

Shoemakers and Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century Paris: The Société Laborieuse des Cordonniers- Bottiers

Michael David Sibal^{*}

The relatively long existence of the Société Laborieuse des cordonniers-bottiers, a shoemakers' mutual society begun in the early 1830s in Paris, illustrates both the strength and the inadequacy of utopian socialism as a remedy for the misery of skilled urban workers. Like so many of the latter, shoemakers suffered in the first half of the century from declining wages and depended increasingly for outlets on the merchant-dominated trade in slops and in ready-made goods for the export trade. The Société Laborieuse, under vaguely Fourierist influence, provided some mutual benefits and also found its members jobs, though mostly in the slop-trade, thus reinforcing the system it sought to replace. In the 1848 Revolution it set up a cooperative workshop which went bankrupt in 1852; the mutual society survived with dwindling membership, increasingly out-of-date in modern industry, down to the eve of the 1914 war.

La carrière relativement longue de la Société Laborieuse des cordonniers-bottiers, société mutuelle parisienne qui débuta autour de 1830, illustre les forces et les faiblesses du socialisme utopique comme remède aux difficultés des gens de métier qualifiés dans un milieu urbain. Les cordonniers, comme tant d'autres, durent accepter des revenus réduits pendant la première moitié du siècle; ils durent recourir de plus en plus au travail de commission (production de masse pour l'exportation) et de confection (produits bas de gamme), soumis au contrôle du capitalisme marchand. La Société Laborieuse, d'inspiration vaguement fouriériste, fournissait quelques secours mutuels à ses membres. Elle leur servait aussi de bureau de placement, cependant la plupart des emplois qu'elle leur trouva était dans la confection, renforçant ainsi un système que sa propre idéologie condamnait. Pendant la Révolution de 1848, la Société fonda un atelier coopératif qui fut faillié en 1852; la société mutuelle elle-même allaît survivre, avec un nombre déclinant d'adhérents, dépassée par les changements économiques, jusqu'à la veille de la Guerre de 1914.

The nineteenth-century French working class can most fruitfully be studied trade by trade. Christopher Johnson's essay on Paris tailors is a model of this kind. By examining changing conditions in a single trade, it demonstrates how merchant capitalism undermined artisanal independence and provoked labour militancy.¹ This article deals with another important Paris trade: shoemaking (which includes the closely related bootmaking trade). Between 1789 and 1848, Paris shoemakers, like most other skilled workers, experienced a deterioration in working and living conditions. One response was militant labour action

^{*} The author is at Concordia University and wishes to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which has so generously supported his research on the Parisian working class in the early nineteenth century.

1. Christopher H. Johnson, "Economic Change and Artisan Discontent: the Tailors' History, 1800-48," in Roger Price (ed.), *Revolution and Reaction: 1848 and the Second French Republic* (New York, 1975), pp. 87-114.

to redress specific grievances. Another was utopian socialism, in which some craftsmen thought to find a permanent, more general remedy to social ills.

While many individual shoemakers embraced one or another of the variant forms of utopianism (they were, for example, the second largest occupational group among Etienne Cabet's Icarians),² there was in the 1840s a single shoemakers' association under Fourierist influence with five or six hundred members. That was the *Société Laborieuse des Cordonniers-Bottiers*, founded on 1 October 1840. An obscure society, it is nonetheless of more than anecdotal interest, for it was part of that broad movement for social reform that flourished in France from the 1820s and came to dominate events in 1848. In those years, socialist intellectuals, left-wing revolutionaries, and labour activists, appalled by the individualistic capitalist society developing around them, advocated alternative forms of social relations.³ The *Société Laborieuse* emerged, prospered and ultimately declined within that environment. Just as its initial success illustrates the appeal that utopian socialism held for skilled craftsmen in deteriorating trades, so its failure demonstrates the inability of utopianism to come to grips with the fundamental causes of the social crisis and to propose a practical solution to it.

I

Shoemaking in nineteenth-century France was the trade of men incapable of doing anything better. A father might well threaten his son, "si tu n'étudies pas, je te ferai cordonnier."⁴ The shoemaker's poverty was proverbial enough for St. Crispin, his patron saint, to become a popular metaphor for destitution, as a dictionary indicated in 1808:

Le Saint-Crépin. Tous les outils nécessaires à un cordonnier, pour pratiquer son métier. On donne aussi ce nom au bagage d'une personne peu fortunée. Figurément, le patrimoine d'un pauvre homme; tout ce qu'il possède.⁵

(In fact, in 1833 a shoemaker could still buy the few simple tools he needed, excluding his workbench, for only 24.45 francs, or about one week's earnings for a skilled craftsman.)⁶ Pierre Vinçard, a left-wing journalist in the 1840s and 1850s, contended that poverty drove many shoemakers mad: "en sentant l'injustice ils exaltent leur imagination outre-mesure et ... un grand nombre se trouvent frappés d'aliénation mentale."⁷ It is more certain that their physical health suffered from a sedentary life, hunched work posture, and fourteen to sixteen hours a day (or more) labouring in stuffy rooms that reeked of fumes from leather and burning candles. "Un vieil ouvrier [cordonnier] est une rareté," noted the police in 1807, and Pauline Roland, the celebrated feminist and socialist, described shoemaking in 1850 as "une de ces industries meurtrières, qui moissonnent sûrement le

2. Christopher H. Johnson, *Utopian Communism in France: Cabet and the Icarians, 1839-1851* (Ithaca, New York, 1974), p. 153.

3. See Paul E. Corcoran (ed.), *Before Marx: Socialism and Communism in France, 1830-48* (London, 1983).

4. Charles Vincent, "Exposition universelle: Cordonnerie", *Le Siècle*, 13 August 1855. See also Jacques Rancière, "The Myth of the Artisan: Critical Reflections on a Category of Social History," in Steven L. Kaplan and Cynthia J. Koepp (eds.), *Work in France: Representations, Meaning, Organization, and Practice* (Ithaca and London, 1986), pp. 318-19.

5. Hautel, *Dictionnaire du Bas-langage, ou des manières de parler usitées parmi le peuple*, 2 vols (Paris, 1808), 1:257, 2:329.

6. "Frais d'établissement des petits métiers dans Paris," *Le Magasin pittoresque*, 1 (1833):19.

7. Pierre Vinçard, untitled manuscript beginning "Les cordonniers de Paris," BHVP (Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris), Ms 1043, fol. 385-88.

plus grand nombre de ceux qui s'y livrent. ...Presque tous sont hâves, maigres, chétifs, et leur regard sombre, désolé, semble accuser une société marâtre."⁸

The typical shoemaker came from a poor family. He began learning the craft at twelve or thirteen, either under his father or as apprentice to a master-craftsman, with whom he often boarded. Master shoemakers established in their own shops rarely took on apprentices; it was the poorer masters, working in their own homes, who trained apprentices, whom they exploited as cheap if unskilled labour. Apprenticeship, which usually cost a one-hundred-franc fee, lasted two to two and one-half years. If the boy's parents were unable to pay this fee, the master generally kept the boy (and his unremunerated labour) for as long as three or four years. "C'est ainsi que nous commençons notre carrière," a shoemaker recalled in 1841, "en mangeant de pain bis et de la soupe à l'oignon, et en faisant *quatorze* ou *quinze* heures de travail chaque jour." After apprenticeship came several years work as a *semainier*, doing simple jobs for a low weekly wage. Finally, at sixteen to eighteen, the young man could set out into the world as a fully-qualified journeyman, but since experienced workers were more in demand, he was at first frequently unemployed. Only as his skills improved could he expect higher and more regular earnings. Marriage and children followed in his late twenties or early thirties, which increased his expenditures and virtually assured perpetual poverty. A shoemaker was old at forty or fifty, and failing skills brought in lower wages: "plus nous avançons en âge, moins l'on veut de nous dans les magasins, parce que notre vie s'éteint et que nos forces nous ont abandonnés." He then had to take whatever work he could get and hope to supplement it with a position as *concierge*.⁹

The already poor conditions in shoemaking undoubtedly worsened as merchant capital transformed the trade in France as in other nations.¹⁰ Before the French Revolution, the shoemakers' guild maintained the economic hegemony of the independent master-craftsman, who owned a small retail shop, employed a handful of journeymen and apprentices, and sold directly to his customers, for whom he made shoes to order.¹¹ The guild forbade production outside the workshop by homeworkers, whose tools and merchandise were liable to seizure by its inspectors.¹² The D'Allarde Law of 2 March 1791 abolished

8. Dubois, Prefect of Police, "Statistique des ouvriers de Paris," 1 March 1807, AN (Archives Nationales), F12 502, reprinted in Alphonse Aulard, *Paris sous le Premier Empire*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1912-1923), 3:828-47; Pauline Roland, "Revue des associations ouvrières: Les Cordonniers," *La République*, 3, no. 181 (30 June 1850).

9. This description is based mainly on Coriot, "Revue industrielle: Enquête: Cordonniers," *Le Populaire de 1841*, 2, nos. 5, 7 (7 August, 9 October 1842), from which both quotations are taken, supplemented by Vincent, "Cordonnerie," and reports by Angibout, 9 June 1848, Colas, June 1848, Delaulne, 9 June 1848, and Pradel-Huet, 10 June 1848, AN, C 943, pièces 236-240. On *semainiers*, see also *Grand Larousse de la langue française*, 7 vols. (Paris, 1971-78), 6:5443, which quotes this from 1833: "c'est un jeune ou vieux garçon, ou plutôt un crétin qui n'a pas assez d'intelligence pour faire un soulier à lui tout seul, et se met à la semaine pour coudre et faire le moins malin de l'ouvrage."

