une moindre dépense de temps et de force.³

Jaurès' design for a genuine people's militia began with military training in the schools where boys aged 10 to 20 would learn physical and martial skills. Men aged 20-34 would comprise the 'active' army, and the citizen-soldiers and their units would train only for the short periods of time necessary to ensure they knew their duties and could work well together. Men aged 34-40 would constitute the reserve, and men aged 40-45 would form a 'territorial army' or second reserve. To lead the new citizen armies, only one-third of the officers would come from the regular

1. Ibid., p.29.

2. Jean Jaurès, L'Armée Nouvelle, (Paris, 1915), p.148.

3. Ibid., p.17.

army; the rest of the officers, as well as most of the sous-officiers, would come from the civilian cadres of the nation. Though the elective principle for officers was not advocated, their promotion system was based on the joint notions of time-in-grade as well as the review board, whose members would be elected by universal suffrage and would have the ultimate say. Thus at a stroke, Jaurès had provided a system capable of mobilising the entire nation while disenfranchising the right-wing officer elite. To handle the difficult question of arms, Jaurès advocated that in areas not threatened by invasion, arms should be kept in local armouries, guarded by both civil and military authorities. In the north-east where the greatest danger lay, citizens could keep arms in their homes. Everywhere the militia would be territorially based; workers could provide many battalions based on their factories, and peasants would be encadred through their villages. While the entire manpower of France could be mobilised in a matter of days, the Right would have no army as in 1848 or 1871 to crush the Left in a civil war. Arms would be equal for all, though joint military-civil control of the armouries was apt to discourage, if not prevent threats of civil war.

Yet Jaurès' system was more than a concept of military organisation. It was also a theory about how armies are employed, about how to end war, and about how to tie the mode of military organisation to the socialist dream of international peace:

Assurer la paix par une politique évidente de sagesse, de modération et de droiture, par la répudiation définitive des entreprises de force, par l'acceptation loyale et la pratique des moyens juridiques nouveaux qui peuvent résoudre les conflits sans violence; assurer la paix, vaillamment, par la constitution d'un appareil défensif si formidable que toute pensée d'agression soit découragée chez les plus insolents et les plus rapaces: il n'y a pas de plus haut objet pour le parti socialiste.¹

1. Ibid., p.2.

If the first fifteen articles of the law Jaurès proposed satisfied the conditions for defence, the final three articles contained his solution for making military force unnecessary.

Article 16. L'armée ainsi constituée a pour objet exclusif de protéger contre toute agression l'indépendance et le sol du pays. Toute guerre est criminelle si elle n'est pas manifestement défensive; et elle n'est manifestement et certainement défensive que si le Gouvernement du pays propose au Gouvernement étranger avec lequel il est en conflit de régler le conflit par un arbitrage.

Article 17. Tout Gouvernement qui entrera dans une guerre sans avoir proposé, publiquement et loyalement, la solution par l'arbitrage sera considéré comme traître à la France et aux hommes, ennemi public de la patrie et de l'humanité. Tout Parlement qui aura consenti à cet acte sera coupable de félonie et dissous de droit. Le devoir constitutionnel et national des citoyens sera de briser ce Gouvernement et de le remplacer par un Gouvernement de bonne foi, qui, tout en assurant la sauvegarde de l'indépendance nationale, offre à l'étranger ou de prévenir ou d'arrêter les hostilités par une sentence arbitrale.

Article 18. Le Gouvernement de la France est invité dès maintenant à négocier avec tous les pays représentés à la Cour de La Haye des traités d'arbitrage intégral et à régler, d'accord avec eux, la procédure arbitrale.¹

Jaurès' theory of the armed people could be summed up thus: first, the army built on the notions of caste and class had to be dismantled; second, a defensive system which tapped the resources of the entire nation without turning the state into a giant barracks had to be constructed; finally, the system had to be devised such that 'l'organisation de la défense nationale et l'organisation de la paix internationale sont solidaires'.² This was the concept that crowned his military edifice: the destruction of militarism lay not in the creation of the militarised nation-in-arms, but rather through acknowledgement of the idea that war is criminal unless it is defensive, that any government which goes to war without first attempting arbitration is a traitor to its own people, and that the facilities necessary to deal with

1. Ibid., p.557.

2. Ibid., p.14.

the arbitration of conflicts already existed. The military system he advocated was that of the armed people who could at a signal drop their tools, pick up rifles and fight with revolutionary fervour in a war which would be by definition a just and defensive struggle.

Jaurès believed that, if his system were adopted by all states, war could be averted. If every army were confined by law to its own territory, no two armies could ever meet on the field of battle. Where territorial claims were disputed, nations could use arbitration rather than force, or perhaps a plebiscite, in a contested area such as Alsace-Lorraine. Jaurès further believed that France could lead the way by implementing the militia system after a socialist electoral victory, and that the organisation of a totally defensive system of the armed people even in one country would considerably ease the military situation in Europe. For it was true that France, Germany, Austria and Russia were drifting into war because they had become prisoners of their own militarised nations-in-arms. Each state had but one scheme (total mobilisation) and but one strategy (a knock-out blow against their opponent) where greater flexibility of response might have averted the outbreak of total war.

But by 1918 the militia pattern of the armed people, which might have secured peace in 1914, had become outmoded. The concept had always been based on a frontal strategy in which the citizen army would meet the invaders on the frontier and, by virtue of their numerical and spiritual superiority, would overwhelm the enemy in a pitched battle. But the developments of such modern machines of war as the tank, the airplane and the submarine meant that citizen armies could no longer defend their nations against lightning offensives by highly-trained regulars.

Further, civilian populaces and industrial capacities had become vulnerable to airstrikes, and shipping was harried by submarine warfare. Where in 1870 France had been able to organise militia armies in the South free from German attack and had been able to receive arms shipments from England and America, after 1918 this freedom of action would never again be achieved.

The lesson drawn from the outmoded militia was that only highly-trained regulars using sophisticated military technology would suffice to fulfil the nation's defensive needs. But ironically, the economic and military advances that made the militia obsolete created the conditions which would give a new impetus to the other two forms of the armed people - revolution and guerrilla warfare.

C. The Development of Insurrectionary Theory, 1871-1917

The second manifestation of the armed people, that most closely identified with the experience of the Commune, became the centre of insurrectionary/revolutionary theory. Prior to the advent of Marx and Engels, insurrectionary theory had consisted primarily of the Babouvist-Blanquist line which relied on the tactics of a coup d'état by an armed conspiracy rather than action by armed masses. Though the failure of their line was apparent, no theory of how to employ the masses in a revolutionary situation had been developed. When the workers rose, as in Paris in June 1848, they fought more as an urban mob - the city equivalent of the peasant millenarian movements - than as a disciplined force ready to attain power.

After the experiences of 1848, Marx and Engels first began to systematise their views on insurrection. Engels wrote excellent

tactical critiques of the Paris rising for the Neue Rheinische Zeitung. Though he criticised the workers for not having captured the western part of Paris after having successfully carried the East and the Hôtel-de-Ville, he had high praises for their military leader Kersausie and his street-fighting tactics: to Kersausie belonged the ploy 'd'avoir, pour la première fois dans l'histoire, organisé le combat des rues'.¹ He pointed out that Cavaignac's victory resulted from the superiority of forces he brought to bear (200,000 versus only 50,000 insurgents) and the brutality he chose to employ, rather than from a lack of courage or martial ability on the part of the working class. Marx² used such analyses to begin building the theory of insurrection. He pointed out that

...a well contested defeat is a fact of as much revolutionary importance as an easily-won victory. The defeats in Paris in June, 1848, and of Vienna in October, certainly did more in revolutionising the minds of the people of these two cities than the victories of February and March.³

Having thus encouraged the worker movement after its series of severe setbacks, he went on to formulate rules in what he termed 'the art of insurrection'.

Firstly, never play with insurrection unless you are fully prepared to face the consequences of your play. Insurrection is a calculus with very indefinite magnitudes, the value of which may change every day; the forces opposed to you have all the advantage of organisation, discipline, and habitual authority; unless you bring strong odds against them you are defeated and ruined. Secondly, the insurrectionary career once entered upon, act with the greatest determination, and on the offensive. The defensive is the

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1. Marx and Engels, Ecrits Militaires, (Paris, 1970), p.268.
 2. There is some debate as to whether Marx or Engels wrote Revolution and Counter Revolution. Though Marx was the greater theoretician, Engels was recognised as the greater strategist. The two conferred and collaborated on most of their works, hence the debate on exact authorship is hardly crucial to a discussion of their ideas.
 3. Karl Marx, Revolution and Counter Revolution, (London, Unwin, 1971), p.72.

death of every armed insurrection; it is lost before it measures itself with its enemies. Surprise your antagonists while their forces are scattering, preparing new successes however small, but daily. Keep up the moral ascendancy which the first successful rising has given to you; rally those vacillating elements to your side which always follow the strongest impulse, and which always look out for the safer side; force your enemies to a retreat before they can collect their strength against you; in the words of Danton, the greatest master of revolutionary policy yet known, de l'audace, de l'audace, encore de l'audace.¹

To complete his striking exposition of insurrectionary principles, Marx paid tribute to the armed people who fuelled every insurrection - a disorganised, spontaneous yet immensely powerful military force:

As in every insurrectionary war where armies are mixed of well-drilled soldiers and raw levies, there was plenty of heroism, and plenty of unsoldierlike, often inconceivable panic, in the revolutionary army; but, imperfect as it could not but be, it had at least the satisfaction that four times its number were not considered sufficient to put it to the rout, and that a hundred thousand regular troops, in a campaign against twenty-thousand insurgents, treated them militarily, with as much respect as if they had had to fight the Old Guard of Napoleon.²

But the revolutions of 1848, no matter how much they might have shown the strength of spontaneous insurgencies or the valour of the working class, offered no example of actual revolutionary organisation should an insurrection triumph. Revolutionary theory and practice, despite the organisation of the International, were at an impasse. The importance of the Paris Commune to Marx and Engels was that it broke the impasse, demonstrated the connection between war and revolution, and showed a theory of revolutionary organisation. Marx analysed the link between the war and a potential revolution and concluded that it was the Government of National 'Defection's' purpose to lose the war:

Paris, however, was not to be defended without arming its working class, organising them into an effective force, and

1. Ibid., p.90.

2. Ibid., pp.95-6.

training their ranks by the war itself. But Paris armed was the Revolution armed. A victory of Paris over the Prussian aggressor would have been a victory of the French workman over the French capitalist and his State parasites. In this conflict between national duty and class interest, the Government of National Defence did not hesitate one moment to turn into a Government of National Defection.¹

Marx was well aware of the French movement's deficiencies; and though he cautioned the Communards to organise rather than to revolt, after 18 March he offered full support to the Commune. He criticised the Communards for not having held the Bank of France as a hostage against the bourgeoisie and for failing to march immediately on Versailles. Further, he believed that the Central Committee ceded power too early to the bickering Commune Council and that the Communards were fools not to have fortified the northern slopes of the Buttes Montmartre against the chance of Prussian duplicity. Nevertheless, he called their efforts 'storming heaven' and in a letter to Kugelmann praised the revolutionary social-political organisation they had created:

If you look at the last chapter of my Eighteenth Brumaire, you will find that I declare that the next attempt of the French Revolution will be no longer as before, to transfer the bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to another, but to smash it, and this is the precondition for every real people's revolution on the continent. And this is what our heroic Parisian party comrades are attempting.²

In a second letter to Kugelmann, Marx declared the historic importance of the Commune to worker movements everywhere:

With the struggle in Paris the struggle of the working class against the capitalist class and its state has entered upon a new phase. Whatever the immediate outcome may be, a new point of departure, of importance in world history, has been gained.³

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1. Karl Marx, The Civil War in France, (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1970), p.42.
 2. Marx and Engels, Writings on the Paris Commune, edited by H. Draper, (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), pp.221-2.
 3. E. Schulkind, The Paris Commune of 1871: the view from the Left, (London, 1972), p.199.

