



The Abolition of the Guilds during the French Revolution

Author(s): Liana Vardi

Source: *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4, (Autumn, 1988), pp. 704-717

Published by: Duke University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/286554>

Accessed: 22/05/2008 18:13

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=duke>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We enable the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The Abolition of the Guilds during the French Revolution

Liana Vardi

The past decade has witnessed a renewal of interest in the French guild system, marked by a special emphasis on its supra-economic function. Unlike earlier generations that proposed to evaluate, and usually ended by condemning, corporative regulations of work and production,¹ historians such as William Sewell, Jr., and Steven L. Kaplan have chosen to set aside the obvious criticisms of the system and to pay greater heed to the guilds' self-justifications.² Both focus, therefore, on Turgot's short-lived abolition and the debate it engendered, crowned by the *avocat général* Seguier's famed defense of the "organic state" or "great chain of being."³ The parlementaires' remonstrances are taken to embody the "corporate ethos," and the "corporate ethos" to embody the guilds.

Liana Vardi is assistant professor of history at McGill University. She is currently working on peasant appeals to the French Royal Council in the eighteenth century.

¹ Emile Coornaert, *Les Corporations en France avant 1789*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1968); Emile Levasseur, *Histoire des classes ouvrières jusqu'à la Révolution*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1859); Germain Martin, *Associations ouvrières au XVIII^e siècle (1700-1792)* (Paris, 1900); Etienne Martin Saint-Léon, *Histoire des corporations de métiers depuis leurs origines jusqu'à leur suppression en 1791* (Paris, 1922); François Olivier-Martin, *L'Organisation corporative de la France d'Ancien Régime* (Paris, 1938).

² William Sewell, Jr., *Work and Revolution in France. The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge, 1980); Steven L. Kaplan, "Social Classification and Representation in the Corporate World of Eighteenth-Century France: Turgot's 'Carnival' " in *Work in France. Representations, Meaning, Organization and Practices*, ed. Steven L. Kaplan and Cynthia J. Koepp (Ithaca, 1986), 176-228.

³ "All your subjects, Sire, are divided into as many bodies as there are different states in the kingdom. The clergy, the nobility, the sovereign courts, the lawcourts, the universities, the academies, the finance companies, the trading companies, they all represent, and in all parts of the state, existing bodies which may be viewed as links in a great chain of which the first is in the hands of Your Majesty, as the chief sovereign administrator of all that constitutes the body of the nation." Renewed remonstrances at the *lit de justice* of 12 March 1776. Flammermont, *Remonstrances du Parlement de Paris au XVIII^e siècle*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1888-98), 3:293-356.

French Historical Studies, Vol. XV, No. 4 (Fall 1988)

Copyright © 1988 by the Society for French Historical Studies

Moreover, Sewell's interest in workers' perceptions led him to argue that the guild system could best be understood in cultural terms, giving no ontological precedence to economic factors.⁴ Kaplan, whose work stresses the policing functions of the guilds, also maintains the primacy of social over economic relations within the corporative system, although he recognizes that he may be overreacting against what he calls an *économisme primaire*. On the other hand, he contends elsewhere that the guilds were politically and sociologically but not economically anachronistic.⁵

It is true that the guilds acted as social controls and that they forged useful political alliances in a society governed by privilege. But it is my belief that their primary role was economic,⁶ and that, as such, they were anachronistic and effectively moribund. Our vision of the guilds is colored by Turgot's fiasco, which has made them emblematic of the Regime's inability to reform itself and lent them, therefore, an exaggerated importance. The irrelevance of the institution may be gauged by the eighteenth-century's lack of interest, not in work as such, but in corporative organization. The debate about their nature was marginal at best, limited to guild representatives and those famous unknowns Cliquot de Blervache and Bigot de Sainte-Croix.⁷ Even the better-known *Eloge de Vincent de Gournay* by Turgot himself would have sunk into oblivion, had the controller general not chosen to begin his work of regeneration by attacking those outdated and troublesome little monopolies known as guilds.⁸

What were these critics of the guilds saying? Essentially that the guilds kept prices unnaturally high and represented unwarranted monopolies. The abuses they listed devolved essentially from the guilds' privileged status. Such closed, oligarchic bodies, they argued, could only be self-serving. They kept out able craftsmen by preposterous en-

⁴ Sewell, *Work and Revolution*, 11, 22.

