

The Condition of the Lyon Weavers in the Letters to Louis XV and Monseigneur Poulletier (1731 and 1732)

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Abstract

On 8th May, 1731, an ordinance of Louis XV, King of France, imposed separation between the production and sale activities of the weavers of 'gold, silver and silk' at the famous Lyon Manufactory in which hundreds of families worked. The ordinance plunged into despair the workers (*maîtres ouvriers*) who, up till then, for centuries, had been allowed to sell their goods freely and were now in danger of being reduced to poverty by a handful of traffickers who knew nothing about their extremely sophisticated, skilful trade, but would be enabled to capitalize on their work. They therefore addressed two petitions (the first in 1731 and the second in 1732) to the King and Monseigneur Poulletier, the King's Superintendent and the Manufactory's Overseer, asking for the abrogation of the ordinance and a revision of the Manufactory's regulations. The interesting aspect of these two petitions is that they show the workers' consciousness of their rights; indeed, their denunciation of these abuses foretells, a century before, the two important revolts of the *canuts* (as the Lyon textile workers were known) which were to break out in 1831 and 1834.

Keywords: Lyon, Revolt, Royal Ordinance, Weavers' Letters

1. *A Story with a Long History*

The revolts of people working in the textile manufacturing trade have a long history, interspersed with hard and often bloody struggles; the grounds of these struggles were always miserable working conditions, extremely low wages and speculation on the part of unscrupulous 'entrepreneurial' groups. Some of these struggles ended up with some success; but most of the time gains were repealed or frustrated owing to contrasting prevailing interests. One example is the revolt of the *ciompi* (i.e. wool-carders) which took place in Florence in 1378. The *ciompi* had started their fight to claim the right of representation and association and, on that occasion, too, the small concessions which had been granted were soon cancelled by the oligarchy of the merchants' guild. However, the fact that stories of revolt against the exploitation of the labour-force recur throughout the centuries is a sign of a slowly expanding pattern: strife after strife, claim after

claim, the feeling of belonging to a community grew. The practice of mutual aid, consciousness of people's dignity and work and awareness of rights were strengthened: in short, these struggles led up to what in the nineteenth century was going to be the birth of the trades union movement.

One example of this is the story of the renowned Lyon Manufactory of gold, silver and silk, an enterprise which started to develop during the sixteenth century under the patronage of Francis I, who successfully placed his highly prized fabrics in all European courts and high ecclesiastical environments, but who was also aware of the ordeal suffered by his workers bound to the handloom, at which whole families, wage-workers and apprentices spent their lives, barely earning their living. How complex and important the economic enterprise of the weaving of rich fabric was for the Lyon area is shown by the number of people employed in this trade: more than 20,000 in the decades we are dealing with, considering the various special skills and linked activities (out of a total population of about 120,000 inhabitants); and how many problems there were connected with this activity is revealed by the conspicuous official correspondence exchanged with the Paris court: supplications, *doléances*, and – on the King's part – decrees, verdicts, ordinances, to which further supplications, etc., were sent in reply.¹ Throughout the centuries the topics of these letters vary: from the cost of labour to the prices of wares and problems connected with the circulation of goods.²

I intend to examine two petitions in particular (written in 1731 and 1732), *Au Roy et à Nosseigneurs de son Conseil* (the King is Louis XV) and *À l'Intendant de la Généralité de Lyon* (a sort of royal official, a government prefect)³ because the topic they deal with was new and because it would be an important step in the following years both for social history in general and the workers' movement in particular.

