

CHAPTER 9 : STORMING HEAVEN - FRANCE AND THE PARIS COMMUNE

REVOLUTIONARY DATES: 1789, 1871 AND 1917

It is impossible to think of our modern age without reflecting on the history and meaning of the French revolution. If in the nineteenth century Britain provided the economic model of the new capitalism; France provided the political. Or at least it gave us the vocabulary of modern politics. Liberty, Equality and Fraternity have still been the secular symbols of our age. Most of our political struggles have reflected what these three aims have meant in different times and for different peoples since 1789(1). If the Russian revolution set the agenda for much of the mid twentieth century, the French set the agenda for most of the last 200 years. Liberty, Equality and Fraternity are themes too which are still very much alive for the twenty first century. There are also similarities to the twentieth century, which forms the recent context for us, as to that presented to the radicals of the early nineteenth century nearly 200 years ago. The French revolution in the late eighteenth century led to a period of reaction and a sustained violent counter revolution across Europe and had its repressive impacts too in ex French colonies like Haiti. Like the French Revolution, despite the actual period of revolution being comparatively free of massive violence, the counter revolution associated by propaganda with the revolution itself, was murderous. The violent repression was repeated after the Paris Commune in 1871 and further symbolized the crushing defeat of an up-rising of the common people. The Paris Commune marked the end of the era of revolution and counter revolutions since 1793. When the revolutionary hopes appeared to be fresh in 1968 the street barricades sprang up in the Latin Quarter in Paris in the same places as they had in 1871 during the Commune. The major difference was the over turned cars (2). The aim of this chapter is to see what the lessons are globally today from the French revolutionary experience and especially what are the lessons from the Paris Commune?

In any analysis of the principles of a participative democracy theoretically enshrined in anarchism, in modern Western Europe at least, one has to go back to the Paris Commune. Even Lenin commented that if Marx and Engels had used the same language for their description of the Commune in 1917 they would have been called Anarchists (3). In 1871, Marx described the Commune as 'the glorious harbinger of a new society' (4) because it embraced both direct democracy and popular control. Despite Marx's vigorous defence of the Paris Commune after its destruction, and lessons he learned from it about the nature of the capitalist State and resistance to it, he never claimed it as a socialist Commune. With or without Marx's imprint, it is also important to see how a practical anarchist politics arose in a particular movement, time and historic place. This is not to argue that the Communards saw themselves as anarchists - but the principles they tried to enact were anarchist ones. The destruction of a real democracy - rather than the so-called chaos of anarchism itself - tells us about the destructive potential of the Capitalist State. For it was the destructive potential of an imperial war like the Franco Prussian War of 1870-1 and the nascent State Capitalisms of France and Germany which set the context for the Paris Commune and the Communards resistance.

CLASS STRUGGLES IN FRANCE

Before the creation of the Paris Commune Marx warned against the workers trying to seize power in an insurrection. Partially he was mindful of the political disasters of 1830 and 1848 from a Putsch style strategy; partially he knew that it would mean unnecessary deaths. Part of the dispute between Marx and Bakunin did not stem from Marx's 'Statism' but Marx's grounded wariness in the heroic gestures of insurrectionism, to which Bakunin was so prone having attempted a meaningless gesture in Lyon. For Bakunin, optimism of the will was everything. Marx instead called the concept of an insurrection a 'desperate folly'. To reach this point, Marx had to try and understand the historical development both of France and of Capital. If England was the historical model for Marx's description of the economics side of the development of Capital, it was France's political experience which provided the theoretical basis for understanding the potential course of future revolutions. Marx's understanding of the specific characteristics of French Capital also provide the basis for his economic and political analysis of French, German, European and potential global developments. The partial nature of French capitalist development in 1848-70 lay at the heart of Marx's political analysis. With our hindsight neither global capitalism - nor French Capital - was on its last legs in 1848.

Marx's major political works on France were explicit attempts to pin down the schematic themes of the Communist Manifesto's stress on class struggle as the motor force of understanding historical development into the dirty and complex history of French class fractions and inter class relationships worked out in politics and alliances. The first two works on the 'Class Struggle in France' begin with the 'revolutionary' up-rising that re-established the Constitutional monarchy of 1830 and end with Napoleon III's coup of 1851. This established the dictatorship known as the Second Empire which lasted until the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and formed the context for the Paris Commune. The second work is called the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon to highlight the continuities between Napoleon I's 'Thermidor' which began the dictatorship of the first Empire in 1799 with the later coup in Marx's own era. As in Germany after 1848, Marx had to come to terms with the reality that the next French - or general European - revolution was no longer just around the corner. The attempt to 'storm the State' was doomed to failure without building alternative power centres based amongst real economic and political struggles (5).

Rude argues that the historical effort particularly since the 1950s has been to downplay the revolutionary aspect of the period from 1789. As Hobsbawm summarises the new conservative revisionism, the revolution of 1789-94 didn't really change much, so the revolution didn't really happen. Having once fought the left over it; now the left invented it. For Rude, this has been part of the continued attempt to 'obliterate 25 years of history'(to 1815) (6). The tumbrels now roll through the street to collect old guard historians, while Marx's head is stuck on a pike carried aloft by the (scholarly) mob. The process of ideologically remaking the much more recent up-rising of 1968 has similarly been the work of revisionist historians on behalf of today's global Capital. Yet the Marseillaise echoes still (7).

THE HOPES OF 1968

If the first modern revolutionary outbreak in Western Europe was in France; the last major revolutionary 'post modern' upheaval in Western Europe - which again marks the defeat of the left - in France was to take place in 1968. The folk of 1968 believed that the times were changing; my generation are the children growing up after the defeats of 1968 – now our hopes seem to be only blowing in the wind. For the European radicals of the generation born after 1945, the events of Spring 1968 in France, in Prague and in Vietnam particularly carried their hopes for a new world. In France, the anarchist ideals of a more direct democracy were explicit both in opposition to the Gaullism that had ruled France implicitly from 1945 and explicitly after the military coup of 1958 and to the Stalinism of the French Communist party. What we have seen is the subversion of these hopes over the next forty years. What can we learn as we seek to re-envisage these ideals again in our context where the rule of the Empire of Global Capital is far stronger than in 1968? As Eley puts it, the mainstream space for imagined alternatives to Capital has been so small since 1989 as to narrow virtually to nothing. This has not been true of alternatives in the broad anarchist umbrella - but the anarchism has been in a marginalised space - akin to that of the hidden ecclesia of the early church. We now have, if my son's generation is anything to go by, what Eley also calls a new generation unaware that they are 'riding the excitements of 1968'. A case could be made that these excitements temporarily peaked at Seattle in 1999 and in Genoa in 2001. In this case any hopes for the future worlds that are possible demand that we understand what happened to the 'future imperfect' hopes of 1968. Let us beware of what Eley concludes have been the 'shrivelled ambitions' of too much of our times since then, as well as the revolutionary millenarianism that has also bedevilled the left - not just since 1968 - but since the earlier generations - of 1917 - and one could add – 1789 (8).

