# Introduction

In their combination of intensity and geographical extent, the 1848 revolutions were unique – at least in European history. Neither the great French Revolution of 1789, nor the July Revolution of 1830, nor the Paris Commune of 1870, nor the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917 sparked a comparable transcontinental cascade. 1989 looks like a better comparator, but there is still controversy as to whether these uprisings can be characterized as 'revolutions'. In 1848, by contrast, parallel political tumults broke out across the entire continent, from Switzerland and Portugal to Wallachia and Moldavia, from Norway, Denmark and Sweden to Palermo and the Ionian Islands. This was the only truly European revolution that there has ever been.

But it was also in some respects a global upheaval, or at least a European upheaval with a global dimension. The news of revolution in Paris had a profound impact on the French Caribbean, and the measures adopted by London to avoid revolution on the British mainland triggered protests and uprisings across the British imperial periphery. In the young nations of Latin America, too, the European revolutions galvanized liberal and radical political elites. Even in far-off Australia, the February Revolution created political waves – though it was not until 19 June 1848 that the news of the February events reached Sydney in the Colony of New South Wales – a reminder of what the Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey once mournfully described as 'the tyranny of distance'.

The revolutions involved a vast panorama of charismatic and gifted actors, from Giuseppe Garibaldi to Marie d'Agoult, author (under a male pseudonym) of the best contemporary history of the revolutions in France, from the French socialist Louis Blanc to the leader of the Hungarian national movement, Lajos Kossuth; from the brilliant conservative

liberal social theorist, historian and politician Alexis-Charles-Henri Clérel de Tocqueville to the Wallachian soldier, journalist and agrarian radical Nicolae Bălcescu. From the young patriot poet Sándor Petőfi, whose recitation of a new national song for the Hungarians electrified the revolutionary crowds in Budapest, to the troubled priest Félicité de Lamennais, whose ultimately unsuccessful struggle to reconcile his faith with his politics made him one of the most famous thinkers in the pre-1848 world; from the writer George Sand, who composed 'revolutionary bulletins' for the Provisional Government in Paris, to the Roman popular tribune Angelo Brunetti, known affectionately as Ciceruacchio, or 'Chubby', a true man of the people, who did much to shape the unfolding of the Roman revolution of 1848–9. Not to mention the countless women who sold broadsheets and newspapers in the streets of the European cities or fought at the barricades (they are very prominent in the visual depiction of these revolutions). For politically sentient Europeans, 1848 was an all-encompassing moment of shared experience. It turned everyone into contemporaries, branding them with memories that would last as long as life itself.

These revolutions were experienced as *European* upheavals – the evidence for this is superabundant; but they were nationalized in retrospect.[1] The historians and memory managers of the European nations absorbed them into specific national stories. The supposed failure of the German revolutions was sucked into the national narrative known as the *Sonderweg*, or 'special path', where it helped to power a thesis about Germany's aberrant road into modernity, a road that culminated in the disaster of the Hitler dictatorship. Something similar happened in Italy, where the failure of revolution in 1848 was seen as pre-programming an authoritarian drift into the new Italian kingdom and thereby paving the road to the March on Rome in 1922 and the fascist seizure of power that followed. In France, the failure of 1848 was seen as ushering in the Bonapartist interlude of the Second Empire, which in turn anticipated the future triumph of Gaullism. In other words, focusing on the supposed failure of 1848 also had the consequence of allowing these stories to be channelled into a plurality of parallel, nation-state-focused narratives. Nothing demonstrates better than these connected upheavals and their fragmentation in modern memory the immense power of the nation-state as a way of framing the historical record – we are still feeling that power today.

There were three phases to the events of 1848. In February and March, upheaval spread like a brush fire across the continent, leaping from city to city and starting numerous spot-fires in towns and villages in-between. The Austrian Chancellor, Metternich, fled from Vienna, the Prussian army was withdrawn from Berlin, the kings of Piedmont–Sardinia, Denmark and Naples issued constitutions – it all seemed so easy. This was the Tahrir Square moment: one could be forgiven for thinking that the movement encompassed the entirety of society; the euphoria of unanimity was intoxicating; 'I had to go out into the winter cold and walk and walk until I had worn myself out', one German radical wrote, 'just to calm my blood and slow down the beating of my heart, which was in a state of unprecedented and baffled agitation and felt as if it were about to blow a hole in my chest.'[2] In Milan, complete strangers embraced each other in the streets. These were the spring days of 1848.

Yet the divisions within the upheaval (already latent in the first hours of conflict) soon became glaringly apparent: by May, radical demonstrators were attempting to storm and overthrow the National Assembly created by the February Revolution in Paris, while, in Vienna, Austrian democrats protested at the slowness of liberal reforms and established a Committee of Public Safety. In June, there were violent clashes between the liberal (or in France republican) leaderships and radical crowds on the streets of the larger cities. In Paris, this culminated in the brutality and bloodshed of the 'June Days', which killed at least 3,000 insurgents. This was the long hot summer of 1848, gleefully diagnosed by Marx as the moment at which the revolution lost its innocence and the sweet (but deceptive) unanimity of spring made way for the bitter struggle between classes.

The autumn of 1848 offered a more complex picture. In September, October and November, counter-revolution unfolded in Berlin, Prague, Vienna and Wallachia. Parliaments were shut down, insurgents were arrested and sentenced, troops returned en masse to the streets of the cities. But, at the same time, a second-phase, radical revolt dominated by democrats and social republicans of various kinds broke out in the central and southern German states (especially Saxony Baden and Württemberg), in western and southern France, and in Rome, where the radicals, after the flight of the Pope on 24 November, eventually declared a Roman Republic. In the south of Germany, this second-wave upheaval was only extinguished in the summer of 1849, when Prussian troops finally

captured the fortress of Rastatt in Baden, last stronghold of the radical insurgency. Shortly afterwards in August 1849, French troops crushed the Roman republic and restored the papacy, much to the chagrin of those who had once revered France as the patroness of revolution across the continent. At about the same time, the bitter war over the future of the Kingdom of Hungary was brought to an end, as Austrian and Russian troops occupied the country. By the end of the summer of 1849, the revolutions were largely over.

These grim and often very violent days of reckoning mean, among other things, that the narrative of these upheavals lacks a moment of redemptive closure. It was precisely the stigma of failure that put me off the 1848 revolutions when I first encountered them at school. Complexity and failure are an unattractive combination.

Why, then, should we make the effort today of reflecting on 1848? First, the 1848 revolutions were in fact *not* a failure: in many countries they produced swift and lasting constitutional change and post-1848 Europe was or became a very different place. It is more interesting to think of this continental uprising as the particle collision chamber at the centre of the European nineteenth century. People, groups and ideas flew into it, crashed together, fused or fragmented, and emerged in showers of new entities whose trails can be traced through the decades that followed. Political movements and ideas, from socialism and democratic radicalism to liberalism, nationalism, corporatism and conservatism, were tested in this chamber; all were changed, with profound consequences for the modern history of Europe. The revolutions also produced – notwithstanding the persistence of 'failure' as a way of thinking about them – a profound transformation in political and administrative practices across the continent, a European 'revolution in government'.

Second, the questions that the insurgents of 1848 asked have not lost their power. There are exceptions, obviously: we no longer wrack our brains over the temporal power of the papacy or the 'Schleswig-Holstein question'. But we do still worry about what happens when demands for political or economic liberty conflict with demands for social rights. Freedom of the press was all very well, the radicals of 1848 never tired of saying, but what was the point of a high-minded newspaper if you were too hungry to read it? The problem was captured by German radicals in the playful juxtaposition of the 'freedom to read' (*Pressefreiheit*) with the 'freedom to feed' (*Fressefreiheit*).

The spectre of 'pauperization' had loomed over the 1840s. How was it possible that even people in full-time work could scarcely manage to feed themselves? Entire sectors of manufacture – weavers were the most prominent example – appeared to be engulfed by this predicament. But what did this tide of immiseration mean? Was the gaping inequality between rich and poor simply a divinely ordained feature of man's estate, as conservatives claimed, was it a symptom of backwardness and overregulation, as liberals argued, or was it something generated by the political and economic system in its current incarnation, as the radicals insisted? Conservatives looked to charitable amelioration and liberals to economic deregulation and industrial growth, but radicals were less sanguine: to them, it seemed that the entire economic order was founded upon the exploitation by the stronger of the weaker. These questions have not faded away. The problem of the 'working poor' is today one of the burning issues of social policy. And the relationship between capitalism and social inequality is still under scrutiny.

Particularly difficult was the question of labour. What if work itself became a scarce commodity? The downturn in the business cycle in the winter and spring of 1847–8 had pushed many thousands of men and women out of work. Did citizens have the right to demand that, if necessary, labour be apportioned to them, as something essential to a dignified existence? It was the effort to answer this question that produced the controversial 'National Workshops' in Paris and their many analogues in other parts of Europe. But it was never going to be easy to persuade hard-working farmers in the Limousin to pay extra in tax to fund work creation schemes for men they regarded as Parisian layabouts. On the other hand, it was the sudden closure of these workshops, which poured 100,000 unemployed men back onto the streets of the capital, that triggered the violence of the Paris June Days of 1848.

The Düsseldorf artist Johann Peter Hasenclever captured the same issue in his canvas *Workers before the City Council*. Painted in 1849 and widely exhibited in a number of versions, it shows a delegation of labourers whose work creation scheme – which involved excavating various arms of the River Rhine – had just been shut down in the autumn of 1848 for lack of funds. They present a petition of protest to the city fathers of Düsseldorf in an opulent council chamber. Through a large window, an orator can be seen in the square outside addressing a raging crowd. Karl Marx loved this painting for its stark depiction of what he

Johann Peter Hasenclever, *Workers before the City Council* (1849). Workers laid off after the closure of a public works programme on the River Rhine petition their town council for a resumption of the works in the autumn of 1848. The council reacts with consternation. Through the window, a demagogue can be seen addressing an aroused crowd. The painting relates to an event that took place in Düsseldorf, but the architecture in the background is not specific to the city and hints at a more general urban predicament.

saw as a conflict between classes. At the end of a long piece for the *New York Tribune*, he praised the artist for conveying with 'dramatic vitality' in one image a state of affairs that a progressive writer could only hope to analyse over many pages of print.[3] Questions about social rights, poverty and the right to work tore the revolutions apart during the summer of 1848. They cannot be said to have lost any of their urgency.

As a non-linear, convulsive, intermittently violent and transformative 'unfinished revolution', 1848 remains an interesting study for present-day readers. In 2010–11, many journalists and historians noticed the uncanny resemblance between the untidy sequence of upheavals that are sometimes called the 'Arab Spring' and the revolutions of 1848, also known as the 'springtime of the peoples'. Like the upheavals in the Arab states, they were diverse, geographically dispersed and yet connected. The single most striking feature of the 1848 revolutions was their simultaneity – this was a puzzle to contemporaries and has remained one to historians ever since. It was also one of the most enigmatic features of the Arab events of 2010–11, which had deep local roots, but were clearly also interlinked. In a lot of ways, Cairo's Tahrir Square was not like the Piazza San Marco in Venice; the *Vossische Zeitung* was not Facebook – but they are alike enough to trigger larger connecting thoughts. The important point is a general one: in their swarming multitudinousness, in the unpredictable interaction of so many forces, the tumults of the mid nineteenth century resembled the chaotic upheavals of our own day, in which clearly defined endpoints are hard to come by.

The revolution of 1848 was a revolution of assemblies: the Constituent Assembly in Paris, which made way for the single-chamber legislature known as the Assemblée Nationale; the Prussian Constituent Assembly or Nationalversammlung in Berlin, elected under new laws created for the purpose; the Frankfurt parliament, convoked in the elegant circular chamber of St Paul's Church in the city of Frankfurt. The Hungarian Diet was a very old body, but in the course of the Hungarian revolutions of 1848 a new national Diet convened in the city of Pest. The revolutionary insurgents of Naples, Piedmont–Sardinia, Tuscany and the Papal States all established new parliamentary bodies. The revolutionaries of Sicily, seeking to break away from the rule of Naples, founded their own all-Sicilian parliament, which in April 1848 deposed the Bourbon king in Naples, Ferdinand II.

But the assemblies were merely one theatre of action. By the summer

of 1848, they were coming under pressure, not just from the monarchical executives in many states, but also from a range of competing agencies of more radical colour: networks of clubs and 'committees', for example, or radical counter-assemblies such as the General Crafts and Manufacturing Congress founded in Frankfurt in July 1848 to represent those workers in the skilled trades whose interests were not catered for in the liberal- and middle-class-dominated National Assembly. Even this body split after five days into two separate congresses, because it proved impossible to bridge the divide between masters and journeymen.

Liberals revered parliaments and they looked with fastidious anxiety upon the clubs and assemblies of the radicals, which seemed to them to parody the sublime procedural culture of properly elected and constituted chambers. Even more alarming, from the perspective of 'chamber liberals', was the prospect of organized demonstrations prepared to intervene directly in the affairs of parliaments. Exactly this happened in Paris on 15 May 1848, when a crowd broke into the lightly guarded chamber of the National Assembly, disrupted the proceedings, read out a petition and then marched off to the Hôtel de Ville to proclaim an 'insurrectionary government' to be headed by noted radical personalities. The tension between parliamentary and other forms of representation – between representative and direct forms of democracy – is another feature of 1848 that resonates with today's political scene, in which parliaments face a fall in public esteem and a diverse array of competing non- or extra-parliamentary groups has emerged, using social media, and organizing around issues that may not command the attention of professional politicians.

1848 wasn't just a story of revolutionaries. Twentieth- and twenty-first-century historians of liberal instincts have naturally been drawn to the cause of those whose demands – for freedom of association, speech and the press, for constitutions, regular elections and parliaments – have entered the repertoire of modern liberal democracy. But while I share this affinity for newspaper-reading, coffee-drinking liberals and radicals, it seems to me that an account that views events only from an insurgent or liberal standpoint will miss an essential part of the drama and meaning of these revolutions. They were a complex encounter between old and new powers, in which the old ones did as much to shape the shorter- and longer-term outcomes of the revolutions as the new. Even this correction falls short, because the 'old powers' that survived the revolution were themselves transformed by it, though generally not in ways

that most historians have found interesting. The future Prussian Minister-President and German statesman Otto von Bismarck was still a small player in 1848, but the revolution enabled him to fuse his personal destiny with the future of his country. Throughout his life he continued to acknowledge 1848 as a rupture between one epoch and another, as a moment of transformation without which his own career would have been unthinkable. The papacy of Pius IX was profoundly altered by the revolutions, as was the Catholic Church and its relationship with the modern world. Today's Catholic Church is in many respects the fruit of that moment. Napoleon III did not think of himself as the crusher of revolution, but as the restorer of order. He spoke of the need not to block, but to channel, the forces unleashed by the revolution, to establish the state as the vanguard of material progress.

This was an upheaval in which the lines between revolution and counter-revolution were and are sometimes hard to draw. Many 1848ers died or suffered exile and imprisonment for their convictions, but many others crossed the floor, making their peace with post-revolutionary administrations that had themselves been transformed or chastened by the revolutionary shock. Thus began a long march through the institutions. More than a third of the prefects (regional police officials) of post-1848 Bonapartist France were ex-radicals; so was the Austrian Minister of the Interior from July 1849, Alexander von Bach, whose name had once stood on the lists of suspect democrats kept by the Vienna police department. Counter-revolutionaries were as often as not – in their own eyes – the executors, rather than the gravediggers, of the revolution. Understanding that enables us to see more clearly how this revolution changed Europe.

