

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation : RIOTS AND REVOLUTION : FOOD RIOTS IN
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE SEINE-ET-OISE,
1789-1795

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This dissertation is a diachronic study of the food riots that broke out in the department of the Seine-et-Oise from 1789 through 1795. The purpose of the dissertation is to study one of the most common forms of popular protest in France in all its complexity. This study traces the riots down the years and situates them within a specific political and economic context. It argues that as the political and economic circumstances changed, the riots changed in form and content from market riots to stoppages of convoys to invasions into the homes of farmers. The dissertation also examines

how the Revolution affected the rioters, not only in their material lives, but in their thinking and ideology as well.

Chapter II traces the breadth and scope of the riots. Chapter III is a study of the connections between the policies of the revolutionary governments towards the commerce of foodstuff and the outbreak of the riots. It is shown that the riots changed in form over the years as the rioters sought to deal with the consequences of governmental legislation at different periods. Chapter IV examines the causes of the riots. It studies the long term and short term causes of the riots as well as the immediate causes. In this context, the chapter examines the social structure of the Seine-et-Oise, the effects of the policy of liberalization of the commerce of foodstuff and the effects of war. Chapter V studies the motivations, the organization and the composition of the riot groups. It argues that the Revolution had a direct impact on the mentalities of the rioters. As the years progressed the outlook of the rioters became steadily more radical, and they came to believe that political rights, and a Constitution which protected their interests, would alone solve the problem of subsistence in France.

The sources for this study are the administrative records, police records, judicial records, legislative edicts, price lists and propaganda pamphlets found in the Archives Nationales at Paris, the Departmental Archives at Yvelines and Corbeil-Essonnes and the Bibliotheque de la Ville de Paris.

RIOTS AND REVOLUTION: FOOD RIOTS

IN THE DEPARTMENT OF

THE SEINE-ET-OISE

1789--1795

by

Sukla Sanyal

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of The University of Maryland in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
1994

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(VOL I of II)

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professors James Cockburn, Gay Gullickson and Donald Sutherland for reading and commenting on the dissertation. I am especially grateful to Prof. Gullickson for carefully going through the dissertation and offering several valuable suggestions for its improvement. Professors Suzanne Desan, James Harris and Claire Moses also offered constructive criticism and helpful advice. I would like to take this opportunity to remember the late Dr. Lou Greenberg who gently helped me ease my way into the American academic system. Prof. Gautam Bhadra who helped shape my first years as a historian has constantly encouraged me from afar. I am deeply grateful to both of them. I am also deeply obliged to the staff and workers of the Archives Nationales de France, Archives Départementales des Yvelines, Archives Départementales de Corbeil-Essonne and Bibliothèque de la Ville de Paris. Their kindness made it far easier to work in these archives than I had ever imagined it would be. My thanks to my parents, sister, and friend Terry for always being there for me. A special thank you to my husband Palash. He has helped in many concrete ways, notably by unlocking some of the mysteries of the computer and helping me to draw the figures and maps. But most of all he has helped

me by not giving up on me even during those dark moments when I all
but gave up on myself.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- A.N. : Archives Nationales
A.D.Y. : Archives Départementales des Yvelines
A.D.C.E. : Archives Départementales de Corbeil-Essonne

Chapter I

Introduction

Crises of subsistence were far from rare in eighteenth-century France. Although France did not experience a full scale famine after 1709, smaller crises occurred every few years. This accounts for the fact that in eighteenth-century France, a majority of people worried endlessly about their subsistence and reacted very strongly when they felt that it was threatened, or would be threatened in the near future. Food riots, which were a perennial problem in *ancien régime* France, also occurred frequently during the revolutionary years. They touched a sensitive nerve both among the rulers and the ruled. Food riots were expressions of an economic problem, with profound political and psychological implications.

Problems in the provisioning system were dreaded not only by ordinary people but by the government as well. No government wanted to deal with the social disorder that almost invariably accompanied a crisis of subsistence in France. But there was also a theoretical and moral reason for the government's concern with subsistence.

Traditionally, it was regarded as the sacred duty of every government to provide for the people's subsistence.¹ For much of the eighteenth century, the government was closely involved with the provisioning system. The government itself did not take over the commerce in foodstuff, but it saw to it that the markets were adequately stocked and that prices remained at levels that the poor could afford. The popularity of government depended largely on the efficiency with which it oversaw the provisioning system and on its ability to provide the people with cheap plentiful food.

During the revolutionary years, the preoccupation with the food question continued. As in the *ancien régime*, people rioted when they thought that their subsistence was threatened. The government, in turn, reacted strongly to food riots. The food riots of the revolutionary years have not been adequately studied. Albert Mathiez's study in two volumes, *La vie chère et le mouvement social sous la Terreur*, which was first published in 1897, remains the standard work on the subject.² Mathiez's work is truly impressive in breadth and scope. He was one of the first historians to focus attention on the struggle for popular rights during the Revolution. In his book, he has traced the struggle for subsistence waged by the ordinary people

¹ Steven Kaplan, *Bread, Politics and Political Economy in the Reign of Louis XV*, 2 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 1:52-96.

² Albert Mathiez, *La vie chère et le mouvement social sous la Terreur*, 2d. ed. 2 vols. (Paris: Payot, 1973).

during the revolutionary years. Although theoretically encompassing all of France, in reality Mathiez's work concentrates heavily on Paris and on governmental policy and debates in the Convention.

It should not be assumed that Paris was representative of all of France. The views and interests of people in the provinces sometimes ran counter to those of Parisians. The situation in the Seine-et-Oise is a case in point. The Seine-et-Oise occupied a unique geographical position in that it completely surrounded Paris.³ Its economic interests often conflicted with those of Paris and the food riots in the Seine-et-Oise had a strong anti-Parisian character. So the Seine-et-Oise provides a good example of a non-Parisian perspective on the problem of food riots in France. The experience of the Seine-et-Oise was not, of course, representative of all the other departments of France. But it may be argued that it was fairly typical of the grain rich departments that surrounded Paris. This combination of particularity and representativeness makes the Seine-et-Oise a useful choice for the study of food riots during the Revolution.

This dissertation studies the food riots in the Seine-et-Oise against the backdrop of the revolutionary years 1789-1795. Situating the food riots in a revolutionary context allows an analysis of how these disturbances combined traditional with non-traditional features. This dissertation shows how the Revolution influenced the composition,

³ In accordance with the law of 1964, the department of the Seine-et-Oise was divided into a number of smaller departments of which the principal ones are Yvelines, Essonne and Val d'Oise.

content and character of a traditional form of popular protest in France.

A. Historiography

Perhaps the most influential study of the traditional food riot has been E. P. Thompson's 1971 article, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century".⁴ Most subsequent works on subsistence rioting have been heavily influenced by or have taken issue with Thompson's concept of the "moral economy". Thompson was criticizing the earlier view that food riots and indeed all forms of popular action were mindless and momentary outbursts of fury triggered by economic stimuli. According to the older view, food riots lacked organization, were not informed by any ideology and had no lasting impact on politics and society. This view was baldly stated by François Furet in a 1963 article.

Courants autonomes, émeutes le plus souvent spontanées et mobilisées par conjoncture, violences contre la force des choses plus que contre l'inégalité des hommes, soulèvements sans coordination, sans mandataires et sans idéologie, tels sont les traits principaux de ce que nous pourrions appeler l'action politique élémentaire des classes inférieures."⁵

⁴ E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* no. 50 (1971): 71-136.

⁵ François Furet, "Pour une définition des classes inférieures à l'époque moderne," *Annales: E.S.C.* 18 (1963): 470.

The principal traits of what we could call the elementary political action of inferior classes are autonomous currents, riots that are most often spontaneous and mobilized by conjuncture, violence against the force of things rather than the inequality of men, uprisings without coordination, representatives and ideology.

It was precisely this kind of interpretation that E. P. Thompson challenged.⁶ Thompson argued that the actions of the rioters followed traditional assumptions. Basic was the belief that the several parties who lived within the community had certain social and economic obligations to fulfill, which, taken together, constituted the moral economy of the poor. Any outrage to these assumptions justified popular action whose aim was to right the wrong which had been committed. In the course of food riots, people variously forced the farmers to bring grain to market, lowered the price of grain or bread, or prevented the merchant from taking grain out of an already impoverished community. Clearly associated with the idea of a moral community was that of a paternalist government. The duty of the representatives of the government was to regulate market practices and prevent evil actions. Thompson argued that the decline of paternalist practices and the rise of a new *laissez-faire* political economy in

⁶ Edward Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* no. 50 (1971): 71-136.

late-eighteenth-century England led to an increase in the bitterness and frequency of food riots.⁷

Thompson's interpretation had a profound influence on further studies of food riots. Louise Tilly used the model developed by Thompson in her analyses of food riots in eighteenth-century France. Tilly traced the rise of new forms of the grain riot -- the *entrave* and *taxation populaire* -- against the development of two new national trends in France in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The first was the change in economic policy from paternalism to *laissez-faire*, which meant the decline of the old regulatory market economy. The second was the development of a national market in grain with Paris as the center, which brought with it increased movement of grain, frequent distributional problems and higher prices in producing areas.⁸

More recently, Florence Gauthier and Guy Robert Ikni have elaborated on the concept of a moral economy to argue that the aim of the popular movements was to promote a more ethical and egalitarian society not based on materialist values alone. Such a society would not eliminate economic competition and profit but would seek to control their negative effects.⁹ Cynthia Bouton in her incisive

⁷ Thompson, "The Moral Economy," 78-79, 93, 99, 131-132.

⁸ Louise A. Tilly, "The Food Riot as a Form of Political Conflict in France," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2 (1971): 23-47.

⁹ Introduction to Florence Gauthier and Guy Robert Ikni eds., *La Guerre du blé au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Éd. La Passion, 1988), 7-30.

surveys of the Flour War of 1775 in the Oise, has also illustrated that the ethical principles concerning prices, the accessibility and distribution of food and the function of government, all of which constituted the moral economy, clearly underlay the food riots of 1775.¹⁰

The writings of these historians clearly demonstrate that food riots had a well defined objective, to restore the functioning of the moral economy which had been temporarily disrupted by illegitimate social and economic practices. In their views, the actions of the rioters were always modified by "culture, custom and reason",¹¹ that is, legitimized by an appeal to tradition. Therefore, to understand food riots, we have to understand the traditional workings of the moral economy.

In recent years, even historians who have accepted Thompson's moral economy as a key to understanding the behavior and motives of food rioters¹² have held that the concept makes certain assumptions

¹⁰ Cynthia A. Bouton, "L'économie morale et la guerre des farines de 1775," in *La Guerre du blé*, 93-110.

¹¹ Thompson, "The Moral Economy," 78.

¹² Several historians have criticized the concept of the moral economy as ahistorical and as an inadequate analytical tool in explaining crowd action in food riots. For example, Dale Williams has pointed out that Thompson, in positing the traditional moral economy which the rioters were supposedly upholding against the political or market economy which the rioters were protesting, overlooked the fact that the rioters were themselves a part of the market economy. Dale Williams, "Morals, Market and the English Crowd in 1766," *Past and Present* no. 104 (August 1984), 56-73. For a response to Dale Williams see A. Charlesworth and Adrian Randall, "Morals, Markets and the

about crowd and community behavior that may not be empirically true. The moral economy supposed a communal consensus about what constituted social responsibilities and legitimate collective action which the critics argue might not in actual fact have existed within the community.¹³ Not all groups within the community joined food riots. Those groups which did might have had different motives for doing so. Therefore, it is important to note which groups joined food riots and which groups did not and why. It is equally important to analyse the motives of those who did join the food riots and to determine if they participated in rioting for the same reasons. Doing so would provide real insight into how the community functioned.

Another point that should be noted is that E. P. Thompson first used the concept of the moral economy to explain how collectively-held notions of justice and legitimate behavior influenced crowd action in subsistence rioting in eighteenth-century England. But such was the power of this analytical concept that historians have used it to

English Crowd in 1766," *Past and Present* no. 114 (1987): 200-213. E. P. Thompson has also responded to his critics in his article "The Moral Economy Reviewed," in *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1993), 259-351.

¹³ This point has been made among others by Robert Woods, "Individuals in the Rioting Crowd: A New Approach," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 14 (1983): 1-24; Suzanne Desan, "Crowds, Community and Ritual in the Work of E.P. Thompson and Natalie Davis," in *The New Cultural History*. ed., Lynn Hunt (Berkeley, 1989), 47-71; Cynthia A. Bouton takes note of this criticism in *The Flour War: Gender, Class and Community in Late Ancien Régime Society* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 22-25.

understand crowd behavior in subsistence riots in different times and places and in other types of crowd action as well. In such cases "the moral economy" might obscure as much as it illuminates because it might lead historians to overlook specific and distinctive features in collective activism at particular times and places.

In studying the food riots in the Seine-et-Oise during the years 1789 through 1795 the dissertation attempts to address these points. The dissertation argues that the rioters in the Seine-et-Oise were protesting the consequences of the liberal economic policies implemented by the revolutionary government and demanding a return of the old regulated economy. Their vision of the old regulated economy in which the responsibilities of the various parties living in society were clearly laid down and enforced by a paternalist government might have been an idealized version of that which actually obtained in eighteenth-century France. But the relevant point is that they were hostile to the *laissez-faire* policies of the revolutionary government and turned to the past for more acceptable practices and norms. In this respect the actions of the rioters wholly conformed to those of the subsistence rioters of Thompson's moral economy who turned to the past in search of the idealized society rooted in custom and tradition. But in other respects the food riots in the Seine-et-Oise show a complexity and a modernism not associated with the rioters of the moral economy. And this complexity, the dissertation argues, was the result of the impact of the Revolution on the riots.

The French Revolution led to a widening of the political nation. Non-elite groups which had never participated in national politics before began to take an interest in the unfolding of the Revolution. Part of this politicization was brought about by constitutional means such as the extension of the vote, the establishment of electoral assemblies and the granting of the right to petition the government. But equally important was the wave of popular activism which swept through France at the onset of the Revolution in 1789. These popular movements like the anti-seigneurial riots of July and August 1789 had autonomous origins, but the impact they had on politics at the national level and on national legislation gave them legitimacy and associated hitherto subordinate groups with national politics. Historians have only recently begun to study in detail the impact of the Revolution on culture and politics at the local level. For example, Suzanne Desan in her study of lay religion and popular politics in the department of the Yonne has shown how religious activists adapted the language, ideology and techniques provided by the Revolution to their own ends and finally forged a new popular religious culture which incorporated elements from the old Catholic and the new revolutionary culture.¹⁴ Bryant Timmons Ragan has shown how the new revolutionary ideology as symbolised in the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity influenced rural political culture

¹⁴ Suzanne Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred: Lay Religion and Popular Politics in Revolutionary France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

and guided political activism in the Somme.¹⁵ Guy Robert Ikni has analyzed the influence of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen on peasant radicalism and shown how the peasantry's interpretation of their declared rights led them to formulate a critique of economic liberalism.¹⁶

This study also argues that there was an intimate connection between the food riots and the Revolution. Even though the riots were autonomous in origin and leadership, the rioters were nevertheless influenced by the revolutionary experience. The early years of the Revolution and the social legislation of the revolutionary governments inspired hopes of radical social change and this hope touched the rioters as well. The food riots that broke out in the early years of the Revolution in the Seine-et-Oise assumed a breadth and scope that surprised the administration of the Seine-et-Oise. An analysis of the language used by the rioters in 1792 and 1795 show their concern that the Revolution might not fulfill the expectations that it had raised. The rioters seemed to find legitimacy for their actions not in tradition alone but also in the principles of liberty, equality and political sovereignty decreed by the Revolution. Sometimes the rioters

¹⁵ Bryant Timmons Ragan, Jr., "Rural Political Culture in the Department of the Somme during the French Revolution." Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1988.

¹⁶ Guy Robert Ikni, "La critique paysanne radicale et le libéralisme économique pendant la Révolution française : droit social, économie morale ou économie politique populaire?" in *La Révolution française et le monde rural*. (Paris: Editions du C.T.H.S., 1989), 507-520.

understood and used the political vocabulary popularized by the Revolution in quite different ways from those used by the revolutionaries in government. They adapted the political language and the ideology of the Revolution to suit their own ends and to legitimize their actions. While organizing themselves, the rioters made use of various techniques of political expression like petitioning, pamphleteering and summoning communal assemblies. These were traditional mediums of expression but the Revolution had given them new potency and popularity.

The food riots in the Seine-et-Oise in the years 1789-1795 also show a level of sophisticated organization that is not usually associated with the traditional food riots. The impact of the Revolution with its emphasis on social justice which could (unintentionally) in turn encourage popular activism may also be seen here. In some communes in 1792, the rioters quite overwhelmed the local administration. Not only did the local officials accept the demands of the rioters, sometimes they even imitated the actions of the rioters by organizing raids into local farms and raising local militias to "maintain order" in the countryside. To characterize such action under the term "riot" might appear to be problematic. It was as if an alternative power structure had been established in the communes, one dictated by the rioters and established as a result of the riots. The riots could assume this level because they were occurring in an atmosphere congenial to change. In the Seine-et-Oise

some district and department officials and notable personalities came out in support of demands made by the rioters such as impositions of controls on prices and regulation of activities of grain merchants. In addition to their feeling that the interests of the Seine-et-Oise were being injured by the new economic policies of the revolutionary governments, they shared with the rioters certain expectations from the Revolution which they voiced to the central government in petitions and delegations. In such cases the riots may be taken as evidence of a communal consensus on the organization of society and the economy. But the riots could also reflect various kinds of tensions between townfolk and countryside that was to become evident in Montlhéry and Dourdan, or between grain merchants, *fermiers*, *laboureurs*, and the rioters. The murder of Simoneau, the mayor of Étampes brought to the fore the strains latent within the community and ranged those who opposed the economic policies of the revolutionary government against those who supported them.

The non-traditional aspect of the food riots in the Seine-et-Oise is also illustrated by a new demand that came up in the course of the food riots there and was closely associated with them. This was the question of redistribution of land holdings. In the Seine-et-Oise property was very unevenly divided: a handful of rich farmers monopolized much of the land while the rest of the peasantry had to make do with small strips or were altogether landless. So those who lacked enough land to make a living demanded that the large

properties be divided up so that more people had access to land. Proponents of land reform argued that if a larger number of people had access to land and therefore to grain, it would stop a few large farmers from monopolizing grain and would help to solve the problem of food riots.

The implications of giving the peasantry access to land has been debated by historians. Georges Lefebvre's view was that the peasantry was an anti-capitalist force, interested only in production for use rather than for the market, and strongly attached to collective rights and practices. Lefebvre maintained that the peasant revolution, which he declared was "autonomous in terms of its origins, its proceedings, its crises and its tendencies," was opposed to the capitalist thrust of the bourgeois revolution. In so far as peasant property survived the Revolution it served as a brake on the emergence of agrarian capitalism in France.¹⁷

Other scholars have disputed Lefebvre's view that the peasant masses were essentially anti-capitalist. Guy Robert Ikni and Florence Gauthier have argued that the small peasantry was not necessarily opposed to the market and have maintained that the growth of market oriented small farming in areas where peasants were given access to

¹⁷ For a synthesis on Georges Lefebvre's views on the peasantry see "La Révolution française et les paysans," reprinted in *Études sur la Révolution française* (Paris: PUF, 1954).

land ushered in capitalist agriculture in some parts of France.¹⁸

This view of peasant-led agrarian capitalism, the *voie paysanne* thesis, has not been empirically proven for most regions of France. There is no evidence to show that if the land hunger of the peasantry had been satisfied in the cereal plains around Paris, it would have ushered in market-oriented small-scale farming in these regions of France. But this demand is significant because it shows that the peasantry was doing more than just expressing traditional grievances with new forms and techniques borrowed from the Revolution; they were debating new solutions to old problems rather than just demanding a return to the past. Giving the poor peasantry access to land might have led to competition over resources and the market which would have engendered new kinds of conflict in the Seine-et-Oise.

In view of what has been said above the food riots in the Seine-et-Oise during the years 1789-1795 may be described as a popular protest movement which combined traditional and modern features.

This dissertation emphasises this combination of traditional and modern features as it traces food riots in the Seine-et-Oise over the years 1789-1795. As the dissertation studies food riots over these

¹⁸ Florence Gauthier, *La voie paysanne dans la Révolution française: L'exemple de la Picardie* (Paris: Maspero, 1977); Ikni, "La Critique paysanne radicale et le libéralisme économique," 506-520. The theory about the peasant route to capitalism was first proposed by Anatoli Ado in a thesis he wrote in Russian in 1971. A summary of this thesis may be found in Albert Soboul, "A propos d'une thèse récente. Sur le mouvement paysan dans la Révolution française," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 45 (1973): 85-101.

years, it tries to place them within their specific political and economic contexts. It shows that as the political and economic situation in the Seine-et-Oise changed over the years, so did the aims of the rioters and the measures they took to redress their grievances. So the form and content of the riots also changed.

Cynthia Bouton first pointed to the necessity of studies that went beyond emphasizing the similarities of food riots that erupted across time and place to pointing to the distinctiveness of particular riots. In her study of the Flour War of 1775 Bouton argued that the rioters were using the instrument of the *taxation populaire* to protest not only high prices, scarcity and methods of selling which they found unjust, but also the increasing economic and social polarization in the *pays de grande culture* which made their conditions of living precarious. The targets of attack were most frequently those who farmed the largest amount of land in the countryside. The latter were also most closely associated with the privileged orders in the countryside either as farmers of seigneurial land or collectors of tithe and seigneurial dues. In attacking them, the rioters were first of all protesting the social order of *ancien régime* France. They were also protesting the nature of its evolution which was pushing the middling and small farmers into the ranks of the landless and making life ever more miserable for the latter.¹⁹

¹⁹ Bouton, *The Flour War*; also Bouton, "L'économie morale." Guy LeMarchand has also maintained that when the rioters searched out reserves of grain in the monasteries or in the granaries of dime

The importance of Bouton's work lies in demonstrating the evolving nature of the food riots which, while retaining their traditional form, underwent a considerable transformation in content to take note of the changes in rural society. In this way, says Bouton, the *taxation populaire* in the *pays de grande culture* during the Flour Wars bypassed the traditional movements of subsistence.²⁰

In this dissertation too, the emphasis is on change. A survey of the riots that broke out in the Seine-et-Oise between the years 1789 and 1795 shows that the aims and tactics of the rioters changed as they attempted to deal with the problems in the provisioning system. Actually, these problems themselves varied with changes in governmental policy and in the economy. The rioters altered their goals and strategies accordingly. This is reflected in the changing form, location and content of the riots. Together with the riots, the dissertation also studies the rioters. Studies by Richard Cobb, Colin Lucas, George Rudé and Michel Vovelle have shown that it is possible to access the hopes, fears and aspirations of the people actually involved in the riots.²¹ While this dissertation studies governmental

owners and farmers who farmed dimes and seigneurial rights, they were indirectly attacking feudalism in the countryside. See "Troubles populaires au XVIIIe siècle et conscience de classe: une préface à la Révolution française," *Annales historiques de la Révolution Française* 43 (1971): 32-48.

²⁰ Bouton, "L'économie morale," 110.

²¹ Richard Cobb, *The Police and the People: French Popular Protest, 1789-1820* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970); Colin Lucas, "The Crowd and Politics," in Colin Lucas, ed., *The French Revolution*

policy and its relevance to the riots, it also analyzes the demands of the rioters, their behavior in the course of the riots and the nature of their participation in the riots.

B. The politics of the Seine-et-Oise

Under the *ancien régime*, the Seine-et-Oise had been a part of the ancient province of the Ile-de-France. The department was formed in 1790 as part of the administrative re-organization undertaken by the Constituent Assembly, which was then the chief legislative body in France. The Assembly abolished the myriad administrative divisions of *ancien régime* France and replaced them with eighty-three departments, one of which was the Seine-et-Oise.²² Richard Cobb has described the formation of the Seine-et-Oise as the most anti-Parisian of a series of measures carried out by the Constituent Assembly. The Assembly was extremely suspicious of the inhabitants of Paris whom it considered to be politically dangerous. So the Seine-et-Oise was

and the Creation of Modern Political Culture, 2 vols. (New York: Pergamon Press, 1987), 2:259-285; George Rudé, "La taxation populaire de mai 1775 à Paris et dans la région parisienne," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 28 (1956): 139-179 and "La taxation populaire de mai 1775 en Picardie, en Normandie et dans le Beauvais," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 33 (1961): 305-326; Michel Vovelle, *Ville et campagne au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1980).

²² William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 125.

designed as a measure to contain Paris, as a means of reducing the influence of Paris on the surrounding countryside.²³

From the very beginning the Seine-et-Oise developed a rivalry with Paris. The capital of the Seine-et-Oise was Versailles which had been the seat of the royal court since Louis XIV moved there in 1682. The Estates General also met at Versailles in May 1789. The Estates General was the assembly summoned by Louis XVI in May 1789 to deal with the looming economic crisis in France. It included representatives of the three orders or Estates in France. The First Estate was the clergy, the Second Estate was the nobility, and the Third Estate comprised the non-privileged, that is, the rest of the population of France. The Estates General renamed itself the National Assembly in June 1789, setting in motion the events that became the French Revolution in motion. On October 6, 1789, King Louis XVI was taken back to Paris by a procession of sixty thousand men and women, in the wake of one of the most important food riots of the Revolution. On October 5, 1789, about seven thousand women marched from Paris to Versailles to protest the high prices of bread. This protest escalated into a riot, the scene of which was the royal palace. The crowd ultimately decided that it would take the 'baker, the baker's wife and the baker's boy,' that is, the king, the queen and the dauphin back to Paris with them. From that time Louis XVI and his family were

²³ Richard Cobb, *Paris and its Provinces: 1792-1802* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 94.

confined to Paris as virtual prisoners of the Revolution.²⁴ The National Assembly followed the king to Paris a few days later. Versailles was politically overshadowed by Paris from this point onwards. The relations between the two cities were mutually hostile. The Parisians tended to dismiss the Versailles as a "population of lackeys" of the royal court. The Versailles, on the other hand, were hostile to the political and economic privileges that the Parisians commanded because of their numbers and their political aggressiveness. They also resented their own diminished political importance and economic deprivation which was the result of the closing of the royal court and emigration of the nobles.²⁵

Economic conflicts of interest added to the bitterness between Paris and the Seine-et-Oise. The Seine-et-Oise formed a part of the region of large-scale cereal cultivation in northern France, from which Paris drew its food supplies. In times of scarcity, the inhabitants of the Seine-et-Oise resented the outflow of grain to Paris, as did the other regions which formed a part of the Parisian bread basket. The Seine-et-Oise suffered the most on this account because of its proximity to Paris. During the Revolution, the government also passed decrees reserving the grain surplus of the

²⁴ For details of this riot see Doyle, *The French Revolution*, 121-123.

²⁵ For more on this theme, see Cobb, *Paris and its Provinces*, 90-97.

Seine-et-Oise for the consumption of the Parisian population.²⁶ The export of grain to Paris was a leading cause of hostility between Paris and the Seine-et-Oise during the period under survey. Adding to the problem was the fact that all of the grain that flowed into Paris, regardless of its place of origin, had to pass through the often hungry Seine-et-Oise. The food riots that broke out in the Seine-et-Oise from 1789 through 1793 had an intensely anti-Parisian character.

The anti-Parisian character of the politics of the Seine-et-Oise does not mean that the department was counter-revolutionary. Support for the war and the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was high in the Seine-et-Oise. In the summer of 1792 the department supplied three thousand volunteers to the French army and very few departments could do better.²⁷ The department participated enthusiastically in the war effort in other ways such as raising money for the war and taking steps to manufacture arms. In early 1793, when the Convention ordered another 300,000 men to be conscripted for the French army, the department responded enthusiastically once again. The First Revolutionary Battalion of the Seine-et-Oise left to fight the counter-revolutionaries in the Vendée in May 1793 and was joined by

²⁶ For example, the law of 14 brumaire an II (November 4, 1793), decreed that the department of the Seine-et-Oise was to be exclusively reserved for the provisioning of Paris.

²⁷ G. Rocher, *Le district de Saint-Germain-en-Laye pendant la Révolution: étude historique* (Paris: F. Rieder & Cie.), 1914.

the Thirteenth Battalion of the Seine-et-Oise soon after. The men of these battalions were praised by general Canclaux for their bravery in the siege of Nantes. Romme, Delacroix and Prieur de la Marne, who toured the department in May 1793 as deputies of the Convention, lauded the patriotism of the inhabitants of the department of the Seine-et-Oise.²⁸ The rate of oath-taking to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was also high in the Seine-et-Oise and this may be interpreted as another sign of support for the Revolution.²⁹

In national politics, the deputies of the Seine-et-Oise generally followed the dominant national line. Most of the fourteen deputies elected to the Legislative Assembly in August 1791 were constitutional moderates, loyal to the Revolution but little inclined towards radical politics.³⁰ But the Seine-et-Oise was the first of the departments to support the Convention in June 1793 after the fall of the Girondins. The arrest of the twenty-two Girondin deputies on June 2 provoked a strong reaction in many departments, where people would go on to organize insurrection against Paris. But the *Conseil général* and the Directory of the department of the Seine-et-Oise, together with the district and communal administrations of Versailles, drew up a strong address in support of the Convention. This address was

²⁸ L. Thenard and R. Guyot, *Le Conventionnel Goujon: 1766-1793* (Paris: Felix Arcan, 1908), 50-54, 74-77.

²⁹ Bruno Benoit, *Les grandes dates de la Révolution française* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1988), XII.

³⁰ Rocher, *Le district de Saint-Germain*, 135.

directed at the eighty-three departments, especially the departments of the west, which had just launched an appeal for revolt. This address was read before the Convention on June 13, 1793. Since this was the first departmental statement in favor of the Convention after the events of June 2, the Convention had reason to be grateful to the Seine-et-Oise, and the reply of President Mallarmé to this address bears ample testimony to this gratitude.³¹

After June 1793 most of the Seine-et-Oise deputies in the Convention supported and collaborated with the Montagnard government.³² Support for the Montagnard government was especially strong in the districts of Versailles and Saint-Germain-en-Laye, where the Jacobin clubs also had a strong Montagnard orientation.³³ So it is clear that in the Seine-et-Oise, hostility towards Paris did not translate into hostility towards the Revolution. Despite their mutual animosities, the two departments followed the same political line. The food riots that broke out in the Seine-et-Oise during the revolutionary years were not, therefore, expressions of widespread

³¹ Guyot and Thenard, *Le Conventionnel Goujon*, 77-78.

³² See Alison Patrick, *The Men of the First French Republic* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 340-358 for the political affiliations of the deputies of the Seine-et-Oise. It should be noted that Jean de Bry, Carra, Grangeneuve, Camus, Goupilleau and Barère, although they were also elected from other departments (and listed as such by Patrick) actually opted to represent the Seine-et-Oise.

³³ Michael L. Kennedy, *The Jacobin Clubs in the French Revolution: The Middle Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 421.

counter-revolutionary sentiment in the department, though the rioters might protest the consequences of specific policies decreed by the revolutionary governments, and might express at various times, especially in 1795, their disenchantment with the Revolution.

C. Structure of Work

This dissertation focuses on the impact of the Revolution on the food riots of the Seine-et-Oise. Chapter II traces the spread of the riots in the Seine-et-Oise during the years 1789, 1791, 1792 and 1795. It identifies patterns in the geography, society and economy of the riot-stricken areas as well as in the behavior and actions of the rioters. This chapter and the following chapters also examine these patterns.

Chapter III shows that the riots changed in form and location over the years as the economic circumstances within which the peasants, artisans and wage-workers provisioned themselves changed. This chapter relates these changes to shifts in governmental policy which occurred frequently during the revolutionary years and which affected the location and supply of grain.

Chapter III pushes Cynthia Bouton's analysis further to argue that not only was the bitterness and frequency of the food riots in the Seine-et-Oise born of the nature of social divisions in the department, but also that these food riots were directly responsible

for giving rise to demands for changes in the social structure in the department.

Chapter IV analyzes the motivations, organization and social and demographic composition of the riot groups. It also analyzes the impact of the Revolution on the riots. It shows that sections of the rioters became progressively more politicized and that their vision broadened in breadth and scope as their political education was furthered during the revolutionary years. It uses E.P. Thompson's concept of the moral economy to measure the depth of this politicization. It argues that the rioters looked not to the old paternalist model, but to their awareness of political sovereignty to further their vision of how the economy was to be organized.

Thus this dissertation hopes to make a contribution to the study of riots. It attempts to show that the riots were complex phenomena which changed in shape and content as the views and opinions of the rioters changed and as the socio-economic circumstances within which the riots occurred also changed. This dissertation also looks closely at popular activism during the Revolution and the popular consciousness and popular mobilization connected with it.

Chapter II

The Geography of Food Riots: July 1789-July 1795

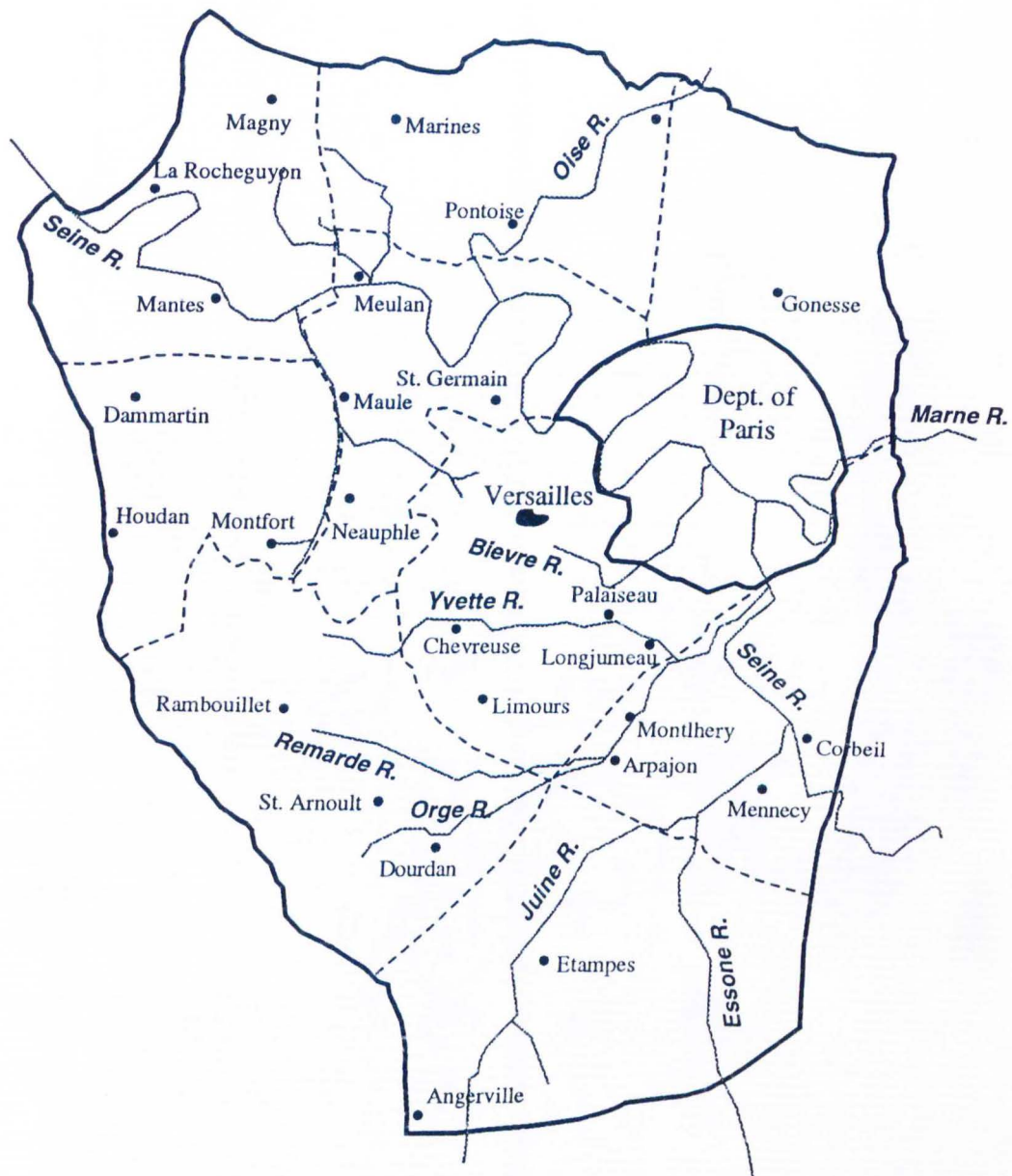
The department of the Seine-et-Oise covered an area of 572,547 hectares and had a population of 493,639 in 1790. The Seine-et-Oise was bounded on the north by the department of the Oise, on the south by the Loiret, on the east by the Seine-et-Marne and on the west by the Eure and the Eure-et-Loir.¹ The Seine-et-Oise also completely encircled the department of Paris.

Geography and economy of the region

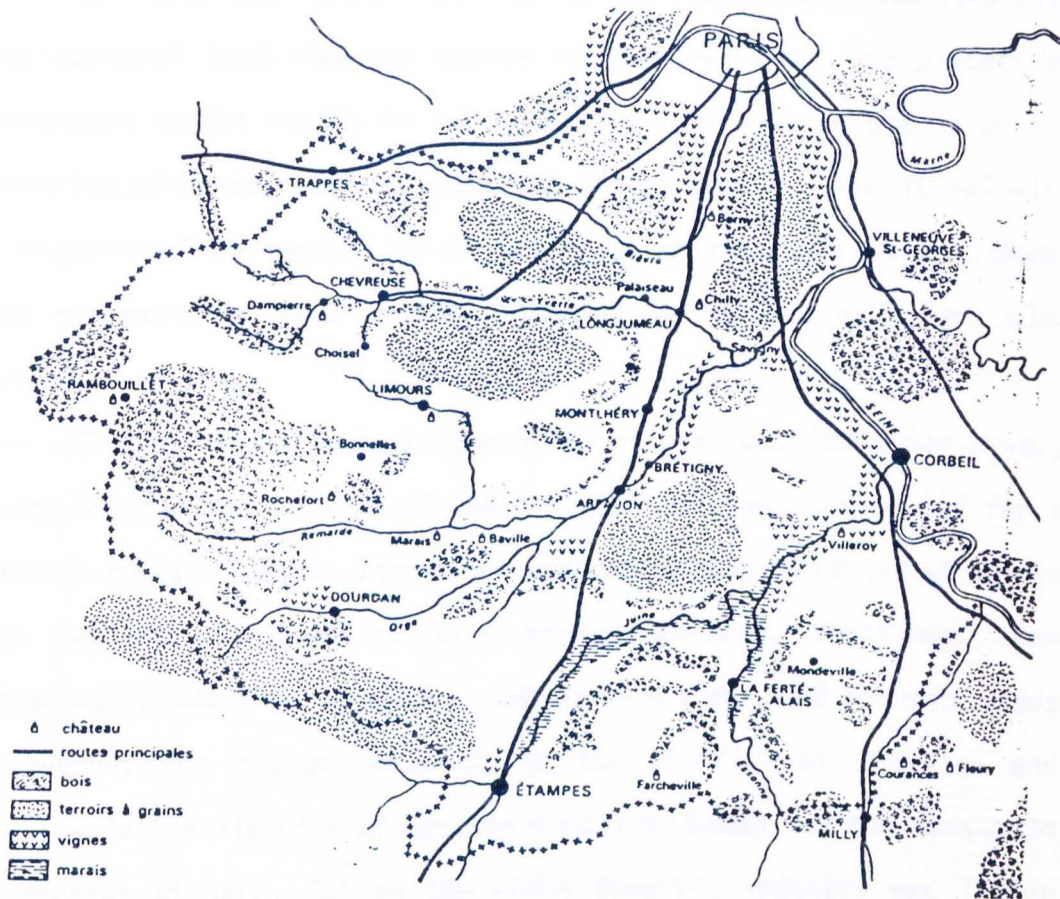
The Seine-et-Oise was known for the great diversity of its topography and the variety of its soils.² Most of the region comprised the area known as the Hurepoix formed by two limestone plateaux

¹ *Mémoire statistique du département de Seine-et-Oise*, A.N., F/20/258.

² *Mémoire statistique du département de Seine-et-Oise*, A.N., F/20/258. Much of the following information is taken from this document and also "L'État du département de Seine-et-Oise en fructidor an VIII. Rapport du préfet Germain Garnier," reproduced in *Revue de l'histoire de Versailles et de Seine-et-Oise* 26 (1925). See also Jean Jacquart, *La crise rurale en Ile-de-France* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1970). Also A. Defrèsne and F. Évrard, *Département de Seine-et-Oise. Les subsistances dans le District de Versailles de 1788-1'an V*, 2 vols. (Rennes: Imprimerie Oberthur, 1921-1922), vol. 1, Introduction.



Map 2.1. The departments of the Seine-et-Oise and Paris in 1790. All market towns have been shown.



château = chateau; routes principales = major routes;
 bois = woodland; terroirs à grains = land under cereal
 cultivation; vignes = vines; marais = swamp.

Map 2.2. The Hurepoix in the eighteenth century. Source: Jean Jacquot, *La crise rurale en Ile-de-France* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1971), 786.

joining together at different levels, although topographically the northern districts had more in common with the Oise. This region was comprised of large forests like those of Rambouillet and Saint-Germain, river valleys formed by the Seine and its tributaries like the Orge, Remarde, Juine, Essonne and Bièvre, and some very rich agricultural land like the Beauce in the southwest, the plateau of Longboyau in the region to the south of Paris and the plains of the district of Gonesse. Its economy was predominantly agricultural with a majority of the population earning a living from agriculture. Wheat and rye were the main cereals although barley and oats were also grown.³

Outside of agriculture the Seine-et-Oise was famed for a very large manufactory of printed cotton cloth located at Jouy and for a smaller one at Essonne. There were some porcelain factories at Sevres and leather workshops at Saint-Germain-en-Laye. There was some household production of cotton and woollen cloth and hosiery goods throughout the region. Beaumont in the district of Pontoise and Louvres in the district of Gonesse were also known for the household production of lace. But on the whole domestic industry was little developed in the Seine-et-Oise.⁴

³ For actual harvest, consumption and export figures see chapter IV, "Causes of Food Riots."

⁴ On this theme see chapter IV.

The region had a thriving commerce in grain, a large part of which was directed towards the provisioning of Paris. The flour trade was developed in the cantons of Étampes, Corbeil and Dourdan to which the numerous mills in these regions bore ample testimony. The flour trade was also important in the districts of Pontoise and Gonesse in the north. It was directed not only towards Paris but towards different parts of the nation as well.⁵

Some very large markets participated in the flour and grain trade in the Seine-et-Oise. The most important of these was Montlhéry in the district of Corbeil. On market day every Monday, *laboueurs*⁶ from as far away as Dourdan as well as from the cereal rich areas like Gometz, Nozay and Fontenay-les-Briis in the neighboring district of Versailles brought grain to Montlhéry. The latter preferred this market to Limours which was closer, because Montlhéry attracted the wealthiest grain merchants as well as numerous bakers from Paris and Gonesse.⁷

⁵ For the growing importance of the flour trade in the Paris region, see Steven Kaplan, *Provisioning Paris: Merchants and Millers in the Grain and Flour Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 95, 344

⁶ *laboureur*: a *laboureur* was a rich peasant who worked, with his own equipment, the land that he owned or leased. Also see glossary.

⁷ For independent buying by Paris bakers in the markets of the Seine-et-Oise, see Steven Kaplan, *Provisioning Paris* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 472-473

In a good year as much as 300-350 *muids*⁸ of cereals were brought to Montlhéry every week. Even in a bad year like 1788, about 30-40 *muids* of grain could be found in the hall of Montlhéry. Next in importance was Étampes, which served as a *entrepôt* from which the wheat from the Beauce was channeled to the north and south of the country and even abroad. The Saint-Gilles market in Étampes attracted about 150 *muids* of grain per week. Other important markets were Houdan, which could supply the Paris region with as much as 120 *muids* per week, Neauphle-le-Chateau, Chevreuse, Gonesse and Pontoise. Transportation systems had been developed with a view to facilitating the transport of grain and flour. The Seine and its tributaries like the Juine and the Essonne served as important channels to take grain and flour to Paris. A network of roads also connected the different market towns of the Seine-et-Oise with Paris and other large towns. The most important of them was the road between Paris and Orléans via Longjumeau, Montlhéry, Linas, Arpajon, Étrechy and Étampes. There were other important routes to Lille, Calais, Dunkerque, Strasbourg in the north, to Rouen, Brest, Nantes in the west and Lyon in the south.

In 1790, when the department was formed, it was divided into nine districts, Mantes, Pontoise, Gonesse, Montfort, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Versailles, Corbeil, Dourdan and Étampes. Versailles with a population of 105,000 was by far the most densely populated, although two-thirds of its population lived in the town of

⁸ *muid* = 2880 *livres* or 12 *setiers* or 1872 litres.

Versailles or its environs.⁹ It was also among the poorest districts although it included the two rich cereal belts formed by the plateau of Longboyau and the plateau of Gometz. Also poor were the districts of Saint-Germain and Mantes which had to import grain from other districts to cover their deficits. Both Versailles and Saint-Germain suffered economically during the Revolution. The departure of the royal court and the aristocracy led to the annihilation of the luxury goods industries, particularly stocking making, and also led to large-scale unemployment in the building and public works sector.¹⁰

The point to note is that even the districts which produced surplus grain had poor zones. The most striking contrasts could be found in the district of Dourdan. Here the two southern cantons of Ablis and Dourdan, especially the regions which lay below the river Orge, formed a part of the Beauce, one of the richest cereal producing regions of France. But the northern cantons of Rambouillet, Les Essarts and Rochefort were poor. The soil was rocky and sandy, covered with forest or stunted bushes and not more than 10 percent of the land could be used for the cultivation of bread cereals.¹¹ The neighboring district of Étampes could also claim some degree of prosperity from

⁹ Census of 1790.

¹⁰ For Saint-Germain, see A.D.Y., 1 LM 443, *États Statistiques*; for Versailles, Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:248.

¹¹ Emile Auvray, "L'agriculture et les paysans (région de Dourdan Rambouillet), à la fin du XVIIIe siècle," *Recherche et publication des documents relatifs à la vie économique de la Révolution*; Comité départemental de Seine-et-Oise 17 (1942-1943): 19-20.

its participation in the grain trade. But some parts of Étampes were very poor, notably the canton of Chamarande. It was here that the riot of March 1792 originated. The soil of the river valleys (in this case the valley of the river Juine) tended to be very poor. They were either forested or used for the cultivation of low quality vines.¹² The cantons of Milly and Maise where the soil was poor and commerce underdeveloped were also poor. Richard Cobb in his studies of the famine of the Year III¹³ has pointed to the poverty of the population which lived along the banks of the river Seine. The soil was poor but had to support a very large population of small cultivators, wine-growers and transport workers.¹⁴ The situation was the same in Mantes, in Saint-Germain and in Corbeil. In Corbeil in 1795, the rioters were invariably drawn from the poor communes that dotted the banks of the river Seine, for example, Draveil, Juvisy, Savigny, Morsang-Saint-Orge, Grigny, Ris, Orangis and le Plessis-le-Comte, although the scenes of the riots were the rich farms that lay to the south-west of the district. The situation in Mantes was no different. Whereas the northern canton of Magny enjoyed a prosperity derived from

¹² Observations of the communes of Chamarande, Brenillot and Villeconin, A.D.Y., 1 LM 443.

¹³ Richard Cobb, "Les disettes de l'An II et l'An III dans le district de Mantes et la vallée de la Basse Seine," *Mémoires de la Fédération des sociétés historiques et archéologiques de Paris et de l'Île de France* 3 (1951): 231.

¹⁴ The reason for the density of population along the river banks will become clear in chapter IV.

the large scale cultivation of wheat, the southern communes were poor, with the population largely composed of wine-growers and transport workers.¹⁵ Grain, making its way to the market-place of Mantes, was regularly stopped on the routes during years of scarcity. In view of this unequal geographical distribution of wealth within the districts in the department of the Seine-et-Oise it is not surprising that all of the districts whether they were deficit or surplus producing areas were affected by the riots.

Types of food riots

The term food riot is used here to include a wide variety of disturbances triggered by popular reaction to the non-availability or high prices of food. The most common forms of food riots that are examined in this chapter are as follows. First, there is the market riot which is the food riot in its classic sense. A market riot usually occurred when there was not enough grain in the market to satisfy the needs of consumers, or when the price of grain brought to market was too high. These two developments usually occurred in conjunction. In response, the angry crowds which had collected in the market square would seize the grain and proceed to sell it at a price they deemed just. A variation of the same form was the bread riot where the crowd would seize bread from bakers who had come to the

¹⁵ See letter of the President of the municipal administration of Mantes to the Minister of the Interior, dated 30 brumaire, an IV, A.N., F/11/405.

market or from bakeries and then sell it at a just price. This was called *taxation*. A third form of the food riot was the *entrave* where cartloads of grain travelling along the roads were stopped and their contents sold. Similarly, barges which had docked at a port with a cargo of grain were boarded, their contents unloaded and sold. A fourth form of the food riot was raids on the farms of cultivators. Grain found in the lofts was seized and sold.

Louise Tilly¹⁶ has characterized the market riot as the urban version of the food riot and the *entrave* as the rural version. This is undoubtedly correct if only locale is considered. But it is useful to remember that participants in a market riot were not only the residents of the market town. Inhabitants of surrounding villages were often accused of being the primary inciters of a market riot. Conversely, disgruntled townsmen often banded together to raid the granaries of farmers in the surrounding villages or to stop cartloads of grain and forcibly bring them to market. Thus in terms of participants, distinctions between urban and rural versions of food riots are problematic.

Although food riots have been classified into various forms as above, two or more forms often occurred together. For example, rioters would stop wagons loaded with grain and headed for a specific destination and divert them to the nearest market town. Municipal

¹⁶ Louise Tilly, "The Food Riot as a Form of Political Conflict in France," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11 (1971): 23.

officials would then attempt to prevent the grain seized by the crowd from being sold on the market, much to the annoyance of the people. The latter would then take matters into their own hands and sell off all of the grain in the market. Similarly a period of raids on the farms of local cultivators could set the stage for a market riot. Or, *taxation* or setting the price of grain could be followed by *taxation* or setting the price of bread so that bakers could not make unfair profits by buying grain at the controlled prices and selling bread at higher prices. In short, a food riot was a many headed and rapidly mutating phenomenon.

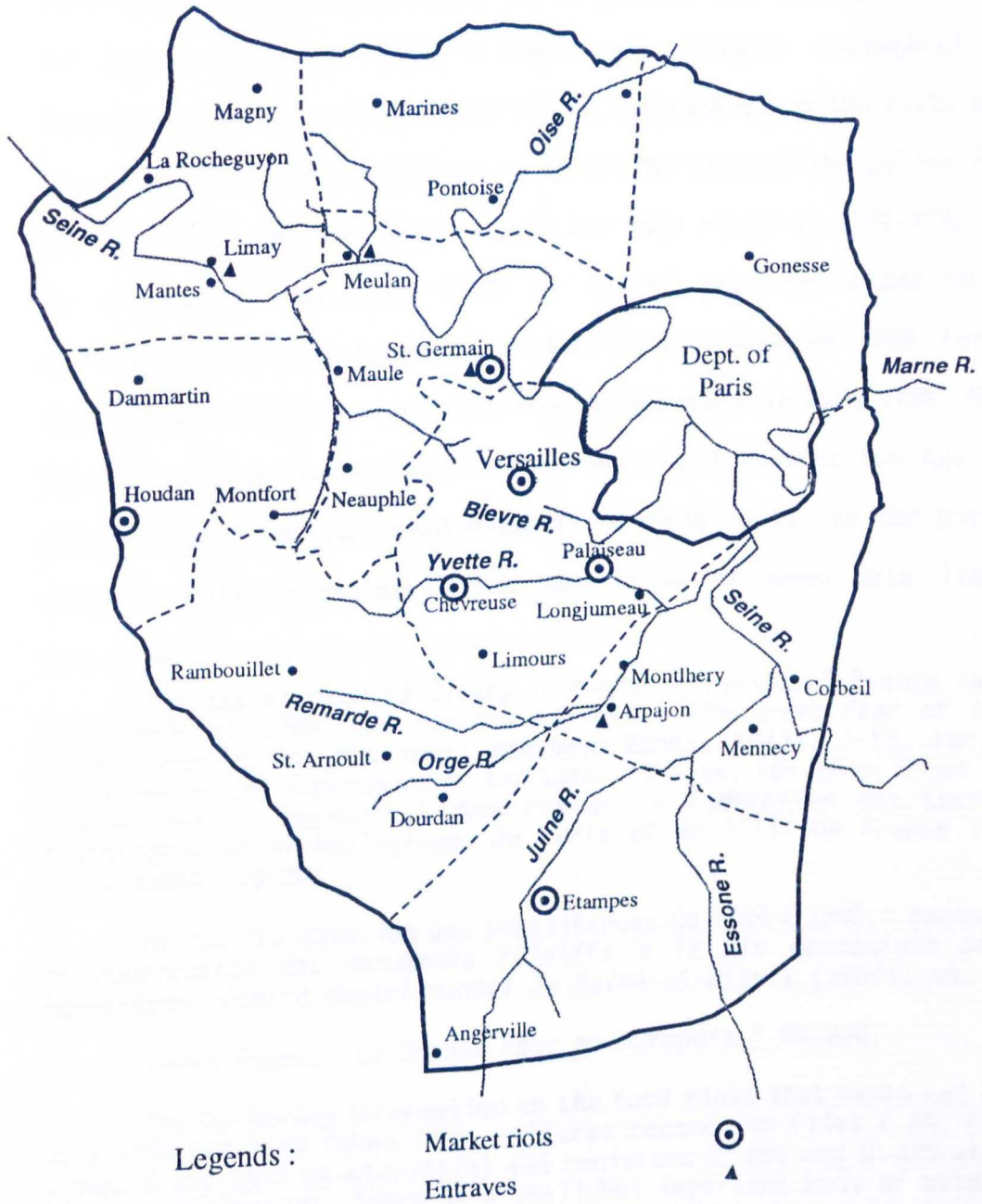
The food riots in the Seine-et-Oise were primarily grain, rather than bread riots. This was partly due to the fact that the Seine-et-Oise was an agricultural region and more people had direct access to grain than was the case in a food importing region like Paris, where people got their cereals in the form of bread which they bought from the bakers. But even in the Seine-et-Oise, the bread market was important in large towns like Versailles, Saint-Germain-en-Laye and Houdan. Even these large towns suffered from grain rather than bread riots during this period. This was largely due to the fact that while the grain sector was being transformed by the liberalization of the economy, the bread sector was still protected. Moreover, the prices of bread were tied to grain prices. So when the prices of grain were set by the rioting crowds, the municipal officers

lowered bread prices, either on their own accord or under pressure from the rioters.

This chapter traces how the riots spread gradually after their initial outbreak in the years 1789, 1791, 1792 and 1795. Detailed descriptions will further our understanding of these riots by helping to establish certain trends. These trends are analyzed in greater detail in the following chapters. This chapter will trace how the riots shifted in location from the market-place to the homes of cultivators and the reasons for this shift will be examined in later chapters. In this overview of riot-affected regions, an attempt will be made to point to similarities in the geographical locations and economies of these areas. In later chapters, the roles of geography and the economy as contributory factors in riots are analyzed. In this chapter, the behavior and actions of the rioters are also described. Here too, it is possible to trace the emergence of certain patterns which will form the basis of the study of the rioters in chapter V. In summary, it may be said that this chapter provides much of the evidence for the arguments which will be advanced in later chapters.

The Food Riots of 1789

The disastrous winter of 1787-1788 was followed by a bad harvest in 1788. These developments set the stage for the food riots of 1789. There was shortage of food, anger at the authorities for not doing enough to assuage the misery of the poor, and intensified fears for



Map 2.3. The food riots of 1789.

the future. The uncertain political situation in the first half of 1789 and the widespread rumors of brigandage and pillage all seemed to spell impending doom.¹⁷ There was trouble throughout the department. Unfortunately, very little information on the riots after the outbreak of the Revolution in July 1789 exists. The police files which contain detailed accounts of the food riots of 1791-1792 have no records for those of 1789. M. Gatin¹⁸ puts the blame on the non-functioning municipalities of July through December 1789. For his remarkable article on the Great Fear of Hurepoix in July 1789, Henri Dinet¹⁹ has gone through hundreds of municipal records but has come across only a few scattered examples of food riots. So the picture remains sadly incomplete.²⁰ But the value of even this limited

¹⁷ For the widespread misery in the countryside of France in the first half of 1789, see Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789*, trans. Joan White (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973), 7-56. For the situation in the department of the Seine-et-Oise, see Henri Dinet, "La Grande Peur en Hurepoix," *Mémoires de la Fédération des sociétés historiques et archéologiques de Paris et de l'Île de France* 18-19 (1967-1968): 99-200.

¹⁸ Gatin, "La question des subsistances de 1789 à 1795," *Recherche et publication des documents relatifs à la vie économique de la Révolution. Comité départemental de Seine-et-Oise* 1 (1907): 48.

¹⁹ Henri Dinet, "La Grande Peur en Hurepoix," 99-200.

²⁰ The following information on the food riots that broke out from July 1789 has been taken from scattered records in files C 88, C 89, C 242, C 252 (all on microfilm) and registers O¹ 485 and O¹ 489 at the Archives Nationales. There is a small but important body of evidence in D XLI (papers of the Comité des Subsistances), also at the Archives Nationales. Secondary sources are -- Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les Subsistances*, 1:216-257; Eugène Grave, "Le service des subsistances à Mantes: d'après les registres des délibérations, Juillet et Août 1789," *Comité départemental de Seine-et-Oise* 1 (1907): 54-55, 57-60,

evidence lies in the fact that it gives us an idea of the grievances of the people in 1789 and the kinds of problems faced by the authorities in maintaining the food supply system.

The lack of grains and flour gave rise to a host of complaints from numerous municipalities all through July and August 1789. There were rumors that grain was being hoarded and not being brought to the market-place. These rumors triggered serious riots in Saint-Germain and its surroundings. On July 16, a crowd of armed men from Saint-Germain and Poissy numbering between eight hundred and a thousand raided the town of Poissy. They searched the homes of several flour and grain merchants. A sizeable amount of grain was found at the home of one miller, the *Sieur* Sauvage. Sauvage was seized and brought back to Saint-Germain, where he was taken to the market hall. There, an angry crowd demanded that Sauvage should be put to death immediately because he was a hoarder. The mayor and some other notables intervened to try to save the life of Sauvage. After much argument it was decided that a meeting would be held at a nearby church, where an investigative committee of twelve commissioners would be appointed to look into the matter. Once appointed, the twelve commissioners went back to the market-place where they interrogated Sauvage. On the basis of this interrogation, they determined that Sauvage was not a hoarder. He had, in fact, received a commission from the government to form a company which was responsible for converting

64-65 and Dinet, "La Grande Peur en Hurepoix," 99-200.

into flour the grain purchased by the government. This flour was to be sent back to Paris to feed the people of the city. The 338 *setiers* of grain discovered at Sauvage's home was part of a cargo that had arrived about twelve days earlier. About 128 sacks had already been converted and had been sent back to the *école militaire* at Paris. The rest would be sent to the same destination as soon as it had been converted into flour.

The commissioners came out of the market-place and tried to tell the crowd of their findings. But they could not make themselves heard above the uproar. One or two of the commissioners were actually threatened that they would be hanged if they tried to defend Sauvage. Thereupon it was decided that the twelve commissioners together with the crowd would move to the church once again where the former would make public Sauvage's responses to their interrogation. But while most of the people did move to the church a few stayed behind. They seized a knife from a butcher boy, went inside the hall where Sauvage was being held prisoner and cut off his head. Not content with this they mounted Sauvage's head on a pike and carried it in triumph around the town.

The next day the crowd left for nearby Andresy and Puisieux to search for grain. At Puisieux, they discovered grain at the home of *Sieur* Thomassin, a grain merchant. Thomassin was seized, tied to a grain cart and dragged back to Saint-Germain, where he was promised the same fate that had befallen Sauvage. Before leaving Puisieux, the

crowd announced that the next day it would be the turn of the town of Pontoise where six heads were destined to fall. When the news arrived at Pontoise, there was tumult in the town. Pontoise, one of the largest grain markets in the area, was inhabited by a large number of grain and flour merchants. While the latter fled to their homes and locked themselves in, a frantic municipality dashed off two letters to the National Assembly begging for armed help. The municipality did not forget to mention that if Pontoise was attacked, the storehouses that held grain for Paris would not be left untouched. So the provisioning of Paris would be interrupted.²¹

The implicit threat had its desired effect. A commission of deputies from the National Assembly rushed first to Saint-Germain and then to the prison of Poissy where Thomassin had been taken. In front of the prison, the deputies confronted a huge crowd of men and women who were bent on hanging Thomassin. The deputies intervened, at first with little effect. Thomassin was dragged out and tied up against a wall. Someone went in search of gallows and another for the confessor. This interval turned out to be critical for during this time the crowd lost its unity. Some inhabitants of Poissy declared that they did not

²¹ For events in Saint-Germain, Poissy and Andresy, see letter of the Maréchal de Noailles, governor of Saint-Germain, to the National Assembly dated July 18; *procès verbaux* drawn up against the *Sieurs* Le Clerc and Sauvage, dated July 16, Interrogation of Sauvage dated July 17 and *Pièces justificatives de l'innocence de Sauvage*, dated July 21; two letters of the Municipality of Pontoise, both dated July 18. All of these documents can be found in A.N., C 89. See also letter of the Municipality of Poissy to the National Assembly dated July 16, 1789, A.N., C 88.

want any blood shed in their town. They handed over Thomassin to the deputies with the stipulation that he be brought to trial. These people themselves escorted Thomassin and the deputies out of town and even showed them a way to Versailles which would enable them to avoid the town of Saint-Germain.²²

These events made the town of Saint-Germain notorious. Matters were not much helped by persistent reports that inhabitants of the town were waylaying cartloads of grain destined for Paris and Versailles and carrying it away to Saint-Germain. The Municipality of Poissy complained that forty carts of grain had been diverted from Poissy to Saint-Germain.²³ Meanwhile in the district of Mantes forty-five carts of grain destined for Paris were stopped in the commune of Limay.²⁴ At Arpajon in the district of Corbeil, two carts of grain, similarly destined for Paris, were stopped on July 17. When the *maréchaussée* arrived, they found the people determined to guard their booty in view of the fact that there had been no grain in the market-place that morning and the bakers had stopped baking bread for lack of flour. The *maréchaussée* was assured that the waylaid grain

²² For the mission of the deputies, see *Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860; recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des chambres françaises (première série, 1787-99)*, 92 vols. (Paris: Librairie administrative de P. Dupont, 1862-1980), 8:249-250, Session of July 20, 1789.

²³ Letter of the Municipality of Poissy to the National Assembly dated July 16, A.N., C 88. See also Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:28.

²⁴ Grave, "Le service des subsistances à Mantes, 1789," 64.

would not be pillaged but would be sold according to the current market price.²⁵ Stoppages of grain destined for Paris and Versailles became so common that armed escorts had to be provided by the authorities to provide for its safe passage.²⁶

Meanwhile matters had taken a serious turn at Chevreuse in the district of Versailles. The inhabitants of Chevreuse and its surroundings had been clamoring for grain for quite some time. They found an able leader in their curé Joseph Adant. Adant had long found himself at odds with the municipality because of his revolutionary preaching. In July, when Chevreuse found itself devoid of grain, Adant intervened with the court on behalf of his parishioners. In response to his letter, the Secretary of State of the King's court (*Secrétaire d'état de la maison du Roi*) wrote that he would have willingly helped the town, but he did not have any surplus grain at his disposal. He would have been glad if the *curé* pointed out where grain could be found. Even before the Secretary's letter reached Chevreuse, the people had pointed out in rude fashion where grain could be found. On July 19, the partisans of the *curé* forced their mayor, some municipal officers and some notables to lead them on a march on the farms of several surrounding cultivators. Grain found there was brought back

²⁵ Dinet, "La Grande Peur en Hurepoix," 108.

²⁶ See the instructions given by the Ministers of War to the commanders of various regiments in July, August and September 1789. Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:30-37.

to Chevreuse and sold the next day at the set price of 24 *livres* per *setier*.²⁷

The same pattern of events was repeated at several other market-places. On July 22, at Houdan, before the market-place opened, the mayor, together with the commander of a detachment of cavalry of the Lorraine Regiment and several inhabitants of the town, searched the homes of several *laboueurs* and grain merchants who lived in the town. A brigadier of the *maréchaussée* together with another detachment of cavalry searched the farms of *laboueurs* who lived near the town. After these searches the *laboueurs*, were instructed to bring certain amounts of grain to market. This was duly done. The mayor then set the price of wheat at 31 *livres* per *setier*, *meteil* at 26 *livres* and rye at 19 *livres*, much to the outrage of the *laboueurs* and the grain merchants who had sold wheat at 62 *livres* per *setier* at the preceding market.

Even these measures did not satisfy the crowd, for the 150 *setiers* of wheat at the market-place did not meet the needs of the more than fifteen hundred hungry buyers gathered there. The mayor and the troops were then forced into a search of the storehouses in town where the *laboueurs* and grain merchants had stored all the flour and grain that they had not brought to market. Ninety *setiers* of wheat were discovered, brought back to the market-place and distributed free

²⁷ For events at Chevreuse, see Dinet, "La Grande Peur en Hurepoix," 104-107. For the Secretary's letter to Joseph Adant see A.N., O¹ 486, dated July 23.

of charge to those who had been unable to secure grain. The mayor told the assembled people that there would be no shortage of grain on the next market day. He was true to his word. The searches of the homes of grain merchants and *laboueurs* continued over the next few days, provoking the latter into sending a strong note of protest to the king.²⁸

Further south in the district of Étampes, the residents of Ferté Alais took similar steps on July 20, to ensure that their market would be supplied with grain.²⁹ Étampes itself narrowly escaped a riot in July. In that month, anonymous letters were sent to several people, including the municipal authorities, warning of dire consequences if the prices of bread were not lowered. From July 15 onwards rumors began to circulate that the city was to be put to flames. Six days later, the city learnt from travellers that a detachment of Parisian guards accompanied by a large number of people from the countryside were marching to Étampes to seize grain and flour. There was panic in the city and the tocsin was sounded. People of all estates took up positions before the gates, determined to defend their homes courageously.

²⁸ For events at Houdan see A.N., C 89, undated letter written to the Duc de Liancourt, President of the *Chambre Nationale* at Versailles by the *laboueurs* and grain merchants of Houdan and its surroundings; also letter written by the captain of the bourgeois militia of Houdan to the deputies of the National Assembly on July 28, 1789.

²⁹ Dinet, "La Grande Peur en Hurepoix," 110-111.

Two citizens, a lawyer and a postmaster, impatient at the non-arrival of the mentioned army, threw down their arms and wandered on ahead to Arpajon to gather information on the number of these troops and the object of their mission. Returning promptly, they informed the waiting citizens that the officers they had spoken to had no other mission than to request Étampes for grain for Paris, and the troops had accompanied them to protect the returning convoys. This convoy departed with 200 sacks of flour but the Municipality of Étampes warned Paris that repeated demands from Paris upon Étampes would cause the townspeople to rise up in arms. People had already been heard to say that it was better to die with arms in their hands than of hunger.³⁰

The trouble that the municipal officers had been anticipating for so long finally broke out on September 5. Details of the riot are unavailable but according to a letter written by the Secretary of State of the King's household, a crowd seized control of the market-place, set the price of grain and insulted the officers of the police, the millers, and the commissioners from Paris who had come to buy flour and grain from Étampes. The latter were prohibited from ever coming back to Étampes, where the rioters were determined not to let

³⁰ For rumors in Étampes, see Dinet, "La Grande Peur en Hurepoix," 104. For the incident of July 21, see A.N., DXLI/2, (undated) address by the citizens of Étampes to the National Assembly.

any grain leave for Paris.³¹ This struggle over grain between Étampes and Paris caused much bitterness between the two cities and was to become a constant feature of their relationship during the revolutionary years.