These texts can be considered 'letters' to all intents and purposes; they can be included in the typology of public and official letters, even though the one addressed to the *Intendant* is formally a *placet*⁴ and the one addressed to the King, although not headed so, is a traditional supplication. The two texts under examination have the formal status of letters: a sender, a deferred message, an absent addressee, writing strategies which are characteristic of the genre, and a linguistic register which is 'adapted' to the addressee. The structure is the customary one of a supplication to the King or authorities: an initial apostrophe and a concluding promise by the supplicants to pray for the well-being of the addressee and his/her family. The pattern thus follows traditional rhetoric, i.e. *exordium*, *narratio*, *argumentatio*, and *peroratio*. Although, as we shall see, the contents of the *lettres/requêtes* show increasing awareness of their social role on the part of the workers making the request, the King is still addressed by 'suppliants': the *Ancien Régime* had not updated the system of justice for centuries and, above all, jealously preserved the power hierarchy in society. However, when it came to requests for pardon⁵ and demands, the deferential tone was lowered. Of the two letters discussed here, each one admittedly has a single sender/signatory, but both of them were compiled in the name of a group of applicants. From the fifteenth century onwards, beginning

with the well-known 'ordonnance cabochienne', which stated that all requests to the King had to be made in writing, the 'maîtres des requêtes' came to the fore as indispensable intermediaries: 'Techniciens de l'écriture, habiles en parole, juristes souvent avertis, il contribuèrent à la réglementation de la procédure par requête qui tendit à prendre de plus en plus, la forme écrite'.⁶ The task of these mediators was obviously that of facilitating an official, ritualized form of communication, but also that of representing hierarchical mediation.

But now let us examine the two letters and the social context in which they were drawn up. During the initial decades of the eighteenth century, the Lyon factories were staffed by *maîtres ouvriers* (skilled workers; later on I will explain the difference between *maîtres ouvriers & marchands* and *maîtres ouvriers à façon*), *compagnons*⁷ and *apprentis* (apprentices). The Manufactory, even though by the end of the previous century it had suffered from the repeal of the edict of Nantes,⁸ whose consequence was that the best craftsmen had fled to other countries, was, in these years, particularly flourishing and was going through one of the brightest periods in its history for the high quality of its products, the avant-garde nature of its techniques and its commercial expansion. There were about 9,000 *maîtres ouvriers*, but, as I said, the subsidiary activities employed about 20,000 people. It was precisely at that moment that, on 8th May, 1731, a decree (*arrêt*) by the King imposed a clear cut separation of roles between traders and workers, establishing that the option for one of the two functions should be made within a month. The *maîtres ouvriers & marchands* (which we would call 'craftsmen') who up till that moment had been authorized to sell the wares they produced would no longer be allowed to commercialize these products, but would have to entrust their goods to a few powerful merchants – the same people from whom they bought their raw materials – who would put them on the market; thus, the supremacy/dominance of capital over labour, of commerce over production and the shop over the workroom was affirmed. The reaction of the workers who asked for the immediate repeal of the decree was soon heard. Only in 1737 would they obtain its partial revision, which was subsequently cancelled by a new royal decree which was to confirm that of 1731 and provoke a huge rising of the whole corporation of weavers (to all intents and purposes a real strike), following which two 'seditious' workers were hanged.⁹

This introduction serves to stress the importance of these two letters which have never been mentioned by the historians of the movement of the *canuts*,¹⁰ who have mainly been interested in workers' history starting in the nineteenth century. However, these are the first letters which, in the rich *corpus* of petitions and supplications sent to people in power, raise the problem of the economic relationship among corporations (but we will see that the idea of class, too, is present in these requests) and challenge the privilege of those who, thanks to their financial resources, would be able

to capitalize on the work of other people, at the expense of those who had spent physical effort, intelligence, high skill and traditional craftsmanship on the production of these goods.

2. *The Supplication to the King*

The supplication to Louis XV opens with the address to the King and the introduction of the petitioners:

Sire,

Les Maîtres Ouvriers, & Marchands d'Etoffes d'Or, d'Argent, & de Soye, de la Ville de Lyon, REMONTRENT très humblement à VOSTRE MAJESTÉ¹¹ que l'Arrêt qu'Elle a rendu dans son Conseil le 8 May dernier entraîneroit, s'il était executé, la ruine totale de leur Commerce. (*Au Roy...* 1731, 1)¹²

If, on the one hand, formal deference for the highest authority is granted by graphic emphasis and adverbs like *humblement*, on the other stress on the fact that the letter is a complaint (*REMONTRENT*) foretells the tone of the petition.