Ross argues that May-June 1968 was the largest mass movement in French history. It was the biggest strike ever by the French workers movement. The mass strike extended beyond the traditional industries into the twenty first century's great re-invention - the 'service' sector, commerce and culture. No region, city, village or occupation was untouched. There were no schools, no post, no buses or trains. There were three times more workers on strike - 9 million - than in the outbreaks under the Popular Front government of 1936. She goes on to show that a key development in French culture since 1968 has been the way in which 'May's radical ideas' have been 'recuperated or recycled in the service of Capital'. This up-rising, like the Paris Commune, was quickly re-written by official France. For Aron, it became an 'elusive revolution' (9); for the official Communist party, which was out-flanked and tried to minimise its impact, it was a 'counterfeit' revolution. I shall use the French experience of 1968 (and to a lesser extent, Italy) as the major model for the history of the last generation. The aim is to understand 1968 materially and politically for today - and not only for France, where Ross has shown its vital importance culturally and symbolically. For France the realities of the left's defeat after the Mitterrand experiment from 1981-3 has meant Sarkozy's victory in 2007. A quote from a 'girl of '68' puts it brilliantly and not only for France - but for Italy too - 'I suffer from communism's delay' (10).

THE DIFFICULTY OF RULING FRANCE

The hopes, the street barricades and the riot police of 1968 was the nearest our post war West European generation got to a Paris commune experience. 1989 may have some equivalence in the East and in Germany but is not our concern here. Before we can look again at the detailed history leading up and surrounding Paris Commune itself, it is necessary to understand the imperial, political and economic contexts for France. We need – here only briefly - to try and set the context and impact of the French Revolution on into the French political economy and national capitalism of the nineteenth century.

From the middle ages, France was a large country to govern. In 1350, out of a total West European population of 54 million, more than a third were French - 22 million. The impact of the French revolution and of subsequent French armies throughout Europe is better understood if we remember that until the mid nineteenth century, France had always been the most populous state in Western Europe and was often the most powerful.

Northern France especially conformed more closely to classical feudalism than anywhere else. Serfdom bore down particularly hard on the French peasantry. Although the French monarchy eventually grew from its base around Paris, early French feudalism never succeeded in being as effectively centralised as the English. Five other major provinces swirled around the central power - in Flanders, Normandy, Burgundy, Aquitaine and Toulouse. It took until the fifteenth century for the French feudal monarchy to claim control over what is now France. This ascendancy started with the expulsion of English armies and the creation of a regularly paid army, independent of the old feudal military services, financed by a new royal army tax.

With the crisis of the late Middle Ages (11), the French response was different from England. The tradition of Roman law surviving to a greater degree in France made peasant ownership a deeply entrenched concept. Many of the peasant plots were small - around 10 - 15 hectares. Many were share-croppers, working for the lord and dividing the harvest. With a rising population, this tended to lead to rising rents (as it had in China). The development of commercial wine and wheat production did not produce the changes that wool brought to England. 'France did not undergo an extensive enclosure movement' (12). Wine growing was labour intensive, while wool production was more intensive of land, and then of capital. There was not the gradual transition to an agrarian capitalism seen in England.

It was better for the French aristocrat to keep the peasant on the land and use the feudal levers to raise the surplus - via share-cropping or in rents. The French nobility lived on dues in cash or kind from the peasants. The fortunes of a large estate depended on the collection of a lot of small dues: an environment tailor-made for lawyers and bureaucrats, which it might be claimed, still have their hold on France today. Making money out of working the land was seen as demeaning.

FRENCH ABSOLUTISM

The economic crisis of the late middle ages produced enough impoverished landlords that the richer bourgeoisie, who had made money out of the towns, were also to acquire land. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, a substantial fusion had occurred between the landed upper class and the upper bourgeoisie. The fusion in France, rather than being directed against the crown, as in England, took place through it. The French nobility came increasingly to be dependent on royal favour.

The French monarchy had militarily expanded into its restless provinces in the late Middle Ages by crushing regional autonomy in the name of crushing heresies. As the monarchy grew more powerful its political solution to the feudal crisis the growing French Absolutism was to choose repression, as the English had in the fifteenth century. This meant a vicious repression of the peasantry and the towns. It also meant reaffirming the Monarchy's control over the landowning aristocracy.

Much of the growth of French Protestantism occurred precisely in those areas where the French monarch's writ had not often run - in Normandy, in Provence (where in the 1540s there had been a renewed slaughter of older 'heretics' - the Waldensians), and in Languedoc. The growth of 'Huguenot' Protestantism was, if anything, stronger in France in 1550 - in the towns and in the regional nobility - than it was in England. In England the gentry had been tied into the Protestant settlement by the granting of monastic lands. In France, the peasantry was squeezed so hard that the Protestants and the often trading based Huguenots in the towns frequently got caught in the crush. The defeat of the Protestant Reformation gave an excellent excuse to consolidate both the aristocracy and the monarch's centralising Absolutism. The St. Bartholomew Day Massacre in 1572 was to kill far more French Protestants than Mary in England (13).

Whereas in England, Protestantism was a sign of the success of English Absolutism; in France, in the sixteenth century, Protestantism was a sign of its weakness. In England, Protestantism had to be consolidated, and Catholics sometimes eliminated (the Duke of Norfolk in 1572 after an up-rising, and Mary Stuart in 1587 before the Armada) to reaffirm the strength of English Absolutism. In France, it was Catholicism that needed to be consolidated. Protestants – particularly Kings - had to be won over. When Henry of Navarre came to the throne in 1589, he converted in 1593 because 'Paris is worth a mass' (14) or marginalised (Geneva was a useful bolt hole), or destroyed. After these battles, by the seventeenth century, French Absolutism could become the dominant force in Europe, as Spain had been in the sixteenth. Forced to temporize at first with the French Protestants with the Edict of Nantes -seemingly granting tolerance - French Absolutism was surer of its power when the Edict was revoked in 1685. The period in between (1598 - 1685) marks the rise of French Absolutism to the kind of power that English absolutism had gained by 1588.

THE LEAD UP TO THE REVOLUTION

After active intervention in the Thirty Years War, French Absolutism had consolidated its own power and territory by 1648. Military expansion, plus the growing weight of the commercial bourgeoisie and artisans in the towns to buy off, all cost money. An increasingly powerful French Absolutism still had the traditional problem of funding its bureaucracy. It solved this problem, more than any other regime in Western Europe, by selling offices. Taxation had quadrupled in the decade after 1630. The sale of up to 50,000 offices came to provide nearly 40% of royal revenues. This was the prop which the French King used to avoid calling Parliament and struggling with it as Charles I was to do in England. The social consequence was to create an upper bourgeoisie which became more fused with aristocracy. This made many natural opponents of reform. The political evolution of the French bourgeois was to be side-tracked for the next 150 years. Barrington Moore calls it the 'feudalisation' of the French bourgeoisie.

Whereas in England, the gentry kept leases insecure, permitting the easier eviction of the peasantry, French lords, short of cash as revenues contracted, were more likely to sell emancipation to their serfs. The French peasants often bought their own enfranchisement, particularly close to towns, where market relationships had spread. In France, as the Feudal crisis hit, peasant property was actually consolidated, both before and after the revolution, rather than being destroyed, as it was in England. By 1789, maybe up to 80 per cent of the population consisted of these peasant owners. The peasants owned nearly 40 per cent of the land and common land accounted for a further 20 per cent, with the nobility taking between 15-20 per cent. There were also big differences between the peasants, with many effectively landless.