10. Eric Hobsbawm and Joan Scott, "Political Shoemakers," *Past and Present*, 89 (November 1980):86-114; E.P. Thompson and Eileen Yeo, *The Unknown Mayhew: Selections from the Morning Chronicle 1849-1850* (London, 1971), 71-73, 234ff.; Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millenium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York, 1978), pp. 38-42; Sean Willentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1789-1850* (New York and Oxford, 1984), pp. 124-27.

11. On the structure of the Paris shoemakers' guild, see "La cordonnerie," in Alfred Franklin, *Les Magasins de nouveautés*, vol. 4 (Paris, 1898), pp. 165-264.

12. Paul Lacroix and Alphonse Duchesne, *Histoire de la chaussure depuis l'antiquité la plus reculée jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris, 1862), p. 142.

the guilds and subsequently homeworkers — variously known as *chambrelans*, *façonniers* or *ouvriers à façon* — proliferated in most Parisian industries.¹³ This was especially true in shoemaking, where there was no significant mechanization that required the establishment of large factories. Although machines for cutting leather and sewing or nailing it together did alarm some masters and journeymen after 1815, these produced only the poorest quality footwear and were hardly used before the late 1840s.¹⁴

But if shoemaking underwent no technological revolution, it experienced profound structural change. The bespoke trade — the production of quality made-to-measure shoes for individual customers — lost ground to *confection* (known as the slop-trade in contemporary England), which turned out inexpensive ready-made shoes in fixed sizes for markets at home and abroad. The domestic market grew as consumer demand increased among the urban masses. A Paris leather-merchant reported in 1831, “L’ouvrier avait presque cessé de porter des sabots et contractait l’habitude de porter des souliers.”¹⁵ Then the first large shoe stores opened about 1840 and sold shoddy mass-produced goods that more discerning clients ridiculed: “On réussit presque partout à faire des chaussures in-usables et à les vendre à des prix fabuleusement réduits. C’est encore la confection qui a produit ce miracle.”¹⁶

Foreign markets also expanded. *Commission* — the ordering of ready-made shoes for export — originated by most accounts in 1814, when a Parisian businessman returned from South America with orders for French-made shoes.¹⁷ The exporter or *commissionnaire* placed his orders with master-craftsmen, who often subcontracted the work; the exporter might also deal directly with homeworkers himself. Few orders required great skill, since in this branch of shoemaking, “Faire vite importe souvent plus que faire bien.”¹⁸ By 1848 Paris was supplying shoes to markets on the European continent, in England, and in cities from Buenos Aires to Calcutta. Some firms, a newspaper reported in 1833, “ne travaillent que pour l’étranger, qui en occupent 4 et 500 [ouvriers].”¹⁹ Militants in most Parisian trades were implacably hostile to the *commissionnaires*, who embodied the power of merchant capital over artisanal production. They were denounced as “ces nouveaux seigneurs, dont la noblesse ... est fondée sur des sacs d’écus,” and as “les plus audacieux, les plus adroits, les plus éhontés, les plus rapaces et les plus impitoyables,” for hiring the poorest and most defenceless workers and exploiting them mercilessly with the lowest wages.²⁰

13. The Chamber of Commerce estimated in 1804 that two-thirds of Parisian workers were *chambrelans*, a claim that was certainly exaggerated. See its minutes for 23 messidor an XIII (12 July 1805), Archives de la Chambre de Commerce de Paris.

14. Report to Minister of the Interior, 10 January 1816, and assorted correspondence, AN, F12 2283; report by Prefect of Police, 3-4 November 1816, AN, F7 3837; André Ratouis in *La Cordonnerie*, 10 November 1879, as quoted in J. Barberet, “Cordonniers,” in his *Le Travail en France: Monographies professionnelles*, 7 vols. (Paris, 1886-90), 5:174.

15. Testimony of Durand, négociant en cuirs, 21 March 1831, in “Extrait du Registre des délibérations de la Chambre de Commerce de Paris,” AN, F12 2713.

16. Jules Simon (1878), quoted in Barberet, *Le Travail en France*, 5:175.

17. *Rapport des délégués des ouvriers parisiens à l’Exposition de Londres en 1862* (Paris, 1862-64), p. 30; Bodart in *Moniteur de la cordonnerie*, 16 March 1888, as quoted in Barberet, *Le Travail en France*, 5:181-82.

18. Roland, “Les cordonniers.”

19. *Le Constitutionnel*, 6 November 1833.

20. Pierre Vinçard, “Les commissionnaires en marchandises,” *L’Union: Bulletin mensuel des ouvriers*, redigé par eux-mêmes, July 1844.

Confection and *commission* undermined the independence of the skilled craftsman and widened the gap between small masters and workers who produced shoes, and the wholesalers and retailers who marketed them. Most production took place outside the shoeshops, which became little more than distribution centres for the storage of raw materials, the cutting of leather (in small shops the employer acted as his own cutter, while large shops might employ several cutters) and the stocking of the completed footwear. Workers only occasionally assembled the cut leather into shoes in the shop itself; more often they worked at home. As a shoe manufacturer explained in 1848:

Les grandes fabriques de chaussures en gros n'ont en frais de personnel que des employés, des coupeurs & des contremaitres. L'ouvrier, lui, ne s'y présente que pour livrer la marchandise confectionnée en échanges de nouvelle qui lui est confiée et toucher son salaire qui lui est compté immédiatement.²¹

This was far from ideal from the worker's point of view. The manufacturer supplied the leather, but the shoemaker himself had to pay for the candles he used, as well as for "les fournitures," which included brushes, thread, wax, and pitch. He brought the finished work back to the employer on his own time and often had to wait an hour or two for new work to be prepared for him; sometimes he had to return for it later.²²

There was an obvious link between *confection* and shoemakers' poor earnings. Wages (or more accurately, piece-rates, which varied according to the type and quality of the shoe) were kept low to hold down production costs in the face of foreign competition, and there was a downward trend in rates during the July Monarchy. One master claimed that the shoemaker's earnings fell by half between 1830 and 1848, especially in *commission*.²³ Another calculated more precisely that a "good [male] worker" who earned twenty-two francs a week in 1835 could earn twenty-one francs in 1848, a decrease of less than 5 per cent, but that the weekly income of an "ordinary worker" fell by 17 per cent, from eighteen to fifteen francs, and an "inferior worker" (the most common in *confection*) suffered a 44 per cent loss, from sixteen down to nine francs a week. The weekly earnings of "good [female] workers" went from twelve to ten francs (17 per cent loss) and those of "inferior [female] workers" from nine to six francs (33 per cent).²⁴ The situation was made worse by the common practice in *confection* of stockpiling footwear for later sale. This made it possible for *commissionnaires* and merchant-manufacturers routinely to increase their own production during the semi-annual slow season (*morte-saison*) in the bespoke trade in December-January and July-August, when unemployment soared. Most shoemakers were then desperate for any work at all, and the very best could be hired at the lowest rates, which might bring them in as little as 1.25 or 1.50 francs a day.²⁵

The first statistical analysis of Paris shoemaking is to be found in an industrial survey of the capital undertaken by the Paris Chamber of Commerce in 1847-1848.²⁶ It counted

21. Report by Pradel-Huet, 10 June 1848.

22. André Futelet, "Ouvriers cordonniers," *La Ruche populaire*, 6 (1845):39-41; "Enquête industrielle: Cordonniers," *Le Bien-être Universel*, 1, 6(30 March 1851):8-9.

23. Reports by Delaulne, 9 June 1848, and Colas [June 1848].

24. Report by Angibout, 9 June 1848.

25. Report by Angibout, 9 June 1848; *Statistique de l'industrie à Paris, résultant de l'Enquête faite par la Chambre de commerce pour les années 1847-48* (Paris, 1851), 2e partie, p. 230.