Whereas Marx had used the Commune to illustrate his ideas on revolutionary theory, Engels used the Commune to explain some of the more difficult concepts in general Marxist theory. First he emphasised the 'proletarian' nature of the Commune, which was often disputed by historians:

Thus from 18 March onwards the class character of the Paris movement, which had previously been pushed into the background by the fight against the foreign invaders, emerged sharply and clearly. As almost only workers, or recognised representatives of the workers, sat in the Commune its decisions bore a decidedly proletarian character.¹

Engels further echoed Marx concerning the necessity of 'shattering the former state power' and of replacing it with a 'new and truly democratic one'.² From this idea flowed the explanation for probably the most controversial of all Marxist terms - the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.

In reality, however, the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy; and at best an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy, whose worst sides the victorious proletariat, just like the Commune, cannot avoid having to lop off at once as much as possible until such time as a generation reared in new, free social conditions is able to throw the entire lumber of the state on the scrap heap.

Of late the Social-Democratic philistine has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words: dictatorship of the Proletariat. Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the dictatorship of the Proletariat.³

Having thus built the concepts for Marxist revolutionary theory, Engels next stated with absolute clarity the conditions which were likely to bring a revolutionary situation - the war-revolution nexus, already evident from the Franco-Prussian War, which contained the seeds for the destruction of militarism:

1. From the 1891 Introduction to Marx, The Civil War in France, op. cit., pp.9-10.

2. Ibid., p.16.

3. Ibid., pp.17-18.

...this war has compelled all continental powers to introduce in a stricter form the Prussian Landwehr system, and with it a military burden which must bring them to ruin within a few years. The army has become the main purpose of the state, and an end in itself, the people are there only to provide soldiers and feed them. Militarism dominates and is swallowing Europe. But this militarism also bears within itself the seed of its own destruction. Competition among the individual states forces them, on the one hand, to spend more money each year...thus more and more hastening their financial collapse, and, on the other hand, to resort to universal compulsory military service more and more extensively, thus in the long run making the whole people familiar with the use of arms, and therefore enabling them at a given moment to make their will prevail against the war-lords in command. And this moment will arrive as soon as the mass of the people - town and country workers and peasants - will have a will. At this point the armies of the princes become transformed into armies of the people; the machine refuses to work, and militarism collapses by the dialectics of its own evolution.¹

Once the 'armies of the people' had overthrown the 'armies of the princes', Engels reasoned that the Left would need a means of defence against the counter-revolution; he argued that a revolution must be 'authoritarian' and called for the armed people to maintain the revolutionary authority as they had done for the Commune:

A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is an act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon - authoritarian means, if such there be at all, and if the victorious party does not want to have fought in vain, it must maintain this rule by means of the terror which its arms inspire in the reactionaries. Would the Paris Commune have lasted a single day if it had not made use of this authority of the armed people against the bourgeois?²

The Commune had provided Marx and Engels with the practice which enabled them to develop the following ideas of their revolutionary theory: the expected collapse of the army and the state in a modern war, the shattering of the remnants of state power by the working class and its replacement by the dictatorship

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1. Frederick Engels, Anti-Dühring, (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1969), pp.204-5.
 2. Engels, On Authority, reprinted in Schulkind, op. cit., p.228.

of the proletariat, and finally the use of the authority of the armed people to preserve the dictatorship of the proletariat against bourgeois counter-revolution. Because of the insights afforded by their theories, as well as the heightened political consciousness of the working class, the revolutionary struggle had indeed entered a 'new phase'. Marx and Engels would, however, not live to see the fruition of their work. Rather, it was left to Lenin, poring over their treatises in exile, to turn their theories into a revolutionary plan of action.

Lenin's thought on revolution shows an even greater reliance on the Paris Commune for inspiration than does that of his mentors. As early as March 1905 he wrote that 'in the present movement we all stand on the shoulders of the Commune',¹ and by 1908 he was comparing the experiences of the 1905 Revolution with that of the Commune:

Mindful of the lessons of the Commune, it knew that the proletariat should not ignore peaceful methods of struggle... but it must never forget that in certain conditions the class struggle assumes the form of armed conflict and civil war; there are times when the interests of the proletariat call for ruthless extermination of its enemies in open armed clashes. This was first demonstrated by the French proletariat in the Commune and brilliantly confirmed by the Russian proletariat in the December uprising.²

Like Marx and Engels, Lenin knew that the arms necessary for the insurrection would come from the state itself, forced by the arming of the citizenry in preparation for modern war. He was therefore critical of socialists who advocated pacifism and stated that 'our slogan must be: arming the proletariat to defeat, expropriate and disarm the bourgeoisie. These are the only tactics possible for a revolutionary class, tactics that follow

1. V.I. Lenin, Lenin on the Paris Commune, (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1970), p.13.

2. Ibid., p.23.

logically from, and are dictated by, the whole objective development of capitalist militarism.¹ Now that Lenin had advanced his theory to the point where an armed clash with the bourgeoisie was expected and that the arms would come from the arsenals maintained for modern war, he moved to consider the question of state power which he viewed as the 'basic question' of every revolution. He called for a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasants, a power which he viewed as

...the same type as the Paris Commune of 1871. The fundamental characteristics of this type are (1) the source of power is not a law previously discussed and enacted by parliament, but the direct initiative of the people from below, in their local areas - direct 'seizure', to use a current expression; (2) the replacement of the police and the army, which are institutions divorced from the people and set against the people, but the direct arming of the whole people; order in the state under such a power is maintained by the armed workers and peasants themselves, by the armed people themselves; (3) officialdom, the bureaucracy, are either similarly replaced by the direct rule of the people themselves...²

To implement the rule of the armed people, Lenin called for a popular militia to be formed from all citizens aged 15-65, regardless of sex.

As the revolutionary situation in Russia growing out of the strains of the Great War deepened, Lenin refined his revolutionary theory by dealing with the key connection between the State and Revolution. The ideas which he formulated, many of which came directly from Commune experience, would furnish the basis for action for the Bolsheviks in the October Revolution. Central to the problems Lenin faced was that of smashing the old state apparatus and constructing another which would 'wither away' once the revolution was consummated:

There can be no thought of abolishing the bureaucracy at once, everywhere and completely. That is utopia. But to smash

1. Ibid., p.29.

2. Ibid., pp.35-6.

the old bureaucratic machine at once and to begin immediately to construct a new one that will permit to abolish gradually all bureaucracy - this is not utopia, this is the experience of the Commune, this is the direct and immediate task of the revolutionary proletariat.¹

Lastly, only Communism makes the state absolutely unnecessary, for there is nobody to be suppressed - 'nobody' in the sense of a class, in the sense of a systematic struggle against a definite section of the population. We are not utopians, and do not in the least deny the possibility and inevitability of excesses on the part of individual persons, or the need to suppress such excesses. But in the first place, no special machine, no special apparatus of suppression is needed for this; this will be done by the armed people itself...²

But Lenin did not mean that the armed people could act only on their own initiative to suppress their enemies. Rather, their activities were to be channelled through a new type of revolutionary organisation, the 'Soviets' described in Lenin's pamphlet Can the Bolsheviki Retain State Power?:

The Soviets are a new state apparatus which, in the first place, provides an armed force of workers and peasants; and this force is not divorced from the people, as was the old standing army, but is very closely bound up with the people. From the military point of view this force is incomparably more powerful than previous forces; from the revolutionary point of view, it cannot be replaced by anything else.³

The creation of the Soviets as a 'new state apparatus' may have followed logically from Commune experience and Marxist theory, but such an assertion depended heavily on the nature of the state apparatus which had been formed. Though the Bolsheviki had found a theory which, when put into practice in the October Revolution and the Civil War, would enable them to attain and retain state power, their theory was but one among several interpretations of the needs of the first socialist state - and one which came under increasing criticism from socialists and

1. V.I. Lenin, The State and Revolution, (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1970), p.57.

2. Ibid., p.108.

3. Lenin, Lenin on the Paris Commune, op. cit., p.94.

anarchists in a variety of different countries. Lenin complicated the issue, once the Bolsheviks had surpassed the seventy-one days' duration of the Commune, by claiming that the Bolshevik version of state power had now come to represent 'a second historical step, or stage, in the development of the proletarian dictatorship'.¹ But if the Commune was, by Engels' definition, the dictatorship of the proletariat par excellence, then a second step would have to be in the direction of placing the 'lumber of the state' on the scrap heap. Lenin's version of state power showed no signs of withering away. Hence his second step was seemingly taken not on the path to a workers' utopia, but rather along the path that led, however tenuously, toward the political excesses of the Stalinist period.

The key to the debate on state power centres on the concept of the armed people and their employment in the Civil War. Because Lenin was largely preoccupied with political concerns such as the building of the party apparatus, Trotsky became the chief Bolshevik spokesman on the organisation of the armed people. Like Lenin, Trotsky had drawn lessons from the Paris Commune. Arguing against Kautsky's attack on the inhumanity of the Bolsheviks compared to the humanity of the Communards, he stated that 'if the Paris Commune had not fallen, but had continued to exist in the midst of a ceaseless struggle, there can be no doubt that it would have been obliged to have recourse to more and more severe measures for the suppression of the counter-revolution'.² There was a paucity of evidence to support such a view, considering especially that the Communards only shot the few hostages they

1. Ibid., p.111.

2. Leon Trotsky, Leon Trotsky on the Paris Commune, p.35.

had after the wholesale massacre of workers by the Versailles was already under way. Trotsky next set out to refute Kautsky's contention that 'the waging of war is not the strong side of the proletariat'.

If the waging of war is not the strong side of the proletariat, while the workers' International is suited only for peaceful epochs, then we may as well erect a cross over the revolution and over socialism; for the waging of war is a fairly strong side of the capitalist state, which without a war will not admit the workers to supremacy. [He added] the waging of war was not a strong side of the Commune. Quite so; that was why it was crushed. And how mercilessly crushed!¹

One can forgive draconian measures during a time of revolution and civil war. As Trotsky knew, the Versailles had shown no mercy to the Communards, and there was little doubt that if the Bolsheviks were swept from power the Whites would have launched a relentless programme of counterterror to root out the Communists and socialists of all shades. But draconian measures during a time of necessity can stem from a basically humane, as well as an inhumane, revolutionary organisation, and the resultant revolutionary regime is very much a hybrid of its organisational theories and its forced experience.