The undersigned proceed by quoting extracts from the decree, followed by their confutations, and thus explain that the royal injunction to opt, within a month, for either the role of merchant or that of worker would mean their ruin: the first option would limit the possibility of continuing with production and require an initial economic investment that none of them could afford; the second would force them to yield their products to people who would decide on their worth and price. It is with pride that the pleaders (who can be reckoned to be about 750 *maîtres ouvriers & marchands* in number, to whom should be added about 8,000 *maîtres ouvriers à facon*),¹³ recall how much effort they spent to acquire the skills which were the pride of the Lyon Manufactories: five years of work as apprentices and five more as *compagnons* which were in danger of being frustrated by the unscrupulous initiative of a small oligarchy of merchants who had influenced the King's judgement:

quelques Marchands, qui n'exercent plus la Profession d'Ouvriers, ébloüis par leur fortune, ont crû qu'ils étoient en droit de donner des Loix à leur Communauté. Leur ambition démesurée leur a suggéré le moyen de s'approprier tout le profit des Manufactures, & de ne laisser aux Maîtres Ouvriers que ce qui peut à peine aider à les faire subsister. (*Au Roy...* 1731, 4)¹⁴

The confrontation between the parties is uneven and the iniquity of the matter cannot but raise resentment:

On accorde au Marchand en ne faisant rien, le droit de profiter du travail d'autrui: en donnant à l'Ouvrier la liberté de travailler, on luy ravit le prix de son travail; Quel parallèle! n'est-il pas infiniment humiliant pour l'Ouvrier, tandis qu'il est très-glorieux pour le Marchand dont il satisfait tout-à-la fois la paresse, & l'ambition? (*Au Roy...* 1731, 6)¹⁵

As one can see, the issue of the misappropriation of the fruits of other people's work, which was to be challenged by socialism and the nineteenth-century workers' movement is already strongly present here; and the analysis of its consequences is already clear: if workers were deprived of property of their goods, they would end up by no longer engaging their skills in the production of goods, their pride would be humiliated and their creativity quenched:

On éteint dans eux toute l'émulation qu'ils pourroient avoir pour se distinguer par leurs Ouvrages; dès qu'ils n'espereront plus de pousser leur fortune, non seulement ils n'imagineront plus rien, mais ils ne seront point excitez à faire les efforts necessaires pour soutenir la perfection où ils ont porté leurs Fabriques. On sçait que nulle autre Fabrique, soit dans le Royaume, soit dans le País Etranger, n'approche de la leur. (*Au Roy...* 1731, 6)¹⁶

The greedy merchants, who mistook 'le bien d'autrui... avec le leur' had also determined, with the speculative rise of prices, the bankruptcy which afflicted many commercial enterprises in Paris:

Faut-il chercher une autre cause des Banqueroutes qui désolent la Capitale du Royaume que le prix excessif auquel les Marchands de Lyon ont vendu leurs Etoffes aux Marchands de Paris? Cette cherté se prouve par les Factures des plus célèbres Détailliers de cette ville ... Ces Marchands ambitieux ne se proposent ... que d'élever une fortune immense sur la ruine totale de leur Corps, & aux dépens du Public ... Il leur importe peu que tout le Commerce perisse pourvû que leur avidité soir satisfaite. (*Au Roy...* 1731, 7-8)¹⁷

The crisis which was to follow the enforcement of the royal decree for the Lyon industry would induce the workers to emigrate. The sad expectation of exodus was linked to a strong feeling of rebellion against those who were trying to subordinate their destinies to economic interests:

L'amour de la Patrie, quelque violent qu'il soit dans le cœur, cede à la cruelle nécessité, lorsqu'elle nous menace, & nous talonne; la seule idée de gémir dans l'esclavage d'un petit nombre de Marchands, est une idée insupportable. (9)¹⁸

The closure displays the usual traditional form of the petition, asking for the repeal of the decree of 8th May. The fact is obviously emphasized that the King is absolutely blameless and unaware of the events, while his magnanimity which makes him the worthy heir of the great Louis XIV is pointed out. Maître Chappe de Ligny, lawyer and signer, pledges that the persons he is acting for, if their requests were to be granted, would reciprocate with a thankful and devoted thought: 'Ils continueront de faire des Vœux pour la santé & la prospérité de VOTRE MAJESTÉ'.¹⁹

The valedictory formula could not have been more respectful of tradition; already in the Middle Ages, the supplication to a powerful man ended with the pledge to pray for him and his dear ones.²⁰ Although centuries have elapsed,

the *Ancien Régime* is still firm; the king is still beyond dispute (as he would be until the 1790s). However, in the text there emerge reasons of discontent which are similar to those which were present throughout the country and which, in the second half of the century, would fuel the Revolution: workers' poverty, dissatisfaction of the petty bourgeoisie, and the abuses of the powerful who act as intermediaries between the king and the population.

3. *The 'Placet' to Monseigneur Poulletier*

But even more extraordinarily anticipatory, both in its contents and modality of exposition, is the second letter I am going to examine: the *Placet* addressed to Monseigneur Poulletier, the King's Intendant in Lyon. Poulletier is 'le Conservateur de la première Manufacture de l'Europe, & le protecteur de dix mille Maitres qui en soutiennent tout le poid par un travail assidu' (*Placet... 1732, 39*).²¹ The letter is addressed to him, in an autonomous form, by the large community of the *mâtres ouvriers à façon*: those we would call 'true workers', that is, skilled craftsmen who offer their manpower without implications concerning the sale of the finished product which, until the promulgation of the decree, was a prerogative of the *mâtres ouvriers & marchands* up to the decree requiring the option.

It was the month of December, 1732; a year had elapsed since the injunction and the conflict between the parties had made working conditions harder, while orders had decreased. If the incipit ('à votre GRANDEUR...') and the closure respect the courtesy formulas which befit a subordinate sender (the usual wishes for prosperity and health), the tone becomes harder, the analysis more lucid and the attack more explicit. In the first place, the signatories, who are represented by Roger l'aîné, enunciator and signer of the letter, call themselves no longer *suppliants*, but *opposants* to a decree which only benefits 'un très-petit nombre de Marchands enrichis par la main de l'Ouvrier, qui cherchent à satisfaire leur esprit de nomination & d'avarice' (*Placet... 1732, 4*).²² A new and, in my opinion, remarkable element is that the contest is already defined as a 'class conflict': the hard-working class of the *mâtres ouvriers & marchands* and that of the *mâtres ouvriers à façon* are acknowledged as legitimate, while the birth of a spurious third class is attacked:

Cet abus vient de ce que quelques-uns des Ouvriers Marchands ayant fait des fortunes rapides ont dédaigné même le nom d'Ouvrier, ils ont quitté la main d'œuvre & ont formé une troisième classe sous le nom de Marchands. Ils se sont emparé des Titres, Comptes & Registres de la Communauté. (*Placet... 1732, 4*)²³

The outcome, which was going to entail the mortification of all competition and the 'theft' of others people's work, would be ruinous:

L'ignorance du Marchand n'est pas le seul inconvénient qui soit à craindre dans l'execution de l'Arrêt du 8 de May: l'on détruit un concurrent qui l'excite & l'anime...