This resentment against Paris' never-ending grain needs was not limited to the town of Étampes. During the grain riot at Houdan, it was noted that bakers and grain merchants from Paris had been prevented from buying grain at the market-place.³² When food was short, each commune naturally tried to hold on to its supply of grain. The well known localism of eighteenth-century towns and villages came to the fore in times of scarcity. On July 19, the town of Meulan expressed its concern that the *subdelegué* of the *Intendant* at Mantes who had been in charge of distributing foreign grains to Mantes and its surrounding market-places had resigned and his function taken over by a committee of inhabitants of the town of Mantes. Clearly, the Municipality of Meulan was afraid that this committee would appropriate for Mantes all grain that came in from the outside, leaving the surrounding areas to fend for themselves.³³

³¹ See letter of the Secretary of State of the King's household to the Comte de la Tours du Pin dated September 11. Also his letter to Saint Suzanne dated September 9. A.N., 01, 486.

³² See undated letter written to the Duc de Liancourt by the *laboureurs* and grain merchants of Houdan, A.N., C 89.

³³ From the register of deliberations of the Municipality of Meulan, A.N., C 88.

The town of Meulan then went on the offensive. In the months to come it made quite a habit of diverting to its own market-place grain making its way to Mantes.³⁴ Meanwhile, the city of Mantes was struggling to maintain order. In July and August, Mantes was besieged by requests from surrounding towns like Meulan, Houdan, Dammartin, Dreux, Neauphle and Montfort for grain. On July 18, a large crowd of Mantais demanded that the municipality take measures to provision the city and prevent barges and wagons of grain destined for other locations from leaving the city. The municipality promised new measures and further trouble was avoided.³⁵

As the harvest began to come in towards the end of August and the beginning of September, the situation appears to have eased somewhat although there was a grain riot in the market of Palaiseau on September 1, and a bread riot in Versailles on September 13. Buyers erupted in anger when they found the market-place of Palaiseau sadly undersupplied on September 1. On being informed by some men and women coming from Igny that a cartload of grain belonging to *Sieur* Sanglier was making its way towards Bièvres, they spoke of stopping this cart and bringing it back to Palaiseau. The rioters were preempted by several notables of Palaiseau, who, accompanied by the *maréchaussée* and a detachment of the bourgeois militia, went to Sanglier's farm,

³⁴ Grave, "Le service des subsistances à Mantes, 1789." For the activities of Meulan see 62, 63, 64, 65, 67.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

berated him for not bringing grain to market, opened up his granaries and brought back to the Palaiseau market-place a cart carrying 2 *setiers* of wheat and 4 of rye. The anger against Sanglier was so great that he was forced to take refuge with a member of the municipal committee. Meanwhile another crowd went to the mill of the widow Theralagant and forced her to hand over 14 sacks of grain that Sanglier had given her to be milled. This grain was sold at the market-place of Palaiseau, the wheat at 24 *livres* per *setier* and the rye at 11-12 *livres* per *setier*. Sanglier himself promised to furnish 8 *setiers* of wheat and 5 of rye every week of the current month, and a total of 1 *muid* of grain for the current year.³⁶

The only known bread riot of the period took place at Versailles on September 13, 1789. The target of the riot was Auguste Boulanger whose bread shop was attacked because he persisted in selling the twelve-pound loaf at 40 *so/s* instead of at 36 *so/s* which was the price set by the authorities. The immediate cause of the riot was a quarrel between the baker's wife and a man named Lacombe who had come to buy bread three times and each time had insulted her. The third time, Lacombe gathered a crowd and this crowd ultimately rioted. Boulanger's shop and home were ransacked, and a part of his oven, utensils and chairs burned. Boulanger himself was dragged outside his shop and almost hanged from a lamp post. He was rescued by the intervention of a company of the bourgeois militia led by the *sous-lieutenant* Petigny.

³⁶ Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:233-234.

Boulangier was taken to Lefebvre, commissioner of the quarter and then carried away to prison to save him from the hands of the crowd. Other bakers were also threatened that same evening, among them the *Sieur Garreau* who was licensed to sell bread to the royal palace and who had made himself very unpopular by selling an expensive and high quality bread to a limited clientele.³⁷ After September, we hear of no grain riots in 1789 although authorities in market towns like Magny, Corbeil and Arpajon continued to requisition grain from the countryside to keep their markets adequately stocked and thus prevent riots.³⁸

Despite the limited evidence at our disposal it seems fair to say that the trends which would become more and more evident as the revolutionary period wore on were already apparent in 1789. The people were angry because the market-place was undersupplied and the prices of grain so high. They blamed the *laboueurs* and grain merchants for diverting grain away from the local markets to those where they could obtain higher prices for their grain, notably Paris. The rioters targeted the grain merchants and the *laboueurs* as their primary victims and sought to obtain control of the grain that the latter had

³⁷ The events of September 13 at Versailles have been reconstructed on the basis of several documents in Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:242-245, including *Rapport de la garde bourgeoise de Versailles*, *procès verbal des officiers de la garde nationale et des gardes de la prévôté de la Hôtel*, and *procès verbal de M. Lefèvre, commissaire de police à Versailles*, all dated September 13, 1789.

³⁸ Letter of the Municipality of the town of Magny dated September 10; letter of the Municipality of Corbeil-sur-Seine, dated September 10, A.N., DXLI/2.

at their disposal. Their aim was to redirect grain to the local markets away from the importing centers like Paris. The resentment towards Paris emerges clearly from the description of the riots of 1789. This tug of war over food was to remain a constant source of tension between Paris and the Seine-et-Oise during the revolutionary period.

The Food Riots of 1791

During 1790 and the greater part of 1791, the situation appears to have remained calm in the department of Seine-et-Oise. The next wave of riots broke out in September 1791 and this time, unusually enough, the coming in of the new harvest signalled the start of troubles.³⁹ In studying the riots of 1791 one is immediately struck by two singular features. First, the food riots broke out in the harvest season when normally food was most abundant and the market-place calm. The famous "flour wars"⁴⁰ which convulsed the northern departments of France in 1775 broke out in May. These months were the *soudure* or waiting period when the produce of the last harvest was exhausted and the new harvest was yet to come in. By

³⁹ Information for the food riots of 1791 has been taken from A.N., F/7/3689/6 and F/7/3689/7 and A.D.Y., 1 LM 459.

⁴⁰ George Rudé, "La taxation populaire de mai 1775 à Paris et dans la région parisienne," *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française* 143 (1956): 139-79, and "La taxation populaire de mai 1775 en Picardie, Normandie et dans le Beauvaisis," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 165 (1961): 305-29.

contrast August and September was the time of plenty. The small cultivators, hard pressed to pay their taxes and dues, would bring in their harvest to the market and prices would be at their lowest. In 1791 this was clearly not the case. Even the administrators were surprised and not a little resentful that markets should be so empty and grain so dear at the end of an abundant harvest.⁴¹

The second surprising feature about the riots was that they were concentrated in and around the richest grain markets of the department of the Seine-et-Oise -- Gonesse and its environs, Étampes, and Corbeil-Mennecy. Gonesse was located in a rich grain producing countryside and its market also attracted grain from Picardy and Brie. The reason for this active commerce in grain was the preponderant role that Gonesse played in provisioning Paris with bread in the eighteenth century.⁴²

Étampes was one of the principal grain markets in the Beauce which was itself perhaps the most important grain producing region in France. Étampes was located on the route from Orléans to Paris. This

⁴¹ Letter of the Directory of the district of Corbeil to the Minister of the Interior dated September 19, 1791, A.N., F/7/3689/6; *procès verbal* of the Directory of the district of Étampes dated September 10; letter of the *procureur général syndic* of the department of Seine-et-Oise to the Minister of the Interior, dated September 14, 1791; and the *procès verbal* of the commissioners sent to the district of Étampes, dated September 22-26 all in A.N., F/7/3689/7.

⁴² Claude Gindin, "La pain de Gonesse à la fin du XVIIe siècle," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 29 (1972): 414-433. Léon Cahen, "L'approvisionnement en pain de Paris au XVIIIe siècle et la question de la boulangerie," *Revue de histoire économique et sociale* 14 (1926): 458-472.

route was of great importance in the transportation of grain from the Beauce, not only to Paris in the north, but also to the departments beyond the Loire and to the ports of the west for export to the other countries of Europe.⁴³ Thousands of hectoliters of grain were bought and sold in the market of Étampes in the eighteenth century.⁴⁴ The economy of Étampes was greatly dependent on this commerce in grain. For example, the mills of Étampes could convert 12,000 sacks of grain into flour every day and milling was a flourishing local industry.⁴⁵

To the north-east of Étampes, on the confluence of the rivers Essonne and Seine stood the town of Corbeil. Although small in size, it was a bustling commercial and artisanal center. Grain from the Beauce, the Brie and the surrounding villages arrived at Corbeil to be bought and sold in its market. A considerable portion of this grain was purchased by flour and grain merchants from Paris and travelled up the river Seine or was transported by road on the route from Fontainebleau to Paris. As at Étampes, so at Corbeil, hundreds of

⁴³ Report of the commissioners sent to the district of Étampes in September 1791, A.N., F/7/3689/7.

⁴⁴ Early in the nineteenth century, the market of Étampes would furnish 150,000 hectoliters of grain for Paris alone. See Louis Bergeron, "Approvisionnement et consommation à Paris sous le Premier Empire," *Mémoires de la Fédération des sociétés historiques et archéologiques de Paris et de l'Île de France* 14 (1963): 197-232.

⁴⁵ This information is contained in the petition which the citizens of Étampes presented to the National Assembly in July, 1789. This petition can be found in A.N., DXLI/2.

mills converted grain into flour every day and bakers from Corbeil played an important role in provisioning Paris with bread.⁴⁶

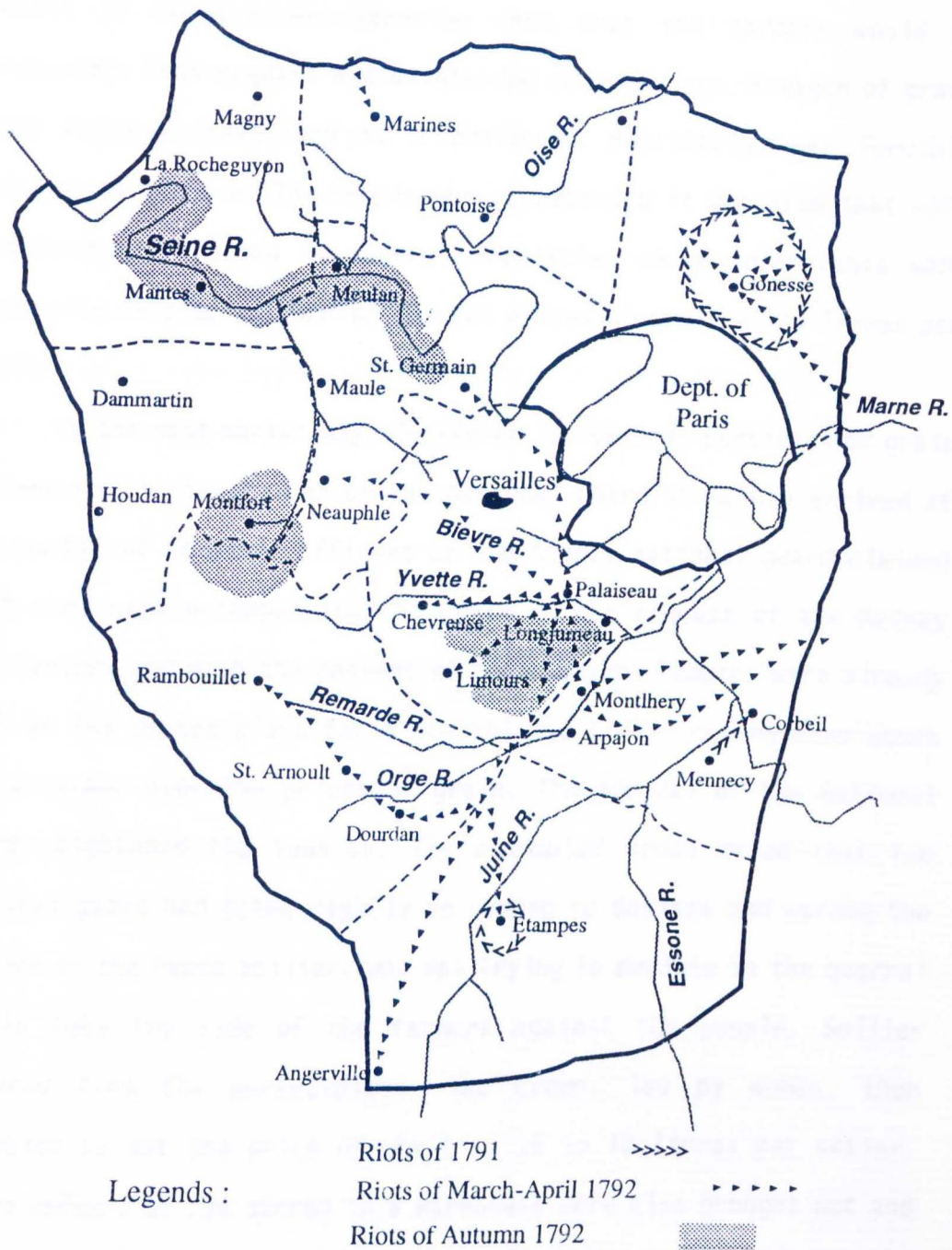
Gonesse, Étampes and Corbeil, therefore, had thriving economies in the eighteenth century. All of their economies were closely linked with that of Paris. Their commerce was overwhelmingly influenced by the needs and demands of the premier city of France. It was these rich commercial centers that were affected by scarcity in 1791.

Gonesse

Early in September, there was trouble in the market of Gonesse. On Monday, September 5, a crowd of women protested the high prices of grain after the harvest and threatened the farmers who had brought grain to the market. In the face of these threats, some of the farmers abandoned their grain and others, informed of what was happening, did not show up. There was only about 500 *setiers* of grain in the market and most of it had already been sold to the grain merchants assembled in the inns. The women decided that in the absence of the cultivators, the grain would be sold at the price of the day and the municipal officers eventually agreed with them. The *procureur* reported that "ill-intentioned" people were making threats to go in search of grain to the nearby farms.

Anxious to prevent trouble on the next market day, the Municipality of Gonesse wrote to the municipalities of the surrounding

⁴⁶ Jacquart, *La crise rurale*, 57.



Map 2.4. The market riots of 1791 and 1792.

communes, asking them to direct their farmers to bring grain to the market of Gonesse and assuring them that the farmers would be protected. This request had unintended consequences. A wagon of grain from Puiseux travelling to a different destination was forcibly brought to Gonesse. The people who accompanied it declared that work had been interrupted in several localities whose inhabitants were proposing to come to Gonesse and set prices of grain at 20 *livres* per *setier*.

On the next market day, September 12, several cartloads of grain accompanied by twenty men of the national guard of Aulnay arrived at the market of Gonesse. Officers of the Aulnay national guard claimed that they were accompanying the grain at the request of the Aulnay cultivators and with the consent of their mayor. Tempers were already high at the market-place for a quarrel had broken out between women and a farmer over the prices of grain. The arrival of the national guard heightened the tension. The assembled crowd cried that the national guard had acted rightly in coming to Gonesse and warned the Justice of the Peace Sollier, who was trying to mediate in the quarrel not to take the side of the farmers against the people. Sollier withdrew from the market-place. The crowd, led by women, then proceeded to set the price of wheat at 16 to 18 *livres* per *setier*. Twelve *setiers* of rye stored in a warehouse were also brought out and although the proprietor was not present, sold at 6 *livres* per *setier*.

The *Conseil général* of the commune of Gonesse concluded that all of these disquieting developments were the result of a conspiracy that had been hatching for several days. The *procureur* maintained in his report that the national guard of Aulnay had written to several other brigades of the national guard of the district and that they had formed a coalition.⁴⁷

Trouble now spread to other parts of the district. On September 12, the big bells sounded at 10:30 in the morning in the market town of Louvres. A group of people marched through the town to the sound of drums that had been seized from the national guard of Louvres. All farmers were asked to present themselves at a parish assembly at midday precisely. The crowd came three times to the mayor and other municipal officials and threatened to drag them by their hair to the assembly if they did not come of their own free will. At the assembly, farmers were forced to agree to sell wheat at 20 *livres* per *setier* and the bakers in turn agreed to sell bread at 2 *sols* per pound. The municipal officers were forced to sign a decree setting the

⁴⁷ For events at Gonesse see especially the *procès verbal* drawn up by the brigadiers of the gendarmerie of Saint Denis and Louvres dated September 5; the anonymous letter written to the mayor and municipal officers of Gonesse on September 6; *procès verbal* of the *Conseil général* of the commune of Gonesse dated September 12, letter of the *procureur syndic* of the district of Gonesse to the commander of the Twenty-first Regiment of cavalry dated September 18. See also the letter of the *procureur syndic* of the district of Gonesse to the Municipality of Aulnay dated September 18 and the reply of the Municipality of Aulnay also dated September 18. All of these documents are in A.N., F/7/3689/6. Some of these documents are also preserved in A.D.Y., I LM 459.

price of the twelve-pound loaf at 24 *so/s*. The municipality then wrote to the Directory of the district of Gonesse asking for armed help.⁴⁸

The agitation also encompassed the surrounding parishes of Puiseux, Marly la ville, Chatenay and Chennevières. In these parishes, the wage workers, particularly the threshers, stopped work and continually sounded the church bells in an attempt to assemble the people. The farmers were made to sign promises to deliver wheat at 20 *livres* per *setier*. Many farmers stopped going to market. People also talked of setting prices of eggs, butter and other foodstuff.⁴⁹

There was trouble again at Gonesse on the next market day. On September 19, Courtier, a *laboureur* of Tremblay, came to Gonesse before eight in the morning. He complained that three of his wagons carrying grain to mills had been stopped by the national guard of Tremblay at two in the morning in contravention of the law of the free circulation of grain in the interior of the kingdom. The grain was to be brought to the market of Gonesse.

The mayor of Gonesse, accompanied by twenty-five cavaliers of the Twenty-first Regiment, then went to the gates of the city to await

⁴⁸ Extract from the register of deliberations of the Municipality of Louvres dated September 14, and copy of the letter written by the municipal officers of Louvres to the Directory of the district of Gonesse dated September 15, A.N., F/7/3689/6.

⁴⁹ Letter of the *procureur syndic* of the district of Gonesse to the Minister of War, dated September 14, 1791; extract from the register of deliberations of the Municipality of Chennevières dated September 18; minutes from the assembly of citizens in the commune of Puiseaux dated September 12; all in A.N., F/7/3689/6.

the arrival of the national guard of Tremblay. When the latter arrived with the mayor of Tremblay at their head, they demanded to be let into the market of Gonesse for which they had brought grain. The mayor of Tremblay maintained that the national guard had been forced to act in this fashion because the week before a *laboureur* of Tremblay had refused to sell grain to the mayor of Tremblay. The mayor of Gonesse was ultimately forced to let in the national guard at the insistence of some women. One of them even struck the mayor, despite the fact that he was wearing his official scarf, and another advanced toward him, spade in hand, and threatened to cut off his head.

In the market-place, too, there were scenes of disorder. Although there were some sacks of grain in the market-place, the proprietors were not to be seen even although the gendarmerie had been to the different cabarets asking them to go to market.⁵⁰ The people demanded that the grain be sold in the absence of their proprietors. Some farmers, however, came to the market after the bells had been rung a second time. Immediately after, quarrels broke out between the sellers and buyers over the prices of grain. Despite the presence of troops, the price of grain was forcibly set and the best quality grain

⁵⁰ The law said that grain could not be sold unless the proprietors or their representatives were actually present by their piles. In order to avoid selling grain which had been forcibly requisitioned or which had already been sold illegally before the market opened, cultivators would sometimes disappear conveniently from the market-place, leaving their grain unattended. This was a great source of frustration for the consumers which found expression during the riots at Gonesse.

sold at 20 *livres* per *setier*. The grain which had been taken into custody by the national guard of Tremblay was also sold at the insistence of the crowds at 18 *livres* per *setier*. Completely overtaken by the turn of events, the mayor who was also a cultivator and flour merchant handed in his resignation at the end of the day.⁵¹

After September 19, peace appears to have been re-established in the markets of Gonesse. On September 20, a deputation of women from the *quartier* Saint Nicolas visited the Justice of the Peace and pointed out that since grain had been sold at the last two markets at 22, 20, 18 and even 16 *livres* per *setier* (according to quality) there was no reason why the price of bread should not also be reduced to 2 *sols* per pound. The directory recognized the justice of the demand. Despite the opposition of the bakers, it decreed that from September 21, bread weighing six and twelve pounds was to be sold at 2 *sols* and 2 *deniers* per pound. The prices of the smaller breads, which were usually consumed by a wealthier clientele were left unregulated.⁵²

⁵¹ Extract from the register of deliberations of the Directory of the district of Gonesse; also copy of the letter written by M. Courtier, farmer at Tremblay to the *procureur syndic* of the district of Gonesse dated September 20 and copy of the letter written by the *procureur syndic* to the Municipality of Tremblay dated September 20, all in A.N., F/7/3689/6.

⁵² Extract from the register of deliberations of the Directory of the district of Gonesse dated September 20, A.N., F/7/3689/6.

Corbeil

By this time strife had spread to the other districts. In the district of Corbeil, there had been sporadic unrest in the markets since the last week of August. People resented the fact that the price of grain was so dear despite the fact that the harvest had been a good one. In Mennecy, troops patrolled the market-place on August 30 and September 6. But the troops, just eight in number, could not prevent violence on Tuesday, September 13. Immediately after the market opened at midday, a violent quarrel broke out between a farmer and women over the price of grain. The farmer was in danger of receiving a severe beating. Thereupon the cavaliers of the detachment of Hainault intervened but the farmer could only be rescued after the women were promised that he would be placed under guard. The women were then joined by men, and matters took an ugly turn with some of the troops being roughed up and repeated attempts being made to get at the farmer. Only the arrival of the mayor and his promise that the best quality wheat would be sold at 24 *livres per setier* managed to calm the crowd. But there remained a lot of ill-will against the troops who were accused of being brought to Mennecy solely for the purpose of supporting the farmers in their ill doings, like selling grain on their farms instead of bringing it to market and exporting grain outside the locality.⁵³

⁵³ Reports of the commander of the Regiment of Hainault dated September 13 and 14, A.N., F/7/3689/6.

Matters also took a serious turn at Corbeil, *chef-lieu* of the district of Corbeil. Corbeil housed important storehouses where grain was stored for Paris. So the town was of great importance to the Parisian authorities as well. On Friday, September 9, some people were seen threatening farmers who had brought grain to market. Fearing serious trouble for the next market day and unable to rely completely on the national guard of Corbeil, the *procureur* of the district requisitioned twenty-five men from the Hainault brigade which was stationed at Mennecey. But the arrival of these troops at Corbeil about forty-five minutes before the opening of the market drove the crowd to fury. Once again the women took the lead and were joined by the men. The troops were soon surrounded and asked under what authority they had arrived at Corbeil. When the commander confessed that they had been ordered to Corbeil by the *procureur*, the latter was seized and narrowly escaped being hanged. On that fateful afternoon the *procureur* was apparently nearly hanged three times and escaped with his life only because of the protection provided by the national guard of Corbeil. The national guard of Corbeil, although seriously offended by the arrival of the troops from Mennecey, nevertheless did try its best to uphold order in the town. They were not wholly successful. By now the tocsin had been sounded, adding to the general confusion. The troops from Mennecey were forced to withdraw at the insistence of the crowds who then took over control of the market-place. The farmers

were forced to sell the best quality wheat at 22 *livres* per *setier*.⁵⁴ Next, the people demanded and obtained the setting of the price of bread. The Directory of the district declared that the best quality bread weighing eight pounds was to be priced at 16 *sois* and bread weighing six pounds was to be sold for 12 *sois*. The "customary" price of bread was supposed to be 2 *sois* per *livre* although during these years the price of bread fell this low only in exceptionally good times.⁵⁵

After September 12 an uneasy calm returned to the markets of Corbeil, although the high prices of wheat there caused a great deal of resentment. A letter postmarked Creteil, October 30, circulated in the parishes of Corbeil, indicates that there might have been some trouble in the parishes around Corbeil. This letter said that an assembly had been held on that very day at Creteil, calling for the diminution of the price of grain. It called for similar assemblies to be held in all the parishes which received the letter.⁵⁶ But there are no records of food riots in the district of Corbeil after September in the year 1791.

⁵⁴ According to the market price list, best quality wheat was selling at 25 *livres* 10 *sois* per *setier* at the market of Mennecy for the first fifteen days of September. See A.D.Y., 1 LM 456.

⁵⁵ Letters written by the Directory of the district of Corbeil to the Minister of the Interior on September 16 and 18; extract from the registers of the national guard of the town of Corbeil, dated September 16, A.N., F/7/3689/6.

⁵⁶ A copy of this letter can be found in A.N., F/7/3689/6.

Étampes

In the district of Étampes, too, there was resentment and concern at the rise in the prices of grains and bread after the harvest. The town of Étampes was a sensitive spot because of the presence of a large number of out-of-town workers with no known domicile who were prone to rioting.⁵⁷ On Saturday September 10, the trouble so dreaded by the town authorities broke out. A large number of workers, both domiciled and non-domiciled marched to the city hall and forced the members of the municipality to come to the market square. The intention was to have the authorities decree the *taxation* of grain, which meant that prices of grain would henceforth be set by the authorities. Members of the directory were also obliged to present themselves in the market square. There the crowd angrily complained to the authorities about the absence of the *laboureurs* from the market-place which effectively meant that the grain that had been brought to market would not be sold. The crowd also demanded that the price of the nine-pound loaf of bread be set at 18 *sols*. The authorities tried unavailingly to get the crowd to listen to a reading of the laws of July 22, 1791, regarding *taxation* or the setting of prices of foodstuff. Unable to control the disturbance, the authorities withdrew. Later in the day, they held a meeting at the town hall to consider the question of *taxation* or the setting of

⁵⁷ Extract from the register of deliberations of the Directory of the district of Étampes dated September 10, 1791, A.N., F/7/3689/7. Also in A.D.Y., 1 LM 459 and 1 LM 461.

prices. Despite the protests of the officials, the people insisted that two of their representatives should attend the meeting. At the end of the meeting it was decided that the price of the nine-pound loaf should be fixed at 19 *so/s* instead of at 18 *so/s* as the people had demanded. This did not satisfy the people, who withdrew from the meeting only after threatening to settle scores on the next market day.⁵⁶

The authorities at Étampes now took exactly the same steps as their counterparts at Corbeil had, with the same unfortunate consequences. They requested fifty dragoons from the Fifth Regiment of cavaliers to come to Étampes to maintain order in the market-place. On Friday September 16, when the detachment of troops arrived on the outskirts of the city, they were met by a crowd of people armed with guns, pitchforks, hatchets and sticks, who adamantly opposed their entry into the town and accused them of being in the pay of the flour merchants. The troops, nevertheless, forced their way into the *faubourg* Saint Pierre. There they were met by a municipal officer who entreated them not to enter the town. The troops withdrew, but by then the tocsin had been sounded, the call to arms given, and the people were ready to do battle. The municipal officers and members of the directory were seized and locked in a room in the city hall for several hours during which they were threatened with all kinds of

⁵⁶ See document cited in footnote 63. Also report of the commander of the national gendarmerie, dated September 19, A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

horrible deaths. They were released after 11:00 in the evening. Most of the members of the municipality and directory resigned or fled from Étampes, leaving the administration in a state of collapse. Market day on September 17 was peaceful enough but the market was all but abandoned by the cultivators with only 50 sacks of grain in the market-place.⁵⁹ It required an expedition by two members of the Directory of the department of the Seine-et-Oise⁶⁰ and a series of decrees installing various regulations in the market-place for things to return to a semblance of normality in Étampes.⁶¹

The riots of 1791 were thus similar to those of 1789 in that they were market riots. But the role of the national guard and the municipalities gave them a more organized character. In July and August 1789, the municipalities had been either dissolved or were non-functioning. They had all been reconstituted by March 1791. The national guard in many cases had been constituted in the wake of the troubles of 1789 to protect against further disorder. But in 1791,

⁵⁹ Account rendered to the commander of the Fifth Cavalry Regiment by the officer commanding the detachment of cavalry ordered to go to Étampes by the king's orders on September 16, A.N., F/7/3689/7; report of the commander of the national gendarmerie at Étampes, A.D.Y., 1 LM 461; copy of the letter written to the commissioners of the National Treasury by the *receveur* of the district of Étampes, A.N., F/7/3689/7; extract from the register of deliberations of the Directory of the district of Étampes, dated September 20, 1791, A.N., F/7/3689/7.

⁶⁰ Expedition of Martial Victor Vaillant and Jacques Antoine Rouveau of which more will be said in later chapters.

⁶¹ Extract from the register of deliberations of the *Conseil général* of the commune of Étampes, dated September 26, 1791, A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

the national guard often came out strongly in support of the rioters, as in the district of Gonesse. The municipalities also played an important part. It was not that they openly sided with the rioters. But in their attempts to diffuse the situation, the municipal officers often took action that was only marginally legal. Once the rioters had set the prices of grain, the municipal officers in their turn, set the prices of bread at the urging of the rioters. Since the prices of grain had been illegally set in the first place, the setting of bread prices was equally so, although the municipal officers took refuge in the specious argument that they were merely maintaining the correlation between prices of grain and bread.

The increasingly active role played by the national guards and the municipalities marked a transition in the nature of the riots. The rioters actively solicited or forced their participation. It was as if the issues involved in the riots were now regarded as being the concern not of the rioters alone, but of the commune as a whole. The commune was trying to protect its interests against those who were trying to injure them. This issue is best illustrated by pointing to the troubles triggered by the arrival of troops of the line at Corbeil and at Étampes. It was as if the municipal officers had taken the side of outsiders and should, therefore, be made to pay for their crimes. This was localism of course, but an organized localism. It is true that these issues were only latent in the riots of 1791 which were limited in terms of geographical space. But they emerged much more

strongly in 1792. The riots of 1789 were momentary outbursts which were quickly suppressed. The riots of 1791 also collapsed quickly. But they brought issues to the forefront that had to be addressed in 1792. When the riots broke out again in 1792, these issues were finally taken up for discussion at the highest level of the departmental administration and also were brought before the Parisian authorities as will be shown in the next chapter. So 1791 marked a transition between the riots of 1789 and 1792.

The Food Riots of Spring 1792

In 1792, as in 1789 and 1791, the rioters set prices of grain in the market-place, they forced *laboueurs* and grain merchants to bring grain to markets and prevented supplies from leaving the area. Almost everywhere, the rioters had the support, either willing or unwilling, of the municipal authorities who led the searches of the farms and the storehouses of grain, set prices of grain and bread in the market-place, and prevented troops from entering the communes. It was not that these communes always acted in concert. It was rather that the same pattern of disobedience was being repeated in all of the communes. The end effect was that the whole of the department of the Seine-et-Oise was in the grip of riots and ultimately in the grip of the rioters who for a period of time, dictated the food policy that the authorities should follow.

The prelude to the troubles of 1792 was the stoppage of a barge of grain sailing down the river Seine. This barge was stopped in the commune of Triel Bourg in the district of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. The Minister of the Interior charged the mayors of the canton of Triel Bourg of having held an illegal assembly on December 4, 1791, with the intention of coordinating efforts to hamper the free circulation of grain. This was strongly denied by the mayors of the canton who claimed that they had met to discuss the organization of the national guard.⁶² This incident appears to have blown over, but it is indicative of the fact that as early as December 1791, scarcity had begun to be felt in the poor communes flanking the river Seine. The mayors of the canton of Triel Bourg were also accused of organizing revolt and insubordination in the canton. These words were to prove almost prophetic, for the food riots which broke out the next year showed a level of organization that caught the departmental and central authorities completely by surprise.

The food riots of 1792⁶³ broke out first in the region lying to the south and south-west of Paris. This area included some very fertile stretches of territory like the plateau of Longboyau, the plains of Chevreuse and the plateau of Gometz which furnished grain

⁶² Extract from the register of deliberations of the Municipality of Triel Bourg dated December 31, 1791, A.N., F/7/3689/7.

⁶³ The best sources of information for the food riots of March-April 1792 are A.D.Y., 1 LM 459, 460 and 461. A.D.Y., 1 LM 408 deals entirely with the murder of Simoneau. Also useful is Defresne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:216-257.

to the markets of Limours and Montlhéry. But it was interspersed with forests and hillocks where nothing grew but some poor quality grapes. Trouble first began in the large market of Montlhéry in the district of Corbeil. Prices of grain in the market of Montlhéry helped determine prices in the surrounding markets and traditionally food riots in the area were triggered by trouble in the market of Montlhéry.

Montlhéry

Monday, February 13, was market day at Montlhéry. There was not enough grain in the hall to suffice for the needs of the four thousand people who gathered there. Matters were complicated by the arrival of a crowd of two hundred people from the municipalities of Vert-le-Grand and Vert-le-Petit of the canton of Arpajon. This crowd arrived in a procession to the sound of drums with the municipal officers at their head. They demanded that the price of the best quality wheat be set at 24 *livres per setier*. The municipal officers of Montlhéry told the crowd that it was not in their power to set the price of wheat. After a while the crowd withdrew after reiterating their demand that prices of wheat in the market of Montlhéry be set for next market day. Meanwhile the people in the market-place had embarked on a search for grain within the town, visiting places where they suspected grain might be stored. One of these groups visited the house of Thibault, a grain merchant and reputed hoarder of grain. The group found only

50 sacks of peas, beans and other vegetables in the warehouse. Matters then took a nasty turn. Another group went to the nearby town of Linas which Thibault was visiting at the time, hunted him down, dragged him back to Montlhéry and beat him to death in the market-place.⁶⁴

The violent death of Thibault shocked official circles and paralysed the Municipality of Montlhéry with fear. For the next month at least, the rioters and their supporters seemed to exercise informal authority over questions of subsistence. On February 20, the next market day, when reinforcements of troops were sent to Montlhéry in the shape of brigades of the national gendarmerie from various towns, it was the Municipality of Montlhéry which refused them entry into the town. The argument was that the troops were too few in number to be able to impose order and their presence would only serve to inflame the crowd.

In its report of February 20, the municipality said that there had been only 200 sacks of grain in the market which was not enough for the twenty-five hundred consumers assembled there. Many of these people had come armed with weapons, in open defiance of the national guard stationed in the market-place. They then demanded that the price of wheat be set at 24 *livres* per *setier*. The *laboueurs*, persuaded by the municipality to sell grain at the price demanded, grumbled that

⁶⁴ Extract from the *procès verbal* drawn up by the Municipality of Montlhéry, dated February 13 and *procès verbal* of the Municipality of the commune of Vert-le-Grand, dated February 20, 1792, A.N., F/7/3689/7.

they would not bring grain to the market of Montlhéry in the future. Overhearing this, the people screamed in fury that they would visit the farms of the *laboureurs* in arms and force them to bring grain to Montlhéry. They were as good as their word. Over the next few days several farms in the area were visited by well organized groups from rural communes, some in the uniforms of the national guard and always with the mayor and their municipal officers at their head. These groups would determine the amount of grain in the granaries and would then secure written agreements from the farmers that the grain would be brought to Montlhéry on the next market day. All of the affected communes -- Morsang, Villemoisson, Grigny, Viry, Ourangis, Plessis-le-Comte, Fleury, Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois, Courcouronnes, Bondoufle, Savigny and Saint-Michel -- lay to the west of Montlhéry which was a poor region covered with forest.⁶⁵

On February 27, the next market day, rioters from these communes joined by others and accompanied by their national guards arrived at the market of Montlhéry. Prices of wheat were set from 20 *livres* to 24 *livres* per *setier* according to quality. Since there was not enough grain in the market, the crowds searched all stores of grain in the

⁶⁵ For events at Montlhéry on February 20, see report of the captain of the gendarmerie of Étampes and the *procès verbal* of the Municipality of Montlhéry, both dated February 20, A.N., F/7/3689/7. For events between February 20 and 27 in the communes surrounding Montlhéry see report of the *regisseur* of the farm of Plessis Comte, dated February 23, report of the commander of the gendarmerie national in residence at St. Geneviève dated February 24, report of the Directory of the district of Corbeil dated February 24, all in A.N., F/7/3689/7.

city. The grain found in these stores was sold to the public. Once again the national gendarmerie, requisitioned by the Directory of the department, were refused permission to enter the town by the Municipality of Montlhéry. They were even hooted and jeered at by the assembled crowds during their retreat from Montlhéry to Marcoussis.⁶⁶ The other markets in the vicinity, Corbeil, Mennecy and Arpajon remained calm during February. The Municipality of Corbeil took the precaution of removing all cords from the church bells on market days in order to prevent the tocsin from being sounded.⁶⁷

District of Versailles

Meanwhile the food riots had spread to the adjoining district of Versailles. On February 21, there were only 5 sacks of wheat in the market of Palaiseau and all of it belonged to one *laboureur*, the *Sieur* Pigéon. Pigéon was forced to sell this wheat at 22 to 24 *livres* per *setier*. There was not enough grain for the buyers. To ease the tumult in the market-place, the municipality divided the discontented into two groups and directed them to large neighboring farms under the

⁶⁶ Report of Robert Kempe, lieutenant of the First Division of the national gendarmerie of the department of the Seine-et-Oise, dated February 27, 1792, A.N., F/7/3689/7.

⁶⁷ Report of the Directory of the district of Corbeil, dated February 18, A.N., F/7/3689/7.

escort of the national guard of Montlhéry. About 14 *setiers* of grain was found at one of these farms and sold at 20 *livres* per *setier*.⁶⁸

In the next few days an anonymous letter began to circulate in the communes around Palaiseau⁶⁹ indirectly asking the people to search the farms for grain.⁷⁰ Over the next few weeks groups of people from the cantons of Longjumeau, Jouy, Chevreuse, Palaiseau and Limours paid visits to several farms in the area. On Tuesday, February 28, the Municipality of Palaiseau was forced by the crowds to visit a farm at Saclay. Twenty-five *setiers* of grain found in this farm were sold at 19 *livres* per *setier*.

On the next day about four hundred inhabitants of Ballainvilliers and Saulx-les-Chartreux in the canton of Longjumeau, ordered the municipal officers of Longjumeau to accompany them in their task of making an inventory of grain in the surrounding farms. On February 29, the Municipality of Igny wrote to that of Jouy-en-Josas inviting the latter to join them in a similar task. On the same day about four hundred inhabitants of Montlhéry, Marcoussis

⁶⁸ *Procès verbal* of the Municipality of Palaiseau, dated September 21, A.D.Y., 1 LM 460. All documents relating to food riots in the district of Versailles from 1789-1793 can be found in Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:216-257.

⁶⁹ The authorship of this circular letter was later traced to the *procureur* of the commune of Palaiseau.

⁷⁰ Observations of the Directory of the department of the Seine-et-Oise, in Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:235. The date given February 21 is incorrect, given the fact that the *procès verbal* that was being commented upon was itself drawn up on February 21.

and surrounding parishes visited the rich farms around Limours, taking stock of the stores of grain to be found there and ordering the farmers to provision the neighboring markets.⁷¹

The next day, Thursday, March 1, was market day at Limours. About eleven in the morning, a troop of people about two hundred strong from the surrounding parishes of Forges, Brüs, Fontenay and Vaugrigneuse arrived in Limours to the sound of drums. They were led by the mayor of Fontenay who declared that he had been forced to lead the crowd under threat of being hanged. The crowd, armed with swords, pitchforks, pistols, guns and bayonets, then proceeded to set the price of wheat. The price of the best quality wheat, which was selling for 28 *livres* per *setier* was set at 20 and 22 *livres* per *setier*, that of medium quality wheat, selling at 26 *livres* per *setier* was set at 18 to 20 *livres* per *setier* and *méteil* selling for 24 *livres* was priced at 16 *livres*. When all the grain in the market-place was sold, the crowd visited various places where grain could be stored. In one of these stores 12 *setiers* of the best quality wheat was found. This grain had already been sold to a miller on the previous market day but it was resold despite the remonstrances of the mayor of Limours.⁷²

⁷¹ The *procès verbaux* of the municipalities can be found in Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:236-238.

⁷² *Procès verbal* of the Municipality of Limours dated March 1, A.D.Y., 1 LM 460.

Districts of Étampes and Dourdan

The food riots in the districts of Versailles and Corbeil were to continue through March and April, but early in March the focus shifted to the south of the department, to the districts of Étampes and Dourdan. On March 3, Simoneau, the mayor of Étampes, was murdered in the course of a food riot. This murder became the most notorious episode of the food riots of 1792.

Étampes had witnessed serious food riots in 1791 and the news of the unrest in Montlhéry, Longjumeau and their surroundings had already warned the authorities of approaching trouble. There were rumors that the parishes of Torfou, Lardy, Boissy-sous-St.-Yon and Chamarande, all of them situated in the wooded areas to the north of Étampes, had formed a coalition with the intention of marching upon the town on market day -- Saturday, March 3, in order to lower the prices of grain. On Friday, March 2, there was trouble in the market of Angerville. The authorities at Étampes now took some precautions. They sent out patrols of the national gendarmerie and a detachment of the Eighteenth Division of cavalry into the surrounding countryside in order to receive prior warning of a march on Étampes. On the morning of March 3, one of the patrols reported that they had met about four hundred to five hundred men armed with guns, pitchforks, and sticks on the road between Chamarande and Etréchy. Many of these men were wearing uniforms of the national guard and they were marching

to the sound of drums. They had declared that they were going to Étampes to set the prices of grain.

Soon after, this crowd, which had by now been joined by the inhabitants of the commune of Etréchy, arrived at the faubourg Capuchins on the outskirts of Étampes. Here they were met by the municipal officers and the troops in full battle formation. The municipal officers of the visiting communes requested to be taken to the city hall where they would draw up a petition. When this demand was refused an argument ensued. Soon all order collapsed. According to the *procès verbal* of the Municipality of Etréchy, the townspeople of Étampes now came running in hordes and the country people excited by this spectacle broke down the barriers set up by the cavalry and entered the town from all sides. Taking advantage of the confusion, the municipal officers of the surrounding communes went to the city hall where they put down their demands on the town register. Meanwhile the municipal officers of Étampes and the troops had followed the crowd to the market-place Saint-Gilles. There the troops were immobilized in the face of the threats made by the crowds who promised to fire at the least provocation. The crowd then ordered the troops and municipal officers to withdraw. The mayor Simoneau attempted to reason with the crowd telling them that their actions were highly unconstitutional. He was shot in front of his troops and also struck with a sword. In the terrible confusion that followed, the troops dispersed and the dead mayor was left lying on the ground. The people

from the surrounding communes then withdrew. On their way back they stopped three wagonloads of grain travelling on the route from Paris to Orléans and took them back to Etréchy.⁷³

The murder of Simoneau sent shock waves through the department and convinced the Directory of the department and the Minister of the Interior of the need for stronger military measures. But as at Montlhéry, so at Étampes, the higher authorities were faced with (in their view) the baffling non-cooperation of the local officials at Étampes. On March 6, the authorities at Étampes wrote to the Interior Ministry requesting that troops not be sent to Étampes. A delegation of citizens from Étampes was also sent to Paris to ask the National Assembly to authorize the administration of Étampes to take measures in concert with the citizens and *laboureurs* to bring down prices of grain to 24 *livres* per *setier*. The requests of the Étampoisis were summarily dismissed by the Assembly. The Assembly decided that two members of the Directory of the department would be sent to the disturbed districts accompanied by six hundred members of the Parisian

⁷³ Extract from the register of deliberations of the Municipality of Étampes dated March 1; extract from the register of the Directory of the district dated March 3; report of François Reydi, captain of the national gendarmerie of the department in residence at Étampes and Jean Baptiste Godard, lieutenant of the Eighteenth Regiment of cavalry, also stationed at Étampes; *procès verbal* of the Municipality of Etrechy dated March 3; all in A.D.Y., 1 LM 408.

national guard.⁷⁴ But before this mission could have any effect on the food riots, the situation in the department became much worse.

Like Étampes, neighboring Dourdan was influenced by the food riots in the northern districts. The circular letter which had originated from Palaiseau and had set off the food riots in the district of Versailles had found its way into Dourdan and was circulating in the various cantons. In the district of Dourdan, the cantons of Dourdan and Ablis formed part of the Beauce, but the other three cantons of Rambouillet, Rochefort, and Les Essarts were poor, much of them covered by forest. Within the canton of Dourdan, too, the northern communes were poor, inhabited mainly by small wine-growers, and it was these communes that rioted in the spring of 1792.

On Saturday, March 3, there was tumult in the market-place in Dourdan. People from the surrounding countryside set the price of grain, threatened the municipal officers and promised to come back in greater numbers on the next market day.⁷⁵ The *procureur* of the commune promptly resigned. The mayor who had been threatened with a fate similar to Simoneau's considered doing the same. There were reports

⁷⁴ Copy of the letter written to the Minister of the Interior by the administrative corps and *Conseil général* of the district of Étampes; extract of the *procès verbal* of the National Assembly dated March 6, and the Minister of the Interior's letter to the administration of Étampes dated March 7; all in A.D.Y., 1 LM 460.

⁷⁵ The *procès verbal* drawn up by the Municipality of Dourdan on March 3 is missing from the files. This scanty information has been drawn from the report of the Directory of the district of Dourdan dated March 5, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

that the same crowds were visiting different markets in the district and causing trouble. On Tuesday, March 6, a large number of people went armed to the market of Saint-Arnoult and priced grain which had been selling at 24 *livres* per *setier* at 20 *livres* per *setier*. On March 9, the Directory of the district wrote to the Directory of the department that trouble was spreading in the district. On Thursday, March 8, the inhabitants of several parishes surrounding the city had spread out into the countryside to determine the quantities of grain which still remained with the *laboureurs*.⁷⁶

On March 9, early in the morning, there rolled into the city of Dourdan eleven carts of grain containing 210 *setiers* of wheat. This grain had earlier been stored in the granaries of the city. It had been removed the night before by the grain merchants who were transporting it to various mills in the vicinity to be converted into flour. The flour was then to be sent to Paris. But this grain was stopped on the route from Dourdan to Paris by sections of the national guards of Saint Cyr, Angervilliers, Val Saint-Germain, Saint Cheron, and Saint Maurice. It was brought back to the town by the national guard and deposited in one of the stores despite the representations made by the municipal officers that this action was opposed to the laws of the National Assembly that decreed the freedom of commerce and

⁷⁶ Report of the Directory of the district dated March 5; extract from the register of deliberations of the *Conseil général* of the commune of Dourdan dated March 6; *procès verbal* of the Directory of the district of Dourdan, dated March 9; all in A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

respect for private property. The key to the store was handed to the mayor. Later on, the mayor was to claim that he took the key to prevent pillage. But he probably took it because he dared not refuse.

On Saturday, March 10, which was market day at Dourdan, a large number of inhabitants of the surrounding parishes once again entered the city. The municipal officers who were at their head, claimed that they had been forced to accompany the people. The *Conseil général* of the commune of Dourdan, alarmed at the effects that such a coalition could have, summoned the *laboureurs* to a private meeting and asked them to lower their prices of their own accord in view of the circumstances. The *conseil* then went to the market and in the presence of the people ceremonially invited the *laboureurs* to lower their prices. It was agreed that grain would be sold three to four *livres* below the normal market price. But nothing could move the people who proceeded to set the price of grain at 20 *livres* per *setier*. Defeated, the *conseil* withdrew. The same afternoon the municipality also decided to lower the price of bread in view of the low prices at which wheat was selling. The price of the nine-pound *pain blanc* was reduced from 20 *sols* to 18 *sols* and that of the *pain bis* from 17 *sols* to 14 *sols*. But the troubles of the city had still not ended.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ From the register of deliberations of the *Conseil général* of the town of Dourdan, dated March 10; report of lieutenant Delahaye, dated March 10; report on the market of March 10; all in A.D.Y., 1 LM 460

On March 15 inhabitants of Sainte-Julienne, Saint-Cyr, Cermaise, Saint-Maurice and Angervilliers, accompanied by their municipal officers again arrived at Dourdan. They wanted their municipal officers to join them in their search for grain in the neighboring farms. If the report of the *Conseil général* of the commune is to be believed, the people of Dourdan initially refused to join the countryside. But they were forced to join in when the latter threatened to set the town on fire and hurt the municipal officers. As in the other affected towns the rioters seem to have taken control of the situation and local officials had no other option but to follow their lead. The market passed peacefully enough with the best quality wheat being sold at 21 to 22 *livres* and *méteil* at 16 to 17 *livres*. On March 19, the Directory of the district at last requisitioned the Directory of the department for armed help.⁷⁸

On the same day there was trouble further north in the commune of Rambouillet. The Municipality of Rambouillet, warned of impending trouble, had placed its national guard, gendarmerie and troops on alert. From about 11:00 in the morning, inhabitants of the communes of Saint-Leger, Saint-Arnoult, la Celle, Bullion, Clairefontaine and Sonchamp began to arrive at Rambouillet. About one thousand people collected at the market-place. The municipality thereupon decided to

⁷⁸ Report of Delahaye, lieutenant of the national gendarmerie, dated March 15, A.D.Y., 1 LM 460; report of the *Conseil général* of the commune of Dourdan dated March 15, A.D.Y., 1 LM 459; letter of the Directory of the district to the Directory of the department dated March 19, A.D.Y., 1 LM 459.

concentrate their forces, which comprised one hundred men of the national guards, one hundred cavaliers, a few Swiss guards and six men of the national gendarmerie at the market-place which was already filled to overflowing with people. Soon there was absolute disorder. The cavaliers could not be used because any kind of movement would have caused terrible injuries in the overcrowded market-place. The *laboueurs* were forced to sell grain at whatever price the people were willing to pay. A farmer from Bréviares had to sell 5 *setiers* of the best quality wheat for only 36 *livres*. Some people went from pile to pile buying grain more than once while others were not able to obtain anything at all. A section of the crowd then threatened to enter the warehouses where grain was stored. Finally, the municipality itself decided to sell grain from the stores at prices set by the people in order to pre-empt any pillage. Some of this wheat was sold to bakers from Dourdan and Perray who had travelled to Rambouillet, unable to obtain wheat in their own markets. The people then demanded that the prices of bread be reduced. Their wishes were complied with. Well satisfied, they withdrew from Rambouillet, firing shots into the air and promising to come back on the next market day.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ *Procès verbal* of the Municipality of Rambouillet dated March 19, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 459.

Districts of Corbeil and Versailles

Throughout this time, the food riots were continuing unabated in the districts of Versailles and Corbeil. On March 4, the Municipality of Brunoy in the district of Corbeil was drawn to the church by the urgent ringing of church bells. There they found an assembly of two hundred men and women who imperiously asked them to write a circular letter to the surrounding communes, summoning them to join the inhabitants of Brunoy in a march to the market of Brie-Comte-Robert in the neighboring district of the Seine-et-Marne. The object was to demand the diminution of the price of wheat. The municipality persuaded the assembly to put off this march and instead to write a letter to the Municipality of Brie. This letter would include the just complaints of the people and would ask them to invite the cultivators and grain merchants to lower prices. The demonstrators agreed and changed their minds and decided that they would march to Brie-Comte-Robert after all with the municipal officers at their head.

Early the next morning the people of Brunoy were joined by those of the communes of Montgeron and Yerres who had been secretly invited to join the former. When the marchers arrived on the outskirts of Brie, they found the inhabitants of the communes of Mandres, Perigny, Villecresne, Villeneuve, Quincy-sous-Senard, Santeny, Epinay, Varenne, Boissy-Saint-Antoine and Villeneuve-Saint-George, all with their municipal officers in tow, assembled there. The assembled communes were met by the officers of the Eighteenth Regiment and the municipal

officers of Brie who told them that they could enter the town only if they laid down their arms. The people agreed. The market was peaceful, although the price of the best quality wheat was set at 24 *livres* per *setier*.⁸⁰

In the district of Versailles domiciliary visits to farmers, seizures of cartloads of grain and price fixing in markets also continued. On March 4 and 5, eleven carts travelling on the grand route from Orléans to Paris and carrying 250 *setiers* of grain were stopped at Longjumeau.⁸¹ On March 4, the big bells sounded in the commune of Chevreuse. About thirty inhabitants banded together and demanded that the mayor and the commander of the national guard lead them in a search for grain in all the farms of the canton. The municipality refused. The next day the municipality changed its mind and decided to give in to the demands of the people. They led the people to several farms in the vicinity, representing to the farmers

⁸⁰ *Procès verbal* of the Municipality of Brunoy, dated March 4 and the *procès verbal* drawn up unitedly by the communes of Montgeron, Yerres, Mandres, Perigny, Villecresne, Quincy-sous-Sénard, Santeny, Epinay-sous-Sénard, Varennes, Boissy-Sainte-Antoine, Villeneuve-Saint-George on March 5 both in A.N., F/7/3689/7. See also the report of the mayor of Santeny dated March 5 and the *procès verbal* of the Municipality of Yerres dated March 5 both in A.D.Y., 1 LM 460.

⁸¹ Extract from the register of police of the Municipality of Montlhéry, dated March 5, 1792 in Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:221;

the needs of the people, requesting them to bring grain to market and assuring them of protection in the market-place.⁸²

On March 7, the Municipality of Palaiseau joined the inhabitants of Orsay, Bures, Bièvres, Nozay, Villebon, Saclay, Vauhallan and Igny in a search for grain in the neighboring farms. Escorted by the national guard of Palaiseau, the group divided into two columns. The first column visited Palaiseau, Fourcherolles and Lozère and the other the plains of Palaiseau.⁸³

Some inhabitants of Bièvres adopted a completely different strategy. This commune forbade the farmers of the neighboring countryside to take their grain to market, maintaining that their grain was to be sold only to the inhabitants of Bièvres at prices ranging from 20 *livres* to 24 *livres* according to the quality of the wheat.⁸⁴

On March 9, a cart carrying 16 sacks of grain belonging to *Sieur* Pluchet of Villiers-le-Bacle was stopped at Saclay. This grain was being transported to the market of Versailles, but on the orders of the mayor of Saclay it was taken to Palaiseau to be sold at the

⁸² Reports of the mayor of Chevreuse dated March 4 and 5, Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:237-238

⁸³ Summary of document given in Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:238.

⁸⁴ Report of Germain, administrator of the department of the Seine-et-Oise, dated March 7, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 460.

market of Palaiseau the next Tuesday.⁸⁵ The same day about twenty inhabitants of the commune of Saint-Remy-les-Chevreuse demanded that the municipal officers make domiciliary visits to the neighboring farms in order to force the farmers to provision the markets. The Justice of the Peace at Chevreuse advised the municipal officers of Saint-Rémy who visited Chevreuse that they should do all they could to avoid the visits but that if they should find themselves surrounded by superior force it would be better to cede to the demands of the people rather than to have their throats slit.⁸⁶

On March 10 some people were heard to say in the market of Chevreuse that "one must do with the municipality that which has been done with the mayor of Étampes."⁸⁷ The next Saturday the Municipality of Chevreuse declared that since the bakers were benefiting from the diminution of the price of wheat in the market-place, they were heretofore limiting the price of the best quality bread weighing eighteen pounds to 19 *sols* and that of brown bread to 17 *sols*.⁸⁸

At Palaiseau, on March 13 there were only 105 *setiers* of wheat in the market and bakers were not able to buy any grain after the

⁸⁵ Declaration of Charles Pluchet to the secretary of the department, dated March 9, A.D.Y., 1 LM 460.

⁸⁶ *Procès verbal* of the Directory of the district of Versailles, dated March 9, A.D.Y., 1 LM 460.

⁸⁷ "Il faut faire de la municipalité ce qu'on a fait du maire d'Étampes."

⁸⁸ *Procès verbaux* of the Municipality of Chevreuse, dated March 10 and March 17, Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:229.

needs of the ordinary consumers had been met. The municipality was forced to make an inventory of grain to be found in the neighboring farms. In the rich farmland around Limours -- Molières and Troux and Pecqueuse -- the domiciliary visits to the farmers were continuing.⁸⁹ At Troux, the curé Briard was reported to have taken the leadership in organizing these visits to the farms.⁹⁰

Meanwhile two members of the Directory of the department, François Huet and Jacques Antoine Rouveau, had been sent on a fact finding mission to the disturbed districts, accompanied by six hundred members of the Parisian national guard. Between March 8 and March 28 the two commissioners drew up a series of reports which are an invaluable source of information on the food riots of March 1792.⁹¹

Everywhere that Huet and Rouveau travelled, they found the municipal authorities in a state of abject fear. They were openly critical of the way the local authorities were handling the situation in Étampes and demanded that the culprits responsible for the murder of Simoneau be dealt with firmly. The local officials replied that their lives would be in danger as soon as the commissioners left

⁸⁹ Letter written by the Municipality of Palaiseau to the Directory of the district of Versailles dated March 16, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 459.

⁹⁰ Testimony of the mayor of Troux to the Directory of the department on April 30, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 459

⁹¹ All of these reports are to be found in A.N., DXL/16. Some of these reports can be found in A.D.Y., 1 LM 459. The reports dated from March 9 through March 22 have been reproduced in *Archives parlementaires*, 1st. ser., 40:420-426.

Étampes. Fifty cavaliers and one hundred men of the Parisian national guard had to be left behind to calm their fears.⁹²

The situation was no better at Montlhéry and its surroundings. When Huet and Rouveau traveled through the commune of Longjumeau on their way to Montlhéry there was an immediate reaction from the commune. The tocsin was sounded and the troops accompanying the officers were refused entry into Longjumeau. The alarm spread to the surrounding parishes where the tocsin was sounded.

News of the incident only strengthened the resolve of the municipal officers of Montlhéry to refuse outside troops entry into the town. They informed the commissioners that the Municipalities of Montlhéry and twenty-two surrounding parishes had decided that on every market day at Montlhéry, each of the twenty-two surrounding communes would send ten men of the national guard to preserve order in the market-place.⁹³ Since the national guards of the surrounding communes had led the rioters into the town during the last three occasions, this decision really meant that the municipality had decided that offering any kind of resistance to the rioters would be foolhardy, especially in the light of what had happened at Étampes. The commissioners pointed out that a guard composed of those who had shown the most ardor in price fixing was scarcely calculated to

⁹² The commissioners' report of March 9 and March 10, A.N., DXL/16.

⁹³ The commissioners' report of March 11, A.N., DXL/16.

inspire confidence in the sellers. But the municipalities went ahead with their plan on the next market day, March 12. The market remained outwardly calm but the commissioners felt that since wheat was selling at 24 *livres* and under, the cultivators were obviously feeling pressured. There were also only about 240 *setiers* of grain in the market which seemed to indicate that some cultivators were still staying away.⁹⁴

The commissioners next concentrated on getting the municipal officers of Montlhéry to release the grain which had been stopped at Longjumeau and brought to Montlhéry. Here again the municipal officers held out as long as they could. It was obvious, declared Huet and Rouveau, "that a panic fear is holding them back as well as the inhabitants of Étampes."⁹⁵

At the market of Palaiseau on March 13, the scene was reminiscent of Montlhéry. Grain was sold at 24 *livres* and below in the presence of the national guards of the surrounding parishes. Although there was abundant grain in the market, the buyers still wanted more and demanded that grain seized from a certain *Sieur Pluchet* be sold. Huet and Rouveau wryly noted in their report that the Municipality of

⁹⁴ The commissioners' report of March 12, A.N., DXL/16.

⁹⁵ "*Qu'une terreur panique les retient ainsi que les habitants d'Étampes.*" The commissioners' report of March 12, A.N., DXL/16.

Palaiseau was probably waiting for their departure before this grain was sold.⁹⁶

On March 15, Huet and Rouveau were informed that there had been trouble at Angerville in the district of Étampes on March 10 and at Saint-Arnoult, district of Dourdan, on March 13. The commissioners visited Angerville on March 16. At the market of Angerville on March 16, people complained of the high prices of wheat which was selling at 30 *livres* per *setier*. But there was no trouble, probably because of the presence of the Parisian national guards.⁹⁷ At the market of Étampes too there was not enough grain but as a result of an agreement between buyers and sellers, wheat was selling at 28 *livres*, 25 *livres* and 24 *livres* according to quality.⁹⁸

The commissioners travelled to Dourdan on March 19. At Dourdan they found the municipal officers convinced of the need for additional forces but unable to turn to the national guards whom they could not trust or to the regular troops because of the fear that this would trigger rebellion in the communes. The commissioners, however, advised the municipal officers to overcome this fear. It was decided that a detachment of one hundred troops and two cannons would be left at Dourdan. Huet and Rouveau also directed a reluctant municipality to

⁹⁶ The commissioners' report of March 13, A.N., DXL/16.

⁹⁷ The commissioners' report of March 16, A.N., DXL/16.

⁹⁸ Report of March 17, A.N., DXL/16.

send to its destination the 210 *setiers* of grain that had been seized.⁹⁹

The next stop was Saint-Arnoult where the situation was not much better than at Dourdan. On market day, March 20, all entrances to the city were guarded by the regular troops but crowds of people from two of the surrounding parishes, la-Celle and Sonchamp, demanded to be let into the town. They were allowed to enter by the municipal officers of Saint-Arnoult who overrode the objections of the commissioners. Nothing the commissioners said made much of an impact on the crowd who maintained that there had been no grain in their locality for three months. The commissioners left after ensuring that 108 *setiers* of grain seized and brought to Saint-Arnoult would be returned to its owners.¹⁰⁰

The commissioners next went to Limours on March 21. Here too the situation was all too familiar. They were informed that armed contingents from the surrounding parishes had been visiting the market, ostensibly to maintain order but really to set the price of grain. The commissioners had a circular letter sent out to all the parishes implicated in the troubles -- Saint-Jean-de-Beauregard, Fontenay, Gourson, Gometz-la-Ville, Gometz-le-Chatel, Brüs, Forges, Janvry and Vaugrigneuse. The letter asked the parishes not to go armed to the market of Limours or to any other market for that matter. The

⁹⁹ Report of March 19, A.N., DXL/16.

¹⁰⁰ Report of March 20, A.N., DXL/16.

municipalities of the concerned parishes sent back replies that they would do all in their power to ensure that their citizens did not go armed to Limours. But despite these promises made early in the morning, the inhabitants of the parishes began to assemble outside Limours as the day progressed. They numbered about fifteen hundred and were armed with guns, bayonets, and pitchforks. The Municipality of Limours allowed them to enter the town. The crowds next insisted that the cavalry be removed from the market-place. The municipal officers of Limours obeyed these orders, whereupon Huet and Rouveau, much disillusioned, returned to Versailles.¹⁰¹

Over the following days, the increased military presence ordered by the commissioners in the various troubled towns did seem to be having an impact. On March 24, when members of the communes around Dourdan paid their weekly armed visit to the town, they were stopped by a superior force made up by the Parisian national guards, members of the gendarmerie, and detachments of troops from Limours and Rambouillet.¹⁰² An uncertain kind of peace returned to Dourdan as the people "more intimidated than enlightened" as the Directory of the district pointed out, decided to bear their misery in silence rather than take on the military might of the state.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Report of March 21, A.N., DXL/16.

¹⁰² Report of the commissioners dated March 24, A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

¹⁰³ Extract from the register of deliberations of the Directory of the district of Dourdan dated March 31, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

The eastern and northern districts

In the spring of 1792, there were food riots in the eastern districts as well. But the food riots in Mantes, Montfort, and Saint-Germain-en-Laye were not so widespread and appear to have been limited to a few large markets. These districts were not grain exporting regions and food riots here did not threaten to disrupt food supplies over a wider area. It is possible that food riots in some of the smaller towns in these districts escaped the attention of the higher authorities, probably much to the relief of the municipalities of the stricken areas who hoped that the incidents would blow over without their having to inform the district, the department, or the National Assembly.

The district of Mantes did suffer from scarcity of grains in March and April 1792, but in the police records of the department there are only isolated incidents of grain being stopped in certain localities. On March 12, cartloads of grain travelling to the market of Magny were stopped at Saint-Clair-sur-Epte. Their contents were removed and the carters or persons accompanying the carts were paid in lump sums which the latter deemed grossly insufficient to cover the actual value of the grain. One of the domestics accompanying the carts of the Justice of the Peace of Sainte-Hilaire ran to the mayor and the *procureur* for help but was told that any interference was useless. The mayor and the *procureur* were sharply reprimanded by the Directory of the district for their callous attitude to the whole affair. On March

13, 6 *setiers* and 6 *boisseaux* of grain being carried in two carts were seized in la-Chapelle. Among those responsible for the seizure was one municipal officer and two members of the national guard, all of whom were suspended from their posts for three months. It is noteworthy that both of these incidents came to light as a result of complaints lodged by individual farmers rather than from reports drawn up by municipalities.¹⁰⁴

At the same time there was tumult in the market of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Saint-Germain was perhaps the poorest district in the department. Large tracts of land were covered with forests which the nobles had used as their favorite hunting grounds. The soil on both sides of the river Seine was also light and sandy, unable to support anything but poor quality grapes. The town was situated right next to a huge forest which was reputed to be the den of brigands. From the beginning of March there was ferment in the town and its surrounding parishes because of the lack of grains. The municipal officers were threatened and it was announced that all grain brought to market would be pillaged. On Monday, March 12, the national guard and gendarmerie were placed on alert. The market-place and its surroundings were soon overflowing with people. There was seditious talk and absolute confusion reigned in the market-place. The municipality ordered four of the most unruly persons to be arrested

¹⁰⁴ From the register of deliberations of the Directory of the district of Mantes, dated March 12 and 13, A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

and taken to prison. Thereupon the crowd trooped to the prison and threw stones at the gendarmerie. At 9:00 in the evening the prisoners had to be released. The crowd then dispersed, but threatened to come back the next week to pillage grain.¹⁰⁵

At Meulan only the strong presence of troops served to maintain order. In place of the customary 300 *setiers* of wheat, there were only 25 *setiers* in the market-place on March 19. The municipality recognized the desperation of the people. In its letters to the Directory of the district, it laid the blame squarely on the *laboureurs* and described scenes where women left the market-place in tears after a weary but fruitless wait for food.¹⁰⁶ The situation had not improved by the first week of April, although the Minister of the Interior promised that grain would be imported into Meulan.¹⁰⁷

Further south in Neauphle-le-Chateau, in the district of Montfort, there was trouble in the market-place on March 12, 1792. There was a big crowd in the market-place and farmers were forced to sell wheat which had been priced at 31 *livres* for 24 *livres*. The crowd also promised to come back the next Monday, armed with pitchforks,

¹⁰⁵ Extract from the register of deliberations of the Municipality of Saint-Germain-en-Laye dated March 13, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 460.

¹⁰⁶ Extracts from the register of deliberations of the Municipality of Meulan dated March 19, 20 and 27, A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

¹⁰⁷ Letter of the *procureur syndic* of the district of Saint-Germain-en-Laye to the Municipality of Meulan dated April 2, and extract from the register of deliberations of the Municipality of Meulan dated April 9, A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

guns and sticks. Troops from Saint-Leger, Saint-Hubert and Rambouillet were quickly moved to Neauphle-le-Chateau and the markets of March 19 and 26 were peaceful despite complaints about the lack of grain. But early in April the troops were withdrawn and cultivators were once again forced to sell wheat at 24 or 25 *livres* per *setier*. The mayor and *procureur* then resigned.¹⁰⁸

There also were reports of cartloads of grain being stopped. One cart carrying 10 *setiers* of grain was stopped near Maule in the district of Saint-Germain and taken to Andely in the district of Montfort. Its contents were discharged and sold despite the protests of the mayor and *procureur* of Andely. Two other carts loaded with 5 and 3 *setiers* of grain respectively were seized at Marcq and their contents sold at 20 *livres* per *setier*.¹⁰⁹

Further north in the district of Pontoise, there was a sudden explosion of trouble in the market of Beaumont-sur-Oise late in February 1792. Beaumont had been quiet up to that point and the food riot caught the municipal officers by surprise. After the price of wheat was forcibly set by the rioters at Beaumont on February 23, the municipality made efforts to activate its national guard. Most members

¹⁰⁸ Letter of the Municipality of Neauphle-le-Chateau to the Directory of the district of Montfort, dated March 15, 1792; extracts from the register of deliberations of the Municipality of Neauphle-le-Chateau, dated March 16, 27, April 2 and 4; letter of the Directory of the district of Montfort to the Directory of the department of the Seine-et-Oise; A.D.Y., 1 LM 460.