When Trotsky began to organise the Red Army, the measures he imposed were designed not to follow the Communards' experience, but rather to win the victory which had escaped them. He noted that out of 167,000 paid National Guardsmen, only 20-30,000 had gone into battle as a sort of 'advance guard':

If the existence of the Commune had been prolonged, this relationship between the advance guard and the mass of the proletariat would have grown more and more firm.

The organisation which would have been formed and consolidated in the process of the open struggle as the organisation of the labouring masses, would have become the organisation of their dictatorship - the Council of Deputies of the armed proletariat.²

1. Ibid., p.45.

2. Ibid., p.46.

But the Commune's advance guard had rejected the idea of a 'military dictatorship' which Trotsky seemed to advocate. The group which had most nearly resembled the 'Council of Deputies' had been the Central Committee, which had readily surrendered power to the democratically-elected Commune Council. Even in the hectic days of May, Moreau, Dombrowski and Lisbonne had refused to support Rossel's attempt to set up a military dictatorship through a coup against the Committee of Public Safety. No-one can dispute the view that the Commune was weak militarily, or that 'it was indispensable to have an organisation incarnating the political experience of the proletariat and always present - not only in the Central Committee, but in the legions, in the battalions, in the deepest sectors of the French proletariat'.¹ Nor would anyone disagree with Trotsky's view that what the Communards lacked was not 'heroism' but rather 'clarity in method and a centralised leading organisation'.² But when Trotsky began to create such an organisation, he opted increasingly for a form of military organisation which resembled a regular army rather than the armed people. By doing so, he not only changed the nature of the conflict, he influenced the character of the revolutionary regime.

At first Trotsky relied on the Red Guards of Petrograd and, to a lesser extent, of Moscow. Though these forces were comprised by the elite of the workers and motivated by revolutionary conviction, they proved to be insufficient in number to meet the needs of the Bolsheviks in a wide-ranging civil and international conflict. The military organisation of volunteer workers which Trotsky had once envisaged gave way to one of conscripted

1. Ibid., p.54.

2. Ibid., p.61.

peasants, and the transformation from volunteerism to regular Red Army was speeded along by a series of decrees. In April, 1918, the principle of elected officers was scrapped, and in May universal military conscription was imposed. To staff the officer corps of the growing Red Army, former Imperial Army officers and non-commissioned officers were mobilised. Finally, to ensure that the massive force would remain disciplined and loyal, the Cheka or political police was established, political commissars were introduced into every command structure, and Communist Party cells were formed in every unit. As Ellis notes,

Though the Bolsheviks were fighting in the name of a revolutionary transformation of society, it was not this fact that determined their military policies. For, having seized power so precipitately, they found themselves engaged, almost despite themselves, in a life and death struggle for sheer political survival. It was the need to survive that underpinned all their military policies rather than any broad considerations about what constituted a truly democratized army, or how genuinely to engage the socio-economic aspirations of the rank-and-file.¹

But this fails to answer the question of why the Red Army so little resembled the armed people from the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune, despite the previous theoretical expostulations on the armed people contained in the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Was it the armed people who had failed the Bolshevik Party, or was it they who had failed the armed people? Just as it is worth wondering why Lenin's second step beyond the dictatorship of the proletariat showed no signs of withering away, it is worth asking why the armed people were viewed as an unreliable instrument in Bolshevik hands.

1. John Ellis, Armies in Revolution, (London, 1973), p.198.

D. The Day of the Guerrilla

The answer to the revolutionary conundrum confronting the Bolsheviks in their civil war belongs to the third concept of the armed people - the guerrilla. The francs-tireurs had been virtually ignored in the military histories of the period; the Germans had even attempted to outlaw similar forms of activity at military law conferences held in the 1870's. But guerrilla warfare as a concept of the armed people had survived; and of the three trends from 1870-71, it appeared suddenly as the most relevant of all in the modern era.

Engels had offered some analysis of the tactics of guerrilla warfare in his Notes on the War, which enabled the concept to pass into insurrectionary theory. But it was Bakunin who seemed to understand better than the Marxists the dual military-revolutionary nature of the concept. His legacy to the Anarchists was thus that of the 'guerrillaism' so anathemic to the Bolsheviks. In 1870 he had called for spontaneous risings all over France as the only force capable of saving the nation from the Prussian invaders. He further believed that the corps francs emerging spontaneously from such a struggle would be the very emissaries of Anarchist revolution:

Il faut envoyer dans les campagnes, comme propagateurs de la révolution, des corps-francs.

Donc avant tout, les corps-francs propagateurs doivent être, eux-mêmes, révolutionnairement inspirés et organisés. Ils doivent porter la révolution en leur sein, pour pouvoir la provoquer et susciter parmi eux. Ensuite, ils doivent se tracer un système, une ligne de conduite conforme au but qu'ils proposent.¹

In short, Bakunin envisaged a people's war in which spontaneous risings based on politically-advanced corps francs propelled the

1. Michael Bakunin, La Révolution Sociale ou la Dictature Militaire, (Geneva, 1871), p.35.

people to power in various regions; as the movement grew through revolutionary warfare, France would be gradually liberated from German invader and bourgeois oppressor alike. The system was founded on the anarchists' belief in the revolutionary force of the peasantry, and it further reflected their wish to see local groups take power throughout the country, thereby defeating any pretensions at statism by overly-ambitious individuals or parties.

The guerrilla concept lay dormant until the latter phase of the Great War. When the state structure of Russia shattered on the twin reefs of military disaster and disruption due to revolutionary activity, the armed people emerged from the debris of Russia's armies to wage insurrectionary war against first the Tsarist regime and then Kerensky's Provisional Government. The Bolsheviks had been as happy to have the aid of guerrillas in the insurrectionary period as they were quick to disown them once they had consolidated their own system of state power. Trotsky went to great lengths to explain why guerrillas were useful in the insurrectionary days but 'dangerous' once the revolutionary regime had achieved power:

As a general rule, insurgents fight according to 'guerrilla' methods; that is, as detachments of a partisan or semi-partisan type, bound together much more by political discipline and by class consciousness of the single goal to be reached than by some kind of regular centralised hierarchy of control.

After the seizure of power the situation is changed completely. The struggle of the victorious revolution for self-preservation and development changes immediately into a struggle for the organisation of a centralised state apparatus. The partisan attitudes which are not only inevitable, but even profoundly progressive in the period of the struggle for power can, after the conquest for power, become a cause of great dangers liable to rock the revolutionary state which is taking shape. It is here that the period of the organisation of a regular Red Army begins.¹

1. Leon Trotsky, Problems of Civil War, (New York, Merit, 1970), pp.9-10.

Trotsky then conceded that guerrillas would still be of considerable use on the periphery of the country, but that they must be incorporated into the regular forces:

Similarly, after the seizure of power in the principal centres of a country, the partisan detachments can play an extremely effective role in the periphery of the country. Do we have to remind ourselves of the help the partisan detachments brought to the Red Army and the revolution by operating behind the German troops in the Ukraine and behind Kolchak's troops in Siberia?

Nevertheless, we must formulate the incontrovertible rule: the revolutionary power works to incorporate the best partisan detachments and their most reliable elements into the system of a regular military organisation. Otherwise, these partisan detachments could undoubtedly become factors of disorder, capable of degenerating into armed bands in the service of petty bourgeois anarchistic elements for use against the proletarian state.¹

Finally, Trotsky showed a particular dislike for the spontaneous guerrilla struggle waged by the Ukrainian Anarchist peasant leader Nestor Makhno:

Manoeuvrability in the present sense of the term is inaccessible to the peasantry both in its revolutionary and counter-revolutionary movements. Because when the peasantry is left to its own resources, the truly peasant form of war is guerrilla warfare. The peasantry is incapable of creating a state with its own forces - we have seen a particularly graphic illustration of this in the case of the Ukrainian Makhnovist movement.²

Trotsky's analysis of the problems of 'guerrillaism' left a lot of questions unanswered. First, why was it necessary to organise a centralised state apparatus and a regular army during a period of revolutionary ferment, when the preceding theoretical abstractions had hinted so strongly in the opposite direction? Second, what were the 'great dangers liable to rock the revolutionary state' which were inherent in partisan attitudes; if the partisans were themselves revolutionaries leading the people

1. Ibid., p.22.

2. Leon Trotsky, Military Writings, (New York, Merit, 1969), p.81.

along the path to socialism, how could this harm the revolutionary state? Third, if partisans were effective operating literally on their own in the peripheral regions of the country, why was it necessary to hamper their style of operation by incorporating them into the regular forces? Fourthly, if the 'truly peasant form of war is guerrilla warfare' and if Russia had need of the peasant soldiers, why would it not have been more sensible to build the defence of socialism around the armed people, which Marxist-Leninist theory had presaged, rather than to create a regular army? Finally, if the peasantry were so 'incapable of creating a state', why did the Bolsheviks find it necessary first to rely on Makhno's peasant movement when they were threatened by the Whites and then to bring massive force to bear against it once they were assured control of the rest of Russia?

The answers to all these questions lay not in Marxist-Leninist theory but in Bolshevik practice. The party paranoically clung to a vision of power which blinded them to revolutionary alternatives which, though easily within their reach, were seen to be championed by other parties or factions and therefore to be opposed. The hybrid organisation which developed from the triad of state power, a regular army and the harsh experiences of the civil war came increasingly to resemble an oppressor of the people rather than their liberator. This was never more evident than in the year 1921 when, with the civil war virtually won, the Bolsheviks commanded their Red Army to crush Makhno's armed peasants and the mutineer sailors of Kronstadt.

Makhno's movement was composed almost entirely of peasants; the leadership, though mainly peasant, was of an anarchist persuasion. His partisan detachments first began operations in September, 1918, against the German, Austrian and Hetmanite

occupation forces in the Ukraine. Initially based in the Gulyai-Polye region, his spectacular achievements succeeded in raising the peasantry and in liberating large sections of Ukrainian territory; to give his military movement a social-political base, he instituted agrarian communes which proved surprisingly popular. After the Germans and Austrians were forced to retire from Russia by the armistice, Makhno continued to fight against the Petlurist Ukrainian nationalists; he was acclaimed in the Bolshevik press, and in 1919 he was engaged against the Whites on the southern front. But after Makhno eliminated Grigoriev's White forces, the Bolsheviks attempted a double-cross. The Cheka became active in villages held by Makhno, and two agents were sent to assassinate the leader. Makhno emerged in opposition to the Bolsheviks, eliminated the Cheka, fought isolated Red Army detachments, and found his popularity among the peasants was even higher. But in the summer of 1919, Denikin's advance threatened to crack the southern front wide open. The Bolsheviks made common cause with Makhno, and the operations of his 55,000 partisans in the rear of Denikin's army proved instrumental in halting and then destroying the White offensive. The defeat of Denikin enabled the Bolsheviks to double-cross Makhno yet again. Their forces were in position in the south and had no serious opponent, so they struck hard, taking many villages. By 1920, the outbreak of the Polish War brought respite, and in September Wrangel's offensive again endangered the survival of the Revolution. Makhno's choice was difficult, but he chose to fight with the Bolsheviks against the counter-revolution. Once again he was a major factor in the Red Army's victory. But in 1921 the inevitable occurred: the Soviet Armies were still on a war footing, and there was no external enemy. The whole of the military machine in south Russia was

available for the elimination of Makhno, and for the support of the State and Party organisations and Cheka in their work on the integration of the Ukrainian villages'.¹ The forces against him were too great; his best leaders had been killed in three years of conflict. After a series of engagements which scattered his forces, Makhno fled in August to Romania and the West with a bodyguard of 250 of his most loyal troops.