In memory, the revolutions (at least for many former participants) took on a stark emotional chiaroscuro: the bright euphoria of the early days, and then the frustration, bitterness and melancholy that came when the 'iron net of counter-revolution' (as the Berliner Fanny Lewald put it) descended on the insurgent cities. Euphoria and disappointment were part of this story, but so was fear. Soldiers feared angry townspeople almost as much as the latter feared them. The sudden panics of crowds confronted by troops produced unpredictable stampedes that can be seen in every insurgent city. 'Since 25 February [1848]', wrote Émile Thomas, architect of the National Workshops in Paris and later a zealous Bonapartist, 'we have been governed under the influence of fear, that evil counsellor that paralyses all good intentions.'[4]

Liberal leaders feared they might be unable to control the social energies released by the revolution. People of humbler social standing feared that a conspiracy was underway to stitch up the revolution, reverse its achievements and plunge them for ever into poverty and helplessness. Urban middle-class residents winced when uncouth figures from the suburbs poured in through the city gates now shorn of their military posts. They feared for their property, and sometimes for their lives. In Palermo, there was a rough, diverse and potentially ungovernable social undercurrent to the uprising in the city. The early leaders of the Palermo revolution were stolid and predictable dignitaries. But as Ferdinando Malvica, author of an unpublished contemporary chronicle of the Palermitan revolution, pointed out, the streets soon also filled with the armed *maestranze* (craftsmen's corporations) and, more disturbingly, with squads from the surrounding country: these, he wrote, were 'ferocious men, almost devoid of human feeling, as bloodthirsty as they were boorish, ugly people [by whom] the beautiful civic capital of Sicily found itself surrounded, infernal tribes peopled only by creatures in whom nothing was human but their sunburnt countenances'.[5] Without the driving force and supposed menace exercised by such people, the risings of 1848 could never have succeeded; and yet a pervasive fear of the lower orders also paralysed the revolution in its later stages, making it easier to play different interests off against each other, to woo liberals into the arms of the established authorities, and to isolate radicals as enemies of the social order. On the other hand, the subsiding of fear could trigger rushes of euphoric emotion, as happened in many European cities during the spring days, when citizens suddenly lost or overcame their fear of the security forces or of the secret police.

Specific displays of emotion could be developed as articulations of revolutionary sensibility and some of these convey the distinctiveness of 1848 as a moment of middle-class revolt. On his way to his execution by a firing squad outside Vienna early on the morning of 9 November 1848, the radical parliamentary deputy Robert Blum was seen – according to several of the poems and songs that commemorate his death – to shed a single tear. When an officer remarked: 'Don't be afraid, it will all be over in an instant', Blum brushed off the effort to comfort him and, drawing himself up to his full (but not very great) height, retorted: 'This tear is not the tear of the parliamentary deputy

of the German nation Robert Blum. This is the tear of the father and husband.'

Blum's tear entered radical legend. The 'Song of Robert Blum' sung across the southern German states well into the twentieth century includes a reference to this moment of private grief amidst the public ritual of a political execution: 'The tear for one's wife and children', it solemnly intones, 'does not dishonour a man.' The tear lived on in memory because it identified Blum as a man of middle-class attachments and values, a private man who had entered public life. This was politics in a bourgeois key. (To this day, *erschossen wie Robert Blum*, 'as shot as Robert Blum', is a proverbial expression in parts of southern Germany.)

Counter-revolutionaries had emotions too, of course. At the end of an extraordinary speech to the United Diet in Berlin, in which Otto von Bismarck reluctantly declared that he now accepted the revolution as an irreversible historical fact and the new liberal ministry as 'the government of the future', he left the podium sobbing violently. These tears, unlike Blum's, were emphatically public, both in their performative character and in their causation. The cry *Berliner Schweine!* ('Berlin pigs!') uttered by rural peasant army recruits from backwoods Brandenburg as they beat suspected barricade fighters in the capital with clubs and iron rods during the March days tell us something (though certainly not everything) about the feelings country youths brought to the tasks of urban counter-insurgency. Vengefulness and anger were important to the brutality of Austrian generals like Haynau, who appeared to delight in the death sentences and executions he meted out to defeated Hungarian insurgents.

The book opens with the precarious social world of pre-1848 Europe, an era in which the great majority of the population was pressed and flexed by rapid change. The link between social distress and political upheaval was deep, if not direct. And economically motivated protest and the spectacle of extreme social distress gave off a polarizing political energy, helping to shape the allegiances of those who would make or inherit the revolutions of 1848. The political universe in which the revolutions broke out (chapter 2) was not structured by hard-and-fast commitments and solid partisan identities. The Europeans of this era charted highly idiosyncratic journeys across an archipelago of arguments and chains of thought. They were in motion, and they remained so during and after the mid-century revolutions. The political conflicts

of the 1830s and 1840s (chapter 3) were fought out along many fault lines. There was no binary cleavage, but a plethora of fractures running in every direction. This remained a feature of the revolutions themselves, which appear at first glance remarkably chaotic and opaque – in that respect they resemble the conflicts that compel our attention today.

Chapters 4–6 zero in on the revolutions themselves: did revolutionaries make them, or was it the other way around? The upheavals began with scenes of often magnificent drama. An account of their inception must make sense both of their great strength and of the structural and psychosocial vulnerabilities that would later be their undoing. Chapter 5 reflects on the parallel processing that took place across the chief theatres of unrest: the transformation of cities into circuitry humming with political emotion, the solemn burial of the revolutionary dead, the creation of new governments, chambers and constitutions, often under conditions of extreme uncertainty. The revolutionaries of 1848 thought of themselves as the bringers and enablers of 'emancipation', but what did this mean for those who hoped to achieve emancipation through them? Following the paths of the enslaved Africans of the French Empire, of politically active women, Jews and the 'gypsy slaves' of the Romanian lands is one way to measure the extent and limitations of what was achieved in 1848.

Chapters 7 and 8 examine the declining arc of the revolutions, focusing first on the gradual ebbing of revolutionary energies, the diffusion of effort and the secession from common enterprises that was a feature of the summer and autumn of 1848. Then comes that long sequence of increasingly violent policing actions that bring the revolutions to an end. Making sense of this part of the story involves understanding not just the weaknesses that made it possible to check the momentum of the revolutions but also the roots of counter-revolutionary success, which lay partly in latent advantages inherited from the past, and partly in the lessons learned from watching the revolutions unfold. Among many other things, the closing phase reveals how much better the counter-revolutionaries were at collaborating internationally than their opponents. The course of the 1848 revolutions, it turns out, was shaped as much by the relations between states as by the civil tumults within them. Chapter 9 tracks away in space and time from the epicentres of the upheaval. Across North and South America, south Asia and the Pacific rim, the ripples generated by the European mid-century revolutions passed into complex societies,

polarizing or clarifying political debates, reminding everyone of the malleability and fragility of all political structures. But the further we get geographically from Europe, the less suitable the metaphor of 'impact' becomes – the diffusion of content becomes less important than selective readings from afar, driven by local processes of political differentiation and conflict. On the European continent, by contrast, the legacy of 1848 was deep and lasting. To see this clearly, we must follow the people, ideas and intellectual styles of the mid nineteenth century into the revolutions of 1848 and back out again.

Europeans, like all humans, are talkative, and there has never been a more garrulous revolution than 1848. It generated a truly astonishing volume of personal testimony. I have tried throughout to listen to these disparate voices and to think about what clues they can give us to the deeper meaning of what was going on around them. But garrulousness is not always communicative, and it is important also to reflect on those situations in which the people of 1848 talked *at* rather than *to* each other. Speeches could be exciting and empty at the same time. Liberals and radicals spoke at length in front of rural people about the virtue and necessity of the revolutionary struggle, but with very meagre results. Liberals found ways of misconstruing or simply of not hearing the demands of radicals. Information circulated in a haze of rumour and fake news, much as it does today, and fear made people listen to some voices and ideas and shut their ears to others.

One of the striking things about these revolutions is the intensity of historical awareness among so many of the key actors. This was one important difference between 1848 and its great eighteenth-century predecessor: 1789 had been a total surprise, whereas contemporaries of the mid-century revolutions read them against the template of the great original. And they did so in a world in which the concept of *history* had acquired tremendous semantic weight. For them, much more than for the men and women of 1789, history was happening in the present. Its movements could be detected in every twist and turn of the revolution's development. Astonishing numbers of them wrote memoirs or historical treatises bristling with footnotes.

For some, this tendency to retrospection made of the events of 1848 a miserable parody of the great French original: the most eloquent exponent of this view was Marx. But for others the relationship was the other way around. It was not that the epic energy of 1789 had wasted away

into caricature, but rather that the historical awareness made possible by the first revolution had accumulated, deepened and propagated itself more widely, saturating the events of 1848 with meaning. The Chilean writer, journalist, historian and politician Benjamin Vicuña Mackenna captured the latter intimation when he wrote in his memoirs:

> The French revolution of 1848 produced a powerful echo in Chile. For us poor colonials living on the shores of the Pacific Ocean, its predecessor in 1789, so celebrated in history, had been but a flash of light in our darkness. Half a century later, however, its twin had every mark of brilliant radiance. We had seen it coming, we studied it, we understood it, we admired it.[6]

# 1
# Social questions

This chapter contains scenes of economic precarity, ambient anxiety, nutritional crisis and ultraviolence. It hovers over the societies of pre-1848 Europe, focusing on areas of pressure, displacement, blockage and conflict. Social discontent does not 'cause' revolutions – if it did, revolutions would be much more common. Nevertheless, the material distress of mid-nineteenth-century Europeans was the indispensable backdrop to the processes of political polarization that made the revolutions possible. It was central to the motivation of many participants in urban tumults. As important as the reality and quantity of suffering were the ways in which this era saw and tabulated social dysfunction. The 'Social Question' that preoccupied mid-nineteenth-century Europeans was a constellation of real-world problems, but it was also a way of seeing. The chapter opens with scenes from the lives of the poor and the not-so-poor and reflects on the mechanisms that alienated social groups from each other and pushed them over the boundary between subsistence and crisis. It explores the techniques employed by those who made things with their hands (weavers, in particular) to ameliorate their condition through the focused application of protest and violence. It closes with the political and social convulsion of 1846, when an abortive political uprising in Galicia was engulfed from below by a violent social upheaval – an episode rich in dark lessons for the people of 1848.

## THE POLITICS OF DESCRIPTION

If you want to know how the poorest of our workers live, go to the rue des Fumiers, which is occupied almost exclusively by this class. Lower your head and enter one of the sewers that open onto the street; step into

a subterranean passage where the air is as humid and cold as in a cave. You will feel your feet slipping on the filthy ground, you will fear falling into the mire. On every side as you pass you will find dark, frigid rooms whose walls ooze dirty water, lit only by the feeble light from a tiny window too badly made to be properly fastened. Push open the flimsy door and enter, if the fetid air does not make you recoil. But take care, because the dirty, uneven ground is caked with muck and neither paved nor properly tiled. Here are three or four mouldy, rickety beds, tied together with string and covered in threadbare rags that are seldom washed. And the cupboards? No need. In a home like this one, there is nothing to put in them. A spinning wheel and a loom complete the furnishings.

Thus two doctors, Ange Guépin and Eugène Bonamy, described the poorest street of their city in the year 1836.[1] The setting was not Paris or Lyons, but Nantes, a provincial town on the River Loire in the Upper Brittany region of western France. Nantes was no teeming metropolis: nearly 76,000 people lived there in 1836, together with an overwhelmingly male transient population of around 10,700 itinerant labourers, sailors, travellers and garrison troops, numbers that placed it outside the list of Europe's forty most populous cities. The city was still struggling to overcome the shock of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. These geopolitical disruptions had ruined the Atlantic Trade (especially in enslaved African people) that had enriched eighteenth-century Nantes, lining some of its best streets with the fine houses of prosperous slavers.[2] Its population had fallen during the wars, and despite a commercial revival after 1815 growth remained sluggish, partly because the French Atlantic seaboard never fully recovered from the impact of the British blockade, partly because the environment for textile production became more competitive and partly because an accumulation of silt in the Loire now prevented larger vessels from reaching the town's wharves. In 1837, the city's external trade was still less than it had been in 1790.[3] A statistical survey carried out by the mayor in 1838 revealed an industrial life dominated by quite small enterprises: 25 cotton mills employing 1,327 workers, 12 construction yards employing 565 workers, 38 woollen cloth, fustian and soft-goods factories, 9 copper and iron foundries, 13 small sugar refineries employing 310 workers, 5 conserve plants with 290 workers, and 38 tanneries with 193 workers.[4] Far more numerous were those who worked outside the factories and foundries, taking in piecework, laundering, working on building sites or as servants of various kinds.

Yet this relatively modest town exhibited in microcosm extreme variations in the quality of human life and it was these that drew the attention of Guépin and Bonamy, physicians and public health experts with a keen social conscience. In a vast work of statistical description, the two doctors brought the city of Nantes to life before the eyes of the reader – its streets, quays, factories and squares, its schools, clubs, libraries, fountains, prisons and hospitals. But the most compelling passages of commentary can be found in a chapter towards the end of the book on the 'Modes of Existence of the Diverse Classes of Nantes Society'. Here the emphasis was on the variety of social destinies. The authors discerned eight 'classes' in the city – this was not quite the dialectical triad that would dominate socialism after Marx. The first class consisted simply of 'the wealthy'. Then came the four ranks of the bourgeoisie: the 'high bourgeoisie', the 'prosperous bourgeoisie', 'the distressed bourgeoisie' and the 'poor bourgeoisie'. At the bottom of the pyramid were three classes of workers: the 'well-off', the 'poor' and the 'miserable'.[5]

The holistic, sociological quality of the observations is striking. The authors move beyond characterizing the economic conditions of each group towards an appraisal of styles, practices, awareness and values. 'The wealthy', they find, tend to have few children (the average is two) and to occupy apartments comprising between ten and fifteen rooms lit by between twelve and fifteen tall and wide windows. The life of the occupants is sweetened by 'a thousand little comforts that one might regard as indispensable, were an enormous part of the population not denied them'.

Immense efforts are expended in support of the seasonal balls that the next stratum, the high bourgeoisie, holds for its daughters. Entire apartments are cleared to make space for the dancers. A daybed is installed in the attic for grandpa. Hairdressers go mad during the ball season; they are besieged like doctors during an epidemic (both Guépin and Bonamy had played a prominent role in fighting the cholera epidemic that ravaged Nantes in 1832, killing 800 residents). Whether the night of revels that followed was really worth all the effort expended was doubtful, at least in the estimation of the authors. For the truth was that a great ball at Nantes was 'a throng where you sweat endlessly, breathe stale air and assuredly diminish your prospect of longevity'. And on the following morning, if the temperature was cold, one found in the joints of the windows 'pieces of horribly dirty ice'. 'The vapour

which, in condensing, has formed these chunks of ice was last night the atmosphere where 300 guests breathed.'[6]

Whereas the high bourgeois maintained their own horses and carriages, the members of a 'comfortably off' bourgeois household (stratum 3) were content to travel across town on the omnibus. The paterfamilias was a loyal subscriber to his reading club, but he was also forever anxious, because 'he always knows that frugality and work will be required to cover all his expenses'. The need for economy ruled out the flamboyance exhibited by the two uppermost strata, though the children of this class mixed more easily with their social betters than their parents could.

Particularly deserving of sympathy were the 'distressed bourgeois' (*bourgeois gênés*: stratum 4). These were the employees, the professors, clerks, shopkeepers, 'the lower order of artists': together they formed 'one of the least happy classes', because their contacts with a wealthier class drew them into expenses beyond their means. These families, the authors wrote, can only sustain themselves by means of the strictest economy. The 'poor bourgeois' (stratum 5) occupied a paradoxical place in the social fabric: with about 1,000–1,800 francs per annum to spend, they earned little more than the better-off workers occupying the next class and could afford only two or three rooms, no servants and a patchy education for their children. These were the clerks, cashiers and lesser academics whose lot is 'survival for the present and anxiety for the future'. But what was poverty for them was abundant wealth for the 'comfortably off workers' (stratum 6), who could live 'without a care for the future' on a smaller income (their revenues ranged from 600 to 1,000 francs). This was the class of the printers, masons, carpenters and cabinetmakers, 'the class of good workers, generally honest, devoted to their friends, personable, tidy indoors, raising with solicitude a numerous family'. Their work was long and hard, but they laboured with courage and even joy. They derived a sense of accomplishment from the fact that their families were clothed and fed; when they returned home in the evening, they found 'fire in the winter, and food sufficient to replenish their strength'. These were the happiest of the city's inhabitants, because it was among them that means and aspirations were most perfectly aligned.[7]

At the bottom of the pyramid, beneath a shadowy class of 'poor workers' living on between 500 and 600 francs (stratum 7), were those who subsisted in a condition of 'extreme misery' (stratum 8). The life of these people was different in every respect from that of the better-off worker,

not just because their income (at 300 francs per annum) was so meagre, but because they lacked the myriad intangible comforts and compensations that sweetened the day of their more prosperous fellows: there was no true rest after work, no favour in return for work well done, 'no smile to follow a sigh'. The material and moral pleasures and the sense of accomplishment that buoyed up the masons and cabinetmakers had no place in the life of the most wretched. 'For them, living means not dying.' These people lived in the foul-smelling basements of the rue des Fumiers and other streets like it, the rue de la Bastille or the rue du Marchix, for example. It was here that they worked fourteen-hour days by the light of a resin candle for a wage of between fifteen and twenty sous.[8]

Again and again the authors reached for statistics, not just because these could be used to situate their descriptions on a plinth of indisputable fact and thereby lift them away from mere political assertion, but also because numbers were sometimes more eloquent than mere words. Here are the expenses incurred by a household subsisting on 300 francs a year:

> Whatever we can say of this miserable sector of society, the detail of its expenditures will be more eloquent; here is the detail:
>
> Rent.....25 fr.
> Laundry.....12
> Fuel (wood and peat).....35
> Light.....15
> Repair of broken furniture.....3
> Change of domicile (at least once a year)...2
> Footwear.....12
> Clothing.....0
> (they dress in old clothes that people give them)
> Doctor.....0
> Pharmacist.....0
> (The sisters of charity bring them medications on doctor's orders)
>
> ....104 fr.