26. *Ibid.* The analysis of shoemaking and bootmaking, from which the following information is taken, is contained in, 1st part, pp. 109-18, and 2e partie, pp. 227-42. For a summary of the information, see, Mlle Rudolphe, "L'industrie parisienne de la chaussure," *Bulletin de la Société d'études historiques, géographiques et scientifiques de la région parisienne*, no. 102-03 (January-June 1959):1-12. It has been pointed out recently

6,052 masters in footwear and 20,929 people working for them: 13,782 men, 6,713 women, and 434 children. Most of the six thousand masters were very small producers indeed: 2,699 worked alone or with the unpaid assistance of family; 1,605 employed a single journeyman; 1,327 employed two to ten workers; and only 421 had more than ten employees. Most smaller masters could hardly have been better-off than the typical journeyman. They worked as hard, their income was no less meagre, and they were equally victims of unpredictable market fluctuations. As the police had already noted in 1807, “on en voit beaucoup acheter au jour le jour la chandelle unique qui éclaire deux ouvriers.”²⁷

The Chamber of Commerce divided the masters and workers into two principal groups. The bespoke trade comprised 11,898 people, including *raccommodeurs* and *carreleurs*, who did shoe repairs; 10,260 people worked in *confection*. The Chamber of Commerce also identified a third group of 2,980 *façonniers* (more than half of them masters) who regularly made up orders from *commissionnaires* or master-craftsmen. It is not clear why they were designated separately and they are best considered as working in *confection*. Thus *confection* dominated the industry: it employed just under half the men and about two-thirds of the women. Moreover, the majority of workers in both branches of the industry were homeworkers: 77.4 per cent of the men and 64.4 per cent of the women worked *en chambre*.²⁸

This prevalence of homework made placement agencies essential intermediaries between isolated, widely scattered workers and their large-scale employers. Shoemaking was therefore one of the few Parisian trades in which almost all hiring took place through agencies.²⁹ The guild had supervised hiring until 1791. Several shoe-merchants then took over, charging journeymen ten or fifteen centimes for every job found, until 1803, when Prosper Lemoine, a former notary's clerk, opened an agency for the Paris leather trades. The police granted him a monopoly in 1804, but his control was challenged in 1816 by members of the newly formed *syndicat* (employer's association). They accused Lemoine of overcharging workers and of supplying labour to manufacturers who produced low-quality goods that discredited the trade. Lemoine countered that the masters wanted to control the labour market themselves so as better to exploit their workers and drive down wages.³⁰ Whatever the truth of these charges, Lemoine lost his monopoly and new privately-run placement agencies appeared. There were two of them in 1830 and three in the 1840s. An employer with work to be done deposited a “placement card” at an agency. A worker took the card, paid a fee of fifty centimes and then, card in hand, went to see the employer.

that there are methodological flaws in the data assembled by the Chamber of Commerce, most notably a tendency to swell the number of employers by including homeworkers among them. See Joan M. Scott, “Statistical Representations of Work: the Politics of the Chamber of Commerce's *Statistique de l'Industrie à Paris, 1847-48*,” in Kaplan and Koeppe, *Work in France*: pp. 335-63.

27. Dubois, “*Statistique des ouvriers de Paris*.” One such master was Heck, a shoemaker on the Rue du Temple who went bankrupt in 1807; his personal property was worth only 464 francs, and this included tools worth 60 francs and shoes and unused leather valued at 50 francs; he owed 3700 francs, principally to various tanners who had supplied him with leather: Archives de Paris, D 11 U3 40, doss. 2542.

28. *Statistique de l'industrie à Paris*, 1e partie, pp. 109, 118, 2e partie, p. 227.

29. “Relevé des articles ouverts aux ouvriers du 1er janvier 1826 au 31 décembre 1835,” APP [Archives de la Préfecture de Police (Paris)], D/b 118.

30. Inspecteur-général des bureaux de placement to Prefect of Police, 4 November 1810, APP, D/b 120; Prosper Lemoine, fils, *Mémoire justificatif pour M. Lemoine, préposé au placement des ouvriers-fabricants en cuirs de la Ville de Paris, contre les tentatives faites par quelques envieux pour s'emparer de son emploi* (Paris, [1817]), BN (Bibliothèque Nationale), Ln27 12,235; Wirtz and Macé, *Réponse des cordonniers de Paris au mémoire du Sieur Lemoine* (Paris, [1817]), BN, Vp 28,399.

The job often lasted only a week or two (and sometimes even less) and the worker therefore had to return frequently to the agency. Shoemakers disliked the agencies and regularly complained that the fees were exorbitant, especially when the job was a small order worth only a few francs.³¹ Nothing was done to remedy the situation.

Yet shoemakers in France, like those in other countries, were generally noted for political and social radicalism.³² Those who worked together *en chambrée*, for example, "ont pris l'habitude de débattre les questions qui occupent leur esprit."³³ This did not translate into labour activity. Since most shoemakers worked in relative isolation at home, they were particularly difficult to mobilize for action.³⁴ Until the 1830s, the only basis for coordinated labour protest was their journeymen's brotherhood or *compagnonnage*. Shoemakers developed a *compagnonnage* as early as the mid-seventeenth century, but it disappeared before the French Revolution and was revived only in 1808.³⁵ In 1813 the police raided the Paris branch, which had 358 members (only about seven per cent of the shoemakers working in the capital), and charged six journeymen with illegal labour activities.³⁶

The shoemakers' record of protest hardly put them in the forefront of the Paris labour movement. There were two strikes during the French Revolution. Journeymen assembled on the Champs-Élysées in August 1789 to impose a minimum piece-rate and they later took part in the strike movement of June 1791.³⁷ No other shoemakers' strike turns up in the daily reports of the Paris police over the next forty years. Yet, in October and November 1833, militant shoemakers launched a well-organized strike for higher wages. Their resistance society, the *Corporation des Ouvriers Cordonniers*, was one of the more ideologically advanced trade associations to appear in the 1830s. It proposed to unite all shoemakers, federate with workers in other trades, raise piece-rates and collect "un capital social" to finance a producers' cooperative that would provide work to all unemployed shoemakers. It was patterned after the conspiratorial and republican *Société des Droits de l'Homme*, with hundreds of members grouped into "sections" of twenty, and the whole headed by an elected twelve-man executive committee. Police repression destroyed this association in December 1833.³⁸ Shoemakers struck again in July and August 1840. This time, a meeting between elected delegates from both sides negotiated a settlement that raised the rates paid for low-quality shoes.³⁹ Thus, the results of shoemakers' labour activities was not particularly impressive, which may explain why by 1840 there were some prepared to accept another approach to ameliorate conditions.

31. See, for example, comments by Futelet, "Ouvriers cordonniers."

32. Hobsbawm and Scott, "Political Shoemakers."

33. Vincent, "Exposition universelle: Cordonnerie."

34. *Rapports des délégués des ouvriers parisiens*, p. 56.

35. Cynthia Truant, "Compagnonnage: Symbolic Action and the Defense of Workers' Rights in France, 1700-1848" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1978), pp. 72-73, 259-70.

36. Report by Prefect of Police, 11 February 1813, AN, F7 4236, doss. 5. There were then an estimated five thousand shoemakers in Paris. See report by Prefect of Police, April 1813, in [Durand], *De la condition des ouvriers de Paris de 1789 jusqu'en 1841* (Paris, 1841), pp. 107-08.

37. *Les Révolutions de Paris*, 3 September 1789; *Feuille de Jour*, no. 161 (10 June 1791).

38. *Fédération de tous les ouvriers de France: Règlement de la corporation des ouvriers cordonniers* (Paris, n.d.), BN, Lb51 4783; Octave Festy, *Le Mouvement ouvrier au début de la Monarchie de Juillet (1830-1834)* (Paris, 1906), pp. 250-54; J.P. Aguet, *Les Grèves sous la Monarchie de Juillet* (Geneva, 1954), pp. 92-94; William H. Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 209-13.

39. Police reports, July-August 1840, AN, F7, Aguet, *Les Grèves*, pp. 199-200.

II

The *Société Laborieuse des Cordonniers-Bottiers de Paris* originated in an unsuccessful attempt to found a shoemakers' association in 1831. Its failure was later blamed on "les tracasseries et l'influence de la police."⁴⁰ Shoemakers tried several times to renew the attempt and finally, Pauline Roland reported, "quelques hommes de bonne volonté" (whom she did not identify) got together enough money to set up the *Société Laborieuse* on 1 October 1840.⁴¹ Laurent Héronville, organizer of the earlier association, became its first manager.

Héronville was born in Paris in September 1802. He worked as a shoemaker from 1815 to 1838 but, like many bright young artisans of his generation, he aspired to intellectual pursuits that would raise him from his humble condition. He developed advanced political and social ideas, wrote amateur verse against the July Monarchy ("ma muse populaire stigmatisa le système de honte et d'infamie imposé à la France pendant dix-sept ans"), and read widely. He later attributed his socialism to "l'expérience d'une longue pratique, jointe aux connaissances théoriques ... puisées dans les discours de la Convention [de 1792-1795], dans Babeuf, Owen, Saint-Simon, Fourier, Louis Blanc...."⁴² Héronville finally left manual labour behind in June 1839, when he registered as "gérant et seul propriétaire" of *Le Nouveau Monde*, "un journal non-politique ... et consacré au développement de la Théorie de Charles Fourier." He was in fact only the business manager, lending his name to the enterprise for legal reasons. Jean Czynski, the editor, controlled and owned the newspaper.⁴³ It was Héronville, however, who stood trial on 4 July 1840 for failure to deposit the "caution money" required of all political newspapers. Fined two hundred francs and imprisoned in Sainte-Pélagie from 29 September to 29 October 1840, he used the opportunity to distribute Fourierist tracts to the other prisoners.⁴⁴ Héronville was thus behind bars when his "anciens camarades" established the *Société Laborieuse* and, on his release, they asked him to manage it.⁴⁵

This appointment brought the new society under Fourierist influence, for Héronville was closely linked to Jean (Jan) Czynski, a Polish refugee who had settled in France. Czynski (1801-1867) had pursued a legal career before fleeing Poland after the collapse of the 1831 uprising. He became a journalist, wrote numerous books and pamphlets, and

40. *Biographies des candidats à l'Assemblée nationale par un vieux montagnard: Lambert (Ferdinand-Jules), Héronville (Laurent-J.-Bap.)* (Paris, [1848]), pp. 9-16, BHVP, no. 14, 107/6. This earlier association may be the one mentioned in a report by the Prefect of Police 30 August 1830, AN, F7 3884. A group of shoemakers, with police approval, replaced the two placement agencies in their trade with their own salaried clerk; profits from the enterprise went into a benefit fund for sick and indigent shoemakers. It presumably fell victim to government repression following the labour unrest of August to November 1830.