⁵ Kaplan, *Work*, 183; "Réflexions sur la police du monde du travail, 1700-1815," *Revue historique* 261 (1979): 29.

⁶ Anthony Black, who summarizes traditional and recent scholarship on the guilds, emphasizes that point in *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (Ithaca, 1984), 8.

⁷ See, for example, Delacroix, *Mémoire à consulter sur l'existence actuelle des Six Corps et la conservation de leurs privilèges*, 26p. (Paris, 1776); Bigot de Sainte-Croix, *Essai sur la liberté du commerce et de l'industrie*, 164p. (Paris, 1775); Cliquot de Blervache, *Considérations sur le commerce et en particulier sur les compagnies, sociétés et maîtrises*, 180p. (Amsterdam, 1758).

⁸ Anne Robert Turgot, *Eloge de Vincent de Gournay*, in *Oeuvres de Turgot*, ed. Gustave Schelle, 4 vols. (Paris, 1913) 1:598-623.

try fees, fought endless lawsuits with neighboring trades, stifled innovation, and ensured neither quality nor adequate productivity. The key was privilege, its antithesis, liberty—with a physiocratic concern for low-priced manufactured goods. The apologists of the system countered by arguing that those very privileges provided high-quality goods and that they protected the consumer and the state against the abuses of liberty, transformed into license. The litany of evils makes grim reading: left to their own devices, artisans would cheat and produce shoddy goods, workers would no longer obey their employers, and vice would proliferate. And while both sides predicted the incipient ruin of French industry should their position be disregarded, the reformers were, by definition, more optimistic and spent less time worrying about man's baseness and cupidity. The laws of the marketplace would provide whatever controls the state did not choose to apply. This is not the place to look for a realistic assessment of the guilds' role in the economy.

Why then did the guilds survive? The Crown's fiscal interest in their existence has become a commonplace: the king sold masterships and regularly blackmailed the guilds into paying for the preservation of their prerogatives. The remonstrance of 1776, couched *in part* in the loftiest of terms, provide the rest of the answer. They reveal not so much a "corporate ethos" as a domino-theory of privilege (if the guilds go, we all go) as well as a perhaps deserved paranoia, replete with suitable references to the recent grain riots. The message was clear: only the guilds could restrain an uncontrollable mob.

The reasons for their survival should not be taken as the reasons for their existence. However they were perceived, the guilds were meant to fulfill an economic function: to ensure the autonomous existence of their members by regulating production and restricting competition. To remove them from that context is effectively to agree that they had lost their *raison d'être*, that they had become outdated. Oddly enough, this has not been argued recently. The confusion stems from the identification of artisanal production with the corporative system. One should be careful to dissociate the two, for it is clear that small workshop production continued to thrive on both sides of the Channel late into the nineteenth century, if not beyond, without need of special monopolies.⁹

⁹ See for example Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures. Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain, 1700-1820* (Oxford, 1985), and Patrick O'Brien and Caglar Keyder, *Economic Growth in Britain and France 1780-1914* (London, 1978).

The vitality of the guilds varied depending on the locality. If one looks at the French economy as a whole, however, there can be little doubt that they had lost the battle for exclusivity. Textiles, the major manufacturing branch in the preindustrial economy, had moved to the countryside in the late seventeenth century, partially to escape the encroachment of the guilds, then at their "apogee."¹⁰ For this reason alone it is impossible to view the organization of labor solely in terms of the structured urban guild.¹¹ The edict of 1762, which officially sanctioned this rural production, could well be seen as sounding the death knell of the guilds.¹²

Privileged manufactures, special enclaves, and "illegal" *chambrelans* undermined guild monopoly in towns as well. In more thriving centers, such as Lyon, the merchants had succeeded in wearing away guild controls, without needing to dismantle the system.¹³ In many a provincial town, furthermore, some trades had never been organized and were only subject to municipal supervision. Nor were the guilds the sole guarantors of quality: should controls prove necessary—and few Frenchmen trusted to a self-regulating market and argued against such controls—the state could and did provide alternatives as in the *bureaux de marque*, geared toward textile production.¹⁴