The Bolsheviks had moved against Makhno for two reasons. First, he had remained independent of their control. He had refused to be incorporated into the Red Army, and had fought rather under the black flag of anarchism emblazoned with the motto 'Victory or Death'. The independence of military action required of a partisan was nevertheless not a quality the Bolsheviks admired. Second, Makhno was instituting an alternative form of revolution to the Bolsheviks' centralised state power. His guerrilla warfare, coupled with the organisation of agrarian communes, reflected Anarchist theory. It proved not only to be a successful form of revolutionary activity but it was further immensely popular with the peasantry. Had the movement spread to other areas of Russia, the Bolsheviks would have been faced with a far greater challenge to their state power than that of the Whites; and even the hasty initiation of Lenin's New Economic Policy had failed to shake peasant support for the Makhnevists.

The anarchist peasants were not the only threat to Bolshevik supremacy to come from the armed people in 1921. For, in March, 'the sailors of the Kronstadt naval base in the Gulf of Finland near Petrograd rose in revolt against the Bolshevik government which they had helped into power'.² As with Makhno's peasants, it

1. David Footman, Civil War in Russia, (London, 1961), p.299.

2. Paul Avrich, The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution, (London, 1973), p.156.

was the lack of freedom in Bolshevik Russia and the growth of Cheka power which led them to defy the Red Army. The ordinary sailors of Kronstadt, who had been the very symbol of the October Revolution, raised the standard of revolt against the 'sickle and hammer...replaced by the Communists with the bayonet and barred windows'.¹ The Bolsheviks attacked with aircraft, artillery, and 50,000² of their best regulars against the 15,000 insurgents. Though the sailors inflicted 10,000 casualties on their attackers while losing 2,000 killed or wounded and a further 2,000 taken prisoner, the result was inevitable. The remnants of the movement fled across the ice to refuge in Finland.

Though the Bolsheviks had defeated Makhno's guerrillas and the Kronstadt insurgents, their victory had hidden costs. By failing to opt for other revolutionary/military forms of organisation and by creating instead a centralised state and a regular army, they had altered the character of their revolutionary regime. Guerrilla warfare was viewed as an anarchist tool and was rejected, despite the successes it had achieved in insurrection and civil war. Nor would there be any attempt to institute a militia of the armed people to defend the revolution and keep order. Though Trotsky wanted to adopt a system similar to that advocated by Jaurès, after the Civil War it was too late. The Bolsheviks had found in the Cheka a means of maintaining order which was far more efficient and amenable to control than the armed people would be. As Stalinism already began to consolidate its grip on state power, the pyrrhic victory of Bolshevik Communism showed that the path from the Finland Station was leading via Gulyai-Polye and

1. Ibid., p.159.

2. All the figures are taken from Paul Avrich, Kronstadt, 1921, (Princeton, New Jersey, 1970), Chapter 6.

Kronstadt, toward The Gulag Archipelago.

'Guerrillaism' had been defeated by the Red Army; it had not, however, been discredited as a form of military organisation. Ironically, even Stalin would be forced to issue the call for partisan warfare when his Red Army had its back to the wall and the Nazi war machine was everywhere on the verge of victory. And a new wave of armed prophets, led by Mao and his vision of people's war, were forging the concept of the armed people that would dominate the post-Second World War era.

E. The Armed Prophets

The armed people had proved to be too radical a concept to be fully employed by the Government of National Defence in 1870-71; and even Gambetta, the fiery advocate of 'la guerre à outrance', had refused to inaugurate a full people's war. Ironically, the concept had proved too radical for Bolshevik practice, as distinguished from Marxist-Leninist theory, as well; for it had come to be championed by 'enemies' of Bolshevik state power. But with the advent of resistance ~~im~~movements, first, against the Axis Powers during the Second World War, and second, against colonial regimes or great-power intervention in the post-war era, the guerrilla pattern of the armed people emerged as a formidable power which combined military and revolutionary action in the same organisation.

These new doctrines of revolutionary people's war have been preached by armed prophets who, from Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh, Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap, to Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, have proved the viability of their ideas on the field of battle, against the West's most sophisticated military technology. France

forgot the lessons of her francs-tireurs from 1870 and even those of her Maquis only to relearn them from her adversaries in Indo-China and Algeria. The United States ignored the French colonial defeats and found even her vast economic and military strength incapable of achieving victory against a movement composed mainly of Vietnamese peasants. Britain found her process of decolonisation harried by movements in Kenya, Malaya, Cyprus and Aden. And Portugal learned that the armed people in her territories, though still far from achieving armed victory, could create the conditions for revolution in the metropole itself. Finally, international terrorism, the last resort of many a lost cause, has become a problem to which no-one has formulated an adequate response.

So effective has been this war of the weak against the strong, the armed people against their would-be masters, that one is tempted to consider it an innate form of defence which any threatened group might adopt. A few determined men, acting initially without the objective support of the people, have often been able by their will to orchestrate the conditions of victory seemingly against all odds. While the concept, viewed in these terms, might appear a viable military alternative to conventional NATO-style alliances or to nuclear shields controlled by the great powers, the 'armed people' is nevertheless troubled by a set of conceptual flaws. First, it is an inherently defensive form of combat - one which must be fought in the homes, fields, forests and mountains of the nation itself. However, not only do certain states continue to advocate offensive rather than defensive military action but also, few states are willing to allow foreign invaders across their frontiers, even though a people's war strategy would bring ultimate victory and pitched battles almost certain defeat. Next, there are states which clearly could not

survive if they depended solely on guerrilla resistance. Israel, without conventional frontal forces for her citizen army, would be easy prey for her Arab neighbours. Third, there are governments which have more to fear from arming their own people than from foreign invasions. Even present-day France, after her experience in May 1968, would fear such a policy. Further, many governments represent more than one 'nation'; to arm the various peoples would risk civil war. Because Tito's partisans were effective against the Germans during the Second World War, one might have expected Yugoslavia to implement fully her concept of General People's Defence after the war; but in the absence of an exterior enemy, the armed peoples might use their weapons against each other or against the fragile central government. Finally, it must be recognised that the armed people have not always been victorious. To Dien Bien Phu, one answers Spain; to Cuba, Che's Bolivian fiasco.

The armed people is thus likely to remain a last resort, to be utilised, as in France, 1870, once the nation's other means of resistance have been destroyed, or as in the Paris Commune, by revolutionaries who have no access to, or despise, regular forces. But there is one final aspect of the armed people which must be understood. Because the concept is a highly defensive form of military organisation, whereas conventional and nuclear forces can be either offensive or defensive, it offers the world a chance to pick up where Jaurès left off prior to the Great War in the construction of a safe, world-wide system of the armed people. If no nation desired aggrandisement, yet all still feared for their national security, then all could implement the armed people as a back-up to their conventional and/or nuclear forces. The process of disarmament could then proceed free from one of its

yet unsolved problems - that of interim security for the disarming nations. The idea of guerrilla warfare as a means of national defence, with Sandhurst and West Point cadets poring over the works of Mao, and with the great powers' nuclear arsenals disarmed in the interest of the security of all nations, is still far from being realised. Yet such a suggestion offers a tantalising opportunity for world peace which statesmen and strategists would be foolish to ignore.

X. APPENDICES

Appendix A. Intellectual Precursors of the Armed People

While it is singularly convenient to begin a discussion of the armed people with the date 1789, it is true that both the concept and its practice predate the French Revolution. Perhaps the first group of cavemen who united in common defence with sticks and stones against another group of men or against wild animals fought as the armed people in a sense undeniably fundamental. Citizen militias thus easily precede regular armies, for the latter could have first appeared only as civilisation advanced and specialisation began. Similarly, guerrilla tactics have been practiced by tribesmen from time immemorial, and armed revolution dates at least from the beginning of recorded history in Egypt.

Ironically, for a concept so central to man's military experience, the precursors and theoreticians of the armed people have been few. Perhaps the first was Sun Tzu, who wrote the Art of War around 500 B.C. His experience, based on the constant skirmishes of the warring groups within China, enabled him to crystallise a set of principles which are fundamental to guerrilla tactics even to this day. For Sun Tzu,

All warfare is based on deception. Hence when able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must seem inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe that we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near. Hold out baits to entice the enemy. Feign disorder and crush him.¹

Further, the art of war is not to 'shatter and destroy' the

1. T.R. Phillips, Roots of Strategy, (London, Bodley Head, 1943), p.11.

enemy, but rather, 'in the practical art of war the best thing of all is to take the enemy's country whole and intact. Hence to fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting'.¹ Contrasted to the already burgeoning military philosophy of the professional army and its tactics of frontal assault and siege warfare, Sun Tzu's lessons were passed down as an alternative pattern of warfare - one which Mao in particular did not hesitate to adopt.

A second precursor was De Saxe, whose Reveries upon the Art of War were published posthumously in 1757. De Saxe advocated a style of war reminiscent of Sun Tzu's guerrilla tactics while at the same time advocating the formation of a citizen militia. After analysing the current methods of procuring soldiers - hiring mercenaries, impressment, or paying professionals - De Saxe decided that a form of universal military service would easily be a better system:

Would it not be better to prescribe by law that every man, whatever his condition in life, should be obliged to serve his prince and his country for five years. This law could not be objected to because it is natural and just that all citizens should occupy themselves with the defence of the nation.²

De Saxe not only abhorred the regulars of his day, he similarly felt that their tactics were wrong. Rather than the pitched battle, he preferred 'frequent small engagements', which would 'dissipate the enemy until he is forced to hide from you'.³ Especially in broken terrain, he knew that 'a detachment of six hundred men can stop a whole army' and that 'an audacious

1. Ibid., p.13.

2. Ibid., pp.102-3.

3. Ibid., p.161.

partisan with three or four hundred men will cause frightful disorder and will even attack an army',¹ aiming especially at its baggage trains and supplies.