The weight of the rising tax burden fell largely on the peasantry. In the seventeenth century, 250,000 nobles (2 per cent of the population) took around 20-30 per cent of national income. In the last half of the eighteenth cent, the nobility increased their share of the peasant crop, by using their feudal rights for dues paid in kind; some limited enclosures took place. Although no real capitalist agriculture emerged to revolutionize agricultural production, the increase in feudal dues hardened peasant hostility. There were regular peasant and urban revolts. They were particularly frequent in the outlying areas – in Normandy (in 1639) and in Brittany (in 1674/5) but other uprisings took place in 1630, 1636/7, 1662, 1664 and in 1670.

After a prolonged depression in 1650-80, European growth and population started to rise after around 1720. The eighteenth century saw a general economic expansion in France, particularly in agrarian prosperity in 1730-74. The population rose from around 18/19m to 25/6m in 1700-89. French industrial output rose 60 per cent and foreign trade quadrupled. Colonial trade came to account for two third's and France had a regular export surplus. The French bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century was not the modernising force it had been in England. Nor was it a revolutionary force, despite up-risings like that of the 'Fronde' in 1650 where Louis XIV had been temporarily been thrown out of Paris (15).

THE FISCAL CRISIS OF THE STATE: 1789

The paradox of French Absolutism was that its time of greatest domestic strength was not matched by an international ascendancy, on a par with Spain before it. It was the struggle over colonies, particularly French support in the American War of Independence, which was essentially a spoiling operation and brought little positive gain, yet nevertheless was the final cause of the downfall of French Absolutism. The fiscal crisis created by foreign wars ultimately undermined the 'ancien regime'. The further repression of Protestants in the late seventeenth century meant that the Huguenots left in droves and took a lot of French industrial and trading dynamism with them. Still however it was larger, more prosperous and more self confident bourgeois. It was still dependent on the monarchy to defend its privileges. Over 40 per cent of the new members of the judiciary in 1774-89 were bourgeois 'who became nobles' with new offices. They looked for freer trade and production. Turgot in office from 1774 'served as a spokesman' for a 'more enlightened despotism'. Turgot's reforms had meant that in 1786 French tariffs on English manufactures were sharply reduced causing unemployment amongst town artisans and less outside work for the peasants. By 1788 the payment of interest on the national debt accounted for nearly 52 per cent of current expenditure, military expenditures a further 25 per cent. Expenditure was overrunning revenue by at least 20 per cent. An Estates General, which the latter demanded, was finally called in 1789 for the first time since 1614. By the time, the Estates General sat in 1789, two bad harvests, had led to rising prices and food riots and after the fall of the Bastille on 14 July, 'the social structure of French rural feudalism and the state machine of royal France lay in fragments' (16).

The Revolution 'began as an aristocratic attempt to recapture the State'. Many of the wealthier and especially liberal nobles were willing to make substantial concessions. But rumours of an aristocratic plot against the Assembly, supported by the King, flew thick and fast. Troops were gathering outside Paris. As often in the next turbulent ten years, a popular uprising in Paris, primarily looking for arms to fight against the suspected counter-coup, 'saved the Assembly'. Until the fall of Robespierre in 1794, each stage of the revolution was to be pushed forward by more radical elements. The main striking force of the revolution, at least until 1794, were the 'sans-culottes'. These were the people who were the actual demonstrators, rioters and constructors of barricades. It was largely an urban movement of the poor, small craftsmen, artisans, shopkeepers, even incipient entrepreneurs. It combined a respect for small private property, with hostility to big government, large landowners and big businesses. Each revolutionary surge succeeded as long as it could draw on active support from the peasantry. When this support dried up, the impulse for a more radical revolution dried out.

THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND THE RIGHTS OF MAN: 1789-1793

The National Assembly's most lasting achievement was to start the process which led to the formal abolition of feudalism and the nobility's legal privileges. Lasting until 1791 it made a written Constitution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man which protected the individual and gave him legal equality. It meant the abolition of the sale of offices and the admission of all to public offices. Lefebvre, the French historian described the results of the Assembly's efforts as the 'death certificate of the Ancien Regime'. It would be wrong, however, to speak of the French revolution as bourgeois and capitalist, in a literal sense. The inadequacies of feudal absolutism turned important sections of the privileged classes against it, as well as the bourgeois and the peasants. 'As it came to France, capitalism often wore a feudal mask'. Some of the nobility wanted both a more efficient capitalist-like agriculture with more access to freer markets but also the benefits of their feudal privileges and dues. The bourgeois wanted ancient fetters removed, but protection from foreign competition and many profited from the corrupt features of the bureaucracy. For the peasants, the demand for their own property was prevalent. Indeed, much of the thrust of the radical peasantry and the sans-culottes was radically anti-capitalist. By and large it was the rich peasantry who set the limits as to how far the revolution could go. To achieve their victory the capitalists, who won important triumphs in city and countryside had 'required the help of their bitterest enemies' (17).

After July 1789, the Assembly of substantial property owners had been saved by a popular uprising. If they turned to the King or what was left of the royal apparatus, they would forfeit their own gains. They acted with a pistol at their head. As a sign of their compromised position, the law originally abolishing feudal dues was subject to redemption payments, in the same way that the abolition of serfdom be-devilled the Russian peasants a hundred years later. Only in the more radical next phase did these payments get swept aside. The discontents of the upper peasantry came from their half way position: they possessed the land, without really owning it. What they wanted was the elimination of the arbitrary aspects of the feudal system. For the poor peasants, 70 per cent of the peasantry in some places being landless, the initial demand was for some land; the second demand, was for more land, if they had some. The conflict between rich and poor peasants centred particularly around the crucial question of dividing up communal and émigré lands, as the nobility fled.

As internal opposition rose to virtual civil war, Austria, Prussia and then Britain declared war from the spring of 1792. From defeat in August 1792 an insurrection against the Monarchy established the Convention. The peasants now won their freedom without indemnity unless the original title survived; villages received their common lands back. The convention had attempted a free market in grain. War spending had led to inflation and misery for the sans-culotte in the midst of a war and revolution.

THE JACOBIN REPUBLIC: 1793-99

The revolution now entered its third phase, with yet another popular – but defensive rising in Paris in May 1793. The uprising brought Robespierre to power in June, the arrest of 31 Girondin deputies, the reign of terror, the Orwellian sounding Committee of Public Safety, the creation of a new army, and the defeat of the counter-revolution, particularly in the Vendee. The final indemnities on feudal rights were abolished and the sale of more émigré lands decreed. Slavery in the colonies was abolished. Hobsbawm summaries achievements of the Jacobin Republic well 'In June 1793 60 out of 80 departments...were in revolt against Paris'; German princely armies were invading from the north and east; the British attacked from south and west. The country was bankrupt. Fourteen months later the invaders had been expelled, the French occupied Belgium and the army embarked on nearly 20 years of success. By March 1794 an army three times as large was run on half the cost of March 1793.

It is not my intention to discuss the moralities of the 'Terror' here. But it is worth emphasising the scale of the problem the Jacobin Republic faced and the extent of the twentieth century like 'total war' it discovered that was necessary to win against most of the rest of Europe. On the agrarian side the key problem was to get food: first, to the army, secondly to Paris and the big cities and finally, to create some surplus out of the shortage. The last was an old problem in a new revolutionary situation. The government responded by requisitioning and price controls. Despite the speculation, and black market operators, the new system worked, despite the scruples of most of the leaders who were at heart patrons of economic liberalism.