The guilds had traditionally loosened their grip in periods of expansion, but the restrictive Colbertist legislation, born in a period of recession, gave the guilds a green light to pursue their particular interests with a vengeance and then proved incapable of adapting to the expanding markets of the eighteenth century. The growing rigidity of the system merely incited merchants to relocate in the countryside, thereby reinforcing the urban artisanate's protective reflexes. Whereas in previous centuries, the most dynamic sectors of industry had blossomed within a corporative structure, albeit strongly controlled by merchants, this was no longer the case in an age of proto-industrialization. The towns retained their commercial role, lodged the mi-

¹⁰ The term is Coornaert's.

¹¹ As does Sewell, *Work and Revolution*, 1-2. See also Pierre Léon, in *Histoire économique et sociale de la France* 2 (Paris, 1970): 656, contradicting the evidence on pp. 657, 252.

¹² This is the argument in Eugène Tarlé, *L'Industrie dans les campagnes en France à la fin de l'Ancien Régime* (Paris, 1910), 53.

¹³ Maurice Garden, *Lyon et les lyonnais au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1970), 283, 578.

¹⁴ The fact that they may have encountered resistance or that they were ineffective is interesting but should not obscure the fact that these alternatives were available. See Gail Bossenga, "Corporate Institutions, Revolution, and the State: Lille From Louis XIV to Napoleon" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1983.), 320-26.

nor crafts as well as the luxury trades, but despite the guilds' determination to safeguard their monopolies, these were circumvented whenever it suited.¹⁵

In the period of heated debate about the nature of the "bourgeois revolution," it came as something of a disappointment to its advocates to discover that the leading element of the Third Estate did not actively demand the abolition of the guilds, these "fetters" to capitalist development.¹⁶ Urban *cahiers* were ambiguous at best, the major opposition stemming from the countryside, the smaller towns, and poorer provinces.¹⁷ One can continue to puzzle over the support of the major manufacturing centers and ascribe it, in part, to the industrial crisis which followed the Eden treaty of 1786. The guilds, after all, stood as the very symbol of protectionism. Yet, it is more than likely that the men who drew up the grievances were partial to the system, either because they belonged to it or because they saw its uses and knew how to get around it.¹⁸ But the *cahiers* are not the only indicators about attitudes toward the guilds. Between September 1789 and March 1791, the National Assembly received about one hundred petitions on the subject—half of them from journeymen.¹⁹ They reveal a system mined from within and further unsettled by the events of 4 August.

Late that night, amid the orgy of self-sacrifice, "the deputy from Beaujolais approached the platform to request the reform of the laws touching the guilds and their improvement and rationalization in ac-

¹⁵ This is what emerges from Bossenga, "Corporate Institutions." Edward J. Shephard, Jr., "Social and Geographic Mobility of the Eighteenth-Century Guild Artisan: An Analysis of Guild Receptions in Dijon, 1700-1790," in Kaplan's *Work in France*, demonstrates the flexibility of the guild system in a town "unaffected by the evolution of a highly developed market economy," 217. D. M. Palliser likewise concludes that "York was an example, not of an urban gild structure keeping away industry, but one able to survive intact because there was so little industry to conflict with it." "The Trade Gilds of Tudor York," in *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500-1700*, ed. Peter Clark and Paul Slack (London, 1972), 112.

¹⁶ For example, Albert Soboul, *Précis d'histoire de la Révolution française* (Paris, 1962); and Alfred Cobban, *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1965) providing the corrective.

¹⁷ Martin Saint-Leon, *Histoire des corporations*, 611; Beatrice F. Hyslop, "French Gild Opinion in 1789," *The American Historical Review* 44 (1939): 252-71; C. Riffaterre, "Le Sentiment du tiers-état sur les corporations en 1789," *La Révolution française* 83 (1929): 289-309; Roger Picard, *Les Cahiers de 1789 et les classes ouvrières* (Paris, 1910).