41. Roland, "Les cordonniers."

42. *Biographies des candidats*, pp. 9-16. On the dilemma of worker intellectuals and their ambivalent attitude toward manual labour, see Jacques Rancière, *La Nuit des prolétaires* (Paris, 1981) and his "The Myth of the Artisan: Critical Reflections on a Category of Social History," *International Labor and Working Class History* 24 (Fall 1983):1-16.

43. Report by Prefect of Police, 23 April 1840; report to Minister of the Interior, 4 December 1840; Minister of the Interior to Minister of Finance, 24 December 1840; AN, F18 392, dossier 54 ("Le Nouveau monde, 1839-1842").

44. Régistre d'écrou, Ste-Pélagie prison, Archives de Paris, DY8 21, entry no. 3079; *Le Nouveau monde* 2:37, 41 (11 July and 1 November 1840).

45. *Biographies*, p. 15.

took an active part in Polish émigré politics and the French republican movement.⁴⁶ In the mid-1830s, he was drawn to the ideas of Charles Fourier, whom he described as “le génie qui a substitué au système du morcellement le principe de l’association.”⁴⁷ Victor Considérant, editor of *La Phalange*, the principal Fourierist organ, assumed leadership of the movement on Fourier’s death in October 1837. He pruned the master’s thought of its more bizarre fantasies, while emphasizing *garantisme*: universal harmony through social cooperation.⁴⁸ The Fourierists, like most other contemporary socialists, advocated “l’organisation du travail” through “association,” which generally meant producers’ or consumers’ cooperatives.⁴⁹ Fourierists differed from their socialist brethren, however, by rejecting class conflict and accepting capitalists as essential to the new social order.⁵⁰

Czynski and Considérant shared the same vision of a Fourierist social utopia but quarrelled over how to get there. Considérant directed his propaganda to France’s educated élite. Czynski in contrast believed in proselytizing ordinary workers: “Les disciples de Fourier frappaient aux portes des puissants, et ces portes ne s’ouvraient pas; ils oubliaient les malheureux qui avaient besoin de leurs paroles vivifiantes.”⁵¹ *La Phalange* attacked Czynski in June 1839 when he published a tract addressed to the working class: “La théorie de Fourier est une science; une Science ne s’adresse qu’aux hommes éclairés, aux hommes qui peuvent la juger; elle n’a rien à attendre des classes pauvres et ignorantes....”⁵² Czynski replied that, on the contrary,

il nous est possible de les calmer, de les consoler, de préparer leur réconciliation avec leurs prétendus ennemis, en leur démontrant les maux qui dérivent des commotions politiques, en leurs exposant tous les bienfaits qui résulteront de la véritable association....⁵³

Czynski was unorthodox in strategy but, as this quotation shows, his Fourierism was wholly orthodox in rejecting labour strife and in preaching reconciliation of the classes in association. In June 1839, Czynski and Héronville began publishing *Le Nouveau Monde*,

46. “Czynski, Jean,” in Jacques Maitron, *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier français, 1789-1864*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1964-66), 1:487-88, is highly inaccurate. See instead Josef Frejlich, “Czynski,” in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* 4 (Cracow, 1938): 375-78. My thanks to M. Prokop of the Bibliothèque Polonaise (Paris) who directed me to this source and to Valia Sanders in St. Catharines, Ontario, who translated it for me. For Czynski’s career in France in the 1830s, see also Léon Hollaenderski, *Les Israélites de Pologne* (Paris, 1846), pp. viii-xiv, 134-38, and Abraham G. Duker, “The Lafayette Committee for Jewish Emancipation,” in Joseph L. Blau et al., eds., *Essays on Jewish Life and Thought, Presented in Honor of Salo Wittmayer Baron* (New York, 1959), pp. 169-82.

47. Czynski to Victor Considérant, 20 July 1837, AN 10, AS 37(5).

48. Hubert Bourgin, *Victor Considérant: son œuvre* (Paris, 1908) and Maurice Dommanget, *Victor Considérant: sa vie, son œuvre* (Paris, 1929).

49. Socialists interpreted these concepts in different ways but the premise that a system of worker-run shops was the best way to eliminate capitalist exploitation was basic to all. See Bernard H. Moss, “Parisian Producers’ Associations (1830-51): The Socialism of Skilled Workers,” in Price, *Reaction and Revolution* pp. 73-86.

50. H. Feugueray, *L’Association ouvrière industrielle et agricole* (Paris, 1851), pp. 212-13: “les phalanstériens [i.e. Fourierists] entendaient l’association à leur façon; ... ils y voyaient seulement le moyen d’une production mieux étendue et d’une consommation plus économique, mais n’y cherchaient pas de tout une institution propre à mettre un temps à la tyrannie du capital.” For a full development of the Fourierist theory of association, see Moïse Bruels, “Organisation du travail,” in *Almanach social pour l’année 1841*, ed. by Jean Czynski (Paris, 1841), pp. 27-49.

51. Jean Czynski, *Avenir des ouvriers* (Paris, 1839), p. 9.

52. Julien Blanc, review of J. Czynski, “*Avenir des ouvriers*,” in *La Phalange* 2:36 (15 June 1839), columns 631-33.

53. “Protestation de M. J. Czynski,” *La Phalange* 2:38 (15 July 1839), column 654.

a newspaper that “a pris pour tâche spéciale de pénétrer dans les ateliers, afin de faire apprécier aux travailleurs les bienfaits de la science sociale.”⁵⁴

There is no way of knowing whether Fourierists were active in the formation of the *Société Laborieuse* before Héronville took up his post as manager, but he was undoubtedly responsible for bringing the society into contact with Czynski. In 1843 the society expressed its gratitude to Czynski, to whom it “a déjà eu occasion de devoir quelques obligations et dont les philanthropiques travaux ont contribué pour une large part dans l’émancipation intellectuelle des travailleurs.”⁵⁵ Czynski’s interest in the *Société Laborieuse* was probably a result of the Parisian strikes of August 1840.⁵⁶ Fourierists saw those strikes as evidence of advanced social disintegration — in Czynski’s words “le fatal symptôme d’une vicieuse organisation du travail et de l’industrie.” But, he added, “le remède est trouvé. Fourier l’a découvert. Ce remède, c’est l’ASSOCIATION. [...] Les ouvriers et les maîtres, unis par le lien de l’association, se réjouiront mutuellement d’un bonheur réciproque.”⁵⁷ For Czynski, the *Société Laborieuse* embodied that associationalist solution: “Les ouvriers cordonniers, au lieu de se coaliser contre leurs maîtres, donnent un bon exemple. Avec le concours de leurs patrons, ils ont fondé une société....”⁵⁸ Labour combinations “enfantent la guerre et la ruine,” whereas “les établissements *garantistes*” would promote “l’amour du travail, d’ordre, et ... [les] bienfaits de la vraie *association*.”⁵⁹ Czynski endorsed the *Société Laborieuse* and followed its development with interest.⁶⁰

III

There were more than two hundred mutual aid societies in Paris in the 1840s, which paid benefits to their members (who were usually wage-earners) in cases of sickness, infirmity, old age and death.⁶¹ At first glance, the *Société Laborieuse* resembled any of them.⁶² The shoemakers who joined paid monthly dues of 1.20 francs and an additional 25 centimes a month for the *Caisse du Fonds Social*. This entitled them, when sick, to benefits of one franc a day, free doctor’s care, and the cost of prescribed medicine. They were also promised an annual pension of 120 francs at the age of sixty-five (and after ten years’ membership) to be paid from the savings accumulated in the *Caisse du Fonds Social*. The society’s statutes diverged from the usual mutualist pattern, however, in articles 62 through 73, which began with the declaration that “la Société assure du travail à chacun de ses membres” — or, failing work, one franc a day in unemployment benefits. Article 63bis,

54. “Progrès de la science sociale dans l’année 1840,” in *Almanach social pour l’année 1841*, p. 134.

55. *Compte-rendu: 1 avril 1843*, AN, F12 4633A, doss. Héronville.

56. See Octave Festy, “Le Mouvement ouvrier à Paris en 1840,” *Revue des sciences politiques* 30 (1913):67-79, 226-40, 332-61.

57. Jean Czynski, “Aux ouvriers,” *Le Nouveau monde* 2:39 (1 September 1840). Considerant’s reaction was identical: see *La Phalange*, 3e série, 1:3 (6 September 1840).

58. *Le Nouveau monde*, 3:9 (1 November 1841).

59. *Le Premier phalanstère*, 15 March 1841. This was a second Fourierist journal edited by Czynski.

60. *Le Nouveau monde*, 3:4, 9 (1 April, 1 September 1841), unnumbered issue (1 February 1843); *Le Premier phalanstère*, 15 March 1841.