These outgoings left a poor household with an income of 196 francs per annum to cover all other needs. And, of that, 150 francs had to be spent

on bread, so that 46 francs remained (per year!) to buy salt, butter, cabbages and potatoes. 'If you bear in mind that a certain amount is also spent at the bar, you will see that despite the pounds of bread dispensed from time to time by charity, the existence of these families is horrific.'[9]

Nowhere was the grip of numbers on the men, women and children of the city more obvious than in the mortality rates of the various quarters. On the quai Duguay-Trouin, a well-off street with large houses, Guépin and Bonamy found a rate of one death per seventy-eight residents per year. But on the rue des Fumiers, the epicentre of poverty in the city and situated *in the same quarter* near the Chaussée Madeleine, they recorded one death per seventeen inhabitants per year. To put the same discrepancy in more drastic terms: the authors found that whereas the residents of the rue Duquesclin died on average at the age of 59.2, the average age of the dead on the rue des Fumiers was 31.16.

During the 1830s and 1840s, a wave of such reports swept Europe. The authors had visited the factories and walked in the quarters of the poorest city dwellers. Their books and pamphlets reflected an esteem for precise observation and quantification. In 1832, James Kay, a medicine graduate from the University of Edinburgh, had published a short study of the Manchester cotton workers. Here, too, there was a discussion of death rates among weavers, and numerical tables showing the distribution of damp dwellings, unpaved streets and open cesspools in the poorest districts. And there were reflections on the drabness and squalor of daily life for working paupers. Life was tough for the cotton workers, Kay wrote, but conditions were particularly bad for the mainly Irish handloom weavers, because the introduction of the power loom had depressed the value of their labour. Their dwellings contained at most one or two chairs and a rickety table, some rudimentary cooking equipment and 'one or two beds, loathsome with filth'. A whole family might sleep together in a single bed, heaped together under a pile of dirty straw and a cover fashioned of old sacking. There were damp, stinking single-roomed cellars in which as many as sixteen people from more than one family were crowded together.[10]

Louis-René Villermé's *Tableau de l'état physique et moral des ouvriers employés dans les manufactures de coton, de laine et de soie* (1840) was the result of years spent studying the textile workers of the Haut-Rhin, Seine-Inférieure, the Aisne, Nord, the Somme, the Rhône and the Canton of Zurich in Switzerland. A pioneering advocate of hygienic

reform and an early exponent of social epidemiology, Villermé was interested in the impact of industrialization on the health and quality of life of the labouring classes. His book, commissioned by the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences in Paris, was a work of laborious classification founded on the scrupulous analysis of data gathered through meticulous observation. Villermé was interested in the length of the working day, the time spent consuming meals, the distance travelled to work, the manner and amount of remuneration. Villermé had been to the places and watched the people he described, patiently following his subjects through their long work day, acknowledging what he described as 'the rigorous duty to describe the facts just as I have seen them'.[11] Watching Alsatian cotton workers approaching their factory in the morning and leaving again in the evening, Villermé observed 'a multitude of pale, skinny women walking barefoot through the mud'. Running along with them was a flock of 'young children no less dirty, no less haggard and covered with rags greasy with oil that has fallen on them from the machines as they worked'. These children had no satchels to carry their provisions in; 'they simply hold in their hands or hide under their shirts the piece of bread that has to nourish them until the time comes for them to return to their homes'.[12]

Like Guépin and Bonamy, Villermé had stepped into the workers' dwellings, dark rooms where two families slept, each in one corner, on straw thrown to the floor and held in by two planks, covered only by rags and a filthy quilt. He, too, saw and described the meagre cooking ware and the sticks of furniture. And he noted the exorbitant rents that were exacted for such marginal dwellings, rents that tempted speculators to build more and more tenements, in the certainty that poverty would soon fill them with residents. The link between income and life expectancy did not escape him. In the department of the Haut-Rhin, where eastern France borders Switzerland, the poverty was so profound, Villermé reported, that it had a drastic impact on the length of human life: whereas in the families of merchants, businessmen and factory directors one half of the children could be expected to reach the age of twenty-nine, half of the children of weavers and cotton spinners had already died before they reached the age of two. 'What does this tell us', Villermé asked, his empathy contending with something more censorious, 'about the lack of care, the negligence on the part of parents, about their privations, about their suffering?'[13]

Count Carlo Ilarione Petitti di Roreto, author of a study of the impact of factory labour on children, was a senior official in the service of the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia and one of the most eminent Piedmontese liberals of his era. Petitti made it clear from the outset that he appreciated the value and necessity of child labour in factories. Children were small and nimble, they could be used for rejoining, winding or reeling torn or wayward threads; they could scramble under machines to make running adjustments without disrupting the rhythm of production (hence the spots of grease observed by Villermé on the clothes of the children leaving Alsatian cotton works); they excelled at numerous tasks requiring small fingers and quick reflexes. They were cheaper than adults and thus crucial to keeping costs down. And they supplemented the family income of the poorest working parents.

The use of children for such work had steadily increased. Children were now beginning work as young as seven and eight and their numbers had risen to the point where they accounted for as much as half of the workers employed in such plants. Petitti noted that the factory-owner had a transparent interest in maximizing output and minimizing costs and was thus likely to demand the greatest possible effort, even from his youngest employees. Impoverished parents had an interest in reducing the burden of the upkeep of their offspring and were thus drawn to place their child in work at the earliest opportunity. All the relevant stakeholders, it appeared (except for the children themselves), had an interest in this system of exploitation, and the results were pitiable. Exhausted by ceaseless labour and deprived of adequate sleep, these small proletarians constantly nodded off into dreams of 'running and jumping', until a harsh voice called them back to their tasks. If they resisted, they were beaten or deprived of their food.[14]

The younger the age at which labour commenced, the greater the danger that specific types of work would produce characteristic illnesses and deformities in adults. Observing the weavers of Lyons, one of Europe's great silk-weaving centres, Philibert Patissier noted signs of a generic debility that appeared to be related to the nature of their work and that manifested itself not just in their appearance and levels of vitality but also in their mood and attitude. In addition to a pale complexion, weavers exhibited limbs that were 'feeble or puffy with lymphatic fluid, soft flesh lacking in vitality, [and] smaller than average stature'. There was 'a certain air of simplicity and silliness in their countenance; their

accent in conversation is singularly slow and flat'. Their bodies were so deformed by rickets and poor comportment that they could be recognized from a distance 'by the irregular development of the skeleton [and] their uncertain and entirely graceless gait'.[15]

Such was the power of the workshop over the constitution of the people who worked there, Patissier wrote, that young people arriving from the countryside near Lyons to embrace this profession soon lost their freshness and plumpness: 'varicose engorgement of the legs and several illnesses of the scrofulous type soon signal the revolution that has taken place in them'.[16] The problem was compounded by the appalling living conditions in the poorest areas of Lyons, where dark and foul lanes were lined by jumbles of poorly constructed and airless houses filled to overflowing with 'a great number of individuals of both sexes and all ages'. Relations among workers who lived in this manner were so intimate that 'libertinism' inevitably took hold among them 'long before their organs have acquired the necessary strength and development to support it. The habit of masturbation begins so early among these artisans that one can scarcely fix the age at which they begin to cultivate it.'[17]

In 1843, when Bettina von Arnim published a book of essays under the title *This Book Belongs to the King* criticizing the Prussian state for neglecting the masses of its poorest subjects, she appended a report on the slums of Berlin that she had commissioned from Heinrich Grunholzer, a 23-year-old Swiss student. Her decision was an unusual one for this sophisticated writer, novelist and composer. Whereas the social critique in the rest of the text was encoded in picaresque meandering dialogues with an oracular female figure, Arnim opted not to work Grunholzer's notes into a text of her own, but to publish them raw, as if to affirm 'the primacy of social fact over the process of literary production'.[18] Since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the population of the Prussian capital had risen from 197,000 to nearly 400,000. Many of the poorest immigrants – wage labourers and artisans for the most part – settled in a densely populated slum area on the northern outskirts of the city. It was here that Grunholzer recorded his observations for Arnim's book. He spent four weeks combing through tenements and interviewing their occupants. He recorded his impressions in a spare prose that was paced out in short, informal sentences, and integrated the brutal statistics that governed the lives of the poorest families in the city. Passages of dialogue were woven

into the narrative, and the frequent use of the present tense suggested notes scribbled *in situ*.[19]

Friedrich Engels's study of the 'condition of the working class in England', published in 1845, was, among other things, a work of social and cultural observation – the first phrase of the subtitle '*Nach eigner Anschauung*' (According to my own observations) made that clear. Engels, too, was a painstaking itemizer and classifier of objects and phenomena and he saw and described many of the same things that Kay, Villermé, Wolff, Grunholzer, Pettiti, Patissier, Guépin and Bonamy had seen before him. He noted the proximity of the poorest and wealthiest districts. In St Giles, London, not far from Regent Street and Trafalgar Square, he found a 'knot of streets' full of three- and four-storey tenements, dirty inside and out. But this was nothing compared to the dwellings in the courtyards and lanes *between* the streets, a maze of rotting rubbish heaps, unglazed windows and broken door frames, where the poorest of the poor cowered in filth and dank darkness. And Engels, like Villermé and many others, was struck by the fact that even these hovels commanded exorbitant rents. He marvelled at how 'the poverty of these wretches, in which no thief would hope to find anything of value', was 'lawfully exploited by the property-owning classes!'[20]

For all their differences, then, these works exhibited a certain family resemblance. They directed upon their subject matter a period eye that delighted in numbers, tabulation and precise description. New trends in statistical reasoning made it easier to mediate between the abstractions of 'large numbers' and averages on the one hand, and the behaviour of individuals on the other, which could now be seen as emblematic of broader social phenomena. The presiding influence on this statistical turn was the Belgian astronomer, statistician and sociologist Adolphe Quetelet, 'the one-man band of nineteenth-century statistics', whose foundational essay on 'social physics' (1835) showed that only the study of large datasets could elucidate the law-like forces governing human social behaviour. The measurement of correlations based on large datasets allowed the exposure of provocative causal claims, about the effect, for example, of income on mortality. Once this paradigm shift in social understanding had taken place, there was no going back. Guépin's stinging observation 'it seems that the less tax you pay, the earlier you die' bore the mark of this new statistical awareness.[21]

There was a literary dimension to social description. The writers of

the Social Question seemed to be charting an undiscovered world, a world that lay, as the German radical Wilhelm Wolff put it in a widely read article on the slums of Breslau, like an 'open book' before the walls of the city, but was invisible to most of its better-off inhabitants.[22] It was an untranscendent, metonymic world, where physical proximity mattered – the perverse adjacency of the richest and poorest districts, the wriggling of dirty children under rags and the promiscuous intimacy of adult bodies in unwashed beds, the huddle of workers at factory gates, the dangerous closeness of the ill to the well. The eye of the reader was always drawn across space, tracking from one object to the next: a smashed window, a two-legged table, a broken bowl, rags, a dirty makeshift bed. But the other senses were also engaged: the stickiness of damp walls, the screams of restive infants, the smell of human waste.[23]

There was doubtless an element of voyeuristic pleasure in the consumption of such texts by bourgeois readers. So seductive was the genre that it overleapt the boundaries of expert treatises and official reports to colonize fiction. The most prominent example – itself an important influence on the burgeoning practice of social thick description – was Eugène Sue's remarkable blockbusting ten-volume novel of the Parisian underworld, *Les Mystères de Paris*, which appeared in instalments during 1842–3 and was widely imitated across Europe. The characters who peopled Sue's book were larger-than-life absurdities, but the world in which they moved was precisely that space of labyrinthine streets drowning in mire that we encounter in the literature of industrialism and urban poverty:

> The murky-coloured houses, which were lighted within by a few panes of glass in the worm-eaten casements, overhung each other so closely that the eaves of each almost touched its opposite neighbour, so narrow were the streets. Dark and noisome alleys led to staircases still more black and foul, and so perpendicular that they could hardly be ascended by the help of a cord fixed to the dank and humid walls by holdfasts of iron.[24]

Sue's work was widely imitated across Europe.[25] If readers were prepared to lose themselves in Sue's colourful demi-monde, Wilhelm Wolff declared, then they should take all the more interest in the *real* 'mystères de Breslau' before their own doorstep. August Brass, author of *Mysteries of Berlin* (1844), noted with disapproval that Sue's German translators

had turned the 'mysteries' of his title into 'secrets' (*Geheimnisse*). But this was a mistake, he protested, because the life of the poor was not about secrets; it was about mysteries 'that take place every day before our very eyes'. Anyone could observe the distress and desperation of the underworld in the Prussian capital, Brass wrote, if they merely 'took the trouble to cast off the comfortable veil of selfish complacency' and direct their gaze outside their customary circles onto 'the life of our brothers'.[26] Eugène Buret, author of a substantial study of the 'misery of the working classes in England and France' (1840), put it succinctly:

> Poverty is the unknown. The nations in whose heart the mortal germs are most actively developing scarcely suspect the evil which is working within them; like a sick person who mistakes fever for a sign of vitality, they delude themselves with the solidity of a prosperity that is only apparent, they shut their ears on purpose to the inner sufferings they feel.[27]

This was the literature of what came to be known as the Social Question. It was a literature in which official reports, publicly commissioned enquiries, prize-winning essays, journalism and genre fiction merged and interacted, embedded in a mid-nineteenth-century European 'culture of enquiry'.[28] It was a question posed for the most part in the third person: what should be done about *them*? (Ange Guépin was highly unusual in directing the same inquisitive gaze upon his wealthy and middle-class fellow citizens as upon the most wretched.) The Social Question was in fact a bundle of many questions about public health and the danger of contagion, occupational illness, the loss of social cohesion, the impact of industrialization, crime, sexual morality, urban housing, population growth, unemployment, child labour, the potentially corrosive effects of economic competition, the impact of the city on the lives and attitude of its inhabitants, and the supposed decline in religion.