But, by now, the revolution was losing the support of the peasants – mainly because of the emergency measures of 1793/94. The revolutionary army at its worst was now more concerned with collecting grain than fighting the enemy. Sometimes outright attack on wealthy peasants did little to improve the lot of the poorer peasants either. This was also the problem which Lenin and Trotsky faced between 1919-21 in Russia. But with a stronger tradition of authoritarian rule and a bigger industrial base than existed in France in 1794, the Russian Robespierres were able to crush the peasants. Stalin was both cause and result. In this final phase in France the needs of the urban sans-culotte and the peasants finally parted. Peasants stopped bringing food into Paris and the major cities. On the Ninth Thermidor of the new revolutionary calendar, or July 1794, the Convention overthrew Robespierre – the representative of the sans-culotte. The next sans-culotte uprising in 1795 was put down. The King was gone and much of the nobility too. A bourgeois retrenchment was underway.

Yet even after the coup d'etat of 1799, and Napoleon's coming to power as Emperor in 1804 the major gains of the previous 10 years upheaval were left intact - confirmed by Napoleon. The problem for the French middle class was how to achieve political stability and economic advance, on the basis of the original programme of 1789-91. It has taken until the mid twentieth century (post 1958) to solve.

A FRENCH BOURGEOIS REVOLUTION?

Hobsbawm lists the different forms of government for the next 70 years as: Consulate (1799-1804), Empire (1804-14), Bourbon Monarchy (1815-30), Constitutional Monarchy (1830-48), Republic (1848-51) and (Second) Empire (1852-70). By these various devices, France was now effectively ruled by the bourgeois – but not necessarily in the interests of Capital. Hobsbawm concludes all were attempts to maintain a 'bourgeois society' while avoiding the double danger of a ('democratic') Jacobin Republic or the old regime (18).

For Magraw, although the French bourgeois had used the revolution to come to power, its triumph at the beginning of the nineteenth century was 'incomplete and precarious'. The bourgeois as a class could only rule by limiting the franchise; this was not because the 'workers' would vote for the radical Jacobins, but because the peasants would vote for a restored King. The peasants had gained some of the land they had wanted. The French villages were to resist attempts to further increase capitalist relations on the land. The radicals - largely artisans in the towns - likewise resisted the onset of Capital, but unlike the peasants looked back to the frustrated aspirations of 1793-5. A dictatorial compromise - Napoleon - was the result.

The French revolution had mortally wounded the 'ancien regime'; the interlocking complex of monarchy, landed aristocracy and feudal rights. The predominant successful thrust was bourgeois and capitalist. However, it was not a revolution made by a commercial and industrial bourgeoisie, even if it had grown stronger in the course of the eighteenth century. Instead parts of the bourgeoisie rose towards power on the back of the peasants and of more radical movements, like the sans-culotte. The peasants in the end determined how far the 'bourgeois revolution' could go. The incompleteness of this revolution therefore meant that it would be a long time either before a full blown capitalism or a full blown capitalist parliamentary democracy could come to dominate.

The France of the nineteenth century was largely a society of peasant owners, who became the chief operators of the rule of the bourgeois, provided the bourgeois did not threaten to take away their land. The number of peasant proprietors after the revolution increased by around 50 per cent - from around 4m to 6.5m. Whatever Napoleon meant for the 250,000 French troops killed in the Napoleonic Wars, his rule reflected a new internal stability and relative prosperity. In 1815 most English people were probably worse off than they had been in 1800; whilst most of the French were almost certainly better off.

On the other hand, the capitalist transformation of agriculture and small enterprise was slowed. The expansion of the home market, the creation of successful international businesses and the creation of a working class were to remain minority phenomena in France in the nineteenth century. The problem was a part of the success of the revolution. The peasantry and petty bourgeois were not that movable from the land and rural areas of France. There were fewer landless labourers, as in Britain, to urbanise the cities. Without mass consumption, French industry made luxury goods, like silk textiles, as Latin America was to do 100 years later (19).

THE SWINDLERS REGIME: 1815-48

After Napoleon's defeat there was something of an 'Indian Summer' for the French aristocracy in 1815-30. In the Bourbon restoration of 1815, rather like that of England in 1660, the landed aristocracy recovered about half of the property lost in the Revolution. The aristocracy was again the dominant political grouping. The revolution of 1830 stemmed from Magraw from the discontent of an increasingly educated but marginalised urban petty bourgeois. The French aristocracy after 1815 had failed to share power with the 'haute' bourgeoisie, or even to make it an ally. Being wary of another repeat of 1789, it led to one - the Constitutional revolution and the barricades of Paris in July 1830 was the result. The French aristocracy finally disappeared from the political arena. From then, French politics was like British Victorian politics in reflecting the strains of conflict between the bourgeois and the rest.

Even as early as 1800, in Lyon and other southern cities (Marseilles, Toulon and Bordeaux) commercial and modern interests had penetrated furthest. The silk industry in Lyon had crippled the artisans and produced an incipient modern proletariat. Here, in the more radical phase of the revolution, an alliance between the wealthy nobility and the bourgeoisie, meant that all the 'middle' orders turned against the revolution, as in Germany in 1848. The recapture of Lyon therefore involved severe fighting and one of the more bloody repressions of the terror. This gave a clue to the strength of the bourgeois elsewhere in France which supported the new regime after 1830.

The bourgeois victory of 1830 establishing a Constitutional Monarchy finally meant the defeat of the chateau; despotism now shifted to the stock exchange. Many of the radical commentators of the time from Balzac and Stendahl to De Tocqueville and Marx, saw France from 1830-70 as a joint stock company run by a narrow oligarchy. Marx saw the 1830 regime had a direct interest in increasing the debt of the State - which was the object of ruling class speculation and enrichment. The King symbolically he called the 'swindler on the throne'. (Sounds remarkably like Gordon Brown). State expenditure doubled under Napoleon III. Rail speculation was rife as shareholders in the companies were often also the parliamentary legislators for new lines. Not for nothing was the people's slogan of the time: 'down with the thieves'. The bourgeois monarchy's role was to give the swindle a legitimate cover. Marx concluded that the July monarchy was nothing more than a 'joint stock company for the exploitation of France's wealth' (20). France in 2008 under Chief Executive Officer Sarkozy may be reverting to type. With the vestiges of either a Statist elitist social democracy of the Mitterrand type or the interventionist corporatism of Gaullism slowly being burnt off, Sarkozy began by performing the Thatcherite rites, as Gonzales' PSOE did for Spain (21) and drags the French people into being another medium sized servant of Global Capital.