61. See Michael D. Sibalis, “The Mutual Aid Societies of Paris, 1789- 1848” (forthcoming).

62. See its statutes, published as *Société laborieuse de secours mutuels des ouvriers cordonniers-bottiers, fondée à Paris le 1er octobre 1840, et autorisée par M. le Ministre de l’Intérieur le 30 janvier 1845* (Paris, 1845), AN, F12 4633A doss. Héronville. For its history from 1840 to 1849, see its regularly published reports, *Société laborieuse des ouvriers cordonniers-bottiers: Compte[s] rendu[s]* (Paris, 1841-48), in the same dossier, and *Association laborieuse et fraternelle des ouvriers cordonniers-bottiers, fondée à Paris, le 1 octobre 1840, 6, rue Bailleul: Compte-rendu du 1 janvier 1848 au 1 janvier 1849* (Paris, 1849), AN, F12 4630, doss. Callerot.

probably later inserted into the original statutes at the insistence of the authorities, denied benefits to strikers: "Ce secours quotidien ne sera pas accordé dans le cas de cessation volontaire et concertée du travail, ou lors d'un chômage résultant d'une coalition quelconque des ouvriers Sociétaires." Only four other mutual aid societies in Paris are known to have offered unemployment benefits and none guaranteed work in preference to cash or defined its insurance programme in such explicitly ideological terms as the *Société Laborieuse*.⁶³

Indeed, the *Société Laborieuse* always considered itself something more than an ordinary mutual aid society. First, sick benefits and pensions, which were the *raison d'être* of all other societies, here took second place to unemployment benefits. Secondly, the society was not content with one or two hundred members, as others were, but sought to bring the entire shoemaking trade within its ranks: "notre désir ne se bornait pas à grouper autour de nous un petit nombre d'individus, nous comptions vous associer tous à notre oeuvre bienfaisante."⁶⁴ Thirdly, the founders envisaged their association in terms of a definitive resolution of the social crisis that beset the working class. They boasted openly and immodestly of the acclaim that they deserved for founding a society

qui, sans secousse, sans rivalité, sans froisser qui que ce soit, aura aidé à résoudre un problème trop longtemps classé parmi les utopies philanthropiques; c'est à dire la fusion intime des intérêts matériels du Patron et des Ouvriers qu'il emploie, résultant d'un échange de services réciproques.⁶⁵

The *Société Laborieuse* thus proclaimed its intention to reconcile the classes "sous la même bannière industrielle."⁶⁶ Members would comprehend "la question d'avenir que notre société doit résoudre." They would see that an ultimate solution could come only when they themselves embraced a new socialist ethic: "si la voix de l'humanité se fait encore entendre dans ce malheureux siècle d'égoïsme, certes ce sera toujours parmi nous, pauvres ouvriers."⁶⁷ As for the details of future social organization, that (in true Fourierist fashion) was left to the experts. The society promised merely to attenuate the workers' misery in the short run, while they waited "avec confiance et sécurité, que des hommes spéciaux et généreux résolvent en leur faveur le problème de l'organisation équitable du travail."⁶⁸

If those were the society's rather grandiose ambitions, its day-to-day concerns were more mundane: recruiting members and providing them with the promised services. The society was eager to grow and from the beginning members were urged to recruit friends and acquaintances: "que chaque Sociétaire devienne ainsi le centre d'où rayonne une bienveillante persuasion."⁶⁹ By 1846, in an obvious attempt to compete with the *compagnonnage*, the society was promising new arrivals in the capital not only work but also lodging in members' homes, "de sages conseils," and help in perfecting their skills (although there is no evidence that any of this was ever actually provided).⁷⁰ The society had 555 members by the end of its first year and savings of 2,183.65 francs. New members

63. These were societies of hat-fullers, hat-finishers, goldsmiths and tinsmiths. See Office du Travail, *Les Associations professionnelles ouvrières*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1894-1904), 2:475-82, 3:74-78, 183-84.

64. *A Messieurs les ouvriers cordonniers-bottiers membres de la Société laborieuse* (Paris, n.d.), AN, F12 4633A, doss. Héronville.

65. *Compte-rendu: 1 octobre 1843.*

66. *Compte-rendu: 1 octobre 1842.*

67. *A messieurs les ouvriers cordonniers-bottiers.*

68. *Compte-rendu: 1 octobre 1841.*

69. *Ibid.*

70. *Compte-rendu: 1 octobre au 1 avril 1846.*

continued to flock to the society: 1607 men and women joined between 1 April 1842 and 1 January 1848, at a rate of about twenty-five a month. But this impressive influx was offset by those who dropped out. The society averaged about 550 members at any given time, never attaining more than 686 members (1 April 1842) or falling below 441 (1 April 1845). The society attracted mainly young (and therefore probably less skilled) shoemakers; almost two-thirds of new members in the late 1840s were thirty or younger and more than four-fifths were thirty-five or younger. The savings continued to accumulate, and reached 18,603.55 francs on 1 January 1848.⁷¹

The society's headquarters were at 6, Rue Bailleul, a convenient location in central Paris rented for five hundred francs a year. The members of the *Société Laborieuse* never convened in general assembly. If their assent was required for some important decision, someone went from home to home to register their votes. A twenty-man *Conseil d'Administration* directed the society; vacancies were filled by co-option rather than election and generally four to eight new men entered it every six months, although some held their seats for many years. Héronville, as office manager (*préposé*), was responsible to the council. He earned twelve hundred francs a year for supervising all activities, keeping the accounts, and running the society's placement office. A clerk, paid sixty-five francs a month and furnished with a flat worth 220 francs a year, maintained in his home an office for distributing raw materials, collecting finished shoes, and giving out pay. He had to keep it open from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. on weekdays and all morning on Sundays and holidays — and still find time to pick up and deliver work, ensure that workers did their jobs properly, promote the society among employers and even visit the sick. A *percepteur*, earning eighty-five francs a month, made the rounds to collect monthly contributions at members' homes.⁷²

One principal service offered by the *Société Laborieuse* was job placement. By this means, the society intended to put an end to exploitation by the *placeurs* who ran private agencies and to ensure that shoemakers received the full value of their labour. Employers who had work to be done either deposited a "placement card" that described the job or brought in the cut leather to be stitched together. The available jobs were posted at the society's headquarters and anyone might ask for a particular job, which could be refused only if Héronville judged that he lacked the requisite skill. This service was free to all members. Non-members could also use it for twenty-five centimes until 1845, when it became free to them as well. The *Société Laborieuse* claimed to have made some sixty thousand placements up to 1 January 1848.⁷³

The *Société Laborieuse* also promised unemployment benefits in the form of either work or cash. Because the society did not have its own workshops, it relied on sympathetic employers to supply the work. It sent out a circular to master shoemakers and booters in July 1841 ("c'est sous vos auspices que nous avons commencé notre œuvre"), asking them

71. *Compte[s]-rendu[s]* AN, F12 4819 contains a scrawled list of 310 members (apparently those who joined in 1846-1849). There are ages for 303 of them, which break down as follows—age 15-20: 11.6 percent; 21-25: 19.5 percent; 26-30: 32.3 percent; 31-35: 17.8 percent; 36-40: 8.3 percent; 41-45: 6.3 percent; 46-50: 2.6 percent; 51 and over: 1.7 percent.

72. On the duties of the employees, see *Compte-rendu: 1 avril 1844*; for the contract between the clerk, François Chailley, and the Society, see *Compte-rendu: 1 avril 1843*.

73. Stewards of the *Société Laborieuse* to members of the *Commission du Travail*, 2 August 1848, AN, F12 4633A, doss. Héronville. These jobs were undoubtedly very small ones. For example, the eight thousand placements made up to 1 October 1844 were each worth only 3.75 francs on average. See *Compte-rendu: 1 octobre 1844*.

to affiliate as "honorary members," pay voluntary monthly contributions, and provide work that, they were assured, would be made up with "promptitude et sécurité" by talented workers.⁷⁴ Within a year of its foundation, the society counted 111 employers as honorary members, thirty-five of whom had agreed to pay contributions.⁷⁵ Employers placed their orders with the society, which, acting as middleman, distributed the work to those on relief and paid them when they brought back the finished shoes. It was reimbursed in turn by the employer when he picked up the merchandise or had it delivered. The volume of this work increased steadily through the 1840s. Most of it, however, came from *commissionnaires*, whose orders for cheap, low-quality shoes paid minimal rates.⁷⁶

This meant that, far from eradicating the underlying cause of the shoemakers' economic distress, the *Société Laborieuse* was in fact working hand-in-hand with the guilty parties. The society denounced the *placeur* and his petty gain as the villain in the piece, and then merely stepped in to take his place as the crucial intermediary in the *confection* system. The society served the interests of employers — and the *commissionnaires* in particular — by providing them with willing and subservient labour. Members were reminded of their obligations and duties, and urged repeatedly to do their utmost to satisfy employers:

En remplissant fidèlement vos engagements, en tâchant de contenter vos patrons, en offrant le modèle des honnêtes travailleurs, vous ferez aimer notre société; les patrons nous donneront la préférence....⁷⁷

The society explicitly eschewed any conflict with employers: "les patrons sont tout disposés à nous être utiles, ils savent parfaitement que notre association n'est pas hostile à leurs intérêts."⁷⁸ Renouncing class struggle and preaching class collaboration, the *Société Laborieuse* made any concerted attempt to raise piece rate impossible.