L'émulation cessera également dans le Maître-Ouvrier, privé sans retour d'un droit commun à toutes le Manufactures & que les lois naturelles donnent d'être le Marchand de l'ouvrage de ses mains. (*Placet...* 1732, 5)²⁴

So much more since the adversary is trying to reduce the number of those who hold the profit and increase the number of those who work at his service in order to lower work costs and increase that of the end products:

Le projet des instigateurs de l'Arrêt du 8 de May est de diminuer le nombre des Marchands & d'augmenter le nombre des ouvriers; la fin qu'ils se proposent est de mettre à rien le prix des façons & et d'en enrichir les Etoffes. (*Placet...* 1732, 6)²⁵

An analysis of extraordinary modernity is that devoted to the unscrupulous logic of capital: those who possess it, out of sheer speculation, are often interested in undermining the production of material goods; on the contrary, the small entrepreneur (in this case the *maître-ouvrier & marchand*) encourages a collective kind of economy (one might say: finance versus economy):

L'expérience a fait connoître que plus il y a d'Ouvriers Marchands moins on doit craindre la cessation du travail; le riche Marchand uniquement occupé du soin d'amasser de gros biens ne sçait pas se contenter d'un petit profit, il peut suspendre la vente de ses Etoffes, il trouve son avantage à faire cesser le travail pour vendre plus cherement: l'Ouvrier-Marchand ignore cette ruse du Commerçant & ne peut la mettre en usage; il a besoin de vendre & de vendre continuellement. (*Placet...* 1732, 7)²⁶

The *placet*, to which a detailed proposal for the reform of the Manufactory's Charter is attached, closes with the invitation to Monseigneur to take cognizance of the problem exposed and intercede in order to re-establish justice:

il s'agit non seulement de conserver dans la tranquillité dix mille familles qui seroient troublées par l'exécution de l'Arrêt du 8 de May 1731; mais encore de tirer ces familles de l'oppression dans laquelle les Marchands les tiennent depuis trente ans: en admettant les Status qui sont proposés, les véritables abus qui sont dans la fabrique cesseroient. (*Placet...* 1732, 38)²⁷

Although the appeal to the authority of the Superintendent is inevitable, the supplication has become an explicit accusation and the solution of the problems is no longer entrusted to the addressee's magnanimity, but rather to the introduction of the corrective norms suggested by the workers as a group.

4. *Towards the New Century: the Revolts of the 'Canuts'*

By this time, the story of the revolution of the Lyon workers is under way: in 1744, as I have said, the most eventful uprising of the *Ancien Régime* was to break out;²⁸ on 7th August, 1786, a *revolte* took place known as 'l'émeute

des deux sous' (the tuppenny revolt), from the paltry rate which craftsmen were able to obtain from traders for the purchase of their goods. During the nineteenth century, weavers still lived in poverty: the economy of the Manufactory gave work to the whole city (it has been calculated that there were about 30,000 looms in workers' homes); work was hard: all, men, women and children slaved away tirelessly, but the earnings were meagre because trading of goods was still in the hands of a few speculators. In 1831 and 1834, the first important risings of the workers' movement broke out in Lyon. In November, 1831, the whole city, to the watchword 'vivre en travaillant ou mourir en combattant',²⁹ rose in revolt against oppression and social injustice; for a few days, the citizens of Lyon, after chasing the army and the prefect's authorities out, autonomously administered the city: at the time meetings increased, certain forms of cooperation and the practice of mutual aid were strengthened, voluntary subscriptions for the families of those who had been wounded or had died were organized; but the experience would not last long: Louis-Philippe made an impressive show of force and repression hit the city. The few benefits which had been obtained were dissolved. In the month of April, 1834, another big rising of the workers/craftsmen against low pay imposed by traders took place; again thousands of labourers poured onto the streets, again barricades were erected, during what would be called the 'semaine sanglante' (the bloody week): more than 600 civilians died and 10,000 insurgents were tried and sentenced either to transportation or long periods of detention. More risings took place in 1848 and 1849: the claim was again for fairer salaries and more humane working conditions.