How the questions were prioritized and posed and how they were answered depended on the politics driving the enquiry. For Friedrich Engels, the narrative hinged on the exploitation of one class by another. If his workers with their bent backs and unsteady gaits looked like veterans, that was because they were indeed, in his eyes, the walking wounded of a 'social war' waged by those who, directly or indirectly, controlled the means of production against property-less masses who had nothing to sell but the strength of their arms. It was precisely the

concentration of industrial capital in the hands of one class that had given rise to the proletariat, he observed. And in the antagonism between the proletariat and its exploiters, Engels believed, lay the seeds of a future revolutionary transformation. Because the rage of the 'entire working class from Glasgow to London against the rich' must in the not-too-distant future – 'one can almost measure it' – break out in a revolution, 'compared with which the first French Revolution and the year 1794 [the apogee of the Jacobin Terror] will seem like a child's game'.[29]

These scenarios of future upheaval held no appeal for Guépin and Bonamy. In the foreword to their study of Nantes, the two men stated explicitly that the purpose of their researches had been to discover 'what we must improve in order to ... enable us to reach the future without having to pass through a new Jacquerie or through a '93 [i.e. the inception of the Jacobin Terror]'.[30] Guépin, who spent his entire life in Nantes, was first and foremost a doctor and a social hygienist who saw himself as a student of the city's 'physiology'. The key to healing the rift in society lay, he believed, in reform based on the activism of associations. In the autumn of 1830, after the political revolution of that year, he founded the Société Industrielle de Nantes to help unemployed workers. With donations from the government and wealthy patrons, the society was able to acquire a building with a library and a clinic and funding to support a range of mutual aid activities.[31] His deep belief in science and in association as a tool of social reform placed him for a time in the vicinity of the elitist utopian Henri Comte de Saint-Simon (1760–1825). The chief task of modern science, Saint-Simon had proclaimed, lay in establishing an integrated 'physiology' that would observe and interpret all social and moral phenomena through the lens of a Newtonian general system. To the practitioners of such a science would fall the task of divining and managing the needs of a future society. It was precisely this feature of Saint-Simon's thought that appealed to Guépin, who would later describe himself as completing and continuing the sage's work.[32] The Saint-Simonian template implied a gradual and peaceful transition towards technocracy, not the all-transforming violent upheaval imagined by Engels. The carriers of transformation would not be enraged proletarians, but an 'industrial class' of hygienists, engineers, planners and managers.[33]

The treatises, essays and pamphlets on the Social Question were animated by a moralizing energy, by the 'grafting of morality onto

economics'.[34] How this energy was focused varied from case to case. Engels made no attempt to conceal his disgust at an urban bourgeoisie that completely neglected the poor in good times, but then, when cholera was in town, 'suddenly remembered' the filthy streets of the slum districts and, 'seized with terror' lest the homes of the poor become a source of contagion, ordered chaotic and ill-considered sanitation measures.[35] Ramón de la Sagra, writing in Madrid, blamed 'the misfortune of certain classes' on 'the immorality and degradation of governments', the imprudence of certain direct taxes, the paucity of elementary education, the neglect of the moral and religious instruction of the masses and the tendency to imbue the young with 'unlimited desires and unrealistic hopes'.[36]

By contrast, Honoré Frégier, author of a study of the 'dangerous classes of the populations of the great cities' (1840), focused his indignation chiefly on the poor themselves, who were seen as co-authors of their own fate. Frégier was an administrative official, a departmental head in the Prefecture of the Seine, with privileged access to police archives. His chief concern was the link between poverty and crime, and he offered his treatise as a handbook for those officials entrusted with 'guaranteeing the inner order of this great city, along with the safety of its inhabitants and of their properties'. The fundamental root of most crime, he argued, lay in paupers' propensity to worsen their condition through vice and idleness. Frégier's male urban worker was a shrewd, mischievous fellow, mouthy and sly, easily tempted away from work by the offer of a drink with his *compagnons*.[37] And this was where the true 'social danger' of poverty lay, because 'from the moment that the worker, surrendered to his depraved passions, ceases to work, he becomes an enemy of society'.[38]

Those who passed in this way from indolence to vice entered the ranks of the 'depraved class': 'the players, the vice girls, their lovers and pimps, the brothel madams, the vagabonds, the fraudsters, the crooks, the rogues and thieves, the she-thieves and the receivers of stolen goods' – here again the voluptuous pleasure of lists. The danger posed by this milieu was not that of sedition, which was 'a rare accident in civil life' (a noteworthy assertion from the citizen of a city that had witnessed two transformative revolutions within living memory), but the chronic illness of vice itself, which ate like acid into the fibres of civilization. The solution was emphatically not to change or dismantle the industrial system, but rather to reintroduce patriarchal relations of

Illustration to the article 'Poverty and Communism', from the *Illustrierte Zeitung*, 1 November 1843. Many of the stock elements can be seen here: the pathetic furniture, wretched clothing, caterwauling children and general disorder. By placing a bottle of spirits in the hand of the male householder, this image suggests, like many contemporary accounts of poverty, that the poor are themselves partly responsible for their plight.

deference and protection between the factory-owner and his employees. 'My spirit', he wrote, 'is not offended by great industrial property and my concern is solely to develop and extend the patronage of the rich over the poor by means that honour the generosity of the former without debasing the character of the latter.'[39]

Eugène Buret's *On the Misery of the Working Classes in England and France*, published in 1840, two years after Frégier's treatise, could hardly have been more different. Buret had been working as a journalist when the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences in Paris announced an essay prize (2,500 francs) in 1837. Candidates were invited to 'establish what poverty consists of and by what signs it manifests itself in in various countries'. Buret's prize-winning essay touched all the usual bases: exorbitant rents, beds of 'wet and stinking straw', broken windows, rooms without light and the 'stale nauseating odour, with some sharp notes' of neglected humans.[40] But unlike Frégier's treatise, Buret's was a critique of the industrial system, not of the workers who served it. To blame the poor for their degradation was a fundamental misunderstanding, he argued, because 'in our view, the moral condition of the working classes is the result, the direct consequence of their physical condition'. Only an observer who possessed 'perfect knowledge' of the 'facts that constitute physical misery' would be in a position both to understand the moral condition of the poor and to look beyond the 'feeling of disgust and contempt inspired by their degradation and their vices'.[41]

Poverty was not an accidental feature of modern industrial systems, Buret argued, but rather their inevitable consequence; it was not a threat *to* civilization, as Frégier had suggested, it was 'a phenomenon *of* civilisation'.[42] Buret's chief inspiration here was the Swiss political economist Jean Charles Léonard de Sismondi, who had argued in his *New Principles of Political Economy* (1819) that the unchecked competition characteristic of modern manufacturing economies tended to lead to overproduction, while at the same time pushing down wages and thus depressing consumer demand. By this reading, low wages were not a boon to industry, but a burden on the economy as a whole.[43]

The Social Question thrived on the meticulous observation of real circumstances, but at times it could take on the quality of a moral panic. Nowhere was this more evident than when male commentators focused on the condition of working women. As vessels of endangered purity on the one hand and incubators of dissolution and vice on the other, they

were emotionally charged emblems, overdetermined by latent anxieties about the stability of the gender order and the intrusion of 'conflicting drives and desires'.[44] The foremost trigger of moral panic was the supposedly intimate connection between working women and prostitution. Ramón de la Sagra, who had spent the mid 1830s in Paris before returning to Spain (with trunks full of books on the Social Question), saw 'the laws of nature and of social morality disturbed and contradicted' by the growing employment of women and children in workshops. This was the spinal cord of social disorder, of poverty and of modern demoralization and the reason for the growth in prostitution and illegitimate births in the large manufacturing centres and cities.[45] Eugène Buret cited a passage in Parent-Duchâtelet's famous study on Parisian prostitution (1837) reporting that female sex workers were almost exclusively the children of day workers, domestic servants, artisans and poor factory workers, a finding that suggested a systematic correlation between modern industrialism and the sex trade.[46]

Acknowledging a causal correlation between industrialism and prostitution opened the possibility that female sex workers were themselves products of the gross asymmetries of wealth and power that were characteristic of modern industrial capitalism. And the inequalities were even grosser for women than for men, since women were usually paid at a lower rate, on the assumption both that their work was less valuable and that their income was or ought to be a mere addition to the wage of a male breadwinner.[47] In many factories, the hours were so long, the wages so poor and the work so hard, Friedrich Engels noted, that women 'preferred to throw themselves into the arms of prostitution, rather than put up with this tyranny'.[48] For Ange Guépin, a feminist, the truly galling thing about prostitution was the way it was sustained by those very middle-class men who claimed to despise it. They needed prostitutes in order to safeguard the honour of their daughters, Guépin wrote, 'just as they need military substitutes so that their sons can avoid conscription'.[49]

Nearly all commentators acknowledged that the prostitution of the streets and brothels was just one aspect of the sex trade. Of the 18,000 domestic servants in Berlin, Ernst Dronke estimated, at least 5,000 were engaged in, if not open prostitution, then secret fornication in return for favours of some kind. Then there were the 'grisettes', young working women who lived or just slept with middle-class students, courtesans

who were 'kept' by a man in an apartment placed at their disposal; and, most pitiable of all, girls who might be as young as thirteen or fourteen trafficked by procuresses into the hands of better-off Berliners, seduced by the dream of wearing fine clothes and drinking champagne. For a few years, Dronke wrote, they might be seen strolling with a friend (usually a young woman in the same situation) down the best streets of the city, where they could pass for women of the respectable classes. But their good fortune was short-lived:

> One may well ask what happens in the end to these lost creatures? When their beauty and youth have faded, they slip out of the public eye whose attention they had once found it so easy to attract. Those who have extracted from the desperation of these unhappy women the possession of their beauty and youth are the ones least likely to know anything about how their story ends. . . . Most of them go into a decline that the reader will forgive us for not describing. They end up in a position where the police press their ownership rights upon them, handing them like miserable outlaws from station to station, all the way to death.

From this perspective, prostitution was the symptom of a society 'completely corrupted in its organization'.[50] The morbid intimacy between female labour and sexual exploitation reverberated in radical manifestos and pamphlets. 'Bread or Revolution! That should be your battle cry!' intoned an anonymous flysheet circulating in Frankfurt in the summer of 1847. 'You build beautiful bed frames and soft beds [for the rich idler], so that your daughters can fall prey to his lust for whores.'[51]

'The world is the totality of facts, not of things' – thus the second sentence of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.[52] With their tables, numbers and meticulous descriptions, the treatises and fictions of the Social Question belong to the moment when such a thought became possible. The enquiry into social conditions was the place where new statistical techniques, ideas about the modern city as a historically distinctive form of existence, observational sociology and the repertoire of literary practices later known as realism fused and interacted, producing new forms of knowledge. The 'reality effect' of this new diction should not distract us from the gaps and elisions in its field of vision. A monumental study of the city of Paris has shown how older kaleidoscopic

images of Paris as a 'multi-coloured city' composed of numerous 'islands' of productive and cultural activity made way during the 1830s and 1840s for a picture painted more starkly in lights and shadows. The working-class spaces of the city slid 'more and more into dark shades' that offered an effective foil to the lights of the new, bright spaces of bourgeois consumption, the *galeries parisiennes*. In focusing their attention on slum dwellings, dirt and contagion, especially after the shock of the cholera pandemic of 1832, the middle-class diagnosticians of social malaise often missed the signs of vitality and change in working-class areas, such as the thickening of commercial and manufacturing networks in the city centre, or the emergence 'from below' of new forms of labour organization.[53]

The energies generated around the Social Question fed back into politics. The arguments advanced by Engels in *The Condition of the Working Classes* went on to shape the *Communist Manifesto*, jointly authored with Karl Marx. Engels's book remained an important empirical resource for Marx and 'the foundational document of what was to become the Marxian socialist tradition'.[54] In one of the best-known tracts of the era, *The Organization of Labour* (1840), the socialist Louis Blanc cited at length Ange Guépin's findings on the average life expectancy of the social strata of Nantes to argue that modern industrial and commercial competition was 'a system of extermination for the people'. The only road out of the impasse lay in the state-managed affiliation of workers in 'social workshops' whose inner life and mutual relations would be cooperative rather than competitive.[55] For Ramón de la Sagra, pioneering Spanish exponent of 'social economy', the chronic struggle between the rich and the poor, 'always destructive of the principle of social order', raised doubts about the costs of industrial progress, unless it were guided by the principles of a disciplined 'social physics'. How a way would be found to suffuse all arms of government with the spirit of an enlightened science remained unclear.[56]

## PRECARITY AND CRISIS

Poverty was nothing new. But the 'pauperism' of the early to mid nineteenth century differed from traditional forms of poverty. The abstractness of the neologism captured what was seen as the systematic quality of the phenomenon. It was collective and structural, rather than dependent

upon individual contingencies, such as sickness, bereavement, injury or crop failures. It was permanent rather than seasonal. And it showed signs of engulfing social groups whose position had previously been relatively secure, such as artisans (especially apprentices and journeymen) and smallholding peasants.

We can see traces of this immiseration almost everywhere we look in pre-1848 Europe. The Bologna special census of 1841 reported that of the 70,000 persons who lived in the city, 10,000 were 'permanent beggars', while a further 30,000 lived in poverty and often required public assistance.[57] Between 1829 and 1834, more than 100 craftsmen were arrested each year for begging in the city of Bremen.[58] A statistical survey of the 1840s suggested that between 50 and 60 per cent of the Prussian population were living on a subsistence minimum.

The plight of the urban poor was richly documented, as we have seen, in the literature of the Social Question. But the crowding of workers into filthy urban streets was often a sign that things were even worse in the countryside. In the 1830s, the cottiers of the more isolated and mountainous parts of County Fermanagh in the north of Ireland lived in 'wretched huts', officially described as 'generally unfit for human habitation'.[59] Travelling through the Veneto (the hinterland of Venice) in 1841, the Briton Samuel Laing was struck by the poverty of the people: 'It is impressive', he wrote, 'to see those who raise silk – the most costly material of human clothing – going about their work barefoot, and in rags.'[60] The peasants of the region subsisted on food that lacked nutritional value, eking out their existences in flimsy, dirty houses. Chronic disease and indebtedness were rife. The supply of work was uncertain, dependence on the harvest absolute.[61] A similar picture emerges for the rural districts of Lombardy. Here, too, there was a decline in living standards from around the turn of the century. Malaria was endemic in low-lying areas and sharecroppers lived in airless cottages with dirt floors, subsisting mainly on maize. Overdependence on maize, a cheap grain preferred by the poor, gave rise to pellagra, a disease of malnutrition whose symptoms are dermatitis, diarrhoea and dementia. So stark were the nutritional differences between social strata that the middle classes – lawyers and other professionals, merchants, businessmen and property-owners – were on average 2.85 cm taller than textile workers, coachmen and barbers.[62] In Germany, too, the first half of the nineteenth century saw a downturn in average heights, particularly marked for those born in the

late 1830s, that is, for children raised during the repeated subsistence crises of the following decade.[63]

Contemporaries differed on the reasons for this decline. Conservatives tended to blame the 'decorporation' of modern society, by which they usually meant the abolition or weakening of guilds and the termination during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras of the system of reciprocal rights and duties associated with feudal land tenure. Friedrich Engels blamed the capitalist industrial economy and its exploitative logic. Carlo Petitti pointed to the increasing employment of women and children: unguilded and accustomed to lower wages, they drove down the remuneration of all workers. For Louis Blanc the root of poverty could be traced to the ubiquitous competition between rival enterprises: 'I insist, competition produces misery: it's a fact proven by the figures.'[64]

None of these claims can be accepted without reservations, but all captured parts of the truth. Decorporation was clearly part of the story: in Barcelona, the legal disappearance of the old guilds enabled the rapid growth of the artisan sector but also exposed it to processes of 'proletarianization'.[65] The integration of the Irish economy with industrializing Britain dealt a devastating blow to Irish domestic industry – here competition was clearly a factor in immiseration, as it was for the Bohemian textile industry, which struggled in the 1840s to deal with the influx of cheaper British wares.[66] Studies of some regions of France have suggested that rural districts marked by overcrowding could have a depressive effect on industrial wages in neighbouring areas.[67] On the other hand, workers were often right to be wary when factory-owners invoked 'competition' as a reason for holding down wages.[68]

That industrialization as such 'caused' poverty is doubtful: in a classic study of European poverty in the early-modern period, Wilhelm Abel showed long ago that the deepening of modern poverty across Europe predated the onset of industrialization; the poor were getting poorer, even before the machines arrived and there is evidence to suggest that under-industrialization may have worsened the impact of subsistence crises.[69] But studies of the most industrialized parts of early-nineteenth-century Britain have suggested that new methods of production gave rise to the emergence of a non-specialized, mobile labour force whose 'structural vulnerability' made it more likely that they would experience the most wretched poverty at certain points in their lives.[70] And there is evidence to suggest, conversely, that the survival in some regions of guilds

may have had a positive impact on nutritional standards. In other words: traditional forms of labour association could under some conditions safeguard living standards in ways that more dynamic industrial and commercial environments could not.[71]

Mass impoverishment unfolded against the background of accelerated demographic growth – was this the root of the problem? Between 1818 and 1850, the population of the Italian states increased from 17 to 24 million; in the German states (excluding the Austrian Empire), the population rose from 22 to 33 million; in France the figure rose from 26 to 36 million between the turn of the century and the revolutions of 1848. Moreover, the growth in population was especially marked in rural areas. In the Kingdom of Prussia, the population increased by 56 per cent from 10.3 million in 1816 to 15.9 million in 1846, but the percentage of the population living in cities rose only from 26 to 28 per cent, meaning that the brunt of growth was felt in the countryside. In the city and province of Bologna, the population of the province grew at an impressive rate in the years 1800–1848, while that of the city stagnated. The extreme case was Ireland, whose population grew at between two and three times the rates prevailing in north-western Europe, producing a population density in rural districts that was unrivalled across the continent.[72]

Yet as soon as we search for a *direct* relationship between population density and poverty, we run into problems. A major study of pre-famine Ireland showed that the lowest per capita incomes were not necessarily to be found in the most densely populated areas.[73] Nor can it generally be said that the social crises of this era were the result of a 'Malthusian trap', where the needs of the population exceeded the available supply of agricultural produce. Over the period between the beginning of the century and the 1848 revolutions, an increase in the amount of land under cultivation and improvements in agricultural productivity roughly doubled the food supply across the European lands. In other words, high as the rate of population growth might have been by historical standards, it was outstripped by growth in the food supply. And therein lay a part of the problem: in Ireland, the deepening dependence on the potato (32 per cent of arable land was used for its cultivation) helped to sustain a rate of population growth disproportionate to the needs of an otherwise stagnant economy. Similar effects can be observed in Spain, where the increased production of food thanks to expanded cultivation and liberal reforms to the structure of land tenure helped to sustain high

population growth around Madrid and on the north-eastern littoral.[74] And the growth in the food supply was reflected in prices. Viewed through the lens of long-term trends, the years from 1815 to around 1850 were a period of falling average grain prices. The problem, then, was not the raw collision of human numbers and physical resources. It was rather that food supplies – notwithstanding the generally positive trend in production – remained vulnerable to natural catastrophes. Poor harvests, cattle epidemics and crop diseases could still turn the surplus into a drastic shortfall, generating price peaks that could push large numbers of people into subsistence crisis.