¹⁰⁹ Report of the Directory of the district of Montfort dated April 11, A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

of the national guard refused to serve. Thereupon brigades were brought in from Pontoise, Lisle Adam, Luzarches and Chambly to restore order in the market-place.¹¹⁰

There were disturbances in the market of Marines on March 14. In the presence of the members of the national guard, two men began to open up the sacks of wheat and called on the people to buy wheat at 20 *livres per setier*. The two men were arrested and matters brought under control. Troops were moved to Marines and peace was re-established.¹¹¹

District of Gonesse

But matters took a very different turn in the adjoining district of Gonesse which was severely affected by the food riots. The riots in Gonesse broke out later than in the rest of the district, and in their character and development seem to have had a direct link with the riots in the neighboring departments of the Oise and the Seine-et-Marne.

The movement in the district of Gonesse began in the shape of demands made by the carters and other day workers for a rise in their daily wages. The first commune to be affected in the second week of

¹¹⁰ *Procès verbal* of the Municipality of Beaumont-sur-Oise dated February 24 and report of the *procureur syndic* of the district of Pontoise dated March 6, A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

¹¹¹ *Procès verbal* of the Municipality of Marines dated March 14, 1792, letter written by the Municipality of Marines to the Directory of the district of Pontoise, dated March 21, A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

March was Aulnay on the borders of the two cantons of Gonesse and Livry. The cultivators of Aulnay appear to have given in quickly to the demands, so peace was re-established almost immediately. But soon the movement spread to the town of Gonesse. On March 19 the farmers, flour merchants and bakers met in the city hall with the carters, threshers and apprentice bakers and promised them an augmentation in their daily wages both in money and kind. There were similar movements in the communes of Roissy and Sarcelles. The movement then spread to the other cantons and in addition to the original demands, workers began to demand the setting of prices of wheat, bread and other foodstuff like butter and eggs. Thus at Tremblay and Villepinte workers demanded and obtained the *taxation* of wheat at 20 *livres* per *setier* and bread at 2 *sols* per pound. Prices of eggs and butter were also set. There were similar movements at Noisy-le-Grand and Gagny.

The movement took on an extremely organized form in the canton of Louvres where workers in each of the communes forced their respective municipalities to draw up acts decreeing that prices of all comestibles be set and that cultivators and merchants enter into agreements with their domestics and apprentices to restructure the rate of daily wages. Cultivators, bakers and merchants were forced to affix their signatures to the acts. First affected in the canton of Louvres was Epiais which was also nearest to the border with the canton of Gonesse. In Epiais there was a riot on March 27 when carters demanded a rise in their salaries. From Epiais the riots spread to

Villeron and Chennevières on March 29; then to Vemars on March 30 and then to Survilliers and Fosses on April 1. Next affected was Marly-la-Ville where the mayor and municipal officers openly sided with the rioters on April 1 and 2. Fontenay and the commune of Louvres were the last to be affected on April 3 and 4. At Louvres the price of wheat was fixed at 22 *livres* per *setier* and the price of the twelve-pound bread was fixed at 25 *so/s*. There were rumors that the surrounding parishes were planning a march to the market of Louvres. In the two cantons of Luzarches and Ecoeuen all the affected communes, namely Lassy, Bellefontaine, le Plessis and Jagny in Luzarches and le-Mesnil-Aubry and Mareil in Ecoeuen, bordered the canton of Louvres.

After the trouble in Louvres, the Directory of the department appointed a commissioner, Martial Victor Vaillant, to travel to the disturbed district with troops to re-establish public order. On his arrival at Gonesse on April 5, Vaillant found the district outwardly calm but price-setting in full force. When Vaillant pointed out to the municipalities the unconstitutional nature of this state of affairs, the latter maintained that such a conciliation between farmers and their domestics had been long overdue. It took the presence of regular troops to break the back of the popular movement in Gonesse.¹¹² By the

¹¹² See the report outlining the troubles in Gonesse in A.D.Y., 1 LM 459; report drawn up the commune of Marly-le-ville dated April 2; extract from the register of the Municipality of Fontenay-les-Louvres, dated April 4; reports of commissioner Vaillant dated April 5 through 12; letter written by the Directory of the district of Gonesse to the Directory of the department dated March 20; report of the Directory of the district of Gonesse dated March 30; report of Joseph

end of April, calm seems to have returned to the department of the Seine-et-Oise, although it was an uneasy calm enforced by the presence of troops.

The riots of spring 1792 were much more widespread than those of 1791. They touched rich and poor districts alike. All the major markets were affected. Particularly affected were those situated along the major export route that ran from Paris to Orléans, for example, Longjumeau, Montlhéry and Étampes. Dourdan, Limours and Chevreuse and Houdan, situated on export routes to the west, were also affected. The geographical extent of the riots indicates that there was growing resistance to grain exports not only to Paris but to the western and southern departments as well. Other sensitive spots were the clusters of communes situated in the river valleys. One of the most disturbed areas in the district of Corbeil in the spring of 1792 was the communes situated along the Seine and Orge rivers. In the district of Étampes, the troubles of March 3 were precipitated by the march organized by some of the communes situated along the river Juine. In the canton of Dourdan, too, the northern communes along the river Orge comprised a major trouble spot. The least agriculturally developed

Blanquiers, administrator and member of the Directory of the department and Denis Dumont, *procureur syndic* of the district of Gonesse, dated April 3; letter written by the Justice of the Peace of the canton of Luzarches to the Directory of the district dated April 7; report of the Municipality of Louvres dated April 30 all in A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

areas in the department were hit hardest by the rising prices and the lack of grain, but the richer areas were also not spared.

The Food Riots of Fall 1792

The harvest of 1792 was everywhere very good.¹¹³ Yet, with the new harvests came reports of renewed unrest. Compared with the situation in spring, however, the trouble spots were few in number and remained largely confined to the poorer areas in the department.¹¹⁴

The first reports of trouble came from Mantes. Mantes had been struggling with scarcity since spring and even after peace was restored elsewhere, stoppages of cartloads of grain had continued in Roehuguyon, Saint-Clair and Charence.¹¹⁵ Then on September 23, 1792, a barge of flour destined for Rouen was stopped at Mantes signalling the start of new troubles in the department.¹¹⁶

Next, there was unrest in the district of Saint-Germain. On October 15, the Minister of the Interior wrote to the Municipality of Meulan, complaining of "seditious proposals" being heard in the market

¹¹³ Pierre Caron, "Une enquête sur la récolte de 1792," *Bulletin d'histoire économique de la Révolution* (1913): 161-184.

¹¹⁴ Records of the food riots of October-November 1792 are to be found in A.N., F/11/221.

¹¹⁵ Report of the Directory of the department of the Seine-et-Oise, dated May 31, 1792, A.N., F/11/221.

¹¹⁶ Extract from the register of deliberations of the *Conseil général* of the commune of Mantes, dated September 23, 1792, A.N., F/11/221.

of Meulan. The municipality wrote back defiantly that they had not heard any such seditious proposals and dismissed them as rumors being spread by the *laboueurs* to spread fears of scarcity.¹¹⁷ Soon after, on November 3, Meulan complained that the administration of Saint-Germain was showing an outrageous preference for the market of Saint-Germain and in the process sacrificing all the smaller markets where people of the countryside bought their provisions. On November 9, the Municipality of Meulan charged that armed members of the national guard of Saint-Germain were visiting the farms of the *laboueurs* and carting away grain to Saint-Germain.¹¹⁸

Meanwhile similar charges were being levelled against Meulan. In October, the Municipality of Vaux in the canton of Triel Bourg complained that domiciliary visits to farmers living in their canton were being ordered by the Municipality of Meulan. Such visits had been conducted in Vaux on October 9 and the requisitioned grain sold at the market of Meulan on October 15.¹¹⁹ The situation in the market of Saint-Germain itself appears to have been no better. On November 16, the Minister of the Interior wrote to the Directory of the department

¹¹⁷ Letter of the Minister of the Interior to the Municipality of Meulan dated October 15, 1792 and reply of the municipality dated November 9, 1792, A.N., F/11/221.

¹¹⁸ Extract from the register of deliberations of the commune of Meulan dated November 8 and letter to the Minister of the Interior dated November 9, 1792, A.N., F/11/221.

¹¹⁹ Letter written to the Minister of the Interior by the Municipality of Vaux dated October 8, 1792, F/11/221.

complaining of riots in the market of Saint-Germain. Farmers had been forced to sell grain at prices set by the people. At the slightest resistance on the part of the farmers, their sacks had been pierced and their grain sold. Wheat was sold at 19 *livres* and 17 *livres*. The soldiers had openly sided with the rioters and the municipal officers had been pushed outside the hall.¹²⁰

Also affected by the food riots was the area comprising the southern part of the district of Montfort and the northern part of Dourdan. On October 25, at 11:00 in the morning, the town of Montfort, l'Amaury received advance warning that the citizens of Montfort, le-Mesnuls, Grosrouvre, Saint-Leger and other neighboring communes had assembled outside the town with their mayors and municipal officers and were planning to enter Montfort when the market opened. Thereupon the mayor, accompanied by an unarmed detachment of national guards, went to meet the assembled crowd. He was informed that the people had no hostile intentions and merely wished to furnish themselves with grain from the market and bread from the bakers. Soon after, a crowd of eight hundred to nine hundred people entered the city and flooded the market-place. There were complaints of the scarcity of wheat after an abundant harvest and this was blamed on the cupidity of *laboueurs* and the new order of things. Next, a petition was drawn up demanding that wheat be sold at 24 *livres* per *setier* and bread at 2 *sols* per

¹²⁰ A.N., F/11/221.

pound and that the markets be sufficiently provisioned. The petition was read to the assembled crowd at 2:00 in the afternoon.

Next, it was found that there were only 51 *livres* of grain in the market-place which would not be sufficient even if it was sold in small portions. It was immediately decided by the crowd that the market would re-assemble the next day, that is Friday. In the meantime, detachments of the national guards would be sent to the farms in the cantons of Montfort and Garancières to check out the granges and invite the farmers to bring grain to market. The unrest then spread to the neighboring regions. On October 27, the Municipality of Rambouillet found itself faced with about five hundred inhabitants of the parishes of Saint-Leger, Montfort, Grosrouvre, Gallois, la-Queue, Méré, Bazoches, Saint-Remy and Mesnuls, many of them armed with guns. Representatives from the crowd handed over a petition calling for uniform prices of wheat throughout the Republic. The people were told that they could enter the town only if they put down their arms. Faced with superior force, the crowd complied. Inside the market, however, a quarrel broke out between a grain merchant and some individuals and cries of "to arms" were raised. Some people ran back to the place where their arms had been left. The gendarmerie was fired upon, but the people were soon disarmed and order re-established.¹²¹

¹²¹ Extract from the register of deliberations of the *Conseil général* of the commune of Montfort, dated October 25, A.N., F/11/221; report of the *Conseil général* of the commune of Rambouillet dated

The district of Versailles, scene of severe food riots in the spring, suffered once again in the fall. On October 26, farmers who had brought grain to market complained of ill-treatment. They declared that they had lost 2 sacks and 6 *minots* of wheat and that they would not be able to provision the market in future unless adequate security was provided. But a sufficient number of troops simply could not be found. On November 23, fifty-four members of the national guard were asked to report to duty but only three showed up in the market-place. Eight *setiers* and 3 *minots* of wheat were seized by the crowd in the absence of their proprietors and sold at much less than their market price.¹²² There was intermittent unrest in the market of Versailles all through December.¹²³

Limours was another trouble spot. Peron, the mayor of Limours, wrote to the Directory that wheat was being sold at 24 *livres* per *setier* and farmers were being abused. The mayor was trying to maintain order with the help of a single gendarme. All the other troops had left for the frontiers. Faced with this impossible situation, the

October 27, A.N., F/7/3689/7.

¹²² Summary of documents in Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:231.

¹²³ Letter of Richaud, mayor of Versailles to the Minister of the Interior, dated December 5, 1792 in Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:232. Also A.N., F/11/221.

procureur and other municipal officers preferred to stay in their homes and see and hear nothing.¹²⁴

There also were reports of grain being stopped in different localities. A cartload of grain was stopped at Chevreuse on September 26, and another at Saint-Cyr on September 28. The national guard of Senlis stopped a horse carrying 2 sacks of oats at Senlis on November 3 during one of their nightly patrols. Another cart of wheat was seized at Saint-Remy-les-Chevreuse. There were repeated complaints of grain being seized at Longjumeau in November and December.¹²⁵

The other districts which had been disturbed in March and April 1792 seem to have remained calm in the fall, notably Étampes and Dourdan. There were vague threats in the market of Gonesse in December 1792, but no serious trouble.¹²⁶

Except for some cases of *entraves*, the department was quiet in the first half of 1793. Probably the abundant harvest of 1792 tided the department over the lean period in the spring. The next wave of food riots occurred in 1795.

¹²⁴ Letter of Peron dated November 2 in Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:231.

¹²⁵ Summary of documents in Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:222.

¹²⁶ Letter written by the Directory of the district of Gonesse to the the Minister of the Interior dated December 11, 1792, A.N., F/11/221.

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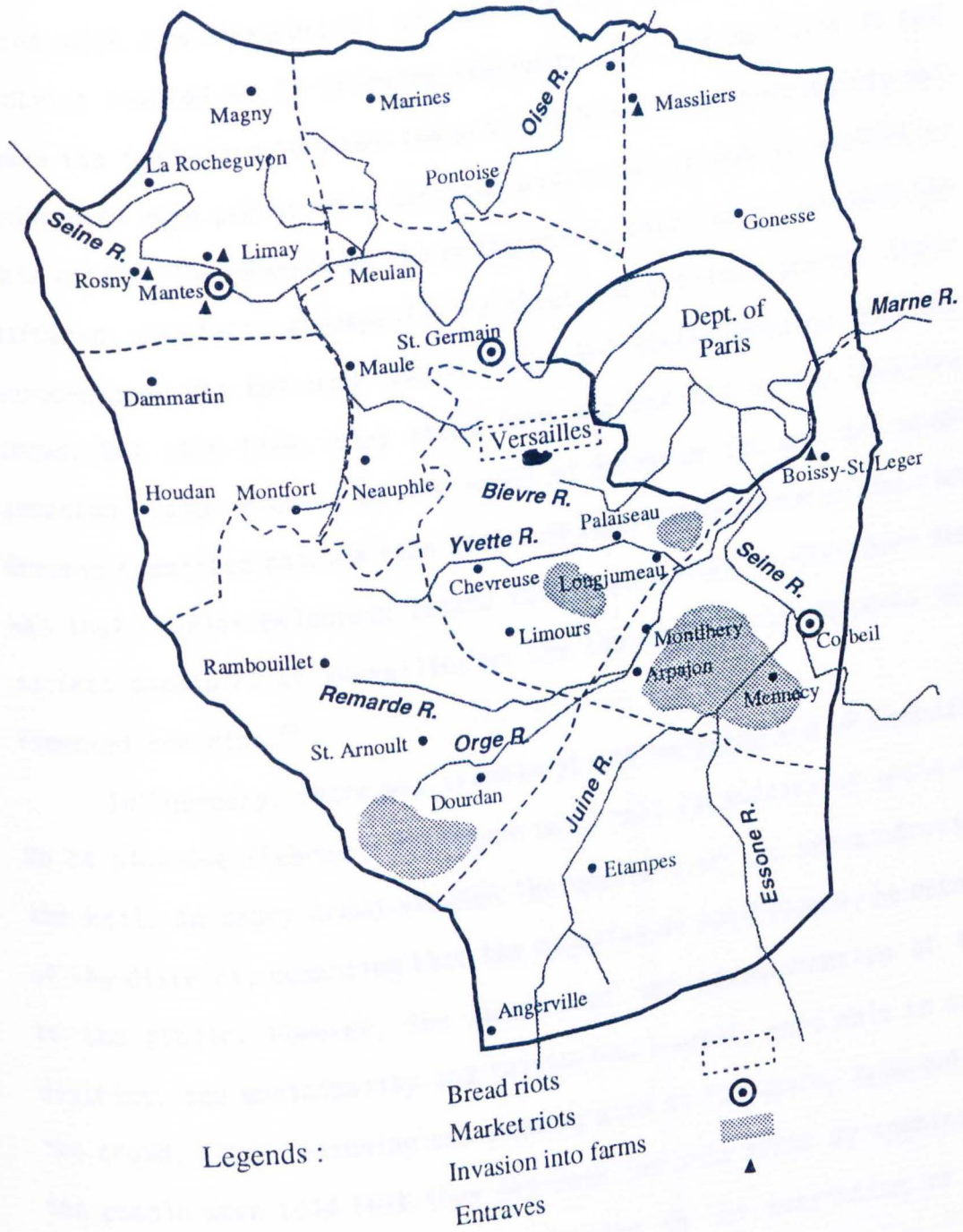
¹²⁶ Letter written by the Directory of the district of Gonesse to the the Minister of the Interior dated December 11, 1792, A.N., F/11/221.

The Food Riots of 1795

The first sign of trouble to come was a bread riot in Versailles on 22 frimaire an III (December 12, 1794). The day before, the municipality had declared that the price of the twelve-pound loaf would remain fixed at 48 *so/s*. The next day, from 8:00 in the morning, women assembled before the bakeries, advising everyone whom they met, not to pay more than 38 *so/s* for the twelve-pound loaf. The municipality initially tried to take a firm stand, ordering all bakeries which had closed to reopen and increasing the number of national guards in the streets. But the latter turned out to be an uncertain ally, with their commander declaring that that they would not execute any orders on matters relating to bread.

Meanwhile the rioting women entered both the *maison commune* and the *hôtel de ville* and declared that they would not disperse till their demands had been recognized. The administration gave way. The district declared that they had taken into consideration the demands of the women and had decided that the twelve-pound loaf would be sold, for the time being, at 38 *so/s*. The committees of government (Committees of General Security and Public Safety) would be petitioned for permission to lower the price of bread at Versailles so that it would not be disproportionately high when compared with that of Paris.

When the two commissioners from Versailles arrived to meet with the committees, they found little support for their actions. The Convention in its turn decided to send Charles Delacroix as a



Map 2.5. The food riots of 1795.

representative on mission to Versailles to deal with the problem. Faced with the disapproval of the center, the Directory of the district revoked on 23 frimaire (December 13), the decision it had taken the day before to lower the price of bread. The municipality was ordered to make public this decision and to put up public notices to this effect. The members of the municipality then fanned out into the different quarters, accompanied by about 150 national guards. Their announcement was met with jeers, cries and stone throwing from the crowd. But this time, they stood firm and had all of the hecklers arrested. Calm returned on the night of December 23, but the mayor Gravois committed suicide soon after. Another consequence of the riot was that Charles Delacroix seized this opportunity to shut down the *société populaire* of Versailles on the charge that the Jacobins had fomented the riot.¹²⁷

In February, there was trouble at the market-place of Corbeil. On 14 pluviôse (February 2), there were only 14 *setiers* of grain at the hall. An angry crowd stormed the quarters of the administration of the district, demanding that the *magasins de subsistance*, be opened to the public. However, the members of the administration of the district, the municipality and the national agent, were able to calm the crowd, after reasoning and arguing with it for hours. Apparently, the people were told that they had been led into error by enemies of the public weal. The officials appealed to the patriotism of the

¹²⁷ Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:316-320.

crowd, extolling the great work being done by the Convention and warning them that any kind of civil war would greatly weaken the national effort against the external enemy.

On a more practical and useful plane, the administration promised to take measures to help the most indigent. Those who had no flour, grain or bread in their homes were asked to put down their names on a list and assured that they would be provided with food as soon as possible. The administration also declared that cultivators who were refusing to bring grain to market would be forced to do so in the future. It was also decided that Charles Delacroix and the Committee of Public Safety would be advised on the state of the district. The crowd then dispersed, although reports continued to come in throughout the night that people were in the streets demanding that the *grenier d'abondance* should be opened up.¹²⁸

At Mantes, rioters made identical demands. Since January, the market-place of Mantes had remained almost empty. A dangerous situation arose on 3 ventôse (February 21) when a crowd of seven hundred who had been waiting impatiently in the cold for grain to arrive, decided that they would open up the storehouses of grain which they knew existed in the town. Members of the administration attempted to tell them that the grain stored in these warehouses was the property of the Republic and destined for the provisioning of the

¹²⁸ For the riot at Corbeil, see *séance publique du district de Corbeil du 14 pluviôse* in the register of deliberations of the district dated 6 pluviôse to 19 germinal an III, A.D.C.E., L 16.

capital, but the people had had enough. "Hungry stomachs have no ears," they screamed at the officers. They surrounded the mayor and promised to kill him if they were not given bread. Finally the mayor was rescued by the gendarmerie. The national guard came out in strength and was posted before the storehouses of the Republic and at the market-place. Defeated, the people dispersed around 4:00 in the evening.¹²⁹

In 1795, the rioters, weakened by hunger, appear to have lacked the confidence and strength of the rioters of 1792. The market riots of 1795 were few in number and did not spread. The rioters also failed to win the support of the authorities to any great extent. These riots in Corbeil and Mantes were not the classic market riots where people seized control of the market-place, set the price of grain and distributed it according to their needs. In 1795, there was not really a true market-place to seize control of. The few straggling sacks of grain that found their way to the market-place did not meet the needs of the crowd by far. The rioters resorted to threats and pleas because there was not any real action that they could take in the market-place. They knew where grain could be found. It was in the storehouses of the Republic and the farms of the cultivators. Not daring to attack the first, they turned their attention to the second.

¹²⁹ Eugène Grave, "Les subsistances à Mantes de messidor an II à messidor an III," *Recherche et publication des documents relatifs à la vie économique de la Révolution: Comité départemental de Seine-et-Oise* 4 (1910-1911):45-46.

In the Year III, incursions into the homes of the cultivators became the most common form of food riot.

Most of the reports of these disturbances came in from the grain rich district of Corbeil. Most often the rioters were drawn from the poorer communes along the banks of the river Seine. The farms which were invaded lay in the richer cantons of Arpajon and Mennecy in the district of Corbeil and in the neighboring canton of Longjumeau in the district of Versailles. The incursions most often took place by night. The rioters would number anywhere from twenty to twenty-five to more than one hundred. They would knock on the door and ask for grain. If the cultivator refused to open up, the rioters would break down the front door. Then they would search all the rooms and granaries for grain. If grain was found, they would thresh it, clean it, and distribute it among themselves, taking care to see that everyone received a fair share. Before leaving they would hand over a sum of money.

On 17 pluviôse (February 5), a circular was distributed among the cultivators warning them of the incursions and asking them to report the names and domiciles of these intruders, or at least the names of the communes from which they came.¹³⁰ The next day, the Municipality of Tigery reported that citizens from the commune of Soissy had been forcibly carrying away grain from the granges of two

¹³⁰ A.D.C.E., L 16.

cultivators named Jason and Gibbon for the last six days.¹³¹ Even earlier on 15 nivôse (January 4, 1795), some individuals from the communes of Grigny, Viry and Epinay-sur-Orge, in the district of Corbeil had threatened a farmer at Paray (district of Versailles) and forced him to hand over 13 *boisseaux* of wheat at 50 *livres* per *setier*.¹³² On January 31, Pierre Guignard, cultivator at Gif in the district of Versailles, made a declaration to the revolutionary committee at Versailles that thirty men and women from the commune at Igny had visited his farm on January 11, and had carried away 5 *minots* of grain which he had reserved for his workers after paying him a certain sum of money.¹³³ In the month of germinal (March-April), when people were literally starving in the department of the Seine-et-Oise, these incursions became very frequent.

One of the worst affected communes was Vert-le-Grand. This commune was home to several cultivators, and was reputed to contain large stocks of grain. Vert-le-Grand suffered raids organized by the communes of Savigny, Geneviève-des Bois, Bretigny, Juvisy, Viry, Fleury, Vert-le-Petit and Athis-Mons. The cultivators of this commune were terrorized by these raiders who uttered threats "most alarming

¹³¹ From the register of deliberations of the Municipality of Tigery, dated 18 pluviôse, A.D.C.E., L 16

¹³² Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:446.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

and counter-revolutionary" and assured them that they would be back soon.¹³⁴

But the surrounding communes were also not spared. On 9 germinal (March 29) about forty men and women from the surrounding countryside went to the farm of *Sieur Rabourdin* at Fleury-Merogis and demanded grain. Disregarding his protestations that he only had enough grain for his workers, about twelve to fifteen of them entered his grange, took 3 *mines* of grain and put down 150 *livres* on the window of his stable.¹³⁵

On 14 germinal (3 April), about 5:00 in the morning, some thirty-five to forty men and women went to the farm of the cultivator Bidaut, at Plessis Paté, in the canton of Montlhéry. They banged on his door, scaled the walls, and after breaking the lock, opened his door. While one man Brigandier, from the commune of Ris held him by the collar, others climbed into his granary and helped themselves to some grain for which they paid 100 *livres* per *setier*. The next morning at 4:00, some sixty men and women from Viry-Chatillon arrived. They mistreated Bidaut, forced him to hand over the keys to his granary, and threshed some wheat and all the barley that they found there. They

¹³⁴ Extract from the deliberations of the *Conseil général* of the commune of Vert-le-Grand, dated 5 germinal an III, A.D.C.E., L 16,

¹³⁵ From the extract of deliberations of the administration of the district of Corbeil, session of 12 germinal an III, A.D.C.E., L 16. Also in A.D.Y., 42 L 57 bis.

paid for the wheat at 120 *livres* per *setier* and for the barley at 100 *livres* per *setier*.¹³⁶

The same day, another group of people knocked at the door of citizen Motteau, also at Plessis Paté. When Motteau refused to open the door, the rioters went away but returned after an hour with more of their comrades. This time they broke down the door, threatened Motteau, and then proceeded to thresh the grain. They paid him 490 *livres* for 49 *boisseaux* of grain. Motteau's own threshers recognized some of the rioters. Most of those arrested were from the commune of Fleury-Merogis.¹³⁷

In the next few days, there were several such raids in the neighboring communes of Bondoufle and Vert-le-Grand.¹³⁸ The biggest such gathering took place in the commune of Paray, in the district of Versailles. On 18 germinal, a crowd of two hundred from the communes of Juvisy and Savigny arrived at the farm of Louis Beaupied at 4:00 in the morning and demanded to be let in. Beaupied sent for the mayor. The mayor arrived but was unable to control the crowd. The mayor in turn sent for the gendarmerie at Longjumeau. Despite the presence of

¹³⁶ Extract from the register of deliberations of the commune of Plessis Paté, dated 23 germinal an III, A.D.C.E., L 16. Also in A.D.Y., 42 L 57½.

¹³⁷ From the register of deliberations of the Directory of the district of Corbeil, session of 22 germinal, A.D.C.E., L 16. Also see Motteau's deposition of 26 germinal in A.D.Y., 42 L 56.

¹³⁸ From the register of deliberations of the Municipality of Bondoufle, dated 23 germinal, A.D.Y., 42 L 56.

the guards, the crowd broke down the door and began to thresh the grain which they found in the granges. Hoping to make the best of a bad situation, the mayor of Paray posted guards who were made responsible for receiving the money being paid by the people and taking down their names and addresses. This measure scared off many, so that ultimately only fifty-one people took a *boisseau* of grain each at 100 *livres* per *setier*.

The same day another group went to the farm of citizen Roinville and carried away some grain. Both cultivators complained that this was not the first time in fifteen days that crowds had carried away their grain.¹³⁹ On the same day, there was a rash of incursions into several farms in the communes of Leudeville and Marolles in the canton of Arpajon. The next day, nineteen people were arrested in the course of one such raid in the commune of Avrainville. Avrainville had witnessed several such raids in the past few days and so the gendarmerie of Arpajon had been lying in wait that particular morning. All of those arrested were from the commune of Savigny-sur-Orge.¹⁴⁰ In the neighboring canton of Mennecey, there were raids on the farms of several cultivators on 17 and 18 germinal (April 6 and 7). The farm

¹³⁹ From the report of the director of the Jury, drawn up at Versailles on 27 floréal an III, A.D.Y., 42 L 55 bis.

¹⁴⁰ From reports drawn up by the Municipality of Arpajon, dated 18 germinal, A.D.Y., 46 L 55 bis.

of one rich cultivator, *Sieur Paillet* was targeted both days.¹⁴¹ The next day, it was the turn of the cultivators of Tigery. The rioters were drawn from several communes and were led by the national agent (*agent national*) of Etiolles.¹⁴²

Reports of such raids began to come in from the district of Dourdan in the month of germinal (March-April). As at Corbeil, so at Dourdan, the raids were organized by the poorer communes of the northern cantons and the targets were the rich farms of the southern cantons, mainly Ablis which was a part of the grain rich Beauce. On 15 germinal (April 4), the national agent of the district of Dourdan, wrote to Charles Delacroix that it was becoming impossible for him to organize the delivery of grain which had been requisitioned from Dourdan. The reason was that no sooner had the grain being threshed and cleaned, than a crowd, often exceeding one hundred people, would descend on the grain and carry it away. These crowds, the national agent claimed, had been scouring the countryside for more than a month. Initially, these incursions had not been so frequent, but now they were becoming regular. The cultivators were not equipped to resist these incursions, nor did the district have enough forces to stop them. He also added:

¹⁴¹ Extract from the register of deliberations of the administration of the district of Corbeil, session of 22 germinal an III, A.D.Y., 42 L 57 bis.

¹⁴² From the register of deliberations of the administration of the district of Corbeil, dated 23 germinal, A.D.Y., 42 L 57 bis.

Je ne peux te dissimuler que le besoin de vivres est une des principales causes de ces sorties et que, par ce motif, la résistance n'en serait que plus dangereuse.

I cannot hide from you that the need for food is one of the principal causes of these outings and on these grounds it would be all the more dangerous to resist.

Gastellier, commissioner in charge of making requisitions for Versailles from the district of Dourdan, wrote on 18 germinal (April 7), that three hundred people from the communes of Rochefort, Clairefontaine and Saint-Arnoult and other communes had assembled near Roinville. There, they had divided into groups of forty to fifty people who were systematically searching all nearby farms and mills. If they found flour they took it. If they found grain, they threshed it before carrying it away. They also left receipts phrased as follows:

Nous, habitons de....., manquant de la première nécessité qui est le pain, soussignés, reconnaissons avoir reçu du citoyen....., cultivateur à....., la quantité de blé (ou farines)..... (signatures)¹⁴³

¹⁴³ These documents can be found in Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:308-310. There is no mention of these riots in the registers of deliberations of the administration of the district of Dourdan, preserved in A.D.C.E. It is possible that the municipalities, unwilling to draw attention to themselves, omitted to tell the higher

We, inhabitants of....., lacking the first necessity which is bread, the undersigned, recognize having received from citizen....., cultivator at....., the quantity of grain or flour..... (signatures)

After germinal (March-April) these raids gradually died down, although there might have been some isolated cases, as at Toussus (canton of Jouy, district of Versailles) on 1 floréal (April 20).¹⁴⁴

The event which overshadowed all else in the month of germinal was the riot that took place at Saint-Germain-en-Laye on 17 germinal (April 6).¹⁴⁵ The immediate cause of the riot was a hike in the price of bread sold by the administration of the commune from 10 *sofs* to 25 *sofs* per pound. For several days before 17 germinal, the supply of bread had been disrupted. Then came the news of the price hike. On 17 germinal (April 6), a large crowd of men and women came to the *maison commune* and surrounded the members of the *Conseil général*. They demanded that the price of bread be brought down to 10 *sofs*. The members initially tried to reason with the crowd, arguing that the *conseil* had itself been forced to buy flour and grain from individual merchants at 35 to 40 *sofs* per pound, but they ultimately gave way.

authorities of these raids.

¹⁴⁴ Report of the *procureur syndic* of the district of Versailles, dated 3 floréal an III, Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:446,

¹⁴⁵ Richard Cobb has studied this riot in *Terreur et Subsistances*, 1793-1795 (Paris: Librairie Clavreuil, 1965).

The crowd then demanded that meetings be held in each of the sections to deliberate on the food situation, to discuss ways of procuring food and bringing down prices. The *conseil* agreed and gave orders for the *rappel* to be sounded. While the *rappel* was being sounded, members of the crowd demanded that it be changed to the *générale*. They argued that it was the only way of conveying to the population the urgency of the situation. Despite their reservations, the *conseil* was forced to agree.

In the meetings of the sections, several radical measures were suggested. One such suggestion was that the Convention should declare all grains and flour over and above what the proprietors needed for their own consumption to be national property. Each section drew up a petition to be addressed to the Convention and then dispersed. In the evening there was a united meeting of all the sections to draw up a joint petition to the Convention. How the petition was to be presented became a point of contention. A large number of those assembled argued that they should march *en masse* to Paris because the Convention would not be able to refuse the demand of thirty thousand citizens for bread. But these citizens were outvoted by those who preferred to send a petition to the Convention through elected deputies. A petition was then addressed to the Convention requesting

that immediate aid be sent to Saint-Germain. It was also requested that the price of bread in Saint-Germain not exceed that in Paris.¹⁴⁶

There were also numerous reports of *entraves* in the first few months of 1795. Carts carrying grain were waylaid by desperate people, their contents unloaded and distributed and a sum of money handed over to the carter. The largest such stoppage took place at Boissy-Saint-Leger (district of Corbeil) when grain weighing 1625 *livres* was forcibly taken by a crowd who paid 270 *livres* for it.¹⁴⁷

In the commune of Massliers (district of Gonesse), the *entrave* took a unique form. The rioters staked out the home of a rich cultivator, refusing to let people come in or go out until their demands for bread had been met. The first time this happened on 19 floréal (May 8), Angélique Portier, wife of Michel Masson was surrounded by sixty to eighty women who claimed that she had 6 *setiers* of grain in the local mills. They wanted to enter her home and search for bread. Blows were exchanged before Portier was rescued by one of her own threshers. The next time that this happened on 24 floréal (May

¹⁴⁶ For the bread riot at Saint-Germain see extract from the register of deliberations of the *Conseil général* of the commune of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, session of 17 germinal an III; letter of the administration of the district to Charles Delacroix dated 18 germinal; minutes of the meeting of the Directory of the district, dated 17 germinal, and the two documents headed *Motifs* and *Petition*, A.D.Y., 2 LM 49. Evidence provided by numerous witnesses may be found in A.D.Y., 42 L 57½

¹⁴⁷ From the report of the director of the Jury of the tribunal of the district of Versailles, dated 15 prairial an III, A.D.Y., 42 L 57 bis.

13), the municipality was summoned. When the mayor told the women that their actions were illegal, they responded that "hunger does not have any law" ("la faim n'avait point de loi") and pointed at their mouths. The mayor went away but returned to the scene later to intercede on behalf of the rioters with Michel Masson. Masson sold the women some bread and they dispersed peacefully.¹⁴⁸

There was another stoppage of grain at Massliers on 21 floréal (June 9). A cart which was travelling by night and carrying 3.5 *setiers* of grain to a mill at Presles was stopped by some men and taken back to Massliers. There, the men were joined by women. The women in turn took the cart to the mayor's home and patiently waited for sunrise. In the morning the municipality was summoned. Despite the remonstrances of the municipal officers, the women distributed the grain among themselves.¹⁴⁹ On 26 floréal (May 15), an attempt by women to stop a cart at Brie-Libre was foiled by the timely intervention of the armed forces.¹⁵⁰

There were numerous incidents of *entraves* in the district of Mantes as well. On 19 nivôse (January 8) grain destined for Mantes was stopped at Limay, one of its neighboring *communes*. Cultivators

¹⁴⁸ From the register of deliberations of the commune of Massliers dated 19 floréal and 24 floréal, A.D.Y., 42 L 57 bis.

¹⁴⁹ From the register of deliberations of the Municipality of Massliers, dated 21 floréal, A.D.Y., 42 L 57 bis.

¹⁵⁰ Copy of the *procès verbal* of the citizen Arbois, *maréchal des logis*, commanding the armed forces at Brie, A.D.Y., 42 L 57½.

bringing grain to the market-place of Mantes was also stopped at Rosny on 23 and 24 nivôse (January 12 and 13) and their grain taken away. Many of these rioters were from the town of Mantes. Frustrated in their attempts to buy grain in the market-place, they had resorted to the *entrave*. There was a stir on 26 ventôse (March 16) in the town of Mantes when some women stopped a cart of grain destined for Paris. The women contented themselves with seizing just a sack of grain. Their restraint was truly astonishing for day after day the famished people of Mantes had watched convoys of carts carrying grain to Paris with anguished eyes while their town was passed over. If these convoys ever stopped at Mantes it was because the carters needed food. And this food had to be provided by the Municipality of Mantes!¹⁵¹

On 28 ventôse (March 18), some women seized a cart of grain between Fontenay la Pèrre and Limay. The cart contained 4 sacks of grain. The women took 2 sacks and paid 170 *livres* to the carter. Soon after, another cart containing 6 sacks of wheat and 1 of rye was stopped at the same spot. The women took 2 sacks of wheat for which they paid 135 *livres*. The same cart was stopped once again at Limay. But the carter was able to inform the municipality which, in turn, was able to stop the women from taking grain. Both the carts, it turned out, were taking grain to Mantes.¹⁵² In the month of germinal, Mantes

¹⁵¹ Grave, "Les subsistances à Mantes de messidor an II à messidor an III," 50-51. See especially the letter written by the municipality to the Committee of Public Safety on 27 ventôse an III.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 51.

continued to suffer the consequences of grain destined for its market-place being stopped by the citizens of the surrounding communes.¹⁵³

Conclusions

Thus between 1789 and 1795 all of the districts of the department of the Seine-et-Oise were affected by the food riots at one time or another. During these years buyers in the market-place were concerned that the prices of foodgrains were too high and that merchants and *laboueurs* were not bringing enough grain to the market-place. So the buyers took steps to redress their grievances. In the course of these riots the crowds set prices of grain and bread forcibly in the market-place. They also forced cultivators and merchants to bring grain to the local markets by organizing visits to the surrounding farms. During these visits the rioters took note of the amount of grain that each cultivator had in storage and directed the cultivator to bring to the markets a portion of this grain. The rioters also prevented grain from leaving the area. They stopped grain travelling on the export routes and diverted it to the nearest market-place. Although they exhibited varied features, the riots from 1789 to 1792 were fundamentally market riots. They were attempts to restore the importance of the market-place that had been declining in the late eighteenth century.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 53.

During the market riots, the rioters exhibited intense suspicion of grain merchants and large cultivators; they sought to control the prices and amounts of grain in the marketplace and they also tried to secure the co-operation of the local authorities and the national guard. These trends began to emerge as early as 1789, became clearer in 1791 and took full form in 1792. The riots of 1792 were widespread affecting all the districts in the department. They were also remarkable for the extent of the involvement of the local administrations and the security forces which in some cases threatened to set the department of the Seine-et-Oise against the central government. The year 1792 marked the high point of the market riots.

The years 1793 and 1794 were on the whole quiet years. In 1795 there was a change in the pattern of the riots. There was a shift in the location of the riots from the "public market-place" to the "private farms". The rioters gave up the struggle to bring grain to the market-place. Instead they organized raids on the private farms in the search for food. With the turning away from market riots there was a change in the level of organization as well. Riots became smaller in scope and participation and the rioters in most cases did not seek to involve the local administrations.

These riots gave rise to a host of questions that will serve as themes for the following chapters. Why was the market-place declining? What should be the policy of the revolutionary authorities towards the commerce of foodstuff? How should the problems arising from these

policies be dealt with? How should grain be distributed within the department? Should export of grain from the department be allowed? What policies should be followed toward the cultivators? What kinds of safeguards should be provided for consumers in times of scarcity? Was a restructuring of the economy possible without a reorganization of the polity? What would be the role of the Revolution in all of this? In the following chapters we shall see how different periods yielded different answers to the questions posed.

Chapter III

Governmental Policy and Food riots: 1789-1796

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the causal relationships between governmental policy, grain supplies and food riots in the Seine-et-Oise during the revolutionary years. Governmental policy fluctuated sharply during this period as the authorities experimented with different ways of assuring a steady supply of food to the people. Riots were, by and large, responses on the part of the rioters to food shortages which they perceived to be the result of shortcomings in governmental policy. As politics changed so did the form and location of the riots. Between 1789 and 1796, the rioters shifted strategy several times as governmental policy affected the location and supply of grain. Conversely, as shortages developed, governmental policy changed. In reacting to shortages, each in their own way, the government and rioters together altered the provisioning system in France, as is reflected in the decline of the market-place.

Conflicting Interests

The first thing to note about governmental food policy is that the government had to struggle to reconcile the sharply differing interests of various groups. First, the government had to balance the interests of the cities with those of the countryside and this was by no means an easy task. In the cities, the popular perception of the cultivators, and especially of the rich cultivators, was that of vile hoarders who had no qualms about starving townspeople if it helped them earn more profits. From this perspective, the best way to guarantee a stable food supply was to exercise close control over the cultivators and over all those who dealt with them, from the big grain merchants to the small *bladiers*¹ and bakers. The sentiments of ill-will which the townspeople bore toward the cultivators were cordially reciprocated by the latter, who regarded the workers and artisans of the towns as unruly thugs, only too prone to start a riot so they could forcibly set prices and pillage grain to their hearts' content.

¹ *bladiers*: small scale dealers who owned their own carts and travelled from market to market. In addition to the traffic in grains, they dealt in all kinds of farm products and other merchandise. Apart from the *bladiers* there were the larger merchants or *negociants* who operated in every city and bourg where there was a market. Often the larger merchants had *bladiers* and smaller merchants working for them. Sometimes they received commissions from the government to supply the latter with a certain amount of grain which they would buy within the country or abroad. On this subject, see Georges Lefebvre, *Études Orléanaises*, 2 vols. (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1962) 1:144.

Food riots no doubt pitted the population of the towns against that of the countryside in a larger sense, but we should guard against carrying the divide too far. The population of the countryside was not a solid bloc. Differing interests led to divisions of opinion among the people in the countryside. The poorest, the *journaliers* or agricultural day laborers, were as interested as the town workers in imposing controls over the commerce in grain. The *journaliers* figured prominently among the food rioters. So did the village artisans. The *journaliers* and village artisans were dependant on the market for their food purchases and wanted price controls and other regulatory devices in times of shortages. Sometimes even the smaller sections of the landholding peasantry joined in. The latter did not produce enough for their consumption and were often forced to buy from the markets when supplies ran out and prices were at their highest. So they took part in riots in order to bring down prices.² The rich peasantry such as the *laboueurs* and *fermiers* on the other hand, resented all controls which would take away from their profits and this resentment set them apart from the poorer sections of the peasantry.

The revolutionary government was often caught between protecting the interests of the townspeople and those of the inhabitants of the countryside. Like the old monarchy before it the revolutionary

² The professions of the participants in the food riots will be studied in detail in chapter V.

government was concerned to maintain order in the crowded towns and realized, as its predecessor had, that "social order was first of all a matter of effective provisioning policy."³ Since the towns were the centers of patriotic and later on republican sentiments, it was vital for the revolutionary government to protect their interests. In times of dearth the poor in the countryside were often sacrificed by the local administrations to protect the interests of the townspeople who were given preference in making purchases of bread and grain in a shrunken grain or bread market. So there always remained a gulf of distrust between the poor of the countryside and that of the towns, however common their interests and grievances ultimately were.

But the government had no desire to sacrifice the interests of the cultivators, who were the backbone of the French economy. Moreover, most of the revolutionaries in the government were deeply imbued with the economic liberalism which had been popularized by the Physiocrats and was becoming entrenched in governing and intellectual circles from the second half of the eighteenth century.⁴ This liberalism was deeply unpopular with the ordinary people who believed

³ Steven Kaplan, "The Paris Bread Riot of 1725," *French Historical Studies* 17 (1985): 24.

⁴ For the growing popularity of Physiocratic doctrines in governmental circles under the *ancien regime* see Steven Kaplan, *Bread, Politics and Political Economy in the Reign of Louis X*, 2 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 97-163. For the influence of these doctrines on members of the National Assembly, see Albert Mathiez, *La vie chère et le mouvement social sous la Terreur*, 2d. ed. 2 vols. (Paris: Payot, 1973), 1:7-25.

that the removal of the old controls on commerce would injure their interests. The riots of 1791-1792 were to bear witness to this unpopularity. From 1793 however, under the pressure of circumstances of which the most important was the European War, many members of the revolutionary government abandoned their theoretical proclivities and supported the adoption of a policy of strict controls. These changes in governmental policy affected the economy, which in turn brought about a change in the nature of the food riots.

Revolutionary policy was made in Paris and the interests of the Parisian population were of prime importance to the authorities, technically on a par with those of the French army. The determination of the revolutionary government to provide the people of Paris with a steady supply of affordable food⁵ often proved costly to the departments which were responsible for the provisioning of Paris.⁶

⁵ The primary item in the diet of the people of Paris, as of most other French people living in the cities in the eighteenth century, was bread. Except in times of great scarcity, this bread was made of wheat. So above all the townspeople sought to protect their supplies of wheat. See Steven Kaplan, *Provisioning Paris: Merchants and Millers in the Grain and Flour Trade During the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 41-48.

⁶ Normally, Paris drew its grain supply from the departments of the Eure, the Eure-et-Loir, the Seine-et-Oise, the Aisne, the Oise and the Seine-et-Marne, although in times of scarcity, the net would be cast even wider. After May 1793, the Parisian zone of provisions was clearly specified. It included the departments of the Oise, the Seine-et-Oise, the Seine-et-Marne, the districts of Chartres, Janville and Dreux in the department of the Eure-et-Loir, Soissons, Chauny, Chateau-Thierry and Laon in the department of the Aisne and Evreux and Andelys in the department of the Eure. See Pierre Caron, ed., *Commission des Subsistances de l'an II* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1924), 7.

During the Revolution the department of the Seine-et-Oise suffered greatly from the incessant demands made upon it by Paris. After the outbreak of the war, when the burden of requisitions on the department became unbearable, the Parisian authorities became extremely unpopular with the rioters in the Seine-et-Oise. Paris, in turn, heavily dependant on the Seine-et-Oise for food and resentful of the resistance of the Seine-et-Oise to its demands, looked upon this department as the most egotistical of all the departments and as the most ill disposed towards Paris.⁷

The conflict of interests between Paris and the Seine-et-Oise led to differences of opinion between Parisian and departmental authorities over how a policy should be implemented or if it should be implemented at all. The departmental authorities, like the revolutionaries in Paris, bent under the pressure of circumstances. They were protective of and loyal to the interests of the people they represented. They also had a sound sense of where their well-being lay. This was the most true of the municipal officers who, after all, came face to face with the rioters. Not many municipal officers were, like Simoneau, ready to give up their lives to implement a policy which was so intensely unpopular with the people they administered.

Not only was the department of the Seine-et-Oise at loggerheads with Paris, but the nine districts within the department were often

⁷ Richard Cobb, "L'armée révolutionnaire dans le district de Pontoise; brumaire-germinal an II," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 193 (September 1950): 195.

locked in a fierce competition for food.⁸ Sometimes, so were the communes within a particular district. When rioters prevented grain from leaving a commune or district officials supported local complaints that requisitions in favor of a local commune were depriving their own of much needed grain, they underlined the localism and provincialism of eighteenth-century France. Each unit in the grid that made up the administrative network had its own interests to protect. This meant that departmental, district or local level administrations did not faithfully implement policies made at the center and often ignored or adapted such policies to suit their own interests. This is clearly revealed in the debate between freedom of commerce and regulation which predated the revolutionary period and which also lay at the heart of the subsistence problem during the period under survey.

The Debate:

Regulation of the grain trade versus freedom of commerce

The problem of subsistence in eighteenth-century France was essentially a problem of distribution. Richard Cobb has commented:

Le problème des subsistances vers la fin de XVIIIe siècle et pendant la Révolution se pose sur la plan de la distribution,

⁸ The nine districts were Corbeil, Dourdan, Etampes, Gonesse, Mantes, Montfort, Pontoise, Saint-Germain-en-Laye and Versailles.

de la circulation, c'est à dire des transports, plutôt que sur celui de la production.⁹

The problem of subsistence towards the end of the eighteenth century and during the Revolution lies at the level of distribution, of circulation, that is to say, of transports, rather than that of production.

In this chapter, I will use the concept of distribution to refer to the entire process by means of which food, specifically grains, was transferred from the producers to the consumers. Under the ancien regime, the belief of the people, a belief fully shared by governing circles, was that the more closely the whole system of distribution was regulated, the more effective it would be in ensuring that the consumers were guaranteed a steady supply of food. Steven Kaplan, who has studied in detail the provisioning system in old regime France, has written about the social belief that it was the responsibility of the government and more specifically of the king to safeguard the subsistence of the people. The idea of "king as father to his people," that is, the paternalist image of the king in old regime France, was closely bound up with the king/government's commitment to safeguard

⁹ Richard Cobb, "Le ravitaillement des villes sous la Terreur. La question des arrivages: septembre 1793-germinal an II," *Bulletin de la société d'histoire moderne* (June 1954): 8.

the subsistence of the people.¹⁰ Since the prevailing belief was that only close controls would safeguard the efficiency of the food distribution system, an immense number of regulations controlled the commerce in grain.

Grain could only be bought and sold in the market-place. On market day, the sellers would bring the grain to market, and, at the designated hour, they would open the sacks of grain for public viewing. They were expressly prohibited from selling the grain on the way to the market or in the inns. The first hour or two was reserved for the inhabitants of the town and of the surrounding countryside to make their purchases. Next, the bakers were allowed in and finally the merchants came in to make their purchases. If any grain remained in the market-place it could not be taken back but had to be stored in public warehouses until the next market day. If there was not enough grain in the market, the authorities would call upon the cultivators to bring more grain to market or would even requisition grain. Similarly when prices were too high, they would exert pressure upon the sellers to moderate their claims. The prices of grain were recorded in the municipal registers and the price of bread was fixed to conform to the price of grain. In Dourdan, for example, the price of an eight-pound loaf of bread was increased by a *sou* every time the

¹⁰ Kaplan, *Bread, Politics*, 1:5-8.

price of a *setier* of good quality grain was increased by a *livre*.¹¹ In addition, the activities of the baker, the miller and the merchants were always kept under close surveillance. Merchants of grain had to register their names with the local authorities. Any societies they formed had to be similarly registered. In the region around Paris, even the amount of grain they bought was controlled. Nevertheless, these regulations were not strictly enforced in times of abundance. It was only in times of scarcity, when prices soared and people began to grumble that authorities had recourse to the rule books.¹²

In the second half of the eighteenth century, there was an increasing trend in favor of freedom of commerce. This was largely due to the growing influence of the Physiocrats. Physiocratic teachings emphasized the place of agriculture in the French economy and claimed that the best way to improve the state of agriculture was to guarantee greater profits to the cultivator. This could only be done by according greater liberty to the commerce in grain. Through a series of edicts passed in 1763, 1764 and 1765, the government swept away many of the old regulations and instituted a new economic regime marked by freedom in the grain trade -- freedom of circulation of

¹¹ Emile Auvray, "L'administration municipale de Dourdan (Seine-et-Oise) et les boulangers (1788 à l'an IV)," *Commission de recherche et de publication des documents relatifs à la vie économique de la Révolution: Assemblée générale de la commission centrale et des comités départementaux*, 2 vols. (Paris: Tépac, 1945), 2:123.

¹² For details of these regulations, see Kaplan, *Bread, Politics*, 1:52-96.

grain by land and sea without any kind of controls, freedom to export grain and most of all to sell from the cultivators' homes, thereby destroying the monopoly of the market in the commerce of grain.¹³ Contrôleur général Laverdy, succinctly summed up the motives behind this new policy. He wrote:

L'objet principal de l'édit de 1765 est de se procurer par la liberté de commerce une élévation dans les prix, encourager par conséquent les cultivateurs, et mettre les propriétaires à portée d'acquitter moins difficilement les impositions que les circonstances ont rendues considérables.¹⁴

The principal object of the edict of 1765 is to procure by freedom of commerce a rise in prices, consequently to encourage the cultivators and to enable the proprietors to pay with less difficulty the taxes which circumstances have rendered considerable.

¹³ Kaplan, *Bread, Politics*, 1:141-163.

¹⁴ Quoted in Léon Cahen, "Le pacte de famine et les spéculations sur les blés," *Revue Historique* 152 (1926): 42. Steven Kaplan has an excellent discussion of the motives which prompted the government to liberalize the grain trade in France. He emphasizes not only the functional, but also the intellectual and philosophical arguments that were advanced by the proponents of free trade. These arguments finally persuaded the king and his officers to withdraw the old regulations and free the grain trade in France. See Kaplan, *Bread, Politics*, 1:97-163.

These edicts were accompanied by a steady rise in the prices of grain which opponents of freedom of commerce blamed on the new liberal economic regime. There were waves of protests in the provinces, protests which were often championed by the parlements.¹⁵ In the pre-revolutionary era, the implementation of the edicts remained erratic, for they were suspended in times of scarcity. But more and more in the years before the Revolution, officials like Calonne and Necker used the old regulations simply as a means of combating scarcity. In times of food shortages, price rise and popular unrest, some of these regulations were brought back. At other times they were allowed to fall into disuse.¹⁶

In 1787, two years before the Revolution, Brienne, a firm believer in the liberty of commerce, abolished all regulations, even allowing liberty of exportation. The following year, however, in the wake of the bad harvest of 1788, the *Conseil d'État du Roi* prohibited all exportation of grains and flour from the country beginning September 7, 1788. On November 23, 1788, buying or selling of grain outside the market was prohibited.¹⁷ A further ordinance of the king

¹⁵ For an account of these protests, see G. Afnas'ev, *Le Commerce des céréales en France au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: 1894), 162-167. Also Kaplan, *Bread, Politics*, 1:164-214.

¹⁶ Lefebvre, *Études Orléanaises*, 1:247-248; Also Kaplan, *Bread, Politics*, 1:164ff.

¹⁷ The complete text of all decrees relating to the commerce of grains between 1788 and the year V, are to be found (with some exceptions) in Pierre Caron, *Le commerce des céréales; instruction, recueil des textes et notes*, in the series *Commission d'histoire*

issued on April 23, 1789, reinforced these previous restrictions and gave the royal commissioners and magistrates of police in the provinces the right to requisition grain for the market wherever freedom of commerce was not enough to ensure the subsistence of the people. But the government was careful to portray this royal ordinance as an exceptional measure which had to be taken because of the alarming food situation in the kingdom. The king's subjects were assured that these restrictions would cease to exist as soon as the food situation improved.

Le Roi ne se porte qu'à regret à prescrire des mesures qui peuvent gêner en quelque chose la parfaite liberté dont chaque propriétaire d'une denrée doit naturellement jouir, mais ces mesures dictées par des circonstances particulières, cesseront à l'époque de la récolte prochaine.¹⁸

The king commits himself only with regret to prescribe these measures which must hamper in some ways the perfect liberty which every proprietor of food naturally ought to enjoy, but

économique et sociale de la Révolution (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1907), 104-320. References to all decrees during this period are from this volume. For the decrees of September 7 and November 23, 1788, see 131-133.

¹⁸ "Arrêt du Conseil d'État du Roi, concernant les grains et l'approvisionnement des marchés." Du 23 avril 1789. Caron, *Commerce des céréales*, 134.

these measures dictated by particular circumstances will cease at the time of the next harvest.

It is clear from this proclamation that by April 1789, freedom of commerce, which gave cultivators and other grain owners the right to engage in the grain trade free of governmental interference, was looked upon in governing circles as the natural order of things. The natural order had to be temporarily disrupted because of the extraordinary circumstances of 1789, but the decree tried to safeguard the free circulation of foodgrains. Article three prohibited the king's subjects from placing any constraints on the free circulation of grains from district to district and province to province. Article four prohibited any gathering or disorder in the market-place or along the trade routes which could make the *fermiers*, *proprietors* of grain and merchants fearful. Therefore, this decree, on the one hand, sought to assure the consumers that the king would fulfill his traditional role of safeguarding the subsistence of the people, and, on the other, sought to reassure merchants and cultivators that these restrictions were purely temporary and that freedom of commerce would soon be restored. What is most notable, is that even while the government was proclaiming freedom of commerce to be the natural order of things, it was falling back on the traditional practice of imposing restrictions on commerce in times of scarcity.

The Revolution did not end the government's commitment to the theory of free trade. On the contrary, it reaffirmed this principle by the decree of August 29, 1789, which lifted the restrictions imposed by the royal ordinance of April 1789 and deregulated the sale and circulation of grain and flour in France. But the exportation of grain from France remained provisorily banned.¹⁹

In the debate on the freedom of commerce which followed in September 1789 in the Constituent Assembly meeting in Versailles, the strongest brief in favor of freedom of commerce was put forward by M. de Beauvais, the former Bishop of Senes and member of the Constituent Assembly. His speech to the Assembly, made on September 15, 1789, outlined clearly the theoretical position behind the freedom of commerce.²⁰ Beauvais attacked the prohibition on the export of grain. He pointed out that since prices of grain were higher in France than elsewhere in Europe, there was little chance of large amounts of grain being exported from France. But exports could be advantageously made in years of great abundance, when, without them, prices would fall to very low levels and the cultivators would be ruined. There was no doubt that in future years when harvests were again abundant, it

¹⁹ "Décret sur la libre circulation des grains." Du 29 août 1789. Caron, *Commerce des céréales*, 135.

²⁰ M. de Beauvais' speech to the National Assembly on September 15, 1789, reproduced in *Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860; recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des chambres françaises (première série, 1787-99)*, 92 vols. (Paris: Librairie administrative de P. Dupont, 1862-1980), 8:645-651. This speech is reproduced in vol. 10 but is attributed to M. de Boislandry.

would be necessary to authorize exports. Beauvais's view was that a multiplicity of decrees dictated by place and circumstances had been a drawback of despotic government and should not become a mark of revolutionary government as well.²¹

Beauvais supported complete liberty in the commerce of grain in the interior of the kingdom. He criticized the laws of November 1788 and April 1789 as injurious to the liberty of the cultivators and as an attack on their property rights. If the cultivators stayed away from the markets, it was because they were mistreated there, the prices of their grains forcibly fixed and their grain sometimes pillaged. Laws which forced the cultivators to bring grain to market destroyed the fraternity between towns and villages. If cultivators were given the freedom to sell at their farms it would make grain cheaper by eliminating costs of transport. Besides markets, which gathered together large numbers of people in the same place with the same interests, were dangerous places.²²

Beauvais called upon the government to stop interfering in the system of food supply. The extraordinary measures taken by the government in 1788 and 1789 such as the awarding of subsidies to private companies and individuals to encourage them to import wheat, injunctions on farmers that forced them to bring grain to market, and governmental buying of grain in foreign markets had spread panic in

²¹ *Archives parlementaires*, 1st ser., 8:645.

²² *Ibid.*, 646-648.

the kingdom because it strengthened the consumers' fears that there was a dangerous shortage of food in the kingdom. People were then in the process of breaking their chains and pushing away the yoke of despotism. The first use that they made of their liberty was to guard their food supplies which in turn increased scarcity. In the towns, people, alarmed by the rise in prices began to attack merchants, millers and bakers, thereby completely disrupting the commerce of grain. It was left to the government to take over the organization of food supply at tremendous cost to itself and to the French economy.²³

Beauvais suggested that instead of actively interfering in the grain trade, the government should assure the people that there was enough grain in France to suffice for the needs of everyone. In addition to calming the unease of the people, the government should take steps to protect the grain merchants, millers and bakers. Commerce in grain was beneficial because it saved the cultivators the trouble of having to take grain to market. It was also useful to the people. In years of abundance, this commerce helped prevent a fall in prices by fostering competition between merchants and buyers. In years of scarcity, it offered the consumers stores of grain whose upkeep cost the government nothing. The greater the number of agents involved, the greater the competition, the greater the supply and the lower the price of grain.²⁴

²³ Ibid., 648.

²⁴ Ibid., 649.

To promote competition, Beauvais suggested abolishing the privileges of master bakers and opening the trade to all. The government should also stop the municipalities from price fixing or interfering with the circulation of grain and flour. Humanity no doubt demanded that the poor be helped in bad years. In those years, the municipalities, instead of artificially lowering bread prices and providing monetary incentives to bakers should establish centers of charity where the poor would get monetary aid. Since grain inevitably flowed towards the area where prices were high, the scarcity would be of short duration.²⁵

Beauvais's speech was a model of the *laissez-faire* capitalism which had been promoted with enthusiasm since the late eighteenth century. The basic argument advanced by the proponents of this model was that the price of grain should be determined only by supply and demand and not by governmental interference in the economy. This was also the argument of Beauvais who maintained that a free market would protect the interests of both the producers and the consumers. It would restore the confidence of the producers. They would be assured that their rights of property would not be infringed upon by the government dictating to them the amounts of grain they should bring to market and the prices for which they should sell this grain. It would also free them from the task of having to arrange for the transport and sale of grain for these duties would be taken over by

²⁵ Ibid., 650-651.

the grain merchants.²⁶ It was also the opinion of Beauvais that the consumers would benefit from free trade, especially in times of scarcity. This was because grain invariably flowed to areas of dearth because of the high prices prevalent there. Moreover, dearth and high prices forced consumers to ration their intake of food, preventing further shortage in the long run.²⁷ Modern historians have challenged many of the assumptions underlying the free trade model,²⁸ but in 1789 the idea of a free market found favor with the majority in the Constituent Assembly since on September 18, 1789, the government reaffirmed the decree of August 29, 1789. Soon after, on October 5, 1789, the Assembly warned that the decrees were being opposed by individuals as well as by municipalities and ordered the latter to execute the laws.²⁹

Deregulation and the department of the Seine-et-Oise

This question of the liberalization of the grain trade lay at the root of the conflict between the central government and the authorities of the Seine-et-Oise. In the years after 1789 and

²⁶ Ibid., 647, 649.

²⁷ Ibid., 649.

²⁸ E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* no. 50 (1971): 89-94; see also his *Customs in Common* (London: Merlin Press, c.1991), 283-285.

²⁹ "Décret sur la circulation des grains." *Du 18 septembre 1789.* and "Décret sur la libre circulation des grains." *Du 5 octobre 1789.* Caron, *Commerce des céréales*, 135-137.

particularly after 1791, departmental authorities became increasingly vocal in support of a policy of regulation, and critical of the policy of liberalization of the commerce of food grains that was being endorsed so enthusiastically by the National Assembly. Some of the resistance to liberalization may have been an ideological carryover from the *ancien régime*. After all, the officials who actually had to deal with food crises had been trained to believe that the more efficient the system of controls, the better and quicker the resolution of the problem. But in the course of the years 1789- 1795, many departmental officials came to think, for reasons that will be studied in this chapter, that liberalization of commerce was actually injuring the interests of the Seine-et-Oise. So they began to turn against the economic innovations of the new regime.

In the summer of 1789, when the department of the Seine-et-Oise faced a food shortage which was a direct result of the bad harvest of 1788, departmental officials fell back on the old system of aggressive intervention in the food distribution system. Despite the speeches of Beauvais in the National Assembly, many departmental officials clearly did not believe that the crisis would resolve itself on its own. Several large towns in the Seine-et-Oise took severe measures to deal with the subsistence crises.

In Versailles, the *Comité permanent de la municipalité de Versailles*, set up in July, was initially hesitant to intervene in the problem of provisioning the city. But in view of the disaster that

threatened the city, it very soon did involve itself and to a very large extent.³⁰ Since the stopping of convoys carrying grain to Paris and Versailles had become a regular feature in the spring and summer of 1789, the municipality asked for and obtained armed guards to escort the convoys. The arrival of regular troops to help the bourgeois national guard in their task of protecting the convoys caused grave disquiet among some people who regarded it as part of a plot hatched by the court to surround Versailles with troops. The news that a regiment of the Flanders infantry would arrive in Versailles on September 23, caused reverberations throughout the city, in the Assembly and in Paris. Despite the explanation of the Municipality of Versailles that the troops had arrived to help the national guard in their fatiguing task of providing escorts for the food convoys, the public emotion was summed up by Maillard in his speech before the National Assembly on October 5:

Ces scélerats croient que vous avez trop de vivres; c'est pourquoi il faut venir des troupes pour les consommer bien vite

³⁰ The best source of information on questions of subsistence in the district of Versailles is the collection of documents compiled by A. Defrèsne and F. Évrard, entitled, *Département de Seine-et-Oise. Les subsistances dans le district de Versailles de 1788 à l'An V* in *Collection de documents inédits sur l'histoire économique de la Révolution Française*, 2 vols. (Rennes: Imprimerie Oberthur, 1921-1922).

et pour vous juguler ensuite et vous dormez! Quand aurons nous du pain.³¹

These scoundrels believe that you have too much food. That is why they make the troops come here to consume it quickly and to suppress you, and you sleep! When will we have bread.[?]

The other measures taken by the municipality proved to be more popular. Bakers were asked to provide for their own supplies of grain and were given an indemnity to compensate for the difference between the price of grain and the price of bread.³² A strict surveillance was exercised on the bakers to ensure that the quality of bread remained good.³³

³¹ Ibid. 1:31-41. See especially the various instructions given by M. de La Tour du Pin, Minister of War, to the municipal officers of Versailles and to the commanders of various regiments. Also the explanation provided by the Municipality of Versailles to the Municipality of Paris on September 23. For the complete text of Maillard's speech see 39-40.

³² Because the bread market was controlled the bakers suffered significant losses in times of rising grain prices. This was because they had to buy grain at free market prices but sell bread at controlled prices. This naturally meant decreasing profits and sometimes even losses for the bakers. Under such circumstances, the impulse of the bakers' was to stop baking bread. The municipality on the other hand sought to persuade the bakers to continue to sell bread. One method was to give them money in order to compensate them for the losses they suffered.

³³ Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:100-102.

Versailles also benefitted from the extraordinary measures taken by the Municipality of Paris to provision itself, including a census of all grains within fifteen *lieux* of Paris and requisitions on farmers to bring grain to market.³⁴ Versailles, in its turn, exhorted farmers and cultivators to bring grain to the markets. When this did not suffice, agents were sent out to buy grain not only from around Versailles, but also from the Soissonais, Picardy and the region around Chartres. These expeditions were not uniformly successful. In December, the countryside in the villages around Soissonais refused to let their grain leave for Versailles.³⁵

The struggle to secure grain also led to bitter exchanges between Versailles and Paris. The Municipality of Versailles accused Paris of depriving the city of much needed grain. The Municipality of Versailles charged that on October 5 and 6, the national guard of Paris had appropriated for its own city, 1500 *setiers* of grain, either by diverting convoys destined for Versailles, or by helping itself to the grain which had been stored in the granaries of Versailles until it could be converted into flour. The municipality pointed out that Paris could not continue to provision itself exclusively from its surrounding areas without seriously inconveniencing the communities

³⁴ Ibid., 47-48.

³⁵ Ibid., 103-108.

and towns located there.³⁶ Versailles also repeatedly asked Paris for help in the form of supplies of grain and flour during 1789. This help was only fitfully forthcoming and this, needless to say, did not improve relations between the two cities.³⁷ This bitterness would grow into full fledged rivalry when Versailles became capital of the new department of the Seine-et-Oise in 1790, and Paris became the seat of the national government.