BLANQUI , BLANC AND 1848

Auguste Blanqui was one man who symbolised keeping alive the hopes of the radicals of 1793. Blanqui was involved in abortive risings in 1823 and 1827, where he was wounded three times. In 1830 after which he was imprisoned, Blanqui became a by-word for secret societies, deep plots, barricades and street battles. These experiences came in handy again in 1848. Another leader of the artisans and workers in 1848 - Louis Blanc argued in 1839 that the bourgeois had gained after the restoration 'like a foam on a tide'. Like another rebel, Babeuf all spoke for what both saw as the war of rich versus poor under the harsh rule of the bourgeois (22). A crisis was developing for peasant France in the 1840s. The rural population had never been more populous - the vast bulk of the increase from 27 to 35m by 1846. The agricultural revolution such as it was benefited the bourgeois who could purchase more land and undermine communal rights. Big tenant farmers and landless labourers became more common in the North. 75 per cent of French farms were still below 5 hectares and the potato blight famine that caused so much death in peasant Ireland had its impact from 1845 in France too. By 1848 the King fell foul of recession and the middle class demand for a wider suffrage (only 240,000 had the vote). As land tax increased 45 per cent a rural tax revolt tied down 50,000 troops (23).

When the Paris arm of the National Guard refused to fire on protesting crowds, a fatal combination of rural and urban unrest and bankruptcy led both Prime Minister and King to resign. A new Republic was proclaimed in the 'three glorious days' from late February 1848, middle class demands were overtaken by a rising in March in a Paris, whose population had doubled in 1800-46. The chain-reaction amongst the unemployed, poor, the artisans and new proletarians started again. Blanqui was released, aged 43 but looking like 60 speaking like 'ice under fire'. When outside troops were brought in, killing up to a hundred, 1500 barricades went up in the poorer districts overnight. The builders of the 1848 barricades could be identified less with the sans-culotte, but more with the slowly emerging industrial proletariat of Paris. The demand for 'national workshops' from Blanc to provide work for the unemployed - running at 60 per cent for the Paris workforce of 340,000 was in place within days.

When the universal male suffrage of 9 million voters announced in March produced a new Assembly in April it went beyond what the middle classes wanted but well short of the radicals' hopes. Blanc got in (and into the government) - but only just - and Blanqui not at all. There were a minority of monarchists but a majority of conservatives. By June 1848 the bourgeoisie was feeling increasingly threatened and feeling the pinch. The workshops were closed. After a demonstration of up to 100,000 in Paris, some of them armed, the terror was again used against the Paris workers. The proletariat was small and isolated. All moderate bourgeois liberals now become conservatives. A more reliable provincial National Guard **was** brought in and leaders like Blanqui tried for treason. This was truly a class war. When the middle classes and peasants deserted the workers and artisans, that betrayal resulted in murder. In a defeat repeated in 1871, up to 50,000 were killed in the repressions that followed (24).

PEASANTS, DICTATORS AND THE ALCHEMISTS OF REVOLUTION

The key by the end of 1848 again was the position of the French peasantry. As Marx saw, upheavals in Paris could be over-turned by peasant votes or peasant troops. When a Napoleon returned, nephew of the old Emperor and with links to agitators like the Carbonari who ran on a radical sounding platform of 'down with taxes, down with the rich', he won over the peasants. In December 1848 he won the first mass suffrage election outside of the USA with the peasant vote; getting 5.5m versus 1.5m for his nearest rival. For Marx, because the new Napoleon 'was nothing, he could appear to be everything'. The peasants had their own 'revolution by proxy'. When the realities of the dictatorship became clear there were up-risings in the cash poor Midi, West and South West, but the old unreliable National Guard had been dissolved.

Blanqui now came to be one of the symbols of the heroism and cruelty of the defeat of 1848. Blanqui's conclusions after 1848 were akin to Lenin's after 1905. The keys to a Blanquist revolution were 'arms and organisation'. He warned of Blanc's reformist betrayals. His sociology in 1852 was much more akin to Marx and more critical than Proudhon's on the Napoleonic victory. It comes straight out of today's critiques of casino capitalism: 'finance reigns, governs and speculates without control' to give 'Rothschild sovereign authority'.

Blanqui and his followers became an increasingly important revolutionary force on the left of French politics, effectively merging into the Marxist and then Communist movement by 1900. Even as the Blanquists were at their most prominent in 1871, there were never more than 2-3,000 signed up adherents; but they could influence thousands more on the streets in difficult times. Marx had a high opinion of Blanqui - and tried to bring the Blanquists over into alliance with the First International in 1867 - but not of conspiratorial insurrections. He saw these secret cabals, both under the Tsar and Bonaparte, as a consequence of living under dictatorship but such 'alchemists of revolution' were pernicious as a method for the future. But in France, Russia, Spain and Italy - where the lower orders were often in incipient revolt against the powers - the appeal of the alchemists was strong (25).

FRENCH PEASANT SOCIETY AND 19TH CENTURY GLOBALISATION

Having failed to create international dominance either under Absolutism or Napoleon, France began in the nineteenth century to be a less dominant economic power than in the middle ages. This can be seen in crude terms of population: in 1780 there were 2.5 French to every English, but in 1830 there was less than 3 to 2; in 1780 there were as many French as Russians, in 1830 there were also half as many Russians again as French. The pace of French economic growth lagged behind the British, Americans and by mid century, the Germans. This was not due to any lack of ingenuity or the inventiveness of its entrepreneurs. The department store, advertising, photography, the soda process and electroplating were all French innovations. Paris only lagged London marginally as a centre of international finance. Apart from Germany and Scandinavia, French enterprise financed the railways of Europe. France was the world's second largest exporter of capital after Britain. Yet France in 1850 was still largely an agricultural and rural society. 50 per cent of the workforce was still employed on the land, but as much as 70 per cent of the population lived in rural areas as late as 1860.

In the era after the failed revolutions of 1830 and 1848, the coming of another Napoleon saw the continued attempt at capitalist modernisation in France. Left historians can present Bonapartism as authoritarian, repressive and only pseudo-democratic. Proudhon at the time used the phrase 'industrial feudalism' to describe it; just as a later sociologist, Dahrendorf described twentieth century Germany before 1945. However, it also had a shrewd agenda of capitalist modernisation in a nineteenth century form. As with today's New Labour Bonapartism had the appearance of a progressive liberalism at times. Magraw sees that this makes Bonapartism a precursor of twentieth century Gaullism which also confused the left with the appearances of a 'progressive' foreign policy in the guise of being against Anglo-American domination.

Magraw also argues that there was a 'last attempt' led by French financial interests to build the 'Liberal Empire'. An apparent shift to a more progressive capitalism obscured the nature of a domestic power structure that reinforced and recaptured the political rule of the French aristocracy. In a pattern to be repeated today, progressive rhetoric is used in a cynical manipulation whose main effect even then was to defend Capital - in this instance French financial Capital. The Bonapartist regime in France, like the later New Liberals in Britain or today's New Labour would talk of overcoming class divides, yet was quite prepared to use troops against strikers - and in 1870 against its own Capital City with massive force. We can learn today then from the distinct national financial capital strategy that dominated the capitalist modernisation of France in the nineteenth century. Today's context is obviously different; yet there are some glimmers as to the implications for any movements against Capital, in the midst of imperial wars, for this is our international situation again today. Today's British sociologists with their Third Way 'progressive' prescriptions, tossed down from Concorde (26) work in an long established elitist tradition.