Unbalanced growth swelled the ranks of the most precarious social strata. In the rural districts of western German Minden-Ravensberg in the Prussian Province of Westphalia, the ratio of families living from the wages of hired labour to landowning peasants at the beginning of the century was 149/100; by 1846, the ratio had risen to 310/100. Such families earned an increasingly marginal living from a combination of agrarian labour and various forms of domestic piecework from merchants who dealt with supra-regional markets. Rural labourers of this kind spent most of their income just on bread; they were extremely vulnerable not only to rises in the cost of grains, but also to fluctuations in the business cycle which could depress demand for the goods – especially textiles – they helped to manufacture.[75]

In central Italy, too, the growing pressure on scarce land tipped the demographic balance away from traditional sharecropping to various forms of landless waged labour. Sharecropping (*mezzadria*) had been a hard way of life, but it had at least offered a stable domicile and a relatively nourishing and reliable diet. Day labourers (*braccianti*), by contrast, worked for daily wages and drifted from job to job. These were the humblest members of the agricultural system. Excluded from marrying into the sharecropping caste, they created a rural proletariat which was widely feared as a source of crime and disorder.[76] And the same imbalances can be observed in the manufacturing sector: whereas the population of Prussia rose by 56 per cent over the period 1816–46, the figure for the number of master artisans over the same period was 70 per cent. Much more dramatic – and problematic – was the rise (156 per cent) in the number of assistants and apprentices. Population growth in early-nineteenth-century Nuremberg stoked tensions between masters and journeymen in the metalworking trade. Masters complained

that the journeymen flowing into the city from the small towns and villages of the region were 'overfilling' their trades and crowding the market. Journeymen, for their part, complained that the access to craft licences was far too restricted.[77] In an economy composed of increasingly large numbers of precarious existences, a period of adverse weather could trigger large movements of hungry people, many of whom made their way towards towns in search of work or charity. In 1828, as grain prices rose, Bologna began to fill with unemployed *braccianti* from the countryside; the city, in the words of one senior official, was so full of rural vagabonds that an order was issued to the province forbidding peasants to leave their villages. The order was futile, because the means for controlling such movements did not exist.[78]

What made the experience of precarity and dearth potentially threatening to public order was the fact that those who suffered did not see scarcity or immiseration as 'natural' or divinely ordained in the sense theorized by Thomas Malthus, but rather as caused by fluctuations in the power relations between human beings. These fluctuations could occur at the micro level in specific productive centres, or they could play out through political and legal changes that might be regional or national in scope. Skilled workers might be tolerant of low wages, but they became restive when they felt that managers were exploiting discretionary powers over them. The complex and poorly monitored process, so easily open to manipulation and abuse, by which merchants appraised the quality and value of the finished fabric delivered by master weavers was a constant source of tension in the Lyons silk and the Silesian linen industries, for example – the result was a tug of war between two unevenly matched groups.[79] There were repeated conflicts in Barcelona between workers and textile bosses over the practice of charging workers for spare parts.[80] The construction workers of the city of Nantes were remunerated under a complicated payments system that was eminently open to conflicting interpretations and abuse by subcontractors, especially when work was suspended on account of bad weather or other disruptions. In the summer of 1836, frustrations over capricious wage calculations culminated in a strike by the city's construction workers. The workers undertook on their honour not to work for any master who had not conceded their demands. Those who had obtained satisfaction would each pay fifty frames per day to the ones who were still on strike; those who had broken the strike would pay a fine of five francs to their

striking comrades. These measures were effective, in that most contractors swiftly backed down and accepted the demand for a more transparent fixed tariff. But since some refused, the strike and agitation continued. When the authorities arrested the leaders for 'unlawful coalition', their colleagues gathered en masse to stone the gendarmes and troops escorting them from the courthouse. The unrest subsided after a general wage agreement was finally reached.[81]

Labour protests of this kind were circumscribed challenges to local systems of labour discipline and control. When larger structures of socio-political power were in flux, legal arrangements that had seemed permanent and immutable became vulnerable to waves of protest that transcended regional and national boundaries. The ownership and exploitation of land was at the forefront of social conflict in early-nineteenth-century Europe, precisely because the normative framework around it was changing. During the Revolutionary and Napoleonic era, the confiscation of lands held in feudal tenure by ecclesiastical bodies and great seigneurial landowners and their resale to private buyers laid the foundations for generations of conflict. Across Andalusia in southern Spain, there were rent strikes, lawsuits and violent land occupations in the 1820s and 1830s, as smallholders fought to reclaim fields 'usurped' by local landowners.[82] In the province of Ciudad Real, about 100 miles to the south of Madrid, a conflict broke out in the 1840s over the payment of feudal rents on common lands that had once been collected by the Order of Calatrava, a Castilian chivalric order dating back to the twelfth century. The fundamental problem here was that the abolition of feudalism had resolved the question of who owned the land but not the question of who had the right to its use.[83]

Wherever traditional 'feudal' usage systems were replaced by more homogeneous forms of commercial ownership and exploitation, communities responded with protests, law suits, illegal occupations and attacks on enforcing officials. At stake were the many kinds of traditional usage rights that had granted local communities access to the water, wood and pasturage on common lands. In the 1820s, the residents of Ullà near Girona in Catalonia demanded the return into communal use of the lands known as the Forest of the March House, recently acquired by a great local landowner. When the provincial authorities pointed out that these lands were now private property and

refused to act, a popular revolt broke out. There were invasions, land occupations and armed confrontations.[84]

These were local tumults focused on local grievances, but that did not mean that they were 'primitive' or apolitical. In the 1820s, the small leaseholders of El Coronil and Los Morales in the province of Seville conducted a remarkably coordinated campaign in support of their rent strike, collecting what for them were huge sums of money in order to pay for legal representation against the local duke. Zealous local priests with rhetorical skills helped them to raise their objections to the level of legal and ideological coherence. The efforts of the landlord's steward to enforce payments were in vain; 'I have fallen out with all of these residents', he reported. 'Since they all pursue the same objective, I believe that this is a general conspiracy.'[85]

In Sicily, too, new laws allowed estate-owners to claim 'unfettered private property' and set aside the rights and obligations associated with the traditional feudal tenure, including the *usi civici* that accorded peasants valuable rights to the pasturage, firewood and water on land held by the lordship. The government in Naples was aware of the problem and regulations issued in 1817, 1839 and 1841 stipulated that when commons passed into private ownership, peasants were entitled to compensation (in the form of land drawn from the commons) for the loss of traditional usage rights, so long as they could 'establish a custom of ancestral usage'. But the reality was that in many areas there were no archives or records to establish usage and no adequate means of enforcing the law. Common lands were simply seized and placed under the custody of intimidators and armed rent-a-thugs. Once that happened, the Bourbon authorities tended to see possession as tantamount to title.[86] How difficult it could be to extract justice from the system is illustrated by the case of the village of Salaparuta in south-western Sicily. In 1829, the village sued the prince of Villafranca, on the grounds that he had illegally usurped a piece of previously common woodland. Furious at the presumption of the local rustics, the prince had the wood burned down. Not until 1842 was there a ruling against him by the regional authorities. The prince appealed and it was not until 1896 that the appeal court ruled in the villagers' favour. The remains of the disputed wood were returned to the village in 1903, by which time the instigators of the original appeal had been dead for several generations.[87]

In France, policy on common lands tended to be gradualist and more

sensitive to the huge variety of local usage rights, though here, too, there was a general tendency towards the partition, leasing, sale and cultivation of commons, a trend that tended to benefit middling peasants and smallholders. That there was no general selling-off of the communal lands was due to the vehement opposition of the communes.[88] But if conflicts over arable land were relatively rare in post-1815 France, forestry rights remained highly contentious, especially after the introduction of the new forestry code of 1827. Whereas previous governments had tolerated various forms of collective usage right, the code sought to abolish them. The grazing of sheep and goats was henceforth forbidden (an exception was made for pigs, who needed the acorns), the cultivation of plots in the forest was severely restricted and punishments were prescribed for those found gathering fallen wood, which now counted as the private property of the owner.

Among the protests triggered by these measures was the 'War of the Girls' (*Guerre des Demoiselles*) that broke out in the Pyrenean mountain *arrondissements* of the department of the Ariège between 1829 and 1831, in which peasant men donned female garb in order to resist efforts by the authorities and private entrepreneurs (especially Catalan foundry-owners) to deny them their customary rights to collect firewood and building materials and to pasture their animals on the forest. With their loose white shirts untucked and bound at the waist with coloured sashes, and their faces daubed with thick red and black paint or with masks of cloth or paper, the *Demoiselles* fired their guns in the air, threatening and sometimes attacking the forest guards whose task it was to keep them out of the woodlands. The outlandish clothing (often supplemented with Napoleonic hats and other memorabilia from the wars) served as a disguise, but also as a symbolic attribute linking the protestors with the female forest spirits of peasant lore known as *demoiselles* or as *dames blanches*.[89] So unpopular was the new code that the Prefect of the Hautes-Alpes found it impossible to find local men willing to serve as village mayors – no one wanted to serve as the scapegoat for a policy that was so widely resented.[90] There were similar tensions in the Rhineland after the Prussian government issued a new law stipulating punishments for the 'theft' of wood from forests subject to various forms of traditional usage right. In the district of Trier alone there were 37,328 verdicts in cases of wood theft between 1824 and 1829 and more than 14,000 in cases of 'other forest-related offences'.[91]

These episodes suggest a conflict between rapacious landowners, or aggressive state authorities, on the one hand, and heroic peasant defenders fighting for their ancient rights on the other. But the transition from commons to privatized land did not take place everywhere, and the protagonists of change differed from region to region. In the Corbières, an area within the Languedoc-Roussillon region of France, it was the smallholding peasants who drove the process of economic transformation, seizing and dividing portions of common land, often without authorization of any kind, and absorbing them into a form of agriculture dominated by market-oriented viticulture, in an example of what Florence Gauthier has called the 'peasant road to capitalism'.[92]

The conflicts triggered by such changes were not just social, but also environmental in character, because the advent of the 'liberal' model of private property entailed the promotion of a new mode of resource management oriented towards the market. Agricultural uses of the soil tended to be privileged over the other mixed forms of usage (pasturage, foraging, forestry). The traditional 'agrosilvopastoral' system of open fields and communal use was swept away. It was a clash between different visions of agroecosystem management.[93] The ecological consequences of intensified cutting in the French forests in the aftermath of the Forestry Code of 1827 were profound: deforestation caused major flooding along the Rhone river in 1843 and there were massive inundations in deforested areas of the Alpine departments in the later 1850s.[94] Woodland was not the only resource that was degraded in this way. In the Liri river valley between the Appenines and the Tyrrhenian Sea on the northern margins of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, the abolition of the old feudal system and the privatization of the waters opened the way to the helter-skelter construction of paper and textiles mills. Bitter conflicts broke out between claimants to water usage rights, as rivals destroyed each other's dams or built illegal mills on each other's property. And in the process the ecology of the valley was transformed. The excessive construction of waterworks along the river and the deforestation of the slopes above gave rise to intensified flooding, with devastating inundations in 1825 and 1833. The anticipated industrial take-off never took place. 'The unregulated freedom of individual "owners" over the water brought "ruin to all".'[95]

Workers mobilized spontaneously against 'strangers' they perceived as rivals for scarce resources. In 1843, unemployed textile workers in the industrial town of Brünn (Brno), capital of Moravia, attacked groups

of rural weavers on their way home with piecework from the city's factories, wrongly claiming that these weavers had taken their jobs.[96] In rural Andalusia, the 'workers from elsewhere' were the most marginal of those who worked the land, *pegujaleros* with tiny parcels of stony soil that barely sufficed for them to feel that they were not merely labourers. They migrated during the year, descending from the mountain ranges into the valleys in search of work because they could not support their families from their own plots. In March 1825, the captain general of Seville reported a violent protest in the town of La Algaba (whose Arabic name meant 'the forest'). The day labourers of the area had attacked the Cordoban and Granadan workers, who, 'harassed by calamity and misery with the shortage of rain in their provinces, arrived in considerable numbers to be employed in the mowing'. Their arrival, the locals argued, had pushed wages down to 'such a tiny amount' that the local workers would be unable to 'unburden themselves of the hardships of winter'.[97] The mere fact of shared misery did not suffice to generate solidarity among the most wretched.

An overview of Europe in the decades before the 1848 revolutions reveals a panorama of social conflicts driven by competition over every conceivable resource in a world marked by scarcity and low rates of productivity growth. Citizens resentful of the tax on tobacco burned down warehouses full of the precious leaves; peasants foraging for wood took pot shots at forestry officials; fishermen from neighbouring towns skirmished over fishing rights. There were attacks on tax collectors and customs offices. In the very stagnant and overregulated economies of central and southern Italy, John Davis has written, the system of allotting vending licences for tobacco, salt, playing cards, lottery tickets and other royal monopoly wares became a pretext for extortion at every transaction level, simply because screwing the customer over was the easiest way to maximize revenues. Many of the direct taxes levied from the subjects of the Neapolitan monarchy were in fact illicit duties imposed by corrupt officials or local extortion rackets. The cost of such dysfunctionality was not just further immiseration and the depression of demand, but also anger and conflict at every point in the supply chain.[98]

These fragile, inelastic systems were periodically shaken by short-term disruptions to the food supply. In 1829, a sudden rise in the price of wheat triggered cascades of riots and grain seizures. In Montmorillon, a market town in central-western France, crowds of angry townsfolk

insulted and beat millers, grain merchants and even the town's mayor. The merchants were forced to accept a lower price for their product. When the local gendarmes drew their sabres, the protesters broke into the workshop of an edge-tool maker and seized scythes, knives and pitchforks. Only with the arrival of fifty horse *chasseurs* did the trouble subside.[99] Tumults of this kind proliferated at great speed across immense arcs of countryside, projecting the sense of a collective popular outrage. And in some areas the waves of unrest returned every time the prices pushed back up, striking fear into the better-off social strata. In the late 1830s, poor harvests again triggered waves of food riots, concentrated around the Atlantic ports of Brest, Nantes and La Rochelle, export depots for grain on its way to England. South of the Loire river, there were numerous *entraves*, or grain seizures, mostly on waterways leading to the Loire. In France, as in Germany and elsewhere, riots tended to take place in areas where grain was in transit from or through areas experiencing shortages and price surges.[100] The sight of the poorest massing in towns with pitchforks in their hands or aprons full of paving stones struck fear into those who had an interest in the liberal economic order of open markets and freely disposable property. 'I am not at all confident', wrote the Public Prosecutor of the commune of Ferté Bernard in north-western France in the autumn of 1831, 'as to the movements and disorders that this coming winter will bring to our appallingly wretched population.'[101]

Worse was to come in 1845–7, when a composite agrarian and industrial crisis swept across the continent. In around 1840, spores of *Phytophthora infestans* had reached Europe from America. This fungus propagates extremely quickly and, dispersed by wind and mist, can infect an entire field of potatoes in a few hours. The leaves turn black and rot, and if there is rain the infection is swiftly carried to the roots and to the potatoes themselves. In the unusually wet summer of 1845, *P. infestans* ran riot. The effect was intensified by the fact that the fungus struck hardest in the clay soil areas where edible (as opposed to factory, or fodder) potatoes were grown. The impact on the Dutch harvest of 1845 was devastating. From an average per hectare yield of 179.3 hectolitres over the years 1842–4, the Netherlands crop fell to 44.5 hectolitres, and the situation was even worse than these figures suggest, because most of the potatoes lifted in 1846 were factory potatoes; very few of these were winter potatoes suitable for storage, the early varieties being much less prone to disease because they reached maturity before *P. infestans* got to

work in the middle of July each year.[102] The following year brought a degree of relief for the Netherlands: the drought in August and September of 1846 slowed the progress of the blight, there being no rain to proliferate the spores to the tubers in the ground.