Early in 1790, the Municipality of Versailles continued to take special measures to provision the city. In the wake of the bread riots in Versailles in January, it introduced a new series of extraordinary measures. From January 9, 1790, the bakers were asked to bake just one type of bread, the *bis blanc*. This bread weighed twelve pounds and its price was set at 30 *so/s*. Steps were taken to prevent people living in the *communes* around Versailles from taking large quantities of bread out of the town. The amount of bread that each individual could take out of the city was limited to twelve pounds.³⁸ The situation appears to have stabilized in February, and by the summer of 1790

³⁶ Ibid., 173-174. See especially the letter written on October 10, 1789, by the Municipality of Versailles to the Municipality of Paris.

³⁷ Ibid., 69-71.

³⁸ Ordinarily three types of bread were baked in the city, the *pain blanc*, the *bis blanc*, and *bis*. The municipality decreed on January 9, 1790, that henceforth only one type of bread was to be baked in the city. Ibid., 110-111.

there was a visible improvement, as municipal measures to provision the city decreased noticeably.

The town of Dourdan, with its population of three thousand, also had to take extraordinary measures to protect its food supply in 1789. Located adjacent to the Beauce, in normal years the city had no trouble provisioning itself. But in the summer of 1789, agents had to be sent out to the surrounding countryside to persuade the cultivators to furnish the market. The amount of grain that each family could buy from the market was restricted and bakers were instructed to sell just two kinds of bread. The situation improved in October after the harvest came in, and the restrictions were relaxed.³⁹

Much worse was the situation in Mantes.⁴⁰ Unlike Dourdan, Mantes was located in a region of poor sandy soils on the left bank of the Seine. In July and August, the municipality, struggling to provide for its own inhabitants, was inundated by requests for help from neighboring towns like Dammartin, Houdan, Neauphle and Dreux.⁴¹ Mantes, in its turn, appealed to Paris for help. The relations between Paris and Mantes were particularly sensitive. Mantes was one of the

³⁹ Emile Auvray, "L'administration municipale de Dourdan," 122-123.

⁴⁰ Most of the following information on Mantes is from Eugène Grave, "Le service des subsistances à Mantes: d'après les registres des délibérations, Juillet et Août 1789," *Recherche et publication des documents relatifs à la vie économique de la Révolution. Comité départemental de Seine-et-Oise* 1 (1907): 53-71.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

principal stops on one of the most important supply routes to Paris, that is, the lower Seine. Convoys of carts and barges, carrying grain, re-provisioned or rested in the city on their way to Paris. It was part of the responsibilities of the authorities of Mantes to ensure their safe passage. This task was not always easy to fulfill.

It is not difficult to imagine the feelings of the inhabitants of Mantes who had to watch loads of grain pass by their city to another destination, while they themselves waited desperately for food. Not surprisingly, the people sometimes rebelled and waylaid the grain, to the great anger of the authorities in Paris. On August 10, Mantes received a placard⁴² from the National Assembly, relating to the violence being done to the convoys carrying grain to Paris.⁴³ It appears from the registers of deliberations that the municipality did its best to protect the grain passing through the city. For its good offices, it was sometimes rewarded with a portion of the grain. Thus on July 26, Cresté, agent of the commission of subsistence in Paris, authorized that 150 sacks of grain, each weighing two hundred pounds, be discharged from the barge named *Victoire*, for the provisioning of Mantes, and another 50 for that of Houdan.⁴⁴ But more often than not,

⁴² These placards, which warned the local populations against breaking the laws were intended to be put up on the walls of cities and villages.

⁴³ Grave, "le service des subsistances à Mantes, 1789," 68.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

the municipality had to content itself with providing safe passage for the convoys without reward.

The arrival in Mantes on July 26 and 27, of a regiment of the Swiss guards as well as a detachment of the volunteers of the Bazoche added insult to injury. The claim of these troops, that they alone were responsible for providing escorts for the convoys was much resented by the authorities in Mantes. Not only was the lack of faith displayed by Paris insulting to their honor, but the lodging and feeding of troops placed a great burden on Mantes. The troops were ultimately removed, but the periodic censure of the Municipality of Mantes by the authorities in Paris, became a constant feature in Paris-Mantes relations.⁴⁵

Unable to rely on Paris for much in the way of help, Mantes had to have recourse to other measures. The municipal council named a subsistence committee on July 18 to deal with the problem. The committee virtually took over the task of provisioning the city. It supervised the stores of grain in the public warehouses and distributed grain to the millers, keeping strict account of the amount of flour given back by the millers. The flour was then distributed to the bakers, and the amount of bread baked was compared with the amount of flour delivered, in order to prevent the bakers from stealing

⁴⁵ Ibid., 61-63. On the constant struggle between Mantes and Paris for food in times of scarcity, see Richard Cobb, "Les disettes de l'an II et de l'an III dans le district de Mantes et la vallée de la Basse Seine," *Mémoires de la Fédération des sociétés historiques et archéologiques de Paris et de l'Ile de France* 3 (1951): 227-251.

flour and using it for private purposes.⁴⁶ When complaints about the poor quality of bread were raised, the committee ordered the bakers to bake just one type of bread made from a mixture of two-thirds white flour and one-third rye. The flour delivered to the bakers would be mixed in advance in accordance with the proportions decreed by the municipality, and the eight-pound loaf of bread would be sold at a price of twenty-three *so*ls. Each loaf of bread would be marked with the initials of the bakers who had baked them.⁴⁷

To deal with the rumors of hoarding, the Committee carried out searches of bakeries, mills and farms in the town and the surrounding countryside. All undeclared grain was confiscated. One such confiscation from a miller at Courgent brought an irate protest from the *syndic* of Dammartin who claimed that the grain belonged to a baker of Dammartin. This grain was restored.⁴⁸ Much more serious was the dispute with the neighboring Municipality of Meulan. On July 19, Mantes had generously provided Meulan with 25 sacks of wheat, 65 sacks of rye and 60 sacks of barley out of its own scarce resources in a spirit of revolutionary brotherhood.⁴⁹ This generosity was ill returned, for in the days that followed, the militia at Meulan

⁴⁶ Grave, "Le service des subsistances à Mantes, 1789," 55-56, 58.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 65. During the critical days that followed, Mantes would show the same generosity out of feelings of fraternity to other hard pressed communes like Montfort and Houdan.

repeatedly stopped cartloads of grain destined for Mantes. The municipal council of Meulan initially maintained that the drivers had been unable to show proof of authorization but on July 29, it changed its tune and maintained that no grain destined for Mantes had been stopped at Meulan. Evidently, municipalities had no compunction about sacrificing fraternal feelings when their own survival was at stake.⁵⁰ Mantes, in its turn, forbade the people of the surrounding countryside to buy bread in the town, until after the needs of its own inhabitants had been satisfied.⁵¹

The Municipality of Magny, in the district of Mantes also requisitioned grain from the surrounding cultivators and proprietors and set the price of wheat at 30 *livres per setier* in September 1789. The town of Corbeil asked permission from the National Assembly to do the same. The efforts of the mayor of Houdan to secure a steady supply of grain in the market-place and to hold down the prices of grain made him extremely unpopular with the cultivators of the area.⁵²

In all of these cases, we can see that in 1789, and particularly in the months of August and September, the local governments closely

⁵⁰ Ibid., 55-56, 62, 63-64.

⁵¹ Ibid.,

⁵² Letter of the municipal officers of the town of Magny to the National Assembly dated September 10, 1789; letter of the Municipality of Corbeil-sur-Seine to the National Assembly dated September 10, 1789; letter of the mayor of the Municipality of Houdan to the National Assembly dated August 11, 1789, all in A.N., DXLI/2. For events in Houdan also see Chapter II.

regulated commerce in grains and bread in the region around Paris. Freedom of trade was not much respected. Local authorities clearly believed that freedom of commerce would not safeguard the subsistence needs of the population. Anxious to prevent disorder, they fell back on a system of controls. Necker recognized and respected these motives. Writing to the Municipality of Versailles on January 29, 1790, Necker suggested that the price of bread should be raised to 3 *sols* per pound in place of 2 *sols* 6 *deniers*. This would alleviate the burden of having to pay subsidies to the bakers and would also provide the latter with more incentive. But Necker warned that before taking this step, the municipality should ensure that this would not provoke a new insurrection or that in case of an insurrection, the municipality would have adequate power to suppress it.⁵³

In their aim of preventing insurrection, the municipalities were generally successful. There were no large scale riots in the second half of 1789 or in the first half of 1790, with the exception of the bread riots of January 7 and 9 in Versailles. The municipalities gradually began to relax controls in the course of 1790. The harvest of 1790 being generally abundant,⁵⁴ the theory and practice of freedom of commerce in grain and bread, gradually began to merge.

⁵³ Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:143.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 53, letter of Lambert, *contrôleur général* of Finances, to the Directory of the department of the Seine-et-Oise, dated September 14, 1790.

The victory of deregulation: 1790

Freedom of commerce became the rule rather than the exception in 1790. This new economic regime aroused inevitable fears of scarcity and some resistance as well. On September 9, 1790, the Directory of the department of the Seine-et-Oise sent a circular letter to all the parishes of the district of Versailles. The *curés* in each parish were instructed to read the letter aloud to all their parishioners. This letter was a declaration of the policy of freedom of commerce.

The directory condemned the reported attempts of the inhabitants of some parishes to force their officers to accompany them to the markets in order to set the price of wheat. Such actions were directly contrary to the decrees of the National Assembly. These decrees laid down that only the abundance or scarcity of wheat could cause a rise or fall in prices. The inhabitants were asked to stop insulting their municipal officers and instead to address their grievances to the Directories of the district and department. They were also advised to stop listening to the instigations of the supporters of the *ancien régime*. The directory warned that if these acts of insubordination continued, the guilty would be denounced to the National Assembly and prosecuted to the full extent of the law.⁵⁵ Then on September 15,

⁵⁵ Ibid., 79-80.

another decree underlying the government's full commitment to the free circulation of grains inside the nation was also passed.⁵⁶

But on the whole, there was not much resistance to freedom of commerce in grain at the local level in 1790, simply because it was such a good year in so far as the availability of food was concerned. In fact, the government even sold off the stores of grain it had built up in the course of the previous years. Municipal measures regulating the system of food supply also became rare.⁵⁷

The beginnings of resistance to de-regulation: The market riots of 1791

This state of affairs continued in the first half of 1791. But the situation rapidly changed after the harvest of 1791 came in. This harvest was not as good as the previous one. It was average at best. Systematic studies of crop yields in the department of Seine-et-Oise during the early years of the Revolution are lacking and one has to perforce to rely on the impressions of departmental administrators. There is no reason to assume that their impressions were wrong. In certain areas like the district of Corbeil, the harvest of 1791 was an average one, although not as good as that of 1790, when the harvest had yielded a bumper crop. A common complaint of the cultivators in

⁵⁶ "Décret concernant la libre circulation intérieure des grains et la prohibition de leur exportation," Caron, *Commerce des céréales*, 138.

⁵⁷ Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:53-54.

1791 was that the sheaves had not yielded as much grain as they had in 1790. In response, the Directory of the district pointed out that even if the yield had been half of that of 1790, the harvest could be considered average.⁵⁸

The harvest was worse in the southern departments.⁵⁹ There was intense buying for the southern departments as well as the customary buying for Paris. But because the harvest had been average in the Seine-et-Oise in the first place, the result of this outflow of grain was to push up prices in the Seine-et-Oise and to cause shortages in the local markets.⁶⁰ The new laws liberalizing commerce prohibited interference in the circulation and sale of food grains. Consequently grain dealers were also free to sell at higher prices and to take grain outside the department. These developments caused a great deal of consternation within the department and the riots of this period bear witness to that.

⁵⁸ See letter of the Directory of the district of Corbeil to the Minister of the Interior dated September 19, 1791; also *Reflexions sur la necessité de trouver des moyens de faciliter les approvisionnements des marchés sans gêner la Liberté du commerce et de la circulation des grains dans l'intérieur du Royaume* both in A.N., F/7/3689/6. For the district of Versailles, see letter of D'Envers to the Directory of the department of the Seine-et-Oise, dated March 28, 1792, in Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:20.

⁵⁹ The Minister of the Interior, De Lessart made a report to the National Assembly on November 1, 1791, indicating that although harvests had been abundant in the north, they were mediocre in the center and south. See *Moniteur*, November 3, 10:276.

⁶⁰ This argument will be dealt with in greater detail in the next chapter, "The Causes of Food Riots."

In the Seine-et-Oise, the first market riots since early 1789 were reported in September 1791.⁶¹ Wherever the riots broke out, the same complaints were made. The rioters charged that cultivators were not bringing grain to market, that they were selling from their farms, that grain merchants and millers were hoarding grain, that grain was being exported abroad and that these factors accounted for the fact that prices of grain remained high even after a good harvest. The rioters consistently blamed the new rules liberalizing the commerce of grains for this state of affairs. They set about redressing their grievances on their own initiative. The rioters, therefore, set the prices of grain in the market-place, organized searches of the farms for grain, threatened cultivators with dire reprisals if they did not bring grain to market, and demanded that the old rules regulating buying and selling in the market-place be brought back.⁶² The aim of the rioters was to restore to the market-place the importance it had enjoyed as the legal arena for the buying and selling of grain. The consensus among the rioters was that the new laws liberalizing the commerce and circulation of grain had detracted from the importance of the market-place and injured the interests of the consumers. So the reaction to the policy of liberalization of commerce took the form of the market riots.

⁶¹ For the riots of 1791, see chapter II, "The Geography of Food Riots."

⁶² See chapter II, "The Geography of Food Riots."

A good source of information for gauging popular emotions is the series of reports drawn up by the two commissioners, Martial Victor Vaillant and Jacques Antoine Rouveau.⁶³ They were members of the Directory of the department of the Seine-et-Oise and were sent to Étampes to deal with the problems there. Soon after their arrival in the city, the commissioners ordered copies of the royal proclamation dated September 22, 1791, to be put up throughout the city. This proclamation condemned the troubles which, it maintained, had been provoked by the perfidious suggestions of a few. It reminded the citizens of the royal decree which upheld the freedom of circulation of grains in the interior of the kingdom. It declared that only the security of merchants, cultivators and farmers and of their property could ensure healthy commercial activity which alone would keep down the prices of grain. It also warned all potential breakers of the peace of strong legal action in case of future misconduct.⁶⁴

On July 24, the commissioners summoned an assembly which was limited only to the administrators of Étampes (the majority of whom had resigned or fled) and to the active citizens. Here again, the commissioners, as representatives of the king, upheld the policy of the freedom of commerce.⁶⁵

⁶³ The *procès verbaux* drawn up by the commissioners, dated September 22, 23, 24 and 25 are to be found in A.N., F/7/3689/7.

⁶⁴ For the royal proclamation see, A.N., F/7/3689/7.

⁶⁵ A.N., F/7/3689/7.

While the government remained clearly committed to the principle of freedom of commerce in the autumn of 1791, a ground swell of resistance was growing among the people. The commissioners saw proof of this in the assembly, as several citizens demanded the return of some of the ancient regulations governing the market-place. The gist of their concerns was that the citizens of the Seine-et-Oise should have first access to the grain grown in their department and that exports should be allowed only after needs had been met. One of those present at the assembly demanded that the regulations that had laid down that the merchants and bakers could make their purchases only after individual consumers had satisfied their needs, be brought back. He was warmly supported by others. It was also suggested by others present in the meeting that the National Assembly be petitioned to issue a decree, reinstating the ancient *acquit à caution* (certificates usually issued by the municipality where purchases of grain were made that clearly stated the amount purchased and the destination of the grains). Such certificates would dispel popular fears that the grains and flour being bought at Étampes were being sent abroad.⁶⁶ The commissioners' *procès verbal* makes it clear that there were many who felt that freedom of commerce had made illegal trafficking of grains easier, and that it was essential to regulate the activities of those who were connected with the commerce of grains -- the merchants, the

⁶⁶ See the commissioners' *procès verbal* of July 24, 1791 in A.N., F/7/3689/7.

bakers, the millers and even the measurers and porters of grain. These feelings were clearly expressed in a letter which a citizen of Étampes, Laurin, wrote to the National Assembly on September 25, 1791.⁶⁷ He described the grain merchants and millers as the plagues of society and demanded that their activities be kept under close surveillance.

The fears of the people were recognized by the commissioners. In their personal observations made to the National Assembly, the commissioners commented that there were widespread fears among the artisans and workers of Étampes that the price of bread would rise as high as in the previous years. They also referred to widespread rumors that the grain being bought in the market of Étampes, apparently to provision the departments beyond the Loire, was actually being exported abroad. It was being alleged, the commissioners noted, that the grain was being bought in bales from the cultivators' homes, thus decreasing the amount and increasing the prices of grain that came to the market of Étampes.⁶⁸

The commissioners accepted the truth of some of these allegations, agreeing that the merchants were making massive purchases at high prices for the departments beyond the Loire. They expressed fears that a further rise in prices might lead to further violence. They even suggested temporary regulations on the grain trade in order

⁶⁷ A.N., F/7/3689/7

⁶⁸ A.N., F/7/3689/7, not dated.

to control the greed of buyers and sellers. People had to be assured that their needs came before the profits of merchants.⁶⁹

It is noteworthy that similar reservations on unchecked liberty of commerce were also voiced by other administrators of Étampes. M. Venard, a member of the Directory of the district of Étampes, wrote in a letter to M. Benin, a member of the Directory of the department, that he had long believed that unlimited commerce in grains was dangerous and it was necessary to rein in the greed of cultivators.⁷⁰ On September 14, Simoneau and LaVallery, both municipal officers, accompanied by Charpentier, President of the Directory of the district, presented themselves before the Directory of the department, carrying a *procès verbal* drawn up jointly by the Municipality and the Directory of the district of Étampes. This *procès verbal* expressed the misgivings of the commune about the high prices of grain and mentioned that it had been necessary to warn the *laboureurs* of the penalties that could follow if they insisted on selling grain at high prices.⁷¹

⁶⁹ The commissioners' report to the National Assembly, A.N., F/7/3689/7, not dated.

⁷⁰ A.N., F/7/3689/7, not dated.

⁷¹ The actual *procès verbal* is missing from the files. But its contents are summarized in a letter written by Simoneau to the Directory of the department. Simoneau's letter is not dated but it is definitely written after September 17 since it mentions the market of September 17 at Etampes. Simoneau's letter is a plea against using armed forces to put down the riots in Etampes. For Simoneau's letter, see A.N., F/7/3689/7.

In a separate letter, the Municipality of Étampes asked for permission to set prices of grain at 24 and 25 *livres* and also to take extraordinary measures to provision the markets.⁷² This proposal was turned down by the Directory of the department, having been seen as opposed to the principle of freedom of commerce. The department instead ruled that with the permission of the Minister of the Interior, six hundred cavalrymen should be sent to Étampes to put down the uprising.⁷³ This move was opposed by the local administrators of Étampes but to no avail.

This difference of opinion was symbolic of the difference in the attitudes of local and departmental officials towards the problem of food riots. The Directory of the department repeated the National Assembly's line that commerce in grains should be completely free, and any threat to this freedom should be put down by force. Local officials learnt from experience, however, that a problem existed that would not go away by being suppressed, that freedom of commerce was not ensuring the consumers' right to subsistence and that perhaps some degree of interference in the economy was necessary under the circumstances. Ordinarily, in times of food shortage and high prices local officials set prices of grain in the market-place and also set

⁷² See footnote 71. In his own letter to the Directory of the department, Simoneau mentions this earlier letter.

⁷³ Extract from the register of deliberations of the Directory of the department of the Seine-et-Oise dated September 20, 1791, A.N., F/7/3689/7.

controls on exports. And even though the laws in 1791 expressly prohibited such interference, some municipalities did intervene in the system of food supply. The Municipality of Étampes, although prevented by law from taking steps that would force the cultivators to bring grain to market, took some measures to ensure that the grain that did come to market would primarily serve the needs of the consumers of Étampes.

On March 26, the municipality decreed that the first two hours of the market, from 1:00 to 3:00 in the afternoon, would be reserved for the inhabitants of the communes to make their purchases. It was only after 3:00 in the afternoon that merchants could enter the market. On every market day, two municipal officers with a detachment of the national guard, were at the market to ensure observance of this regulation. Cultivators and proprietors of the surrounding areas were also invited to bring grain to market and protection was guaranteed to them.⁷⁴ Thus the municipality did bring back a few of the ancient regulations even though in 1791 freedom of commerce clearly won.

The revolt against a free market: The market riots of 1792

The situation in Étampes during the riots of September 1791 was representative of the situation elsewhere in the district. But 1791 was just a prelude to the events of 1792. The riots of 1792 broke out

⁷⁴ Extract from the deliberations of the Municipality of Étampes dated September 26, 1791, A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

on a scale never before experienced in the Seine-et-Oise. The pattern was everywhere the same. People of one or more parishes grouped together and visited neighboring farms. Cultivators were told that if they did not bring grain to market, they would sorely repent of their action. On the next market day, the same groups, ranging from two hundred to even a thousand and frequently accompanied by their municipal officers, went to the nearest market town. They then forced the municipal officers of the town to set the prices of the grain available in the market-place or proceeded to set it themselves. The rioters also stopped cartloads of grain travelling on the routes, especially if they were travelling by night. If the carts were not furnished with the correct papers, the grain was seized and taken to the nearest place where it could be safely stored. The complaints were the same as in 1791, only more widespread.

It is particularly significant that in 1792, local officials were openly expressing the same opinions as the rioters. Had they expressed these opinions only in the market-place, it might have been argued that they were doing so under duress. But the same opinions were being expressed in the private correspondence of the officials. Taken as a whole, their comments add up to an indictment of the system of freedom of commerce. On February 21, 1792, the Municipality of Palaiseau wrote to the Directory of the district of Versailles, asking that farmers be forced to provision the markets.⁷⁵ This letter appears

⁷⁵ A.D.Y., 1 LM 460.

to have made an impression on the Directory of the district. On March 1, 1792, the Directory of the district wrote to the Directory of the department. In this letter, the former acknowledged that the laws of the National Assembly, which decreed freedom of commerce in the interior made any constraints placed on the cultivators and farmers a violation of the laws on liberty and property. But the letter hinted that farmers and cultivators were taking advantage of these laws to send their grains abroad. The Directory of the district then asked if the farmers might not be forced to provision their usual markets, and whether a census of grains was permissible under the circumstances. Such dispositions might be conceived as contrary to the rights of property, the letter concluded, but in certain circumstances, all private rights must be subjected to the public weal.⁷⁶

The Directory of the department clearly thought otherwise, for it expressed serious misgivings about the conduct of the municipal officers of Palaiseau.⁷⁷ But in this case, the Directory of the department was in a minority. On March 26, the mayors and municipal officers of the thirteen parishes of Limours drew up a petition to the Directory of the department, which was really a justification of the conduct of the rioters. They protested the appellation of brigandage given to the gatherings in the market-place. The petition pointed out that day and night, the people saw the grain of their canton being

⁷⁶ A.D.Y., 1 LM 460.

⁷⁷ Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:235.

taken away, and they were driven to desperation by the rising prices of grain, the lack of work and the fear of famine. The people had been visiting the farms not to threaten the farmers but to ensure that there would be enough grain in the canton to last till the next harvest. Farmers were being invited to bring grains to market and they did so willingly. Grain was being sold at 22 *livres* in the market-place which was a reasonable price. The petition blamed the troubles in the market-place on the presence of troops there. People feared the presence of troops because they felt that this would only encourage grain becoming more expensive and leaving the canton. This petition clearly bent the facts in order to justify the actions of the rioters for it was well known that in Limours, as elsewhere, the rioters were forcibly setting the price of grain in the market-place and threatening the farmers with reprisals if they did not bring enough grain to market.⁷⁸ This petition was snubbed by the Directory of the department which maintained that the principles of the deliberations were contrary to the law on the liberal circulation of grain.⁷⁹

But everywhere in the department the same views were being echoed. In its deliberations of March 6, 1792, the *Conseil général* of the commune of Dourdan decried the riots but accepted the fact that

⁷⁸ See *Copie d'une petition présentés par les municipalités du canton de Limours, district de Versailles* in A.N., F/7/3689/7.

⁷⁹ A.N., F/7/3689/7

the people's fears were being fuelled by the amount of grain leaving the commune by night. The *conseil général* suggested that it would be more discreet to provide for the departments which did not produce enough grain by buying from abroad and not by depleting Dourdan's reserves.⁸⁰

After the suppression of the market riots at Dourdan, the Directory of the district wrote to the Directory of the department on March 31, complaining of the attempts being made by the *laboueurs* to profit from the protection being given them by raising the prices of grain. The directory declared that the *laboueurs* had been warned of the fatal results that would follow their actions.⁸¹

In a letter to the Legislative Assembly written on March 15, 1792, Sedillon, *procureur* of the commune of Étampes, pleaded "in the name of humanity" to end the liberty of commerce, which was causing 2000 sacks of flour to leave Étampes every week.⁸² Sedillon claimed that six months before the harvest, the granaries of the cultivators were empty.

The effects of de-regulation and riots on the market-place

The policy of freedom in commerce and circulation of foodgrains and the food riots that followed whenever grain was in short supply

⁸⁰ A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

⁸¹ A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

⁸² A.N., DXL/16

initiated a trend in the system of provisioning in the Seine-et-Oise which would become increasingly evident as the Revolution progressed. This trend was the shift in the locus of exchange of grain from the market-place to the homes of cultivators and *laboureurs* who traded in grain. The importance of the market-place in pre-revolutionary France is well known. Under the *ancien régime*, the markets had enjoyed a monopoly, at least theoretically, in the commerce of grain, for grain could only be bought and sold there. Arthur Young had described such a system as wasteful, for cultivators could profitably sell from their homes and avoid the costs of transport, while buyers would also not lose a day's work in coming to market. But as Georges Lefebvre pointed out, markets had a social importance in addition to their economic significance, for they provided people with a welcome diversion in an otherwise monotonous existence.⁸³

As a result of the new liberal legislation, markets lost their monopoly on the sale of grain. Cultivators preferred to sell from their own farms and storehouses. They presumably felt more confident of their ability to dictate prices within their own homes, away from the watchful eyes of the crowd in the market-place. Moreover, now that freedom of circulation of grains had been decreed, it was more profitable to transport grain to distant markets and sell it at higher prices than to take it to local markets and sell it at customary prices. Municipal officers repeatedly expressed their frustration and

⁸³ Lefebvre, *Études Orléanaises*, 1:230.

anger at the disinclination of the cultivators to bring grain to market. Much of their frustration stemmed from their inability to force the cultivators to supply local markets.

In a recent thesis, Judith Miller has warned us against making schematic divisions between "regulated economies" and "free economies" while studying how the market-place functioned at the local level in pre-revolutionary France.⁸⁴ She has argued that what influenced the actions of administrators at the local level was not so much government dictums on the commerce of foodgrains as their need to devise workable strategies to ensure that the markets under their jurisdictions remained adequately provisioned. Even during so-called periods of free trade, officials could find plenty of ways to influence market supplies and prices without directly compromising the liberty of the grain trade. Officials could flood local markets with grain bought on their own account in order to bring down prices. They could persuade sellers to bring grain to market without using force, and they could negotiate bargains between buyers and sellers without actually setting the price of grain. Miller thinks that the term "pragmatic economy" would best describe the process by which "the many participants in the grain trade sought to impose policies -- both old

⁸⁴ Judith Miller, "The Pragmatic Economy: Liberal Reforms and the Grain Trade In Upper Normandy, 1750-1789." Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1987.

and new -- during a period of rising population and inadequate harvests."⁸⁵

It is clear that there was much more flexibility in the functioning of the local markets than the terms "regulated" or "market" economies imply and the reaction of government officials to the demands of various groups can be said to be pragmatic, but combining regulated and market economies into the single category of the pragmatic economy obscures the very real changes that the transition to a free economy introduced not only in market-place practices but in the functioning of the entire economy. Some of the evidence cited by Miller indicates that during a period of free trade, local officials were often powerless in the face of the intransigence of the cultivators.⁸⁶ The letters written by the local officials to the Directories of the district and the department during the riots of 1791 and 1792, which have been cited above, show that this helplessness on the part of the local officials probably increased during the early years of the Revolution when the extreme governmental decentralization brought with it diminished economic power and political clout for local officials. What an *Intendant* or subdelegate could do in pre-revolutionary France, the municipalities, directories of districts and even departments could not do after 1790. Earlier, before freedom of commerce became the rule, local officials had not

⁸⁵ Miller, "Liberal Reforms," 6.

⁸⁶ See the section "The War of Words," 110-132.

been averse to taking heavy-handed measures to get grain to market during times of scarcity, when all other measures of persuasion had failed. Now the new laws expressly prevented them from interfering in the commerce of grain.

Chafing at their powerlessness, local officials sometimes called for a return to the old controls which would re-establish the importance of the market-place or threatened to use force. On April 17, 1792, the Municipality of Roheguyon in the district of Mantes, blamed the perfidy of the farmers for the scarcity in the markets and wondered whether they could not be forced to provision the markets.⁸⁷ The Municipality of Houdan, in the district of Montfort, threatened on March 21, 1792, to send the national guard to neighboring villages in order to force the *laboueurs* to furnish the markets.⁸⁸ In its *procès verbaux* of March 19 and 27, the Municipality of Meulan in the district of Saint Germain, commented that the *laboueurs* were abusing their privileges and that the National Assembly should issue a decree forcing them to provision the markets and stop selling in their homes and in the inns. This demand was echoed by the Directory of the district.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Letter written by the Municipality of Roheguyon to the Directory of the district of Mantes on April 17, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM, 460.

⁸⁸ Quoted in the letter of the Directory of the district of Montfort to the Directory of the department, dated March 24, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM, 461.

⁸⁹ A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

A familiar solution was also advocated by the Municipality of Chevreuse. In a petition to the Legislative Assembly, the *Conseil général* of the commune complained that the farmers and *laboureurs*, in league with the counter revolutionaries and capitalists, were speculating in grains and thus in the lives of the people, under protection of the law of the free circulation of grain. The *conseil général* advocated a number of controls among which a census of all grains and a law forcing farmers and cultivators to provision the markets figured prominently. The petition ended:

Vous avez bien mis nos personnes en réquisition pour la défense de la République. Mettez y donc aussi les subsistances pour nous y donner la force. Sans cette précaution nous sommes perdus."⁹⁰

You have placed our persons in requisition for the defense of the Republic. Place subsistences too under requisition to give it force. Without this precaution we are lost.

But force could not really solve the problem. The ultimate measures of force, the food riots of 1791 and 1792, amply demonstrated this fact. Those cultivators and merchants who had continued to bring grain to market after the new legislation were frightened by the riots and stayed away from the markets.

⁹⁰ A.N., F/11/221, the letter is dated April 17.

Unfortunately, records which would show how much grain was brought to the markets before and after the riots are lacking. Only some scattered figures indicate the adverse effects of the riots on provisioning in the market-place. After the disturbances of September 10 and 16, 1791, there were only 50 sacks of grain in the market-place of Étampes on September 17 in place of the customary 1500-1600 sacks.⁹¹ February 6, 1792, there were 318 *setiers* of wheat at the market-place of Gonesse. On February 20 and 27, the amounts were 99 *setiers* and 454 *setiers* respectively. On March 5 the amount was 357 *setiers*. On March 12, after the outbreak of the troubles, the amount dipped to 289 *setiers*. On the marketdays of March 9 and 27, the municipal officers observed that cultivators were voluntarily selling the best quality wheat at 24 *setiers* per *livre*, in order to avoid further trouble and taking significant losses in the process. The amounts available in the market-place were 242 and 153 *setiers* respectively.⁹² This was a source of serious worry to the local officials who repeatedly warned the rioters that their activities would accentuate the very trend that they found so troubling, that is the desertion of the market-place by the producers of grain. But this trend could not be reversed. During the revolutionary years, markets would not recover from the impact of the riots of 1791 and 1792. The

⁹¹ Letter of Venard to Benin in A.N., F/7/3689/7, undated.

⁹² Figures are from A.D.Y., 1 LM 457.

had enjoyed an abundant harvest in 1792 was requesting Jean-Marie Roland, Minister of the Interior, for a share of the grains imported from abroad.⁹⁶

The war forced the Legislative Assembly to make the first compromise in its policy of freedom of commerce and circulation of food grains. All through the first half of 1792, the Legislative Assembly stoutly advocated a policy of freedom of commerce. It found a perfect mouthpiece in Roland. But the demands of war forced certain concessions from the Assembly. In order to purchase for the armies of the Republic and for Paris, the government had to form an idea of the amount of food available in every department. On June 2, Roland asked the departments, in a circular, for information on the amount usually harvested in each department and on the kind of harvest expected that year. He does not seem to have received much information, for the demand was reiterated on September 1.⁹⁷ Then on September 9, the

commune of Chevreuse, district of Versailles to the Convention on April 17, 1792; extract from the deliberations of the *Conseil général* of the commune of Mantes, dated September 23, 1792; letter written by the Municipality of Houdan to Jean-Marie Roland, the Minister of the Interior on September 27, 1792.

⁹⁶ Letter of the commission temporarily fulfilling the functions of *procureur général syndic* of the department of the Seine-et-Oise, to the Minister of the Interior, dated November 14, 1792, A.N., F/11/221.

⁹⁷ "Circulaire du Ministre de l'Intérieur aux administrateurs de département, contenant demande de renseignements sur le produit annuel des récoltes en grains." Du 2 Juin 1792. and "Circulaire du Ministre de l'Intérieur aux 83 départements pour demander des renseignements sur le produit de la récolte de 1792." Du 1er septembre 1792. See Caron, *Commerce des céréales*, 141-142.

Assembly authorized the administrative bodies of each district to order proprietors, cultivators and farmers to bring grain to market on the basis of the information provided by the municipalities on the state of the markets. The National Assembly acknowledged that the purchases made for armies, for Paris and for some departments, as well as the lack of threshers, were the primary causes of the shortfall in the markets. A census could serve as the basis on which to make requisitions for the market.⁹⁸

The law of September 9 was put into effect in the Seine-et-Oise by the law of September 16. In response to the decrees of the National Assembly, the *Conseil général* of the Seine-et-Oise ordered a census of all grains in the department on September 16. The aim was to determine the amount of grain that each *commune* should furnish to the markets. The completion of the census was delayed as a result of the recalcitrance of the cultivators to make honest declarations and the lackadaisical attitude of the municipal officers. So on October 30, the *conseil général* ruled that until the census could be completed every cultivator and farmer would have to bring to the public markets 3 *setiers* of grain, whether wheat, rye or *metéil*, or one and a half sacks of flour for every plough owned. The delivery of this amount would be certified by the municipal officers of the market town to ensure that the required amount was really being brought to market.

⁹⁸ "Décret sur la libre circulation des grains." Du 9 Septembre 1792. Caron, *Commerce des céréales*, 143.

Every individual who came to buy in the market would have to have a certificate, signed by at least two municipal officers of the commune in which he or she lived, which declared that this individual did not have enough grain to last till the next week or at most for fifteen days. If the buyer needed seed, this fact would have to be clearly stated. Bakers also had to produce such certificates. The first two hours of every market would be reserved only for individual buyers and the bakers to make their purchases. After these two hours, grain merchants could be admitted to make their purchases.⁹⁹

Thus the first limited inroad was made into the principle of freedom of commerce. Freedom of commerce seemed unable to meet the needs of the hour. So partial controls were instituted. But these partial controls, it will be seen, only exacerbated the food crisis in the Seine-et-Oise and caused further conflict between the center and the department.

As it was, the law of September 16, was soon seen to suffer from a serious shortcoming. It did not specify which market the cultivators and farmers should supply -- the market they ordinarily provisioned, or the nearest market of the district in which they lived. The two were not necessarily the same. Cultivators living on the borders of a department or district would sometimes take grain to a neighboring department or district if that market was nearer or if grain and flour sold for higher prices there. As the markets increasingly suffered

⁹⁹ A.N., F/11/221.

from scarcity of grain in the course of the year, the competition to attract grain increased, often souring relations between neighboring departments, districts and communes. In October 1792, the Municipality of Beaumont-sur-Oise in the district of Pontoise, complained that the Municipality of Chambly in the department of the Oise had established a market in its territory and was forcing cultivators, who normally provisioned Beaumont, to take their grain to Chambly. In September, Rocheguyon in the district of Mantes, accused the municipalities of Dreux, Andelys and Magny, the first two in the department of Eure-et-Loir and the third in the district of Pontoise, of preventing their cultivators from provisioning Rocheguyon. L'Isle Adam situated on the borders of the Oise and the Seine-et-Oise complained it was losing out to all the neighboring markets. In November, Meulan accused Saint-Germain of sending troops into its territory and seizing grain for its own market.¹⁰⁰

But the problem that dwarfed all others was that of grain leaving the Seine-et-Oise for Paris. Since grain sold for higher prices in Paris, cultivators rushed to Parisian markets. On December

¹⁰⁰ Letter of the *Conseil général permanent* of the city of Beaumont to the Minister of the Interior, dated October 11. Also, extract from the minutes of the Secretariat of the Municipality of the city and commune of Beaumont, dated October 11.

Letter of the Municipality of Rocheguyon to the Minister of the Interior, September 17, 1792,

Extract from the register of deliberations of the Municipality of Meulan and the *Conseil général* of the commune of Meulan dated November 8 and November 9, 1792. All these documents are in A.N., F/11/221.

9, 1792, the administrator temporarily fulfilling the functions of *procureur général syndic* recognized that the law of September 16 could not work so long as the choice of market was left to the cultivators. He concluded that Paris alone had benefitted from the law of September 16.¹⁰¹

The demand for the Maximum

In these circumstances a new demand now began to be voiced in the department -- that of a maximum on the prices of grain throughout the Republic. The effect of such a maximum obviously would be to make it unremunerative for cultivators to transport their grain over long distances, if they were forced to sell it at a standard price.

We first come across this demand in the papers of the Municipality of Houdan, in the district of Montfort. It was through a complicated route that the municipality had arrived at a demand for a maximum. On September 8, in a letter to Roland, Houdan complained that its market which had previously attracted 500-600 *setiers* of grain per week, now found itself supplied with barely 150-200 *setiers*. It blamed the *laboureurs*, claiming that they preferred to sell their grain at exorbitant prices at their homes rather than bring grain to market. The report claimed that some modifications of the law of free circulation of grains was necessary.

¹⁰¹ Letter of the *administrateur commissaire provisoire aux fonctions de procureur général syndic*, dated November 3, 1792, A.N., F/11/221.

Then, in a letter dated September 27, the municipality charged that the district of Dreux was forcing many *laboureurs* who ordinarily provisioned the market of Houdan to provision Dreux instead. Many of these *laboureurs* lived within a *lieue*¹⁰² or even a quarter of a *lieue* of Houdan but found themselves within the boundaries of the department of the Eure-et-Loir, although they lived three or four *lieue* away from the market of Dreux. The district of Montfort, under the direction of the Minister of the Interior then nominated a commissioner to investigate the matter. While meeting with the Municipality of Dreux, the commissioner was surprised when he met a farmer of Goussainville who pleaded with the Directory of Dreux for permission to provision Dreux rather than Houdan even though he lived in the canton of Houdan.

Further investigations revealed that since September 1792, the farmers around Houdan, Montfort and Neauphle-le-Chateau had been forced to sell at fixed prices which were 25 *livres* the *setier*, measure of Neauphle and 24 *livres* the *setier*, measure of Montfort.¹⁰³ Apparently, this submission had been extracted by two representatives of the *pouvoir executif provisoire* who had been sent from Paris to the district of Montfort. This had caused a flight of grain from the district of Montfort to the surrounding districts where grain was still being sold freely. The Directory of the district of Montfort

¹⁰² *lieu* or *lieue* = 3.898 m.

¹⁰³ Weights and measures could vary in different markets within the same district, in this case the district of Montfort l'Amaury.

concluded that it was dangerous to fix the price of grain in a territory which was surrounded by free markets. The Municipality of Houdan offered a different solution. It demanded a fixed price of grain in all the markets of the Republic so that it would make no difference to farmers where they sold their grain.¹⁰⁴

This idea gained ground in the department. It was taken up by the governing circles in the Seine-et-Oise. The demand for the Maximum, when viewed from a departmental, rather than from a Parisian perspective¹⁰⁵ emerges not as a cherished tenet of radical politics which was forced upon a reluctant government but as a demand voiced unitedly by the ordinary people and the administrators of the Seine-et-Oise who looked upon it as an instrument for survival. In fact, in the Seine-et-Oise, the demand for the Maximum was first officially voiced by the administrators of the department who saw in it a means of preventing its food reserves from being swallowed up by

¹⁰⁴ All the papers relating to the affair of Houdan are to be found in A.N., F/11/221. See especially the letters written by the Municipality of Houdan to the Minister of the Interior on September 8 and 27, 1792, and to the Convention on October 11, 1792; the explanation provided by the Directory of the district of Dreux to the commissioner of the Directory of the district of Montfort on 27 September, 1792; the report drawn up by the President of the Directory of the district of Montfort on October 20, 1792, after his visit to the Municipality of Houdan and the letter written by the Directory of the district of Montfort to the Directory of the department of Seine-et-Oise on October 25, 1792.

¹⁰⁵ For the Parisian perspective see Mathiez, *La vie chère*, 108-101.

Paris. So a look at the food problem from a departmental perspective enables us to re-interpret certain aspects of governmental policy.

In November, the idea of the Maximum was accepted by the electoral assembly of the department of the Seine-et-Oise. The same month Goujon, the *procureur syndic* drew up an address to the Convention. He collected 138 signatures and presented it to the Convention on November 19, 1792.¹⁰⁶

Goujon's address began with the statement that the principle of unregulated commerce of grain was incompatible with the existence of the Republic. The Republic was composed of a small number of capitalists and a large number of poor. The capitalists were those who traded in grain for the purpose of enriching themselves. This they did by effecting a continuous rise in the price of grain. Not only did the capitalists control the prices of grain, but they also controlled the wages of labor as well. The result, argued Goujon, was a growing disproportion between wages and grain prices. While daily wages ranged from 16 to 18 *sols*, the *setier* of wheat weighing 260-270 *livres* cost 36 *livres*. These daily wages were no longer sufficient to live on, with the price of bread so high. The result was the total ruin of all individuals who lived by manual labor.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ *Archives parlementaires*, 1st. ser., 58:475-476. The text is also reproduced in DeFrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:195-199.

¹⁰⁷ *Archives parlementaires*, 1st. ser., 58:475.

Goujon went on to say that unlimited freedom of commerce had become unpopular with the people. The numerous insurrections bore ample witness to that. The Legislative Assembly had also recognized this truth with its law of September 16, 1793. But the law did not go far enough and if it remained unchanged, it would cause greater ills to the Republic.¹⁰⁸ It was up to the Republic to provide for the subsistence of all of its people. And this could be done by bringing about a just proportion between daily wages and the price of bread which could only be achieved by setting a maximum on the price of bread.¹⁰⁹

Goujon next went on to request a return to the ancient regulations, many of which had been brought back in the course of 1792. But it added to these regulations the demand that large farms should be broken up for they helped to concentrate large amounts of grain in the hands of the guilty. No person could farm more than 120 arpents of land and a proprietor could not exploit more than one united body of land. The proprietor should be obliged to rent out the rest of the land.¹¹⁰

It is true that this address did not specify a uniform maximum for all of the Republic. But it did suggest that a central administration, chosen by the people be put in charge of provisioning

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 475-476.

all of the Republic in order to eliminate the ruinous competition between local administrations. By way of illustration, the address pointed to Paris and the Seine-et-Oise. It declared that the provisioning of Paris which had been placed in unscrupulous and inefficient hands had denuded the Seine-et-Oise of all of its grain. Therefore, the address concluded, the abolition of unlimited freedom of commerce, administration of subsistence by a central body, maintenance of the prices of grain at a fixed price by means of periodic laws, and the establishment of a just proportion between the price of work and the price of grain were the demands of the department of the Seine-et-Oise.¹¹¹

Goujon's address made an impression on the Convention. Some deputies demanded that it be put in print but others protested. Defermon, a deputy declared "that it would be very dangerous to propagate these ideas which lead to famine, which terrify proprietors and lead to the depreciation of the *bien nationaux* and slow down their sale." The Convention therefore refused the demand.¹¹²

Goujon and his supporters were a step ahead of the rest of the Convention in their demand for a maximum. The people of the Seine-et-Oise had a vested interest in the imposition of a maximum as a way of preventing grain from leaving the department. Grain importing regions which needed to attract grain were opposed to a maximum for

¹¹¹ Ibid., 476.

¹¹² Ibid., 482.

precisely the same reasons. A nation-wide maximum on grain prices would take away the incentive from grain dealers to carry grain to deficit areas.

Many among the Convention Deputies were no doubt opposed to a maximum for ideological reasons as well. The proposals put forward by the department of the Seine-et-Oise were defeated in the debate on subsistence in the Convention in November 1792. Many Deputies spoke out in favor of freedom of trade, irrespective of party affiliations. Their view was summed up by Lequinio who declared on November 20, that "all public agitations to procure grains, all the cries of hoarding, all menaces against farmers, merchants and so called hoarders, all violent measures to make grain circulate by force, are precisely those which prevent their circulation, which cause this kind of artificial scarcity which desolate several corners of the Republic and which exposed it to those disorders caused by the multitude who find themselves, for whatever reason, exposed to starvation".¹¹³ This was also the view of Jean-Marie Roland, Minister of the Interior.¹¹⁴ Maximilien Robespierre was one of the few deputies in the Convention who spoke out against unlimited freedom of commerce of grain, but because he had no solutions to offer, he was hooted down.¹¹⁵ Louis

¹¹³ Ibid., 657.

¹¹⁴ See, for example Roland's speech to the Municipality of Paris, on November 18, and his letter to the Convention dated November 4. *Archives parlementaires*, 1st ser., 58:477-479 and 58:481-482.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 54:45ff.

Antoine Léon Saint Just, a protégé of Robespierre broke with his patron to speak in favor of liberty of commerce.¹¹⁶

Although the motion advanced by the representatives of the Seine-et-Oise was defeated in the Convention, the demands for a maximum did not die down. Unwilling to uphold a law which they felt was injuring the interests of their department, the administrative bodies of the Seine-et-Oise and the sections of Versailles wrote to the Convention on April 6, 1793, that "unlimited freedom of commerce driven by a disastrous egotism was causing a terrible war between proprietors and consumers. Versailles suffered in particular from the nearness of Paris....". Therefore, "a general and proportional tax throughout the Republic, a rigorous declaration of all grains harvested, obligation to sell in the markets, in brief an uniformity of laws touching all the *laboueurs*" was demanded.¹¹⁷

On April 18, 1793, the tone became more dramatic. If some measures to tax the prices of grains were not taken, the Directory of the department warned the Convention, the results would be disastrous and the nation would hold the Convention responsible for the tearing apart of the Republic, perhaps also for the destruction of liberty.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 53:664-665.

¹¹⁷ *Les corps administratifs siégeant à Versailles et les sections de la ville à la Convention Nationale*, dated April 6, 1793, Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:201-202.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 202-203.

The First Maximum

By April 1793, however, the thinking of the Convention was changing. The pressures of war, specifically the need to feed the large army was forcing many of the Convention Deputies to abandon their beloved principles of economic liberalism and to consider establishing state controls over the food reserves of the nation. It was increasingly recognized that a census, price fixing and requisitions were necessary if the needs of the state and the volunteer army were to be met.¹¹⁹ These ideas were put into effect in the decree of May 4, 1793, which instituted the First Maximum. The law of May 4, stipulated that the departmental administrations would have to draw up an average price for each type of grain, based on the prices at which these grains were selling in the various markets of the department between the first of January and the first of May. This price would serve as the maximum at which the grain could be sold within the department. The law also decreed that the Maximum would be reduced every month till September by 1/10, 1/20, 1/20 and 1/40 respectively.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ A good example of this evolution in the thinking of one Conventionnel is, Paul Mansfield, "Collot d'Herbois at the Committee of Public Safety: a revaluation," *The English Historical Review* 103 (July-October 1988): 565-567. For a general account of the background to the institution of the Maximum see, Mathiez, *La vie chère*, 1:157-181.

¹²⁰ "Décret concernant les subsistances." *Du 4 mai 1793*. Caron, *Commerce des céréales*, 150-153.

Among the other measures that the law of May 4 decreed was that all merchants, cultivators and proprietors would have to make declarations of the amount of grain they had in their possession and the amount that remained to be threshed. Municipalities were given the right to make domiciliary visits if they suspected a false declaration. Grains and flour could be sold only in public markets and administrative bodies and municipalities had the right to requisition from cultivators, merchants and proprietors all the grain in excess of the amount needed for the consumption of the latter. All those who traded in grains had to have their names registered in the place of domicile; they would have to obtain certificates clearly stating the amount of grain in transaction and signed by the municipal officers both in the place of purchase and in the place of sale. Many of these regulations had already been put into effect by the department of the Seine-et-Oise by the law of September 16, but the First Maximum turned out to be a disaster for the department.

The First Maximum in the Seine-et-Oise

In the first place, the law of May 4, allowed a different maximum for each department. This meant that departments with a higher maximum enjoyed an advantage as they naturally attracted more grain. The markets to which the cultivators were to take grain were largely left to their own discretion; every department was given the right to

create its own markets. The Seine-et-Oise suffered on all these counts.

First of all, the department of the Seine-et-Oise fixed a Maximum earlier than did Paris. On May 10, the directory decreed a list of maximum prices for all types of grain with that of wheat being fixed at 15 *livres* per quintal.¹²¹ Immediately, grain began to leave the department for Paris where the Maximum had not yet been set. Matters were not improved when the Maximum for the price of wheat in Paris was fixed at 15 *livres* 2 *sols* 9 *deniers* per quintal. The price of a sack of wheat flour weighing 320 *livres* was fixed at 69 *livres* 7 *sols* and 2 *denier*, while in the Seine-et-Oise, a sack of flour weighing 325 *livres* cost 56 *livres*. Even when the costs of transport were taken into account, it was advantageous for cultivators and merchants to sell their grain in Paris, especially when they lived within a short distance of the city.¹²² So the law of May 4, did not really solve the problem of grain leaving the department of the Seine-et-Oise.

On May 28, 1793, the administrators of the department of the Seine-et-Oise protested strongly against this state of affairs and warned that this would lead to attacks on the law which decreed free circulation of grain in the interior of the Republic. The

¹²¹ A. N., F/11/221.

¹²² This argument will be worked out in detail in the next chapter, "The Causes of Food Riots."

administration of the Seine-et-Oise demanded that the administrators of Paris join with them in petitioning the Convention to adopt a uniform method of fixing prices throughout the Republic.¹²³

Meanwhile on May 27, the Directory of the district of Pontoise had gone further and had prohibited all producers of grain from sending their grain and flour to the markets outside the limits of the district. In a letter written on May 27, to the Directory of the department, the Directory of the district of Pontoise said that they had been moved to take this measure by the excessive and frightening exports of flour to Paris from the district. If this were allowed to go on, the district would suffer from scarcity. The directory acknowledged that this measure might injure the principles of liberty of commerce but nevertheless maintained that it was dictated by the critical circumstances in which the district found itself.¹²⁴

This decree drew protests not only from Paris but also from the district of Saint-Germain which was dependent on the grain of Pontoise. The Directory of the department of the Seine-et-Oise then abrogated the decree of the Directory of Pontoise, but passed a new one. This new decree, issued on June 1, made the decree issued by the Directory of Pontoise applicable to the whole of the department. It ordered that cultivators and proprietors could only sell their grains

¹²³ *Les administrateurs du département de Seine-et-Oise aux administrateurs du département de Paris.* Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:332-335.

¹²⁴ A. N., F/11/221/

and flour in the markets within the limits of the department to the exclusion of all others.¹²⁵ On June 13, the *administration de subsistances* of Paris denounced this decree as a "project really conceived to starve Paris, and as an oath typically characteristic of federalism."¹²⁶

The Food riots of 1793 -- the *entraves*

The form that the food riots took during this period best illustrates the nature of the problems created in the Seine-et-Oise as a result of the implementation of the First Maximum. There were reports that wagons of grain destined for Paris were being stopped at various locations in the Seine-et-Oise, notably at Crosne, Linas, Longjumeau, Montfort L'Amaury and Rambouillet. Municipalities of these communes were also said to have supported the actions of the rioters. In fact, from May 1793 the *entrave* became the most common form of food riot in the Seine-et-Oise. These stoppages were clearly an attempt on the part of the rioters to prevent grain leaving the department of the Seine-et-Oise. Since the law of May 4 had aggravated the problem of

¹²⁵ A.N., F/11/221.

¹²⁶ "Projet bien conçu d'affamer Paris, et comme un serment bien caractérisé de fédéralisme." Fernand Gerbaux and Charles Schmidt, *Procès verbaux des comités d'agriculture et de commerce de la Constituante, de la Legislative et de la Convention*, 4 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1906-1910), 3 (July 6, 1793):140 including footnotes 1 and 2.

grain leaving the department of the Seine-et-Oise, the stoppages may be interpreted as the reaction of the rioters to the First Maximum.

On June 17, the Minister of the Interior Garat, sent a circular letter to all of the nine districts of the Seine-et-Oise. This letter said that the Seine-et-Oise had cut off its food supply from the rest of France, behavior which was in sharp contrast to the earlier patriotism shown by the department. The Minister pointed to the frequent stoppages of grain destined for other communes and even for the armies that occurred in the various communes of the department. The letter charged that the spirit in which the laws concerning the commerce of grain was being executed in the department of the Seine-et-Oise was that of finding guilty parties rather than of preventing abuses. These stoppages were often accompanied by violence. *Procès verbaux* were not being seriously drawn up and the grain and flour were confiscated and distributed without giving the defendants the chance to appeal.¹²⁷

In their responses, the administrators of the districts denied that they were actively involved in these stoppages and confiscations.¹²⁸ The Directory of Étampes acknowledged that such confiscations had taken place but said that it had not yet looked into the matter. The Directory of Gonesse acknowledged only two such cases,

¹²⁷ A.N., F/11/221.

¹²⁸ The responses of the districts of Etampes, Dourdan, Gonesse, Versailles, Montfort l'Amaury and Mantes are to be found in A.N., F/11/221.

one of grain at Sarcelles, the other of flour at Gonesse, both carried out by the national guard. The directory also pointed out that restitution had been made in both these cases. Dourdan insisted that the free circulation of grains had not been interrupted in any way in that district. Versailles acknowledged three cases of stoppages,¹²⁹ but maintained that in two of them the drivers had not been furnished with proper *acquit à caution*. As for the proper execution of the law of May 4, the directory wrote that it found itself caught between the people who had nothing and the farmers and proprietors who had everything and who calculated their gains in proportion to the misery of the people. The responses of the Directories of the districts of Mantes and Montfort L'Amaury were concerned almost entirely with the misfortunes in which the people of the two districts found themselves.

There is not much additional information on these stoppages of grain carts or *entraves*, but they seem to have continued for quite some time. In a letter to the Directory of the district of Montfort L'Amaury, the Minister of the Interior wrote that complaints that wagons of grain destined for Paris were being stopped in the territory of the department of the Seine-et-Oise were continuing. In fact these complaints might have played an important role in the decree of July 5, which ordered all administrative bodies and municipalities to

¹²⁹ Those stoppages had most probably taken place at Longjumeau, Sévres and Linas.

provide protection for the transport of grain destined for the armies, or the cities and departments suffering from scarcity.¹³⁰

Another source of tension between Paris and the Seine-et-Oise was the purchases of grain and flour made by the agents charged with the provisioning of the capital. The law of July 1, 1793, authorized administrators of departments and districts that lacked grain to make purchases in the departments with surpluses. But the law allowed such purchases to be made directly from individuals rather than from the markets.¹³¹ In these private sales, the Maximum was often violated and owners of grain naturally preferred to make these private sales at a profit rather than in the market under the eyes of the police and the people.

On August 18, the *Conseil général* of the department decided to complain to the Convention about the commissioners of the commune of Paris who were flouting the law of May 4 with impunity by making purchases above the Maximum. On August 24, the Directory of the district of Versailles also appealed to the Directory of the department to ask for the abrogation of the law of July 6, which allowed the agents of the administration of military subsistence to

¹³⁰ "Décret relatif à la protection à donner par les corps administratifs et municipaux, pour les transport des grains." Du 5 Juillet 1793. Caron, *Commerce des céréales*, 156.

¹³¹ "Décret relatif aux départements et districts qui manquent de grains." Du 1er juillet 1793. Caron, *Commerce des céréales*, 155

buy above Maximum prices.¹³² The conseil-général decided to demand a uniform maximum of prices throughout the Republic. The law of July 1 was abrogated by that of August 15. The law of August 15 which, recognizing the extraordinary needs of Paris, gave the representatives of the people the right to requisition food supplies for the capital directly from the cultivators.¹³³ This measure did little to improve conditions in the Seine-et-Oise and naturally gave rise to renewed protests. The tensions between the two departments was summed up by the representative of the people, Roux, sent on mission to the departments of the Eure, the Seine-Inférieure and the Seine-et-Oise. He wrote on September 14, 1793:

Il reste à vous parler du département de Seine-et-Oise. Vous apprendrez avec étonnement que nos plus proches voisins ne sont pas de nos meilleurs amis et que les grains que nous avons requis ont été injustement arrêtés par le département de Seine-et-Oise.¹³⁴

It remains to tell you of the department of the Seine-et-Oise. You will learn with surprise that our closest neighbors are not our best friends and the grains that you have requisitioned

¹³² Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:337.

¹³³ "Décret contenant des mesures pour assurer les subsistances de Paris." Du 15 août 1793. Caron, *Commerce des céréales*, 159.

¹³⁴ Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:289. See also *Moniteur Universel*, no. 257 (14 septembre 1793), 1092.

have been unjustly seized by the department of the Seine-et-Oise.

Thus, in so far as governmental policy was concerned, there was a big difference between the summer of 1792 and the summer of 1793. From 1790 through the summer of 1793, the central government actively backed the idea of a free market, despite growing resistance from local and departmental administrations like that of the Seine-et-Oise. But from the fall of 1792, the demands of war forced the Legislative Assembly to compromise on this policy until in May 1793, it abandoned economic liberalism and returned to the regulations of the pre-revolutionary era. In addition to the earlier regulations, a maximum on the prices of grain was also decreed. This program of regimentation was not installed in response to the demands of the rioters, but it did conform to the demands of the rioters of 1792 and so won their support.

The food situation did not improve much even after the institution of the First Maximum. Now, however, in the summer of 1793, it was the greed of Paris rather than the lack of regulations that was largely blamed by the rioters for their troubles. So the rioters' target of attack shifted from the *laboureurs* and smaller farmers to the Parisians and the agents who supplied Paris. The market riots of 1791 and 1792 were largely replaced by the *entraves* or stoppages of grain in 1793 of which the primary targets were the transports of

grain destined for Paris. The people who rioted in 1793, together with many of the local administrators clearly believed that Paris was reaping the benefits of the institution of the First Maximum. This, together with the fact that the grain markets were depleted anyway and losing their importance, probably accounted for the shift in the location of riots from the markets to the highways.

In 1793 as in 1792 the rioters seem to have had the tacit approval of many of the administrators of the department of the Seine-et-Oise which probably accounts for the lack of *procès verbaux* relating to the stoppages of grain.¹³⁵ The actions of the departmental administrators during the riots of 1792 had shown that they were not the faithful mouthpieces of the revolutionary government of Paris. The interests of their own department came first with them. This identification with a particular area or locality was all the more marked at the lower levels of government, that is, the district and especially the municipal level. These identifications surfaced again in the summer of 1793. But in the course of 1793, as administration became more and more centralized in France, departmental sensitivities were overridden by the central government. All that seemed to matter were the interests of an abstract Republic. In practical terms, this

¹³⁵ In his circular to the Directories of the districts of the Seine-et-Oise dated June 17, the Minister of the Interior Garat reprimanded them for the failure to draw up *procès verbaux*, on the stoppages of the wagons of grain in the summer of 1793. A.N., F/11/221.

meant the interests of Paris and of the armies fighting at home against the counter-revolutionaries and abroad.

The Second Maximum

The new policy of centralization brought with it the measure for which the department of the Seine-et-Oise had been agitating. This was the law of September 11, 1793, which instituted uniform prices for grains throughout the Republic.¹³⁶ On 1 brumaire an II (October 22, 1793), the *Commission des subsistances et approvisionnements* was set up to supervise the new economic regime to be instituted by this law. In its circular to the popular societies sent out on 9 brumaire an II (October 30, 1793), the Commission spelled out its duties:

Embrasser les besoins de la nation en tout genre; connaître tout ce qu'elle possède pour en user, tout ce qui lui manque pour y suppléer; rassembler et distribuer dans les différents points les objets nécessaires à l'existence, à l'entretien de l'homme, soit pour les citoyens de l'intérieur, soit pour les armées; encourager, soutenir et développer l'agriculture et la reproduction, le commerce et l'industrie; dompter l'avidité du spéculateur, renverser ses projets liberticides; établir le bonheur du peuple sur les débris de la coalition de ces hommes à argent, de ceux qui ont dit: "Nous arrêterons le commerce qui

¹³⁶ "Décret qui fixe un maximum du prix des grains, farines et fourrages, et prononce des peines contre l'exportation." Du 11 septembre 1793. Caron, *Commerce des céréales*, 164-173.

fait vivre le peuple, puisqu'on arrête nos fortunes scandaleuses..."¹³⁷

To embrace all the needs of the nation, to know all that the nation possesses in order to use it and all that it lacks in order to supply it; to assemble and distribute to different areas the objects necessary for existence, for the maintenance of people, whether citizens of the interior or the armies; to encourage, protect and develop agriculture and reproduction, commerce and industry, to subdue the greed of the speculator, reverse all projects destructive of liberty, establish the happiness of the people on the debris of the coalition of the men of money, of all who have said, "We will destroy the commerce which keeps people alive, since they have destroyed our scandalous fortunes...."

This was the language of economic centralization and economic controls, anti-capitalist in its content because it forbade free and unhindered competition for profits in the market-place. The government had moved far from the liberal ideas of 1792.

¹³⁷ *"Circulaire de la Commission des subsistances et approvisionnements aux sociétés populaires, sur la nécessité de leur concours pour l'exécution de sa tâche." Du 9 brumaire an II -- 30 octobre 1793. Caron, Commerce des céréales, 177-178.*

The law of September 11, 1793, together with that of 18 vendémiaire (October 9, 1793) and 25 brumaire (November 15, 1793) attempted to rectify many of the defects of the law of May 4. The confusion and corruption that resulted when different agencies made competing claims on the resources of a particular region was to be eliminated or, at least, controlled. The law of September 11 put the Minister of the Interior in charge of requisitioning grain from departments that had a surplus for those that were suffering a deficit. All commissions for purchase of grains and fodder emanating from different sources were annulled. Only the representatives of the people for the armies were empowered to make requisitions for the armies. The law of 18 vendémiaire clearly defined the circumscription of a market. Henceforth all villages which had frequented a market before 1789 were subject to requisitions for that market, even if the market fell within the borders of another district. No new markets could be established.¹³⁸ The decree of 25 brumaire made all the grains harvested in France the common property of all the French. The law theoretically laid down that the totality of the harvest of a cultivator could be requisitioned. The administrators would provide the cultivators only with the amount necessary for consumption. Only one kind of bread was henceforth to be baked throughout the Republic,

¹³⁸ *"Décret qui maintient dans leur arrondissements les anciens marchés existants avant 1789, et défend provisoirement d'en établir d'autres." Du 18 vendémiaire an II -- 9 octobre 1793. Caron, Commerce des céréales, 173-174.*

and that was to be made from an amalgam of three-fourths wheat and one-fourth barley or rye.¹³⁹

The Second Maximum in the Seine-et-Oise.

The law of September 11 took effect in the Seine-et-Oise by the decree of the *Conseil-général* of the department, dated September 23, 1793. Article nineteen of the decree laid down that the municipalities would be responsible for the subsistence of their communes and that the cities should inform the department of the measures taken to implement the law of September 11, 1793.

Thanks to the work of A. Defrèsne and F.Évrard, we have a wealth of information on the measures taken by the authorities of the district of Versailles.¹⁴⁰ District officials appear to have made sincere efforts to implement the measures decreed by the law of September 11. The sum total of these measures was to bring the whole system of food distribution under the control of the district authorities. Subsequently commerce in foodgrains was largely a state controlled activity. The markets were no longer arenas for profit making but rather so many loci for the distribution of food.

Despite the institution of the Maximum, the food crisis reached alarming proportions in Versailles in September and October 1793. With

¹³⁹ "Décret relatif à la circulation des grains et l'approvisionnement des marchés." Du 25 brumaire an II -- 15 novembre 1793. Caron, *Commerce des céréales*, 180-181.

¹⁴⁰ Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, vol. 2.

the institution of the Maximum, foodgrains disappeared from the markets because cultivators had no desire to sell at the controlled price. Famine threatened the district. Thereupon, the departmental and district authorities took extraordinary measures to provision the city. On 21 vendémiaire an II (October 12, 1793), it was decreed by the Directory of the department that cultivators who owned one or more ploughs had to bring 3 *setiers* of wheat, rye, *metéil*, or barley per plough to the local market.¹⁴¹ Commissioners appointed by the district, diverted to the *grenier d'abondance* all the flour found in the mills of the district.¹⁴² Commissioners were sent to Dourdan, Étampes, Corbeil, Gonesse and Pontoise and to the neighboring Eure-et-Loir to buy grain for Versailles.¹⁴³

The markets were closely controlled. In order to buy at the markets each person had to secure a certificate endorsed by at least two municipal officers which stated that the person had a real need for grain. The certificate would also specify the amount and kind of grains that could be bought. Bakers too had to have similar certificates. Bakeries were also kept under close surveillance. The Municipality of Versailles encouraged the bakers to provision themselves in the markets outside the city by giving them an indemnity for the costs of transport. Subsidies were also accorded to bakers for

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 114-115.

each sack of grain they secured beyond their ordinary consumption. But ultimately the task of providing the bakers with grain fell on the city. The municipality closely supervised the quality and quantity of bread sold by each baker within the city.¹⁴⁴ Every citizen had to make a declaration to the section in which he lived, stating the names of all the members of his family and the name of the baker from whom the family bought its bread. Every family received a certificate containing this information. This information was also sent to the municipality which then determined the amount of flour that each baker was to receive. The municipality took steps to ensure that people who were buying from bakers did not also provision themselves at the grain market and that people from neighboring communes did not take bread out from the city. The municipality determined the price of bread as well as the amount of bread that each individual could buy.¹⁴⁵

This system was by no means unique to Versailles. In Dourdan, in Mantes and presumably in the other districts too, the same program of controls was instituted.¹⁴⁶ But it was by no means an easy task. Cultivators could evade the Maximum by selling at night. They could evade the requisitions by citing a variety of excuses: a faulty census

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 180-183.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 191-192.

¹⁴⁶ For Dourdan, see Emile Auvray, "L'administration municipale de Dourdan," 125-130. For Mantes, see Eugène Grave, "Les subsistances à Mantes en 1793 et 1794," *Recherche et publication des documents relatifs à la vie économique de la Révolution. Comité départemental de Seine-et-Oise* 2 (1908): 60-70.

which had overestimated the amount of grains harvested, the lack of transport and the lack of threshers. Bakers, hoping to squeeze out profits from prices that did not allow much profit margin, sold a very poor quality bread, more bran than flour. They also sold secretly to out of town consumers at prices above the Maximum. Despite the ban on making pastries or baking more than one type of bread, they continued to do so, much to the frustration of municipal officials.¹⁴⁷

Early in 1794, as food supplies in the granaries ran out, the problems loomed larger than ever.¹⁴⁸ By late January 1794, the market in Versailles was showing serious signs of strain. On 2 pluviôse (January 21, 1794), there were only 55 *setiers* of wheat and 4 *setiers* of oats for more than 2000 buyers. On 8 pluviôse (January 27, 1794), there were 102 *setiers*, but the number of buyers was considerable.¹⁴⁹ On 23 pluviôse (February 11, 1794), the administration of the district of Versailles wrote to the *Commission de subsistances* about the alarming situation in Versailles. Although grain was only being delivered in its smallest measure, the *boisseaux*, it still did not suffice, and 1000 to 1200 people were leaving the market without being

¹⁴⁷ Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:116, 179, 186, 191-192.