¹⁸ Georges Lefebvre argues this, for example, in *The Coming of the French Revolution* (Princeton, N.J., 1967).

¹⁹ Fernand Gerbaux and Charles Schmidt, *Procès-verbaux des comités d'agriculture et de commerce de la Constituante, de la Législative et de la Convention*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1906).

cordance with justice and the common good.”²⁰ The man who voiced these sentiments, Charles-Antoine Chasset, was a lawyer and mayor of Villefranche-en-Beaujolais, and the son of a merchant clothier.²¹ He had drafted the *cahier* of his town whose thirty-first article had requested the dismantlement of the guilds. He had also excluded guild members from the assemblies electing deputies in the Estates General.²² No clearer opponent of the system could be found.

Indeed, although the most often quoted source, the *Moniteur universel*, referred to “la réforme des jurandes” (the reform of the guilds), most observers believed that Chasset had actually called for their abolition.²³ The recapitulation in the early hours of 5 August devoted a specific item to the guilds, but by 6 August they had been included in a broader revocation of the special privileges of provinces, principalities, towns, and various corporate bodies. Finally, on 11 August, that article was rewritten, excluding the reference to *corps* and *communautés*.²⁴ The guilds had survived.

The guilds may have lobbied and voiced their opposition. Yet no records are extant of their approaches, even in the antichambers of power.²⁵ Until further evidence comes to light, the reason why the guilds were not abolished immediately after 4 August will always remain something of a mystery and open to conjecture. It seems unlikely that the members of the Assembly responded to pressure from guild members or that they evinced economic scruples.²⁶ The suggested re-

²⁰ *Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur universel*, 39 vols. (Paris, 1858-63), 1:287.

²¹ Joseph Balloffet, *Histoire de Villefranche, capitale du Beaujolais* (Villefranche, 1932), 273.

²² Patrick Kessel, *La Nuit du 4 août 1789* (Paris, 1969), 169.

²³ *Moniteur*, 1, 288. The *Révolutions de Paris*, 1, No. 11, p. 23, called it the “suppression des jurats et maîtrises des villes.” Kessel, *La Nuit*, 169, mentions the deputies La Salle, Ménard de la Groye, and Maupetit who reported on the proposed abolition while only Barère stressed the reform rather than the abolition of the system. See also Albert Mathiez, “Les Corporations ont-elles été supprimées en principe dans la nuit du 4 août?” *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* (1931), 250-56.

²⁴ *Moniteur* 1, 293, 6 August 1789, item XII: “Il est déclaré que tous les privilèges particuliers des provinces, principautés, villes, corps et communautés, soit pécuniaires, soit de toute autre nature, sont abolis sans retour, et demeureront confondus dans les droits communs à tous les français.” It was understood that the term “communautés” referred to the guilds which were commonly known as “communautés d’arts et métiers.” *Moniteur*, 1, 333: 11 August; the item (number X) now read specifically “villes et communautés d’habitants.”

²⁵ In November of that year, the Six Corps, the most powerful guilds in Paris, petitioned the mayor, Bailly, to keep the system intact. Martin Saint-Léon, *Histoire des corporations*, 603-4. On the morning of 4 August 1789, the Six Corps had come to salute the Assembly, but the purpose of their visit is not clear. *Moniteur*, 1, 278.

²⁶ Georges Lefebvre, *The Coming of the French Revolution*, trans. R. R. Palmer (Princeton,

form or dismantlement of the guilds has to be viewed within the context of that night's proceedings. What began as a concern over the disorders in the countryside and the abolition of feudal remnants turned into a renunciation or recasting of specific privileges. In most instances, these proposals were either voiced directly or made on behalf of groups present in the Assembly: seigneurs and clerics, office-holders and high pensioners, provincial or municipal bodies. There were no guild spokesmen to renounce their privileges or minimize the impact of the suggested "reforms" of their institution. This is what happened to the parlements which found a powerful champion. When the deputies of Franche-Comté requested that their parlement be abolished, Fréteau, a councillor in the Paris Parlement and the Assembly's secretary on 4 August, agreed that the parlementaires might renounce some of their personal privileges, but he defended the institution as a whole. Of course general reforms were enacted. Although some suggestions were disregarded, such as the improvement of the lot of slaves and religious freedom,²⁷ others were adopted; namely, equality of taxation and of legal penalties and open access to administrative and military posts. As far as we know, the eradication of the guilds was not yet linked to overriding principles such as the right to work or economic freedom, which transcended individual renunciations. Whatever Chasset had intended, the guilds were assimilated instead with regional and institutional particularisms.