In Ireland, exactly the opposite happened: whereas the blight had destroyed about half of the crop in 1845, the entire crop failed in the following year. The estimated total number of famine deaths in the Netherlands was 60,000; in Ireland, over an eighth of the population (about 1.1 million of a population of 8.3 million) perished as a direct consequence of the famine and the diseases that thrived in its wake. It was 'the greatest natural demographic disaster of modern European history'.[103] It was also an ecological event, in the sense that the damage done by the blight to the potato was permanent; the crop never recovered. The problem here was not industrialization as such, because Ireland and the Netherlands were both 'under-industrialized' by contemporary western European standards. Belgium and Scotland, which were both more industrial and more commercialized in their agriculture, weathered the potato shock far better than the Netherlands, even though the damage to crops was comparable. In other words, it was not the shift to more capitalist forms of production that generated vulnerability, but overdependence on a vulnerable commodity (how vulnerable it was, no one had guessed), exacerbated in Ireland's case by poor management of the crisis, once famine tightened its grip on the country.

Just as the blight was getting to work, there were failures at other points in the food economy. The very drought that helped to arrest the progress of the blight in northern Europe in 1846 in turn damaged grain crops, especially wheat and rye, the staple grain of the poorer classes. The French wheat crop fell from 62 million hundredweight in 1844 to 40 million in 1846. An attack of rye rust accounted for nearly half the northern European crop in 1846. And since the potato crisis had emptied food stores, the reserves that would otherwise have cushioned the impact of the shortfall were depleted. Then came the winter of 1846–7, which was unusually long and severe. In the spring of 1847, price shocks proliferated across all the substitute products, from wheat and rye to buckwheat, oats, barley and beans, making it harder for the poor to compensate for the loss of potatoes, which had now in any case become unaffordable. In the French departments to the north of the Loire River, the price of wheat rose from 20 francs per hectolitre in 1845 to 24 in 1846 and 39 in May

1847, as the hunger season (*la soudure* – the period when the old harvest was largely used up and the new one not yet in) approached.

As the price shocks triggered by the shortages proliferated across the European economies, depressing demand for manufactured goods, a lapse in investor confidence gave rise to a liquidity crunch in the commercial sector. It is easy to think of the period before the 'take-off into sustained growth' of the 1850s as an era of 'agrarian economies' in which everything depended upon the food supply. But the balance was shifting. In France, to be sure, 80 per cent of the population still lived in the countryside. But whereas the proportion of GDP accounted for by agricultural products fell from 45 per cent in 1820 to 34 per cent in 1850, the figure for industrial (i.e. manufactured) products rose from 37 to 43 per cent. And much of this manufacturing was dispersed and rural. The valleys of the Alps and Upper Silesia bristled with little spinning and weaving factories. As the population density of rural areas grew, so did the pressure on people in the countryside to find something to do other than work the soil.[104]

Wherever they worked, the people who made things for other people to buy were acutely vulnerable both to disruptions in their own supply chains and to fluctuations in demand. The rising cost of bread, a staple that most poorer households found it impossible to substitute for, suppressed the demand for other goods, eating into the receipts of workshops and factories and thus driving more people out of work. The resulting reverse-multiplier effect led to a drastic contraction of industrial production.[105] In the city of Roubaix, a major centre of wool-spinning, 30 per cent of workers were unemployed by February 1847 and 60 per cent by the middle of May. Many factories closed or laid people off and slowed down, while managers, unable to keep financing themselves, applied to the commercial banks for loans on stocks, only to find themselves falling foul of the general scarcity of credit.[106] The situation for industry was worsened by two successive shortfalls (in 1845–6 and 1846–7) in the American cotton crop. With cotton imports falling, the price of raw cotton shot up by about 50 per cent in 1845–7, further depressing home consumption at a time when the price shock in foodstuffs was also cutting into demand. The first to feel the pain were the Lancashire cotton mills, where there was heavy unemployment and short-time working, but the symptoms quickly proliferated across all the cotton manufacturies of Europe.

This overlayering of an international commercial-industrial crisis with food shortages and grain price shocks is important, because it

closed the scissors around the landless or virtually landless rural poor who, unable to feed themselves and their children from their own gardens, lived on income from various forms of piecework – weaving or spinning, for example. They faced the double jeopardy of high food prices and a decline in piece-rates, a fall in the quantity of orders, or even unemployment. As one observer in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg noted, the living conditions of working-class families or families of the lower artisan strata resisted precise quantification, because 'when the flow of work dries up and foodstuffs get dearer, their revenues no longer suffice even for a miserable existence and their destinies fall into the hands of chance and charity'.[107]

The effect on the lower strata of the population was immediate and severe. The church records of Lyons show that of the 13,752 people who died in the years 1845–7, 10,274 had nothing at all to bequeath to their descendants. In Friesland, with a population of 245,000, there were 34,859 persons in receipt of poor relief in 1844 and 47,482 in 1847; in the city of Liège, the number of persons receiving emergency assistance rocketed from under 8,000 to nearly 17,000 between mid 1847 and mid 1848.[108] Under such conditions, the number of residents officially classified as poor in German towns could swell to two thirds or even three quarters of the population.[109] Food riots broke out across swathes of Europe. There was serious rioting in Leyden, the Hague, Delft and Haarlem in the autumn of 1845, where fears of the coming winter were stirred by the collapse of the potato crop and the rise in prices. One historian has counted 158 food riots for Prussia alone in the panic-filled *soudure* of April–May 1847. And the numbers involved were much higher that this total suggests: in all, around 100,000 citizens took an active part in the *c.*200 riots recorded for the spring of 1847. The rioting took a range of forms. In East Prussia, home to many landless rural labourers, looting or begging parties formed 'food marches' numbering hundreds and armed with sacks and baskets.[110] These were the *Büdner*, *Häusler* and *Einlieger*, the most precarious existences of the German agrarian world, analogous in this respect to the *pegujaleros* who came from the Andalusian mountains in spring, desperate for work. Across Europe, vagabondage and mendicancy shot up. In May 1847, one report from North Brabant in the Netherlands described 'many and among them fairly well-to-do people in the country' living on 'the herbs of the field, on stinging nettles, wild elder and such'; the poor had scoured the countryside so energetically for these

plants that they had become scarce.[111] In Ireland, the sudden displacement of huge numbers of people in search of work and food did much to spread epidemics. Exhausted people unable to wash themselves or change their clothes easily became infested with the lice that carried typhus, one of the great killers of the famine years.

The bleakest evidence of the suffering inflicted by the straitened conditions of the crisis years is simply the demographic record. The catastrophic impact of the potato shock on Ireland and the high death toll in the Netherlands have already been mentioned, but we see elevated death rates almost everywhere across the continent. In the German states, the death rate for 1847 was 8.8 per cent above the norm, while in Austria the excess was 48 per cent. France was less hard hit, but even here there was a modest rise in deaths to 5.3 per cent above the average.[112] This was the apogee of the 'pauperism' that had haunted the literature of the Social Question for decades.

Disasters of this kind can sometimes seem like natural events, analogous to seismic instability or extreme weather. But hunger, as Amartya Sen has observed, is a political phenomenon, not a natural one.[113] And the European subsistence crisis was eminently political, both in the sense that its effects were shaped by structures that expressed the power relations between different social groups, and in the sense that it forced local and regional officials to make decisions under pressure. We can see this more clearly if we examine the case of a Spanish town that succeeded in evading the worst effects of the 1846 grain crisis.

By the early autumn of 1846, it was clear that the results of the harvest had been very poor in southern Spain. In the city of Jerez de la Frontera not far from Cadiz in the south-west of the country, wheat prices were already starting to surge in September, although the harvest was scarcely in. This was highly unusual: in normal years, the city balanced its grain exports with imports from the small towns of the provincial interior, hedging against fluctuations in demand. But this year the shortages were everywhere and could not be hedged against. The first to respond to the looming emergency were the speculators and grain traders, who sallied out onto the roads to buy up the grain that the muleteers were bringing to Jerez from the surrounding countryside. As the price continued to climb, anxiety spread across the city and many of the lesser towns of the region. When the provincial administration ordered an enquiry into the state of the city's grain reserves, they received an alarming reply. The

Commercial Council reported that the current stock was at about half the level needed to cope with the population's needs until the next harvest. From the Patriotic Economic Society, an association of philanthropically inclined local notables, came a forthright warning: it was essential, they insisted, that the authorities put the nutritional needs of the population above the commercial interests of the agrarian sector, even if this meant doing short-term damage to that very small portion of society that lived from the commercial speculation in staple goods.

While these exchanges were underway, panic was breaking out in the city. On 23 February 1847, a local baker spoke before the city council, declaring that he had not been able to buy sufficient wheat to make up his dough and would thus be unable to supply his retailers for the coming Saturday. This, he argued, was a consequence of all the sellers having got together and agreed not to sell in order to push up the price. For the moment, the authorities continued to trust in the market and ordered local officials to prevent any efforts to block or disrupt the trade in grain. But, at the same time, they summoned grain suppliers to the City Hall in order to ascertain which merchants currently held stocks of wheat. The grain merchants were told to keep their warehouses and granaries open for business and warned of the responsibility they would incur if their non-compliance triggered 'a major alteration of public order in the city'. Merchants and growers were ordered to produce statements detailing the precise amount of grain they had in storage. When they responded with gross understatements of their actual holdings, they were ordered to re-submit and threatened with hefty fines for under-reporting.

None of these measures succeeded in halting the upward journey of the bread price, which continued to rise into March 1847. At eight in the evening on 11 March, the city council met in extraordinary session and agreed to convene twelve of the most important bakers in the city. At eleven o'clock that night, the bakers appeared and the mayor asked them to consider lowering the price of their bread in order to make their product accessible to the popular classes of the city. The bakers baulked at this assault on their profit margins, but when more than thirty-six bakers convened on the following day, it was agreed that the city's bakeries would sell 1,140 loaves of bread daily at an agreed discount price (the number was later raised to 6,000 loaves as the crisis deepened). A subsidy for each loaf, payable by the city, would cover a portion of their losses. In this way, the town of Jerez de la Frontera and its bakers shared

the burden of the emergency measures enacted to meet the shortfall in supply. This arrangement remained in place until the end of May, when the prices began to fall and tension eased.

In the context of mid-nineteenth-century Spain, this was an unusually deep and adventurous exercise in administrative interventionism. Municipal authorities with liberal economic instincts prized free markets. They were generally loath to curtail the rights of property-owners to buy and sell their goods as and when they wished, even though in this case the grain speculators, with their cartel-like behaviour, were scarcely shining examples of free-market governance. Yet, as a way of keeping a major social upheaval at bay, the pragmatic deal struck in Jerez de le Frontera worked. Prices fell again in June, in anticipation of the better harvest.[114] The bakers of Jerez were wise to collaborate in these manoeuvres: in other parts of Europe, bakers were among the chief targets of rioting crowds. Of the forty-five shops attacked and ransacked by rioters in Berlin during the 'potato revolution' of 21–23 April 1847, nearly thirty were bakeries.[115]

How the authorities handled the challenge of such tumults varied from place to place. In Prussia, three decades of economically liberal governance disposed the government not to intervene in the crisis, beyond a few cosmetic measures intended to build public confidence; instead, they placed their faith in strong and effective repression. But there were many initiatives at local level, just as in Jerez de la Frontera. In a number of Rhenish (i.e. also Prussian) commercial and manufacturing towns – Cologne, Barmen, Elberfeld, Solingen, Krefeld – local middle-class elites took the lead in organizing and financing ameliorative measures, initiatives that reinforced the claim of the better-off bourgeoisie to social and political leadership. In Danzig, too, private money was forthcoming to fund discounted potato sales and soup kitchens. Things went less well in Berlin, because the Prussian authorities there were wary of ceding any kind of initiative to the bourgeois elites in the city, with the result, for example, that their requests for preventive measures and a civil militia were rejected out of hand. Faced with the choice between an empowered middle class policing its own neighbourhood and relatively disorganized food riots, the authorities 'preferred the riot'.[116]

In France, too, there were hunger riots in Buzançais, Lisieux and le Mans, and these events were extensively pored over in the press. But bread distributions were organized by the authorities without major

problems in most of the country. In Belgium, parliament voted an exceptional credit for poor relief, enabling the formation of charity committees in almost every locality, and government work creation programmes focused mainly on the improvement of local roads helped many unemployed men to make it through the worst months. In the relatively industrialized region of Wallonia, the presence of factories that were still employing large numbers (albeit on very low wages) also helped to mute the worst effects of the food shortages, it being an advantage that the cycles of grain shortage and industrial crisis were only contingently linked and thus not fully synchronized.[117]

If things were so much worse in Ireland, this was not because the British government failed entirely to intervene. When the potato blight struck in 1845, the Peel government responded immediately, buying maize from the United States for sale in Ireland, expanding the existing programme of public works and cutting tariffs in 1846 in order to ease the import of grain (similar tariff reforms were enacted in Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands and Piedmont–Sardinia[118]). But the controversy stirred by such interventionist measures brought down Peel and his government. His successor as Prime Minister, Lord Russell, was a strong adherent to liberal laissez-faire principles and thus opposed to state intervention in society or the workings of the market. Russell's Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Charles Wood, was a laissez-faire evangelical who saw in the famine a work of divine judgement and a trigger of salutary structural change that should best be left to play itself out.[119] The measures adopted in 1845–6 were largely abandoned in the following year. The public works programme was shut down. The remarkably successful network of soup kitchens established in February 1847, analogous to the charity committees established in many continental towns, was wound up again in October. Against the background of anxiety about the financial burdens of famine relief and widespread 'famine fatigue' in Britain, the disaster was allowed to grind on, until it consumed an eighth of the Irish population and drove further hundreds of thousands to leave the country, among them the emigrants to rural New South Wales from whom I am descended.

## WEAVERS

At about seven o'clock in the morning of Monday, 21 November 1831, 400 silk weavers formed up in orderly groups in the Croix-Rousse, a suburb of the city of Lyons. Their plan was to march down the Grande Côte towards the centre of town and insist that their employers, the town's silk merchants, accept as binding a minimum wage agreed with the city's authorities a few days before. A small unit of fifty National Guardsmen despatched to stop them were greeted with a hail of thrown stones, surrounded and disarmed. Emotions were already running high: only with difficulty did Pierre Charnier, a master weaver and one of the key orchestrators of the protest, succeed in preventing a group of enraged protestors from lynching Police Commissioner Toussaint. Re-forming in groups of four with their arms interlocked, the weavers resumed their progress down the Grande Côte, where they were met by the Grenadiers of the First Legion of the National Guard. Among the Guardsmen were a number of the silk manufacturers who employed the insurgent weavers. Shots were fired. Several weavers fell, gravely wounded; an officer was struck in the thigh by a bullet. Pushed back by the weavers, the Guardsmen broke into a disorderly retreat, while the weavers ascended in haste to call the population of the Croix-Rousse to arms. Huge barricades appeared at the entrance to the Grande-Rue and the weavers unfurled their flag, a finely made thing (they were weavers, after all). On it were embroidered words that would reverberate into the twentieth century: *Vivre en travaillant, mourir en combattant* (Live working or die fighting).