Even so, the *Société Laborieuse* eventually ran afoul of the authorities, who were always leery of organized workers. Mutual aid societies required formal authorization from the Minister of the Interior and he withheld it in this case, apparently from the mistaken fear that unemployment relief would be used to fund strikes.⁷⁹ The Prefect of Police warned the society in April 1843 that it was illegally constituted and, when this had no effect, formally dissolved it on 4 December 1844. The society immediately suspended operations and took steps to get authorization. Czynski's help was instrumental. Czynski, although nominally a Catholic, was of Jewish descent and regularly published articles on Jewish affairs. He was therefore well acquainted with Adolphe Crémieux, a principal leader in the Jewish community and an important opposition deputy with vague socialist sympathies.⁸⁰ Czynski arranged for the officers of the *Société Laborieuse* to meet with Crémieux, who consented to approach the Minister of the Interior on their behalf. As a result, the society received its authorization on 30 January 1845 and the grateful members commis-

74. Untitled circular headed *Société laborieuse des ouvriers cordonniers-bottiers* (Paris, [1841]), AN, F12 4633A, doss. Héronville.

75. *Compte-rendu: 1 octobre 1841.*

76. *Compte-rendu: 1 avril au 1 juin 1847.*

77. *A Messieurs les ouvriers cordonniers-bottiers.*

78. *Ibid.* See also *Compte-rendu: 1 octobre 1842.*

79. Roland, "Les cordonniers."

80. S. Posener, *Adolphe Crémieux (1796-1880)*, 2 vols (Paris, 1933-1934), 1:160-62, 2:9; and Z. Szajkowski, "French Jews during the Revolution of 1830 and the July Monarchy," in his *Jews and the French Revolutions of 1789, 1830 and 1848* (New York, 1970):1035.

sioned a silver medallion to present to Crémieux with their thanks.⁸¹ There was also at this time some internal disagreement that threatened to disrupt the society. Several members denounced the administration as a self-perpetuating oligarchy and accused it of financial mismanagement. They took their charges to the public prosecutor in March 1845, although nothing came of this, and in June they haled the administration before a justice of the peace, demanding reimbursement of past contributions; the judge ruled against them. Crémieux had once again stepped forward to defend the society.⁸²

There is some question as to how effective the aid provided by the *Société Laborieuse* really was. In the first place, the accounts covering almost seven and one-half years (16 July 1841 to 1 January 1849) show that in that whole period only 524 members received sick benefits, which totaled 13,629.15 francs, an average of 25.82 francs per sickness. There is no mention at all of pensions. Old age pensions would not have been payable before October 1850 (since ten years' continuous membership was required to collect), but it is surprising that no one ever applied for a disability pension. Much more important, however, was the society's evident inability to supply sufficient work to the unemployed. For example, the society reported in April 1842 that during the previous *morte saison* it had paid no cash relief at all but had distributed work that earned members 2,688.70 francs.⁸³ That was at best one thousand days of poorly paid work at a time when the society had over six hundred members. Up to 1 January 1848, the society distributed 79,410.35 francs worth of work to its unemployed.⁸⁴ This figure seems impressive until averaged out to less than ten francs per member per year.

Moreover, the members who did get work sometimes complained that it required little skill and paid less than they usually earned. The society in turn complained of their negligence, for they often kept the work too long, did it poorly and even sometimes ruined the raw materials. Members often declared that they would prefer to receive their unemployment benefits in cash but the principle of giving out work instead, whenever possible, was fundamental. Cash relief would quickly exhaust the society's limited resources and furthermore, they stated, "of la paresse n'aurait pas su se substituer au véritable besoin."⁸⁵ A member was entitled to relief only after forty-eight hours without a job. If the society could provide him with any kind of work — even if this were only an order for a single pair of shoes — he had to wait another two days to become re-eligible. In that way, the *Société Laborieuse* managed to avoid paying any cash benefits at all until the industrial crisis of the late 1840s. It disbursed cash for the first time during the winter of 1847: a total of 180 francs to thirty-four individuals.⁸⁶ It gave out another forty-four francs in the last six months of 1847. Even during the entire year 1848, with orders received down dramatically to about one-third those for 1847, cash benefits still amounted to a mere 1,916.25 francs.⁸⁷

81. *A Messieurs les ouvriers cordonniers-bottiers de la Société laborieuse: Compte rendu des travaux du Conseil d'Administration* (Paris, n.d.); *Compte-rendu: 1 avril 1844*; *Compte-rendu: 1 avril au 1 octobre 1845*; Crémieux to the Société Laborieuse, 20 December 1844; letter of authorization from police commissioner of quartier Saint-Honoré, 3 February 1845; AN, F12 4633A, doss. Héronville.

82. *Compte-rendu: 1 octobre 1844* and *Compte-rendu: 1 avril au 1 octobre 1845*.

83. *Compte-rendu: 1 avril 1842*.

84. Stewards to Commission du Travail, 2 August 1848.

85. *Compte-rendu: 1 avril 1842*.

86. *Compte-rendu: 1 janvier au 1 juillet 1847*.

87. *Compte-rendu du 1 janvier 1848 au 1 janvier 1849*. See also Héronville, "Guillaume and Tronchet to Comité des Travailleurs," AN F12 4633A doss. Héronville for a slightly higher figure of 1950 francs up to 29 May 1848.

The management of the *Société Laborieuse* was not unaware of its shortcomings. Czyski and other Fourierists were advocates of producers' cooperatives and by the late 1840s the society was eager to extend and improve its operations by setting up a commercial association to produce and market shoes on its own. But the authorities refused to allow them to invest the society's savings in the venture and they were unable to amass the necessary capital on their own, especially at a time of falling wages.⁸⁸ For the full development of its socialist potential, the *Société Laborieuse* had to wait for the Revolution of 1848.

IV

The February Revolution of 1848 held out the promise of a new era for French workers. The Provisional Government recognized the "droit au travail," organized the National Workshops for the unemployed, and instituted the Luxembourg Commission, where delegates from Paris trades could discuss and resolve labour problems. In this propitious political climate, groups of workers tried to develop more fully their various theories of "association" and founded entirely new organizations or restructured those already in existence. Thus emerged the *corporations nouvelles*. These were more than associations for mutual aid by which workers implicitly accepted their condition as wage-earners, for here, "ils songèrent à s'affranchir de cette condition même, en acquérant la propriété des instruments de leur travail." The new associations were intended to assure a decent minimum wage, provide relief to the sick, the elderly and the unemployed, train young workers, and most importantly, initiate producers' cooperatives, "faisant de l'atelier une véritable république, dans laquelle il n'y eût eu ni supérieurs, ni inférieurs, ni serviteurs, ni maîtres, ni commandement, ni obéissance."⁸⁹

Paris was home to as many as three or four hundred workers' associations in 1848-51, and about half were producers' cooperatives.⁹⁰ Shoemakers alone tried to organize eleven associations, including a revamped *Société Laborieuse*; only six ever functioned, and within two years these dwindled to three, of which the *Société Laborieuse* was one.⁹¹ It had struck out in new directions and survived despite political upheaval, shifting government policy and intense rivalries within the workers' movement.⁹²

In Héronville's words, "Les bases de notre Association reposent sur deux principes également nécessaires à l'amélioration du sort des travailleurs: Secours mutuels, Organisation du travail." The *Société Laborieuse* had applied the first principle from the beginning; 1848 provided the opportunity to develop the second principle under government auspices.⁹³ A general assembly of members, held on 12 March 1848, voted to establish

88. Stewards to Commission du Travail, 2 August 1848

89. *Almanach des corporations nouvelles* (Paris, 1852), pp. 11, 17-18. See also the informative but confused study by Rémi Gossez, *Les Ouvriers de Paris: l'Organisation, 1848-1851* (Paris, 1967).

90. Emile Heftier, *Les Associations coopératives de production sous la deuxième république* (Paris, 1899), pp. 190-95. Pauline Roland considered the *Société Laborieuse* a forerunner of these associations. See her letter of 13 June 1850 in A. Guépin, *Philosophie du socialisme* (Paris, 1850), p. 682.

91. *Statistique de l'industrie à Paris*, 2e partie, p. 230; *Almanach des associations ouvrières pour 1850* (Paris, 1849), BN, Lc22 188, lists six shoemakers' associations; *Le Peuple*, no. 155 (23 April 1849) lists three; Sigmund Engländer, *Geschichte der französischen Arbeiter-Associationen*, 4 vols. (Hamburg, 1864), 4:298 lists three for 1850, only two of which are the same as in the previous reference.

92. Gossez, *Les Ouvriers*, pp. 173-76 describes the experience of the *Société Laborieuse* in these years, but his account is incomplete, garbled and inaccurate.