¹⁴⁸ The results of the census of grains for the district of Versailles, completed in December 1793, showed that the harvest could support the population for six months. This made the harvest of 1793 an average one for the district of Versailles. Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:43.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 229.

able to buy grain. Because of the crush of buyers, it was becoming impossible to keep the registers which were used to keep track of the amount bought and sold. Each market day was a "day of grief". The municipality had been forced to reduce the number of market days to two per *décade*.¹⁵⁰

A large number of buyers came from the neighboring district of Saint-Germain-en-Laye where conditions were worse than in Versailles. The Municipality of Versailles wanted to, but could not in the name of liberty, exclude these buyers who had come provided with certificates issued by their municipalities which testified to their need.¹⁵¹ On 25 pluviôse an II (23 February, 1794), there was no grain in the market-place of Versailles. Defeated, the municipality handed over the responsibility of provisioning Versailles to the district. On 5 ventôse, the administrators of the district wrote to the Committee of General Security, that the lack of subsistence could cause trouble at any time in the market-place. Desperate men and women were running from commune to commune in search of food and coming back empty handed.¹⁵²

On 27 nivôse an II (January 16, 1794), the *Commission des subsistances et des approvisionnements* had granted Versailles

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. The decree of 19 nivôse an II (January 8, 1794) had reduced the number of market days to two per decade.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., 229-230.

emergency help of 10,000 quintals of grains, to be requisitioned from the districts of Gonesse, Dourdan, Corbeil, Montfort, Étampes and Pontoise.¹⁵³ But these districts were loathe to respond to these requisitions and the commissioners of the district who were sent to speed up requisitions met with little success. The situation worsened with time. On 5 germinal (March 25), there remained only 50 sacks of flour in the public granary, which would serve only one-third of the needs of Versailles for the next day.¹⁵⁴ A new requisition of 300 sacks of flour from the districts of Étampes and Dourdan, followed by another one of 600 sacks tided the city over an immediate crisis. But the relief was only momentary. Henceforth, requisitions proved increasingly difficult to realize because the supplies of the communes being requisitioned were becoming exhausted.¹⁵⁵ An attempt to obtain requisitions from the district of Montfort l'Amaury (renamed Montfort le Brutus) triggered a rebellion in the communes of Martin des Champs and Osmoy on 30 floréal an II (May 19, 1794) and the commissioners barely escaped with their lives.¹⁵⁶

In May 1794, the lines for bread became longer and longer, causing great unease for the administrators. On 18 floréal an II (May

¹⁵³ Table of aid given to Versailles in Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:502.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 217.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 248.

7, 1794), grain markets were reduced to one per decade.¹⁵⁷ In late June and early July, the markets remained deserted and the scarcity continued. On 28 prairial (June 16, 1794), supplies from the granary of Versailles to the city and the surrounding communes was reduced by a third. Then on 2 messidor (June 20), bread rations were reduced. It was decreed that all individuals below eight years of age would receive half a pound of bread and all those above eight would receive a pound of bread per day.¹⁵⁸ What saved Versailles from famine during these critical months was the increasing use of rice.¹⁵⁹ On 16 thermidor (August 3), the municipality undertook the charge of preparing a special type of flour made from a mixture of wheat and rye.¹⁶⁰ Although the Convention had decreed on September 11, 1793, that "Republican bread" would henceforth no longer be made of pure wheat, it appears that people in the cities had clung to their bread of pure wheat till the supplies of wheat ran out.¹⁶¹

All through the second half of 1794, the difficulties in securing enough provisions continued. The decree of 14 fructidor

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 88.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 118.

¹⁵⁹ Both on 28 prairial and 2 messidor, the administration supplemented the meager rations of bread with rice. Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:118.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 61.

¹⁶¹ In Dourdan, it was not till prairial an II (May-June, 1794) that the municipality ordered this amalgam. In Mantes, on the other hand, the amalgam was being practiced from the beginning of 1794.

(August 31) of the *Conseil général* of the district of Versailles charged the farmers with disobedience of the Maximum and refusal to fulfill their obligations. Another decree, passed the next day, required citizens to serve as threshers. But these steps proved to be insufficient. To judge from the reports that the administration sent to the *Commission du commerce et approvisionnements*, the district was living from day to day in October.¹⁶² On 9 brumaire an III (October 30, 1794), the *Commission du commerce* ordered new requisitions for Versailles from the districts of Dourdan and Montfort and also from Evreux in the department of the Eure. But these requisitions were executed with excruciating slowness because of the resistance of the cultivators of those districts.¹⁶³ There were tumultuous scenes in front of bakeries as people jostled for bread. On 6 frimaire an III (November 20, 1794), Bizard, the national agent for the district of Versailles denounced the inhumanity of those who "with the excuse of searching for bread which they often did not need, knocked down the women gathered in front of the bakeries, hit them, bruised them with their elbows to push them away, wounding those who were pregnant and

¹⁶² The reports are dated 23 vendémiaire an III (14 October, 1794), 3 brumaire an III (24 October, 1794), 10 brumaire an III (31 October, 1794). Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:218-219.

¹⁶³ Pages 282-312, vol. 2 of Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, include several valuable documents which testify to the tremendous resistance of the cultivators to the requisitions and the ensuing bitterness between Versailles and these districts.

causing them to have miscarriages."¹⁶⁴ Bizard's denunciation, clearly conveys the desperation of those looking for bread in the winter of 1794.

The same desperation was felt in other districts as well. From the month of pluviôse an II (January-February, 1794), the Directory of the district of Mantes began pleading for help from the Convention, the *Commission des subsistances*, and the Representatives on Mission.¹⁶⁵ From the month of ventôse, several municipalities began to restrict the amount of grain that an individual could purchase from the markets even for personal consumption. Since this amount did not exceed 5 *livres* per week, the officials worried that workers were not getting enough nourishment for the hard work that they had to do in the countryside. But two-thirds of the cultivators of the district had exhausted their resources and all efforts to persuade the big cultivators to bring grain to market had failed. So there was little else that could be done.¹⁶⁶ It did not help relations between Mantes and Paris, when agents of the *Commission des Subsistances* diverted

¹⁶⁴ *Proclamation de l'agent national auprès du district de Versailles à ses concitoyens*, Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:315.

¹⁶⁵ A.D.Y., 2 LM, (district of Mantes), 7.

¹⁶⁶ Letters of the Directory of Mantes to the *Commission des subsistances*, dated 12 ventôse, and to the citizen Isoré, representative of the people charged with the provisioning of Paris, dated 16 ventôse an II, A.D.Y., 2 LM (district of Mantes), 7.

grain that they found or seized from the granges of cultivators to the capital.¹⁶⁷

The situation was no doubt bad at Versailles and Mantes, which at the best of times, did not produce enough for their own needs, but it was not much better in the more productive districts like Dourdan. The regime which was associated with Robespierre became totally discredited with his fall on 9 thermidor an II (July 27, 1794). The cultivators of Dourdan no longer obeyed the law of September 11, 1793. They sold above the Maximum at their homes and refused to bring grains to market or to fulfill their requisitions. By the end of fructidor an II, Dourdan owed 12,000 quintals to Versailles and 18,000 quintals to the Seventeenth division of the army in grains that had been requisitioned but not delivered. Versailles had to protest repeatedly and send commissioners to Dourdan to secure even a part of these requisitions. In the city of Dourdan, the price of the nine-pound loaf of bread rose from the usual to 33 *so/s* in brumaire, an III.¹⁶⁸

The national agent acknowledged in frimaire that the Maximum had collapsed in the district.¹⁶⁹ By the end of 1794, conditions were

¹⁶⁷ Letter of the Directory of the district to the *Commission des Subsistances*, dated 12 ventôse, A.D.Y., 2 LM (district of Mantes), 7.

¹⁶⁸ Normally, a pound of ordinary bread sold slightly above 2 *so/s* per pound.

¹⁶⁹ Emile Auvray, "Les subsistances dans le district de Dourdan pendant la Convention thermidorienne," *Recherche et publication des documents relatifs à la vie économique de la Révolution. Comité départemental de Seine-et-Oise* 14 (1935-1937): 37-38.

deteriorating in the department of the Seine-et-Oise. There were bread riots in Versailles on 22 frimaire (December 12, 1794) -- the first serious disturbance since 1792. But the worst was still to come.

Looking back at the period September 1793 to December 1794, one is struck by the absence of food riots in the Seine-et-Oise. It is true that part of this period, September 1793, through July 1794, was the period of the Terror, but this alone cannot explain this period of internal calm. After all, food riots had always been illegal. The *ancien régime* had always been extremely sensitive to food riots as were the revolutionary governments from 1789 onwards. The latter never forgot that it was the food crisis of 1788-1789 that had led to the people's participation in revolutionary politics. The government had always been harsh in dealing with rioters. But that had not prevented people from rioting. And they probably would have rioted in 1793-1794 had they felt that conditions called for such expressions of protest. But during the period September 1793 through December 1794 the government was doing what the people had demanded that it do, that is, regulate the system of food distribution. After all, the popular belief was that that control of the commerce of grain would protect the interests of ordinary people. It is true that the food situation remained desperate but in most cases people attributed this to non-compliance with governmental regulations by selfish interests

rather than to defects in the system itself.¹⁷⁰ This, together with the fact that there was not much grain to seize, probably accounted for the patience with which the people bore their suffering during this period.¹⁷¹

After the abolition of the Maximum

It was after the abolition of the Maximum and the establishment of the liberty of commerce on 4 nivôse an III (December 24, 1794) that the worst period of suffering began. The law of 4 nivôse made it legal to sell grain outside the markets and also to transport grain without the *acquit à caution*. Export of grain outside the country remained prohibited.¹⁷² If the authorities had hoped that the abolition of the Maximum would bring grain back to the market, they were soon disillusioned. The markets remained deserted. The law of 4 nivôse,

¹⁷⁰ See for example the section titled *Doléances* in Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:215-241.

¹⁷¹ Georges Lefebvre and Albert Mathiez have also expressed the view that the government, through the institution of the system of the Maximum and the regulation of the system of food distribution does appear to have ensured that the minimum necessary for subsistence was available to the people. See Lefebvre's introduction to the *Documents relatifs à l'histoire des subsistances dans le district de Bergues*, 2 vols. (Lille: C. Robbe, 1914-1921), LXXXIV; also Mathiez, *La vie chère*, 2:120. In the Seine-et-Oise, the situation would certainly have been much worse without the heroic efforts of the local and district administrations to secure food for the people.

¹⁷² "Décret relatif à la suppression de toutes les lois portant fixation d'un maximum sur le prix des denrées et des marchandises." Du 4 nivôse an III -- 24 décembre. Caron, *Commerce des céréales*, 234-235.

gave the districts the right to provision markets by requisitioning grain from cultivators, proprietors and merchants for a period of one month. But requisitions did not help matters. Binois, the national agent in the district of Dourdan wrote in pluviôse, to Charles Delacroix, the representative on mission in the department of the Seine-et-Oise that:

Les cultivateurs profitent de la liberté que leur assure la loi du 4 nivôse et vendent leurs denrees à des prix exorbitants à des commerçants étrangers... De nombreux cultivateurs vendent même au préjudice de leurs réquisitions.¹⁷³

The cultivators, profiting from the liberty that the law of 4 nivôse provides them are selling their grains at exorbitant prices to foreign merchants..... Some cultivators sell even at the expense of their requisitions.

By ventôse, the Municipality of Dourdan could no longer find grains to buy within the district. On 15 ventôse (March 5), it asked the representative on mission in the department of the Eure for permission to buy in the district of Janville, a request that was

¹⁷³ Cited in Auvray, "Les subsistances dans le district de Dourdan," 41.

refused. Such this was the state of the district situated right next to the Beauce!¹⁷⁴

The situation was no better in Mantes. On 19 nivôse (January 8) there were 150 quintals of grain and flour in the market of Mantes but eight hundred buyers. Despite the presence of the mayor and the National Guard, there was absolute disorder in the market-place as people fought for the grain. Many cried in despair "kill us or give us bread". Most had to leave the market-place without making any purchases. On 19 nivôse, the Municipality of Mantes observed:

Depuis la liberté de la circulation des grains, nous avons la douleur de voir que l'Egoïsme, l'Agiotage et la Cupidité s'agissent en tous sens pour nous conduire à la famine. Le fermier et le cultivateur n'apportent sur la halle qu'une petite quantité de blé, et vend chez lui à des prix exorbitans.¹⁷⁵

Since the freedom of circulation of grains, we sadly observe that egotism, speculation and greed are bringing us to famine. The farmer and cultivator bring only a small quantity of grain to the markets and sell in their homes at exorbitant prices.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Cited in Eugène Grave, "Les subsistances à Mantes de messidor an II à messidor an III," *Recherche et publication des documents relatifs à la vie économique de la Révolution. Comité départemental de Seine-et-Oise* 4 (1910-1911):41.

The price of bread began to rise at a frightening rate. By 13 pluviôse (February 1), the price of the eight-pound loaf of bread had risen to 6 *sols* 3 *denier* per pound. On 13 ventôse (March 3) it was 8 *sols* 6 *denier* per pound, a price beyond the reach of most people. From messidor an II to ventôse an III, the price of bread had risen from 26 *sols* to 3 *livres* 10 *sols*. On 14 ventôse (March 4), the new municipality observed that "despite all the precautions, all these measures, it has not been possible to arrive at the goal desired, that of providing for the needs of this commune and provisioning the markets".¹⁷⁶

Conditions were even worse in the districts of Versailles and Saint-Germain. In Versailles, by January 1795, the reserves of the cultivators were exhausted and the district was dependant on the requisitions from other districts. On 17 nivôse an III (January 6, 1795), the *Commission du commerce et approvisionnements* had ruled that requisitions made earlier in favor of Versailles would be extended for two months. These requisitions proved no easier to obtain than the earlier ones. In fact, by the month of March, they had all but dried up. The people of Versailles were then reduced to eight ounces of bread per day. Towards the end of the month the supply was sometimes reduced to four ounces. On 27 germinal (16 April) people received two ounces.¹⁷⁷ This state of affairs continued in floréal and prairial.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 47.

¹⁷⁷ Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:419, 422-423.

Versailles was in the grip of a famine. The once proud city was reduced to pleading with Paris for food.

On 3 pluviôse (January 22) the *Conseil général* of the commune of Versailles asked the Convention to regard Versailles as a faubourg of Paris. Repeated requests were made to assimilate the provisioning of Versailles to that of Paris. The municipality pointed out that if the ration of the Parisians was reduced by half an ounce per day, it would be enough to provide the people of Versailles with eight ounces of bread every day.¹⁷⁸ The sporadic help that Paris accorded Versailles was not enough. On 5 messidor an III (June 23, 1795), the *Conseil général* of the commune of Versailles wrote to the Committee of Public Safety, that Versailles had been in the grips of famine for twenty-five days. No bread had been distributed in the last five days. It was impossible to buy flour even in distant markets because of the competition of a large number of agents who bought at exorbitant prices and pushed up prices of grain.¹⁷⁹ On 22 messidor an III (10 July, 1795) the mayor and the municipal officers of Versailles wrote to the Committee of Public Safety, "our condition is still the same: a lot of tranquillity but no bread."¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 421-424. At 8 ounces per person, Versailles could make do with 60 sacks of flour per day.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 423-424.

¹⁸⁰ "Notre état est toujours le même: beaucoup de tranquillité et point de pain." Dèfresne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 425.

Table 3.1. State of markets in district of Versailles, Year III.

| Name of Market | Dates in two calendars | | Amount of grain | Price in livres |
|----------------|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| | Revolutionary | Gregorian | | |
| Versailles | 3 pluviôse | Jan 22 | 14 <i>sétiers</i> of wheat | |
| | 13 pluviôse | Feb 1 | none | |
| | 22 pluviôse | Feb 10 | none | |
| | 26 pluviôse | Feb 14 | none | |
| | 3 ventôse | Feb 21 | none | |
| | 22 ventôse | Mar 12 | none | |
| Chevreuse | 19 pluviôse | Feb 7 | 2 quintals of flour, little grain | |
| | 26 pluviôse | Feb 14 | none | |
| | 3 ventôse | Feb 21 | none | |
| Limours | 3 pluviôse | Jan 22 | 15 <i>setiers</i> of wheat | |
| | 16 pluviôse | Feb 4 | none | |
| | 23 pluviôse | Feb 11 | 2 <i>setiers</i> of wheat | 50 |
| | 2 ventôse | Feb 20 | 2 sacks of wheat | 60 |
| Longjumeau | 27 nivôse | Jan 16 | none | |
| | 29 pluviôse | Feb 17 | none | |
| Palaiseau | 1st <i>décade</i> of nivôse | Dec 21-30 | none | |

Source: A. Defrèsne and F. Évrard, *Les subsistances dans le district de Versailles*, 2 vols. (Rennes: Imprimerie Oberthur, 1921-1922), 2:350-351.

The last remark is striking. It is true that even during these times of famine, Versailles and indeed the whole department of the Seine-et-Oise did not witness food riots on the scale of 1792. This is not to say that there was absolute calm. There were bread riots in Saint-Germain on 17 germinal. Stoppages of carts of grain were repeatedly reported in Mantes. But these riots were not comparable with those of March and April 1792. One obvious explanation is that people were too exhausted to riot. People usually rioted when there was the fear of famine. Once famine was upon them, all their energies were diverted to survival. Another point to bear in mind is that the authorities were really referring to the situation in the market-place. The market-place was quiet in Versailles in the first half of 1795 because the markets were usually deserted. Table 2.1 gives us an idea of the state of some of the markets in the district of Versailles during the months of nivôse, pluviôse and ventôse (December-January, January-February, February-March) in 1795. From 22 pluviôse to 8 messidor an III, for twenty-three consecutive markets there was no grain at Versailles.¹⁸¹ The situation was not much better elsewhere. Reports from all the districts mentioned the emptiness of the market-place and the obstinate refusal of the cultivators to bring grain to market.¹⁸² People realized that rioting in the market-place

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 351.

¹⁸² The best source of information are the *comptes décadaires* which are reports drawn up every ten days by the district administrators and which give detailed information on a range of

would not bring them food. The market-place had lost its importance. Hence, market riots had lost their significance. In its report to the Commission of Public Safety, the administration of the department of the Seine-et-Oise summed up the situation in the department for the second and third decades of messidor an III.

La circulation des denrées n'éprouve aucune entrave. Les marchés sont protégés, sûrs et tranquilles. On n'y vont que des légumes et les fruits de la saison.¹⁸³

The circulation of foodstuff are not hindered in any way. The markets are protected, secure and tranquil. One sees only vegetables and fruits of the season there.

The Riots of the Year III: The raids on farms

But the department was not really as quiet as the reports would have us believe. In the Year III (September 1794-September 1795), the Seine-et-Oise witnessed quite another type of food riot. Groups of

matters from the public spirit to the state of the markets. Unfortunately, not many of these reports survive, but the few that do are invaluable. For Dourdan, A.D.Y., 1 LM 390, *comptes décadaires* for thermidor-fructidor; Étampes, A.D.Y., 1 LM 391, *comptes décadaires* from messidor an III to brumaire an IV; Gonesse, A.D.Y., 1 LM 392, *comptes décadaires* for the first *décade* of vendémiaire; Mantes, A.D.Y., 1 LM 393, messidor-thermidor an III; Pontoise, A.D.Y., 1 LM 395, *comptes décadaires* from prairial to fructidor an III; Saint-Germain-en-Laye, A.D.Y., 1 LM 396 from floréal an III to vendémiaire an IV; Versailles, A.D.Y., 1 LM 397, floréal-fructidor an III.

¹⁸³ Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:362.

thirty to forty people, mostly day laborers from the countryside began to show up at the larger farms where they searched out grain, distributed it among themselves and paid the cultivator a sum they judged reasonable. There had been raids on farms in 1792, but the intent of the rioters then had been quite different from those of 1795. In 1792, the rioters checked out carefully the amount of grain at the farms and then directed the farmers to bring specified quantities of grain to market. No grain was bought or sold on the site. The intention of the rioters in 1792 had been to restore the importance of the market-place which had been waning because of the decrees liberalizing commerce in foodgrains. In 1795, there was no thought of the market-place which had lost importance as the physical space where grain was traditionally bought and sold. With the decline of the market-place, market riots also declined in importance.¹⁸⁴ Their place was taken by raids on the farms of cultivators, for it was here that grain was to be found in 1795. There were a few such incursions in the district of Versailles in nivôse (December-January) and pluviôse (January-February) an III.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Edward Thompson has also pointed to a parallel process in England in the late eighteenth century. He has commented, "In 1766 and afterwards there were fewer crowd actions in the market place because less grain was being sold there. Sales were removing to inns, and the open market was in some places coming to an end." See Edward Thompson, "The Moral Economy Reviewed," in *Customs in Common* (London: Merlin Press, 1991).

¹⁸⁵ Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:446.

The raids commenced on a larger scale in the district of Dourdan in ventôse (February-March).¹⁸⁶ When reports of such raids on the farms began to come in from the district of Dourdan, Charles Delacroix, the representative of the people, dismissed it as yet another ruse on the part of the cultivators to avoid requisitions. But on 15 germinal an III (April 4, 1795), the national agent for the district of Dourdan wrote a letter to Charles Delacroix which testified not only to the truth of the operations, but also to the fact that they were becoming more frequent. Binois pointed out that scarcity was the most important motive behind these raids, and so any resistance would only make them more dangerous.¹⁸⁷ These raids spread from Dourdan to the district of Corbeil as well, but they appear to have died down after messidor (June-July) an III. These testify to the fact that people were tracing grains to their source -- to the farms of the cultivators. If the cultivators would not bring grains to market, they would go to the homes of the cultivators and get grains at a price they deemed just.

The markets continued to decline despite the fact that from 4 thermidor (July 22, 1795) the government once again began a process of whittling away at the liberty of commerce and tried to return the

¹⁸⁶ For details see chapter II, "The Geography of Food Riots."

¹⁸⁷ Auvray, "Les subsistances dans le district de Dourdan," 42.

monopoly of buying and selling grain to the markets.¹⁸⁸ The law of 7 vendémiaire an IV (September 28, 1795) embodied the new spirit of regulation. The law prohibited the sales of grain outside the markets, although some exceptions were made in favor of those who did not harvest and the *bladiers*. In order to buy in the market-place, all individuals had to secure a certificate from their municipalities and they could buy only enough to last till the next harvest. Districts were authorized to requisition cultivators to provision the markets and to use force against the latter if necessary. The choice of markets was also taken away from the cultivators for it was left to the authorities to determine which market a particular cultivator would provision. Municipalities were held responsible for carrying out the provisions of the decree.¹⁸⁹

The law did not put an end to the penury of the market-place. Complaints continued in the year IV that cultivators were selling in their homes, or engaging in clandestine commerce while refusing to provision the markets. Cultivators, in their turn, maintained that the law of 2 thermidor an III (July 20, 1795), which decreed that proprietors of land would have to pay half of their taxes and farmers half of their rent in kind, did not leave them with a surplus with

¹⁸⁸ "Décret portant établissant de patentes pour l'exercice de toute espèce de commerce." Du 4 thermidor an III -- 22 juillet 1795. Caron, *Commerce des céréales*, 256-257.

¹⁸⁹ "Décret sur la police du commerce des grains et l'approvisionnement des marchés et des armées." Du 7 vendémiaire an IV -- 29 septembre 1795. Caron, *Commerce des céréales*, 264-268.

which to provision the market-place.¹⁹⁰ In the midst of these recriminations the markets remained deserted. Louis Bergeron has shown that in the late eighteenth century, apart from a few large markets situated on the Seine valley which served as stages in the provisioning of Paris, others that were very important before the Revolution had been reduced to shadows of their former selves.¹⁹¹ In this chapter, we have investigated how this happened.

Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter therefore, the problem of subsistence in the department of the Seine-et-Oise during the years 1789-1795 has been studied from the top, that is from the standpoint of governmental policy. Governmental policy towards the problem of subsistence was far from stable during the revolutionary years as it veered from position to position as circumstances dictated. In this sense, it was no different from the policies pursued by the royal government before 1789. Beginning from a theoretical inclination towards the concept of a free market, born out of the belief that such freedom alone would rejuvenate French agriculture, governmental policy changed track in 1792 and reverted to one of regulation. This it did to meet the needs of war and of provisioning Paris which demanded that the government

¹⁹⁰ For these complaints see A.N., F/11/404 and A.N., F/11/405.

¹⁹¹ Louis Bergeron, "Approvisionnement et Consommation à Paris sous le Premier Empire," *Paris et Ile de France: Mémoires* 14 (1963): 201-202.

exercise closer control over the food resources of the nation. The governmental attempt to dispense with the regulations did not prove successful in 1794 and so they were adopted once again in 1795.

The departmental authorities welcomed, adapted or protested governmental policy when the interests of the people they represented demanded it. Food policies that were advocated and executed by the departments were by no means faithful blueprints of those of the center. It was up to the departmental authorities to try to reconcile the needs of the nation, as defined by the center, with the needs of their own department. The case of the Seine-et-Oise shows that these interests were sometimes irreconcilable and led to lasting discord between Paris and Versailles.

There was a close association between governmental policies and food riots. The government, on the one hand, tried to deal with shortages by instituting policies which it thought would best meet the needs of the hour. The people, on the other hand, responded to shortages according to the current government policy which influenced the supply, price and location of grain. Thus the governmental policy of freedom of commerce, which together with average harvests and the effects of war, led to high prices and low grain supply in the market-place, triggered the market riots of 1791 and 1792. The government, in its turn, attempted to deal with food shortages by instituting a series of controls on the commerce of grain, including the First Maximum. The First Maximum became unpopular in the

Seine-et-Oise because it was perceived as placing the markets of that department at a disadvantage in relation to those of Paris. This led to the *entraves* or the stoppages which targeted grain leaving the Seine-et-Oise for Paris. Lastly, the failed experiment of the Maximum, which did not solve the problem of shortages, once again led to a partial removal of controls over commerce, which in turn set the seal of decline on the market-place. This is reflected in the food riots of 1795, where the scene of action moved from the market-place to the homes of cultivators, reflecting the rioters' acknowledgement of the fact that markets had lost their importance as the primary sites for the buying and selling of grain.

RIOTS AND REVOLUTION: FOOD RIOTS

IN THE DEPARTMENT OF

THE SEINE-ET-OISE

1789--1795

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of The University of Maryland in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
1994

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CI MD Dept. of History
(VOL II of II)
p. 231+

Chapter IV

Causes of Food Riots

Introduction

Studies of food riots have tended to concentrate on one incident or spate of incidents in a particular year. This focus has influenced the analysis of the causes of food riots.¹ Most studies point to sudden and apparently inexplicable rises in prices as being immediately responsible for the outbreak of riots. There follows an inquiry into the causes of the price rise and this is deemed to be a sufficient explanation for the occurrence of riots. Such a format is not wrong. Indeed, a steep rise in prices invariably preceded food riots and it is undoubtedly important to understand the causes of the rise. But over the years historians have garnered sufficient knowledge of the economic background to the riots so the analysis can now be pushed further. This longitudinal study of riots in the department of the Seine-et-Oise helps us to pose the problem in new ways. Why was a grain-rich region like the department of the Seine-et-Oise so prone to riots? In other words we need to concentrate on continuity and to

¹ See bibliography.

see the underlying conditions that made the region particularly susceptible to food riots.

Summary of argument

A variety of factors combined to make the Seine-et-Oise the scene of repeated riots. First, wealth and property were very unevenly distributed in the Seine-et-Oise and consequently large numbers of people were poor and led precarious lives in the best of times. A shortfall in the harvest which meant a shortage of grain in the market-place and high prices spelled disaster for the poor and sometimes drove them to desperate action. Second, the interests of the poor were injured by the new laws passed by the National Assembly in 1789 which destroyed the old regulations governing the commerce of foodgrains. These old regulations had partially safeguarded the poor in times of scarcity. Their removal brought great hardship for many of them in 1791 when the deleterious effects of an average harvest were compounded by a large amount of grain leaving the department and cultivators refusing to supply the local markets. This state of affairs was a source of great frustration not only for the ordinary consumers but for the local administrators as well. Had the new laws upholding freedom of circulation and commerce of foodgrains not been in force, local officers could have requisitioned grain for the local markets, limited exports and set prices of foodgrains, as they customarily did in times of crisis. As it was, they were powerless to

take any of these measures. Consequently many of them turned against the new economic regime. The rioters in their turn also tried to bring back the old regulations which they felt could alone protect their interests.

Third, the region was subject to grain requisitions. The year 1792 brought with it a bumper harvest. Ordinarily, this should have resolved the problem of shortage of food grains. But this time it was the war with Europe which complicated the effects of freedom of commerce of food grains. The government's need to feed the armies resulted in supplies being drained away from the department of the Seine-et-Oise. The soldiers garrisoned in the various towns on their way to the frontiers also had to be fed. All this was in addition to the exports both to the southern departments and to Paris which continued unabated during this period. Consequently, complaints of shortage continued as did the food riots.

Fourth, from as early as 1789 the department suffered from a lack of metallic currency which hampered exchange transactions. The assignats, the paper currency which replaced metallic currency during the Revolution, suffered from a lack of confidence in them. This chapter argues however, that during the period 1791-1792, the inflation caused by depreciation in paper money was not a major factor in the increase of grain prices, because the latter consistently stayed above the inflation rate. So inflation did not contribute directly to the riots. But the lack of confidence in the assignats

must have made buying and selling more difficult. The shortage of metals also led to a shortage of agricultural implements which slowed down both the harvesting and seeding processes and injured the cause of agriculture in the Seine-et-Oise.

Finally, the institution of the first Maximum, which allowed the different departments to set their own maximums on prices of foodgrains, exacerbated the problem of outflow of foodgrains from the Seine-et-Oise and provoked another bout of food riots in May 1793. Representatives from the Seine-et-Oise therefore proposed the idea of a uniform maximum throughout the nation. The institution of the Second Maximum brought about a marginal improvement of the situation. But its abolition led to a recrudescence of all the old problems. Although a few controls over commerce were brought back, they were openly defied by the cultivators who stubbornly refused to sell their grain for the now worthless assignats.

The Social Structure in the Seine-et-Oise

In recent years historians have pointed to the social structure in certain regions of France which placed large numbers of people at a permanent disadvantage, caused great social tensions, and fostered food riots. The path breaking work was done by Cynthia Bouton in an article titled "L'économie morale et la guerre des farines".² In this

² Cynthia Bouton, "L'économie morale et la guerre des farines," in Florence Gauthier, Guy Robert Ikni, eds., *La Guerre du blé au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Éditions La Passion, 1988), 99-110.

study of the food riots of 1775 in the department of the Oise, Bouton drew attention to the increasing economic and social polarization in the rich, cereal producing plains of the *pays de grande culture* around Paris in the last half of the eighteenth century. In these plains a great economic divide separated a small elite of rich *fermiers* and *laboureurs* from the mass of small producers -- *petit fermiers*, *petit laboureurs* and *haricotiers* -- and propertyless workers.

This economic divide widened in the second half of the eighteenth century when the big *laboureurs* and *fermiers* launched an aggressive drive for land that pushed the small producers onto the defensive and ultimately swelled the ranks of the landless agricultural workers. The rising prices of foodstuff, with which agricultural salaries did not keep pace, also put great pressure on the agricultural workers. The social tension born out of this polarization was evident in the food riots. Whereas the crowds of the rioters were largely made up of agricultural laborers, semi-specialized workers and small producers, the victims were largely drawn from the ranks of the big *laboureurs* and *fermiers*. The latter not only exploited the largest properties and paid the heaviest taxes, they were also closely associated with the privileged order of *ancien régime* France in their roles of farmers of seigneurial rights and tithes. This agricultural elite was attacked, not only because they were the owners of surplus grain, but also because they were symbols of social, economic and political power -- a power detested by the

mass of disadvantaged people in the countryside. Bouton, therefore, argues that the food riots were not only an attempt to uphold the moral economy but also a protest against the prevailing socio-economic and political structure in the countryside in eighteenth-century France.³

Bouton's analysis is relevant to our purposes because the department of the Seine-et-Oise was a part of the *pays de grande culture* around Paris. But in the Seine-et-Oise, and especially in the region called the Hurepoix, which made up a large portion of the department, this polarization had begun much earlier. As early as the sixteenth century, the peasantry of the Hurepoix owned less than 50 percent of the land.⁴ This land was largely monopolized by a handful of rich *laboureurs* and *fermiers* while the rest of the peasantry had to make do with small strips of land or were landless. As many as 91.1 percent of the people in the countryside owned less than 2.5 hectares of land and 70 percent held less than one hectare.⁵ This division continued across the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth.

³ For this part of the argument see Bouton's "L'économie morale", 104-110. Also relevant are two other articles by the same author, "Gendered Behavior in subsistence riots: The French Flour War of 1775," *Journal of Social History* 23 (1990): 735-754; "Les victimes de la violence populaire pendant la Guerre des farines (1775)," in Jean Nicolas, ed., *Mouvements populaires et conscience sociale, XVIIe-XIXe siècles* (Paris: Maloine, 1985), 391-399.

⁴ Jean Jacquart, *La crise rurale en Ile de France* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1974), 104. The rest of the land was owned by members of the privileged classes and the bourgeoisie.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 140

Thanks to the work of J. Loutchisky, we have an idea of the partition of property in the region that became the department of the Seine-et-Oise on the eve of the Revolution.⁶ Loutchisky's research shows that the peasants' loss of land was far advanced in this region. In the *subdélégation* of Versailles and the *élection* of Montfort l'Amaury, peasant property amounted to 9.9 percent and 5.8 percent respectively. In Gonesse, it was a mere 5.5 percent. In the regions situated further away from the two big urban centers of Versailles and Paris, the proportion of peasant property rose, but not by much. In the *subdélégations* of Corbeil and Étampes it was 11.5 and 19.6 percent respectively, while in the *élections* of Montlhéry and Pontoise it was 17.9 and 19 percent respectively.⁷

According to Loutchisky, there is not enough information to show the distribution of property among the different groups of the peasantry but there are pointers that indicate that the distribution of property was very unequal. Thus, in the 314 parishes studied by Loutchisky, the numbers of those who categorized themselves as *laboureurs* did not exceed 3.6 percent of the whole population, but the

⁶ J. Loutchisky, "Régime agraire et populations agricoles dans les environs de Paris à la veille de la Révolution," *Revue de histoire moderne et contemporaine* (1933): 97-142. Loutchisky has studied the partition of property in the 438 parishes of the six *subdélégations* of Gonesse, Enghien, Pontoise, Saint-Germain, Versailles and Montfort l'Amaury and the three *élections* of Montlhéry, Étampes and Corbeil. Enghien alone did not become a part of the future department of the Seine-et-Oise which was also to include the two *élections* of Mantes and Dourdan, not covered by Loutchisky's study.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

numbers of those who described themselves as *journaliers* (agricultural laborers) amounted to 58.4 percent of the population. Closely associated with the *journaliers* were the artisans who numbered 9.2 percent of the population. *Journaliers*, artisans and indigents together accounted for 90.8 percent of the population.⁸

Other data furnished by Loutchisky also indicate that a large portion of the population did not hold enough land to ensure an adequate subsistence. In the 438 parishes studied by Loutchisky, the predominant form of agricultural exploitation was *fermage*, that is, most of the land was leased as farms. In an overwhelming number of parishes, a few large farmers held a major portion of the land while a mass of small producers held the rest in the form of small scattered strips. The territory covered by the big farms amounted to 65.8 percent of all rented land, while that covered by the small farms amounted to 31.2 percent. In the whole of the *élection* of Montfort l'Amaury, there were only 141 farmers capable of leasing farms of over 100 *arpents*,⁹ while in Pontoise the number was 191.¹⁰

In the district of Dourdan, the situation was no different in the late eighteenth century. The richer lands in the cantons of Ablis and Dourdan were dominated by large and medium-sized farms, while the poorer land in the north, as well as the areas along the banks of the

⁸ Ibid., 124-125.

⁹ 1 *arpent* = 0.42 hectares or 1.04 acres

¹⁰ Loutchisky, "Régime agraire," 139.

rivers Rémarde and Orge, were divided into a large number of small farms.¹¹

The result of this state of affairs was that even though the department of the Seine-et-Oise was a grain exporting region,¹² a majority of people within the department, both in the towns and in the countryside, did not produce for their own subsistence and were dependent on the market as consumers. A sharp rise in grain prices or shortage of grain brought about a major dislocation in the lives of these people and contributed to an atmosphere of crisis, which formed the background to the riots. The people resented this dependence on the market and attributed their vulnerability to the fact that a small number of *laboureurs* and *fermiers* controlled so much of the land and its produce. For this reason the question of a more equal distribution of land loomed large in the course of the food riots in 1791 and 1792.

¹¹ Emile Auvray, "L'agriculture et les paysans (région de Dourdan-Rambouillet) à la fin du XVIIIe siècle," *Recherche et publication des documents relatifs à la vie économique de la Révolution Française* 17 (1942-1943): 31.

¹² A statistical report drawn up in the year IX estimated that the department produced 4501,100 quintals of wheat and rye. After consumption (65.54 percent of the harvest) and seed (17.39 percent of the harvest) needs had been met, there remained an excess of 768,248 quintals of wheat and rye or 17.07 percent of the harvest of wheat and rye. The report went on to say that this surplus was calculated on the assumption that people ate only wheat and rye bread. But since many ate bread mixed with barley and other grains the surplus was probably much larger. See *Mémoire Statistique du département de Seine-et-Oise*, A.N., F/20/258. It is also important to remember that in the year IX, the two wheat exporting districts of Dourdan and Gonesse no longer formed a part of the Seine-et-Oise. During the years 1789 through 1795 production from these two districts must have made the surplus much higher.

As mentioned earlier, Bouton has claimed that the social tension caused by the polarization between the handful of large landowners, on the one hand, and the mass of the smaller landowners and the landless, on the other, found expression in the food riots of 1775. As evidence, she points to the fact that the majority of victims were large *laboueurs* and *fermiers*. In addition, Bouton has pointed out that unlike in earlier riots, most of the victims of the Flour War of 1775 were *laboueurs* and not merchants.¹³ This evidence, while it does point to hostility toward the big *laboueurs* and *fermiers*, has to be accepted with certain reservations. First of all, the Flour War broke out in late April 1775, and continued in May 1775. By May of any year the only people in the countryside with reserves of grain would be the larger *laboueurs* and *fermiers*.¹⁴ So they would logically become the targets of people searching for grain.

The fact that *laboueurs*, rather than merchants, were the primary targets of the riots is not conclusive evidence for increasing hostility against the *laboueurs*. The Flour War broke out in 1775, right after the government had relaxed regulations over the grain trade. *Laboueurs* and *fermiers*, normally prohibited from trading, were free in 1775 to participate in the grain trade; and, considering the fact that they had the expertise and the capital, they probably did

¹³ Cynthia Bouton, "L'économie morale," 106.

¹⁴ For further elaboration of this point, see Olwen Hufton, "Social conflict and the Grain Supply in Eighteenth-Century France," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6 (Autumn, 1983): 303-331.

so. The result was that the distinction between the *laboueurs* and merchants was probably breaking down. Hence, the evidence presented by Bouton does not necessarily indicate a greater hostility against *laboueurs* and *fermiers* in late-eighteenth-century Oise, although considering the socio-economic circumstances in the Oise as described by Bouton such a backlash is entirely understandable.

Stronger evidence for Bouton's argument may be found in the course of the riots in the Seine-et-Oise in 1792, where, in addition to the raids on the farms of *laboueurs* and *fermiers* and plentiful criticism of their behavior, concrete steps were also proposed to permanently curb their power. In this context we should once again refer to the events of November 1792 when the proposal of a ceiling on land holdings was ceremoniously presented to the National Assembly by Goujon, *procureur général syndic* of the department of the Seine-et-Oise.¹⁵ Goujon's proposal was born out of the growing dissatisfaction with the distribution of land holdings in the Seine-et-Oise. Research by P.M. Jones in the department of the Seine-et-Oise, and in the district of Versailles, in particular, has shown that in this region there was a strong current of radical opinion favoring some kind of redistribution of land holdings, so the landless poor could become owners of land.¹⁶ Jones has demonstrated

¹⁵ See chapter III, "Governmental Policy and Food Riots."

¹⁶ P.M. Jones, "Agrarian Radicalism during the French Revolution," in Alan Forrest and Peter Jones, eds., *Reshaping France: Town, country and region in the French Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University

how in the course of 1789, 1790, 1791 and 1792, the poor would sometimes invade land which they did not own (most often forested, previously uninhabited land), clear it, and then lay claim to it.¹⁷ In reality, a small strip of land would not suffice for the subsistence of an average sized household, but to the landless even that was better than nothing.¹⁸

For the people without adequate land holdings, the issue of land redistribution was inextricably connected with the problem of food riots. The greater the degree of their dependence on the grain market, the greater their vulnerability to price and supply fluctuations. Ownership of a plot of land would serve as a bastion of security against hunger.

But that was only part of the issue for those seeking a solution against landlessness and hunger. The other part was to limit the power of the *laboueurs* and *fermiers* who controlled vast concentrations of land and so were able to monopolize the supply of grain. Hence, Goujon's proposal was to limit the size of a farm. In his address,

Press, 1991), 137-151; see also P.M.Jones, "The Agrarian Law: Schemes for land redistribution during the French Revolution," *Past and Present* no. 133 (November, 1991): 96-133.

¹⁷ Jones, "Agrarian Radicalism," 142-143. It was only after the decrees of June 3 and June 10, 1793, were passed, that the government began to implement a policy of land distribution among the landless.

¹⁸ Jones points out that the landless agricultural laborers from the Versailles area who were given only one *arpent* of land per household under the land distribution scheme of June 3, 1793 planted their lands with bread, grain and vegetables. See Jones, "Agrarian Radicalism," 130.

Goujon demanded that the size of a farm should be limited to 120 *arpents*. People who owned more than this amount of land should be forced to farm out this surplus. The argument was that, if land concentrations could be limited, more land would be available to a larger number of households. Better distribution of land holdings would provide small peasant households with a larger measure of economic security, and would reduce the dependency of the landless on wage labor. Goujon pointed out that because wage labor was so abundant in the department, it was possible for the larger farmers to hold down wages while raising the prices of grain.¹⁹

It should be emphasized that in his address, Goujon did not call for a redistribution of property rights. He limited himself to the demand that the amount of land that a proprietor or a *fermier* could farm or own should be limited. The purpose was to restrict the amount of grain that one would have at one's disposal. The demand that no proprietor could receive rents in kind was made with the same object in mind. Thus Goujon's proposal had the same objective as others that called for controls over commerce -- the prevention of monopoly.

In a department where concentrations of land and wealth were so remarkable, it is not surprising that there were many who were concerned with questions of monopoly and engrossment. The upper limit

¹⁹ See Goujon's speech, reproduced in A. Defrèsne and E. Évrard, *Département de Seine-et-Oise. Les subsistances dans le district de Versailles de 1788 à l'An V* in *Collection de Documents inédits sur l'histoire économique de la Révolution Française*, 2 vols. (Rennes: Imprimerie Oberthur, 1921-1922), 1:196.

of 120 *arpents* set by Goujon was actually quite generous. Pierre Dolivier, the radical *curé* of Mauchamp, who led a delegation to the Legislative Assembly in May 1792, maintained that leaseholds farms should be restricted to a size that a single family could cultivate.²⁰ Dolivier's ideal was a holding of 10-12 *arpents*. All excess land was to be rented out to landless peasants. There would be a general redistribution of land every three or four years.²¹ Dolivier wrote from personal experience. In his village of Mauchamp, two big *fermiers* held 92 *arpents* of land while thirty-two other families held no more than 86 *arpents* among them.²²

Both Dolivier, who came into the spotlight after the tragic events at Étampes on March 1792, and Goujon, who presented his proposals to the Legislative Assembly in the wake of the riots in the autumn of 1792, no doubt made the connection between the food riots and the unequal partition of holdings in the department of the Seine-et-Oise. Such a state of affairs created a good deal of resentment against the *laboureurs* and *fermiers*. In fact, it aggravated the suspicion with which all those connected with the

²⁰ For Dolivier's delegation to the Legislative Assembly, see next chapter.

²¹ All excess land would presumably be held by the village community. For Dolivier's ideas see R.B.Rose, "The Red Scare of the 1790s: The French Revolution and the *Agrarian Law*," *Past and Present* no.103 (1984): 124-125. Dolivier put forward his proposals in his *Essai sur la justice primitive*, published in Paris in 1793.

²² Rose, "The Red Scare," 124.

commerce of grain were generally regarded in eighteenth-century France.

Popular beliefs

In a predominantly subsistence economy, a certain amount of suspicion against those who make profits from trading in foodstuff is understandable. But in France, the situation was much more complicated and volatile. Richard Cobb has written extensively on popular attitudes and beliefs connected with the problem of subsistence.²³ According to Cobb, "The *problème des subsistances* is situated in a dark forest of myth, supposition and alarm".²⁴ Large numbers of people were constantly worried about their future food supply because they lived so close to the edge. Even a slight rise in food prices could throw into disarray the normally strained family finances, while a temporary disruption in food supplies in the market-place could mean the loss of one or more valuable days of work, as people went from market to market or from baker to baker looking for food. Food usually meant cereals, for the diet of the ordinary people was overwhelmingly cereal dependent. In the towns, people generally ate bread made of

²³ Richard Cobb has written extensively on subsistence problems and food riots. He is particularly interested in questions of *mentalité*, associated with the problem of subsistence. For a list of his writings, see bibliography. A very good synthesis of his ideas may be found in the third and last section of his *Police and the People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 246-324.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 280.

wheat, while in the villages they ate wheat bread or wheat bread mixed with rye or sometimes barley.²⁵

Because of its importance in the diet of ordinary French people, the supply of wheat was of critical importance. In the late eighteenth century and particularly during the Revolution, the government tried to reduce this cereal, and especially wheat dependence, by encouraging the cultivation of potatoes and rice.²⁶ The French were extremely conservative in matters of food and although the terrible conditions of the Year III forced them to turn to potatoes and rice, they were usually disdainful of these food items.²⁷ The result of this "food conservatism" was that the supply of wheat alone could make the difference between a good year and a bad one. And bad years were far from scarce. Although France did not know a full scale famine after 1709, there were plenty of bad years before the Revolution, as in

²⁵ It was estimated that the average *journalier* consumed 1.5 pounds of bread, half a pound of meat and a small amount of vegetables every day, *Mémoire statistique du département de Seine-et-Oise*, A.N. F/20/258. But this was only a broad estimate. Bread consumption was probably higher considering that *journaliers* in the towns did not get to eat meat and vegetables every day and *journaliers* in the countryside all but eliminated meat from their diet.

²⁶ Details of some of these efforts may be found in A.N., F/10/210, A.N., F/10/264.

²⁷ Cobb, *Police and People*, 259. Also see letters written by some district administrations and citizens to the *Commission des subsistances* in the Years II and III in A.N., F/10/ 210 and A.N., F/10/263.

1725, 1740, 1741, 1767, 1768, 1775, 1776 and 1784.²⁸ People endlessly watched and waited for the next bad year.

What complicated matters was that in the popular conception and vocabulary, there was no such thing as a *disette réelle*, that is a scarcity born out of a failure of harvests or productivity. Every scarcity was a *disette factice*, that is a scarcity artificially engendered by *malveillants*, or malicious people. Actually, it was the government itself which was responsible for promoting this belief. Perhaps for government officials, the prospect of a real harvest failure, which would bring with it scarcity and widespread social disorder, was too horrifying to contemplate. Therefore, it comforted itself by pointing the finger at unnamed individuals whose activities would, in theory at least, be easier to control. But in hoping to contain public panic, which so often followed news of a bad harvest, the government helped to unleash public anger. For people reacted all the more furiously, if they believed that certain individuals, rather than nature, were responsible for their misery. In fact, government propaganda about *malveillants* being responsible for scarcity often misfired because government officials themselves became targeted as the villains. In the pre-revolutionary years, the government closely regulated the provisioning system. So any failures or breakdowns were blamed on the government, which was suspected, for reasons unnamed,

²⁸ The dates are from H. Monin, *L'État de Paris en 1789: Études et documents sur l'ancien régime à Paris* (Paris: D. Jouaust, 1889), 285.

of wanting to starve the people. The idea of a "famine pact", first mentioned in writing by Le Prévost de Beaumont in the 1760s, was born out of such a mentality.²⁹ But it was easier to blame local figures, rather than a distant king or obscure government officials, for masterminding an artificial dearth. Cobb has pointed to the "identifiable hate figures" within any community, the miller, the corn factor, the hoarder, the speculator etc.³⁰ Steven Kaplan has also written wittily and at length about the suspicion and opprobrium that surrounded all those connected with the provisioning trade.³¹

This mentality, of which fear and suspicion (which easily translated into anger) were the predominant traits, was very evident during the revolutionary years. It was a commentary on the social structure of the Seine-et-Oise, that the culprits charged with having engineered the scarcity were immediately identified as the big *laboureurs* and *fermiers*. The murder of Sauvage and the attack on Thomassin at Saint-Germain on July 18, 1789, were directly related to their status as *fermiers* -- and very wealthy ones at that.³² The

²⁹ Details of this famine plot can be found in Steven Kaplan, *Bread, Politics and Political Economy in the Reign of Louis XV*, 2 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 1:344-407.

³⁰ Cobb, *Police and People*, 278.

³¹ Steven Kaplan, *Provisioning Paris: Merchants and Millers in the Grain and Flour Trade during the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 82-83, 169, 217, 266-267.

³² *Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860; recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des chambres françaises (première série, 1787-1799)*, 92 vols. (Paris: Librairie administrative de

charge against them was that of hoarding. These same charges, and many others besides, were reiterated again and again in the following years. In contemporary documents the *fermiers* are sometimes described as the new aristocrats of the Revolution, whose power had to be broken like that of the old nobles.³³ The feelings of the people were summed up in a petition presented to the National Assembly by the sections of Versailles on April 3, 1793, in which the misery of the people was blamed on the *infâme cupidité des gros propriétaires, fermiers et accapareurs* who were described as "une aristocratie encore plus funeste, encore plus déchirante que celles de nobles,"³⁴ that is, "an aristocracy, even more harmful, even more harrowing than that of the nobles."

The government's reaction was quite predictable. It dismissed the anger and suspicions of the people as nothing more than ill-informed paranoia. Year after year, it denied that any real scarcity existed in the nation, by pointing to the abundance of the harvests. The riots, the government asserted, were the result of the machinations of counter-revolutionaries and enemies of the

P. Dupont, 1862-1980), 8:249-251. Thomassin paid 7000 *livres* in *taille* annually, which gave rise to the popular charge that the concern for his life was because of his wealth, a charge the National Assembly indignantly refuted. *Ibid.*, 251.

³³ Petition presented to the Minister of the Interior by the commune of Triel Bourg, district of Saint-Germain on October 13, 1792, A.N. F/11/221.

³⁴ Évrard and Defrèsne, *Les subsistances*, 1:200-201. For more on the same theme, see below and also chapter V, "Riots and Revolution."

Constitution.³⁵ Cahier de Gerville, Minister of the Interior, repeated these views in a letter he wrote to the *procureur général syndic* and the Directory of the district of the Seine-et-Oise on March 30, 1792. Gerville described the troubles as being provoked by *les ennemis du nouvel ordre de choses*,³⁶ -- "the enemies of the new order of things".

The official viewpoint

Departmental, district, and municipal officials, who were closer to local realities, found it difficult to swallow the official view of events. Even the most conservative among them were forced by the circumstances to recognize that a problem existed. On September 18, 1791, the *procureur général syndic* of the department of Seine-et-Oise, wrote to the Minister of the Interior "qu'il y a un agent invisible et inconnu qui repand partout l'esprit de vertige," -- "that there is an invisible and unknown agent who is spreading the spirit of giddiness everywhere." But the letter went on to say:

D'un autre coté on ne peut dissimuler que quelqu'un de ces cultivateurs par leur peu de bonne volonté à se preter aux

³⁵ Government pronouncements regarding harvests and availability of foodstuffs may be found in the decrees passed on September 15, 1790, September 18 and 26, 1791, September 9, 1792 and August 31, 1793. On its views that the fear and troubles were the result of manouvres of enemies of the nation see decrees of September 15, 1790, September 18 and 26, 1791, and September 1, 1792. The text of these decrees can be found in Pierre Caron, *Le commerce des céréales; instruction, recueil de textes et notes* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1907), 138-139, 141, 143, 161.

³⁶ A.N., F/7/3689/7.

circonstances ont pu donner lieu à ces craintes d'ailleurs le rencherissement subis des grains est d'autant plus extraordinaire que l'augmentation se fait sentir plutôt dans ce temps de la moisson ou le petit cultivateur garnissent ordinairement les marchés.³⁷

On the other hand, one cannot conceal the fact that some of these cultivators, by their unwillingness to play along with the situation, could have given rise to these fears. Moreover, the rise in prices of grains is all the more extraordinary because it makes itself felt in this time of the harvest when the small cultivator ordinarily furnishes the markets.

Implicit in the *procureur général syndic's* response was the thought that the people would not or could not riot on their own. They had to be goaded into doing so by the invisible agents to which he referred. But he acknowledged that the department was facing some serious problems in September 1791. The response of Le Brun, President of the Directory of the Seine-et-Oise, was also quite similar. Le Brun was not known for his compassion towards the rioters.³⁸ He repeated

³⁷ A.N., F/7/3689/7.

³⁸ After the riots of the spring of 1792 had collapsed in April, Le Brun made a speech to the National Assembly on April 21, 1792, which was a model of mean spiritedness and viciousness. For this speech, see *Archives parlementaires*, 1st ser., 40:249.

the official line about the causes of the riots in a speech to the Legislative Assembly on March 16, 1792:

Cette fermentation, Messieurs, a des causes profondes et lointaines. Ce n'est pas tout à coup, ce n'est pas par une détermination spontanée que les habitants de nos campagnes se sont portés à ces actes séditieux. Des moteurs secrets, des ennemis de La Constitution ont égaré leurs âmes jusqu'à la ferocité.³⁹

Gentlemen, this unrest has deep seated and profound causes. It did not happen suddenly; it is not by a spontaneous determination that the inhabitants of our countryside are committing these seditious acts. The secret driving forces, the enemies of the Constitution, have misled their souls into violence.

Before the end of the month, however, Le Brun had somewhat modified his views. In another speech, also to the Legislative Assembly, Le Brun, even while asserting that intrigue did have a hand in the riots conceded,

Ce peuple aussi a des craintes et des inquiétudes raisonnés. Il se souvient de 1789 et il redoute le retour du même fléau. Cette liberté de circulation que la justice et l'intérêt nous

³⁹ *Archives parlementaires*, 1st ser., 39:414.

commandant de protéger, lui est toujours suspecte parce qu'il voit les grains sortir de son territoire et ne voit pas le terme où ils vont se rendre..... il anticipe ses craintes et la chance d'une disette dans quelque mois est déjà une disette pour lui aujourd'hui.⁴⁰

The people also has reasonable fears and anxieties. They remember 1789, and fear the return of the same plague. This freedom of circulation, which justice and interest commands us to protect, is always suspect to them because they see the grain leave their territory and do not see where it is going.....they anticipates their [worst] fears and the chance of a scarcity in a few months becomes a scarcity today.

Le Brun could not bring himself to concede the fact that the fears of the people might have already been realized. But he, like the *procureur général syndic*, did point to some of the reasons for unrest. Le Brun referred to the memories of 1789 which still haunted the people in 1792. In fact, there were many similarities between the situations of 1789 and those of 1791 and 1792. The most obvious one was a steady rise in the prices of grains and bread in the period before the riots began. The riots of July-August 1789 in the region

⁴⁰ Le Brun's speech of March 23, 1792, *Archives parlementaires*, 1st ser., 45:404.

around Paris were part of a series of outbreaks which had been occurring intermittently since late 1788. Prices of grains and bread had remained consistently high during this period. The high prices were widely acknowledged to be the result of the bad harvest of 1788, one of the worst of the century.⁴¹ Unfortunately, tables of prices are lacking for 1789, but local studies indicate that prices remained high in July-August of 1789. In the cities of Mantes and Dourdan, the municipalities artificially held down bread prices by heavily subsidizing bakers for the grain they bought at high prices.⁴² Even though there was almost universal recognition that the harvests of 1788 had been terrible, there was a consensus that human factors were aggravating the crisis. There was a chorus of complaints from

⁴¹ On November 26, 1788, the Parlement of Paris empowered Joly de Fleury, the *procureur général*, to carry out an inquiry, through the medium of his representatives in the *baillages* under his jurisdiction, into the high prices of grain. The results of this inquiry were made known by the *avocat général* Séguier on December 13, 1788. The *procureurs* and lieutenant generals in the *baillages* who responded to the inquiry were largely of the opinion that the steady rise in prices in the last half of 1788 were largely due to the terrible harvest of 1788, one of the worst in the century. For more on this inquiry, see "Une enquête du Parlement de Paris sur la récolte de 1788," *La Révolution française* 62 (1919): 38-53, 134-170, 220-230; see also Monin, *L'État de Paris*, 307-308.

⁴² For Dourdan, see Auvray, "L'administration municipale de Dourdan (Seine-et-Oise) et les boulangers: 1788 à l'an IV," *Commission de recherche et de publication des documents relatifs à la vie économique de la Révolution: Assemblée générale de la Commission centrale et des comités départementaux* 2 vols. (Paris: Tépac, 1939), 1:123; For Mantes, Grave "Le service des subsistances à Mantes: d'après les registres des délibérations, Juillet et Août 1789," *Recherche et publication des documents relatifs à la vie économique de la Révolution: Comité départemental de Seine-et-Oise* 1 (1907): 55.

consumers of grain against the *laboureurs* and *fermiers*, both in 1788 and 1789.⁴³

The question of exports

We have a small but very valuable body of evidence in a series of petitions addressed by the bourgs and cities around Paris to the *Comité des subsistances* in 1789.⁴⁴ Most of these petitions point to the fact that not enough grain was being brought to the market, and what little was brought was priced beyond the means of ordinary people. In a significant move, the Municipality of Magny ordered all cultivators and collectors of *dîmes* to bring specified amounts of grain to the market-place. All farmers of seigneurial land had to furnish a *sétier* of grain for every *charrue*⁴⁵ of cultivated land. Other cultivators had to supply half a *sétier*, and all those whose receipts from the *dîme* exceeded 1000 *livres* had to supply 1 *sétier* per week. The mayor of Houdan threatened to institute similar measures,

⁴³ Many of the letters responding to the inquiry of the *Parlement* of Paris emphasized the cupidity of the large proprietors and the *laboureurs* and their dishonest practices. Thus, they did not bring grain to market, they deliberately delayed having their grain threshed, they hoarded grain, closed their granaries and storehouses and bought up grain from the smaller proprietors with the intention of monopolizing the market. Monin, *L'État de Paris en 1789*, 307.

⁴⁴ A.N., DXLI/ 2 -- *Mémoires, adresses, demandes, observations, dossiers envoyés au Comité des subsistances par les villes et bourgs*. Although some of these petitions relate to a slightly later period, that is September 1789, they are nevertheless a very valuable source of information about the causes of popular discontent in 1789.

⁴⁵ *charrue* = Forty-five hectares or ninety *arpents*.

while the city of Corbeil asked permission to do the same.⁴⁶ These petitions reflect the popular opinion that the cultivators were creating an artificial scarcity by staying away from the market-place and that the problem could be solved if they could be forced to provision the markets. This line of thinking would also be evident in later years.

The petitions also point to the reason why the *fermiers* and cultivators were not bringing grain to the market-place. Almost all of them claimed that their markets were being starved because grain was being channelled towards other markets, notably Paris. The strongest statement came from Étampes which narrowly escaped a food riot on July 21. In its petition, the municipality claimed that the city was being squeezed dry by the repeated demands made upon it by Paris for flour and grain. It complained that commissioners from Paris were buying up all the grain and flour in the city at very high prices.

The municipality went on to say that the resources of the town had been enormously strained by the fact that the villagers from the surrounding territory were coming to Étampes to buy bread. The bakers had been baking four times more bread than usual, further depleting the town's fast dwindling resources of grain. In fact, a census made

⁴⁶ Letters written to the *Comité des subsistances* by the Municipality of Magny on September 10, 1789, the mayor of Houdan on August 11, 1789 and the Municipality of Corbeil on September 10, 1789, A. N., DXLI/2.

by the town bourgeois militia had indicated that Étampes would run out of grain before the next harvest. Under the circumstances people were ready to take up arms to prevent grain from leaving the city. If Paris sent another convoy, the petition warned, the people could no longer be contained. These veiled threats were, however, couched in the language of submission. Étampes was placing itself in the care of the National Assembly, the petition said, and concluded that "it would be horrible if the town which fed the capital were to suffer because the capital had taken all its grain, and had moreover bought this grain at very high prices."⁴⁷

The complaints made by the Étampoïis were reiterated in milder form by the other towns. The petition from Magny claimed that pressure was being put on the market of Magny by cities like Paris, Saint-Germain and Versailles. Corbeil claimed that permission given to the bakers of Paris to provision themselves at the farms resulted in the markets being deprived of grain and in prices going up.⁴⁸ The gist of these petitions is that the *laboueurs* were not supplying the local markets because they preferred to supply more distant markets where they could obtain higher prices.

⁴⁷ This petition was read to the National Assembly by a deputation from Étampes a few days after July 21, 1789, A.N. DXLI/2.

⁴⁸ See footnote 46.

Freedom of the grain trade

Traditionally, markets in grain importing regions offered higher prices for grain than markets in grain producing regions. This was the way by which grain was drawn from centers of production to centers of consumption. Thus, prices in Parisian markets were higher than in the markets of the Seine-et-Oise, because Paris needed to attract grain from outside. Those markets in the Seine-et-Oise that were close to Paris found it especially advantageous to export to Paris, because transport costs were negligible and Paris grain prices reflected costs for grain brought from regions further away from Paris than the neighboring markets of the Seine-et-Oise.

Montlhéry, at a distance of about twenty km from Paris emerged as one of the largest grain exporting markets to Paris in the eighteenth century. Also important were Chevreuse and Houdan. Étampes, situated further south in the Seine-et-Oise made significant exports to Paris but also found a huge market for its flour and grain in the markets farther to the south, like Pithiviers and Orléans. The protestors in the Seine-et-Oise blamed these exports for the shortage of grain and the high prices in the Seine-et-Oise.

This last complaint rose to a crescendo during the years 1791 and 1792. Grain prices rose steadily during the years 1791 and 1792, after having dropped in 1790. Figs 4.1-4.3 give us an idea of the rise

in prices in 1791 and 1792,⁴⁹ and Fig. 4.4 shows bread prices in the town of Saint-Germain in 1791-1792.⁵⁰ Wheat prices were rising in August and September, the period when grain from the new harvests came into the markets and prices were expected to fall. The rising prices in September were, therefore, much remarked upon. Evidence indicates that the harvests of 1791 were not as good as those of 1790 in the department of the Seine-et-Oise, although they were not below average.⁵¹ The Minister of the Interior, De Lessart, made a report to the Legislative Assembly on November 1, 1791, indicating that although harvests had been abundant in the north, they were mediocre in the center and south.⁵² The result was that the southern departments sought to make up for this shortfall by buying heavily from the north, thereby pushing up prices in the northern departments.⁵³ What is more

⁴⁹ Sources: A.D.Y., 1 LM 456 and A.D.Y., 1 LM 458. Prices shown are for the first and second halves of every month. When prices were available for every week rather than for each half of the month, the weekly prices were averaged to obtain one price for each half of the month.

⁵⁰ Source: A.D.Y., 2 LM 75, district of Saint-Germain-en-Laye.

⁵¹ Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:18-20. Also memoir drawn up by the district of Corbeil, titled *Réflexion sur la nécessité de trouver des moyens de faciliter les approvisionnements des marchés sans gêner la liberté du commerce et de la circulation des grains dans l'intérieur de Royaume*, A.N., F/7/3689/6.

⁵² *Moniteur*, November 3, 10:276.

⁵³ The observations (undated), of Martial Victor Vaillant and Jacques Antoine Rouveau, commissioners deputed to Étampes by the Directory of the department in September 1791. A.N., F/7/3689/7 and A.D.Y., 1 LM 459.