Sun Tzu and De Saxe advocated the concept of the armed people, whether in its guerrilla or militia pattern, because they believed it was militarily efficacious. Other precursors advocated the concept for avowedly political reasons. For them the armed people was not just a concept capable of providing good soldiers or clever tactics, but rather, it represented the military embodiment of a particular political system. Machiavelli in The Prince stated that

...experience has shown princes and republics, single-handed, making the greatest progress, and mercenaries doing nothing except damage; and it is more difficult to bring a republic armed with its own arms under the sway of one of its citizens than it is to bring one armed with foreign arms. Rome and Sparta stood for many ages armed and free. The Switzers are completely armed and quite free.²

The armed people thus offered a republic a military force capable of defending the people from foreign invasion and internal coup alike. Rousseau, in The Social Contract, seconded Machiavelli's ideas with a criticism aimed directly at the alternative regular army or mercenary pattern and the political system upon which it was based:

When it is necessary to march out to war, they pay troops and stay at home; when it is necessary to meet in council, they name deputies and stay at home. By reason of idleness and money, they end by having soldiers to enslave their country and representatives to sell it.³

A political system capable of combining both the military and political attributes of the armed people would not be formed

1. Ibid., p.161.

2. Nicolas Machiavelli, The Prince, (London, Dent, 1968), p.67.

3. J.J. Rousseau, The Social Contract, (London, Dent, 19), p.82.

until the French Revolution. Yet two decades prior to the revolution, the French officer Guibert called for the implementation of the armed people and thus became a direct precursor of, rather than an indirect influence upon, the concept of military organisation which emerged in France, 1789-1792. As Soboul's analysis shows,

Sans présenter de solution d'une manière systématique, Guibert suggère que la constitution militaire ne reprendra quelque vigueur qu'autant que la nation y aura part.¹

Guibert criticised the French lack of patriotism, but placed the blame on the military system of the monarchy:

Dans la plupart des pays de l'Europe, les intérêts du peuple et ceux du gouvernement sont très séparés; le patriotisme n'est qu'un mot; les citoyens ne sont pas soldats; les soldats ne sont pas citoyens; les guerres ne sont pas les querelles de la nation; elles sont celles du ministère et du souverain.²

To replace the outmoded system, he advocated a citizen militia:

A l'armée dévorante qui existe, je substitue une milice nationale de quatre cent mille hommes, qui, au lieu d'être composée pour la plupart de l'écume et de la lie des villes, n'est composée que de citadins et de citoyens agrestes; car le dernier des citoyens français est un citoyen important...³

Guibert argued that the implementation of such a system would ensure the domination of Europe to the nation which adopted it. He thus foresaw not only the concept of the armed people, but predicted the wars of the French Revolution:

Mais supposons qu'il s'élevât en Europe, un peuple, vigoureux de génie, de moyens et de gouvernement; un peuple qui joignît à des vertus austères et à une milice nationale, un plan fixe d'agrandissement, qui ne perdit pas de vue ce système, qui, sachant faire la guerre à peu de frais et

1. A. Soboul, Les Soldats de l'An II, (Paris, Le Club Français du du Livre, 1959), p.29. Original in Guibert, Essai Général de la Tactique or Oeuvres Militaires de Guibert.

2. Ibid., p.29.

3. 'Aux Immortelles Milices Nationales de l'Empire Français... réfutation de M. Guibert', (Paris, Chez Garnéry, [1790]), pp. 7-8.

subsister par ses victoires, ne fût pas réduit à poser les armes par des calculs de finances. On verrait ce peuple subjuguier ses voisins et renverser nos faibles constitutions, comme l'aquilon plie de faibles roseaux.¹

Guibert's system was, however, susceptible to the kinds of problems discussed in Chapter I; it was especially vulnerable, with its talk of 'subjugating neighbours', to subversion into a large regular army. The force, though originally conceived as purely defensive, drifted toward militarism once it threatened to take the offensive. During the critical years of the French Revolution, constant watch was kept on the armed forces and 'Robespierre avait signalé le péril dans ses discours contre la guerre, aux Jacobins, des 5 et 11 janvier 1792'.² One potential solution to the Revolution's military problems, though it was never adopted, was advocated by the Minister of Defence Servan: the militia pattern of the armed people. Though composed in 1792, Servan's system bore striking resemblance to the one Jaurès would advocate 120 years later. His Constitution pour l'Armée des Français was a forty-point system designed to protect the state from militarism within while providing a force capable of defending the nation from foreign aggression: 'La force doit être constituée de manière à ce qu'elle puisse toujours protéger efficacement les droits des associés, et jamais y porter atteinte, ni même en concevoir le projet'.³ Servan similarly provided that his military system rest in harmony with the economy of the nation: 'Elle doit être constituée de manière à ce qu'elle ne nuise ni la population, ni à l'agriculture, ni au commerce'. It

1. Soboul, op. cit., p.30.

2. Ibid., p.277.

3. This and all subsequent quotations are taken from 'Projet de Constitution pour l'Armée des Français', presented to the Assembly by Servan in 1792.

would further be a system of equality, with 'toutes les charges publiques devant être supportées proportionnellement par tous les citoyens' and with all citizens charged with the responsibility to 'concourir à la formation de la force publique'. Once incorporated into the militia, all citizen-soldiers would have an equal opportunity to advance, 'sans aucune distinction que celle des talents et des vertus'. Servan next dealt with the question of offensive war which had come to trouble the Revolution: 'Le Peuple Français devant être guéri de la maladie des conquêtes, et avoir formé la résolution de ne jamais étendre les bornes de son Empire, l'état de guerre défensive active doit servir seul de base à la constitution de la force publique française'. Because the force would be purely defensive, there would be no need for a standing army, and 'l'armée active ne doit être rassemblée que pendant le temps nécessaire à son instruction'. Finally, the military laws would be written in such a fashion that they would 'attacher l'Officier au Soldat, le Soldat à l'Officier' and 'séparer, le moins qu'il sera possible, le Soldat et l'Officier du reste des citoyens'.

Servan's militia pattern of the armed people not only combined the military efficacy of arming the entire population with the political principles of equality and democracy, it further represented a totally defensive system capable of halting offensive wars of conquest. That Servan's scheme was not accepted, and that the French Revolutionary Armies were allowed to drift into militarism and Bonapartism, meant that the political will to initiate such a far-reaching plan did not yet exist. The precursors of the armed people had accomplished their task; the practitioner Servan had been poised for action; but a truly revolutionary regime of the armed people had not emerged.

Appendix B. The German Attitude toward the Commune

The German attitude toward the Commune was evident long before 18 March, 1871. The Ultra-Left which had so vociferously called for the 'Commune' throughout the siege of Paris had also advocated the revolutionary measures of 'la guerre à outrance'; its policies were anathema to Favre and Bismarck alike. Thus, during the initial negotiations leading to the January Armistice, there could be but little doubt that both men saw the suppression of the revolutionaries and the disarmament of the National Guard as preconditions for a stable peace. Favre, however, knew that his regime was not strong enough to disarm the Guard without Prussian complicity and that any unilateral attempt would bring the overthrow of authority in Paris. Bismarck replied to Favre that he should 'provoke an uprising while you still have an army to repress it'¹ - a reference to the fact that once the armistice was signed, there would remain too few troops to deal with a mass uprising - and threatened to impose on starving Paris the formula of 'un pain pour un fusil'.² But the German General Staff was highly sceptical of such an operation, which would not only have required military occupation of the radical arrondissements of Paris but also the co-operation of French 'regulars' who were still bitter over the events of the war. Moltke's fear of renewed war was so great that he adamantly refused to allow the regulars to retain arms, even as a prelude to disarmament of the Guard. Thus, at the Armistice of 28 January, only 25,000 regulars were

1. M. Busch, Bismarck in the Franco-German War, (London, Macmillan, 1879), vol.II, p.265.

2. Albert Sorel, Histoire diplomatique de la guerre franco-allemande, (Paris, Plon, 1875), vol.II, p.169.

permitted to garrison Paris; they shared with the 300,000-man National Guard the responsibility of keeping civil peace.

The election of the Assembly in February and the ascension of Thiers to executive power, though bound to inflame radical Paris, considerably eased French negotiations with Bismarck. The German Chancellor may even have supported Thiers' ideas of a coup d'état; he almost certainly had prior knowledge, for otherwise the movement of so many troops throughout Paris would have unduly alarmed Moltke and the General Staff. But even with German acquiescence, Thiers' situation was far from promising. Not only was the garrison limited by treaty to 25,000, but the rest of the army was forced to remain behind the Loire and could thus offer no support should the operation encounter difficulties. Though the preliminaries of peace signed on 13 February increased the Paris garrison to 40,000 men, Thiers had difficulty in finding additional troops; and in early March he opened negotiations for the repatriation of prisoners-of-war held in Germany.¹

Once the coup had failed and the revolutionaries achieved power on 18 March, a triangular pattern of Frankfurt, Paris and Versailles emerged. The Germans (Moltke, in particular) feared that Paris and Versailles would strike an accord of national unity and reopen the war.² Paris feared that the German Army would join the Army of Versailles in repressing the Commune. And Versailles feared that German restrictions on troop levels would prevent them from winning the civil war against the Commune. As the situation developed more clearly into a direct Paris-

1. Archives Historiques de la Guerre, Fort Vincennes, Guerre de 1870-1871, L^o 167, 'Rentrée des prisonniers'.

2. Moltke's fear lends further support to the idea that the Commune's original motivation was patriotic rather than purely military.

Versailles confrontation, the Germans pretended at neutrality by continuing to allow food supplies to reach Paris and by insisting that the articles of the Treaty be carried out. But in reality Bismarck was determined to use the existence of the Commune as a club against Versailles to ensure prompt French fulfilment of the peace treaty; for each time Thiers found it necessary to increase the Army of Versailles, he would be at Bismarck's mercy.¹

The Germans played their hand very cleverly. Bismarck bullied Favre by threatening to reimpose Napoleon III; after all, he had captured the Imperial Army intact and could have used it to dismiss the Versailles regime as well as to suppress the Commune. And although he offered the Commune 'une attitude pacifique et passive',² he threatened to

...traitera en ennemie la ville de Paris si Paris use... de procédés contradictoires avec les pourparlers engagés et les préliminaires de paix, ce qui entraînerait l'ouverture du feu des forts occupés par nous.³

Though the threat was never carried out, it was sufficient to immobilise the Communard Army and prevent it from marching directly against Versailles.

Bismarck probably never intended to reimpose Napoleon III, for French opinion would not have accepted the disgraced Emperor. He had the Versailles regime on its knees and could thus extract political benefits without risking the dubious, political venture

1. Sorel, op. cit., vol.II, pp.271 and 282.

2. This phrase was unfortunately translated by the Commune as 'amicale et passive' - an error which enabled Thiers to claim for propaganda purposes that the Germans and Communards were co-operating. The propaganda effort was necessary to undermine the 'patriotism' of the Commune and thus limit provincial support based on that motive.