This was the opening scene of the *révolte des canuts*, the uprising of the silk weavers of Lyons (known colloquially as *canuts*) in November–December 1831. Over the next few days, the weavers attacked and captured the fortified police barracks at Bon-Pasteur, broke into the arsenal to commandeer weapons and harried various units of the National Guard and the army. The battle for the city cost 600 casualties. By the morning of 23 November, the mayor and the commanding general in the city had both fled. In its inception, the upheaval resembled other social protests of the period. The revolution of the previous year in Paris, exacerbated by a cholera epidemic in the capital, revolutions in Latin America and a banking crisis in the United States had

disrupted the trade cycle in silk, leading to a fall in orders, prices and wages. The master weavers demanded a minimum piece tariff. The merchants refused to pay it, even though a general tariff had been agreed and recommended by the municipality.[120] The weavers went on strike and demanded justice.

A more remarkable feature of the Lyons uprising is the sophistication of the organizational culture behind it. In 1827, a group of master weavers had formed a Mutual Aid Society (Société du Devoir Mutuel) founded on an elaborate cellular structure of small 'companies', each consisting of no more than twenty master weavers (to avoid falling foul of Article 291 of the French penal code of 1810) and headed by a 'syndic' assisted by two 'secretaries'. The syndics reported to a 'central office' consisting of a director, two deputy directors, a secretary and a treasurer. The syndics meeting together with the five members of the 'central office' constituted a 'grand council'.[121] This 'free-masonry of the workers', as its chief instigator, the weaver Pierre Charnier, would later call it, was more than just an instrument for distributing aid; it was an attempt to offset the asymmetrical historical effects of the commercial liberty inaugurated during the French Revolution and prized by the property-owning classes of Europe. The Le Chapelier Law of 1791 had not just abolished the old guilds, but had also denied citizens the right to strike or associate in pursuit of 'their pretended common interests'. And yet it remained legal for factory-owners and merchants to engage in cartel-like behaviour or to form organizations such as the chambers of commerce.[122]

The animating principle behind Charnier's panoptical system of cells reporting to a central office was 'association', a word whose mid-nineteenth-century charisma is hard to recapture today (though perhaps less so in France, where until 2017 there was still a minister 'pour la vie associative'). Only through association would the working masses overcome the structural weakness of the individual. The idea possessed a special appeal for the master weavers, who were not gathered together in open-plan factories, but owned their own looms and worked in their own workshops, supported by an entourage of apprentices, journeymen, subcontractors, female specialists and assistants of varying ranks, ages and social statuses. Without a robust organization, it was easy for the merchants to play the masters off against each other. United through their association, the weavers would command the respect they were owed:

> In association we will be able to find all the consolations for our ills. We will learn that a man who is poor in wealth is not necessarily poor in quality. When we have become suffused with our dignity as men, the other inhabitants of this city, whose glory and wealth we have unstintingly fashioned for many years, will cease to use the term 'canut' in a derisive or insulting way.[123]

In 1831, the Mutual Aid Society of the master weavers was joined by a Society of Silkworkers (Société des ferrandiniers) representing the workers, or *compagnons*. These bodies enabled the collective processing of common experiences, collective bargaining, the enforcement of collective agreements and the building of collective strategies. This ability to collaborate is itself noteworthy. The masters were small-scale entrepreneurs, owners of the means of production, who often rented out one or more of their looms to journeyman weavers, who might themselves hire assistants. Most of the *compagnons*, by contrast, were proletarians who had nothing to invest but their labour. Yet the 8,000-odd masters and the 20,000-odd *compagnons* of the city succeeded for the most part in working together. The reason for this success probably lay in the intimate geography of Lyonnais weaving: the *compagnons* often lodged with their masters; quarters like the Faubourg Croix-Rousse were densely packed with weaving households: of the 16,449 inhabitants of the Croix-Rousse in 1832, over 10,000 were weavers or their dependants.[124]

The Lyons uprising of 1831 might look at first glance like the purely 'social' or 'industrial' provincial counterpart to the political revolution of 1830 in Paris. This was certainly how the novelist and poet Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, who was in the city when the first insurrection broke out, saw it: 'Politics plays no part in this immense revolt', she wrote to a friend in Bordeaux on 29 November 1831. 'It is an uprising of hunger. Throwing themselves before the bullets, the women shouted "Kill us! Then we will no longer be hungry!" Three or four cries of *Vive la République!* were heard, but the workers and the people always responded: "No! We are fighting for bread and for work."'[125] It was not unusual for middle-class commentators to raise such tumults to the status of tragedy by insisting upon a purely social motivation, innocent of politics. But the Lyon weavers were not, generally speaking, starvelings of the kind depicted in the slum descriptions of the social hygienists,

and their world was saturated with politics. The tradition of concerted protest by workers in the city dated back into the eighteenth century, and the weavers had long memories.[126]

On the eve of the uprising, Lyons was already attracting the interest of radical intellectuals. A delegation of radicals visited the city in May 1831, drawing huge crowds to their public lectures. The most sensational, by Jean Reynaud, a Lyonnais by birth who would later serve in one of the Parisian revolutionary governments of 1848, was a 'sermon' on the subject of property: 'Behold', Reynaud told his audience, 'the glory [of property] is passing and its reign expires.'[127] In June, two new republican newspapers opened in the city, *La Sentinelle nationale*, edited by Joseph Beuf (who would later be fined and arrested for sedition) and Adolphe Granier's *La Glaneuse* (The Gleaner). *La Glaneuse*, a wickedly funny satirical journal printed on pink paper, relentlessly mocked the pretensions of the new French monarchy established in 1830 through an assortment of genres: vignettes, short stories, jokes, mock recipes and advertisements. But after the uprising of 21 November, a solemn editorial piece put the ironic banter on hold to bewail the dead and to hail the victory of the weavers over the forces of 'order': 'Our sympathies, let's say it out loud! . . . are with the most numerous and the poorest class; today and always we shall be its defenders; today and always we shall claim on its behalf the sacred rights of justice, of humanity![128]

The well-intentioned condescension of this claim to speak 'on behalf of' a subaltern class was entirely absent from *L'Écho de la Fabrique*, a remarkable journal founded in October 1831, whose columns reflected a view of the world from within the milieu of the weavers, or at least of the master weavers. The founding cohort of shareholders in the paper included thirty-one master weavers and its columns were full of news items about industrial negotiations, arbitration proceedings and the meetings held by weavers themselves. Its purpose, openly avowed in the prospectus, was to combat the 'greed and egoism' of the bosses (*chefs de commerce*), curb abuses of the system and 'establish an equilibrium which, without damaging the general interests of the employers, will bring about an improvement in the fortunes of those who are dependent upon them'. *L'Écho* was to be a venue in which a working community made itself audible in new ways – weavers from across the Lyons

community were invited to submit material they deemed newsworthy to the editors.[129] The alienated, third-person perspective of the 'Social Question' made way for a new lexicon, shaped in an eclectic way by Saint-Simonianism and later by the socialism of Charles Fourier, but also by the lived experience of its subjects, a language capable both of articulating and of normalizing the emotional textures of a workers' movement and of endowing the conflict between the Lyonnais weavers and their employers with ethical and political legitimacy.[130]

The retaking of Lyons in 1831 turned out to be surprisingly bloodless. Stupefied by this insurrection in the second city of France only a year after the revolution that had installed him on the throne, the new king, Louis Philippe, ordered that the army should proceed firmly but avoid capital executions. On 3 December, 20,000 soldiers entered the city under the command of General Jean-de-Dieu Soult, a veteran of the Napoleonic wars. There were numerous arrests, only a few of which led to prosecutions, and all of these ended in acquittals.

The story might have ended there, but three years later the silk workers of Lyons rose again, this time under rather different circumstances. The market for silk had recovered and there had been a surge in silk workers' piece-rates. The merchants, who feared a further downturn, tried to trim their wage bills. Protests over a reduction in the wages of the workers in plush (*péluche*) escalated, triggering a strike across the sector. The spring of 1834 brought renewed clashes and arrests; when the police found a letter full of supposedly seditious phrases written by one of the more radical *canuts*, there was a crackdown. In April there was a fully fledged uprising; during the 'bloody week' that followed, barricades appeared across the city to hinder the army's progress. The workers stormed the Bon-Pasteur barracks (as they had in 1831) and the Arsenal; they transformed the various districts of the city into fortified camps. At the core of the uprising were about 3,000 insurgents, but large numbers of other residents also took part. The wife and daughters of the bookseller Jean Caussidière, for example, prepared cartridges and food and brought them to the fighters at the barricades. In the districts dominated by weavers, an eye-witness reported, the attitude adopted to the troops by non-combatant residents was one of 'hostile neutrality'.[131]

This time, the government's response was brutal. Adolphe Thiers, Minister of the Interior, withdrew the troops from the town, surrounded it and then took it back piece by piece, making liberal use of artillery


This image of the *Horrible Massacre at Lyons* in 1834, the work of an anonymous local engraver, captures the intimate, close-range quality of violence in the small spaces of inner cities. More than 300 were killed and nearly 600 wounded in this bitter conflict over wages and the right of workers to associate and strike.

and massacring many workers and innocent bystanders in the process, a technique he would in old age use again in crushing the Paris Commune of 1871. Cannon were used to clear squares. The use of explosive charges to blow open the doors of buildings started fires in several quarters. One man who had taken refuge in a chimney was deliberately burned alive. The son of Jean Caussidière was killed in the fighting and his body repeatedly mutilated by the troops with bayonets (after the outbreak of revolution in 1848, the other son, Marc Caussidière, a republican leader in nearby Saint-Étienne, would briefly serve as Prefect of the Paris Police). Learning from their opponents, the soldiers climbed onto the roofs of buildings and engaged the insurgents in a 'battle of the chimneys'. Estimates of total casualties range from 200 to 600, but 350 is a good guess. Contemporary visual depictions bring home the savagery of fighting at the closest quarters in small squares surrounded by tall buildings. When troops and insurgents clashed on and around barricades, battle soon gave way to massacre.

Jean-Baptiste Monfalcon, doctor, journalist and librarian, and a son of the city, noted a crucial difference between the first and second revolt: 'At first truly industrial, [the revolt] became bit by bit industrial *and* political, and the misfortune of the times would have it that it finally took on an almost exclusively party-political character.' In November 1831, Monfalcon wrote, the workers had risen over the matter of a 'poorly posed and poorly understood' question of salary. But in April 1834 it was no longer just a matter of tariffs: the workers, 'guided by political parties in open revolt against power, raised barricades in the name of republican opinion'.[132]

There is something to be said for this view. Things certainly changed between the first and second revolt. After 1831, republican agents gradually infiltrated the working population of Lyons; there was a sharpening of republican political rhetoric in the journals and Lyons became a centre of republican activism in eastern France. During the second revolt, republican leaflets were distributed in the city and posted on buildings. These argued that the revolt was no longer about workplace grievances, but about challenging the authority of the Orleanist monarchy. Propagating political ideas was relatively easy in this milieu, because about three quarters of the male silk-weavers in Lyons were literate. The masters needed good reading skills in order to be able to scrutinize the contracts they signed with the merchants. The children of weavers

(including many *compagnons*) attended the free primary schools in the suburbs, and many of their parents took evening and Sunday classes at the same schools, acquiring the skills that they needed to sustain a network of reading clubs and library societies.[133]

On the other hand, although republicans led the resistance of April 1834 in a few locations, most of the rebel forces were locally recruited and commanded (often rather chaotically) by members of the mutual societies or simply by weavers or other workers. Of the 108 people arrested after the fighting in the city's fifth arrondissement, only five were listed as republicans. The weavers, for their part, continued to operate within their traditional moral economy: they were motivated more by traditional assumptions about what was fair than by the theories or prescriptions of any political grouping. Republican agitators tried hard to channel the activism of the weavers into political action, but the weavers were generally reluctant to follow their prompting.[134] At their trial in Paris, the Lyonnais weavers among the accused insurgents refused to cooperate with the efforts of the republicans also facing prosecution to turn the trial into a platform for a political repudiation of the July Monarchy.[135] The republican accused, for their part, rarely referred directly to the *canuts*, and when they did it was in the stereotypical terms of the Social Question. Here is the republican Charles Lagrange, explaining why he and his colleagues were so keen on the principle of association:

> [We have] seen in our unfortunate city 15,000 women working from five in the morning until midnight without earning enough for the necessities of life. Many of them are without fathers, brothers, or husbands, and have been forced to deliver themselves into corruption in order to survive . . . Yes, we have seen all that, and that is why we have said to the proletarians: Associez-vous![136]

But the weavers did not think of or describe themselves as 'proletarians', nor did they need the prompting of men like Lagrange to understand the value of association. And no weaver would have claimed in front of the Court of Peers that the young women of his community were prostitutes. In short: the politics of republicanism and the politics of worker activism were converging in 1834, but they had not intertwined.

The 1834 insurrection lasted only a few days, but its impact reverberated across the cultural networks of France. By July 1835, when the

massive trial of accused rebels was drawing to a close in Paris, lithographed portraits of the most outspoken Lyonnais defendants were on sale in the bookshops and on the stalls along the banks of the Seine. The 'fine drama' of the 'two great events' (Stendhal) resurfaces in the essays, letters and novels of the canonical male literary stars of the era, from Lamartine to Balzac, Victor Hugo, Chateaubriand and Alfred de Vigny. Félicité Robert de Lamennais, the radical priest whose *Paroles d'un croyant* (Words of a Believer), published in 1833, was already on its way to becoming one of the most famous books in the world, dedicated a passionate pamphlet to the weavers, whose trial before the Court of Peers he denounced as the betrayal of the liberty promised by the revolution of 1830. Was it for this, he asked, that the people had chased away the Bourbons? 'The people', Lamennais warned, had at last acquired 'an awareness and a feeling for their rights'; there would henceforth be no rest for those who failed to understand the fullness of what this meant.[137] For George Sand, who dressed as a man to join the spectators in the Court of Peers, the trial was a political awakening. The lawyers defending the accused were a line-up of left-wing luminaries: Ledru-Rollin and Garnier-Pagès would both later serve in the Provisional Government of February 1848; Armand Barbès was an habitué of the revolutionary underground who would play an important role on the far left in 1848, as would the trial advocate and sometime leftist deputy Michel de Bourges, whose affair with George Sand began after they met at the trial.[138] Lyons secured a unique and lasting place in the historical imaginary of the far left, from Blanqui, Marx, Engels and Fourier to Paul Lafargue, the revolutionary journalist, literary critic activist and co-founder of the French Workers' Party (Parti Ouvrier Français). In the 1880s, Lafargue would teach the cadres of his party that the revolutions of 1789, 1830 and 1848 paled into insignificance alongside the great social revolt of the Lyonnais weavers.[139]

One of the most powerful contemporary expressions of the emotional resonance of these events is a poem by Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, composed shortly after the second insurrection. By situating the action of her poem in the immediate aftermath of the repressions, Desbordes-Valmore hides the politics of the insurrection from view. Her weavers are not activists, but blood-stained victims of repression. Their advocates, an unnamed woman and a female chorus in the manner of Greek civic drama, make no specific accusations, but there is a radical energy in the

language. To say that 'the murderer makes himself king' is not quite the same as saying that the king is a murderer, but the inference offers itself. Desbordes-Valmore depicts the violence of counter-insurgency as a brutal inversion of moral order that makes a mockery of the Church's promise of spiritual comfort.

On a dark Day in Lyons

THE WOMAN
There is no money left for burying our dead.
The priest has come about the funeral fee,
And here the flattened corpses, gouged by shot,
await a winding sheet, a cross, remorse.
The murderer makes himself king. . . .
Like crushed flowers, God gathers
Women and children . . .
Death, the hired guard, who stands astride the road,
Is a soldier. He shoots and frees
The rebel witness; tomorrow will not hear his voice.

THE WOMEN
Let's take our black ribbons and weep all our tears
They've forbidden us to move our murdered ones:
They've simply piled up their pale remains.
God! Bless them all, they were all unarmed!