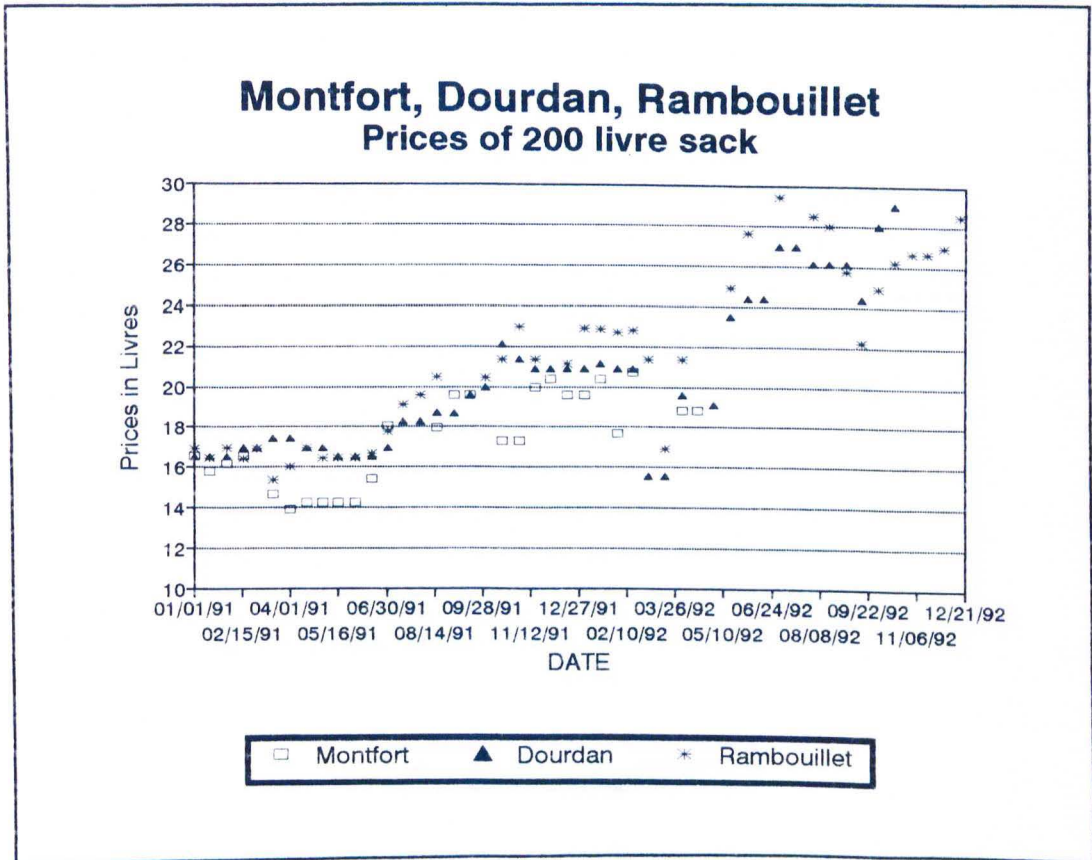


Fig. 4.1. Prices of wheat at the markets of Dourdan, Rambouillet (district of Dourdan) and Montfort (district of Montfort) in 1791-1792. Source: A.D.Y., 1 LM 456 and A.D.Y., 1 LM 458.

important is that in 1791, large-scale purchases of grain in the northern departments could be made without any kind of official regulation because this was a period of free circulation and commerce of grains. This freedom gave rise to a great deal of consternation and provoked complaints, both from local officials and from ordinary people in the department of Seine-et-Oise. The most common complaint was that the cultivators were no longer bringing grain to markets because they preferred to sell it at their farms and granaries to

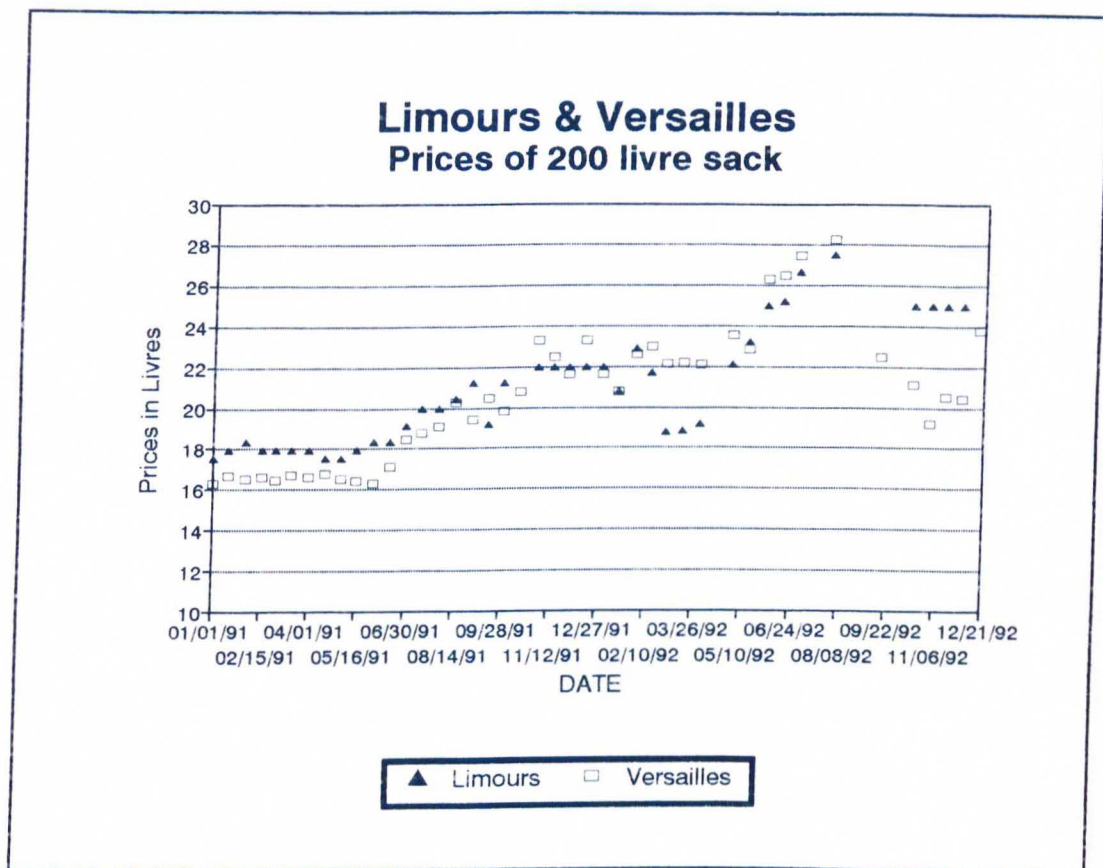


Fig. 4.2. Prices of grain at the markets of Versailles and Limours (district of Versailles) in 1791-1792. Source: A.D.Y., 1 LM 456 and A.D.Y., 1 LM 458.

merchants who were willing to pay high prices for it. Even when the cultivators brought grain to the markets, they could not be found by their piles during market hours, so the grain remained apparently unsold.

In reality, it was alleged, this grain had already been sold by sample at the local inns or on the way to market. The merchants who bought this grain took it to markets outside the department -- either to Paris or to the departments beyond the Loire, where they sold it

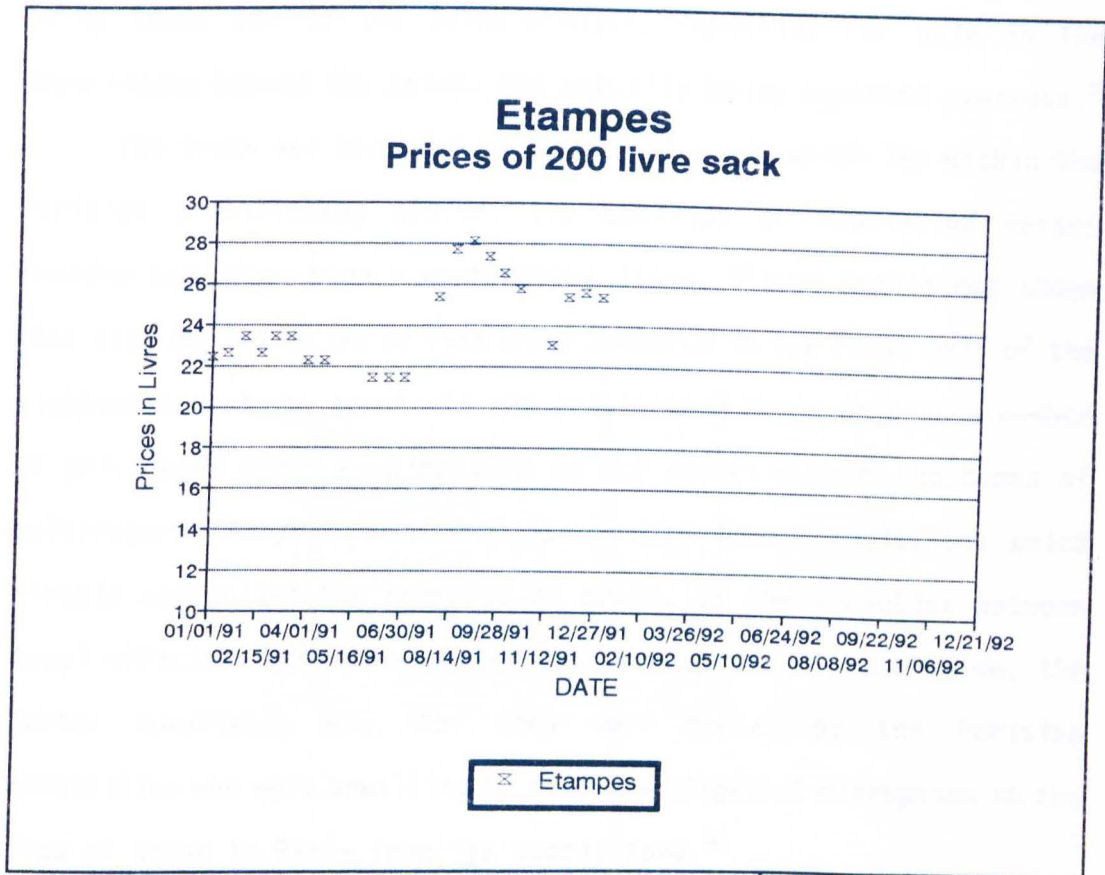


Fig. 4.3. Prices of Grain at the market of Étampes (district of Étampes), 1791-1792. Source: A.D.Y., 1 LM 456 and 1 LM 458.

for huge profits.⁵⁴ Moreover, there were rumors that grain which was

⁵⁴ For these complaints see for example, letters of the Directory of the district of Corbeil to the Directory of the department, dated September 16 and September 19, 1791, A.N., F/7/3689/6; letter of the *procureur syndic* of the district of Gonesse dated September 8, 1791, A.N., F/7/3689/6; report of the troubles at the market of Gonesse on September 19, 1791 drawn up by M. de Princé, commander of the national gendarmerie, A.N., F/7/3689/6; report of the *procureur général syndic* of the department of the Seine-et-Oise dated September 18, 1791, A.N., F/7/3689/6; extract from the registers of deliberations of the Directory of the district of Étampes dated September 10, 1791, A.D.Y., 1 LM 459, A.N., 461; observations of commissioners Vaillant and Rouveau, A.N., F/7/3689/7 and A.D.Y., 1 LM 459.

being taken out of the Seine-et-Oise, reputedly for sale in the departments beyond the Loire, was actually being exported overseas.⁵⁵

The truth was that in the grain rich areas which lay within the Parisian provisioning system, the question of regulation versus freedom had often been a contentious issue. Steven Kaplan has shown that even during an era of regulated commerce in the first half of the eighteenth century, merchants who provisioned Paris enjoyed a number of privileges which enabled them to buy directly from the homes of cultivators. They could also bypass other local regulations which closely controlled the commerce of grain. In the squabbles between local officials and Paris merchants over matters of regulation, the latter invariably won, for they were backed by the Parisian authorities who were unwilling to risk the slightest disruption in the flow of grain to Paris from its supply zone.⁵⁶

In fact, in normal years when harvests were good and prices low, local officials, despite periodic misgivings, tolerated freedom of commerce, giving precedence to usage over law. Indeed several of the market towns welcomed Parisian grain business in the eighteenth century. A thriving grain market could give a big boost to the economy of the market town and its surrounding villages. The presence of Parisian merchants was an incentive to the cultivators to bring grain

⁵⁵ Observations of commissioners Vaillant and Rouveau, see footnote 53.

⁵⁶ Kaplan, *Provisioning Paris*, 123-127.

Price of Bread at Saint Germain Jan 1791 through May 1792

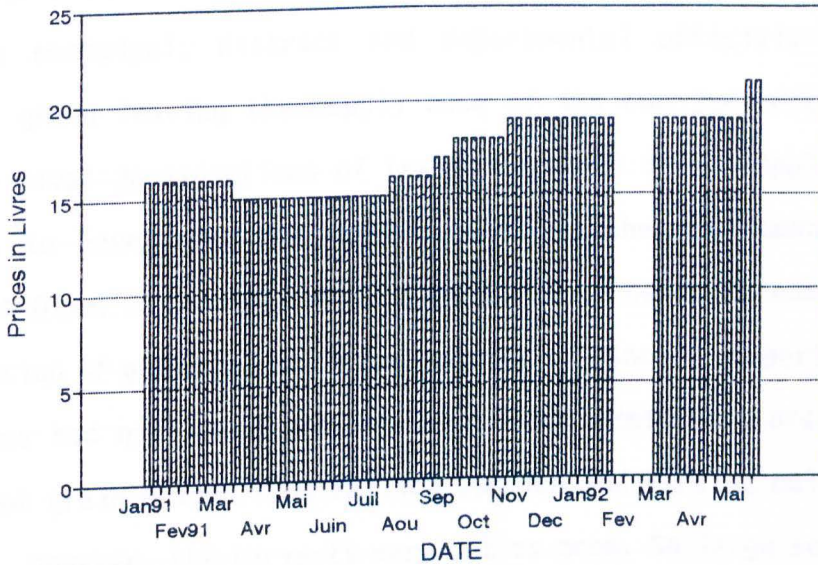


Fig. 4.4. Prices of bread in the town of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, 1791-1792. Source: A.D.Y., 2 LM 75, district of Saint-Germain-en-Laye.

to market. The town could then collect increased market fees. Since grain was largely transported to Paris in the form of flour, the local milling industry also made big profits. In fact, Étampes, Corbeil, and Dourdan were not only famous as market towns but also as milling centers. The multiplier effects of the grain trade could be felt in the local hotel business as well. Therefore, it is not surprising that many of the market towns vied with each other to attract business. In the 1720s the authorities at Étampes had even tried to divert the

grain trade from Montlhéry to their own town by relaxing police regulations and tolerating illegal trading practices.⁵⁷

In bad years, this liberalism would vanish and the emphasis would again be on regulations and control. Localism would rear its head as municipal, district and departmental officials tried to prevent grain leaving the supply zone of its own jurisdictions and accused rival jurisdictions of trying to steal their supplies. This appears to have been the case in 1791 in the department of the Seine-et-Oise. In 1790, the harvest had been abundant. Free circulation of grain had not been a matter of concern. Export to other provinces had not been prevented by local administrators, because they kept grain prices from falling too low and hurting cultivators. In 1791, however, the harvests were not as good. So large scale grain imports began to push up prices of grain.

In departments like the Seine-et-Oise what the people resented most was that prices were rising, after what appeared to be a perfectly adequate harvest, even while grain was flowing out of their department. Because the laws expressly prohibited any kind of interference in the circulation of foodgrains, imposing controls on prices and exports was not possible. Therefore, people suffering from the rising prices blamed, on the one hand, the *laboueurs* and *fermiers*, for not bringing grain to market and for preferring to sell to strangers in their granaries. On the other hand, there was a

⁵⁷ Ibid., 99-100.

backlash against the departments buying from the Seine-et-Oise. Paris as usual, was a target.

On September 14, 1791, the *procureur général syndic* of the department wrote a letter to the Minister of the Interior in which he blamed the huge purchases ordered by the Municipality of Paris in the Seine-et-Oise, for occasioning a great deal of disquiet.⁵⁸ Because prices were higher in Paris, cultivators from the Seine-et-Oise preferred to sell there. Moreover, the higher prices in Paris also helped to push up prices in the department of the Seine-et-Oise. Thus the trouble in Tremblay in the district of Gonesse appears to have begun when on September 16, a farmer of that commune refused to sell grain to the mayor, a baker and a worker of that commune on the grounds that he did not know the grain prices for the day at the *halle* of Paris.⁵⁹

In addition to Paris, there was the competition of the southern markets. When Vaillant and Rouveau arrived at Étampes on September 20, they found the people of the town up in arms against the exodus of grain from the commune. A telling incident occurred on the night of September 23, when the two commissioners were secretly approached by a *Sieur* Mechin. It turned out that this person had been sent by the Municipality of Angers to make purchases of grain and flour from the

⁵⁸ A.N., F/7/3689/6.

⁵⁹ Extract from the register of deliberations of the Directory of the district of Gonesse, dated September 19, 1791, A.N., F/7/3689/6.

towns of Orléans and Étampes. Mechin mentioned that he had come to Étampes with the express purpose of purchasing 2500 sacks of flour. He had even travelled secretly by night to the homes of several *fermiers* who had agreed to fill his requests. But the food riots in Étampes in September 1791, made the *fermiers* afraid for their lives if they sold food out of the region. So they were now refusing to sign contracts and still less to send their grain through Orléans. Mechin was on the point of withdrawing without fulfilling his mission, when the commissioners asked him to persevere a bit longer, hoping that their mission would bring back tranquillity and restore liberal circulation of grains.⁶⁰

Despite their words of support for Mechin, the commissioners privately observed that the Étampoisis were right in their contention that the departments beyond the Loire, which did not grow enough grain to support themselves, invariably turned to the town of Orléans for grains and to Étampes for flour, because it was easy to transport grain along the Loire. The commissioners said that the limitless demand from these regions provided an incentive for the merchants to employ all possible methods to procure grain and flour at any prices. These large-scale purchases in turn aroused the fury of the local people.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Observations (undated) of Martial Victor Vaillant and Jacques Antoine Rouveau, A.D.Y., 1 LM 459 and A.N., F/7/3689/7.

⁶¹ Observations of Vaillant and Rouveau, A.D.Y., 1 LM 459 and A.N., F/7/3689/7.

The commissioners further observed that the current situation in which the *fermiers* were afraid to go out of their homes and the cultivators afraid to expose their grain in the markets should lead them to strive to reconcile the interests of commerce with the subsistence needs of the Seine-et-Oise. They believed that if the people could have even mediocre quality wheat at reasonable prices, they would not care what happened to the surplus.⁶²

The solution suggested by the commissioners was temporary regulation of the commerce of grain till the crisis was over.⁶³ In this, the commissioners were merely echoing the views of the citizens of Étampes. In an assembly presided over by the commissioners at Étampes on September 24, and restricted to the active citizens, there were numerous requests that at least some of the ancient regulations on commerce be brought back. There were pleas for the return of the laws that barred merchants from entering the market-place until the ordinary citizens and bakers had provisioned themselves, and that ordered all merchants to carry *acquit à caution* stating the origin and destination of grains carried by merchants.⁶⁴

⁶² Observations of Vaillant and Rouveau, A.D.Y., 1 LM 459 and A.N., F/7/3689/7.

⁶³ Observations of Vaillant and Rouveau, A.D.Y., 1 LM 459 and A.N., F/7/3689/7.

⁶⁴ Observations of Vaillant and Rouveau, A.N., F/7/3689/7 and A.D.Y. 1 LM 459.

All through the harvest year, the complaints about the export of grain and flour from the department continued. Sedillon, procurator of the commune of Étampes, wrote an angry letter to the Legislative Assembly on March 15, 1792, in which he called upon the assembly to end the liberty of commerce in the "name of humanity". Sedillon maintained that 2000 sacks of flour were leaving Étampes every week and charged that some of it was being exported abroad. The twenty mills within the city itself had no time to mill the small sacks of the local people because they were too busy grinding flour for the merchants and millers.⁶⁵

The Directory of the district of Dourdan similarly wrote in April that the people were outraged because the *laboueurs* did not bring grain to market. They preferred to sell at their farms or at the inns where the grain was priced three to four *livres* higher than the market price. The grain was transported by the millers at night, milled and sent out of the communes. The directory pointed out that since grain cost more in Paris, millers and flour merchants bought up grain in Dourdan and sold it in Paris. The Directory of the district of Dourdan further charged that some of the grain was even being taken abroad. Its solution was to call for a law that would prohibit all grain transports by night.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Sedillon's letter is dated March 15, 1792, A.N., DXL/16.

⁶⁶ Letter is dated April 17, 1792, A.N., DXL/16.

In a separate report, the *Conseil général* of the commune of Dourdan said in March that all the smaller cultivators had sold all their grain, while the *laboureurs* with larger exploitations had only a third of their harvest left. Considering that the next harvest was five months away, the *conseil général* recommended that all grain exports be severely controlled. Sedillon made the same point in his report. Six months before the harvest, he said, the granaries and granges of Étampes were empty.⁶⁷ A week later, Le Brun, President of the Directory of the department of the Seine-et-Oise pointed out in a speech to the Legislative Assembly that the suspicion that grain was being exported overseas was not unreasonable. As long as merchants purchased grain with the depreciated *assignats* it did not matter that they bought it for higher prices than were current abroad. They could still make enormous profits if they sold this grain abroad in exchange for metallic currency.⁶⁸

A comparison of prices

Local officials, of course, consistently argued that because prices of grain were higher in many of the markets of the departments surrounding the Seine-et-Oise, grain merchants and cultivators found

⁶⁷ Report of the *Conseil général* of the commune of Dourdan, dated March 21, A.D.Y., 1 LM 459; Sedillon's letter is dated March 15, 1792, A.N., DXL/16.

⁶⁸ *Archives parlementaires*, 1st ser., 15:404, Le Brun's speech of March 23 to the National Assembly.

it more profitable to sell in those markets than in the local markets of the Seine-et-Oise. The market singled out most frequently was Paris, the largest consumer market in France. The point to consider is if the officers were right, if the price differential made it more profitable to sell in Paris even after the cost of transport was taken into account.

The lack of grain price lists for Paris in the years 1791 and 1792 prevents a systematic comparison between prices in the capital and the Seine-et-Oise. However, one important strand of evidence makes an estimate possible. Under the First Maximum of May 4, 1793, the market price of a 320 *livre* sack was fixed at 69 *livres*, 7 *sol*s and 2 *deniers* in Paris,⁶⁹ while that of the 325 *livre* sack was fixed at 56 *livres* in the Seine-et-Oise.⁷⁰ The First Maximum(s) was fixed on the basis of average prices prevalent in the various markets of each department in the preceding few months, so it offers a fair approximation of prices prevalent in the various departments in the early months of 1793. It is obvious that under the First Maximum, grain prices were higher in Paris than in the Seine-et-Oise. Under the Second Maximum, the cost of transporting flour was fixed at 5 *sol*s per

⁶⁹ Law passed on May 17 1793, by the department of Paris, see A.N., F/11/221.

⁷⁰ Law of May 10, 1793 passed by the department of the Seine-et-Oise, A.N., F/11/221.

lieue per quintal.⁷¹ If this is taken as the average cost of transport, it turns out that Montlhéry, situated at a distance of only twenty km from Paris, could make huge profits from the sale of flour to Paris.⁷² A cultivator from around Montlhéry, selling at the local market would make 56 *livres* from the sale of a 325 *livre* sack of flour or 55 *livres* 2.6 *sols* from the sale of a 320 *livre* sack of flour. That same cultivator could sell a 320 *livre* sack of flour in Paris for 69 *livres*, 7 *sols* and 2 *deniers*. The cost of transporting a 320 *livre* sack of flour from Montlhéry to Paris at 5 *sols* per *lieue per quintal* is 4 *livres* 2 *sols*. This means a cultivator from Montlhéry could make 65 *livres* 5 *sols* 2 *deniers* from the sale of a 320 *livre* sack of flour or a profit of around 10 *livres* over the 55 *livre* asking price at Montlhéry. It is no wonder that Montlhéry was the largest grain and flour exporting market to Paris.

This argument is based on the assumption that cultivators sold their own grain and flour in the markets of Paris. Some *laboueurs* did sell their marketable produce themselves, in order to avoid the

⁷¹ Under the First Maximum(s) only the maximum prices of flour and grain were set in each department. Transport costs were not regulated. It was under the Second Maximum that uniform prices for all essential commodities were set for the whole nation. Transport costs were regulated as were the wages of workers. Transport costs set under the Second Maximum of September 11, 1793, are to be found in Évrard and Defresne, *Les subsistances*, 2:58.

⁷² *lieue* = 3.898 km. 1 *quintal* = 100 *livres*.

middle-men and big grain-merchants.⁷³ But this was not always the case. Richer *fermiers* might have sent their domestics to sell grain in the markets. Merchant middlemen also bought grain from the markets of the Seine-et-Oise and from the homes of cultivators.⁷⁴ The fact remains that it was profitable to buy grain from the Seine-et-Oise and resell it in markets where profits were higher. Étampes was located forty-four km away from Paris and so the costs of transport to Paris were considerably higher, 9.03 *livres* for every 320 *livre* sack of flour transported to Paris. But even then, a cultivator or grain merchant from Étampes could make 60 *livres* 7 *sols* 2 *deniers* from every 320 *livre* sack of flour sold in Paris or around 5 *livres* more on every sack of flour sold in Étampes.

Cultivators and grain merchants from Étampes could also make immense profits from transporting grain to the southern markets. An interesting example of the efforts of the southern departments to attract grain from the north is to be found in Georges Lefebvre's *Études Orléannaises*. The department of the Loiret arbitrarily fixed the price of the 325 *livre* sack of flour at 55 *livres* 11 *sols* 4 *deniers* under the First Maximum. Then, finding it impossible to attract enough wheat, the various towns began to bend the rules. The

⁷³ See the document describing the activities of the *laboueurs* in the Essonnes valley in Pierre Goubert, *The Ancien Régime: French Society, 1600-1750*, trans. Steve Cox (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974), 119-120.

⁷⁴ For more on the grain merchants of Paris, see Kaplan, *Provisioning Paris*, 122-220.

district of Orléans for example, began to pay a transport subsidy of 2 *sols* per *lieue* and per sack, a measure that was illegal under the First Maximum. The *Conseil général* of the district of Orléans admitted that this measure had effectively doubled the price of grain sold at Orléans.⁷⁵ Rouveau and Vaillant's report reflects the concern of the local officials over export of flour from Étampes to the departments south of the Loire.

It is clear that cultivators and grain merchants had an incentive to sell in the markets of the grain importing regions bordering the Seine-et-Oise rather than in the markets within the department. This was especially true in 1791-1792, when the southern departments were willing to pay high prices to make up for the shortfall in their own harvests. The northern departments, including the Seine-et-Oise, had only an average harvest. As demand from the south as well as from Paris exceeded supply in the Seine-et-Oise, grain prices rose steadily. Had this been a period of regulation, local officials could have placed limits on prices and exports. Not being able to impose limits in 1791, they began to demand a return to some of the regulations that had been in force before the period of liberalization of commerce.

⁷⁵ Georges Lefebvre, *Études Orléannaises*, 2 vols. (Centre national de la recherche scientifique), 2:119.

The Reaction

What local officials and notables suggested be imposed by law, the rioters sought to put into effect on their own initiative. Angered and frightened by the dearth of grain in the market-place, they tried to force the cultivators to bring grain to the local markets and to prevent them from taking or selling grain to distant markets. They also battled the rising prices of grain by setting limits on prices. Rising prices meant great hardship for ordinary consumers because wages did not keep pace with prices. Fig. 4.5, which charts variations in wages and wheat prices⁷⁶ from 1776 through 1791 in the canton of Maule, district of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, shows that during periods of liberalization of the grain trade, grain prices always rose faster than wages. The reverse was true during periods of regulated trade. Even during the lean years of 1783 and 1784, wages increased at a faster rate than grain prices. Conversely during the terrible years of 1788 and 1789, when the grain trade was deregulated, grain prices rose faster than wages. Grain prices fell to a very low level during 1790 when the harvest yielded a bumper crop, but began to rise again in 1791. Far from keeping pace with grain prices, wages fell during 1791.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ In the figure, wages and grain prices have been represented in proportion to the minimum during this period.

⁷⁷ Source: A.D.Y., 2 LM 71, District of Saint-Germain-en-Laye.

Wages and Grain Prices in Maule 1776 through 1791

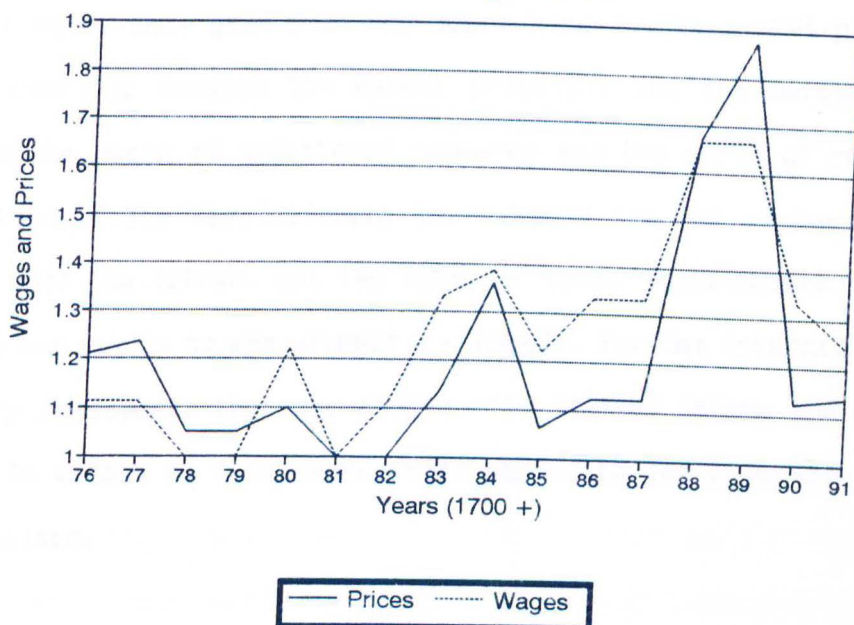


Fig. 4.5. Grain prices and wages in the canton of Maule, district of Saint-Germain, 1776-1791. Source: A.D.Y., 2 LM 71, district of Saint-Germain-en-Laye.

Thus it may be argued, that in 1789 and 1791 the effects of a bad (1789) or average (1791) harvest were accentuated by the policy of liberalization of commerce because there was now no control on prices. Freedom of commerce gave the cultivators the right to stay away from the market-place. Away from the market-place and on their own farms, it was the cultivators who had the upper hand; away from the watchful eyes of the crowd, they decided to whom they would sell,

at what prices they would sell and what their margins of profit would be.

The rioters sought to take away this freedom by reimposing the ancient rules that gave them the upper hand in the market-place. It was a conflict between the market principle and the market-place, between the world of unfettered commerce and the world of rules and regulations.⁷⁸ The revolutionary years would see the victory of the former over the latter. But the riots of these years showed that the victory was not to be won without a struggle, for the interests of the ordinary consumers, that is, people with limited income and with no or little access to land, were still wedded to the principle of the market-place.

Medium of Payments

In addition to deregulation, other problems further sharpened the food crisis in the Seine-et-Oise. The problem of medium of payments, which had been a source of disquiet since 1789, was accentuated from early 1792. From 1789 and even earlier, the nation had been suffering from a lack of metallic currency. There were several reasons for the scarcity of gold and silver. These metals were widely hoarded. The exchanges had depreciated sufficiently to make the

⁷⁸ For more on this conflict between the market-place and the market principle, see Kaplan, *Provisioning Paris*, 23-40.

export of metals extremely lucrative. The government also required gold and silver for certain essential purchases.⁷⁹

The substitutes for metallic currency were treated with suspicion, because of the fear of devaluation. In November 1789, the Municipality of Versailles complained that the merchants whom they had charged with the provisioning of the city were refusing to accept the notes of the *caisse d'escompte* because they were worthless in the market-place.⁸⁰ In 1790, the *assignats* became the substitute for the rapidly disappearing metallic currency.⁸¹ But the *assignats* were originally issued in large denominations, mainly to keep them out of the hands of the poor. In 1791, the smallest denomination was that of 5 *livres*. The shortage of small coins in the market made it impossible to exchange the *assignats* for smaller currency, causing great hardship to small buyers in the market-place. In addition, cultivators were

⁷⁹ S.E. Harris, *The Assignats* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930), 168.

⁸⁰ Letters of the Municipality of Versailles dated November 28, 1789, to Necker and of the *Comité permanent* of Versailles dated November 25, 1789, to M. de Montaran, Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:175, 1:107.

⁸¹ The *assignats* were first issued in December 1789 as interest bearing government bonds which were backed by the security of national properties. In September 1790, the government decided that interest would no longer be paid on the *assignats*, and they became legal tender. For a short history of the *assignats*, see Michel Bruguière, "Assignats" in François Furet and Mona Ozouf, *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 426-436.

wary of accepting *assignats* as payment for grain.⁸² The solution proposed was a large issue of small metallic currency, which was not really feasible considering the shortage of gold and silver in France. Pierre Dolivier, curé of Mauchamps and a member of the *Société des amis de la Constitution de Versailles*, proposed in a session held on September 6, 1791, that all vases of gold and silver in all the churches be melted down and transformed into small coin, but his solution was not at all graciously received.⁸³ The government's response was to issue 300 million *livres* worth of *assignats* in denominations of 10, 15, 25 and 50 *sous* in January 1792. The intention was that the *assignat* should entirely take the place of hidden and exported metal coin. But the *assignats* never won the confidence of either the buyers or the sellers. And so the problem of medium of payments continued unabated.

The *assignats* suffered some depreciation in 1791 and 1792 and this itself led to a rise in prices. But a close look indicates that except during the period of the food riots in February-March 1792, the rates at which food prices rose were consistently higher than the rates of depreciation. Figs 4.1-4.3 presented rates of increase in wheat prices in some of the markets in the Seine-et-Oise. Figs

⁸² Extract from the register of deliberations of the Directory of the district of Etampes dated September 10, 1791, A.D.Y., 1 LM 459; 1 LM 461; deliberations of the *Société des Amis de la Constitution de Versailles*, session of September 9, 1791, Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:150.

⁸³ Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:150

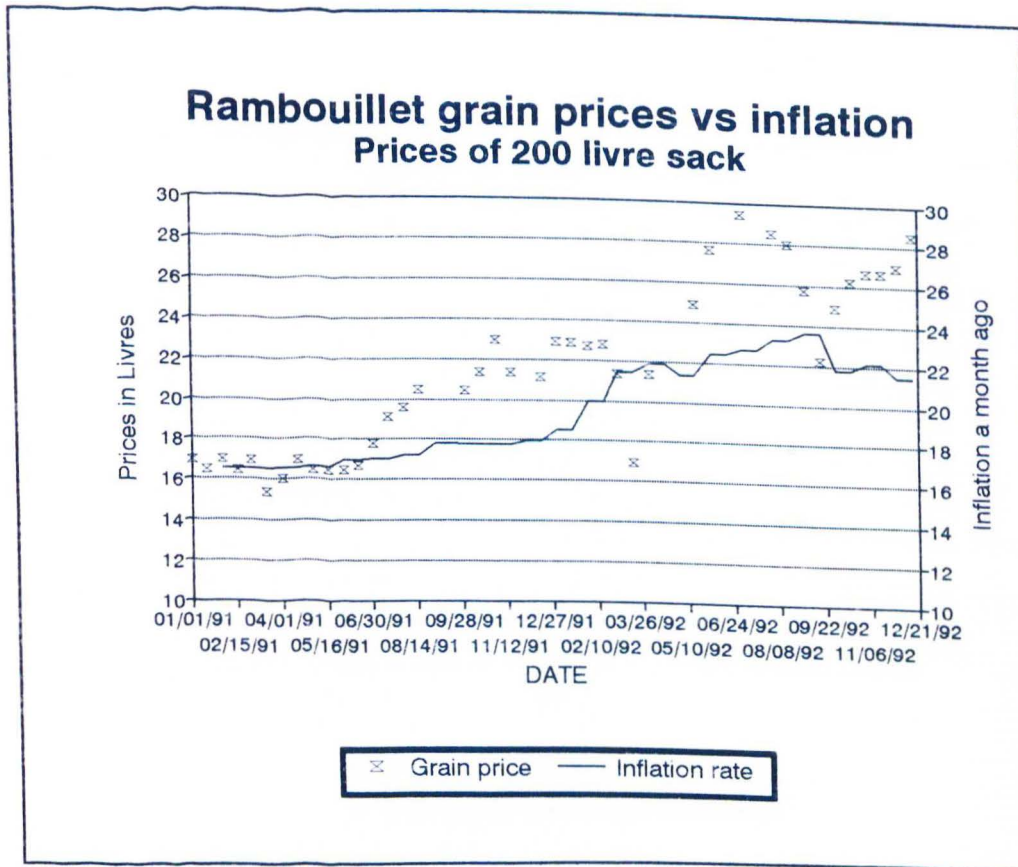


Fig. 4.6. Rambouillet grain prices vs inflation. Source: Pierre Caron, *Tableaux de dépréciation du papier-monnaie* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1909), 407-408.

4.6-4.11 compare those rates with the rate of inflation.⁸⁴ All of these graphs show that in the Seine-et-Oise, after June 1791, food prices rose at rates which were consistently above the rate of

⁸⁴ In these figures, the inflation plotted against a certain point of time corresponds to gold prices one month prior to that point. This lag has been put in because it is expected that grain prices should follow the general inflation rate. For each graph, the inflation index has been proportioned to the value 16.50 on 1/1/91, which (in *livres*) is roughly the price of the 200 *livre* sack of grain on that date for all of the markets considered.

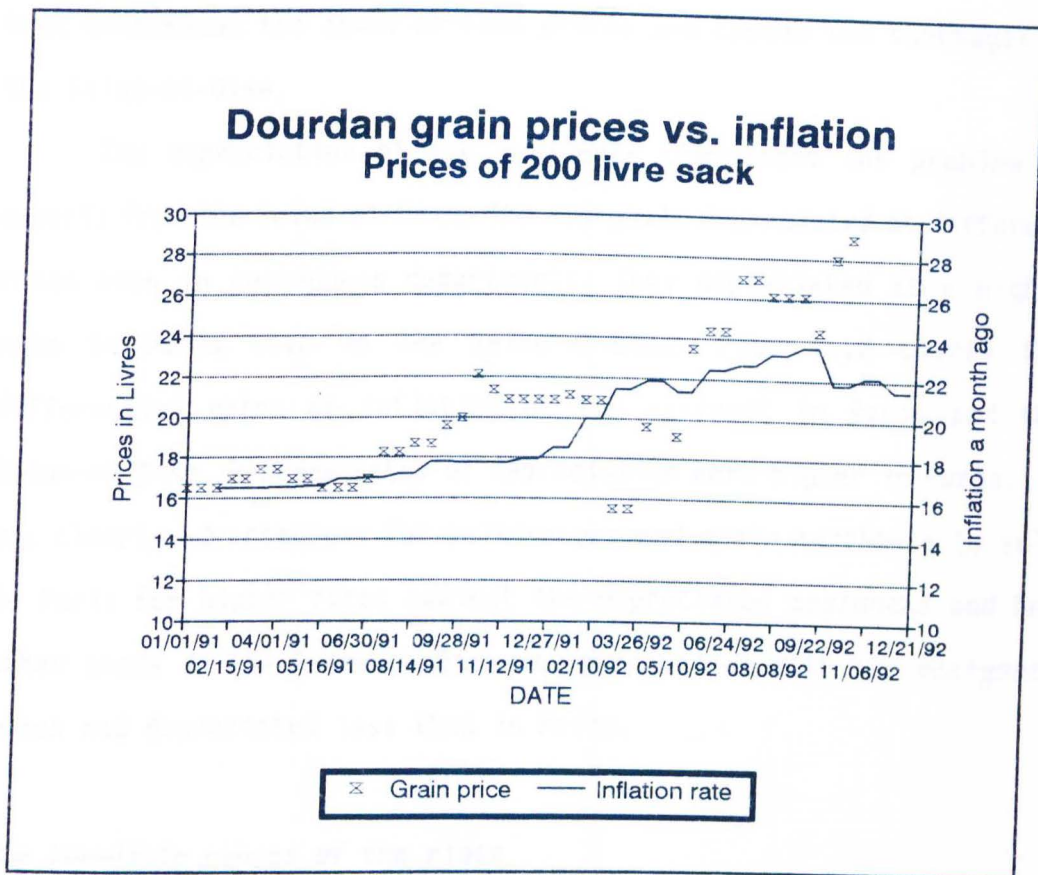


Fig. 4.7. Dourdan grain prices vs inflation. Source: Pierre Caron, *Tableaux de dépréciation du papier-monnaie* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1909), 407-408.

inflation.⁸⁵ Moreover, grain prices and the inflation rate were moving in the same general direction, suggesting that grain prices were driving inflation. Thus it is possible to argue that even though the depreciation of the *assignat* contributed to the rise of food prices, ultimately it was the possibility of exports and increased grain sales

⁸⁵ Tables of the rates of depreciation of the *assignat* can be found in Pierre Caron, *Tableaux de dépréciation du papier-monnaie* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1909). For rates of depreciation in Paris, see 386-388. For the Seine-et-Oise, see 407-408.

that determined the level of food prices and caused the shortages in the Seine-et-Oise.

The depreciation of the *assignats* compounded the problem of exports from the Seine-et-Oise. The *assignats* depreciated at different rates even in contiguous departments. They depreciated at a higher rate in Paris than in the Seine-et-Oise. Fig. 4.12 charts the differential rates of inflation of the *assignat* in Paris and the Seine-et-Oise. Because rates of depreciation were higher in Paris, it was clearly advantageous for cultivators and grain merchants to sell in Paris for higher rates against the depreciated *assignats* and buy other goods in the Seine-et-Oise at lower prices with the *assignats* which had depreciated less than in Paris.

The immediate causes of the riots

Several developments led up to the riots in February and March 1792. From January the air was filled with rumors that war was about to break out with the European countries, which in turn provoked a rush to buy food and hoard supplies. This must have brought about an increase in grain traffic and caused increased fears of shortages. In February and March the roads and rivers became more accessible after the winter and the grain convoys began to move again. The convoys offered proof of what the people had been saying all along -- that local markets were empty because *fermiers* preferred to sell at higher prices in distant markets. Beginning on February 13 and continuing

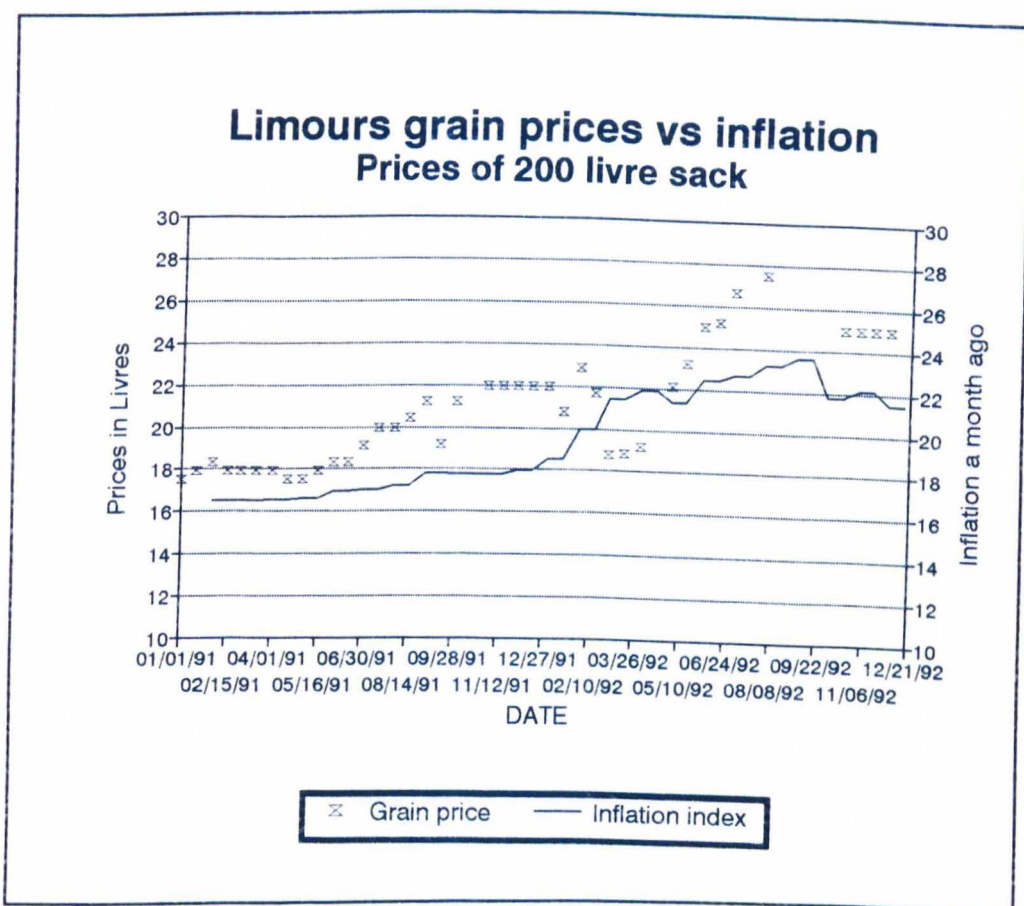


Fig. 4.8. Limours grain prices vs inflation. Source: Pierre Caron, *Tableaux de dépréciation du papier-monnaie* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1909), 407-408.

through April 1792, most of the major markets situated on the main routes by which grain was taken out of the department were affected by the riots. Longjumeau, Montlhéry, and Étampes on the route to Orléans, and Dourdan and Limours on the routes to Chartres were scenes of riots. Only Arpajon, on the route to Orléans appears to have escaped a major grain riot.

The reasons why Arpajon remained calm might serve as a commentary on the causes of the riots elsewhere. In a letter written

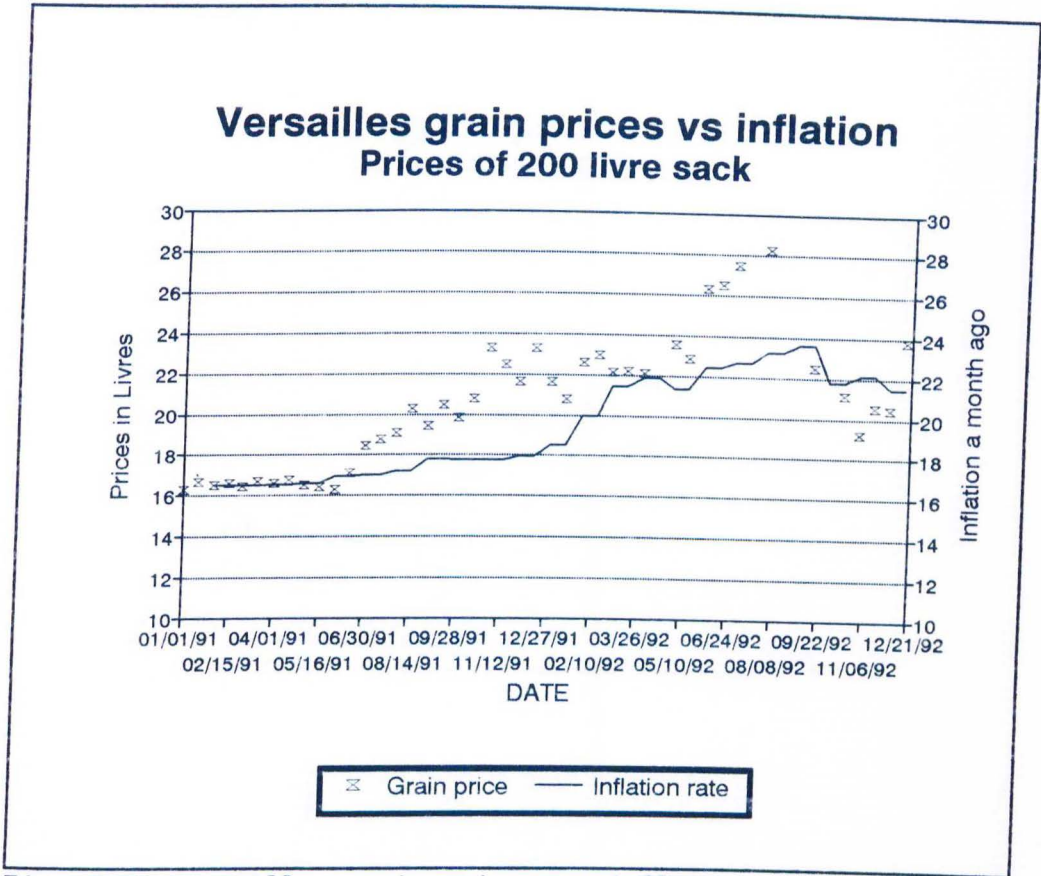


Fig. 4.9. Versailles grain prices vs inflation. Source: Pierre Caron, *Tableaux de dépréciation du papier-monnaie* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1909), 407-408.

to the Directory of the department on March 2, 1792, the *procureur syndic* said that Arpajon had remained peaceful despite the effervescence in the surrounding markets. The reason was that the price of wheat had fallen on their own from 30 *livres* to 24 *livres* and the market had remained well furnished.⁸⁶ The fall in prices might not

⁸⁶ Report of the *procureur syndic* dated March 2, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 461. Also address of the municipal corps of Arpajon to the Legislative Assembly, dated March 24, 1792, A.N., DXL/16.

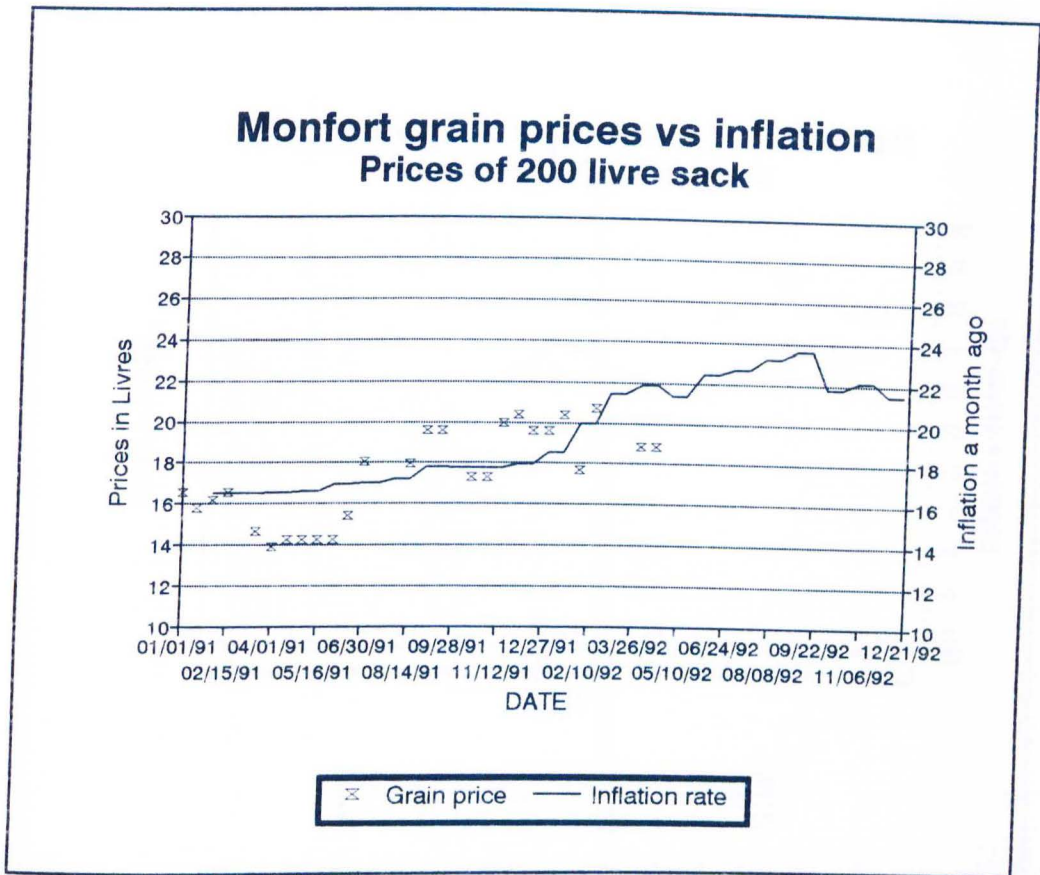


Fig. 4.10. Monfort grain prices vs inflation. Source: Pierre Caron, *Tableaux de dépréciation du papier-monnaie* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1909), 407-408.

have been completely natural. Arpajon was nearest Montlhéry and the events of February 13 and 20 might have had an impact on the *laboureurs* and *fermiers* who took grain there. The *procureur syndic* also pointed to the fact that the national guard of Arpajon and Saint-Germain combined, as well as the national gendarmerie, had played an exemplary role in maintaining the peace.

In the latter respect Arpajon was an exception, for the other markets were not as well policed. The few straggling men of the

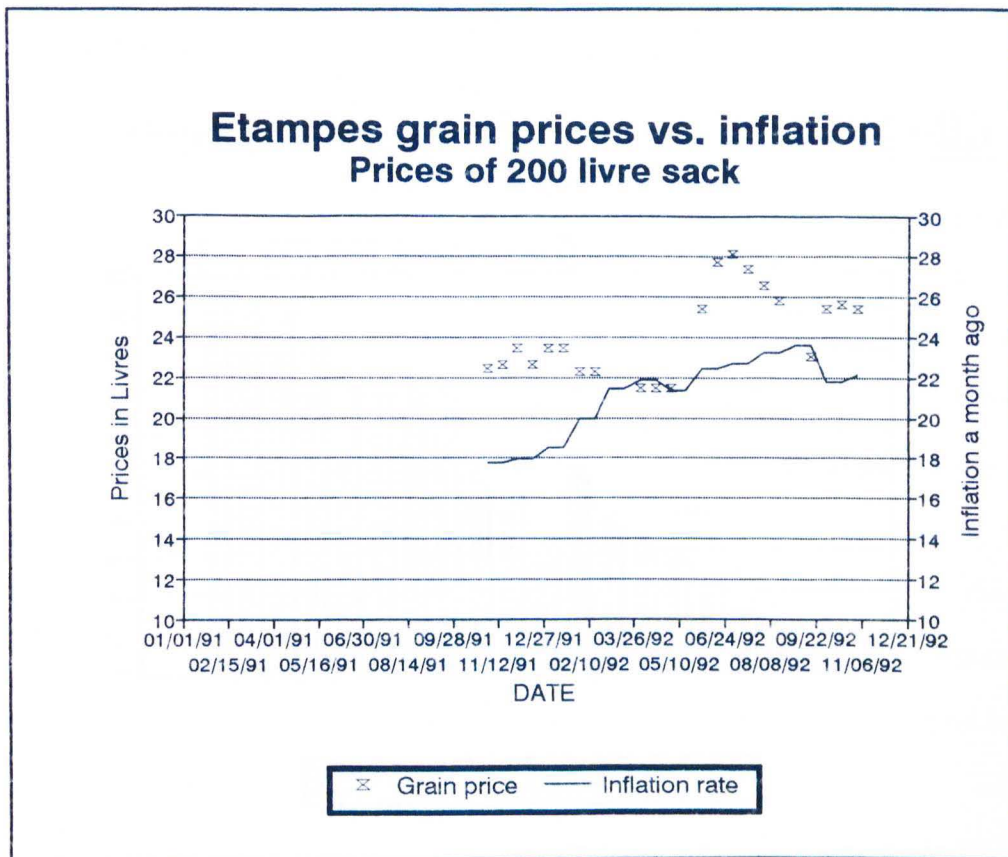


Fig. 4.11. Étampes grain prices vs inflation. Source: Pierre Caron, *Tableaux de dépréciation du papier-monnaie* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1909), 407-408.

national gendarmerie, posted in the towns, were an object of derision rather than of fear. In fact, the Municipality of Montlhéry refused to allow the brigades of the national gendarmerie (requisitioned by the Directory of the department) to enter its town on both February 17 and 20. It pointed out that the men were too few in numbers to

Depreciation of the assignat: 1791-95 Paris and Seine-et-Oise

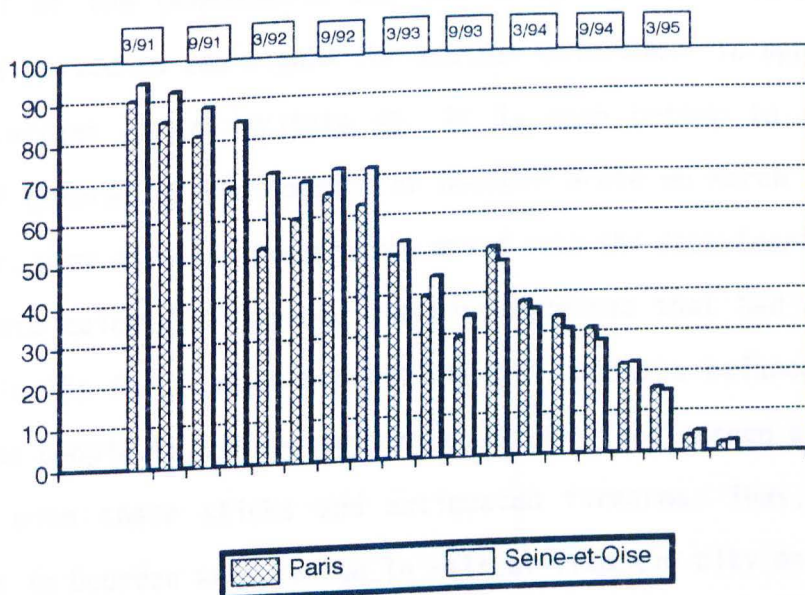


Fig. 4.12. Depreciation of the *assignat* in Paris and the Seine-et-Oise. Source: Caron, *Tableau de dépréciation*, 407-408.

impose order and would only irritate the crowd.⁸⁷ The lieutenant of the First division of the national gendarmerie reported that, while

⁸⁷ Report of the captain of the national gendarmerie of Étampes dated February 20 and report of the lieutenant of the national gendarmerie of the First division dated February 27, 1792, A.N., F/7/3689/7.

his men were retreating from Montlhéry, they had been hooted and whistled at by the rioters!⁸⁸

In the following days the municipalities began to dread the arrival of the gendarmerie and the troops of the line, for this usually served as the signal for another outbreak. "To oppose a dike to a torrent is to irritate it. It is much better to cede", the *Conseil général* of the commune of Dourdan wrote on March 15, 1792.⁸⁹ However, when sizeable troops were moved into the department in April, the riots quickly collapsed. The circumstances that had caused the riots in the first place had not changed, but the balance of power had. The people in the countryside could not face cannon and mounted troops with their sticks and antiquated firearms. Thus, when the rioters in Dourdan were forced to retreat from the city on March 24, they promised to come back another day after buying a piece of cannon with the help of subscriptions raised from twenty villages!⁹⁰

A widespread complaint that was heard in the spring of 1792 was the lack of work in the countryside.⁹¹ During the population surveys

⁸⁸ Report of the captain of the national gendarmerie of Étampes dated February 20 and report of the lieutenant of the national gendarmerie of the First division dated February 27, 1792, A.N., F/7/ 3689/7.

⁸⁹ A.D.Y., 1 LM 459.

⁹⁰ Report of Huet and Rouveau, dated March 24, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

⁹¹ Reports of the *Conseil général* of Dourdan dated March 10 and March 21, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 459; report of the Directory of the district of Étampes dated March 5, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 408; petition

done in the course of the revolutionary years in the department of the Seine-et-Oise, local officials came across widespread rural unemployment. In their personal observations, they mentioned that agriculture did not provide enough work to support the people. Some argued that too much land was controlled by one *fermier* which increased the number of unemployed and landless. To increase employment they recommended the building of roads and encouraging the poor and the weak (women, old men and children) to take up spinning, weaving and lace making, all of which were underdeveloped in the Seine-et-Oise.⁹² In March and April preparatory work for the summer harvest began. The large number of people who were unemployed and underemployed were filled with fear at the rise of prices. They must have realized the extent of the misery awaiting them in the months ahead when prices would rise steadily until they reached the summer peak, the *soudure* or waiting period, before the harvest came in.

Prices were high enough by March to trigger riots everywhere in the department. Even the usually large markets like Montlhéry and Étampes were consistently undersupplied. In the market of Montlhéry,

addressed by the Municipalities of the district of Limours to the Directory of the department on March 26, 1792, A.N., F/7/3689/7.

⁹² See especially A.D.Y., 1 LM 443, for example, observations of the officials of the communes of Livry and Ecoeu (district of Gonesse), Corbeil and Sucy (district of Corbeil), Saint-Germain en Laye (district of Saint-Germain), Chamarande, Brenillot, Villeconin (district of Etampes), Limay and Magny (district of Mantes) and Grisy (district of Pontoise).

the largest in the department, about 300-350 *muids*⁹³ of grain were usually sold every week. Étampes, the largest wheat market, was furnished with as much as 150 *muids* per week in a good year.⁹⁴ But in February and March 1792, there was never enough grain for the consumers. The municipal officers of Montlhéry complained that there were only 200 sacks of grain (40,000 *livres*) in the market-place on February 20, and 300 sacks (60,000 *livres*) on February 27, 1792.⁹⁵ In the smaller markets, conditions were worse. At the market of Meulan on March 19, there was only 25 *setiers*⁹⁶ of grain instead of the 300 or so that were usually brought there at that time of the year.⁹⁷

The riots only made matters worse because it prompted the *laboureurs* to stay away from the markets, as the local officials never tired of telling the rioters. On March 14, for example, there were only 240 *setiers* of grain at the market-place at Montlhéry.⁹⁸ Almost all of the markets that Huet and Rouveau visited suffered from a

⁹³ *muid* = 2880 *livres* or 12 *setiers* or 1872 litres.

⁹⁴ For descriptions of the markets of Montlhéry and Étampes, see Kaplan, *Provisioning Paris*, 94-103.

⁹⁵ According to the measure prevalent at Montlhéry one sack contained 200 *livres* of grain. See A.N., F/7/3689/6 for the comments of municipal officials.

⁹⁶ 1 *setier* = 1/12 *muid* or 156 litres. Also see glossary.

⁹⁷ Extract from the deliberations of the Municipality of Meulan, dated March 19, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 460.

⁹⁸ Report of Huet and Rouveau dated March 12, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 459 and A.N., DXL/16.

similar shortage of grain. Also, in the prevalent atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, there was a rush to buy up all the grain that could be found and to stock up on supplies. This put further pressure on the market-place. At the market-place of Palaiseau on March 13, there were 105 sacks of grain, double the amount that was usually brought there. Yet there were complaints from those who could not buy enough grain.⁹⁹ As during any crisis of subsistence, so in March 1792, panic only intensified the effects of scarcity.

Autumn 1792: The Effects of War

The harvest of 1792 was abundant throughout the north of France,¹⁰⁰ but conditions did not improve appreciably in the Seine-et-Oise. The price charts show that grain prices continued to remain high in some regions, even in August 1792.¹⁰¹ The market-places were still not adequately provisioned. The impact of war was now making itself increasingly felt in different ways. What was most

⁹⁹ Report of Huet and Rouveau dated March 13, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 459.

¹⁰⁰ Pierre Caron ed., "Une enquête sur la récolte de 1792," *Bulletin d'histoire économique de la Révolution* 1 (1913): 161-184. According to Caron, the Seine-et-Oise did not send census results. Goujon, the *procureur général syndic* of the department made a report on January 15, 1793 from which it appears that only the district of Versailles even completed the census of the harvest of 1792. For Goujon's report see, Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:26.

¹⁰¹ Unfortunately, grain prices for the last few months of 1792 are missing for most of the markets of the Seine-et-Oise. Figures 1-3 show grain prices in markets for which figures are available.

disadvantageous to ordinary buyers was the almost total lack of metallic currency. Comments of local officials indicate that in many markets all transactions were conducted through the medium of the paper money in circulation -- the *billets de confiance*, *billets patriotiques*, and *assignats*.¹⁰² Cultivators were understandably reluctant to accept paper money as payment both because its value was fast depreciating and because there was a large amount of false paper money in circulation.¹⁰³ The refusal of the cultivators to accept paper money caused trouble in the market-place and provided the cultivators with another excuse to stay away.¹⁰⁴

Once again there was an outpouring of complaints against the *laboureurs* and *fermiers*. The commune of Triel in the district of Saint-Germain-en-Laye declared that a nation of 20 million citizens

¹⁰² Observations from the markets of Dourdan, Rambouillet and Saint Arnoult for the first two weeks of July; from Étampes, Angerville and Rambouillet for the first two weeks of August; from Étampes for the last week of August; from Angerville for all weeks of September; from Étampes, Angerville and Limours for the first two weeks of October; from Dourdan and Étampes during the last two weeks of October; from Étampes and Rambouillet during the last two weeks of November, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 458.

¹⁰³ For the depreciation of the *assignats*, see the letter written by the mayor of Versailles to the Minister of the Interior, dated December 5, 1792 in A. N., F/11/221; also see letter written by the Municipality of Houdan to Roland, Minister of the Interior, dated September 8, 1792, which spoke of the refusal of the *fermiers* to accept paper money in A.N., F/11/221. For the false money in circulation, see observations from the market of Angerville for the last two weeks of September 1792 in A.D.Y., 1 LM 458.

¹⁰⁴ Observations from the market of Rambouillet during the first two weeks of November 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM, 458.

could not be held hostage by 88,000 *fermiers* and that after the destruction of the *caste nobiliaire et la caste sacerdotale* there still remained the *caste des fermiers* to destroy.¹⁰⁵ In Étampes, angry people promised to slit the throats of all the grain merchants in town.¹⁰⁶ At Montfort and at Meulan there were searches of farms to determine whether grain was being hoarded.¹⁰⁷ In a petition to the Convention, some of the communes of the district of Montfort commented bitterly that the enemies of the Revolution who wanted to sow division among the French peoples were counting on the *fermiers* for achieving their cruel projects.¹⁰⁸ The air was thick with suspicion and rumors which were always a prelude to riots. There were rumors of grain being deliberately destroyed, hoarded or spirited away. A shipful of flour destined for Rouen was stopped at Mantes on September 23, 1792, on the suspicion that it was being sent to a destination where it could be

¹⁰⁵ Letter written on October 13, 1792, to the Minister of the Interior, A.N., F/11/221.

¹⁰⁶ Report of the captain of the national gendarmerie, performing the functions of lieutenant, dated October 6, 1792, A.N., F/11/221.

¹⁰⁷ Report of the *Conseil général* of the commune of Montfort, dated October 25, 1792 in A.N., F/11/221; for Meulan see G. Rocher, *Le district de Saint-Germain-en-Laye pendant la Révolution* (Paris: F.Rieder & Cie., 1914), 211.

¹⁰⁸ *Petition des paroisses de Montfort d'Amaury, les Mesnuls, Saint-Leger et Grosrouvres pour l'approvisionnement des halles et la diminution des grains*, A.N., F/11/221.

hoarded.¹⁰⁹ At Meulan, a rumor spread that the river bed of the Epte was covered with wheat which had been dumped there through malice.¹¹⁰

Another effect of the war can be seen in the frequent complaints from cultivators about the lack of threshers in the countryside. Many of the cultivators complained that the harvested grain could not be made ready for market because of the lack of threshers. Administrators suspected that this was yet another excuse on the part of cultivators to stay away from the market-place,¹¹¹ but took steps to deal with the problem. The law of October 30, 1792, decreed that farmers who required more threshers should address themselves to their municipalities for help. These were the first symptoms of a shortage which would assume larger proportions in the following years.

A more direct impact of the war could be felt in the pressure of volunteers who were garrisoned in the various districts on their way to the frontiers. From the petitions addressed to the Minister of the Interior, it appears that the northern districts -- Mantes,

¹⁰⁹ Extract from the deliberations of the *Conseil général* of the commune of Mantes in permanent session, dated September 23, 1792, A.N., F/11/221.

¹¹⁰ Report of the *Conseil général* of the commune of Meulan, dated November 3, 1792, A.N., F/11/221.

¹¹¹ The *procureur général syndic* of the department of Seine-et-Oise commented, "ils (les possesseurs de grains) ne voulurent plus aussi porter aux marchés et pour qu'on ne pût pas les y contraindre ils conservaient leurs grains en gerbes et prétextaient une fausse impossibilité de le battre," from *Extrait du compte rendu au nom du directoire provisoire*, dated January 15, 1793, Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:96.

Pontoise, Saint-Germain, Montfort -- were the most burdened.¹¹² In its letter to Roland, the Municipality of Houdan complained that the passage of troops was a terrible burden, because it meant that there were as many as six hundred more individuals to feed per week. The letter said that on September 21, two thousand volunteers from the department of the Orne, armed with orders for setting up overnight camp at Houdan had suddenly arrived. The town's resources ran out and it had to have recourse to the millers who supplied flour to Paris, to provide the much needed flour to bake bread for the city. This sudden arrival of volunteers was becoming quite a regular feature, the municipality complained.¹¹³

On November 14, the *procureur général syndic* of Versailles wrote to the Minister of the Interior that more than a hundred thousand volunteers had passed through the department of the Seine-et-Oise and used up its harvest. The result was that the Seine-et-Oise now had to look outward for its subsistence.¹¹⁴ This letter also pointed out the other standard cause of scarcity in the Seine-et-Oise, that is, the

¹¹² Petition (undated) of the Municipality of Triel Bourg, district of Saint-Germain en Laye; extract from the deliberations of the *Conseil général* of the commune of Mantes in permanent session, dated September 23, 1792; letter written by the Municipality of Houdan to Roland, Minister of the Interior, dated September 27, 1792, all in A.N., F/11/221.

¹¹³ Letter written by the Municipality of Houdan to the National Convention, dated October 11, 1792, A.N. F/11/221.

¹¹⁴ Letter of the *administrateur commissaire provisoire aux fonctions de procureur général syndic*, dated November 14, 1792, A.N., F/11/221.

looming presence of Paris and its enormous consumption of grain originating from the Seine-et-Oise. The law of September 16, 1792, which forced cultivators to take grain to market but did not specify which market they should provision, had worsened relations between Paris and Versailles. Because prices were higher in the markets of Paris, farmers naturally preferred to take grain there rather than to the local markets. This prompted the *procureur général syndic* to comment bitterly that Paris alone had reaped the benefits of the law of September 16.

In addition to the farmers taking their grain to Paris, commissioners from the capital and from the army travelled from market-place to market-place and even to the farms, buying whatever grain they could find at any prices the cultivators demanded, with no questions asked. It was the responsibility of the Minister of the Interior, the *procureur* charged, to stop these commissioners from starving the neighboring departments through these ruinous bargains.¹¹⁵

In addition to the purchases made for Paris and for the armies, there were those made for the southern departments. In October 1792, there was a public row between the department of the Indre-et-Loir and the district of Étampes. Three commissioners from the Indre-et-Loir had been sent to the neighboring departments to make purchases of

¹¹⁵ In addition to letter dated November 14, 1792 see also letter dated December 9, 1792, A.N., F/11/221.

flour and grain for the town of Tours which was suffering from a serious shortage of provisions. The commissioners made their purchases. But the flour they purchased in Étampes was stopped in the town. The department of Indre-et-Loir took up the matter with the Minister of the Interior who ordered that the flour be transported to Tours as soon as possible. For months all attempts to free the grain failed, possibly because the administrators of the Seine-et-Oise did not want to see the grain released. The commissioners sent by the Directory of the department of the Seine-et-Oise to Tours came back from a failed mission to report that "there is nothing to hope for from a people menaced by famine because of the powerlessness of the law and the manoeuvres of the cultivators."¹¹⁶ The last we hear of this matter is a commitment made by the Municipality of Étampes on December 5, to ensure that commissioners sent by the department of the Indre-et-Loir and the commune of Chateauroux (department of the Indre) would face no obstacles in making purchases of grain within the district.