3. Sorel, op. cit., vol.II, p.261. The words are from a letter by General Fabrice, who handled Germany's military relations with the Commune.

of a Bonapartist Restoration. Yet for his policy to work, he had to ensure that the Army of Versailles was strong enough to survive and ultimately to conquer. Thus, on 28 March, 1871, he permitted the Army of Versailles to increase from 40,000 men to 80,000 - an action which came just in the nick of time, as it enabled the Versaillais to crush the Fédérés offensive and force the revolution on the defensive. The contest had, however, been too close for comfort. To guard against future mishaps, he began the repatriation of prisoners-of-war from Sedan and Metz,¹ and allowed the Army of Versailles to increase to 100,000 men.² With such a force, Thiers was strong enough to advance against the ramparts of Paris.

The fact that the Army of Versailles seemed to grow in direct proportion to the number of returned prisoners-of-war supports the contention that the Army advancing against the Commune was composed almost entirely of regulars furnished by Bismarck - a view that is not only in accordance with Thiers' noted inability to find sufficient troops in early March, but is further reflected in Marx's analysis:

But where to find an army? The remnants of the line regiments were weak in number and unsafe in character. His urgent appeal to the provinces to succour Versailles, by their National Guards and volunteers, met with a flat refusal. Brittany alone furnished a handful of Chouans fighting under a white flag, every one of them wearing on his breast the heart of Jesus in white cloth and shouting 'Vive le Roi!'. Thiers was, therefore, compelled to collect, in hot haste, a motley crew, composed of sailors, marines, Pontifical Zouaves, Valentin's gendarmes, and Pietri's sergents-de-ville and mouchards. This army, however, would have been ridiculously ineffective without the instalments of imperialist war-prisoners, which Bismarck granted in numbers just sufficient to keep the civil war agoing and keep the Versailles Government in abject dependence on Prussia.³

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1. Jules Favre, Gouvernement de la Défense Nationale, (Paris, Plon, 1871-5), vol.III, p.297.
 2. Ibid., p.308.
 3. Karl Marx, The Civil War in France, (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1970), pp.83-4.

Counter-balanced against the leftist view that without the repatriated regulars Versailles could not have conducted the civil war is the moderate opinion that the regulars were used only in the final assault on the ramparts, the entry into Paris and 'La Semaine Sanglante', and that they numbered only 30,000 men out of an army of 130,000. Edwards takes this position,¹ which has the advantage of concurring with Article 10 of the Treaty of 10 May:

Le gouvernement allemand continuera à faire rentrer les prisonniers de guerre en s'entendant avec le gouvernement français. Le gouvernement français renverra dans leurs foyers ceux de ces prisonniers qui sont libérables. Quant à ceux qui n'ont point achevé leur temps de service, ils se retireront derrière la Loire.²

Though no final answer can be given,³ the treaty provision does not by itself invalidate the Left's contention. The treaty may have been designed for official consumption, while Thiers used the repatriated troops in the manner he saw best. Why else would Thiers and Favre have shown so much interest in a question which would otherwise have been trivial compared to the burden of fighting a civil war?

Nor would it be the only time the Germans overlooked an article of the peace treaty to suit their purposes. The agreement on the preliminaries of peace⁴ signed on 13 February 1871 (Article 9) made it clear that the Germans would have no political authority over Paris:

Il est bien entendu que les présents ne peuvent donner à l'autorité militaire allemande aucun droit sur les parties du territoire qu'elles n'occupent point actuellement.⁵

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1. Stewart Edwards, The Paris Commune of 1871, (London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1971), p.203.
 2. Favre, op. cit., vol.III, p.570.
 3. The question will be dealt with more extensively in Appendix C.
 4. There were three important documents concerning peace: (1) the Armistice of 28 January, (2) the Preliminaries of Peace, 13 February, and (3) the Peace Treaty, signed on 20 May.
 5. Favre, op. cit., vol.II, p.528.

Bourgin's research shows that, despite this clause, in the early days of May Bismarck was so upset at Thiers' apparent lack of progress that he not only agreed to return more prisoners-of-war, he wanted German troops to participate in a combined operation:

Bismarck offrait, ainsi que l'indique un télégramme de J. Favre du 7 mai, de coopérer à la reprise de Paris ou même d'occuper Paris de vive force, si l'armée de l'ordre ne réussissait pas à prendre la capitale.¹

Further evidence of the Germans' intentions is provided by Moltke's telegram to a subordinate, that 'si par malheur les soldats français étaient repoussés, l'armée allemande leur ouvrirait ses rangs pour la retraite et tirrait sur les insurgés...'.² Bourgin concludes that, because 'le chef allemand doit sommer la Commune d'avoir à désarmer tout le front nord et nord-est, sous peine de bombardement, l'accord est donc complet entre Versailles et Franckfort'.³ The accord was deepened by the events of the latter half of May, as shown by the Favre-Thiers telegram of 20 May:

'Le chancelier demande à nous aider pour en finir le plus vite possible.' [Bourgin continues]: De fait, il met à la disposition de Thiers des masses de prisonniers à raison de 30,000 par envoi. Il signa le traité de paix à onze heures du soir ce même 20 mai; il offrait de sommer la Commune de désarmer, étant prêt à agir ou à bloquer, selon le désir du gouvernement français. 'Ce n'est pas', dit-il à J. Favre, 'un parti contre lequel vous luttez, c'est un ramas de brigands, violant les lois sur lesquelles reposent toutes les civilisations. Pouvons-nous assister les bras croisés au renversement des monuments publics, à la destruction des propriétés privées, peut-être au meurtre de l'archevêque? Notre abstention ne se comprend plus et nous ne pouvons la promettre que pour bien peu de temps...'.⁴

Edwards concurs with Bourgin on the likelihood of German intervention:

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1. Georges Bourgin, 'Une Entente Franco-Allemande: Bismarck, Thiers, Jules Favre et la Répression de la Commune de Paris (Mai, 1871)', International Review of Social History, Vol.I., 1956, Part 1, p.42.
 2. Ibid., p.43.
 3. Ibid., p.43.
 4. Ibid., pp.43-4.

Had the Versailles troops suffered defeat there is little doubt that the German troops would have energetically intervened to guarantee order in France and the payment of the indemnity, and to prevent the spread of republican ideas in Europe.¹

Because the last batch of repatriated regulars enabled Thiers' Army to break through the ramparts and crush the Commune, direct German intervention proved unnecessary. Nevertheless, indirect assistance was tendered to the Army of Versailles on at least three occasions during 'La Semaine Sanglante'. First, Versailles troops were allowed to pour through the Porte Saint-Ouen, held by the Prussians, and to attack the Buttes Montmartre from the rear. The Communards had foolishly ignored Marx's warning to fortify the northern slope against Prussian duplicity,² and they paid dearly for their mistake with the collapse of their strongest defensive position in all Paris. Second, the Germans were in a position, in north and north-east Paris, to block the escape of Communards fleeing from the wrath of the Versaillais. The Bavarians, however, humanely allowed some leaders to escape. Finally, Prussian forces assisted the Army of Versailles in obtaining the surrender of Faltot's garrison on 29 May.

Though no direct intervention had occurred, the ugly spectre of international collusion against revolutionary activity had nevertheless been raised by Bismarck's policies. The Tsar of Russia had urged Bismarck to crush the Commune in March, for he feared the outbreak of a spate of revolutionary movements similar to those of 1848.³ His fears were not unfounded, for after the defeat of the Commune, many Russians who had fought in the

1. Edwards, op. cit., p.160.

2. Letter to Professor E.S. Beesly, in Jacques Duclos, A l'Assaut du Ciel, (Paris, Editions Sociales, 1961), p.289.

3. Bourgin, op. cit., p.42.

revolution returned to their native land to inaugurate insurrectionary activity, or formed the nuclei of expatriate organisations which were to play an important role in the period leading up to 1917.¹ Indeed, international revolution was considered, after the events of March to May 1871, as a problem of international import. Favre even suggested to Bismarck that an international conference should be held to discuss questions raised by the insurrection.² National differences had temporarily paled before an international threat; and collusion in counter-insurgency had begun as a policy of containment against proletarian revolution.

1. See Jeloubovskaia, La Commune de Paris, 1871, (Moscow, 1971), Chapter XI.

2. Bourgin, op. cit., pp.45-6.

Appendix C. The Army of Versailles

It is clear from the preceding appendix that the greatest mystery which remains from the period 1870-71 is the exact composition of the Army of Versailles. Despite the question's obvious historiographical importance, no-one has ever written on the subject; nor are the archives at Fort Vincennes very helpful. The composition of the initial army of 40,000 is not disputed; it consisted of Bonapartist gendarmes, sailors, marines, the few regulars who remained in the Paris garrison, and the handful of Breton 'Chouans' mentioned by Marx. These were the troops who failed to carry out Thiers' coup d'état and then straggled to Versailles to form the nucleus for his army of repression. But when Bismarck allowed Thiers to enlarge the army from 40,000 to 80,000 men, he had noticeable difficulty in obtaining troops. Further, there is disagreement among historians over the composition of that and succeeding augmentations of the Army of Versailles. The Left, led by Marx, insists that the men were almost entirely repatriated regulars from German prisoner-of-war camps, while the moderates maintain that regulars were used only during the final stages of the campaign in May and that they numbered only 30,000 men out of an army of 130,000.

Though no definitive answer can be given, the following theory is advanced for discussion. There could have been only four sources from which the soldiers who filled the ranks of the Army of Versailles could conceivably have come: provincial troops, volunteers, new soldiers called to the colours, and repatriated prisoners-of-war. The provinces, however, uniformly refused to furnish troops (at least in March and April) for two reasons. First, provincial officials needed the men to guard against

insurrections in the larger cities; and second, many of the men had fought in the war and were not considered politically reliable enough to be used in a civil war against Paris. The sole exception to this generalisation was the presence of 20,000 provincial National Guardsmen at Versailles, mentioned in Favre's Gouvernement de la Défense Nationale. However, none of the accounts of the fighting written by Versailles officers mentions the use of such units; rather, they refer to line regiments or combat units of sailors and marines. It is more likely that the Guardsmen were used to garrison Versailles, thus freeing regulars for combat against the *Fédérés*, and that they were not even included in the overall figures for the number of troops in the Army of Versailles. A second possible exception to the generalisation on provincial troops is contained in scattered references to civilian demonstrations against troop trains in April and May. While it is possible that the provinces sent troops to Versailles once local insurrections had been suppressed, the trains may rather have contained regulars who had been reorganised in the training camps of western, southern and eastern France. The second category, volunteers, can be even more readily discounted. Save for the handful of Chouans, nowhere is there a reference to the use of volunteers; nor would the regular force Thiers was building have welcomed short service recruits who would resign once the civil war had ended. The third category, 'new soldiers', cannot be specifically ruled out. Because the men would have been subject to military law and discipline, they might have obeyed orders to fight against the Commune. However, those who had fought in the war were tainted by republicanism, and might have shown solidarity with Paris, which those who had seen no service in 1870 would scarcely have had sufficient time for training.