Indeed, although the "reform" of the guilds figured separately in the summary drawn up later that night (which made no mention of the parlements), by the next day their fate had been linked to other corporate bodies whose special privileges were suppressed on 6 August. But as mentioned earlier, the final version of 11 August made no mention of the guilds and other *corps*. The Assembly was unwilling to tackle either the parlements or other privileged companies, and the guilds benefited from such reluctance. This political and institutional approach to the guilds prevailed over economic and social considerations. The debate at the time of the abolition in 1791 would show that the deputies were well aware of the nature of French industrial organi-

N.J., 1967), 176, presumed the guilds were not abolished because the Third Estate was divided in its attitudes.

²⁷ Jean-Pierre Hirsch, *La Nuit du 4 août* (Paris, 1978), 167, 180.

zation, and there is no reason to suppose that the guild system survived in 1789 as a tribute to its economic vitality.

While the Assembly waffled, Parisian workers responded to the reforming spirit of 4 August. In the reminiscences of the mayor of Paris, Bailly:²⁸

The decrees of 4 August had a strong effect on the corporations: all people rebelled against the privileges of masters. The National Assembly, however, had not legislated on the guilds; and although one could predict that freedom of trade would require their abolition, it behooved us, before allowing complete freedom, to know what regulation the Assembly wished to add to the decrees and to enforce the old regulations until new ones were in place. . . . But there was widespread resistance; the forces at our disposal were inadequate and difficult to deploy; and license and violations grew apace.

After a squabble involving the women of the Halles, the Paris authorities had to decree that "[the fruit-sellers] would remain subject to the traditional regulations of their trade until a newly formed municipal council . . . established guidelines concerning the various claims put forth by members of that useful class of citizens; and that until that time, to ensure order and public tranquility, the [communal] Assembly orders that the old regulations be observed . . ."²⁹

Yet the response to grievances was not always negative. The communal authorities granted the journeymen tailors a rise in wages and supported the claims of the wigmakers against the guild clerks who distributed work permits.³⁰ Master tailors, on the other hand, were rebuffed when they tried to enforce their monopoly against old-clothes dealers. The municipality informed them that such procedures were "contrary to the spirit of the times."³¹

It was only natural to try to ensure a semblance of order and to reduce labor unrest in a period when spirits ran high, and the municipal authorities and the National Assembly perceived this as their responsibility. Until the Assembly finally abolished the guilds, the authorities persisted in these half-hearted attempts to shore-up the corporative system, but they proved incapable of arresting defections within individual guilds. Journeymen were quick to act. Irrespective

²⁸ Jean-Sylvain Bailly, *Mémoires d'un témoin de la Révolution*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1804), 3:89.

²⁹ *Révolutions de Paris*, 1, 17. See also Sigismond Lacroix, ed., *Actes de la commune de Paris pendant la Révolution*, 1st Series, 1:175.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1, No. 6, p. 15.

of the deputies' ultimate decision, the guilds were slowly disintegrating. Bailly recounts that many workers were establishing themselves without masterships.