¹¹⁶ "Il n'y a rien à esperer d'un peuple menacé de la famine par l'impuissance de la loi et les manoeuvres des cultivateurs." Letter of the *procureur général syndic* of the department of the Seine-et-Oise to the Minister of the Interior, dated December 6, 1792, A.N., F/11/221. For the quarrel between Tours and Étampes see also letter of the Minister of the Interior to the administrators of the district of Étampes, dated October 17, 1792 and extracts from the register of deliberations of the Directory of the district of Étampes dated December 5 and December 7, 1792, all in A.N., F/11/221.

The Maximum

Viewed against this background, the reasons for *procureur-général syndic* Goujon's proposal for a maximum on prices becomes clear. It was an attempt to stop the ruinous outflow of grains from the department. The logic was that if there were not larger profits to be made by transporting grains elsewhere, cultivators would lose the monetary incentive which impelled them to hold back grain from the local markets. But Goujon also called for a maximum on the size of exploitations, in addition to that of the maximum on prices. His argument was that a maximum on property would help to combat the widespread landlessness, unemployment and underemployment that was a cause of social tension in the Seine-et-Oise. Thus Goujon's proposals amounted to a program to combat the perceived causes of scarcity (both internal and external) in the department of the Seine-et-Oise.

One part of this economic program -- the Maximum on prices -- was put into effect some six months later as a measure for national defense. The institution of the Maximum on grains and flour on May 4, 1793, and its extension to all necessary goods on September 11, 1793, brought an end to the era of economic freedom and replaced it with a controlled economy propelled by governmental force and will. The government fixed the prices of goods and kept the market-place provisioned through means of requisitions. The government's will was

backed up by force -- the most vivid symbol of which was the *armées révolutionnaires*.¹¹⁷

The Maximum was far from being a perfect system. Throughout the period that it remained in force, from May 1793 to December 1794, it appeared to be teetering on the point of collapse, largely because of the stubborn resistance put up by the cultivators. The latter in turn were backed up by local officials who resented being bullied by Paris and having their own districts drained of grain by the capital, the armies and the districts that lacked enough grain for their needs.¹¹⁸ In the short run, however, the system met its immediate goals. Despite some violations, grain and bread were sold at the decreed prices.¹¹⁹ Markets were far from adequately provisioned but the situation was at least better than in the preceding period. It was the poorer districts -- Mantes, Saint-Germain and Versailles -- that benefitted the

¹¹⁷ One of the best studies of the enforcement of the Maximum is Richard Cobb's, *The People's Armies*, trans. by Marianne Elliot (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 249-312.

¹¹⁸ An example of one such case may be found in Richard Cobb's "L'armée révolutionnaire dans le district de Pontoise (brumaire-germinal an II)" *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française* 193 (1950): 193-220.

¹¹⁹ According to Richard Cobb "... (even the) application of the Maximum to grain was a considerable achievement, and most of the authorities of the Year II recognized that grain and bread had indeed been sold at statutory prices, not only in Paris but throughout France." *The People's Armies*, 308.

most.¹²⁰ Although appearing to be perpetually poised on the brink of disaster, these districts survived with the help of requisitioned grain. Thus Saint-Germain received grain from Gonesse and Pontoise, Mantes from Dourdan, and Versailles from Montfort, Dourdan, Étampes, Gonesse and Corbeil.¹²¹ On the whole the department stayed calm during the period that the Maximum was in operation.

The primary assemblies in the department of the Seine-et-Oise, which had been convened in June 1793 to vote on the Constitution of 1793, came out strongly in support of the Maximum on prices. Several of these assemblies also demanded that the Maximum on property be tied to the Maximum on prices. The three communes of Lisses, Ivry-sur-Seine and Villabbé fixed at 150 *arpents* the maximum quantity of land that a farmer could exploit. As their orator pointed out, this measure would eliminate the aristocracy of farmers who by exploiting 10,000 to 12,000 *arpents* of land dictated the law to two or three villages because of the lack of competition. The assembly of Meulan similarly sought to assure the *subsistance générale*. It maintained that the best way to guarantee this would be to prevent the concentration of too

¹²⁰ For Versailles, Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:1-246; for Saint-Germain, Rocher, *Le district de Saint-Germain-en-Laye*, 220-223; for Mantes, E. Grave, "Les subsistances à Mantes en 1793-1794," *Bulletin de l'histoire économique de la Révolution*, Comité départemental de Seine-et-Oise 2 (1908): 60-70.

¹²¹ Pierre Caron ed., *Commission des subsistances de l'an II. Procès verbaux et actes* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1924), 38, 105-106, 476, 487, 510, 538, 587, 616-617, 636; Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, vol. 2, 113, 114, 117, 282-312.

large an amount of land in the same hands. The assembly of Marines maintained that all farmers should be prohibited from exploiting two farms at the same time, such as joining to one's own farm other small pieces of land because this deprived poor citizens of all means of subsistence.¹²²

After the Maximum

The real misery began in the second half of 1794. The Maximum was so closely associated with Robespierre's regime that it became discredited after his death. That the Maximum had worked despite the opposition of the cultivators was only because of the tremendous apparatus of force set up to make them conform to a system under which prices did not reflect adequately the costs of production. After the fall of Robespierre, this apparatus of force also collapsed. Since cultivators were no longer forced to supply the markets, they did not.

¹²² These primary assemblies had been convened in response to the invitation of the Convention issued on June 27, 1793 to vote on the Constitution of 1793. The original directive had been that these assemblies should limit themselves to a simple "yes" or "no" to express their approval or disapproval of the Constitution. But several hundred of the more than six thousand assemblies summoned accepted no such restraints. They proceeded to express freely their opinions on a large range of subjects, including the matter so close to their hearts, the question of subsistence. Their opinions have been tabled by C. Réffaterre in an article of great value, "Les revendications économiques et sociales des assemblées primaires de Juillet 1793," in *Commission de recherche et de publication des documents relatifs à la vie économique de la Révolution* no. 4 (1906): 321-380. The views of the primary assemblies of the Seine-et-Oise on the Maximum on prices and the Maximum on property may be found in pages 336 and 343-345 respectively.

Finally the Maximum was repealed on 4 nivôse an III (December 24, 1795), although requisitions temporarily stayed in place. Hopes that the cultivators would provision the markets once the ceiling on prices had been removed were soon crushed. Grain simply disappeared from the market-place.

The collapse of the assignats

The primary reason for the flight of grain from the markets was the collapse in the value of the *assignats*. There were complaints in all the districts about the adamant refusal of the cultivators to accept *assignats* as payment for grain. In both Corbeil and Saint-Germain, rioters claimed that they had begged the cultivators to sell them grain and had even offered to pay any price they demanded, but to no avail.¹²³ On 5 germinal an III (March 25, 1795), the Municipality of Versailles denounced the greediness of the cultivators to the Convention:

Ils dédaignent les assignats; le sac de grain se vend 300 livres et le sac de farine 700 livres. Ce même sac de blé est livré pour 36 livres en espèces d'or et d'argent ou échange facilement contre des meubles, des habits ou du linge.¹²⁴

¹²³ Testimony of Theodore Maître, *fils aîné*, district of Corbeil; testimony of François Bouilly and Pierre Laliez, district of Saint-Germain. All documents are in A.D.Y., 42 L 57½.

¹²⁴ Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:435. Richard Cobb has also said, "Whatever they had lost in the Year II the farmers won back tenfold in the unheard of conditions of the Year III. The farms of the

They disdain the *assignats*; the sack of grain sells at 300 *livres* and the sack of flour at 700 *livres*. This same sack of grain is delivered for 36 *livres* in gold currency or is exchanged easily for furniture, clothes and linen.

The Directory of the department also complained to the Committee of Public Safety that:

Les fermiers ont avili les assignats en établissant entre cette monnaie et le numeraire une disproportion effrayante et en provoquant le surhaussement du prix des marchandises par celui qu'il ont mis à la denrée de première nécessité.¹²⁵

The farmers have debased the *assignats* by establishing a frightening disproportion between it and the gold and silver currency and by provoking a rise in the price of goods by raising those on essential foodstuff.

Pays de Caux, the Brie, the Beauce, the Soissonais, of Flanders, the Orléanais and the Gatinais were like well-stocked furniture stores and sale rooms crammed with the pillage of cities. After what he had been through in the Year II the farmer no doubt had some excuse, but his rapacity knew no measure. At least the sans culotte economic restrictions of 1793-1794 had contributed as much to the *magasins de la République* as to the poor man's ill-stocked larder (and each got only the necessary minimum); whereas there was something insultingly indecent about the rural profiteering of the years III and IV. This was more than revenge; it was downright cupidity," *The Police and the People*, 300-301.

¹²⁵ *Compte décadaire* rendered by the administrators of the department of the Seine-et-Oise in the first *décade* of messidor an III.

On 7 ventôse an III (February 25, 1795), the people who waited in vain for grain to arrive at the market-place of Mantes told their mayor:

Les fermiers se refusent à nous vendre des grains pour des assignats; ils nous disent qu'ils ne nous en vendront que pour du vin ou pour de l'argent.¹²⁶

The farmers are refusing to sell us grain for the *assignats*. They tell us that they will only sell it to us for wine or gold and silver currency.

Speculation

These circumstances encouraged many people who could lay their hands on a reserve of grain to throw themselves whole-heartedly into the grain trade. Widespread speculation, in turn, forced prices up. In Étampes and Corbeil, speculators bought rye for as much as 1550 *livres* per *setier*. The Municipality of Mantes had the following comments to make on the nature of this commerce:

Le gros capitaliste et l'homme aisé qui se ressouvient de ce que le peuple courroucé à fait éprouver aux affameurs, en 1790, ne se mêlent plus du commerce des grains. Mais toutes les personnes de la campagne à qui, par la cherté excessive des

¹²⁶ E.Grave, "Les subsistances à Mantes de messidor an II à messidor an III," *Bulletin de l'histoire économique de la Révolution: Comité départemental de Seine-et-Oise* 4 (1910-1911): 46.

denrées, il suffit d'avoir trois ou quatre arpens de terre, une vache et douze poules pour être dans l'opulence; les vigneronns surtout,..... se jettent à corps perdu dans le commerce des grains, parcourent tous les marchés et toutes les fermes, achètent le blé à 45 livres et 50 livres le quintal, dans l'espoir de le vendre quand il sera encore plus cher. Par ce négoce, le grain d'un seul fermier va, en très peu de temps, se trouver disséminé entre deux ou trois cents petits acquéreurs qui auront d'autant plus de facilité de le séquestrer et de le cacher, qu'ils n'en auront chacun qu'une petite quantité.¹²⁷

The big capitalists and the rich men who remember what the wrathful people made the speculators suffer in 1790 meddle no longer with the grain trade. But all the people of the countryside for whom, because of the excessive dearness of grains, it is sufficient to have three or four arpents of land, a cow and a dozen hens to be rich; above all the wine-growers.....throw themselves madly into the grain trade, travelling to all the markets and all the farms, buying grain at 45 *livres* and 50 *livres* per quintal, in the hope of reselling it when it is even more dear. Because of this trade, the grain of a single farmer is scattered in very little time between two and three hundred buyers for whom it is all the

¹²⁷ Ibid., 41.

easier to hide the grain because each of them has it in very small quantities...

The *procureur syndic* of Saint-Germain-en-Laye described largely the same sort of commerce:

Cette denrée (bled) ainsi que la farine ont disparu depuis longtemps. il s'en vend dit on encore tous les jours, mais ces chez les fripier, les cordonnier et autres individus qui commerçant sur cette denrée depuis la rareté;...ils la revendent de deux cent vingt à deux cent trente livres le boisseau pésant 13 livres.¹²⁸

This foodstuff (grain) as well as flour disappeared a long time ago. It is said to be still sold everyday, but at the second hand clothesdealer, the cobbler and others who deal in this foodgrain since the scarcity; they resell (the grain) at 220 to 230 *livres* the *boisseau* weighing 13 *livres*.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ A.D.Y., 1 LM 396, *compte décadaire* rendered by the *procureur syndic* of Saint-Germain-en-Laye during the first *décade* of messidor an III.

¹²⁹ *Compte décadaire* rendered by the *procureur syndic* of Saint-Germain-en-Laye during the first *décade* of messidor an III.

All these factors combined to cause a terrifying rise in the prices of grains. Fig. 4.13 gives an idea of the rise in prices in the market of Dourdan when compared with that of 1792.¹³⁰

The price of bread also rose almost every day, reflecting the steep rise in the prices of grains. On 6 messidor an II (24 June, 1794), the price of the eight-pound loaf in Mantes was 26 *so*ls. On 28 messidor (July 16), it rose to 30 *so*ls and then to 34 *so*ls on 15 nivôse An III (January 4, 1795). On 5 pluviôse (January 24) its price was 48 *so*ls. On 20 pluviôse (February 8), the price of bread was fixed at 7.5 *so*ls per pound (or 3 *livres* for the eight-pound loaf). By 20 germinal the price had risen to 24 *so*ls per pound. Thereupon the municipality decreed that the price of a pound of bread would be fixed at 18 *so*ls and the bakers would be reimbursed by the municipality for their losses.¹³¹ Even at this price, bread was not available. For example, in the town of Saint-Germain where the price of bread was 25 *so*ls in germinal an III, all distribution was suspended from 12 germinal (April 1), which in turn provoked a riot on germinal 17

¹³⁰ Source: Prices for 1792 are from A.D.Y., 1 LM 458; prices for 1795 are from Emile Auvray, "Les subsistances dans le district de Dourdan pendant la Convention thermidorienne," *Bulletin de l'histoire économique de la Révolution: Comité départemental de Seine-et-Oise* 14 (1935-1937): 39.

The inflation index has been proportioned to the value 44 on 12/29/94 which (in *livres*) is the price of a 230 *livre* sack of wheat in Dourdan on this date.

¹³¹ Grave, "Les subsistances à Mantes de messidor an II à messidor an III," 36-63.

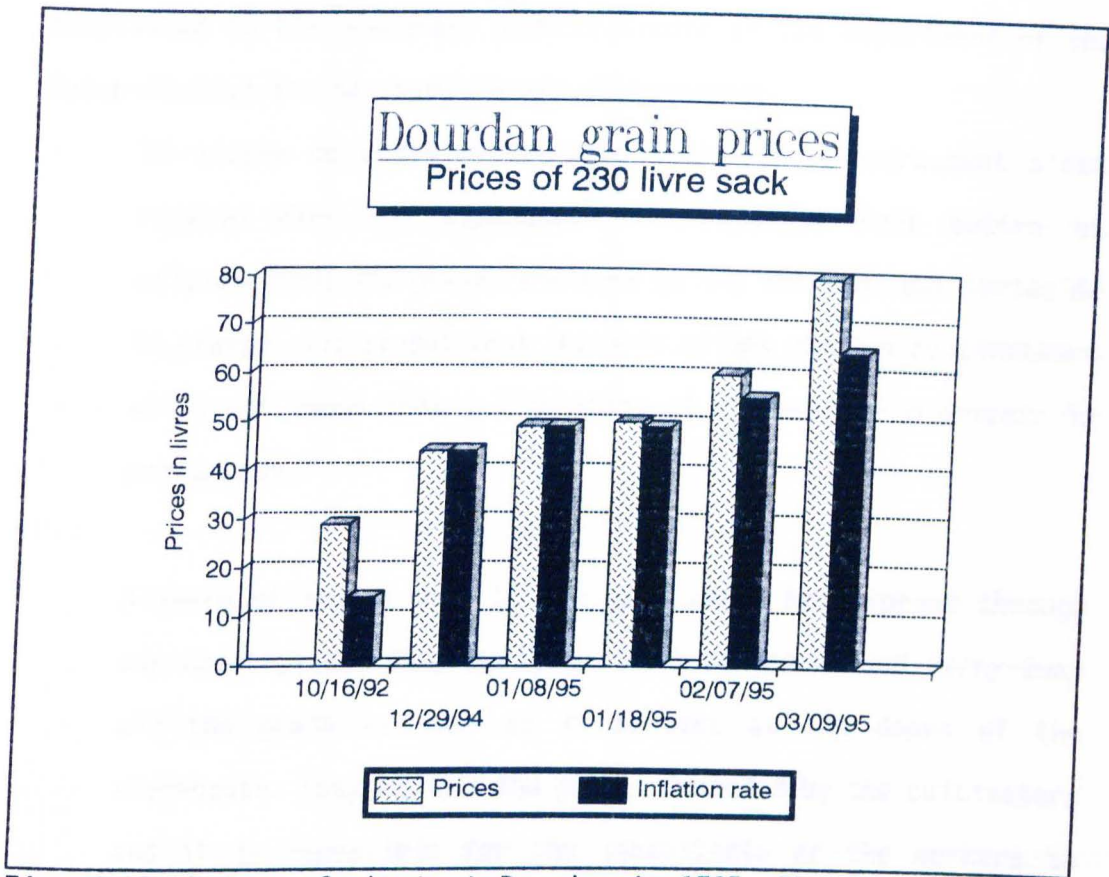


Fig. 4.13. Prices of wheat at Dourdan in 1795. The last available price from 1792 is also given. For purposes of comparison, the rate of inflation has also been shown. Source: Auvray, *Subsistances*, 39.

(April 6).¹³²

When food became this scarce within the department, the activities of the agents, sent by the Parisian government to the various communes of the department of the Seine-et-Oise, provoked widespread resentment. These agents toured from farm to farm, buying up all the grain available at whatever prices the cultivators demanded. Thus the administration of the district of Étampes

¹³² Rocher, *Le district de Saint-Germain-en-Laye*, 223.

complained to the *procureur général syndic* of the department of the Seine-et-Oise in the third *décade* of messidor:

Un essaim de commissaires envoyés par le gouvernement s'est repandu dans nos campagnes. ils achètent font battre et enlèvent tous les grains a mesure qu'ils arrivent aux portes de la grange. ils payent tous les prix exigés par les cultivateurs et il est impossible a l'habitant et a l'ouvrier d'obtenir la préférence.¹³³

A swarm of agents sent by the government have spread through our countryside. They purchase, have threshed, and carry away all the grain as soon as it arrives at the doors of the storehouse. They pay all the prices demanded by the cultivators and it is impossible for the inhabitants or the workers to obtain any preference.

These agents toured not only Étampes and Dourdan, but Saint-Germain and Mantes as well, depleting the scant reserves that these poorer districts had at their disposal. At Saint-Germain these agents paid as much as 5000 *livres* for a sack of flour. As far as the districts of the Seine-et-Oise were concerned, their activities were not much different from the black marketeers who had emerged as the

¹³³ *District d' Étampes: Compte rendu par les administrateurs du district envoyés au procureur général syndic, troisième décade de messidor, A.D.Y., 1 LM 391.*

scourge of the department in 1795.¹³⁴ Lastly, the Committee of Public Safety's decree of 4 germinal (March 24), which requisitioned for Paris all grains and flour in a twenty-*lieue* circle around the capital greatly aggravated the situation. It wiped out all grain from the markets near the capital and helped to precipitate the riots in the district of Saint-Germain and Corbeil in germinal.¹³⁵ The traditional resentment that the Seine-et-Oise bore towards Paris is evident in the following comment made by the *procureur syndic* of the district of Saint-Germain in the first *décade* of fructidor:

Paris est tout; le reste n'est rien et les trésors que nature elabore doivent être exclusivement consacré à cette commune engloutissant.¹³⁶

Paris means everything; the rest count for nothing and all the treasures wrought by nature have to be consecrated exclusively to this all engulfing commune.

¹³⁴ For complaints against these agents in Étampes see *compte décadaire* rendered in the third *décade* of messidor and the first *décade* of fructidor, A.D.Y., 1 LM 391; in Pontoise, *compte décadaire* rendered in the third *décade* of fructidor, A.D.Y., 1 LM 395; in Mantes, *compte décadaire* rendered in the first *décade* of messidor, A.D.Y., 1 LM 393; in Saint-Germain, *compte décadaire* rendered in the first *décade* of fructidor, A.D.Y., 1 LM 396.

¹³⁵ For the effect of this decree in the district of Saint-Germain, see Cobb "Les disettes de l'an II," 249.

¹³⁶ *Compte décadaire* rendered by the *procureur syndic* of the district of Saint-Germain in the first *décade* of fructidor, an III, A.D.Y., 1 LM 391.

The Weight of Requisitions

Whereas the cultivators were liberally abused for not bringing grain to market, they in turn maintained that the weight of requisitions was exhausting their resources. The law of 14 brumaire an II (November 4, 1793), which decreed that the department of the Seine-et-Oise was to be exclusively reserved for the provisioning of Paris, turned out to be a source of friction, not only between the Seine-et-Oise and Paris, but between the different districts of the Seine-et-Oise as well. The richer districts claimed that it was impossible to fulfill requisitions for the poorer districts, in addition to fulfilling those for Paris. Thus in December 1793, the district of Pontoise refused to fulfill requisitions in favor of Saint-Germain, citing the burden of their obligations towards Paris. On February 12, 1794, the district of Étampes dispensed its cultivators from fulfilling any requisitions other than those for Paris.¹³⁷ On 30 floréal an II (May 19, 1794), when some commissioners from Versailles attempted to requisition flour from the two communes of Saint-Martin-des-Champs and Osmoy in the district of Montfort, they were attacked by enraged crowds and barely escaped with their lives.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Caron ed. *Commission des subsistances de l'an II*, 105, 106, 343.

¹³⁸ Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:248-252.

In 1795 the problem worsened as the cultivators and the municipalities became openly defiant. As requisitions from Dourdan and Étampes virtually stopped, the plight of poorer districts like Versailles, Saint-Germain and Mantes worsened.¹³⁹ In the battle to secure grain, it was each commune for itself; the more powerful the commune, the greater its chances for success. Paris, at the top of the pyramid of power, cornered supplies in the districts of Dourdan, Janville and Evreux (the last two in the department of the Eur-et-Loir) at the expense of Versailles, in the Vexin at the expense of Mantes, and in the districts of Breteuil (Oise) Gonesse and Corbeil at the expense of Saint-Germain.¹⁴⁰ Next in order of importance came the *chef-lieu* of each district. The smaller communes were the worst off. On 11 germinal an III (March 31, 1795), the Municipality of Louveciennes complained that it was impossible to purchase grain in the towns of Ablis and Dourdan in the district of Dourdan because of the requisitions being made for Versailles.¹⁴¹ The report of Germain,

¹³⁹ E. Auvray, "Les subsistances dans le district de Dourdan pendant la Convention thermidorienne," *Bulletin de l'histoire économique de la Révolution: Comité départemental de Seine-et-Oise* 14 (1935-1937): 38,41; Cobb, "Les disettes de l'an II," 248.

¹⁴⁰ Auvray, "Les subsistances dans le district de Dourdan," 41; Grave, "Subsistances à Mantes de messidor an II à messidor an III," 50-51; Cobb, "Les disettes de l'an II," 248; Évrard and Defrèsne, *Les subsistances*, 2:390, 434; R.C. Cobb, "Les journées de germinal an III dans le zone de ravitaillement de Paris; Trois émeutes de la faim: Rouen, Amiens, Saint-Germain-en-Laye" in *Terreur et Subsistances: 1793-1795* (Paris: Librairie Clavreuil, 1965), 263.

¹⁴¹ Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:388.

mayor of Viroflay in the district of Versailles, who had been sent to purchase grain for his commune noted:

Il a vu sur les marchés tous les grains enlevés par deux catégories d'acquéreurs; les vigneron qui ayant vendu leur vin cher échangeaient un poinçon pour deux sacs de blé, les commissaires des grands villes qui, les mains pleines d'assignats achètent chez les laboureurs à mesure du battage et de la mouture. Enfin le représentant Loiseau a donné ordre à tous les fermiers de livrer par préférence pour Paris, ce qui entrave l'approvisionnement des petites communes.¹⁴²

He had seen in the markets all grain taken by two kinds of buyers; the wine-growers who, having sold their wine dearly, exchange a *poinçon* for two sacks of grain, [and] the agents from the large towns, who, their hands full of *assignats*, purchase from the *laboureurs* as the grain is threshed and ground. Lastly, the representative Loiseau has given orders to all the farmers to give preference in deliveries to Paris, which hinders the provisioning of the smaller communes.

Another factor which contributed to the scarcity in the market-place was the result of another kind of requisition -- that of

¹⁴² Ibid., 396-397. Report is dated 24 pluviôse an III (February 12, 1795).

manpower and of iron (which was necessary for making instruments of war). The result was a lack of threshers as well as of agricultural implements in the countryside. The effects of this scarcity might have been exaggerated by the cultivators. But the problem existed, as is evidenced by the efforts of the municipalities to round up people to serve as threshers in the Years II and III.¹⁴³ These efforts were not entirely successful. The required number of threshers often could not be found. In accordance with the instructions of the Committee of Public Safety, each section at Versailles opened up a register in which people willing to help with the harvest of the Year III could sign up. The project was a dismal failure because hardly anybody signed up.¹⁴⁴ Even if a number of people could be rounded up, they could not be provided with the necessary implements. Sometimes the threshers were sent back by furious farmers, who claimed that their inexperience was more a hindrance than a help. On August 2, 1794, the *Conseil général* of the commune of Versailles wrote to the municipality, thanking it for the exemplary zeal which it had shown in sending men to work on the harvest, but requesting it to "choose preferably those citizens who are in a condition to support the

¹⁴³ Ibid., 27-33; also Auvray, "Les subsistances dans le district de Dourdan," 36.

¹⁴⁴ Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:30-31.

fatigue and used to working in the fields."¹⁴⁵ Scant attention was paid to these complaints as is evident from the increasing use of prisoners of war to serve as threshers during the Year III.¹⁴⁶

Therefore, a complex of causes, most of them the direct result of the war, created the scarcity in the market-place in the Year III. In richer districts like Corbeil and Dourdan, as well as in a few rich communes of Versailles, people suffering from scarcity, at least, had a choice. They could raid the farms of the big *laboureurs* and *fermiers* where they found precious reserves of grain. That 140 people could find enough grain in just one farm at Paray tells us why the term *disette factice* was bandied about so liberally in times of scarcity, as it was during the Year III. But in the poorer districts like Mantes, Saint-Germain and Versailles, which did not produce enough to feed themselves in the best of times, people agitated helplessly in the market-place because they had nowhere else to turn. On 27 ventôse (17 March) the Municipality of Mantes wrote to the Committee of Public Safety that 5000 quintals of grain had been requisitioned from the small farmers of Mantes with the solemn promise that it would be returned once the season was more advanced. Not only had the grain not been returned, but Mantes had had to take on the additional responsibility of feeding the endless numbers of carters, seamen and

¹⁴⁵ "Choisir de préférence des citoyens en état de supporter la fatigue et habitués aux travaux de champs." Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:29.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 303.

other transport workers who descended on the various communes along the river Seine while transporting grain to Paris.¹⁴⁷ It was really districts like Mantes which were worst off in the Year III. Because of the general shortage of grain, they were deprived of the outside assistance that they received in normal years. What made matters worse was that they were also drained of their own meagre resources which were channelled into sectors regarded as more important, that is, Paris and the armies.

Conclusions

Looking back at the period 1791-1795, it becomes evident that the department of the Seine-et-Oise suffered from a lack of adequate provisioning of the market-place, which in turn led to chronic high prices of grain. Considering the fact that the harvests during these years were average at worst (1791) and good as a rule (1792, 1793, 1794, 1795), there appears to have been no natural cause for the rise in prices. This caused great public anger and led to the food riots.

The causes of the rise in prices must be viewed against the background of the liberalization of commerce with which governments had been experimenting since the mid 1760s. Liberalization of commerce led to a diversion of grain from the markets of the Seine-et-Oise because the cultivators now preferred to sell their grain at higher

¹⁴⁷ Grave, "Subsistances à Mantes de messidor an II à Messidor an III," 50-51.

prices for distant markets, whether they be the southern departments, Paris or even foreign nations. Prices of grain in the department of the Seine-et-Oise consequently went up.

During the period of controlled commerce, this phenomenon would not have been possible because cultivators would have been forced to take their grain to local markets where ordinary consumers would have had precedence over the merchants in buying grain. The traditional rules of the market-place became obsolete during the period of free commerce. Merchants, millers and bakers bought grain at the farms of cultivators, they bought grain which was on the way to market and they bought grain at the market-place at high prices before ordinary consumers had a chance to bargain. Cultivators too, preferred to sell at their homes because they could thus avoid the costs of transport and could also set their own prices away from the watchful eyes of the crowd in the market-place.

It may be argued that liberalization of commerce paved the way for a national market in grains by bringing closer together the prices of grain in the different departments of the nation. In the short run, however, the rise of prices greatly affected the wage earners in the Seine-et-Oise because wages did not keep up with the price rise. Consequently, the steep hike in prices put wage workers in the department at a serious disadvantage. In 1790 the daily wage of a *manouvrier* in the district of Pontoise was 1 *livre*. It had risen to 3 *livres* in 1795. The price of wheat was 15 *livres* per quintal while

the prices of rye and barley were 11 and 8 *livres* respectively. In 1795, the prices of wheat, rye and barley were 60, 40 and 30 *livres* respectively. Therefore, while wages rose by a factor of three between 1790 and 1795, food prices rose by at least a factor of 3.6. In the district of Étampes, wages rose from 1 *livre* 10 *sols* in 1790 to 5 *livres* in 1795. But the district reported that prices of wheat had gone up from 11 *livres* per quintal in 1790 to an incredible 154 *livres* in 1795!¹⁴⁸ So it probably is safe to say that wages in the department did not keep up with prices.¹⁴⁹ This is evidenced, for instance, by the movement in the district of Gonesse in the spring of 1792. The original aim of this movement had been to secure a rise in the salaries and subsidies of carters, other transport workers and agricultural laborers.

The effects of price rises were particularly acute in the Seine-et-Oise because in this department a small coterie of *laboureurs* and *fermiers* controlled most of the land. The majority of residents did not have access to sufficient land to meet their subsistence needs or were completely landless. Therefore the rising prices caused tremendous social tension, as is reflected in the open hatred towards

¹⁴⁸ Quite possibly, an error was made in converting from one measure to another.

¹⁴⁹ Wage and price figures given above are from Lucien Raulet, "L'Enquête sur les prix après la suppression du maximum dans les districts d'Étampes et de Pontoise (ventôse-floréal an III)," *Bulletin d'histoire économique de la Révolution: Comité départemental de Seine-et-Oise* 5 (1911-1912): 287,291.

fermiers, laboureurs and grain merchants, who were branded as an aristocracy enjoying special privileges which were denied to the rest of the population.¹⁵⁰ The food riots drew attention to the need for a better distribution of land holdings. It was as the direct result of the food riots that the demand to give more people access to the land, if not as owners, then at least as exploiters, was taken up at the administrative level in 1792.

The effects of war made themselves felt from 1792 and complicated the effects of the liberalization of commerce. The increasing demands made on the food reserves of the department by the volunteers as well as by Paris, and the depreciation of paper money increased the problem of scarcity in the market-place. The period of the Maximum marked an attempt to reverse the natural effects of war by forcing cultivators to provision markets and sell at fixed prices. But this forced experiment could not be sustained. When the Maximum was lifted, the reaction was all the more severe. By 1795, the market-place, where for so long producers and consumers had met face to face to buy, sell and bargain, had lost much of its importance and the site of exchange had shifted elsewhere.

¹⁵⁰ For more on this theme see next chapter.

Chapter V

Riots and Revolution

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the organization, the motivations and the social and demographic composition of the riot groups. Attention is also paid to any changes that occurred in any of these areas during the period under survey. Another theme this chapter addresses is if the Revolution had any impact on the riots, that is, if the lessons learned from the Revolution affected the thinking and the organization of the rioters and so gave these riots a character that is not typically associated with the traditional food riots.

Any comprehensive study of the riots in the department of the Seine-et-Oise during the revolutionary years must really begin in 1791. Records for 1789 are sparse. The available evidence also indicates that the food riots of July-August 1789 were not as widespread in the region around Paris as in some of the other provinces, although the scale of the riots was not negligible either.¹

¹ See Georges Lefebvre's account of the grain riots in the region which was later on to become the department of the Seine-et-Oise in *the Great Fear of 1789; rural panic in revolutionary France*, trans.

1790 was a quiet year as far as food riots are concerned. The riots broke out again on a large scale in 1791-1792 and there is enough information for these years to make a meaningful analysis possible.

The riots of 1791 and 1792: Targets of activity

The food riots of 1791 and 1792 were essentially market riots, triggered by shortages and high prices in the market-place. The rioters took direct action to rectify this state of affairs. Reacting against the high prices, they imposed just prices on grain and bread. The price of the best quality wheat was fixed at between 20 *livres* and 24 *livres* per *sétier*, while the price of bread was fixed at the traditional price of 2 *sols* per *livre*. Rioters also took steps to remedy the shortage of grain. They searched out all stores of grain which belonged to the grain merchants or to the cultivators and sold them off at the set price. Sometimes this grain had already been sold and was only being stored till it could be delivered. A miller of Limours suffered heavy losses when in the course of a market riot on March 1, 1792, 10 to 12 *sétiers* of wheat, that he had purchased on the previous market day and stored in a loft, were confiscated by the crowd and sold off. When the mayor attempted to interfere, he was accused of being in league with the hoarders and threatened with a

Joan White (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973), pp.89-90. Also, Henri Dinet, "La Grande Peur en Hurepoix," *Mémoires de la Fédération des sociétés historiques et archéologiques de Paris et de l'Ile de France* 18-19 (1967-1968): 99-200.

hanging.² The crowd was extremely suspicious of large stores of grain found outside the market-place, for hoarding was thought to be largely responsible for the scarcity in the market-place. Thibault, grain merchant and suspected hoarder was killed at Montlhéry on February 13, 1792, although a search of his granary yielded only 50 sacks of peas, beans and other green vegetables and no grain or flour. The rumor immediately spread that Thibault had been mixing wheat flour with that of peas and beans. Such a charge was ridiculous, the Directory of the district of Gonesse pointed out, because a *sétier* of beans cost more than a *sétier* of wheat flour.³ This rumor, however, was indicative of the hatred borne towards the grain merchants by the people which led them to believe anything defamatory said about them, than it was of the gullibility of the public.

The search for grain fanned out into the countryside. Bands of people systematically searched the farms for hidden stores of grain. When large stores of grain were discovered, the proprietor was often threatened with a hanging.⁴ The farmers only escaped after promising

² Letter of the brigadier of the gendarmerie of Limours to the lieutenant colonel of the department of Versailles, dated March 2, 1792, A.N. F/7/3689/7.

³ Report of the Directory of the district of Gonesse to the Directory of the department, dated February 18, A.N. F/7/3689/7.

⁴ As was *Sieur* Cauville of Martinière in the parish of Saclay, one of the largest cultivators of the region. See letter of the Directory of the department to the Legislative Assembly, dated March 23, 1792, A.N., DXL/16. Numerous other instances may also be found in the report of the steward of the farm of Plessis-le-Comte in the district of Corbeil, dated February 23, 1792, A.N. F/7/3689/7, A.N.

to take grain to market on the next market day.⁵ These visits to farms were a comparatively new feature of eighteenth-century riots,⁶ but they became a fully established feature in 1791 and 1792, drawing the attention of the authorities.⁷

Closely associated with the market riot was the *entrave*. There were numerous instances in 1791 and 1792 when wagon loads of grain were stopped and rerouted to the nearest market-place.⁸ Sometimes, it was just one cartload of grain like the one that was stopped at Saclay and stored in Palaiseau to be sold on the next market day.⁹ The point to note is that the grain was never sold or distributed on the spot

DXL/16.

⁵ In Dourdan precise instructions were given to the cultivators about the amount of grain each of them were to take to the market of Dourdan, which was proportional to the amount of grain discovered in the farms. See report of the *Conseil général* of the commune of Dourdan, A.D.Y., I LM 459.

⁶ Guy LeMarchand, "Troubles populaires au XVIIIe siècle et conscience de classe: une préface à la Révolution française," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 43 (1971): 35.

⁷ See speech made by Lebrun, President of the Directory of the department to the National Assembly on March 6, 1792, *Archives parlementaires de 1789 à 1860; recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des chambres françaises (première série, 1787-1799)*, 92 vols. (Paris: Librairie administrative de P. Dupont, 1862-1980), 39:414. Also the letter of the Directory of the department of the Seine-et-Oise to the Legislative Assembly on March 23, 1792, A.N., DXL/16. Both referred to the fact that the inhabitants of the countryside were forcing the cultivators to sign promises to bring grain to market in quantities which were fixed arbitrarily without any regard to the amount of grain they had in their granaries.

⁸ For details, see chapter II, "The Geography of Food Riots."

⁹ A.D.Y., I LM 460.

where it was commandeered. The rioters consistently rerouted the grain to the nearest market-place. Receipts acknowledging that grain had changed hands were given to the drivers of the carts as at Palaiseau or Etréchy.¹⁰

Organization of the riots of 1791 and 1792

The first striking feature of the riots is the amount of organization behind them and the efficiency with which they were carried out. In fact the term "riot" with its traditional connotations seems totally inadequate to express the breadth and scope of the events of 1791 and 1792. Traditional food riots as described by historians like George Rudé and Guy LeMarchand¹¹ were not very well organized. E.P. Thompson has commented that "the food riot did not require a high degree of organization."¹² It was not that they happened out of the blue. Behind every food riot there was usually a history of price rise and shortage and consequent popular anger. The

¹⁰ Palaiseau, A.D.Y., 1 LM 460. For Etréchy, F/7/3689/7.

¹¹ George Rudé, "La taxation populaire de mai 1775 à Paris et dans la région parisienne," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 28 (1956): 139-179; "La taxation populaire de mai 1775 en Picardie, en Normandie et dans le Beauvaisis," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 33 (1961): 305-326.
Guy LeMarchand, "Les troubles de subsistances dans la généralité de Rouen," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 35 (1963): 401-427; "Troubles populaires au XVIIIe siècle et conscience de classe: une préface à la Révolution française," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* no. 279 (1990): 32-48.

¹² E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth-century," *Past and Present* 50 (1971): 119.

atmosphere would also be rife with rumors of hoarding and conspiracies to deprive people of food. Local officials would warn of impending catastrophe if immediate action were not taken. But exactly how and when the riots would break out was not clear, at least in a majority of cases. By contrast, in 1791 and 1792, the rioters appear to have planned their course of action meticulously in advance. In September 1791, the *Conseil général* of the commune of Gonesse declared that the riots were the result of a *complot projeté depuis plusieurs jours*.¹³ This was standard language used by officials in their accounts of food riots, but this time there appears to have been some truth in it. In the commune of Gonesse, alone, the ferment went on for over fifteen days. From their actions, which included price fixing in the market-place with the help of the national guard, systematic searches for grain, and diversion of all confiscated grain to the market-place at Gonesse, it appears that the rioters were putting into effect a premeditated plan. This was even more evident in the commune of Louvres where the plans were finalized in a parish assembly held on September 12. All cultivators, bakers and municipal officers were ordered to attend. At this assembly they were presented with a written agreement that grain was henceforth to be sold at 20 *livres per sétier*

¹³ Report of the *Conseil général* of the commune of Gonesse, dated September 12, 1791, A.N. F/7/3689/6.

and bread at 2 *so/s* per livre. All cultivators were required to sign this agreement.¹⁴

The riots of 1792 were far more widespread than those of 1791. Their organization also became more sophisticated. The best source of information is the judicial records, and from them it is sometimes possible to build up a complete picture of the preparation for a riot from the testimony of witnesses and the interrogation of arrested persons. The chain of events which led to the death of the mayor of Étampes was initiated at least a day earlier, in the small wine-growing community of Chamarande.¹⁵ On the morning of March 2, an assembly was held at Chamarande where the march on Étampes was planned. Letters were then sent out to the neighboring communes of Etréchy, Auvers, Lardy and Boissy-sous-Saint-Yon, inviting their inhabitants to join those of Chamarande the next day in an expedition to Étampes to bring down prices of grain and bread. All members of the commune were ordered to join, indeed forced to join, including members of the national guard and municipality.¹⁶ Early in the morning on

¹⁴ Letter written by the Municipality of Louvres to the Directory of the district of Gonesse, dated September 15, 1791, A.N. F/7/3689/6.

¹⁵ One hundred and forty six people appeared as witnesses for the prosecution in the case of the murder of Simoneau, mayor of Étampes. Their testimony, as well as the interrogations of the twenty-eight arrested persons are to be found in A.D.Y., 42 L 30.

¹⁶ Louis Jacques de Batz, gardener and member of the national guard of Chamarande testified that all those who had been reluctant to join the marchers were jeered at and abused the whole way to Étampes, testimony that was backed up by others. Jean Pierre Alain carpenter of Boissy, had dared not refuse to join, but once at

March 3, the marchers from Chamarande set out, to the sound of drums, armed with pitchforks, sticks, bayonets, guns and swords, led by their municipality and national guard. They marched to all of their neighboring communes and were joined by people awaiting their arrival. Finally, when they set out for Étampes, the marchers were five hundred to six hundred strong.

Étampes was not an exception. On February 12, the inhabitants of Vert-le-Grand held an assembly where it was decided that they would march to Montlhéry the next day to bring down prices of grain. They forced their procurator to write a letter to the commune of Vert-le-Petit asking its inhabitants to join them. The march on Montlhéry by these communes precipitated the riot that signalled the outbreak of troubles throughout the department. The riots in Brie-Comte-Robert, Limours and Dourdan in March, and in Montfort and Rambouillet in October, involved a large number of communes. Sometimes, all the communes of a canton acted in concert, as at Brunoy in March and Louvres in April 1792.

The communes acted together to "impose order on the market-place" with well-planned determination. In Montlhéry representatives of twenty-two communes met together to decide that on every market day, each commune would delegate ten men of the national guard to maintain order in the Montlhéry market-place. It was also

Étampes, had proceeded to hide himself in a storage room, A.D.Y., 42 L 30.

decided that all inhabitants who needed grain would be given special *billets* or tickets so they could have preference in the market-place.¹⁷ In the district of Dourdan, too, the communes around the city sent detachments of their national guards to police the market-place. The presence of these delegates had the required effect. The terrified *laboueurs* all agreed to sell their wheat at 20 *livres* per *setier*.¹⁸ The Limours market-place was similarly policed by the communes surrounding it. It was the same in the markets of Rambouillet and Montfort in October 1792. What the insurgents called establishing order in the market-place was naturally not looked upon as such by the authorities. Describing the troubles in the district of Versailles, the Directory of the department wrote:

Ces mêmes habitants vont les jours de marché à Palaiseau, à Montlhéry, et de même armés et tambour battant sous prétexte d'y mettre l'ordre, et dans le fait, pour forcer les cultivateurs à leur donner le blé au prix qui leur convient.¹⁹

¹⁷ Report of Huet and Rouveau, dated March 11, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 459.

¹⁸ From the register of deliberations of the *Conseil général* of the commune of the city of Dourdan, dated March 10, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 459.

¹⁹ Letter of the Directory of the department of the Seine-et-Oise to the Legislative Assembly, dated March 23, 1792, A.N. DXL/16.

These same inhabitants go on market days to Palaiseau, to Montlhéry, armed and beating on their drums, on the pretext of imposing order there, but, in fact, to force the cultivators to give them grain at a price which suits them.

At Marly-la-ville and Fontenay-les-Louvres in the district of Gonesse, the insurgents, led by carters and other agricultural laborers, not only determined the amount of grain that each farmer had to supply to the market but also the period of the year (April through November) that such delivery had to be made. At Fontenay, the agreement drawn up specified that this grain would be reserved for the consumption of *journaliers* and other workers. The rioters also decided that the consumption needs of each family of *journaliers* would be verified to determine exactly the amount of grain the farmers would have to supply.²⁰

Other surprising details of organization emerge from the records. In the canton of Brunoy, *Sieur* Lelarge was placed in charge of distributing arms to the rioters.²¹ In Lardy, rioters returned arms to their original owners by handing these over to their *curé* in the confessional, thereby ensuring that their identities would be kept

²⁰ *Extrait d'un acte fait par la commune de Marly-le-ville*, dated April 2, 1792; from the register of the Municipality of Fontenay-les-Louvres, dated April 4, 1792, both in A.D.Y., 1 LM 459.

²¹ Testimony of Pierre Pichot, weaver of Brunoy, on June 28, 1792, A.D.Y., 42 L 28.

secret. The *curé* said that he had been told in the confessional that these arms had been gathered before the march to Étampes.²²

Another striking feature of the riots was the attempt to involve municipal officers and the members of the national guard, both local authority figures. This may have been an attempt by the rioters to protect themselves from future retribution, but there may be another explanation as well.

In a 1989 study of crowd and politics during the Revolution,²³ Colin Lucas has argued that from 1789 on there was an important shift in the political consciousness of the crowd. Even in 1789, the crowd had come to identify the government, rather than individual authority figures as its primary antagonist. Then came the realization that if it were to seek a permanent solution for its problems, it had to put pressure on the seat of power and force the holders of state power to enact measures that would ensure permanent solutions to popular problems. This was reflected in the events of October 1789 when the king was forced to accompany them from Versailles to Paris. This type of action, which was completely new in 1789, was repeated in 1792 and 1793 as well as during the food riots of germinal (March-April) and prairial (May-June) Year III. It may be argued, following Lucas, that

²² From the register of deliberations of the Directory of the district of Étampes, dated April 2, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 408.

²³ Colin Lucas, "The Crowd and Politics," in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1989): 2:261.

during the food riots of 1792 the rioters were also attempting to put pressure on the holders of power in order to force them to take measures which would solve the problems of the rioters. Admittedly, the seats of power being targeted were local, but this was wholly in keeping with the mentality of the rioters.

The riots of 1792 were larger in scope when compared with those of the pre-revolutionary years, but the basis of action remained at most "a confederacy of communes."²⁴ It was logical, therefore, that the seat of power in the commune -- the municipality -- would be chosen as the target to exercise pressure. It must be emphasized that the municipal officers were not chosen as representatives of the crowd who would act on their own initiative. Rather, they were treated as instruments to enforce the will of the crowd; they were to put into action the rioters' plan. The rioters took steps to bring under control all those who in their view were injuring the interests of the larger community in their search for narrow economic gain. This was done by drawing up decrees and then forcing the municipal officers, the farmers, millers and bakers, to affix their signatures to them. Thus for a period of time, it was the law made by the insurgents that held sway over the market-place and its environs, and the authorities

²⁴ This expression has been used by David Hunt in his article, "The People and Pierre Dolivier: Popular Uprisings in the Seine-et-Oise Department (1791 -1792)," *French Historical Studies* 2 (Fall, 1979): 200.

had no alternative but to submit to these laws.²⁵ On September 6, 1791, the rioters of Étampes forced the *Conseil général* of the commune as well as the Directory of the district to draw up a decree which was signed by eleven of the insurgents and only one notable.²⁶ This decree laid down that only the bakers and the citizens of Étampes could buy wheat from the market-place and then only for their personal consumption. The millers could only mill for the bakers and the citizens. If other municipalities needed wheat from Étampes, they had to address themselves to the Municipality of Étampes. The people put in charge of these purchases of wheat could buy in the market-place of Étampes, but the municipalities had to acknowledge receipt of these grains by stamping their passports. Grain could not be sold "by sample" in the market-place. Grain unsold on a market day could not be taken back, but had to be stored in the church of Saint Croix and again exposed for sale on the next market day. Lastly, the National Assembly would be presented with a decree requesting that the prices of flour be set. This address would be signed by as large a number of citizens as possible. The decree, thus, marked a return to some of the

²⁵ R.B. Rose has described this situation as the establishment of a "local, limited 'dictatorship of the proletariat'" in "Eighteenth-century Price Riots and Public Policy in England," *International Review of Social History* 6 (1961): 288.

²⁶ The original decree is missing from the records but a synopsis can be found in the list of documents drawn up by Claude Gillot, Justice of the peace of the city of Étampes, dated March 10, 1792 and included in A.D.Y., 42 L 30.

old rules which had controlled the commerce in grain in the *ancien régime*.

The drawing up of decrees shows that the rioters envisioned imposing these controls on a permanent basis and devised practical measures for doing so. In earlier years, the rioters also, might have wanted permanent solutions but they had generally lacked the organization necessary for achieving them. Again, following Colin Lucas, it may be argued that the insurgents invaded the seat of public power, or in Lucas' words, "the public space", but, whereas the traditional crowd would have receded from the public space once they felt that their immediate goals had been achieved, this crowd sought a permanent control of this space for the realization of its own ends. Even though outwardly, municipal forms were being maintained, there was a substitution of municipal authority by popular authority.²⁷

²⁷ For Lucas' statement on public space, see "The Crowd and Politics," 269-271. Of the Parisian crowd of 1793, Lucas says, "The Germinal and Prairial days also demonstrate the limits on the crowd's capacity for revolutionary action. In practice, once it had invaded the Convention, it did not really know what to do with the powers it had gained. It depended entirely upon the rump of radical deputies taking charge and providing it with detailed measures to enforce. It had no real concept of revolutionary substitution". By contrast, the rioters of 1792 seemed to have had some idea of how their power was to be used, admittedly at the local levels of government.

Language

The actions and organization of the rioters' provide important keys to understanding the nature of the riots. The language used by the rioters provides another important key to their feelings. Municipal officers frequently reported that while remonstrating with the crowd they had pointed out that the rebels were breaking the laws but were met with the response that "they did not give a damn about the laws."²⁸ The *Conseil général* of the district of Dourdan said in its report of March 6 that the department was in a state of crisis because the people had lost respect for the laws and confidence in their magistrates.²⁹ In their report of March 24, 1792, the commissioners Huet and Rouveau described the events that had taken place on the outskirts of the city of Dourdan on that day. While attempting to prevent a coalition of communes from entering Dourdan, the commissioners told them that they were breaking the law on the free circulation of grain. The people are said to have replied that "the law was not good, that it was badly made, that it was not useful to them and that they required others."³⁰ Alexandre Cocardat, drummer of the national guard of Chamarande, who was arrested for his role in

²⁸ "Ils se foutaient des lois."

²⁹ A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

³⁰ "La loi n'était pas bonne, qu'elle était mal-faite, qu'elle ne leur convient pas et qu'il leur fallait d'autre". The commissioners claimed to be reporting verbatim the expressions used by the rioters, A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

organizing the riots, was alleged to have said that "he would not burden himself with the decrees and if the decrees did not want them to eat bread then they did not want them."³¹

On September 17, 1791, Jacques David, journeyman plasterer of Étampes, had a fierce exchange of words with the *procureur* of the commune when the latter expressed his inability to give orders that the *marechaussée* withdraw from Étampes. David pointed out that the *procureur* had had no trouble giving orders for the sale of the land of his forefathers and of the clergy. The *procureur* replied that these orders had been given according to laws passed (by the Constituent Assembly). David retorted, "Make laws for our district and we will support you."³²

David's exchange with the procurator was perhaps indicative of the hope for change aroused during the early days of the Revolution and the disillusionment that followed. His feelings were representative of those of the rioters who felt that if the laws made by the authorities did not ensure their interests, they would make their own laws.

The targets of the rioters (and the victims of the riots) would be the *laboureurs*, farmers, bakers, millers, flour and grain merchants

³¹ "Il ne s'embarrassait pas des décrets et que si les décrets ne voulaient pas qu'ils mangeassent du pain ils ne voulaient eux." Interrogation of Alexandre Cocardat on May 24, 1792, A.D.Y., 42 L 27.

³² "Faites des loix pour notre district et nous vous soutiendrons." Interrogation of Jacques David, May 22, 1792, A.D.Y., 42 L 27.

-- all those who had profited from the freedom of commerce and sacrificed, in the process, the people's right of subsistence. These targets became the new aristocrats of the Revolution, as much disliked and abused as the old ones had been. Charles Boudier, basketmaker of Étampes, was accused of having shouted after the death of Simoneau, that "his death must be followed by those of the merchants of grain and aristocrats."³³ Jean Brasiliev, journeyman weaver and *journalier* of Étampes, was accused of having raised a cry that all merchants and millers were to be hanged.³⁴ In Étampes, a number of merchants and millers had armed themselves on March 3 and joined the troops in a show of solidarity with the authorities. Their presence only inflamed the situation. They were warned that if they advanced to the market-place they could "render the Revolution more grand."³⁵ Isidoire Morize was supposed to have yelled in the market-place, "we have been dupes of the aristocrats and millers for long enough."³⁶

Anyone who opposed the rioters was automatically grouped with the enemy. Gabriel Baudet, accused of firing on Simoneau, had called

³³ "Qu'il faudrait que sa mort fut suivi de celle des marchands de bleds et aristocrates." *Acte d'accusation* against Charles Boudier dated June 1, 1792, A.D.Y., 42 L 30.

³⁴ Interrogation of Jean Brasiliev dated May 22, A.D.Y., 42 L 30.

³⁵ "Rendre la Révolution plus grande." *Acte d'accusation* against Jean Pierre Daudin, tapestry maker of Étampes, dated June 1, 1792, A.D.Y., 42 L 30.

³⁶ "Il y a assez longtemps que nous sommes dupes des aristocrates et des meuniers." Interrogation of Isidoire Morize who gave his profession simply as broker on May 19, 1792, A.D.Y., 42 L 30.

r "coquin" (rascal) and "gueux" (villain, rogue), standard insults favored by the rioters, and also "marchand de blé".³⁷ The rumor that Simoneau traded in grain was rife after his assassination, although there is not a shred of evidence to support the contention that he did.³⁸ The troops who opposed the rioters in the market-place were accused of being aristocrats themselves or in the pay of aristocrats.³⁹ The rioters' use of the term *aristocrate* shows an imaginative adaptation of the current vocabulary of the Revolution. The enemies of the people were lumped within this category and then opposed to the *citoyens*, another term popularized by the Révolution. Gabriel Baudet, a carter at Étampes, was reported to have asked the soldiers of the Regiment of Berry, "Are you citizens? I hope that you will be one of us and not one of the aristocrats."⁴⁰ Members of the national guard who were unwilling to join the rioters were also

³⁷ *Acte d'accusation* against Gabriel Baudet, dated June 1, 1792, A.D.Y., 42 L 30.

³⁸ An anonymous letter repeating this charge was written to Simoneau's widow after his death, A.D.Y., 1 LM 460. Pierre Dolivier, *curé* of Mauchamp, who led a delegation to the National Assembly elliptically referred to these rumors in his speech. David Hunt gives credence to these rumors without citing his sources. Hunt says, "Perhaps himself involved in the grain trade, Simoneau might have calculated that economic considerations alone required him to stand up to these insurgents". Hunt, "The People and Pierre Dolivier," 196.

³⁹ Testimony of *Sieur* Juif, brigadier of the regiment of Berry and *Sieur* Foyer, cavalier of the same regiment, dated March 9, 1792, A.D.Y., 42 L 30.

⁴⁰ "Etes vous citoyens? J'espère que vous ferez de notre parti et que vous ne ferez pas aristocrates." Testimony of *Sieur* Juif, dated March 9, 1792, A.D.Y., 42 L 460.

branded *aristocrates* and accused of being opposed to the interests of the parish (*aux besoins de la paroisse*).⁴¹

The use of terms like *citoyen* and *aristocrate* certainly show a general awareness of the events unfolding in Paris and of the vocabulary that the Revolution had popularized, but the rioters adapted this vocabulary to express views and ideas that were sometimes very different from those held by the revolutionaries in government. Obviously in March 1792, a majority of the members of the Legislative Assembly would not have attacked the big cultivators and merchants as the "new aristocrats of the Revolution." The argument might be made that the use of terms like *citoyen* gave the rioters a sense of power, the source of which was the events of 1789. In 1789 the *citoyens* had won important victories over the aristocracy. Perhaps in the minds of the rioters, the battle was being taken up once again, but with the new aristocrats this time -- those privileged who had profited from the economic policies of the government. The battle was being fought at the local level, against the local *laboureurs*, grain merchants, millers and bakers. The language of the rioters shows that if they were aware of the high politics of the Revolution, their interests were purely local.

This hostility towards merchants, millers, bakers and cultivators was not, of course, peculiar to Étampes. The murder of

⁴¹ Testimony of Louis Jacques de Batz, captain of the national guard of Chamarande, dated July 12, 1792, A.D.Y., 42 L 30.

Thibault at Montlhéry and the general ill-treatment of cultivators and merchants in the market-place and their homes give ample testimony of these feelings.

Another striking example of how the people could invert or adapt the meaning of terms popularized by the high politics of the Revolution is provided by a dialogue that took place between a municipal officer and a rural worker of Meulan. In the words of the municipal officer, who reported the conversation,

Un habitant de la campagne est venu chez un de nous et a dit "Il n'y a donc plus de liberté en France." "Pourquoi?" lui a-t-on répondu. "C'est" (a répondu le campagnard) "qu'on vient de lire à la messe qu'il n'est plus permis d'aller chez les laboureurs leur dire d'apporter leurs grains au marché, et qu'ils peuvent le vendre chez eux à tel prix que ce soit, on a essayé de lui faire entendre raison, mais on n'a pas y parvenir".

An inhabitant of the countryside came to one of us and said, "So there is no liberty anymore in France." "Why?" someone responded. "Because" (replied the countryman) "one has just read at mass that it is no longer permitted to go to the *laboureurs* to tell them to bring their grain to market, and that they (the *laboureurs*) can sell at their homes at any

price. We attempted to make them see reason, but did not succeed."

"Liberty," for the person involved, was not the liberty of commerce and circulation of food grains but rather the ancient liberty to defend one's basic right, that is, the right to subsistence. If the vocabulary used by the people symbolized their hopes and aspirations for the Revolution, then the different uses made of the same vocabulary indicate that different groups had different aspirations for the Revolution. To those who supported freedom of the grain trade, the rioters were the *mal-intentionnés*. Gabriel Baudet, who was among the rioters at Étampes on March 3, used this term to berate Simoneau, but, for him, the *mal-intentionnés* were those who would oppose the people's right to subsistence. Baudet charged:

"C'est bien étonnant qu'un citoyen comme vous qui êtes bien dans l'esprit du peuple ayez voulu faire détruire un peuple qui ne demande qu'à vivre, il faut que vous ayez été conseillé par des gens mal-intentionnés."⁴²

It is very surprising that a citizen like you who is well thought of by the people wanted to destroy a people who

⁴² *Acte d'accusation* against Gabriel Baudet, dated June 1, 1792, A.D.Y., 42 L 30.

only wanted to live, you must have been counselled by ill-intentioned people.

Objectives of the rioters in 1791 and 1792

A survey of the features of the riots clearly shows that the aim of the rioters was to restore to the market-place the importance it had enjoyed as the locus of exchange before the laws liberalizing commerce had been passed. Within the market-place, too, the rioters sought to reimpose the old controls that were being steadily whittled away, controls that the rioters believed had preserved the interests of the consumers. The new laws, guaranteeing free commerce and absolute rights of property, had all betrayed the interests of the consumers. They were held in contempt by the rioters. So the rioters wanted to go back to the earlier system of controls. They were an attempt to enforce a kind of socio-economic behavior which was no longer guaranteed in a changing world. In short the riots were an attempt to enforce the moral economy in the market-place. As such, they were a part of the traditional body of food riots that had broken out repeatedly in the eighteenth century.

Sources of Ideas

There were plenty of new ideas for the rioters to implement, for evidence indicates that there was a diffusion of new ideas throughout the department. One obvious source of such ideas was the circular

letters which circulated between the various *communes* and served as the primary means of communication. One such letter was that of Jean Le Roy, *procureur* of the *commune* of Palaiseau who was blamed for starting the troubles in the district of Versailles and also in Dourdan.⁴³ Another case was that of Charles Blondeau, barrelmaker of Louvres, who was arrested for writing the circular letters that provoked the troubles in the canton of Louvres on April 3 and 4, 1792.⁴⁴

In addition to these letters, pamphlets were also written analyzing the causes of the high prices and shortages of foodstuff and proposing remedies for the situation. These pamphlets were very different from the learned debates in the National Assembly on the problem of subsistence. These were simple tracts, addressed directly to the people, often playing on their worst fears and encouraging them to take direct action. One of these pamphlets, written by M. Ducatellier and entitled *Adresse aux Tiers État*, found wide circulation in the district of Gonesse.⁴⁵ This work squarely placed the blame for the misery of the people on the farmers who were denounced as hoarders. It alleged that the big farmers had bought up

⁴³ Report of the commissioners Rouveau and Huet, dated March 13, A.D.Y., I LM 459.

⁴⁴ Interrogation of Charles Blondeau on May 2, 1792, A.D.Y., 42 L 28.

⁴⁵ "*Mémoire justificatif pour Messieurs Coron et Roussel, officiers municipaux de Marly-la-ville*," A.D.Y., 42 L 28.

the grain of the small cultivators and were acting in accord with the monopolists. It went on to remind the *Tiers État* of their strength and called upon the people not to suffer their oppression silently because the Constitution told them to rebel against their suffering. Among the proposed remedies was setting the price of grain at 20 *livres per sétier*. Coron, mayor of Marly-la-Ville, and Roussel, municipal officer of the same commune, both of whom were themselves implicated in the riots, identified this tract as the direct cause of the riots of Gonesse.

Many municipal officers and other members of local representative bodies were forced to join the riots, or, at least, they invariably claimed that they had been. But in more than a few cases there was voluntary cooperation as well. Many of the local officials were critics of free trade. Some of them had experienced first hand the conditions that led to the riots in the first place. A farmer of Tremblay had refused to sell grain to the mayor of the commune, which probably influenced the mayor's decision to lead the national guard of Tremblay to the market of Gonesse.⁴⁶ Jean Baptiste Demolière, wine-grower and municipal officer of Chamarande, who was arrested for his role in the riot of Étampes on March 3, 1792, claimed

⁴⁶ *Procès verbal* of the Municipality of Gonesse dated September 19, 1791, A.N. F/7/3689/6.

that he was one of the most needy in the commune and therefore could not resist when the others wanted him to accompany them to Étampes.⁴⁷

Whatever their reasons, many local officials did participate willingly in the riots and brought to the movement their organizational and political skills. Both at Dourdan and Montlhéry, the municipal officers and the national guard helped organize the "army" made up of representatives of each commune to police the market-place. The *procureur*, secretary and municipal officers of Mesnuls organized the march to the market of Rambouillet in October, 1792. Pierre Duval the secretary had even drawn up two detailed lists -- the first containing the names of people who would march to the market of Rambouillet; the second, the names of those who would march to Neauphle the following Monday. Those who refused to join were to be fined 40 *so/s*.⁴⁸

Local officials, conscious of their role as intermediaries, tried to present the point of view of the rioters before the higher authorities. In September 1791, Simoneau and LaVallery, municipal officers of Étampes, attempted to intercede for the rebels before the department, asking that troops not be sent to Étampes and that prices of wheat be set. The petition drawn up by the mayor and municipal officers of the thirteen communes around Limours went a step further

⁴⁷ *Acte d'accusation* against Jean Baptiste Demolière, dated June 1, 1792, A.D.Y., 42 L 30.

⁴⁸ Interrogations of Abraham Bigot and Marc Lejeune, dated October 29, 1792, A.D.Y., 42 L 33.

because it attempted to justify the actions of the rioters before the authorities.⁴⁹ The Municipality of Palaiseau actually helped to organize the searches of the farms in the neighboring communes and then wrote to the Directory of the department that farmers should be forced to provision the markets.⁵⁰ The municipality was censured by the department for its approval of the conduct of the insurgents.

This censure only served to make the municipality more defiant. In a circular letter to all the communes in the department, dated February 26, the municipality criticized governmental policy of supporting grain sellers and berated monopolists who hoarded the best grain so that "our brothers, *journaliers* and other professions, cannot get enough to eat. The *fermiers* insult them even in their weakness, saying that they could not care less about all the citizens, and that no one can force them to fill the markets, that they will sell their wheat where they please." The letter called on the Legislative Assembly to fix the price of a *sétier* of grain at 15 *livres* and to order a lowering of leases. It also demanded legislation requiring the *fermiers* to provision the markets and forbidding them to sell anywhere

⁴⁹ See chapter III, "Governmental Policy and Food Riots."

⁵⁰ Letter of the municipality to the department dated February 21 and the department's reply, A. Defrèsne and F. Évrard, *Les subsistances dans le district de Versailles de 1788 à l'An V*, 2 vols. (Rennes: Imprimerie Oberthur, 1921-1922), 1:235.

else.⁵¹ In March 1792, the administrative bodies of Étampes helped organize a delegation of citizens to Paris, to ask the Legislative Assembly to take measures so that the market of Étampes would always remain provisioned up to the next harvest and the price of wheat would remain at 24 *livres per sétier*.

In many cases a significant part was also played by the *curés*. Some of them had close ties with their parishioners and tended to side with them in their troubles. Some were highly literate which made them leaders of the community. Their special sermonizing skills helped them to reach out to the people. Some were radicalized by poverty. Others were politicized by the Révolution. In 1789, the *curé* of Chevreuse, Joseph Adant, distinguished himself by his opposition to the municipality.⁵² We hear less about him in 1792, but he was nevertheless nominated to present to the department the petition drawn up by the thirteen *communes* of Limours.⁵³

A more active role was played by Antoine Briard who lived not far away in the *commune* of Troux. Antoine Briard helped organize the searches of the farms around Limours in March 1792. He warned his parishioners not to put down anything in writing, so as not to leave

⁵¹ This letter is missing from the records. But David Hunt, using Dramard as his source (*La disette de 1789 à 1792 jusqu'à la loi du maximum*), has quoted this letter in "The People and Pierre Dolivier," 204. The translation is by David Hunt.

⁵² Dinet, "La Grande Peur en Hurepoix," 104-105.

⁵³ A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

any trace of evidence behind. He also advised that detachments of six men should be sent to the homes of those who refused to accompany the marchers. When the mayor of Troux informed him of the impending arrival of troops, the *curé* retorted that this would cause an united uprising among the parishes of Limours.⁵⁴

The mayor of Marly-la-ville, M. Coron, also claimed in a deposition on April 10, 1792, before the commissioner sent to investigate the riots, that about a month earlier, the *curé* of Marly-la-ville had delivered a sermon, calling upon the cultivators to lower the price of wheat and other comestibles and to raise the salaries of workers. The mayor claimed that this sermon had made a deep impression upon the people and had prepared the way for the insurrection which was being waged for the same objectives.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Testimony of the mayor of Troux before the Directory of the department of Versailles on April 30, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 459. Also Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:240. Briard was arrested for his role in the riots on April 27, but set free on May 5. He was a declared supporter of the Révolution and in 1793 helped to found a popular society in Chevreuse. He also became an administrator of the district of Versailles. He was brought before the Criminal Tribunal of the Seine-et-Oise in nivôse, an II, for trespassing on the property of emigrés. He was transferred to the *Conciergerie* and sent before the Revolutionary Tribunal but he managed to save his head. He went back to Versailles and proceeded to establish himself as a grain merchant! He was deported to Rochefort in the Year VII for hostile remarks against the Directory -- Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 1:88.