93. Héronville to Conseil d'Encouragement, 15 July 1848, AN, F12 4633A, doss. Héronville.

a cooperative workshop and a retail outlet for its products. The workshop would employ out-of-work members in turn until such time as it could offer work to the entire membership. It planned to pay no more than the prevailing piece-rates, so as to avoid drawing workers away from their current employers. One-third of any profits were to be retained by the society and two-thirds divided equally every year among all members.⁹⁴

As the *Société Laborieuse* was making these plans, it negotiated a merger with the *Association Fraternelle*, another shoemakers' society whose president, Théodorat, had similar ideas. He lobbied the government in March for funds to set up an "atelier national" to employ shoemakers at their trade.⁹⁵ The result of this fusion was the *Société Laborieuse et Fraternelle*, ratified by general assemblies of the two component societies on 28 May and 18 June. The new society was more or less the old *Société Laborieuse* and even kept the same head office on the Rue Bailleul. It promised benefits for the sick and unemployed, an annual pension of 120 francs for the retired and infirm, and a forty-franc death benefit. Administration was entrusted to three stewards (*délégués*), responsible to two *commissions* elected by general assembly, one for supplies and one for accounts.⁹⁶ The stewards wrote the government on 29 May to ask for support for the proposed cooperative workshop: a loan of twenty thousand francs (they offered sixteen thousand francs in *rentes* as collateral), the concession of premises for the store and a contract to supply shoes to the army.⁹⁷

Héronville, whose name was virtually synonymous with the *Société Laborieuse*, had resigned his post as manager in December 1847, but he returned as one of the three stewards in May 1848. He now had other interests, however. He was president of the *Club Républicain des Ouvriers Cordonniers-Bottiers*, surely one of the most obscure of the two hundred revolutionary clubs in this period.⁹⁸ And he was a candidate in Paris for the National Assembly in the elections of April 1848, where he made a very poor showing.⁹⁹ The *Association Laborieuse et Fraternelle* last mentioned Héronville in early 1849, and he then disappeared from history.

The new *Association Laborieuse et Fraternelle* remained true to its roots in promoting cooperation and rejecting class conflict and strikes:

Nous le répétons, nous ne voulons apporter aucune perturbation dans les relations habituelles entre les patrons et les ouvriers. ... Les crises commerciales, les fausses spéculations et par suite l'abaissement des salaires ne sont que les conséquences d'un *malentendu social*.

94. Notices of general assemblies on 12 March and 27 April, headed *Société Laborieuse des ouvriers cordonniers-bottiers*, BN, Lb 53 1536; Héronville, Guillaume and Tronchet, *délégués de la Société Laborieuse, to Comité des Travailleurs*, 29 May 1848, and "Séance du 26 juillet: Rapport du Comité au Conseil d'Encouragement," AN, F12 4633A, doss. Héronville.

95. Théodorat, petitions to the provisional government, 22 March 1848 (missing from file) and n.d. (ca. 27 March 1848), AN, BB30 301 (2), no. 3828, and BB30 306 (1), no. 6245.

96. *Société laborieuse et fraternelle: Association industrielle et commerciale des ouvriers cordonniers-bottiers, fondée à Paris, le 1er octobre 1840* (Paris, 1848), BN, Lb54 1949 and Archives de Paris, 6 AZ 1768.

97. Héronville, Guillaume and Tronchet to the Comité des Travailleurs, 29 May 1848.

98. "Club Républicain des ouvriers cordonniers-bottiers, rue Montorgueil: Extrait du procès-verbal de la Société du 12 avril 1848," AN, C 941. This is signed by Héronville as president and Callerot, also on the executive of the *Société Laborieuse*, as treasurer. There is no other evidence of the club's existence and it is not mentioned in Peter H. Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy: The Paris Club Movement in 1848* (Princeton, N.J., 1975).

99. He was endorsed by the Fourierist *Club des Socialistes Unis*: see "Séance du 9 avril [1848]," in the club's minutes, AN, 10 AS 31 (7). For election returns, see AN, C 1450: He won only 155 votes in Paris, all in the city centre (the 2nd, 4th, 7th and 9th arrondissements) and a few additional votes in the suburbs (one vote in Charenton, 2 in Vincennes, and 31 in Sceaux).

Lorsque la confiance sera rétablie, ... il sera facile de s'entendre, mais il est temps de faire bon marché de ce mot si gros jadis de dangers imaginaires: *Coalition*, bon tout au plus à être accolé dans nos dictionnaires à l'épithète: *vieux mot*. L'association l'a détrôné.¹⁰⁰

Other shoemakers, however, mobilized for labour action under the direction of the three shoemakers' delegates to the Luxembourg Commission, elected by the trade in early March: T. Guillaumou, A. Maurice and F. Pinet. The best known was Toussaint Guillaumou who, as an activist in the *compagnonnage*, came out of a militant labour tradition. In 1848 he was also "l'âme du mouvement d'union compagnonique," and worked hard to unite the *compagnons* of all trades into a single movement.¹⁰¹

Throughout the spring of 1848, employers and journeymen shoemakers were in conflict. The workers wanted higher piece-rates that would bring their earnings up by as much as 1.50 francs a day. The employers refused more than the rates that they had paid in 1847, for the economy was in serious crisis.¹⁰² The Luxembourg delegates summoned all shoemakers to meet on 17 April to establish a trade association that could enforce an industry-wide schedule of piece-rates (*tarif*) and also make provisions for the "organisation du Travail dans les Ateliers Nationaux de la corporation." They appealed for trade solidarity: "si l'union fait la force, l'indifférence fait la faiblesse. Laissez de côté les différends qui existent parmi les différentes sociétés".¹⁰³ Their call led to the establishment of the *Société Générale de la Corporation des Ouvriers Cordonniers-Bottiers* (sometimes also called the *Association Générale* or even the *Union Générale*).

The *Société Générale* was a militant labour organization, which resembled the corporate organization of 1833. It was open to all shoemakers, with members grouped into sections of twenty. A general assembly elected a twenty-five-man governing council. The statutes set out a detailed *tarif* listing every sort of work and the prices to be paid for it. The society established a placement agency, "qui doit être l'unique pour la ville de Paris et ses faubourgs," that would assure adherence to the *tarif* through its monopoly of the labour market. The agency initially operated out of the Luxembourg Palace before moving to the society's headquarters on the Rue Saint-Honoré. Employers who paid less than the society's *tarif* or who hired workers not belonging to the society "seront mis en grève jusqu'à ce qu'ils rentrent dans le bon chemin."¹⁰⁴ Any workers who accepted a lower rate were forbidden to work anywhere for one month and furthermore lost all right to benefits for three months.¹⁰⁴ The *Société Générale* intended its *tarif* to guarantee shoemakers an income of 3.00 to 3.50 francs a day. The problem was to get it accepted. A meeting on 22 May considered a general strike to enforce demands, but for unknown reasons the society was unwilling to take strike action at that time.¹⁰⁵

100. Stewards to the Commission du Travail, 2 August 1848.

101. T. Guillaumou, *Les Confessions d'un compagnon* (Paris, 1864) makes no mention at all of his labour activities in 1848; his brief narrative of events in that year (pp. 233-39) deals with his participation in the Luxembourg Commission and his attempt to unify the *compagnonnages*. See also Rémi Gossez, "Le Compagnonnage en 1848," *Compagnonnage*, nos. 108-11 (April-July 1950).

102. Report by Delaulne, 9 June 1848.

103. *Appel à tous nos frères de la corporation des ouvriers cordonniers et bottiers de la ville de Paris, sans distinction de société* [Paris, April 1848], BN, Lb53 1168.

104. *Règlement et statuts de la Société générale de la corporation des ouvriers cordonniers-bottiers* (Paris, 1848), AN, C 2232. The statutes are dated 15 April, which probably means that they were prepared and printed in advance of the meeting on the 17th. For the placement agency, see *L'Atelier*, 8, no. 15 (21 May 1848): 154 and *L'Organisation du travail, Journal des ouvriers* 1, no. 20 (22 June 1848).

105. *L'Organisation du travail: Journal des ouvriers*, 1, no. 4 and no. 20 (6 and 22 June 1848).

The *Société Générale* and the *Société Laborieuse* inevitably came into conflict. The two followed very different principles, and the *Société Générale*'s plan to unite the entire trade for labour action precluded any rival society. Moreover, the elected Luxembourg delegates who directed it could reasonably claim to speak for the vast majority of shoemakers on this point. On 2 April 1848, at the request of a shoemakers' delegation, the Prefect of Police closed the three private placement agencies for the trade; the free one run by the *Société Laborieuse* was also shut down. When the *Société Laborieuse* sought permission to reopen it, the prefecture referred the matter to the Luxembourg delegates, who responded with the suggestion that the *Société Laborieuse* merge with the *Société Générale* — on very unfavourable terms. The *Société Laborieuse* turned to its old protector, Crémieux, who was now Minister of Justice.¹⁰⁶ Crémieux took up their cause. He rebuked the police for interference and met personally with the Luxembourg delegates. Although the details of their discussion are unknown, the delegates wrote in late May to thank Crémieux for "la cordialité et la justice" with which he resolved all differences through an appeal to the "union fraternelle" among shoemakers.¹⁰⁷ The two societies survived side by side in the following years.