Although the Paris population, too, rose in those years (the 'trois glorieuses' days against the restoration monarchy of Charles X took place in 1830), the struggles of the Lyon workers of 1831 and 1834 would resound throughout Europe, surprise the liberals, thrill the socialists, and be considered (as they still are today) the first forms of proletarian revolt.³⁰ They would be an example for the workers' movement (even for the extremely important rising which took place in England, where in those years the trades union movement was consolidating its strength): they would be an example of organization, demand and proposition. The experience of self-rule carried through by the citizens of Lyon would inspire that of the Paris *Commune* in 1871 (it, too, was to have its 'semaine sanglante').

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Jean Jaurès, who edited an imposing *Histoire socialiste*, decided that a whole chapter of this work should be devoted to the Lyon insurrection. Eugène Fournière, who wrote that chapter, said that it was 'une insurrection imprévue [qui] fit apparaître dans l'histoire un élément révolutionnaire qui n'en devait plus sortir désormais':

Paris se soulevait pour conquérir la liberté et l'apporter aux peuples. Lyon s'insurgeait pour donner au peuple souverain le premier et indispensable attribut de la souverai-

neté: le pain quotidien... Certes, ce n'est pas une nouveauté dans l'histoire que des ouvriers se soulèvent parce que le salaire ne leur permet plus de vivre. Mais ce qui est nouveau, c'est qu'un tel soulèvement se produise dans un milieu social où l'on achève de détruire les derniers restes des rapports féodaux et où s'assoit la domination d'une seule classe, qui tient son pouvoir et sa richesse de la vente des produits du travail. Ce soulèvement pose la question des droits du producteur.³¹

Thus the myth of the *canuts*, which is still living, was born. This myth is represented, among other things, by the well-known song of protest 'Les canuts',³² which has been given modern renderings and interpretations. The Lyon labour movement has been an object of interest for scholars who study nineteenth-century social history, but the barely explored eighteenth-century documents still have much to say about it. The petitions which have been examined here were to be followed by others,³³ but these are the first and they have been ignored by scholars, although they represent an extraordinary piece of evidence about the extremely lucid way in which the ideas of class and profit and the issues of labour exploitation were posited, one century before the well-known nineteenth-century risings. 'Written' dissension would find, in the nineteenth century, more independent forms of expression: the workers' print, whose first specimen was *L'Écho de la Fabrique*, would appear precisely in Lyon during the 1831 risings; but if we want to fully understand the course of events, we must also examine – as I have been trying to do here – the humble entreaties to the powerful, which constitute the fire simmering under the ashes. In my view, a study of these entreaties is a task worth pursuing.

¹ For the years under analysis the ordinances of the Kings of France are collected in De Laurière *et al.*, eds (1723-1849).

² I wish to quote the extremely topical supplication to the King (*Au Roy...* 1701), in which the Lyon weavers of silk, gold and silver fabric complain about the competition of India which, they argue, exports to Europe (Holland and England in particular) less qualified wares which endanger French industry. The advice they give to the King is that of stopping all imports to France, a measure which would convince the rest of Europe not to buy such goods which were not considered 'fashionable' in France.

³ In those years, the 'Intendant de la Généralité de Lyon' was Pierre Poulletier (1680-1765), Lord of Nainville and of La Salle.

⁴ In accordance with the Latin etymology, *placet* means, in the juridical sense of the word, an assent granted by Authority, either civil or ecclesiastical; it also defines, in this sense, which is now obsolete, a message addressed to a person in power to ask for an act of justice or obtain pardon or favour.

⁵ Pleas for pardon, especially by those convicted of a crime, were presented in the form of *lettres de rémission* (letters setting out the facts written by a royal notary, so that the court of justice could ratify them and the King exercise clemency). On this type of letter see Natalie Zemon Davis (1987). The practice continued in the eighteenth century.