LESSONS FROM FRANCE 1851 -70: NATIONAL FINANCE CAPITAL

Proudhon complained that French capitalist modernisation was driven by the banks and especially by Rothschild's. One of our latest apologists for the Empire of Global Capital's continuing imperial capitalist modernisation, Niall Ferguson, cut his economic history teeth on an apologetic for Rothschild's (27). As Magraw describes the blunders of Bonapartism's foreign policy, one can see an implicit nationalist strategy stemming from the domination of French capitalism by finance. This had important liberal, imperial and capitalist elements which borrowed but also created conflict with Britain, Germany and Russia. French capitalism was sufficiently powerful to follow nationalist objectives, but sufficiently weak to antagonise all its imperial rivals. Fighting alongside the British in Crimea looked to be a useful start as French imperial Capital, like the British sought to support free trade - which then like today for the financiers - actually meant the free movement of capital and the control of labour. French support for the Polish Revolt in 1863 antagonised the Russian empire. As the British had economic control of much of Latin America, so the bid of French Capital to compete internationally was never clearer than in their rival effort to take over Mexico, but this then succeeded in annoying the US elite. Further attempts to control their international financial lending led to conflict with the British over Egypt and inspired early troubles in Algeria.

As we now see in 2009, the 'progressive' deception asserted by New Labour, is kept on the road by economic expansion. In the France of the 1860s came the beginnings of the French industrial and capitalist revolution. In 1851-69 French industrial output rose by 50 per cent and exports - still largely of wine and silk - rose by 150 per cent. After 1851, the policy of capitalist modernisation meant the attempt at economic expansion and political repression ideologically justified in a populist manner - rather like the regime of George II in the US in the early twenty first century. The Bonapartism of France's Second Empire fell on a failed imperial strategy.

Does the failure of French imperial finance policy in the nineteenth century matter today? Well firstly it matters because in 1870-1 it led directly to the Paris Commune. Secondly, it has coloured the whole French intellectual debate - and that on the 'left'- up to and past 1914. It left for example the powerful French Communist Party still supporting the Algerian War in the 1950s and meant that the French left's critique of imperialism generally - rather than US imperialism - was rather muted until at least 1968. Thirdly, and most importantly, the failures of a national capitalist strategy and its historical impact on the left is a lesson we urgently need to learn again in our new century. In 1871, class war gains could not be swept under a carpet for ever - will they be in 2011? Only the economy allowed the Bonapartist balancing act to survive. This may now be proved true for our global capitalist economy's political balancing act under the likes of New Labour or Obama's Democrats today, as 15 years of global economic boom now ends.

FRENCH WORKERS AND THE RUN UP TO 1870

Although there had been major textile strikes in Lyons in 1831 and 1834 the trade union movement or specifically proletarian militancy was still embryonic in France. 1848 was not a workers revolt, but some workers nevertheless fought in the streets. The working class was neither an ideologically or sociologically homogeneous movement. In the interests of 'modernisation' there had been some labour reforms enacted from above; they did not come out a campaigning working class movement as in England. In Paris, the new industrialisation was dividing the city by class and the new working classes - of whom 44 per cent were in industrial occupations by 1872 - congregated on the left bank of the Seine or in the suburbs like Belleville.

As the 1850s 15 year boom faded with a recession in 1867-8, it ended with a strike wave of 1869-70 that was political as well as economic. Riots were endemic: 900 were arrested in Belleville in one night in June 1869. In the 1869 elections, the first free elections in the Second Empire, the Republican opposition won all the major cities. Proudhon sensed the changes coming: his last book in 1864 was called 'On the Politics of the Working Class'. Marx too - rarely out of London, visited Paris in July 1869. Marx's international workingmen's association was involved in organising strikes in the 1860s in the Lyon area, but was tiny; although a French branch was founded in 1866 its membership was dominated by Proudhon's mutualist ideas. Even in Paris, most industry was in small artisan workshops. Proudhonist policies of protection, education and cheap credit appealed. The Paris section of the International was barely formed before the 1870 war. Nevertheless, like today's Al-Qaeda, the French government - even before 1871 - saw the hand of Marx's 'international' everywhere. In 1868 its leaders were arrested. Two regiments were used against strikers at Schneider's Le Creusot steel factories in 1870 and a brigade sent against the miners. As 1871 was to prove, the employers were in effect supported by bayonets.

Given its imperial and financial motivation, Edwards argues that war with Germany was seized upon in 1870 by the Bonapartist dictatorship as a means of escaping from domestic conflict. As in 1940, the French faced a German army 'better organised, better armed and better led' (28). As in 1914 the French elite played on a historical patriotism and the voices of the International calling for both sets of workers to resist the war was ignored. Fighting alone (in a way the British were not to allow in 1914) the defeat of a French army trapped at Sedan was almost replicated at Verdun two generations later. Despite the abdication of the Emperor in September, the war continued for another eight months. By the winter of 1870 Paris was under siege and starving. For the common people the only recipe that made economic sense was to join the National Guard. In Paris 300,000 are estimated to have joined the army. The control of arms then became one of the keys to the future conflict, as workers led by women seized the artillery on Montmartre in the revolution of March 18th 1871. As in Germany in 1918-19 small arms proliferated: no-one could claim to be a citizen, it was said, unless they had a rifle.

THE COMMUNARDS

After September 1870, the central government's writ did not run to Paris. Kropotkin wrote that the 'government evaporated like a pond of stagnant water in a spring breeze' – a foretaste of St Petersburg in 1917. When the new Commune was elected in February 1871 the French stock exchange did not move. From February to May 1871 events in the exceptional circumstances of a siege moved with great rapidity. There were protests in Limoges, Lyons, Grenoble and Narbonne against the repression of the previous twenty years. In Toulouse a revolt was put down by troops. The prefect appointed by Paris was shot in St Etienne and three days for 'order' to be restored. The most violent revolt took place in Marseilles; the troops attacked here in early April and in a foretaste of Paris there were mass arrests and executions.

But thereafter Paris was on its own. The pre-occupation of the Versailles government was to attack Paris, for which the Germans released 130,000 French troops and another 30,000 former prisoners. The German troops surrounded Paris and left the French army do the dirty work of putting down the rebel city. Seeing this, the Paris Commune became more radical by the week. In 1863 Paris had already voted for the Republican opposition – winning 8 out of 9 seats. In March 1871 elections for the National Guard a number of Blanquist members of the International were elected along with republican workers and representatives of the petty bourgeois. The new President was a Proudhonist and two of his key secretaries were Blanquists. Of the Commune council of 80, 35 were manual workers, 30 were members of the professional classes and 11 came from commerce. Whatever the precise numbers, the feeling was that Paris had been taken over by its working population; a working local government had been created which was outside of the ruling capitalist elite. There was a sense of both popular control and of direct democracy.

In the midst of this exceptional war situation rather like Russia in 1917, or Spain in 1936, the Commune began to initiate increasingly radical reforms. The first decree which more favoured the middle classes was to abolish rents owing from the previous October. Factories were taken over, but only those abandoned by their owners. Increasingly the workers councils began to organize the Louvre arms factories and the distribution of work. A maximum ten hour day was implemented. But as Marx was to criticize and Lenin was to make much of in his case for the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' fighting the war was not given the top priority. It was for Thiers in Versailles (who had finished bottom of the polls in Paris). The insolent workers were to be taught a lesson through massed corpses. As the government troops advanced, the artillery bombardment, as in Berlin in 1919 (29), blew up ordinary houses with abandon. The preservation of Paris which featured so high on the elite agenda in 1914, 1940 and 1944 did not do so against its own workers in 1871.