It is therefore the final category, repatriated prisoners-of-war, which must be considered the most likely source for the soldiers of the Army of Versailles. After the two-phase war, they numbered 419,000,¹ of which 4,500 were interned in Belgium, 86,000 in Switzerland and 328,500 in Germany. The 4,500 men in Belgium must have been mainly escapees from the battles around Sedan and Metz; they would have been available for immediate integration into the Army of Versailles when they were returned to France on 10 March and may even have formed part of the first army of 40,000. The men interned in Switzerland came almost entirely from Bourbaki's army, which had contained two corps of regulars as well as the finest provincial troops. They were made available to the French government at the rate of 1,000 a day from early March, and the timetable might well have been speeded up. One telegram shows that the decision had been made to release prisoners who were not regulars, while veterans and regulars would be retained for incorporation into the army. It was a closed system: the men would have had virtually no contact with Paris since the beginning of the siege; they were now brought back, reorganised in special camps, given good pay and food along with anti-Communard propaganda, and then sent to Versailles. And when time was short, another telegram suggested that 'des régiments presque complets pourraient peut-être réorganiser ici [en Suisse]!'. Though there is no direct evidence, they might then have passed directly into the ranks of the Army of Versailles. Thus, even had Bismarck not consented to return the prisoners-of-war he controlled until May, the men interned in Switzerland could nevertheless have furnished sufficient regulars (perhaps

1. The information for this section comes from the Archives Historiques de la Guerre, Guerre de 1870-71, L^o 67, 'Rentrée des prisonniers'.

40,000 or more) to enable the Army of Versailles to increase from 40,000 to 80,000 men.

Evidence that the German-held prisoners-of-war were repatriated long before May comes from two unimpeachable sources. First, the Archives contain the correspondence between the German General Fabrice and the French Ministry of the Marine over the return of the prisoners. Fabrice's letter of 9 March reveals that the King of Prussia granted his consent to the return of the prisoners-of-war. The French reckoned that their maritime capacity would allow the repatriation of 100,000 men per month. Further, since the Germans had retained the prisoners-of-war's military organisation down to the company level, it would be a relatively easy chore to refit the men for integration into the Army of Versailles. Of the men detained in Germany, at least 250,000 were soldiers of the Imperial Army - the best-trained and most politically reliable troops Thiers could possibly have obtained. Confirmation that these soldiers were used as early as April comes from Favre. He stated that on 3 April, Bismarck agreed to repatriate 20,000 prisoners-of-war from Sedan and Metz;¹ four days later, the Versailles Army was increased from 80,000 to 100,000. On 6 May, Favre announced that the total of repatriated prisoners-of-war from Germany totalled 80,000,² and on 15 May he received a further 20,000 for service in Algeria and 40-50,000³ for immediate incorporation into the Army of Versailles. These reinforcements would have brought the Army of Versailles to an overall strength of 140,000 men, of which almost all were regulars and fully half were repatriated prisoners-of-war from

1. J. Favre, Gouvernement de la Défense Nationale, Vol.III, p.297.

2. Ibid., p.318.

3. Ibid., pp.401-2.

Germany.

The theory can be summed up thus: 40,000 regulars repatriated from Switzerland were added to the initial nucleus of 40,000 men; this army of 80,000 men repulsed the Communard offensive. With the addition of 20,000 Imperial troops repatriated from Germany, the Versailles Army grew to 100,000 men and was able to take the offensive. The final addition of 40-50,000 Imperial repatriates allowed the Army of Versailles to reach its full strength of 140,000 - a regular army fully capable of defeating the Communard ramparts forces.

Indeed, the last batch of prisoners-of-war sent by Bismarck must have been the elite of Bonaparte's Army; for the correspondence of the Army of Versailles shows how readily they were received. The commander of the Third Infantry Division, Army of the Reserve, wrote to Vinoy that

Au moment où la rentrée des prisonniers d'Allemagne permet de relever les effectifs, j'ai l'honneur de vous remercier pour les renforts, à peu près 1,700 hommes. J'ajoute qu'il y a un intérêt sérieux à mêler à de jeunes troupes de vieux éléments comme ceux que nous offrent les hommes qui reviennent d'Allemagne.¹

Another letter of 17 May speaks of 'l'utilité de compléter les cadres présents par l'envoi des anciens militaires ainsi réclamés', and on 19 May the Minister of War wrote to General MacMahon that he was sending a detachment of 1,000 men composed entirely of men repatriated from Germany.

These fragments, if they have been correctly interpreted, support the following conclusion: that the last group of prisoners from Germany were integrated into the other units to 'stiffen' them for the final stages of the civil war; and that on the verge of the final breakthrough against the Commune, entire battalions

1. This and the following quotation come from the Archives, Armée de Versailles, Li 124, 'Correspondance 15-28 mai'.

of elite soldiers were formed to spearhead the attack. It was the use of these troops which brought the sudden and unexpected collapse of the Commune in late May.

Appendix D. Maps

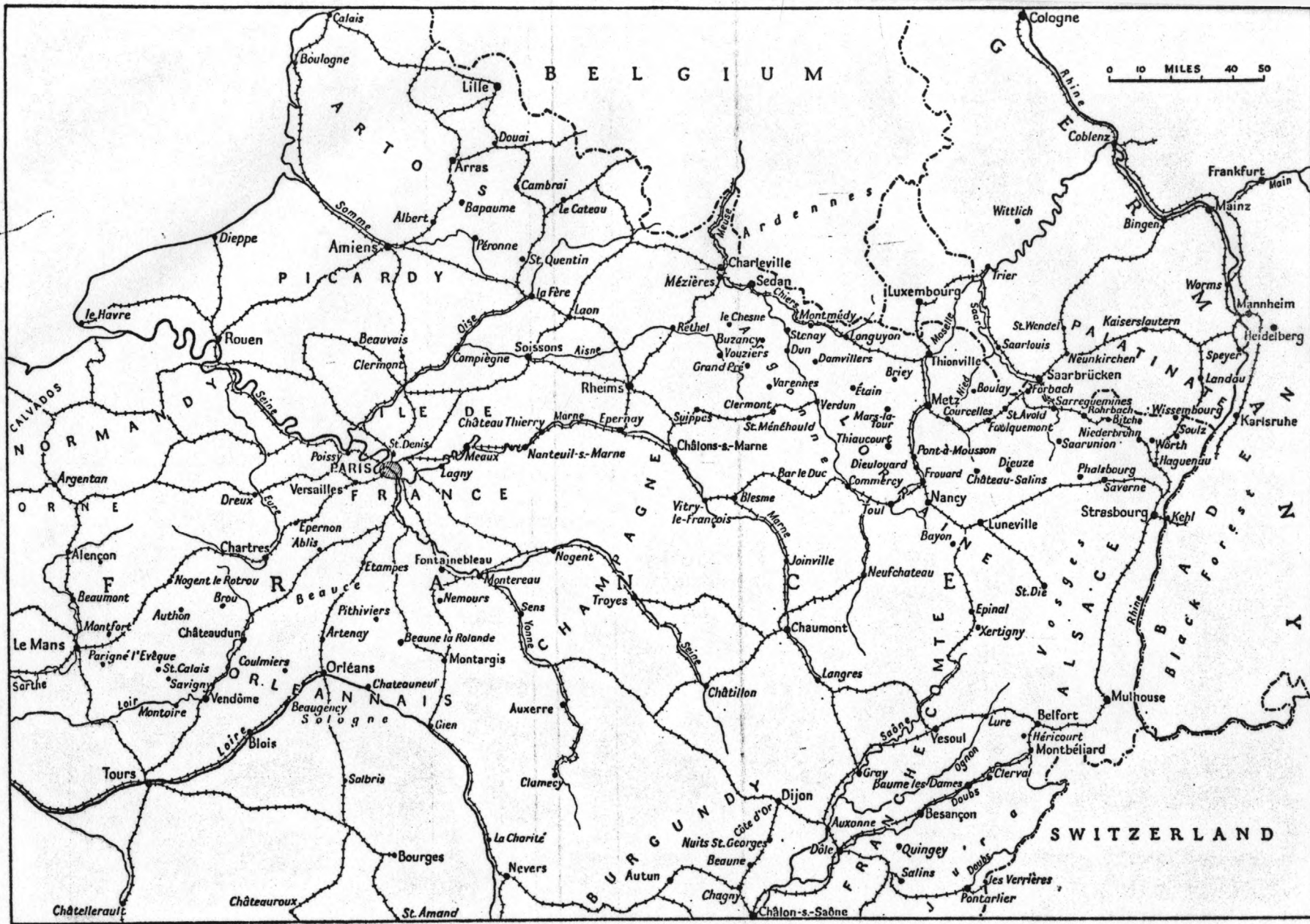
1. France, 1871; the battle area, including the railway network connecting Paris with Germany.
2. France, 1871; the extent of the German occupation of French territory at the Armistice.
3. Paris environs, 1871; the forts and ramparts which defended Paris throughout the two sieges.
4. Paris streets, 1871; the area which witnessed most of the street fighting during La Semaine Sanglante.

Note:

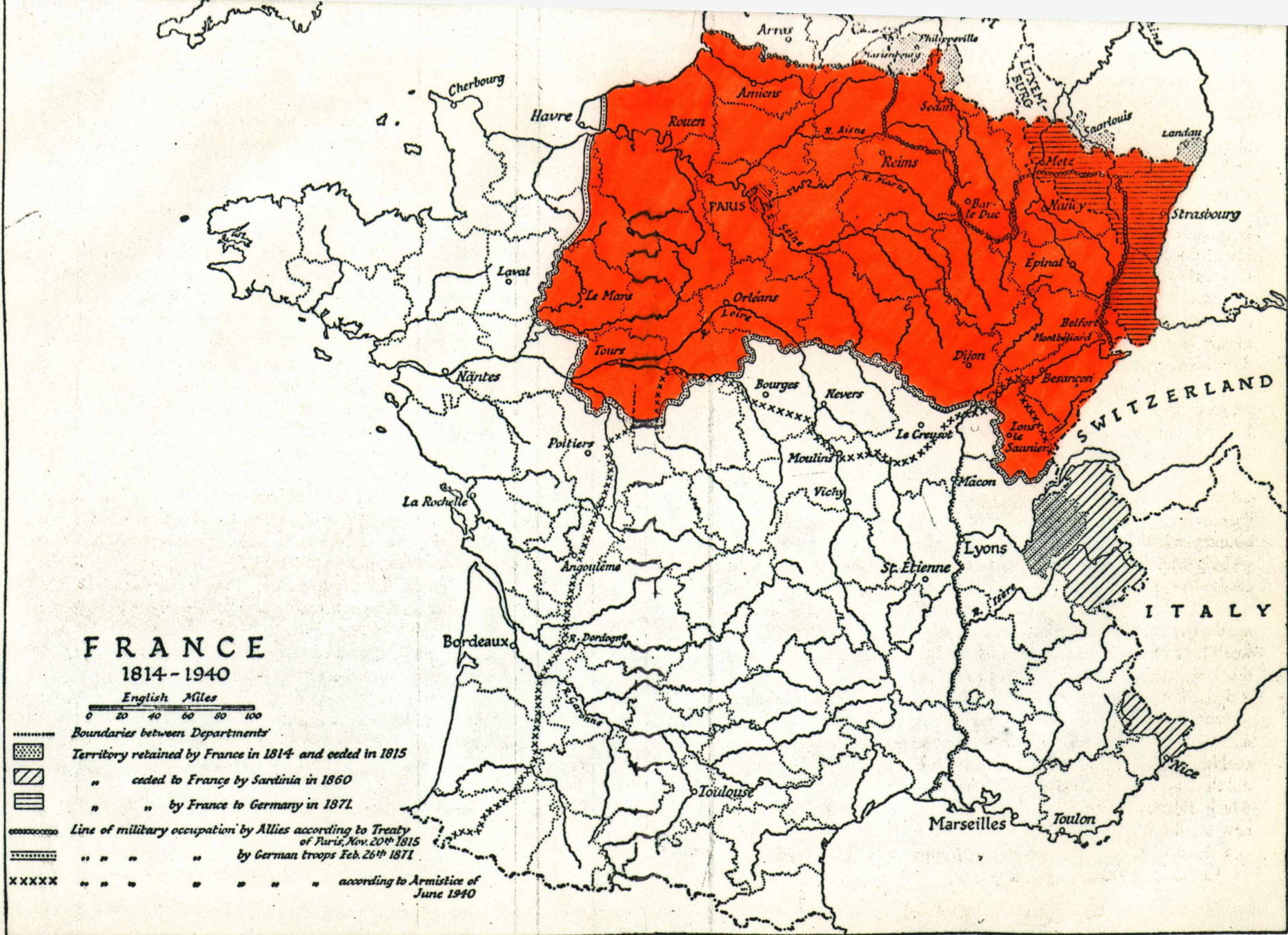
Map 1 is taken from Michael Howard, The Franco-Prussian War.