The Declaration of the Rights of Man, voted on 26 August 1789, only increased the confusion. The draft proposal presented on 17 August had included the "right of every citizen to acquire, possess, manufacture and sell, and use his abilities and skills . . . as he pleases."³² The final version was more general, protecting property (article XVII) and the freedom of the individual (article IV). This last article was widely interpreted as freeing workers from corporative bonds.³³ A decree of the year 1796, from the department of the Haute-Saône makes this quite evident:

Such a guild should have been dissolved by the police of these two localities, from the very first promulgation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, which, by establishing the freedom of work in all crafts and professions and guaranteeing it to one and all, sanctioned the destruction of all types of guilds among citizens of the same trade or profession.³⁴

Likewise, the petitions sent to the National Assembly and processed by its Committee on Agriculture, Commerce, and Manufactures reveal that journeymen throughout France were disregarding traditional restrictions, especially in those trades which required little capital investment.³⁵ Nearly one-quarter of the petitions emanated from journeymen wigmakers, who expressed their opposition to mastership certificates, either individually or collectively. In most cases, they had set up on their own following the August decrees and faced prosecution from their masters. They asked that they be allowed to work independently and that all masterships be abolished. Such pleas came from Angoulême, Archac, Châtellerault, Clermont-Ferrand, Cognac, Grenoble, Laon, Limoges, Loches, Nancy, Nantes, Nevers, Niort, Paris, Poitiers, Sens, and Toulouse. The master wigmakers of Bordeaux, Châtellerault, Dijon, Douai, Laon, La Rochelle, Marseille, Metz, Paris, Pezenas, and Saint-Quentin responded as if on cue. They protested the insubordination of the journeymen and asked the Committee to

³² P. J. B. Buchez and R. C. Roux, *Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution française*, 40 vols. (Paris, 1834-8), 1:273.

³³ See, for example, M. de Jabin, *Liberté du commerce, abolition des maîtrises et jurandes, suppression des moines* (Paris, 1789?), 7p., who argues that the August decrees and the Declaration of the Rights of Man required the abolition of the corporative system.

³⁴ AN, F¹² 1560, "Manufactures, corporations, police des ouvriers, fabricants (1791-1813)."

³⁵ Gerbaux and Schmidt, *Procès-verbaux*, *passim*.

endorse the prosecution of workers who disregarded guild regulations. They also requested that the Committee issue a directive forbidding all journeymen to work outside the guilds. There were parallel conflicts among tailors. The masters of Montbrison echoed the complaints against journeymen who had set up on their own, whereas the journeymen tailors of La Flèche, Rouen, and Strasbourg asked to be allowed to work without masterships.

Journeymen in other trades, who had misinterpreted the August decrees, also asked to be allowed to work outside the guilds despite the masters' opposition. Such requests came from a journeyman shoemaker of the Havre de Grâce, a locksmith from Laon, a lemonade-seller from Nancy, a mason from Paris, and a journeyman hosier from Lyon. Two petitions arrived from carpenters in Bourg and Rennes. A mercer from Saint-Quentin, who had set up independently and had been taken to court by the merchant-mercers of that town, appealed to the committee for support. A hairdresser from Nantes and a journeyman jeweller from Brignolles protested against abuses by masters, while a master jeweller from Beauvais expressed his unqualified support of the guild system.³⁶

The committee also received several collective pleas in the name of all journeymen or masters of a given locality. On 26 March 1790, it acknowledged receipt of a petition by three thousand journeymen from the city of Nantes who called for the abolition of guilds. Another, by 2,316 Lyonnais, was put to the Assembly on 15 February 1791. The artisans of Lisieux, on the other hand, petitioned for the retention of their privileges at least until the Assembly had issued a final decree.³⁷

At least fifteen petitions asked for advice or clarification regarding the status of the guilds.³⁸ The first came from Chasset himself. In March 1790 the merchants of Abbeville wanted to know how to deal with people who were establishing themselves without masterships. The lieutenant-general of Pontoise, the municipality of Laon, a deputy from Moulins, the guild masters of Toulouse, the merchants of

³⁶ Other masters expressed their attachment to guild monopolies in other ways. The merchant-mercers of Abbeville, Agen, Amboise, Boulogne-sur-Mer, Honfleur, Lisieux, Nantes, Noyons, Richelieu, and Saint-Quentin, as well as the Parisian hosiers, voiced no complaints against the journeymen, but asked to be protected against pedlars and itinerant merchants. A number of pleas revolved around the special privileges of the owners of the Parisian butcher stalls.

³⁷ Gerbaux and Schmidt, *Procès-verbaux*, 1:240, 586; *Moniteur*, 7:396.