The suspension of the Luxembourg Commission on 16 May, the subsequent dissolution of the National Workshops and the failed insurrection of 23-26 June dashed hopes that direct state intervention would resolve the social question. The government nevertheless continued its encouragement of workers' associations. The Decree of 5 July 1848 appropriated three million francs to be lent by a special *Conseil d'Encouragement* to cooperative associations among workers or between workers and an employer.¹⁰⁸ The *Société Laborieuse*, which had already asked for a loan in May, renewed the application, only to be rejected on 26 July. The *Conseil d'Encouragement* ruled that the *Société Laborieuse et Fraternelle* was not a true cooperative association, since it employed only a fraction of its total membership. The *Conseil* also disapproved of running a business enterprise in conjunction with a mutual aid society, lest profits be squandered on benefits.¹⁰⁹

The *Société Laborieuse et Fraternelle* decided to go ahead without a loan. It held a general assembly on 14 January 1849¹¹⁰ and on 29 January underwent yet another transformation, becoming a commercial enterprise as the *Association Laborieuse et Fraternelle*. It offered its merchandise to both large-scale exporters and to individual clients, who could be measured for a pair of shoes at home or buy them ready-made at a central store on the Rue Saint-Honoré. Advertising circulars promised excellent service, good workmanship and high-quality merchandise at reasonable prices.¹¹¹

106. Héronville to Crémieux, 26 April 1848, AN, BB30 329, doss. H.

107. Maurice, Guillaumou, and Pinez to Crémieux, 31 May 1848, AN, BB30 329, doss. C.

108. Octave Festy, *Les Associations ouvrières encouragées par la deuxième république (décret du 5 juillet 1848): Documents inédits* (Paris, 1915).

109. "Rapport du Comité au Conseil d'encouragement sur la Société commerciale et industrielle des ouvriers cordonniers, Séance du 26 juillet [1848]," AN, F12 4633A; and Octave Festy, *Procès-verbaux du Conseil d'encouragement pour les associations ouvrières (Décret du 5 Juillet 1848), 11 Juillet 1848-24 Octobre 1849* (Paris, 1917), pp. 13-16.

110. *Le Peuple*, 57 (14 January 1849).

111. Two circulars with identical text but different signatures: *Association laborieuse et fraternelle des ouvriers cordonniers-bottiers provisoirement 6, rue Bailleul, près celle de l'Arbre-Sec: Appel aux vrais amis des travailleurs*, BN Lb55 162 and Lb53 1537; *Association laborieuse et fraternelle des ouvriers cordonniers-bottiers, fondée en 1840, rue Bailleul 6, tient actuellement son magasin central pour hommes et pour dames, rue St-Honoré, 22*, AN F12 4630, doss. Callerot.

The new association formally registered its statutes and an official corporate name on 3 September 1849: Barthélemy, Collerot, Lecoge et Compagnie (these were the names of its managers). All members of the association owned an equal share. Capable men were admitted on request; women, only as they were needed. Admission cost two francs and monthly dues of 1.60 francs comprised seventy-five centimes for the mutual-aid fund, twenty-five centimes for the pension fund and sixty centimes for the "social capital" to run the business.¹¹² Because the association refused to touch its mutual-aid and pension funds for operating expenses, it soon ran into financial difficulties. The association asked President Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte in August 1849 for a state loan to keep them going; it was refused in October.¹¹³

Pauline Roland visited the *Association Laborieuse et Fraternelle* in 1850 for a series of articles on the cooperative movement.¹¹⁴ Although favourably impressed, she did note some problems, including a declining membership (down to 350 from six hundred before the Revolution), unfair and unequal treatment of women, and an acute capital shortage that prevented further expansion. Only forty or fifty members could be employed at any one time, and they worked at home rather than in a central workshop. This she thought unfortunate, since "l'atelier ... répond aux besoins de sociabilité inhérents à la nature humaine."¹¹⁵

It is interesting that the rival *Association Générale* had simultaneously evolved into a similar commercial enterprise with eighty members in 1850. In July 1848, claiming 2,500 members, it too had applied to the *Commission d'Encouragement* for a loan and had also been refused.¹¹⁶ It was calling itself the *Association Fraternelle des Ouvriers Cordonniers* by April 1849. Guillaumou was now manager and it sold merchandise at its headquarters on the Place du Louvre and at two branches on the Rue Saint-Jacques and the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Antoine. Its ultimate fate is obscure, but its placement agency was still active in May 1851.¹¹⁷

There is somewhat more information on the final years of the *Association Laborieuse et Fraternelle*. In the first six months of 1850, it sold shoes and boots worth over twenty-one thousand francs and paid out wages of 8,296.24 francs. The wage rates varied according to the individual shoemaker's skill and the managers rejected calls for equal rates as inherently unjust (an equal rate, they said "récompense de la même manière l'homme laborieux ... et le travailleur indolent") and as, in any case, inapplicable to home work. The association was on the verge of bankruptcy by the autumn of 1851, which it averted only

112. *Association laborieuse et fraternelle des ouvriers cordonniers-bottiers: 22, rue Saint-Honoré, 22* (Paris, n.d.), BN, Lb55 1165. For an earlier and incomplete draft of the statutes, see *Association laborieuse et fraternelle des ouvriers cordonniers-bottiers: Statuts* (Paris, n.d.), BN, Lb55 2702.

113. Collerot to Prince Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, 29 August 1849, and reply from the Ministère de l'Agriculture et du Commerce, 4 October 1849, AN, F12 1430, doss. Collerot.

114. See Edith Thomas, "Pauline Roland et les Associations ouvrières," *Actualité de l'histoire*, 7 (mars 1954):5-28; and her *Pauline Roland: Socialisme et féminisme au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1956), chapter 18, "Les Associations ouvrières."

115. Roland, "Les cordonniers."

116. *Statistique de l'industrie à Paris 2e partie*, p. 230; *Association Générale* to the Commission, 13 July 1848, and reply, 27 February 1849, AN, F12 4632, doss. Guillaumou; "Des associations," *Le Travail affranchi* 1 (7 January 1849):2-3. The *Association Générale* asked for half a million francs on behalf of thirty thousand shoemakers. It was refused because of its overly ambitious aims and its labour activities.

117. *Le Travail affranchi*, 13 (1 April 1849) and *Le Peuple* 155 (23 April 1849). There is a copy of a placement certificate, dated 16 May 1851, in Archives de Paris, 6 AZ 1768.

by an agreement with its creditors and by borrowing more than two thousand francs from the funds reserved for mutual aid. In 1852, the association formally separated into two distinct organizations: a producers' cooperative association and a mutual aid society. The former went bankrupt in 1854 and paid creditors only twenty per cent what they were owed. The mutual aid society lost 536.77 francs as a result.¹¹⁸ The latter survived, however, and in November 1855 opened membership to workers in all trades, thus ceasing to be a distinctive society of shoemakers. It had ninety-seven active members and nineteen pensioners in 1886, with reserves of ten thousand francs. In 1898 there were only fifty-nine members, thirty-one of them pensioners, but reserves had grown to more than thirty-five thousand francs.¹¹⁹ All further trace of it is lost.

The *Société Laborieuse* probably broke up in the years before the First World War, as did many mutual aid societies whose dwindling membership made it impossible for them to carry on. But whatever its fate, this society no longer bore any significant resemblance to the social experiment instituted with such enthusiasm in 1840 or to the producers' cooperative of 1848 that, along with many similar associations, dreamed of recasting French society for the benefit of the workingman. Utopian socialism never recovered from its dismal failure in 1848 and eventually gave way to Marxist-influenced socialism in the 1860s and 1870s. The *Société Laborieuse* exemplifies the inadequacies of utopianism, for it proved incapable of evolving beyond its Fourierist ideology, which taught that socialism would come about through class collaboration and which therefore discouraged protest, strikes or any other manifestation of class struggle. The *Société Laborieuse* counted on the ingenuity of socialist intellectuals to design a better society and the good will of employers and the government to bring it into being. This was naive and impractical. Fourierism itself survived in modified form, however, and is generally considered a principal source of the modern French cooperative movement, which has brought forth consumers', producers' and credit cooperatives of various kinds.¹²⁰

As for Parisian shoemakers, their lot did not improve in the decades after 1848. A recent analysis of French workers in the late nineteenth century has observed that shoemaking in the capital resisted the factory until the 1920s, while unionism among shoemakers remained "extremely weak and functioned only in spurts." The shoemakers continued to share "the same common experience of dispossession and of de-qualification" that led them to accept "the most varied ideologies, as these expressed a radical demand for social relationships founded on something other than competition among workers and capitalist accumulation among businessmen."¹²¹ Fourierism and the *Société Laborieuse* had been but one episode in their sad story.

118. For the impending bankruptcy, see two lithographed circulars, headed *Association laborieuse et fraternelle des ouvriers cordonniers-bottiers*, announcing meetings for 2 November and 23 November 1851, Archives de Paris, 6 AZ 1768; *Associations professionnelles ouvrières*, 2:14-18. For the accounts for the first half of 1850, see *Association laborieuse et fraternelle des ouvriers cordonniers-bottiers, Rue Saint-Honoré*, 22 (Paris, 1850), BN, Lb55 1760.

119. Barberet, *Le Travail en France*, 5:173; *Associations professionnelles ouvrières*, 2:19.

120. Jules Duval, "Les Origines du mouvement coopératif," *Journal des économistes*, 3ème série, 2ème année, tome 8 (October-December 1867):216-40; Jean Gaumont, *Histoire générale de la coopération en France*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1923-1924).

121. Alain Cottureau, "The Distinctiveness of Working-Class Cultures in France, 1848-1900," in Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg, *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States* (Princeton, 1986), pp. 125-30.