INTEGRATING THE FRENCH WORKERS: 1914 AND 1995?

Sassoon argues that despite this revolutionary tradition the French socialist movement before 1914 was much weaker than the German. French Marxism before 1914 could not speak to the larger urban petty bourgeois and craft artisans of France (30). This is true but looks only through the lens of intellectual antecedents. The key was the sheer scale of the defeats of 1848 and 1871. Even in the 1930s when the French socialists became the most important in Western Europe, the mark of these crushing defeats, like those in Germany between 1918-33 have stayed with the French revolutionary movement ever since. The French State kept its repressive stance - and sometimes found a violent response. In the General Strikes of 1900-02 95,000 troops were mobilised; in 1906, Clemenceau, later war Prime Minister, flooded Paris with troops and shot workers. Railway strikers were threatened by military call up in 1910.

The socialist party in France also kept its republican antecedents and its bourgeois leaders and inclinations. This is why the revolutionary syndicalists like Sorel - and a major trade union like the CGT - rejected the 'socialists' loudly before 1914. Magraw notes that before 1914 there was a 'deep hostility to the established order'. Sometimes the syndicalists did attempt to take power into their own hands. In Nantes and St Nazaire syndicalist dockers and shipyard workers took over the town hall and resisted troops. Such successes are however fragmentary. The Australians present the only case before 1914 of 'socialists in power'. In Western Europe there was no socialist in any government. As the war broke out, they were co-opted first in France; this made resistance to the war more difficult politically - mutiny became the logical answer by 1916-17.

And what of today? Ian Birchall's book on 'the spectre of Babeuf' is dedicated to the French public sector workers of 1995. In 1995 there was a minor repeat of 1968 for a new generation. *Le Monde* called it the strike against 'globalisation'. It was a major strike of 2 million French public sector workers threatened by the coming of the ravages of neo-liberalism that had defeated the miners in Britain, ten years before, and the working classes of the USA over and over again. Letting the 'free markets' rule took the concerted powers of a police State. This was no 1968, however. The public transport sector came to a halt, but there were no private sector strikes. There was a long tradition of such public sector strikes - in 1912/13 Metro workers were on strike for 9 months.

By 1995 French privatisations had done their work: there was no French State willing to step into to save the workers. It never had, but there was always the hope that it would. As in Italy over the generations, what became more and more apparent in France and elsewhere was the gulf between the political/media/intellectual elite and the common people. Daniel Cohn Bendit self appointed guru of '68 and now one cipher for the new realities - asked people not to 'take away our gains'. Whose gains? (31)

ALTHUSSER: THE DETOURS OF A STALINIST PCF

The French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, became a public figure in France again in the 1990s. Whereas in the 70s I had to encounter Althusser by Re-reading Capital myself, the new rather morbid interest in Althusser's murdering his wife (32), accompanied the virtual destruction of the Communist Party (PCF) as a electoral force. In the 2007 French Presidential election first round a divided and sectarian left managed 9 per cent of the vote, while the PCF's candidate took less than 2 per cent.

The PCF after 1945 had seemed to Althusser to embody the hopes of his generation for a new Europe - that arose from the anti fascist resistance. By the late 1940s the PCF in the traditions of French Statism placed itself firmly on the Russian side against US imperialism. Althusser joined the PCF in 1948; sadly for him and the French left, the Cold War led the PCF to retreat back inside its Stalinist fortress. The hopes and the decline are reflected in the PCF's membership, which increased from 500,000 in 1945 to 800,000 in 1946, but had fallen back to 300,000 by the time of the Hungarian up-rising in 1956. Nevertheless, the Communist vote remained steady at 25 per cent and remained above 20 per cent until 1981 (33). Althusser renounced his Catholicism to join the party, the PCF embraced the old certainties of faith: outside of the party, there was no salvation. Althusser finally saw the vacuum of his position by 1977, a few years before the Communist electorate. He then tried to position a left 'Maoism' against Stalinism. By then with the Chinese move to State capitalism ever clearer this theoretical attempt also ran into the sands. Now no concrete left State models remain. One can only build again on the lessons. And one of the lessons of Althusser is not to believe in illusions, particularly those that need theoretical detours round reality to get us there. Althusser's despair was also reflected the Latin Marxisms of Mediterranean Europe coming to terms with further defeats - in Portugal, Spain and Greece, as well as in Italy and France.

Apart from the China card, part of Althusser's other appeal was his critique from the left of the PCF's attempt to create an 'opening to the right' - by negotiations with Mitterrand's Socialist party. This Popular Front-ism Elliott argues seriously clouded the PCF's reaction to 1968. A PCF leadership was anxious to keep in with the Socialist Party's conceptions of legality in the 80s. Althusser argued that students needed to stay with the 'working class' leadership. The PCF was in such a hurry to get on with the new Popular Front that it wanted to put the potential revolution on its doorstep behind it as quickly as possible. Elliott argues that the PCF had even failed as a reformist organisation. Its vanguardism and dictatorial inheritance were an inhibition in 1968 and beyond; permanently detrimental to the French left. So in 1968 it was 'dragged along by events' and 'responded by trying to bring them down to its level'.

Althusser's own personal crisis after 1977 likewise seems to mirror the crisis of the French left and of French Marxism in the years after '68. When re-assessing his earlier work on Althusser Elliott writes in 2006 of the 'present acute crisis of Marxism' which flows dialectically out of the crisis of the left as a whole (34). This crisis remains.

STORMING HEAVEN: A TIGER LEAP IN TIME

In two key West European nations – France and Germany - we have seen then the crisis for the left at work in the history of defeated and lost revolutions. Does the more open anarchist experience of Italy and Spain began to give us any answers? In all this, it is vitally important to remember the final experience of the Paris Commune. As with all counter revolutionary eras, the destruction of the Commune by the French army turned into a blood-bath. All those captured at barricades, including women were shot. Up to 50,000 may have been killed, and 100,000 were dead, jailed or exiled.

Paris was ruled by martial law for a further five years - until 1876. The depth of the fright given to the ruling bourgeois is the only explanation one can give for the extent of the counter revolutionary violence. All of the leading French intellectuals of the Second Empire, including Zola and Flaubert, attacked the Commune. One English journalist reported an officer shooting a prisoner in the face with the words: it's the stonemasons who would rule us now'. The rulers had rightly seen the threat to their power.

Marx saw it too. He never claimed the Commune as a proletarian up-rising, even less a socialist revolution. What he did claim was that the Paris Commune provided an embryonic form, in exceptional war circumstances of what a socialist democracy – of what a real dictatorship of the proletariat - would look like. It provided a political form in which the people could then work out their economic and social emancipation. In Paris in 1871 this was always going to be a folly that proved impossible. It turned, as Marx had warned, into a disaster for the French workers' movement, which even as late as 1914 had barely recovered. Indeed the ease of the elite persuasion of the peasantry to war in 1914 may well have stemmed from the destruction of so much opposition in 1871. Only two per cent of French soldiers refused to enlist when conscripted; most showed a 'dutiful resignation' (35). Marx's political and economic critique of the putsch strategy is an important lesson in the story – not only on Paris in 1871, but for Leninist Russia in 1917, Germany in 1919-23, Italy in 1921-2 and Spain in 1936-7. There may yet be lessons for today's hopes in Venezuela. The hidden history of the German Republic I have shown was based on the military destruction of any independent workers movement at the behest of a nominally socialist party. Magraw's last paragraph on France comes to a similar conclusion: the 'French Republic was born amid the mass slaughter of the Parisian working class'.