⁶ 'Writing technicians, skilled in wording, often expert jurists, they contributed to the regulation of the request procedure which tended more and more to take the written form' (Mattéoni 2003,

288). In the eighteenth century, those who held the office of *maîtres des requêtes* often came from the judiciary. They were administrative officials, members of the King's Privy Council, in which their task was to report on the supplications and requests which had been addressed to the King (see also <<http://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/maitre-des-requetes/>>, accessed 9 May 2013). Here and in the following footnotes translations are editorial.

⁷We could call *compagnons* 'skilled workers' working under craftsmen, who had looms in their homes. It is important to recall that sixteenth-century France had already seen the development of the *compagnonnage*, a confraternity of workers under craftsmen in various manufacturing activities. Their purpose was solidarity and mutual aid. These corporations, seen as signs of privilege, were abolished during the French Revolution, only to return in the nineteenth century in the guise of mutual aid societies for the defence of workers' rights. On *compagnonnage* in the *Ancien Régime* and its development in the social history of the nineteenth century see Sewell (1980).

⁸The Edict of Nantes, promulgated by Henry IV in 1598, granted freedom of worship to Protestants. Following its repeal in 1685, under Louis XIV, thousands of Huguenots – especially craftsmen and members of the bourgeoisie – were obliged to go into exile. As a consequence of their expatriation the country's economy was weakened.

⁹It would be impossible to quote specific relevant sources because there is an immense bibliography on the history of the workers' movement in Lyon; particularly interesting are the materials kept in the archives of the Lyon municipal Library. As regards the eighteenth century I will only quote Bayard 1997.

¹⁰This term does not appear, at least in written texts, before the nineteenth century. According to some sources, *canut* is a contraction of *cannes nues*, with reference to the workers' walking sticks, which were not as finely decorated as those of the rich. According to more reliable sources the word is connected to the *canne* or *cannette*, i.e. the spool which was used to weave the fabric. The female version of *canut* is *canuse*. An essay devoted to women's work in the weaving trade is Budin 2002.

¹¹I have kept the upper and lower case letters in the original text.

¹²'Sir, the Master Workers & Merchants of fabrics in Gold, Silver & Silk of the city of Lyon very humbly complain to YOUR MAJESTY that the decree you have approved on 8th May last past in your Council would result, if executed, in the total ruin of their trade.'

¹³The *Maitres-Ouvriers à façon* were workers who were commissioned to place their manpower under the supervision of the *Maitres-Ouvriers & Marchands* who also provided the thread for weaving. In the conflict with the *maarchands* they were united with all the other workers.

¹⁴'some Merchants who no longer practise the Profession of Workers, dazzled by their fortune, have believed that they had the right to establish Laws for the Community. Their boundless ambition has suggested to them the means through which they could take possession of all the profits of the Farms, and leave to the *Maitres Ouvriers* only what serves for their bare subsistence.'

¹⁵'The Merchant, who does nothing, is allowed to profit from other people's work: on the other hand, while workers are given liberty to work, they are deprived of the profit of their work. What a difference! Is this not terribly humiliating for Workers, while it is enhancing for the Merchants, whose idleness and ambition are at the same time satisfied?'

¹⁶'In them, the sense of emulation which they could feel in order to distinguish themselves through their work will be extinguished; if they lose all hope to increase their fortune they will not only cease to invent, but will also be discouraged to make the necessary efforts to keep up the perfection which they have achieved in the quality of their products. It is well known that no other cloth production, either in the kingdom or in other countries, can be compared to theirs.'

¹⁷'Is it necessary to seek for a cause of the bankruptcies which devastate the Capital of the Realm other than the excessive price at which the Lyon Merchants have sold their fabrics to the Paris Merchants? Such a high cost is proved by the receipts of the most famous shop-owners in the city... These ambitious Merchants only aim... at making a large fortune on the total ruin of their Corporation, and at the expense of the Public... They little care about the death of the whole commercial enterprise, provided that their greed be satisfied.'