³⁸ Gerbaux and Schmidt, *Procès-verbaux*, 1:97, 177, 233, 328, 405, 408, 416, 503, 511, 518, 545, 630; 2:4.

Boulogne-sur-Mer, and the butchers of La Rochelle all asked whether the guilds had been abolished, and if not, whether they would be. The municipal authorities of Périgueux and Rennes went further and urged the National Assembly to decide the future of the guilds. In fact, a number expressed dissatisfaction with the indecisiveness of the Assembly. The wardens of the guilds of Commercy and Tours, a locksmith from Laon, and the deputy from Caen insisted that the matter should be settled one way or the other.

The Committee on Agriculture, Commerce, and Manufactures initially dismissed the petitions touching the guilds. Its members concluded time and again that no discussion was warranted ("il n'y a pas lieu à délibérer"). In July 1790, when the chairman, swamped by the number of petitions, asked his committee for guidance, "the Committee authorized him to answer that since the National Assembly had issued no decree on the question, the old regulations were to be followed until their repeal."³⁹

On 18 August and again on 30 September 1790, the member for Orléans, Gillet de la Jaqueminière, insisted that someone be delegated to prepare a report on the question. The committee would then be in a position to discuss the issue when it was raised in the Assembly.⁴⁰ The members adopted his proposal and charged Boufflers, a liberal aristocrat, to draw up a preliminary report.⁴¹ He had no time to present a proposal, for on 4 February 1791 d'Allarde appeared before the committee to present a draft decree calling for the suppression of the guilds drawn up by his own Committee of Public Contributions. He submitted it to the National Assembly on 15 February.⁴² The dismantlement of the guilds was tied to the abolition of various duties on drinks and given a fiscal slant. Merchants and artisans would pay for a license, the *patente*, and hopefully not pass on the cost to the consumer. Linking the abolition to the elimination of the *aides* and the creation of this new tax ensured that the discussion would go further than generalities. The Assembly would have to decide who was subject to the new tax and, therefore, define the nature of French production.

In the Assembly, the committee's spokesman repeated the now familiar denunciations of guild privileges coupled with a Physiocratic

³⁹ Ibid., 1:420-21.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1:468.

⁴¹ Ibid., 1:530.

⁴² Ibid., 2:23-28, and *Moniteur*, 7:396ff.

fixation on agricultural production: "La terre qui produit tout."⁴³ Competition had to replace monopoly to ensure cheaper consumer goods. At the same time, objections to the corporative system echoed the focus on "rights"—as opposed to duties—which embodied the first phase of the Revolution. Deputy after deputy referred to the "right to work" (already an Enlightenment tenet) and the need to grant "indigent" members of society their livelihood. Another philosophical position was voiced by Roederer, member of the Committee on Taxation, who saw the guilds as unwarranted intermediary bodies:

The important thing is to dissolve the craft guilds, for they represent major political and economic drawbacks: political drawbacks, because they contradict the spirit of the Constitution by their tendency to divide citizens, setting one against the other by way of special interests; economic drawbacks, insofar as they can raise the price of consumer goods and lower the wages of workers.⁴⁴

None of these general principles elicited much comment. The Assembly took it for granted that the time had come to eradicate such heinous monopolies (with proper compensation) and deliberated instead about who should be liable to the new tax.

The discussion reveals that the deputies were well aware of the actual state of the French economy. They viewed production in its entirety: that is, involving not only organized crafts but rural industry and urban *chambrelans*. A basic concern was not to overtax the deserving poor, another to differentiate between dependent and independent artisans.

Malouet: I would point out that the peasant worker or rural artisan paid nothing in the Ancien Régime and that, besides, such peasants only work part of the year.

Garat: I support M. Malouet: the Assembly has taken on the obligation of freeing the poor from oppression. Only tavern-keepers, butchers and retail merchants should pay [a *patente*] in the countryside.⁴⁵

Decretot: I request that the Assembly explain what it means by the term master craftsmen [*maîtres ouvriers*]. . . . I would think that it refers to artisans who work independently and not for other masters; yet yesterday people supposed that weavers would have to pay the *patente*.