In a France of 1871 where Capital had barely ruled and was nothing like fully developed, as the last 140 years have shown, Benjamin saw the Paris Commune as a 'tiger leap in time'. Blanqui thought it 'a universal evocation of revolutionary social consciousness'. Edwards concludes that it was 'a truly revolutionary event. A revolution of more than its own time'. Marx wrote in April 1871 that the Communards were trying to 'storm heaven' (36). The example of the French common people attempting to storm heaven in 1871 was rooted in the experience of 1789-93. 1968 was to be its shadow. So far Capital has been able to absorb all the storms that ordinary people have been able to attempt against it.

END NOTES

1. Judt, T. Marxism and the French Left. Oxford University Press, 1986 p 2. As Judt comments it even gives the opponents of the left a common ground. In the 2009 EU elections, it seemed as if Sarkozy was able again to steal the left's clothes in appearing to defend France from the effects of the 'Anglo American' recession.
2. Edwards, J. The Paris Commune, 1871. London, Eyre & Spottiswoode 1971 Preface
3. Lenin, V. I. State and Revolution.
4. Marx, K. Civil War in France in The First International and After. Political Writings Volume 3. London, Penguin 1974; hereafter Marx (1870).
5. Fernbach, D. Introduction to Marx, K. The First International p 30-34. The quote is p 32.
6. Rude, G. The French Revolution. London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson 1988 p 165.
7. Hobsbawm, E. Echoes of the Marseillaise. Two Centuries Look Back on the French Revolution. London, Verso 1990 p xi – xiv.
8. Eley, G. Forging Democracy. History of the Left in Europe. 1850-2000. Oxford University Press, 2002 p vii – xviii, 503.
9. Aron, R. The Elusive Revolution. The Anatomy of a Student Revolt. 1968, London Pall Mall 1969. Having led the way in justifying Vichy France, Aron quickly put together the Establishment line that 1968 was just a student revolt.
10. Ross, K. May 1968 and its Afterlines. University of Chicago 2002 p 3-4. The quote is p 196. By the 2007 Presidential election Sarkozy was inverting Marxist language to speak of 'liquidating' the 'spectre' of '68. Daily Telegraph 30 April 2007.
11. Anderson, P. Lineages Of the Absolutist State London, New Left Review 1974, this ed Verso, 1980, p 86 -90. The Crisis of the Middle Ages – roughly from 1300 onwards is dealt with in more detail in my Chapter on Scotland.
12. Barrington Moore, Jr – Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy. Lord And Peasant in the Modern World. 1966, this ed London, Penguin 1973.
13. Cameron, E. The European Reformation Oxford University Press 1991 p 288-9.
14. Lindberg, C. The European Reformations. Oxford Blackwell 1996 p 275-96.
15. Anderson p 93-111, Barrington Moore p 63-85.

16. Hobsbawm, E.J. - The Age of Revolution 1962; This Ed London, Abacus 1996 p 74-84; the quote is p 83. The Turgot quote is Barrington Moore p 68.
17. Roberts, J.M. – The Penguin History of the World London 1976, this ed Penguin, 1995 p 708-9, the quotes are Barrington Moore, p 78 & 69 and see p 75-110.
18. Hobsbawm (1962) p 73- 94. The quotes are p 90 & 94.
19. Magraw, R. France. 1815-1914. The Bourgeois Century. Oxford, Fontana 1983 p 17, Hobsbawm (1962) p 91, 98, 217-8.
20. Marx, K. Class Struggles in France in Surveys From Exile p 37-9. Magraw p 23-6, Barrington Moore p 103.
21. Poirier, A, Meet the President, Our Perfect CEO. New Statesman, 20 August 2007.
22. Birchall, I. The Spectre of Babeuf. London, MacMillan 1997 writes of a Babeuf who was ‘born in the mud’ and post Stalin presents an opportunity to re-discover a genuine (French) socialist tradition p 1-10.
23. Bernstein, S. Auguste Blanqui and the Art of Insurrection. London, Lawrence & Wishart 1971 p 7-47, Hobsbawm p 140,369, Magraw p 92.
24. Hobsbawm, E.J. Age of Capital. 1848-1875. London, Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1975 p 21-30, Bernstein p 113-38, Magraw p 96 - 125, Roberts p 722-3, Hobsbawm (1962) p 140-6.
25. Bernstein p 9,139-85, 299- 311 Quotes are p 335, 232-3, 9. Also see Hobsbawm (1975) p 26 – 34, Magraw p 128-9. Marx is quoted by Magraw p 135. For the Carbonari see my Italian chapter 11.
26. Giddens, A is happy to tell us that his thinking in Over to You Mr Brown. How Labour Can Win Again. London, Polity Press 2007 is begun on a Concorde flight p xi. For the less well expensed work on France, see Magraw p 159, 187, Edwards p 3, Hobsbawm (1962) p 135, 217. On Germany via another ex Director of LSE and Dahrendorf’s ‘industrial feudalism’ see Wilde (2006) Chapter 3.
27. Ferguson, N. The House of Rothschild. The World’s Banker. 1849-1999. London, Viking 1999 who points to Rothschild’s role in funding the British end of the Napoleonic wars and then the expansion of railways in both Britain and France p xxiii, 85, 103.
28. Magraw p 159-68, 187-191, Edwards p 2,10-17, 32. The quote is from Davies, N. Europe: a History. London, Pimlico 1997 p 868.

29. Edwards p23, 40-7, 176-206, 264. Horne, A. The Fall of Paris. The Siege and the Commune 1870-71.1965; this ed, London Reprint 1967 describes Paris in ruins p419-20.
30. Sassoon, D. One Hundred Years of Socialism. The West European Left in the Twentieth Century. London, Tauris, 1996 p 10-15.
31. Sassoon p 27-8 on the Great War incorporation; the quote is Magraw p310, see also p 307-11. On Cohn Bendit, see Ross p 182, 211.
32. Althusser, L & Balibar, E. Reading Capital. London, New Left Books 1970 was 'required reading' on the left when I took my PhD at Sussex. For my reading of Capital see Wilde (2006) Chapters 1&2.
33. Price, R. A Concise History of France. Cambridge University Press, 1993 p 335-41.
34. Elliott, G. Althusser: The Detour of Theory Leiden, Brill 2006. A rather quick summary of a stimulating work; see p xi – xviii, 214-5. The quote is p 220-1.
35. Edwards p 272, 330, 351. Magraw p 191-201; the quote is p 201. Horne, a military journalist, in a disappointing book, blames the division on the left subsequently on the Paris up-rising (p 430). In my opinion, this is a complete misreading of the politics.
36. Edwards p 360-5, Magraw quotes p 375, 200. Hobsbawm's conclusion for 1848 stands also for 1871: neither global capitalism - nor French Capital - was on its last legs in 1848; in hindsight it was hardly getting into its stride. See (1990) p xiv. Chris Harman whose work on Germany is so enlightening also uses the title 'Storming Heaven' for his chapter on France in A Peoples History of the World. London, Bookmarks 1999 p 368.