¹⁸ ‘Love for one’s country, however intense it can be in one’s heart, withdraws before cruel necessity, when necessity threatens and chases us; the mere idea of suffering, slaves to a small number of Merchants, is unbearable.’

¹⁹ ‘They will continue to pray for the health and prosperity of YOUR MAJESTY.’

²⁰ On the rituality of this final wishing formula, see Mattéoni 2003, 296.

²¹ ‘the Overseer of the first Manufacturing Firm of Europe, and the protector of the ten thousand Masters who hold all its weight with their daily work.’

²² ‘a very small number of Merchants who have been enriched by the Workers’ hands, who try to satisfy their spirit of domination and avarice.’

²³ ‘This abuse derives from the fact that certain *Ouvriers Marchands*, having made quick fortunes, have even rejected the name of Worker, have abandoned manpower and have constituted a third class under the name of Merchants. They appropriated the Titles, the Accounts and the Registers of the Community.’

²⁴ ‘The ignorance of the Merchants is not the only inconvenience which should be feared as concerns the enforcement of the *Arrêt* of 8th May: the Merchants are no longer subjected to stimulating competition. In the *Maitres-Ouvriers*, too, emulation will be extinguished, for they will be for ever deprived of a right which is common to all Manufacturing firms and which, according to the laws of nature, legitimates the trading of one’s own handiwork.’

²⁵ ‘The project of those who prompted the *Arrêt* of 8th May is to reduce the number of Merchants and increase the number of workers; the end they are envisaging is a drastic reduction of the cost of manpower and an increase in the price of cloth.’

²⁶ ‘Experience has shown that the more there are of Merchant Workers, the less the discontinuance of work is to be feared; the rich Merchant, only interested in hoarding great riches is not content with a small profit, he can suspend the sale of the Fabrics, because he finds an advantage in discontinuing the work in order to sell at a higher price: the *Ouvrier Marchand* ignores this stratagem which is proper to the dealer and cannot put it into practice; he needs selling and selling all the time.’

²⁷ ‘it is not only a question of granting the serenity of ten thousand families that would be unsettled by the enforcement of the *Arrêt* of 8th May 1731; but also to draw these families out of the oppression in which the Merchants have been keeping them for the last thirty years: by admitting the regulations which have been proposed, the real abuses which are in the firm are going to end.’

²⁸ ‘The cause which prompted the revolt would also be the introduction of the power loom invented by Jacques de Vaucanson, which risked reducing the number of hand workers; another blow in this direction would be the invention, a century later, of the Jacquard loom. On the 1744 rising and on Vaucanson’s innovation, see Serre 2009. Also in England, starting from the end of the eighteenth century, mechanical looms began to be smashed by the workers who feared the threat to their jobs. Luddism, a protest movement which theorized and practised the sabotage of machines, developed, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, among textile workers.’

²⁹ ‘To live working or die fighting.’

³⁰ The best-known historian of the Lyon risings is Fernand Rude. Two of his fundamental works are especially important: Rude 1977 and 2007 (1982). On the organization of textile craftsmanship during the nineteenth century, see also Sheridan 1979.

³¹ ‘an unforeseen insurrection which caused a revolutionary element which would never disappear from history to appear’: ‘Paris was revolting to conquer liberty and to hand it to all the peoples. Lyon revolted to give to the sovereign people the first indispensable attribution of sovereignty: daily bread... It is certainly not a novelty in history that workers rise because their salary does no longer allow them to make their living. But what is new is the fact that such an insurrection takes place in the social context in which the last remains of feudal relationships have just been dismantled and in which the dominion of one sole class which gains its power from trading the products of work is consolidating. Such insurrection poses the issue of the producers’ rights’. See Fournière (n.d.) in Jaurés, ed. (1900-1908), VIII, 142.

³² The song was composed in 1894 by Aristide Bruant.

³³ That of 1789 is worth quoting for the particular historical circumstances in which it was written. A new edition, with a full introduction, is Rude 1977.

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