I would point out that there are two kinds of weavers: those who work independently and sell their products to whomever they please, and those, as

⁴³ Mavidal and Laurent, *Archives parlementaires*, 15 February 1791, 1st series, 80 vols. (Paris, 1868-1914), 23:199.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 16 February 1791, 219.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 17 February 1791, 220.

numerous, who work for clothiers [*fabricants*] who provide them with raw materials and pay them either by the day or by the piece.

I would presume that you do not intend to subject the latter to the *patente* since they work, like journeymen carpenters and so on, for masters who already pay these dues. . . .⁴⁶

A deputy: You cannot possibly tax workers who work at home for a manufacturer, because they can hardly support themselves.⁴⁷

A consensus developed along those lines. Journeymen and apprentices were exempted from the *patente*, as were passive citizens, who did not pay the equivalent of three days' wages in *contribution mobilière*. By excluding the poorer strata of the urban and rural workforce, the Assembly was categorizing workers according to economic realities, where some had only their labor to sell and without any reference to status as defined by guild hierarchies. Furthermore, whatever the rhetoric in the preamble of the law, unfettered market forces were not viewed as a panacea: no one argued that the workers would so prosper from the new regime that they would soon be able to meet these payments.

In accordance with the governing precepts of the day, farmers selling grain, livestock, and other products (excepting alcohol) were also exempted from the *patente*. "The committee never meant to subject agriculture to the *patente*."⁴⁸ "Parasitical" intermediaries such as itinerant merchants, on the other hand, did not elicit the sort of sympathy reserved for the farmer, the rural artisan, or agricultural laborer:

Everyone knows that pedlars cheat rural inhabitants either about the quality or the price of goods. It would be much better if they stayed in the countryside and tilled the land rather than travel around with such awful merchandise. I therefore ask that pedlars who use carts pay an eighty-livre *patente*.⁴⁹

Other articles show that the legislators were practical. Surgeons and goldsmiths would continue to be regulated. Moreover, as the deputy Germain stated: "Your intention, gentlemen, has been to favor agriculture," but not to the detriment of the reputation of French manufactures. They should be made "to conform to whatever regulations

⁴⁶ Ibid., 17 February 1791, 225.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 17 February 1791, 225.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 16 February 1791, 217.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 17 February 1791, 229. Suggestion by Populus, incorporated into item 17.

might be decreed" in order to avoid pernicious license.⁵⁰ His proviso was adopted.

The Assembly did not examine the potential uses of the guild system. It swept away an outdated institution, which it associated with disgraceful privileges, and it did so not in order to create heaven on earth, but to align itself to economic realities. This is the essential point which brings us full circle to the original description of French industry. The guilds represented an outmoded organization, propped up by a political system which had now been revamped. Their disappearance was linked to the rationalization of the economy and polity, but this process was not merely imposed from the outside. The guilds had formed bothersome monopolies which had been attacked and undermined in the ancien régime. What is more, conflicts between masters and journeymen as well as between dependent and independent artisans caused the system to totter within the first weeks of the Revolution.

The reaction to the edict was on the whole favorable.⁵¹ The guilds, of course, denounced the abolition. On 30 March, for example, the Committee of Agriculture, Commerce, and Manufactures received petitions from the guilds of Le Havre protesting against the abolition of their privileges and the favors accorded to *colporteurs*.⁵² But on the whole the issue did not awaken much resistance.⁵³ If there was opposition, it tended to be passive, as in the refusal to pay the *patente*.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Ibid., 16 February 1791, 217.

⁵¹ The *Révolutions de Paris*, for example, rejoiced. 7, No. 84, 266-67, but Marat expressed his disapproval. Cited by Jean Juarès in *Histoire socialiste de la Révolution française*, 4 vols (Paris, 1968, reprint), 1:872.

⁵² Gerbaux and Schmidt, *Procès-verbaux*, 2:33.

⁵³ Ibid, 2:210.

⁵⁴ On the difficulty in collecting the *patente*, see *Actes de la commune de Paris*, 4:497, 5:179, 473, 6:536-38, 7:148.