Map 2 is adapted from J.P.T. Bury, France, 1814-1940.

Maps 3 and 4 come from Stewart Edwards, The Paris Commune of 1871.



17 The Theatre of War, 1870-71



FRANCE
1814-1940

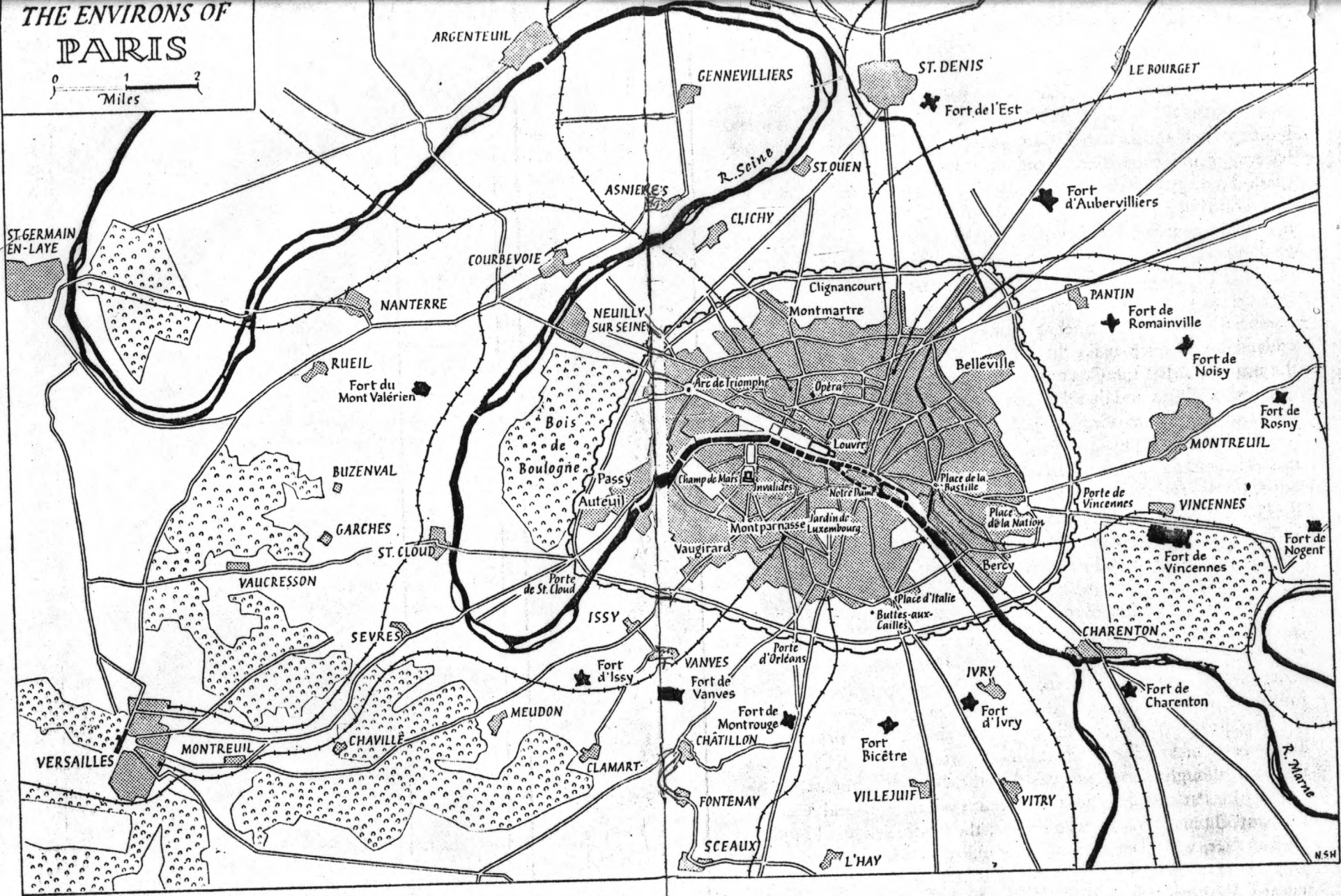
English Miles
0 20 40 60 80 100

- Boundaries between Departments
- ▨ Territory retained by France in 1814 and ceded in 1815
- ▧ " ceded to France by Sardinia in 1860
- ▩ " " by France to Germany in 1871
- Line of military occupation by Allies according to Treaty of Paris, Nov. 20th 1815
- - - - - " " " " by German troops Feb. 26th 1871
- xxxxx " " " " according to Armistice of June 1940

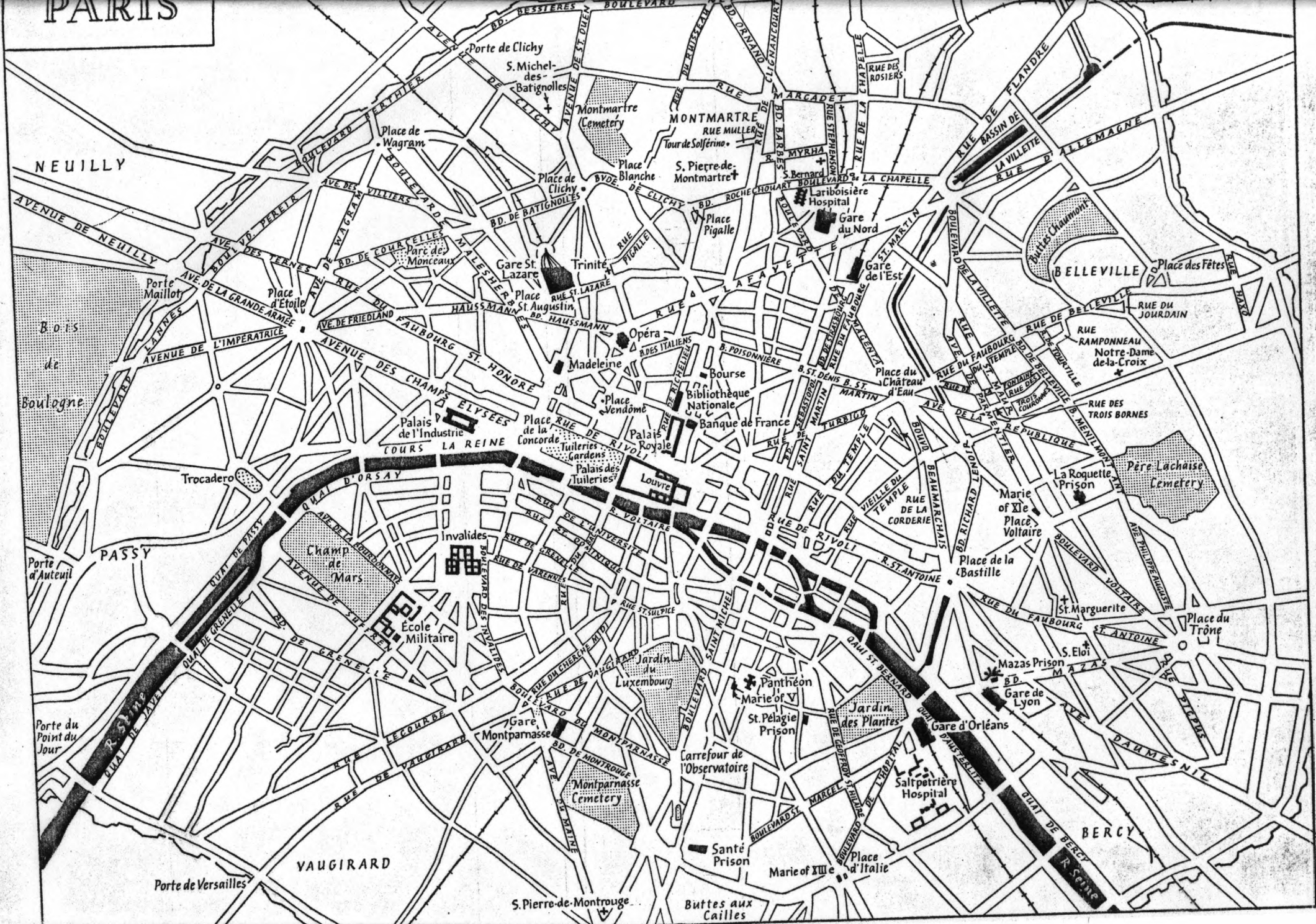
R. G.

371

THE ENVIRONS OF PARIS



PARIS



NEUILLY

BOIS de Boulogne

PASSY

VAUGIRARD

S. Pierre-de-Montrouge

Buttes aux Cailles

BERCY

Porte de Clichy

Porte Maillot

Porte d'Auteuil

Porte du Point du Jour

Porte de Versailles

Montmartre Cemetery

Montparnasse Cemetery

Belleville

Père Lachaise Cemetery

Tour de Solferino

Louvre

Pantheon

Carrefour de l'Observatoire

Santé Prison

S. Pierre-de-Montmartre

St. Pelagie Prison

Carrefour de l'Observatoire

Santé Prison

Lariboisière Hospital

Salt-patrière Hospital

Place Pigalle

Palais National

St. Eloi

Place d'Italie

Place de la Concorde

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