4 April 1834

The reference to dead women and children is striking; it does seem that whereas there were no women among the persons arrested at the end of the fighting in April 1834, and none in the dock during the *procès monstre* that followed, women and children were quite numerous among the civilian dead (a precise count does not exist). This may simply mean that whereas women tended to withdraw from protesting crowds when the violence started, both they and their children found it difficult to escape the effects of artillery shot and the fires started by explosions. Desbordes-Valmore did not witness the second insurrection, but she had witnessed, at the age of fifteen, the 1802 insurrection of Guadeloupe, triggered by

Napoleon's decision to reimpose slavery in the island, eight years after its abolition in 1794. In Pointe-à-Pitre, where she was lodging with her mother, who was dying of yellow fever, she saw captured former slaves thrown into 'an iron cage'. One of the central figures in *Sarah*, the novel she published in 1821, was a formerly enslaved male refugee by the name of Arsène, who figures as an ersatz 'mother' to the eponymous white heroine. The violence of colonial repression reverberated in the poet's depiction of indiscriminate slaughter in 1834.[140]

For those who sympathized with the silk merchants, the experience of insurrection brought home the fragility even of a well-resourced bourgeois existence. On 22 November 1831, the day after fighting had broken out, the doctor and journalist Jean-Baptiste Monfalcon volunteered to carry a prefectoral proclamation to the headquarters of the insurgents at the top of the Croix-Rousse hill. As he walked up the Grande Côte, he was struck by the silence: 'no sound of a loom, no human sound can be heard in this street, ordinarily so crowded and so noisy'. But before he had finished his ascent up the Croix-Rousse, Monfalcon found himself surrounded. Forty men, armed with a few bad rifles, encircled him, swearing and tearing away his rifle, his sabre, the epaulettes he wore as an officer of the National Guard. Then the punches began to rain in. The proclamation he had volunteered to carry was grabbed from his hands and trampled underfoot:

> . . . from all sides I hear cries of vengeance: 'he's a merchant; let him pay for the others . . .' strong hands seize me by the neck and drag me to the gutter, and I realise how this violent scene is likely to end, when, over the shouts, I hear these words: 'don't kill him, he's my doctor, let him go'. It is the voice of a lame silk worker who is not my patient, but whom I know quite well.

The helpful acquaintance persuaded the angry silk weavers to inspect their victim's rifle; finding that it had not recently been fired, they let him go. Monfalcon remained preoccupied by this episode throughout the rest of his life; it was a physical memory that refused to leave him.[141] Himself the son of a master weaver, Montfalcon had secured an excellent education and was well known in the city for his charitable medical work among the poorer weaving families. He was a respected contributor to the literature on the Social Question with an interest in statistical

analysis and social hygiene that was typical for his time – Patissier included an essay by Monfalcon on the characteristic maladies of silk weavers in his famous compendium on occupational illness. On the afternoon of 21 April, the doctor had tended the wounded from the first day's fighting – this was where he had encountered the man who would save his life on the following day. His account of his brush with death, first published in a newspaper and then, after many iterations, twenty years later in his memoirs, carried a complex message. It was an edifying fable about the redemptive impact of social engagement. But Monfalcon's description of a respected man of the bourgeoisie cowering under a hail of punches as the attributes of his rank are torn from him and he is dragged like a heifer to be killed over a gutter also carried more urgent messages about the preciousness and indispensability of civic order.

The riots that broke out in Brno in May 1843 never acquired the mythic status of the Lyons insurrections, but they too disturbed one of the great regional hearts of textile production. Brno was the 'Manchester of Moravia', the home of some the most prestigious textile brands of Central Europe – Offermann, Schöller, Peschina, Skene, Haupt and a host of lesser enterprises serving niche markets in Vienna, Pest and Milan.[142] A spike in food prices during the winter and spring of 1842/3 had depressed demand for textile goods, just as mild temperatures pushed down the demand for winter garments, leaving manufacturers with a backlog of unsold merchandise. The result was a wave of bankruptcies and dismissals. Brno was acutely sensitive to such fluctuations – of just over 45,000 people who lived in the city and its suburb at the time, about 8,000 were weavers, of whom over 2,600, about a third, were reported to have been laid off by the late spring of 1843. But there was less evidence here of an awareness of common economic interests. Rather than pressuring the bosses, the unemployed weavers turned on their fellows still in work, ambushing, for example, groups of weavers making their way home to the mountain villages of Rájec, Račice and Zábrdovice with packs of cotton to be processed. These workers were neither foreigners nor newcomers; they had been working for the Brno factories for many years without ever facing this kind of hostility. Whereas sinking wages generated indignation and fear for the future, unemployment tended to have a deadening, diffusing effect on the political awareness of workers.[143] The only upside for the dismissed weavers of Brno was that their bad news came at the beginning of summer, leaving them with the hope they might find less lucrative

temporary agricultural work, or labouring jobs on the Brno–Svitavy railway, which was still under construction.

The riots that raged through the textile districts of Prague in the following year suggest a higher level of organization. The trouble started on 16 June 1844 when the managers of the Porges calico works announced wage cuts. Workers left their stations and sent a delegation to the management demanding not only that the current wage be sustained, but also that the owners abstain from putting their new block-printing machines, known as 'perrotines', into operation. The managers refused to meet either demand, and passed the names of the delegates to the police, who arrested six of them during the night. A rapid escalation followed. Workers descended on the Porges works and destroyed several of the new machines. A wave of machine-breaking spread across the city. After they had been denied access to various venues, the strikers established a headquarters in the Perštýn district of Prague, in front of a lodging house for workers from out of town. For a week, virtually every factory in Prague was on strike. On 24 June, after consultations between the Provincial Governor's office, the commander of the military garrison, General Windischgrätz, and the mayor of Prague, Josef Müller, troops and police moved in and 525 strikers were arrested.

A striking feature of these protests was the absence of women. Women made up a large part of the workforce in the textile sector, there were many exclusively female specialisms and women were no less threatened by the advent of the 'perrotines' than the men were. Yet among the 525 strikers arrested on 24 June there was not one woman. The argument that women shunned or were afraid of violent confrontations doesn't work, because eyewitness reports describe how, after the men had been arrested and taken to the courthouse at the livestock market (*Dobytčí Trh*), 'the women gathered and went from house to house, taking rebels with them. Each of them put stones in their aprons and after they had smashed the factory windows, the crowd reached the Livestock Market and began to throw stones at the soldiers.'[144] Several of them were arrested, including their leader, a certain Josefina Müllerová, and others were driven away with bayonets.

So it was not fear or an aversion to violence or the need to see to domestic duties that kept the women away from protests and demonstrations. More important was the masculine character of associational life among the Prague weavers. Like their Lyonnais counterparts, the Prague

textile workers had built a network of mutual aid societies that provided cover in case of injury, sickness, death or unemployment. But these were men-only societies, whose statutes usually forbade women workers to join. Women's societies were in any case forbidden by law in the Austrian Empire, as in most continental states. And this meant, in turn, that when the strike broke out, support was provided only for male printing workers and not, for example, for the female cutters, whose work was also disrupted by the disturbances. The only women entitled to receive strike support under the statutes of most of the mutual aid societies were 'the wives of imprisoned men'. Women were thus shut out, not only from equal participation in the pecuniary benefits of association, but also from the deeper cultural advantages, the quarterly meetings with their elaborate protocols, the discussions, the votes, a rich schooling in collective action. For the working women of Prague, as for many of their English counterparts, then, the refinement of working-class associational culture brought new forms of gender inequality and segregation.[145]

An enormous policing effort was invested in ending the unrest and in tracking down and capturing escaped strikers. The labour protests of 1844 'elicited the most significant police and military activity in Central Europe since the end of the Napoleonic Wars'. Needless to say, the workers did not succeed in preventing the installation of the perrotines. Attacks on machines were extremely common in these years across Central Europe and so were petitions and demands of the kind submitted by the Prague strikers to their management. Yet they never succeeded in halting or even significantly slowing technological change.[146] On the other hand, there was some small progress on wages. Most of the Prague employers quietly raised their rates after the strikes to avoid further trouble and the Provincial Government issued guidelines for the future internal management of relations between workers and managers that assigned at least some minimal rights to labour.[147]

The aftershocks of the Prague events were still rumbling across northern Bohemia when the Silesian textile district around Peterswaldau and Langenbielau became the scene of the bloodiest upheaval in Prussia before the revolutions of 1848. The trouble began on 4 July 1844, when a crowd of angry weavers attacked the headquarters of Zwanziger Brothers, a substantial textile firm in Peterswaldau. The firm was regarded in the locality as an inconsiderate employer that had exploited the region's oversupply of labour to depress wages and

degrade working conditions. 'The Zwanziger Brothers are hangmen', a popular local song declared. 'Their servants are the knaves. / Instead of protecting their workers, / They crush us down like slaves.'[148]

Having broken into the main residence, the weavers smashed everything they could lay their hands on, from mirrors, tiled ovens and gilt mirrors to chandeliers and costly porcelain. They tore to shreds all the books, bonds, promissory notes, records and papers they could find, then stormed through an adjacent complex of stores, rolling presses, packing rooms, sheds and warehouses, smashing everything as they went. The work of destruction continued until nightfall, bands of weavers making their way to the scene from outlying villages. On the next morning, some weavers returned to demolish the few structures that remained intact, including the roof. The entire complex would probably have been torched, had someone not pointed out that this would entitle the owners to compensation through their fire insurance.

Armed with axes, pitchforks and stones, the weavers, by now some 3,000 in number, marched out of Peterswaldau and found their way to the house of the Dierig family in Langenbielau. Here, they were told by frightened company clerks that a cash payment (five silver groschen) had been promised to any weaver who agreed not to attack the firm's buildings. In the meantime, two companies of infantry under the command of a Major Rosenberger had arrived from Schweidnitz to restore order; these formed up in the square before the Dierig house. All the ingredients of the disaster that followed were now in place. Fearing that the Dierig house was about to be attacked, Rosenberger gave the order to fire. After three salvos, eleven lay dead on the ground; they included a woman and a child who had been with the crowd, but also several bystanders, including a little girl who had been on her way to a sewing lesson and a woman looking on from her doorway some 200 paces away. The defiance and rage of the crowd now knew no bounds. The troops were driven away by a desperate charge and during the night the weavers rampaged through the Dierig house and its attached buildings, destroying 80,000 thalers' worth of goods, furnishings, books and papers.

Early on the following morning, troop reinforcements, complete with artillery pieces, arrived in Langenbielau and the crowd of those who remained in or around the Dierig buildings was quickly dispersed. There was some further rioting in nearby Friedrichsgrund, and also in Breslau,

where a crowd of artisans attacked the houses of Jewish merchants, but the troops stationed in the city managed to prevent any further tumults. About fifty persons were arrested in connection with the unrest; of these eighteen were sentenced to terms of imprisonment with hard labour and corporal punishment (twenty-four lashes).[149]

Low wages were a key trigger here, as in Lyons and Prague; so was the shortfall in orders, as at Brno. But the crisis of the Silesian weavers had been deepening for some time, as the *Times* reported on 18 July:

> For a long period the distress among the handloom linen weavers has been dreadful. This has now extended itself to the cotton spinners, and the description of the appearance of these work-people – the formerly simple, peaceful, industrious, and happy inhabitants of the Silesian valleys – is heartrending. Pale, consumptive, weak-eyed men, languidly gliding down from the mountains, staff in hand, clad in their blue linen jackets, and bearing wearily the bundle of linen to the master's, which they have woven at 1s. 6d. the 120 ells, is the picture of the linen weavers.[150]

We are dealing here with a very different environment from the silk-working districts of Lyons. These were workers in linen and cotton, not silk, less securely linked to international markets and more vulnerable than their Lyonnais colleagues both to machine-produced textiles from England and to the vicissitudes of geopolitics (the eastward Silesian trade across the border with the Russian Empire had recently been shut down). There was no Société du Devoir Mutuel, no *Écho de la Fabrique*, and there were no networks of republicans striving to politicize the weavers or to coordinate their revolt. This was something rawer and more provincial.

What is truly astonishing about the Silesian events is their resonance in public life and intellectual discourse across the Prussian lands. Even before the revolt itself, attention was fixed on the textile districts of Silesia. There were collections for the Silesians in the textile towns of the Rhineland. During March, the poet and radical literary scholar Karl Grün toured from town to town holding popular lectures on Shakespeare, the proceeds from which were sent via the provincial government to help the weavers of the Liegnitz district. During May, on the eve of the uprising, Alexander Schneer, an official in the provincial administration

Carl Wilhelm Hübner, T*he Silesian Weavers* (1844). This painting attracted large crowds when it was shown in Cologne, Berlin and other German cities. Hübner does not focus on the violence of the uprising itself, but on the social tensions at its root. He depicts a wealthy merchant turning down a bolt of cloth presented by a desperate family of weavers. Transactions of this type, in which processes of appraisal and evaluation exposed gross inequalities of power, were at the centre of many instances of social violence.

and a member of the Breslau Association, walked from house to house in some of the most affected areas, meticulously documenting the circumstances of weaver families. In this sympathetic cultural environment, it is hardly surprising that contemporaries viewed the uprising of June 1844 not as an inadmissible tumult, but as the inevitable expression of an underlying social malaise.

Despite the best efforts of the censors, the news of the revolt and its suppression spread across the kingdom within days. From Königsberg and Berlin to Bielefeld, Trier, Aachen, Cologne, Elberfeld and Düsseldorf, there were extensive press commentaries and public discussion. There was a flowering of radical weaver-poems, among them Heinrich Heine's apocalyptic incantation of 1844, *The Weavers' Song*, in which the poet invokes the misery and futile rage of a life of endless work on a starvation wage: 'The crack of the loom and the shuttle's flight; / We weave all day and we weave all night. / Germany, we're weaving your coffin-sheet; / Still weaving, ever weaving!'

For radicals in particular, subsistence riots provided the opportunity to focus and sharpen their arguments. Some Left Hegelians argued, like the 'social conservatives', that the responsibility for arresting the polarization of society must lie with the state as the custodian of the general interest. The Silesian events of 1844 prompted the writer Friedrich Wilhelm Wolff to elaborate and refine his socialist analysis of the crisis. Whereas his report of 1843 on the Breslau slums was structured around loose binary oppositions such as 'rich' and 'poor', 'these people' and 'the rich man', or 'a day-labourer' and 'the independent bourgeoisie', his detailed article on the Silesian uprising, written seven months later, was far more theoretically ambitious. Here 'the proletariat' is opposed to 'the monopoly of capital', 'those who produce' to 'those who consume' and 'the labouring classes of the people' to the domain of 'private ownership'.[151]

The debate between Arnold Ruge and Karl Marx over the meaning of the Silesian revolt provides a further illustration of the same process. In a rueful piece for *Vorwärts!*, the journal of the German émigré radicals in Paris, Ruge argued that the weavers' uprising had been a mere hunger riot that posed no serious threat to the political authorities in Prussia. Karl Marx responded to his former friend's reflections with two long articles in which he put the contrary case, arguing, with what almost sounds like Prussian patriotic pride, that neither the English nor the French 'worker uprisings' had been as 'theoretical and conscious in

character' as the Silesian revolt. Only 'the Prussian', Marx announced, had adopted 'the correct point of view'. In burning the company books of the Zwanzigers and the Dierigs, he suggested, the weavers had directed their rage at the 'titles of property' and thereby struck a blow not only at the industrialist himself, but against the system of finance capital that underpinned him.[152] This dispute, which ultimately turned on the issue of the conditions under which an oppressed population can be successfully revolutionized, marked an irrevocable parting of the ways for the two men.

Neither in Silesia nor in Prague, Brno or even Lyons did the politics of the radical left bond easily with the activism of the weavers. But the bitter social conflict over resources gave off a negative energy that quickened the pace of political differentiation. Echoes of the Silesian troubles would ring into the late nineteenth century. Gerhart Hauptmann's five-act drama *Die Weber* (The Weavers, 1892), one of the classics of German naturalism, evoked the insurrection in such a vivid and compelling way that its performance was initially forbidden by the Berlin police authorities. Among those touched by Hauptmann's drama was the artist Käthe Kollwitz, whose preoccupation with this theme produced the unforgettable print series *Ein Weberaufstand*. To this day, her drawings of gaunt, hollow-eyed weavers locked in a futile struggle against an oppressive system frame public memory of what happened in 1844.

## GALICIA, 1846

Nowhere in pre-1848 Europe did socially motivated resentment blend with political conflict to more destructive effect than in Galicia in the Austrian Empire. On the evening of 18/19 February 1846, an extraordinary encounter took place in front of the inn at Lisia Góra, about seven kilometres north of Tarnów, one of the principal towns of western Galicia. Polish patriots had gathered to launch an insurrection against the Austrian authorities. Among them were delegates of the Polish National Government in Parisian exile, including Count Franciszek Wiesiołowski and other distinguished figures, members of the Polish landowning nobility, along with officials from their estates, and members of the Polish clergy and professional class. All were armed in preparation for an