⁵⁵ Report of commissioner Antoine Victor Vaillant dated April 10, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 459. It should be mentioned here that Coron himself was accused of having helped the rioters and denouncing the National Assembly and Constitution on several occasions. He was deprived of his position and property (destituted) as a result of his role in the riots. M. Lapin, the constitutional priest was no friend of Coron and even gave testimony against the mayor at his trial. But Coron's

Composition of the riot groups

Ultimately the planning was the work of the insurgents themselves and it is important to know their identity. The research of George Rudé, Guy LeMarchand and Cynthia Bouton has indicated that the majority of rioters were drawn from certain sectors of the population. They were urban and rural wage workers,⁵⁶ artisans and craftsmen, shopkeepers and petty traders.⁵⁷ These people led a precarious existence in the best of times. In times of scarcity their family economies were completely disrupted, which explained their large participation in the riots.

Arrest records help us to compare the participants in the riots of 1791 and 1792 with those of the pre-revolutionary years. Arrest records do not give us a full picture of the social composition of a riot. Usually, only the leaders, or those whose behavior and dress

testimony might not necessarily have been false because he did say that the *curé* was moved by the "best intentions in representing the misery of the people."

⁵⁶ This category includes all those who owned little or no property and earned a living by working for others. They worked at jobs like mowing, harvesting, threshing, woodcutting, working the soil and the vineyards, clearing the land, carrying soil to vineyards and elsewhere, laboring for builders etc. They also found seasonal employment at haymaking, harvesting, and grape-picking time. See Vauban's description of day laborers in Pierre Goubert, *The Ancien Régime: French Society 1600-1750*, trans., Steve Cox (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1973), 116-117.

⁵⁷ George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960): 178-190; Cynthia Bouton, "Gendered Behavior in subsistence riots: The French Flour War of 1775," *Journal of Social History* 23 (Summer, 1990): 743; Guy LeMarchand, "Les troubles de subsistances," 405.

distinguished them from the rest, were arrested. The mass of the rioters managed to escape into safe anonymity. This was especially the case in 1791 and 1792. In 1791 no action appears to have been taken against the rioters. In Étampes, for example, it was only in April 1792 that a few people were arrested for their role in the riots of September 1791, together with those accused for participating in the riot of March 3.

In 1792, the numbers arrested were only a minute fraction of those who actually took part in the riots. Paralyzed with terror and perhaps more than a little sympathetic to the rioters, the local authorities preferred to take no action against them. Their policy of inaction was extremely frustrating to the departmental officials and especially to Huet and Rouveau who were in charge of re-establishing peace in the department. These commissioners tried to goad the local officials into preparing the cases against the rioters, but often it was too late.⁵⁸ Many of the rioters had fled by then and it proved impossible to identify others. Authorities contented themselves by bringing to book a few, unfortunate, symbolic victims. Only in Étampes, where the murder of Simoneau was followed by a massive hunt

⁵⁸ For the comments of Huet and Rouveau on the inaction of the local authorities in Étampes and Limours see their reports in A.D.Y., I LM 459, dated March 9 and A.N., DXL/16, dated March 26. For the case of Montlhéry, see the comments made by Lebrun, President of the Directory of the Seine-et-Oise to the Legislative Assembly on March 6, *Archives parlementaires*, 1st ser., 39:413.

for the assassins, were 28 people arrested.⁵⁹ Twenty-six were men and 2 were women. Search warrants were served for 10 more people but they were never found. Of the 26 men arrested from the communes of Chamarande, Étampes, Lardy and Auvers, 10 were artisans of whom 3 were apprentices.⁶⁰ The artisans ranged from tapestry weavers, representatives of the luxury crafts that had suffered so badly during the Revolution, to marginal craftsmen like basket weavers. Seven of those arrested were urban or rural wage workers.⁶¹ Among the rest were a commercial agent, an innkeeper, 4 wine-growers, a school-master and a drummer. The professions of women are usually not listed in the arrest records. Two women from Étampes were arrested for complicity in the riots. One was identified as the "wife of a carter who drove her own cart;" the other was simply identified as the "wife of a fisherman."

The identity of the rioters presents few surprises. Probably without any landed resources of their own, most of them were completely dependent on the market for their food. Price rises and shortages hit them especially hard. The wine-growers were property owners but the land they owned did not support any cereal cultivation.

⁵⁹ All information about the accused has been taken from the the *acte d'accusation* drawn up on June 1, 1792 at Étampes by the Director of the Jury of the criminal tribunal, A.D.Y., 42 L 30.

⁶⁰ Three basketmakers, 3 cobblers, a tapestry maker, a plasterer, a coppersmith and a locksmith. Of them a basketmaker, a cobbler and a locksmith were apprentices.

⁶¹ Three *journaliers*, 3 gardeners, a carter and a quarrier.

In the Seine-et-Oise only the poorest land, usually sandy strips along the rivers, were used to grow a poor to mediocre quality wine.⁶² Wine-growers were among the poorest cultivators. The unfavorable movement in wine prices since the 1770s must have made the conditions of wine-growers even more precarious.

A study of the arrest records for the whole department does not alter the picture. Again, arrest records are scanty and the cases studied are few. In addition to the records for the troubles at Étampes on September 16 and 17, 1791, and March 3, 1792, arrest records are available for the market riots at Montlhéry and Angerville which took place on February 13 and March 9, 1792 respectively.⁶³ They are also available for the troubles at Essonne on March 5, when crowds visited the homes of various cultivators and ordered them to bring grain to market and then set the price of grain in the market-place. Scattered records are also available for the troubles in the district of Gonesse in April 1792, when inhabitants of the various communes systematically set about setting the prices of grain, eggs, butter and other foodstuff, and for the market riot at Montfort on October 25, 1792.⁶⁴ The names of 62 arrested persons can be retrieved from the records. Of them 7 are women. Of the 55 men arrested, the professions

⁶² See chapter II, "The Geography of Food Riots."

⁶³ Arrest records may not be complete in each case.

⁶⁴ The relevant arrest records may be found in A.D.Y., 42 L 27, 28, 30 and 33.

of 54 are given. They include 23 artisans,⁶⁵ 16 wage workers,⁶⁶ 2 merchants, 2 innkeepers, 9 wine-growers, a commercial agent, a drummer, and a school-teacher. The women are listed as being the "wives of", a fisherman, a carter, a dressmaker, a mason, a carpenter and 2 wine-growers. It thus appears that the largest role in the riots was played by the artisans and urban and rural wage workers, including those engaged in cottage production like the weavers and stocking makers.⁶⁷ The merchants who participated were probably petty traders -- as hard pressed as their fellow rioters, although some like the *marchand de veaux* at Marines, who bought two sacks of wheat at the set price of 20 *livres* per *sétier* and then had the money sent on to the *laboureur* by his porter, were probably seeking to take advantage of lowered wheat prices.⁶⁸

Most of the rioters were men and women with families. The average age of the rioters was 37.9. Because eighteenth-century men

⁶⁵ Four basketmakers (one apprentice), 2 stockingmakers (one apprentice), a blacksmith, a coppersmith, a locksmith, 2 tapestry-makers, a plasterer, 2 cobblers, a roofer, 3 masons, 2 dress-makers and a glass-worker.

⁶⁶ Ten *journaliers* or *mainouvriers*, 3 gardeners, 2 carters and a quarrier.

⁶⁷ Domestic industry was not well-developed in the Seine-et-Oise. There was some household production of cotton and woollen cloth and hosiery goods throughout the region. Beaumont in the district of Pontoise, and Louvres in the district of Gonesse was also known for the household production of lace.

⁶⁸ Testimony of Etienne Fleury, *laboureur* at Guancourt, A.D.Y., 42 L 27.

and women married late, many in their late thirties and early forties were still supporting dependent children.⁶⁹ Rioters were sometimes asked about the size of their families. Their replies reveal some of them to be supporting large families. Jean Flizet, basket maker of Étampes, who was arrested for his roles in the riots of 1791 and 1792, was forty-two years old, married and with five children. Alexandre Cocardat, also of Étampes, was forty-six years old and had six children. The pressure of supporting a family in hard times must have been a strong incentive for joining the riots.⁷⁰ Only one of the rioters had a previous arrest record, suggesting that these were not natural hotheads or hardened criminals, and supporting the contention of Olwen Hufton and Cynthia Bouton that for the participants, the riots were a last desperate expedient to save their families from disintegration in times of economic hardship.⁷¹

But the participant whom Olwen Hufton had in mind was pre-eminently a woman. The bread riot, Olwen Hufton has said, was

⁶⁹ This point has been made by Bouton in "Gendered behavior," 749-750. Women from artisanal, shopkeeping and peasant families normally married sometime between their twenty-fourth and twenty-eighth birthdays.

⁷⁰ Twenty of the twenty-eight persons arrested at Étampes were married. Fifteen had children and the wives of two of the rioters were pregnant with their first child. The total number of children in the fifteen families was 48 or 3.2 per family.

⁷¹ Olwen Hufton, "Women in Revolution, 1789-1796," *Past and Present* 53 (Nov. 1971): 90-108; Cynthia Bouton, "Gendered Behavior in subsistence riots: the French Flour War of 1775," 741.

"female, or rather maternal terrain".⁷² E.P. Thompson, while not suggesting that food riots were predominantly feminine has said, "initiators of the riots were, very often, the women."⁷³ Since it was women who purchased food for the family from the market and since they were the ones who first deprived themselves in times of shortage, they tended to be sensitive to high prices and shortages. Hufton adds that men did participate in food riots but in lesser numbers and in subsidiary roles.

Cynthia Bouton, in her study of the 1775 Flour war has modified the picture. She shows that men participated in greater numbers than women in the rural manifestations of the grain riots like "incursions into the farms of *laboueurs* and *fermiers*, rural mills, religious communities and the occasional seigneur,"⁷⁴ although women tended to participate in market riots in greater proportions and with greater visibility. These men, Bouton argues had become "feminized," because declining socio-economic status, unstable family structure and political alienation left them in a dependant situation similar to that of women in the family economy of early modern society.⁷⁵ Many of the men who participated in the rural manifestations of the Flour

⁷² Olwen Hufton, "Women in Revolution," 94.

⁷³ E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* 50 (1971): 115.

⁷⁴ Bouton, "Gendered behavior," 741.

⁷⁵ Bouton, "Gendered behavior," 744-745.

War were victims of agrarian proletarianization in the commercialized wheat producing zone around Paris. Landless, unskilled, sometimes suffering from joblessness as well as from eroded status within the family, these men "found themselves in the women's domain of subsistence rioting".⁷⁶

Although questions may be raised about the soundness of Bouton's thesis,⁷⁷ she nevertheless points to an important feature of late eighteenth-century riots, that is, the important presence of men. A study of the arrest records would indicate that men participated in greater numbers than women. But arrest records are not infallible as a means of measuring the scale of women's participation in food riots. Bouton has pointed out that the police and authorities tended to be more lenient towards female rioters because women were regarded as

⁷⁶ Bouton, "Gendered behavior," 745.

⁷⁷ The trouble with Bouton's thesis is that it compresses into the last quarter of the eighteenth century a process which had been set in motion since the beginning of the eighteenth century if not earlier. In the cereal producing plains around Paris, the increasing concentration of holdings had been forcing a large number of peasant families to become landless. So the loss of socio-economic status and political alienation that Bouton describes had afflicted a large number of male members of poor rural households a long time before the outbreak of the Flour Wars. So the process of feminization ought to have begun earlier. Yet from Bouton's thesis it appears that these men did not participate in food riots in large numbers before 1775.

There is another objection that can be raised against Bouton's thesis. It is difficult to accept the argument that loss of economic power leads to "feminization" of male members of poor households. It is simplistic to argue that inequalities of status between men and women within the household are based solely on the greater economic power of men and that if men lose this economic power they somehow become "feminized."

naturally troublesome and unruly, politically less dangerous, and more justified in rioting to protect the interests of the family.⁷⁸ Despite the small numbers of women arrested, they continued to play an important role in the market-place in some cases, as in Gonesse in 1791 when the presence of women in the crowd was noted by the local authorities and the troops of the line.⁷⁹ Of the 7 women whose names appear in the arrest records of 1791 and 1792, 2 were arrested for their roles in the market riot at Étampes on March 3, 1792, and 5 for their roles in the market riot at Montlhéry on February 13, 1792.

Women were also active in the movement launched by agricultural workers in the district of Gonesse in March-April 1792. In fact, one of the two petitions drawn up by the commune of Fontenay les Louvres on April 4, 1792, specifically mentioned that "inhabitants of the parish, like the mothers, demand that eggs be delivered to them at 12 *soles*, butter at the same price, milk at 3 *soles* the pint and cheese at 1 *sol* 6 *deniers*".⁸⁰ Hufton's theory that traditionally food riots were "maternal terrain" is supported by the language of the document. But

⁷⁸ Bouton, "Gendered behavior," 743. Also, Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women on Top," In *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays by Natalie Zemon Davis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 124-125.

⁷⁹ See report of the Directory of the district of Gonesse dated September 5, 1791 which mentions "des gens attroupés principalement des femmes", A.N., F/7/3689/6. See also report of the *procureur syndic* dated September 8, 1791, and report of the *Conseil général* of the commune dated September 12, 1791, A.N., F/7/3689/6.

⁸⁰ From the register of the Municipality of Fontenay-les-Louvres, dated April 4, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 459.

women are noticeably absent from the marches organized by the rural communes to the homes of farmers or to the market towns to fix prices. The terms used to describe the crowds such as *gens attroupés*, *rassemblements*, *citoyens armés*, make it impossible to determine if women were present along with the men. But sometimes the records specifically mention that only men were present. Thus the report drawn up by Francois Reydi, captain of the *gendarmerie nationale* of the Seine-et-Oise, and Jean Baptiste Godard, lieutenant of the Eighteenth regiment of cavalry, mention that only men were present in the crowd who marched on Étampes on March 3.⁸¹ Of those arrested for the riot of March 3, only two were women and both were from the town of Étampes. The interrogation of those arrested and the testimony of witnesses indicate that the townspeople of Étampes were not given prior notice of the march, although once the marchers were in the town, a section of the townspeople welcomed them with joy.

The situation was the same at Dourdan. Describing the price fixing expedition to the market-place of Dourdan that was organized by the surrounding communes, Huet and Rouveau said that all of the participants were armed men.⁸² The report drawn up by the Municipality of Perray on March 12 also mentioned that the crowd that descended on the commune to determine the amount of grain threshed was composed of

⁸¹ Report is dated March 3, 1792, A.D.Y., 1 LM 408.

⁸² Report of Huet and Rouveau, dated March 24, A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

men.⁸³ From the detailed descriptions of the marches to the markets of Limours and Brie-Comte-Robert in March 1792 and to Montfort in October of the same year, in which hundreds took part and numerous communes were involved, it appears that women did not participate.⁸⁴ These descriptions make us wonder whether men systematically excluded women from these marches.⁸⁵ It has been mentioned earlier that these price fixing expeditions to the market-place were often meticulously planned as were the marches to the farms of the *laboueurs*. Perhaps the more organized a riot was, the more likely it was to be a male activity.

Edward Thompson has described eighteenth-century riots in England where men sought to prevent women and children from accompanying them on the more organized expeditions.⁸⁶ He says that it "is probable that the women most frequently precipitated the

⁸³ A.D.Y., 1 LM 461.

⁸⁴ See for example the joint *procès verbal* drawn up by the municipal officers and *procureurs* of the communes of Montgeron, Yerres, Mandres, Perigny, Villecresne, Brunoy, Villeneuve, Quincy-sous-Senard, Santeny, Epinay-sous-Senard, Varennes, Boissy-Sainte-Antoine, Villeneuve-Saint-George on March 5, 1792, describing the march on Brie-Comte-Robert, A.N., F/7/3689/7; the *procès-verbal* drawn up by the mayor of Limours dated March 1, A.D.Y., 1 LM 460; report of the *Conseil général* of the town of Montfort dated October 25, 1792, A.N., F/7/3689/7.

⁸⁵ The distances travelled may have kept women from joining the marches, but it should be pointed out that in 1795, women travelled considerable distances in search of food.

⁸⁶ Thompson, "The Moral Economy," 111.

spontaneous actions."⁸⁷ In 1791 and 1792, it was in the market-place that the scope for spontaneous action still remained. In many cases, inhabitants of communes who were not involved in the prior march joined in, and here the women could be very active. On February 12, the two communes of Vert-le-Grand and Vert-le-Petit organized a march to the market of Montlhéry. No women appear to have been involved.⁸⁸ When the marchers arrived at Montlhéry they caused a tumult in the town. The men from the two arriving communes withdrew without entering the market-place, but their original intentions were carried out by the women of Montlhéry who bullied the municipal officers into fixing prices of grain, searched the storage rooms adjacent to the market, and ultimately killed Thibault, the grain and flour merchant. David Hunt has described the assassination of Thibault as being a more traditional, more "archaic" act of violence. In his view, it was not even an organic part of the revolt of 1792, which was more organized and controlled in character.⁸⁹

The interrogation of the arrested people and the testimony of witnesses indicate that the townspeople of Étampes were not given prior notice of the march on their town, although once the marchers

⁸⁷ Thompson, "The Moral Economy," 116.

⁸⁸ We get this impression from a reading of the detailed denunciations of the organizers of the march made by the procurator of the commune on March 13, 1792, as well as from the arrest records, A.D.Y. 42 L 27.

⁸⁹ David Hunt, "The People and Pierre Dolivier," 196.

were in the town, a section of the townspeople, including women, greeted them with joy. Therefore, available evidence indicates that in 1791 and 1792, women played an active role in the more spontaneous forms of food riots, while men dominated the more organized forms. Because the organized marches on the market towns and granaries played a significant role in the riots of 1791 and 1792, men appear in a dominant role in the food riots of these years.

In retrospect, it appears that the riots of 1791 and 1792 combined traditional and new features. The insurgents wanted to re-establish the importance of the market-place and the old rules and regulations which had controlled the commerce in grain. These were traditional objectives. What was new was the degree of organization that went into the riots and the attempt of the rioters to appropriate power locally in order to establish their objectives. In order to achieve their aims, the insurgents devised a broad range of strategies aimed at regulating buying and selling in the market-place so the interests of consumers were protected.

Did the Revolution have an impact on the rioters? In some ways it did. It instilled a sense of self confidence, of power, as is indicated by the detailed organization that went into the riots and the persistence with which the rioters sought to implement their ideas. Having waged war against the old aristocrats, the people now turned against the new, the speculators, the hoarders, the black marketeers, all those, who by breaking the ethical rules that governed

a community had placed themselves outside it. The Revolution had also given them a recognized role in politics. It had taught them that their elected representatives were there to do their bidding, and that if the laws in force did not serve their interests, new ones could be made that would.

But the riots were limited by their essentially localized character. Although we have spoken of a diffusion of ideas, it must be pointed out that this did not necessarily make for a wider community of action. Yves Marie Bercé has described the food riots of 1643 and 1709 as "no more than a rash of simultaneous incidents".⁹⁰ The food riots of 1791 and 1792 cannot be dismissed as incidents. They revealed a strength of ideas, a depth of organization and a staying power that seriously disconcerted authorities, including the National Assembly, and made them an event in the history of the Revolution.

The weakness of the rioters was their inability to conceive of their problems on a wider scale. There is no indication that they thought of a nation-wide or even a regional economic system. The basis of action remained the community, a community conceived of in broader terms than in pre-revolutionary times, perhaps, but still a community whose borders were circumscribed by those of the canton or the district at most. Many of the actions of the rioters, like their insistence that *laboureurs* and *fermiers* supply only the local markets

⁹⁰ Yves Marie Bercé, *History of Peasant Revolts*, trans. Amanda Whitmore (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1990), 179.

or their diversion of grain from one local market to another could injure the interests of the wider community. Any idea of a general movement or common interests was undercut by traditional suspicions.

David Hunt has said that the movement at Étampes on March 3 "provides an early example of a militant strategy of bringing urban and rural consumers together to gain better access to basic foodstuff."⁹¹ There are numerous indications that townspeople and country people, although involved in the same riot, did not act together, or sometimes did so reluctantly. The examples of Montlhéry and the two communes of Vert-le-Grand and Vert-le-Petit have already been given. The townspeople of Montlhéry erupted only after the inhabitants of the two communes of Vert-le-Grand and Vert-le-Petit withdrew from the town.

The authorities of the town of Étampes blamed the surrounding communes for the events of March 3. But the Municipality of Etréchy, the only one of the rural communes to draw up a detailed *procès verbal*, claimed that it was the townspeople who had excited the "arriving crowd," thus changing the character of an essentially peaceful expedition.⁹² The townspeople of Dourdan appear to have been forced against their will to join the people of the surrounding communes in their expeditions to the neighboring farms to determine

⁹¹ Hunt, "The People and Pierre Dolivier," 200.

⁹² *Procès verbal* of the Municipality of Etréchy, dated March 3, A.D.Y., 1 LM 408.

the amount of grain left in the district.⁹³ It is also doubtful if many of the participants felt a sense of solidarity with their fellow rioters. Some of the communes insisted that they had been forced to join a riot by their neighbors.⁹⁴ Individual rioters made this claim even more frequently. Although some stoutly refused to implicate their fellow rioters by naming names,⁹⁵ others just as frequently did.⁹⁶

Because the vision of the rioters was local, their ideas could have never been imposed on a permanent basis, despite their best efforts and intentions. The numerous "confederacy of communes" set up by the rioters would have ultimately collapsed under the weight of their own contradictions because of the friction arising from conflicting interests. It is fair to say that the scope of revolutionary action remained limited. It is to read too much into the riots to claim, as David Hunt has, that "Participants in these

⁹³ For the procès verbal of the *Conseil général* of the commune of Dourdan, dated March 15, see A.D.Y., 1 LM 461; for the report of Delahaye, lieutenant of the national gendarmerie, dated March 15, see A.D.Y., 1 LM 459.

⁹⁴ For example, this claim was made by the communes of Auvers and Etréchy, in the district of Étampes after March 3, and by the commune of Santery, in the district of Corbeil on March 6. For Etréchy, see procès verbal of the municipality, A.D.Y., 1 LM 408 and for Auvers, deliberations of the Directory of the district of Étampes, dated April 2, A.D.Y., 1 LM 408. For Santery, procès verbal of the municipality dated March 6, 1792, A.N., F/7/3689/7.

⁹⁵ For example Jean Baptiste Demolière, wine-grower and municipal officer of the commune of Chamarande, district of Étampes, see acte d'accusation, dated June 1, 1792, A.D.Y., 42 L 30.

⁹⁶ Interrogation of Abraham Bigot dated October 29, 1792, A.D.Y., 42 L 33.

revolts, whose first relatively modest objective was to enforce the just price and the customary rules in the market-place, gradually came to formulate a more comprehensive political strategy. The Republic they were beginning to envision was not a mere juridical form, but a new kind of society in which democratic practice would ensure popular sovereignty and the right of subsistence."⁹⁷ This conception of society in broader, more abstract terms was not present among the rioters in March and April 1792.

It needed a Pierre Dolivier, *curé* of Mauchamp, who led a delegation of citizens from the communes north of Étampes to the Legislative Assembly, to pose the problem in terms more applicable to the whole country, and indeed to society as a whole. Dolivier presented the problem of subsistence as one dividing society between the rich and the poor. He declared that "the benefits of nature should fall upon the person who renders it the most laborious and assiduous services."⁹⁸ Yet, this did not happen in reality. In Dolivier's view, the rich idlers who had done nothing to deserve their prosperity remained secure from all scarcity, while the poor laborer and the working farmer remained at the mercy of accidents and suffered the misfortunes of scarcity.

⁹⁷ Hunt, "The People and Pierre Dolivier," 185.

⁹⁸ Pierre Dolivier's petition may be found in *Archives parlementaires*, 1st ser., 42:635-638.

Dolivier spoke out strongly against unlimited freedom in the commerce of food grains for it only injured the interests of the poor. He disputed the concept that regulating prices of grain was an attack on the rights of property. He claimed that the nation alone was the sole proprietor of land, thus implying that proprietors only enjoyed such rights as were delegated by the nation. The solution that Dolivier proposed was also political. He demanded universal manhood suffrage. Dolivier criticized the aristocratic electoral system which deprived three quarters of the citizens of their rights and claimed that for justice to be available to all, the right to vote should be universal.

Dolivier thus posed the problem of subsistence in fundamental terms. Like the rioters he called for a regulated economy. But he argued that this economy could only be part of a society where political rights were evenly distributed. Once the poor had political rights, they would be able to fight for their economic rights as well. For Dolivier the key to such restructuring of society was the extension of political rights to the poor.

Such a solution was not envisaged in March-April 1792, by either the rioters or the authorities. The troops sent into Seine-et-Oise by the Legislative Assembly ultimately broke the back of the riots. But the questions raised -- that of economic controls and redistribution of property -- did not die away. The situation in which the department of Seine-et-Oise found itself after April 1792 ensured that the

complaints first made by the rioters gradually came to be echoed by the authorities, even the Directory of the department.⁹⁹

Impact of the riots on the administration

In September 1792, the Municipality of Houdan in the district of Montfort, made the first demand for uniform prices throughout the Republic. It might not be entirely coincidental that the same demand was voiced for the first time by the rioters in October 27, 1792, at Rambouillet. The demand was part of a petition drawn up by the communes of la Queue, Galluis, Méré, Grosrouvre, Montfort and les Mesnuls from the district of Montfort. Here we find an example of the interaction between the rioters and the authorities referred to at the beginning of this chapter. The demand for fixed prices first voiced by the rioters was taken up by the local authorities, who, in the process, gave them a national character they had lacked earlier. Learning quickly, the rioters reiterated this demand but gave it force and immediacy by voicing it in the course of a riot.

That same month, the mayor and municipal officers of the commune of Rocheguyon, in the district of Mantes, along with eighty-four other citizens, drew up a petition which they presented to the Convention.¹⁰⁰ The object of the petition was to obtain a general law whose advantage could be shared by all the citizens of the French

⁹⁹ See chapter III, "Governmental Policy and Food Riots."

¹⁰⁰ A.N., AD 69.

Republic. This petition maintained that the law upholding freedom of commerce and circulation of grain in the whole of the country could not be successful as long as there remained greed in the hearts of men. The effect of this law had been to make the cultivators, proprietors and farmers, withhold grain from the market, thus pushing up prices to levels at which the poor could no longer afford to buy. The petition proposed placing a series of controls on "cultivators, proprietors and farmers" who would be obliged to furnish markets within a radius of four to six *lieues* of their residences, to take to market $1/4$, $1/3$ or $1/2$ of their harvest, according to whether the harvest that year was good, mediocre, or bad and to make a declaration before the municipalities about the quantity and quality of the harvest.

The next month Goujon presented his petition to the Convention where he called for the return of the ancient regulations throughout the Republic.¹⁰¹ The radical feature of Goujon's petition was the proposal of a ceiling on landed property. Goujon appended the idea of a maximum of property to the idea of a maximum on prices. The rioters had wanted to set limits on the absolute right of property through their demand of a maximum on prices. Goujon went further and called for a restructuring of property in the Republic. The solution that Goujon proposed to deal with the problem of subsistence was intimately

¹⁰¹ For details, see chapter III, "Governmental Policy and Food Riots."

linked with the conditions in the department of the Seine-et-Oise, where a small fraction of the population controlled much of the land, thus making the rest of the population extremely vulnerable to food shortages and price rises. But Goujon presented his petition as a solution for the problem of subsistence which was applicable to the whole country.

Thus, by November 1792, there was consensus among a large section of the population of the Seine-et-Oise that unlimited freedom of commerce and circulation of grain were injurious to their interests and that a return to a more controlled system was necessary. The demands for a controlled economy had first been formulated by the rioters, who, in their own circumscribed way, had been groping for solutions, only to be crushed by the might of the state. These demands were gradually taken up by the administrators at various levels of the government of Seine-et-Oise who consciously presented them as a national solution for the problem of subsistence. The administrators also realized that if a controlled economy had to be brought back, it could only be enforced from the center. Thus, they began to bring increasing pressure on the Convention as well. The result of these developments was that, by the autumn of 1792, the demands originally made by the rioters became a part of mainstream politics, at first in the department of the Seine-et-Oise, and then in the whole France.

The Food Riots of 1795: Targets of activity and objectives

The next wave of food riots broke out in the spring of 1795. In the two intervening years, the popular movement had won a stunning victory with the institution of the Maximum and then suffered a crushing defeat when the Maximum was abandoned in December 1794. The riots of germinal (March-April) 1795 have this defeat written all over them. These were not the market riots of 1791-1792, but incursions into the farms of rich cultivators in search of grain. There were also scattered cases of *entraves*. But the *entraves* of 1795 were very different in character from those of 1791-1792. When grain was found it was always distributed right on the spot or, at most, taken to the commune the rioters came from and then distributed. That the market-place was no longer important was recognized even by the rioters. The old controlled economy that the people had fought for was a thing of the past. In 1795, there is none of the confidence of the earlier years, no desire to re-establish order in the market-place or to teach the aristocrats a lesson. The terrifying face of famine is imprinted in the words and actions of the rioters. A carter who had been the victim of an *entrave* in the commune of Lassy in the district of Gonesse, complained that the people who had stopped his cart had not only taken away his grain, they had devoured on the spot the meager dinner he was carrying with him.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Among the people involved in the incident were the secretary and the mayor of the commune of Lassy, A.D.Y., 42 L 57 bis.

We also come across cases where the rioters lose their sense of discrimination in their choice of victims. Thus in Lassy again, on the 22 messidor (July 10), a large number of women stopped three people who were carrying 3 *minots* of grain. Two *minots* of grain were taken away. Among the victims, one identified herself as the wife of a *mainouvrier* of the commune of Mareil en France.¹⁰³ This behavior may be contrasted with that of 1792, when, in the searches of farms around Palaiseau, the rioters seized 20 *sétiers* of wheat at Sanglier's farm but left untouched 3 or 4 *minots* of wheat which the farmer Niçaise of Villebon claimed he had put aside as seed.¹⁰⁴

The desperation of the people comes across in other ways as well. During their interrogations the rioters repeatedly said that unbearable hunger had forced them to the homes of the cultivators. Many of the arrested persons said that they would have paid more if the cultivators had so demanded but that the latter had refused to set a price.¹⁰⁵ Others claimed that they had earlier asked the cultivators to sell them grain, offering to pay the market price, but that the

¹⁰³ A.D.Y., 42 L 57 bis.

¹⁰⁴ Procès verbal of the Municipality of Palaiseau dated February 21, 1792, A.D.Y., I LM 460.

¹⁰⁵ Interrogations of Jean Baptiste Legras, cobbler of Morsang, district of Corbeil, dated 18 germinal an III, and Augustin Tourdeau, wine-grower of Villecresne, district of Corbeil, A.D.Y., 42 L 57 bis.

cultivators had refused to sell.¹⁰⁶ One of them said that it was because the cultivators had refused to bring grain to market that they were forced to come to their farms. He even reminded the cultivators of the law that they were breaking, the law that obliged them to take grain to the market.¹⁰⁷ The ethical rules that governed the community had clearly been broken and the rioters were trying to re-establish them. But this time the moral economy was being established, *not* in the market-place, but in the farms, which in itself was a defeat for the rioters.

The sense of community was very strong among the rioters of 1795. In an effort to ensure that all the needy got at least a little grain, the rioters never took more than a *boisseau* each. The fact that Marie Sophie Avenard of Savigny had taken 3 *boisseaux* of wheat from the farmer Beaupied in the course of a riot on 18 germinal, was so singular that it aroused the curiosity of the judge. Marie Sophie replied that all the 3 *boisseaux* were not for her. One was for her uncle, one for her cousin and only the third was for her.¹⁰⁸ Theodore Maître, arrested for stopping a cart with three and a half *sétiers* of

¹⁰⁶ Interrogation of Theodore Maître of Massliers, district of Gonesse, dated 1 prairial, an III, A.D.Y., 42 L 57½; interrogation of Michel Béliard and Marguerite Chambron on 17 messidor an III, A.D.Y., 42 L 57 bis.

¹⁰⁷ Interrogation of Pierre Laliez, gardener of Ris on 23 floréal A.D.Y., 42 L 57½.

¹⁰⁸ Interrogation of Marie Sophie Avenard on 27 floréal an III, A.D.Y., 42 L 55 bis.

grain near Massliers, in the district of Gonesse on 21 floréal, said he had taken the cart back to Massliers so it could be distributed among all the members of his commune.¹⁰⁹ After threshing the grain and distributing it among themselves, the rioters always insisted on paying, even if it was a price they had fixed themselves. The money could be left on a window sill (as at Roubourdin's farm at Fleury Méroges in the district of Corbeil) or could be sent over afterwards by a person not involved in the riot (as to the home of S. Mottheau at Plessis Paté, district of Corbeil).¹¹⁰ But the rioters could always state the rate at which the cultivator had been paid which showed that as in the market riots, so in these incursions to the farms, the price fixed was based on the consensus of the community.

Organization and composition of the riots

The organization behind these riots was minimal. There were rarely more than thirty to forty people in a group. The largest assembly was at the farm of citizen Beaupied at Paray in the district of Corbeil. The crowd was composed of two hundred to three hundred people, both men and women, and all of them were from Juvisy and Savigny. Some of the arrested persons said that they had heard of the proposed expedition the night before or early the same morning, but

¹⁰⁹ Interrogation of Theodore Maître, mason at Maffliers on 1 prairial, A.D.Y., 42 L 57 ½.

¹¹⁰ A.D.Y., 42 L 56; A.D.Y., 42 L 57 bis.

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¹⁰⁹ Interrogation of Theodore Maître, mason at Maffliers on 1 prairial, A.D.Y., 42 L 57 $\frac{1}{2}$.

¹¹⁰ A.D.Y., 42 L 56; A.D.Y., 42 L 57 bis.

by far the largest number maintained that it was while passing by Paray that they had noticed the assembly in Beaupied's farm and had gone to investigate.¹¹¹ These early morning expeditions were a far cry from the organized riots of 1791-1792, often involving three hundred to four hundred persons and sometimes ten to fifteen communes. Women and men both participated in all the riots in 1795, which in itself is a telling sign. The arrest records for the district of Corbeil show a total of 89 arrests.¹¹² Of them only 22 are women, but the *procès verbal* and the testimony of witnesses invariably mention women in the crowd. The women were mostly the wives of wine-growers (6), urban and rural wage workers (8) and artisans (4).¹¹³ Of the 67 men arrested,

¹¹¹ A.D.Y., 42 L 55 bis.

¹¹² The records available mostly relate to invasions of the farms of various cultivators, namely, the invasion of the farm of Louis Beaupied in Paray, district of Versailles on 18 germinal (April 7), where the crowd was mostly made up of men and women from the communes of Savigny and Juvisy in the district of Corbeil; invasions of various farms in the commune of Arpajon, district of Corbeil, from 18 to 21 germinal (April 7 to 9); the invasions of various farms in the communes of Plessis Paté, on 14 and 15 germinal (April 3 and 4), Fleury-Merogis on 12 germinal (April 1), Tigery on 19 germinal (April 8), Mennecy on 17 germinal (April 6), and Vert-le-Grand on 5 germinal (March 25), all in the district of Corbeil. The records can be found in A.D.Y., 42 L -- 55 bis; 56; 57½; 57 bis. There is one case of a group of men and women stopping a cartload of grain in Boissy-Saint-Leger on 23 germinal (April 12), and distributing its contents among themselves.

¹¹³ Seven *journalières* or wives of *journaliers*; the others are listed as "wives of" -- wine-growers (6); quarrier (1); carpenter (1); locksmiths (2); carpenter (1); butchers (2). One is a *couturière* and the other is listed simply as the being the wife of "so and so".

20 were artisans,¹¹⁴ 20 were wage-workers,¹¹⁵ 16 were wine-growers and 2 were notary-clerks. Among the rest were an inn-keeper, a postilion, a wine-merchant and grocer, a forest guard, a marine, and a butcher. The professions of three men are unknown. In 1795 it was the poor rural communes, largely made up of landless agricultural laborers and small wine-growers, which were the worst hit. The municipalities of the larger towns put together a system of distributing food, however unsatisfactory that might be. In the richer communes (as in southern Corbeil) the *journaliers* received a food portion as part of their wages and subsidies, which perhaps saved them from starvation. It was in the poorest communes, for example, Savigny, Juvisy, Morsang, and Draveil, located on the banks of the Seine river, that the inhabitants, without work, without food, and without any system of relief, faced the worst effects of the famine of 1795.

In Gonesse the arrest records show 21 of the 30 arrested to be women.¹¹⁶ The women were identified either as lace workers, or as

¹¹⁴ Two weavers, 2 masons, 3 shoe-makers, a dress-maker, a baker, 2 wheelwrights, a coppersmith, an ex-cook, a wood-turner, 2 carpenters, a blacksmith, 2 locksmiths, a cooper.

¹¹⁵ Five gardeners, 11 *journaliers*, a quarrier, a navy, a carter and a bell-ringer.

¹¹⁶ The arrest records mostly relate to cases of cartloads of grain being stopped by men and women in the communes of Massliers on 21 floréal (May 10), Brie-Libre on 26 floréal (May 15), and at Lassy on 23 floréal (May 12) and 30 germinal (April 19), A.D.Y., 42 L 57 bis and 42 L 57½.

wives of artisans and *journaliers*.¹¹⁷ Among the men only one was a *journalier*. Among the rest were a mason, a merchant, a carter, a butcher, a roofer, a mayor, and a clerk. Again, it may be argued that in the rich agricultural communes of Gonesse, it was the artisans and those engaged in cottage production, rather than the *journaliers*, who were worst hit by the famine of 1795.

The Market riots of 1795

The market riots of 1795 showed signs of greater organization and a greater degree of political consciousness among the rioters than the incursions into the homes of farmers. The market riots of 1795 were far fewer than those of 1791 and 1792. It has been shown in chapter III that the decline of the market-place led to a decrease of market riots in 1794-1795. There were numerous demonstrations against the lack of foodstuff in the market-place, as at Corbeil and Mantes, but the most important market riot was the one that occurred at Saint-Germain on 17 germinal (April 6).¹¹⁸ Some of its features are reminiscent of the riots of 1791-1792.

Initially the people demanded that the tocsin be sounded so that the surrounding communes could join with them and make searches to

¹¹⁷ Nine lace-workers, and "wives of" *journaliers* (3), masons (2), carpenters (1), dressmakers (1), inn-keepers (1), and locksmiths (1). One is a linen-worker and the other is a domestic.

¹¹⁸ The history of the food riot at Saint-Germain has been reconstructed from the testimony of witnesses taken on 22 germinal, an III. These documents may be found in A.D.Y., 42 L 57½.

determine who had hidden stores of flour and grain. The targets were the grain and flour merchants who were liberally abused. But the riot had other features which were indicative of the political awareness and organization that had taken place among the popular classes since 1793. After the initial outburst, sectional meetings were held where the plan of action was decided. One of the strongest demands was that the people of Saint-Germain, accompanied by those of the surrounding communes go to the Convention in a body to demand bread. In the general meeting of the four sections held at the *Temple de la Raison*, the cry was raised, "*en masse, en masse, du pain, la Constitution de 1793.*" Demands were made for grain to be declared national property. Some suggested that the grain merchants be forced to march in front of the crowd. It is clear from the actions of the assembled people that they were aware that it was the Convention that had to be pressured to give in to their demands, that ordinary consumers would be best served through a Constitution which permanently embodied their interests. There was at the same time a marked disillusionment with the central power. Felix Rauzan, a witness, said that at the general assembly, people had not asked for a return to the monarchy (which makes us wonder whether such demands had been voiced among the people of Saint-Germain in the recent past), but acknowledged, as did many

other witnesses, that people had spoken badly of the representative on mission, Charles Delacroix, as well as of the Convention.¹¹⁹

The food riot in Saint-Germain gave rise to a rumor which people heard far away, that the rioters had demanded a king.¹²⁰ In 1795, there were many who, even if they did not actually yearn for the return of the king, at least sighed for the times of Robespierre. Tisson, pedlar of journals, was reported to the lieutenant of the national gendarmerie for having identified himself as a Jacobin and having asked the *citoyenne* Pigourier, "do you have more bread since the death of Robespierre?"¹²¹ Breton, a carpet maker, was hauled up before the *Conseil général* of the commune of Saint-Germain for having composed a ditty named *réveil des sans culottes* which parodied the *réveil de peuple*.¹²² The *réveil de peuple* was an anti-Jacobin song which became the battle cry of the *muscadins*, the foppishly dressed young men who became increasingly visible in the Year III as opponents

¹¹⁹ It is significant that the people are supposed to have referred to the Convention as the *représentation nationale*. The use of this term shows that by 1795 the crowd is aware of how the political system works, that is there is a feeling among the crowd that government is made up of their representatives and it is the duty of the representatives to protect the interests of the people.

¹²⁰ François Peroux, carpenter at Saint-Germain mentioned in his testimony that he had received a letter from a gunner who was a volunteer in the army of Moselle. He had wanted to know whether the rumor was true, A.D.Y., 42 L 57 ½.

¹²¹ "Avez vous plus de pain depuis la mort de Robespierre?" He was reported by citizeness Julienne Doulé, A.D.Y., 42 L 57 ½.

¹²² *réveil* = awakening.

of the Jacobins and the sans-culottes. In parodying this song, Breton was expressing his Jacobin sympathies, and this got him into trouble with the authorities in the Year III. Jeanne Catherine Maugglet, wife of a real estate merchant declared that on the day following the riot, some women had come to the door and among other threats had said "One must bring down all the muscadins and rich men."¹²³ The government was discredited in the eyes of the rioters, and all those who supported or were associated with the regime in any way became the enemies of the rioters.

At Mantes on 6 germinai (March 26), the daily demonstration at the market-place took on an overtly political character. About eight hundred people from the countryside converged on the market-place in their search for grain. Their efforts to secure grain proved no more successful than in earlier days. In disgust, the people began to systematically tear off the *cocarde nationale*¹²⁴ from their caps and hats. Those who refused to do so were accused of being in possession of grain and ordered to leave the market-place. The Municipality of Mantes recognized that the demonstration was aimed directly at an order issued the day before by the department of the Seine-et-Oise and ratified by the representative of the people Delacroix. The order enjoined all citizens to wear the *cocarde nationale* and threatened

¹²³ "Il fallait tomber tous les muscadins et les gens riches."
A.D.Y., 42 L 57½.

¹²⁴ *cocarde nationale* = the round tricolor badge worn by the supporters of the Revolution.

with punishment all those who snatched it from the heads of good citizens. Copies of this order had apparently been put up in all corners of the market-place.¹²⁵ This intertwining of political and economic motives is striking. A government which failed to feed its people had no right to give them orders. Everything this government held sacred would be rejected by the people. The sentiments of the people of Mantes may be compared with those of Versailles who were reported to have said that "one would do better to procure flour for them than to decree fêtes,"¹²⁶ in obvious contempt of the revolutionary festivals decreed by the government.

In Dourdan children cried in the streets,

Vive la République

(Long live the Republic)

Il n'y a pas pain dans la boutique

(There is no bread in the boutique/shop)

Vive la Nation

(Long live the Nation)

Il n'y a pas pain dans la maison

¹²⁵ Grave, "Les subsistances à Mantes de messidor an II à messidor an III," 52.

¹²⁶ "On ferait mieux de leur procurer de la farine que de décréter de fêtes." Report on *esprit public* submitted on January 25, 1794, Defrèsne and Evrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:443-444.

(There is no bread in the home).¹²⁷

The feelings of the people were summed up by the administration of the department in the *compte décadaire*¹²⁸ that it sent to the Committee of Public safety in the third *décade* of thermidor.¹²⁹

Si quelques individus sortent de la énorme apathie ou les ont plongés de la faim supportées depuis si longtemps ce n'est que pour faire entendre des murmures et des imprecations toujours dirigés contre ceux qui tiennent les rênes du gouvernement. La représentation nationale est la premier attaqué. Les fonctionnaires publics ressentent les contrecoups de la prescriptions qui menace les uns et les autres.

If some individuals emerge from the enormous apathy into which they have been plunged by the hunger they have endured for so long, it is only to make known the grumbings and the imprecations always directed against those who hold the reins of government. The national government is the first one

¹²⁷ Emile Auvray, "Les subsistances dans le district de Dourdan pendant la Convention thermidorienne," *Recherche et publication des documents relatifs à la vie économique de la Révolution. Comité départemental de Seine-et-Oise* 14 (1935-1937): 40.

¹²⁸ *compte décadaire* = the *comptes décadaires* were reports drawn up every ten days by the district and departmental administrations. These reports contained detailed information on matters relating to subsistence.

¹²⁹ A.D.Y., 1 LM 387.

attacked. The public servants feel the effects of the repercussions of the instructions which menace all.

This disillusionment with the central government was not limited to the people on the streets. It could also be found in the writings of the departmental administrators. Writing to the Convention, the Directory of the district of Versailles, outlined the horrific state of subsistence in the district of Versailles where the inhabitants of the countryside were forced to buy a pound of bread at 15 *so/s* to 35 *so/s* and the people of the city had just eight ounces of bread per day. The total exhaustion of resources could weary the patience of the staunchest republicans, the letter concluded.¹³⁰

In the food riot of 1795 at Saint-Germain, the political awareness among the rioters was more advanced than that of 1792. The riot at Saint-Germain was a local one but the vision of the rioters was by no means local.¹³¹ They were advocating a plan for a controlled commerce in grain which was to be put into effect by the central power in the nation as a whole. In practical terms, such a program of action was likely to be far more successful than the localized actions of the rioters in 1792. That such a program was to be embodied in a

¹³⁰ Letter of 5 germinal an III (March 25, 1795), quoted in Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances* 2:416.

¹³¹ Tisson, distributor of journals had yelled in the moment when the tocsin was being sounded at Saint-Germain, "la révolte de Rouen, l'insurrection d'Amiens," a sign that some people at least, had transcended the localism of 1792.

Constitution, ratified by the people, was another guarantee of its permanent success. In this respect, the actions of the rioters of Saint-Germain in 1795 were more advanced politically than those of the rioters in 1792. The actions of the rioters of Saint-Germain on 17 germinal (April 6) were probably influenced by the events of 12 germinal (April 1) in Paris, where the people marched in a body to the Convention to the cry of *du pain et la Constitution de 1793*. Richard Cobb and George Rudé have characterized the riot of 12 germinal (April 6) as "the last popular movement of the Revolution in Paris."¹³² It was a throwback to the happier days of 1793-1794, when the people had seen their economic and political program come closer to realization than at any other time during the Revolution.

In Saint-Germain, the very same days were evoked in the course of the riot. The actions of the rioters at Saint-Germain showed that they had learned the political lessons of 1793-1794 well. They had realized that a permanent solution to the problem of subsistence could be worked out only through the central government and hence they thought to march to the Convention to press their demands. But the rioters did not trust the conservative Convention of 1795 to protect the interests of the people. So they demanded a return to the Constitution of 1793 which had given political rights to the people and protected their interests. This was the same kind of program

¹³² Richard Cobb and George Rudé, "Le dernier mouvement populaire de la Révolution à Paris: Les journées de germinal et de prairial an III," *Revue Historique* 214 (1955): 250-281.

advocated in 1792 by Pierre Dolivier who had argued that political rights should be the foundation of economic rights. By 1795, this program had been adopted by the rioters of Saint-Germain as their own. The idea that accession to political rights would help the people protect their economic rights was an idea directly bequeathed by the Revolution, and its adoption by the rioters was an important indicator in the progress of political consciousness.

The women of Versailles who rioted on 21 and 22 frimaire, an III (December 11 and 12, 1794) to bring down the price of bread were groping towards the same kind of solution. They not only invaded the localities where the Municipality and the Directory of the district held their sessions, but had also forced the members of the directory to accept the idea of persuading the Committees of the central government (in this case the committees of Public Safety, General Security and Legislation) to fix the price of bread. The riot was crushed on the following day, but the idea of marching on the Convention did not die out, resurfacing again and again during the troubled days of germinal (March-April).¹³³ Even in small towns like Sevres, people talked of marching upon the Convention in order to impose their demands on the government. On 10 germinal (March 30) several inhabitants of the Municipality of Sevres began to sound the drums, while Joseph Nadot, a wine-grower of the commune of Firly,

¹³³ Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:316-317. For the germinal days, see page 422.

mounted the bell tower in order to sound the bells. Nadot was arrested and interrogated by the municipality. He said that neither he nor his four infants had had bread for four days and that they were dying of hunger. He said that his intention had been to gather the populace and to lead them on a march to the Convention.¹³⁴

It should be pointed out here that the goal of the crowd was still traditional. Their aim was to bring about the return of the controlled economy which they believed could alone protect the interests of the people. The new liberal economy, which hurt the interests of the poor and deprived them of the means of subsistence while enabling a small aristocracy to get rich at their expense, was not acceptable to them. In this sense the crowd wanted a return to the "moral economy". But in another sense the rioters of Saint-Germain went beyond fighting for the traditional "moral economy" as defined by E.P. Thompson. The crowd in the food riot, as E. P. Thompson has pointed out, "derived its sense of legitimation from the paternalist model."¹³⁵ Many among the local gentry, magistrates and other government officials resented the whittling away of the old controls and thought that a free economy would be detrimental to the interests of ordinary people in times of dearth. The rioters in turn looked to these paternalists to support them in their grievances. In 1795, the

¹³⁴ *Procès verbal* of the Municipality of Sevres, dated 10 germinal an III (30 March, 1793). Defrèsne and Évrard, *Les subsistances*, 2:433,

¹³⁵ E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy," 95.

rioters of Saint-Germain acted differently. They declared that the Constitution of 1793 would protect their interests, not government officials who sought to impose on the populace their vision of what was best for them.

The writings of some government officials also expressed this new line of thinking in striking terms. The *compte décadaires* which the *procureur syndic* of Saint-Germain, a dedicated official and compassionate human being, sent to the *procureur général syndic* of the department, are a model of meticulous reporting.¹³⁶ Every ten days this official reported in great detail on the extreme misery in the district of Saint-Germain and the toll that it was exacting on the bodies and minds of the inhabitants. He wrote in the third *décade* of prairial, "the people suffer the ills in the most profound silence,"¹³⁷ and again in the first *décade* of thermidor, "nothing energizes these people so easy to excite in the past."¹³⁸ But the same official wrote the third *décade* of fructidor that the news that a new constitution had been drawn up and general committees convened had led to a effervescence among the people. Describing the process he said:

A la lecture de la charte constitutionnelle chaque membre d'une assemblée primaire répète: et moi aussi je suis souverain, et

¹³⁶ A.D.Y., 1 LM 396.

¹³⁷ "[Le peuple] souffre les maux dans le silence le plus profond."

¹³⁸ "Rien n'électrise ces hommes autrefois si faciles à inflammer."

bientôt redescendait au simple rang de législateur; chacun s'assie modestement à côté de Montesquieu.¹³⁹

At the reading of the constitutional charter, each member of a primary assembly repeats: "And I also am sovereign," and immediately descended back to the simple rank of legislator; each one sits modestly besides Montesquieu.

The connection between this new consciousness of political rights and the food situation becomes clear when he writes in the second *décade* of vendémiaire, an IV (October, 1796):

Le peuple n'a plus d'espoir que dans la marche accélérée de la nouvelle constitution. Elle seul doit mettre un terme à ces orages politiques qui rompent les anneaux de la chaîne sociale, et ramener l'ordre, l'abondance et la paix.¹⁴⁰

The people have hope only in the accelerated march of the new constitution. It [the constitution] alone can put an end to these political storms that are breaking the rings of the social chain, and can bring back, order, abundance and peace.

¹³⁹ A.D.Y., 1 LM 396.

¹⁴⁰ A.D.Y. 1 LM 396.

The thoughts of this official and of the rioters of Saint-Germain converge in their belief that the hope for the future lay in a Constitution which would safeguard the interests of the consumers and bind upon the government. This Constitution, they hoped, would restore the rights which had been progressively whittled away, including the right of subsistence. So, in 1795, it was political sovereignty, not paternalism, from which the moral economy drew legitimacy.

1795 was not 1793 or even 1792. In 1795, the weight of accumulated defeats and the terrible ravages of a famine had crushed the spirit of the people. The cry for a controlled economy, voiced by the rioters at Saint-Germain, found no echo elsewhere in the department. Unlike in 1792, this demand was not taken up by the departmental authorities. The rioters and the authorities had parted ways. To the people at the top, a controlled economy was no more than a failed experiment. To the people at the bottom, it offered a solution for their economic problems. But without any support from the top, this idea could not be enforced. So the market riot at Saint-Germain remained an isolated spark, a monument to the politicization of the rioters and the expression of their desires, but not an event with lasting impact on the Revolution.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

This dissertation is both a study of food riots in late-eighteenth-century France and of popular activism during the Revolution. The dissertation argues that food riots may be usefully studied by placing them within specific economic, social and political contexts. As contexts changed, so did the character of the food riots. The French Revolution provided the background for the food riots in the Seine-et-Oise from 1789 through 1795. The policies of revolutionary governments, the war, the hopes and aspirations engendered by the Revolution all provided the setting for the food riots. As circumstances changed, so did the problems faced by the rioters. So the responses they fashioned to deal with the problems also varied, which accounts for the fact that the riots exhibited different characteristics during different years.

By taking the long view, it is possible to identify different phases of the food riots during the revolutionary years: 1789-1792, 1793 and 1795. The ultimate aim of the rioters during all of these periods remained the same, to get access to food at fair prices, that is, to guarantee their right to subsistence. But the particular

circumstances of the different periods demanded that the rioters adjust their immediate goals accordingly. Until 1793 the primary goal of the rioters was to keep the marketplace functioning. But as the marketplace declined irreversibly in 1795, the rioters turned their attention to the private farms and storehouses to get access to food.

The rioters also changed strategies as the immediate goals they set out to achieve changed. Thus, in the period 1789-1793 they adopted a range of strategies to get grain to the marketplace. In 1789-1792 the primary targets of the riots were the rich farmers and grain merchants whom the rioters forced to take grain to the markets, while in 1793 the primary targets were the convoys carrying grain to Paris. There was thus a shift from the market riots of 1789-1792 to the *entraves* of 1793. In 1795 the targets were the farms of the rich farmers where the rioters located grain. Through all these years the rioters emphasised the need to act as a community (even though strains within the community were sometimes evident) and to pay just prices for the grain they took from other members of the community.

In this dissertation, food riots have been viewed not only as negative expressions of protest but also as constructive attempts on the part of the rioters to correct what they felt was wrong with the economy, society, and ultimately the polity. This dissertation has, on the one hand, explored the social structure and the economy of the Seine-et-Oise, as well as short term governmental policies and economic strains with a view to determining how they contributed to

the subsistence problem and, therefore, to the riots. On the other hand, close attention has been paid to the actual riots, to the events as they unfolded, to the goals of the rioters, the demands they formulated, the strategies they employed, and the organization they built up to achieve their aims. It has been shown that the riots were not random events, that the best way to understand them is to study them as informed responses on the part of the rioters to the actual problems they faced during a particular period.

The Revolution was closely intertwined with the food riots. The needs of the Revolution helped shape the governmental policies which turned out to be unpopular with the rioters. The Revolution also caused some of the economic strains that contributed to the riots, and the political lessons learned from the Revolution helped the rioters devise ever more radical solutions to solve the problem of subsistence. This dissertation has argued that in the course of the years 1789-1795, the rioters were drawn into the wider political nation which the Revolution helped bring about through the legitimation it granted to popular activism and popular participation in the constitutional process. But the origins of the riots and the goals of the rioters remained autonomous. Although they were aware of the high politics of the Revolution, the rioters adapted revolutionary language, techniques and ideology as symbolized in the principles of liberty, equality and popular sovereignty to suit their own needs and pursue their own goals, many of which were traditional or customary.

To study the food riots during the Revolution, is to study how the Revolution affected the lives of the ordinary people -- the artisans, the wage-workers and the small peasants -- in the department of the Seine-et-Oise.

In the history of subsistence rioting, the food riots of the Seine-et-Oise occupy a distinct position, combining both traditional and modern features. To a certain extent, the ideology of the moral economy underlay the riots and provided the justification for the rioters' actions. From this perspective, the riots were a part of the traditional body of food riots in France. But the riots also showed some signs of modernity in organization and techniques, and to a certain extent, in goals. By 1795, some rioters had realized the need to move beyond localized politics and this realization invested the riots with great potential power. The demands of some 1795 rioters that their right to subsistence should be enshrined in a Constitution that would permanently protect their interests showed that these rioters were conscious of the principle of popular sovereignty espoused by the Revolution. The rioters' insistence that the central government take responsibility in providing subsistence to the people shows that some of them were moving towards a realization of modern national politics. There is not, of course, a linear relationship between the food riots of the Revolution and modern politics, for food riots in the nineteenth century could revert to the localism of earlier times. The point to note is that subsistence rioters at

various times and places could and did make use of new ideas and techniques. This study of food riots has shown how the rioters in the Seine-et-Oise learned from the Revolution and used new techniques, language and ideas from the Revolution to add new dimensions to a traditional form of popular protest during a very important period of French history.

Appendix A
Chronology of Market Riots

| Date | Place of riot | Wheat price fixed at (in livres) |
|------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| 1789 | | |
| July 16-18 | Saint-Germain, Poissy, Andresy, Puisseux | |
| July 19 | Chevreuse | 24 |
| July 20 | Ferté Alais | |
| July 22 | Houdan | 31 |
| September 1 | Palaiseau | 24 |
| September 5 | Étampes | |
| September 13 | Versailles | |
| 1791 | | |
| September 5, 12, 19 | Gonesse | 16-22 |

| | | |
|---------------------|--|----|
| September 12--19 | Louvres, Puiseux, Marly-la-ville, Chatenay, Chennevières, Tremblay -- district of Gonesse | 20 |
| September 10--16 | Étampes | |
| September 13 | Mennecy -- district of Corbeil | 24 |
| September 16 | Corbeil | 22 |
| 1792 | | |
| February 13 | Montlhéry, Vers-le-Petit, Vers-le-Grand -- district of Corbeil | 24 |
| February 20 | Montlhéry, Morsang, Villemoisson, Grigny, Viry, Ourangis, Plessis-le-Comte, Fleury, Courcouronnes, Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois, Bondoufle, Savigny, Saint-Michel -- districts of Corbeil and Versailles | 24 |

| | | |
|-----------------|---|-------|
| February 23 | Beaumont-sur-Oise -- district of Pontoise | |
| February 27 | Montlhéry -- district of Corbeil | 20-24 |
| February 21--28 | <i>cantons</i> of Longjumeau, Jouy, Chevreuse, Palaiseau, Limours -- district of Versailles | 20-24 |
| February 29 | Ballainvilliers, Saulx-les-Chartreux -- district of Versailles | |
| February 29 | Montlhéry, Marcoussis -- district of Corbeil | |
| March 1 | Limours, Forges, Brus, Fontenay, Vaugrigneuse -- district of Versailles | 20-22 |
| March 2, 10 | Angerville -- district of Étampes | |
| March 3 | Étampes, Torfou, Lardy, Boissy-sous-Saint-Yon, Chamarande, Étréchy -- district of Étampes | |

| | | |
|-------------|--|-------|
| March 3 | Dourdan | |
| March 4 | Brie-Comte-Robert (department of Seine-et-Marne), Brunoy, Montgeron, Yerres, Mandres, Perigny, Villecresne, Villeneuve, Quincy-sous-Senard, Santeny, Epinay, Varenne, Boissy-Saint-Antoine, Villeneuve-Saint-George -- district of Corbeil | |
| March 4 | Chevreuse -- district of Versailles | |
| March 6 | Saint-Arnoult | 20 |
| March 9-10 | Dourdan, Saint-Cyr, Angervilliers, Val Saint-Germain, Saint-Cheron, Saint-Maurice -- district of Dourdan | 20 |
| March 15-17 | Dourdan, Sainte-Julienne, Saint-Cyr, Cermaise, Saint-Maurice, Angervilliers -- district of Dourdan | 21-22 |

| | | |
|-------------|---|-------|
| March 7--13 | Palaiseau, Orsay, Bièvres, Bures, Nozay, Villebon, Saclay, Vauhallan, Igny, Lozère, Foucherolles, Saint-Remy-les-Chevreuse -- district of Versailles | 20-24 |
| March 12 | Saint-Germain-en-Laye | |
| March 12 | Neauphle-le-Chateau -- district of Montfort | 24 |
| March 14 | Marines -- district of Pontoise | 20 |
| March 19 | Rambouillet, Saint-Arnoult, la-Celle, Saint-Leger, Bullion, Clairefontaine, Sonchamp -- district of Dourdan | |
| March 19 | Meulan -- district of Saint-Germain | |

| | | |
|-----------------------------|--|-------|
| March 19 -- April 4 | Gonesse, Roissy, Sarcelles, Tremblay, Villepinte, Epiais, Villeron, Chennevières, Vemars, Survilliers, Fosses, Marly-la-ville, Fontenay, Louvres, Lassy, Bellefontaine, le-Plessis, Jagny, le-Mesnil-Aubry and Mareil -- district of Gonesse | 20-24 |
| October (?) November (?) | Saint-Germain-en-Laye | |
| October (?) | Meulan | |
| October 25 | Montfort, le-Mesnuls, Grosrouvre, Saint-Leger -- districts of Montfort and Dourdan | 24 |
| October 27 | Rambouillet, Saint-Leger, Montfort, Grosrouvre, Gallois, la-Queue, Méré, Bazoches, Saint-Remy, Mesnuls -- districts of Dourdan and Montfort | |

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| October 26 | Versailles | |
| November (?) | Limours | 24 |
| An III (September 1794 - September 1795) | | |
| 22 frimaire (December 12) | Versailles | |
| 14 pluviôse (February 2) | Corbeil | |
| 3 ventôse (February 21) | Mantes | |

Appendix B
The Republican Calendar

| Dates in the Republican Calendar | Corresponding Gregorian date for | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| | <i>an II</i> | <i>an III</i> | <i>an IV</i> |
| 1 vendémiaire | 22 Sep 1793 | 22 Sep 1794 | 23 Sep 1795 |
| 15 vendémiaire | 6 Oct 1793 | 6 Oct 1794 | 7 Oct 1795 |
| 1 brumaire | 22 Oct 1793 | 22 Oct 1794 | 23 Oct 1795 |
| 15 brumaire | 5 Nov 1793 | 5 Nov 1794 | 6 Nov 1795 |
| 1 frimaire | 21 Nov 1793 | 21 Nov 1794 | 22 Nov 1795 |
| 15 frimaire | 5 Dec 1793 | 5 Dec 1794 | 6 Dec 1795 |
| 1 nivôse | 21 Dec 1793 | 21 Dec 1794 | 22 Dec 1795 |
| 15 nivôse | 4 Jan 1794 | 4 Jan 1795 | 5 Jan 1796 |
| 1 pluviôse | 20 Jan 1794 | 20 Jan 1795 | 21 Jan 1796 |
| 15 pluviôse | 3 Feb 1794 | 3 Feb 1795 | 4 Feb 1796 |
| 1 ventôse | 19 Feb 1794 | 19 Feb 1795 | 20 Feb 1796 |

| | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 15 ventôse | 5 Mar 1794 | 5 Mar 1795 | 5 Mar 1796 |
| 1 germinal | 21 Mar 1794 | 21 Mar 1795 | 21 Mar 1796 |
| 15 germinal | 4 Apr 1794 | 4 Apr 1795 | 4 Apr 1796 |
| 1 floréal | 20 Apr 1794 | 20 Apr 1795 | 20 Apr 1796 |
| 15 floréal | 4 May 1794 | 4 May 1795 | 4 May 1796 |
| 1 prairial | 20 May 1794 | 20 May 1795 | 20 May 1796 |
| 15 prairial | 3 Jun 1794 | 3 Jun 1795 | 3 Jun 1796 |
| 1 messidor | 19 Jun 1794 | 19 Jun 1795 | 19 Jun 1796 |
| 15 messidor | 3 Jul 1794 | 3 Jul 1795 | 3 Jul 1796 |
| 1 thermidor | 19 Jul 1794 | 19 Jul 1795 | 19 Jul 1796 |
| 15 thermidor | 2 Aug 1794 | 2 Aug 1795 | 2 Aug 1796 |
| 1 fructidor | 18 Aug 1794 | 18 Aug 1795 | 18 Aug 1796 |
| 15 fructidor | 1 Sep 1794 | 1 Sep 1795 | 1 Sep 1796 |
| 5th complimentary day | 21 Sep 1794 | 21 Sep 1795 | 21 Sep 1796 |
| 6th complimentary day | | 22 Sep 1795 | |

Glossary:

- *conseil général*, *directoire* (directory), *procureur général syndic* (procurator), *agent national* (national agent): From 1790 each department was administered by a *conseil-général* composed of thirty-six members elected among men paying the equivalent of ten days' unskilled labor in taxes. The *conseil général* was elected by the electoral assembly of the department. The *conseil général* was not always in session. To represent it during the intervals between its sessions, the *conseil général* appointed a directory (*directoire*) of eight members. The directory functioned as the executive wing of the *conseil général* and was in charge of taxes, charity, prisons, schools, agriculture etc; The king was represented at the departmental level by the *procureur général syndic* who was also elected by the electoral assembly of the department. The *procureur général syndic* was in charge of ensuring that laws were applied within the department. The *procureur général syndic* communicated directly with the ministers.

From 1790 each district was administered by a *conseil général* composed of eighteen members. The *conseil général*

appointed a permanent directory of four members. The *procureur syndic* represented the king at the district level.

At the level of the *commune*, there was a *conseil général* consisting of the notables and the municipal officers elected among men who paid the equivalent of ten days' labor in taxes. The municipal officers formed the municipality, which was the permanent and the active wing of the *conseil général*.

Departmental and district personnel were chosen by indirect elections. Primary assemblies in the cantons (the basic electoral unit) composed of men over twenty-five paying the equivalent of three days' unskilled labor in taxes, chose electors, who were men paying taxes to the value of ten days' labor. The electors, who formed the electoral assembly in each department, appointed personnel to the district and departmental councils. Direct elections took place only at the municipal level. After October 1792, all members of the departmental, district and municipal administrations were elected by universal manhood suffrage.

The law of 14 frimaire an II (December 4, 1793) abolished the positions of *procureur général syndics*, *procureur syndics* and *procureurs* of the *communes*. The *procureur syndics* were replaced by the *agents nationaux* who were direct representatives of the government. The *procureurs* of the

communes were replaced by *agents municipaux* who were also direct representatives of the government.

- *dîme*: The parish population had to pay the *dîme* (tithe) to the church. The *dîme* amounted, in practice, to a surcharge levied by the church on the parish population in varying amounts to pay for the upkeep and repair of the church.
- *haricotier*: The *haricotier* was a peasant who held a modest amount of land, and owned some tools and a little livestock. The *haricotier* also did a little market-gardening and stock-farming on the side, and worked part-time for others. The *haricotiers* ordinarily earned enough for their subsistence but in bad times they could fall into debt.
- *journaliers, mainouvriers*: They were the rural and urban landless workers who did piece and day work for those who employed them.
- *laboureur, fermier*: In the rich cereal plains of the Paris basin, the term *laboureur* referred to a rich peasant who owned or leased at least ten hectares of land but often much more. The *laboureurs* possessed considerable resources in livestock and property and also employed permanent or seasonal labor.

The *fermiers* were also rich peasants who leased all of the land they cultivated.

- *livre: livre, sol* and *denier* were the standard units of currency in Seine-et-Oise. The *livre* equalled twenty *sols* and the *sol* equalled twelve *deniers*.

- *setier*: The *setier* was the standard measure of capacity in the department of the Seine-et-Oise. The *setier* was subdivided into the *mine*, *minot*, *quartier*, *boisseau* and *pechet*. Generally the *setier* equalled two *mines*, the *mine* represented two *minot*, the *minot* two *quartiers* and the *quartier* six *pechets*. The *setier* equalled 1/12 muid. The *setier* of wheat contained twelve *boisseau* and the *setier* of oats sixteen *boisseau*. There were some variations in the content of these measures in the different markets of the Seine-et-Oise. For details, see Léon Janrot, "Les Poids et mesures aux environs de Paris avant le système métrique," *Recherche et publication des documents relatifs à la vie économique de la Révolution; Comité départemental de Seine-et-Oise* 16 (1940-1941): 34-37. In metric units a *setier* represents 156 litres.

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