Chapter 3
From Malthusianism to Populationism: The French Liberal Economists (1840–1870)

The Economists as a Sect

Of the large number of writers interested in population in France in the mid-nineteenth century, the liberal economists deserve special attention.[1] Like the English free-trade economists, they organised in 1841 an opinion and pressure group to press for the abolition of protectionist laws which had become increasingly stringent since the seventeenth century.[2] They did not, however, succeed in giving rise to a mass movement in support of free trade like their counterparts across the Channel and their adversaries did not fail to denounce them as a "sect of economists" obsessed by the idea of free trade. This sect was nonetheless quite active. The economists spread their ideas through their publications. Thus, in 1841, they established the periodical *Le Journal des Economistes* and in 1846, the weekly *Le Libre-échange* to support their anti-protectionist campaign; in 1860 *L'Economiste français* and *Journal de la Société de statistique de Paris* were set up. The economists also wrote regularly in dailies (*Le Journal des débats*) and in periodicals (*La Revue des Deux Mondes*).[3] Moreover, they held almost all the chairs, both public and private, in economics and related disciplines. In addition to having a firm footing in many learned societies like the *Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques*, they founded several *Sociétés d'économie politique*, initially in Paris in 1842 and later in Marseille, Lyon, Bordeaux, Saint-Etienne and Douai and the *Société de statistique de Paris* in 1860. Thanks to political support from Napoleon III, these ardent believers

[1] This chapter is largely a summary of Charbit: *Du malthusianisme au populationnisme : les Economistes français et la population 1840–1870*. Very few recent studies have dealt specifically with the ideas of economists on population, but *L'économie politique en France au XIXè siècle*, (Breton and Lutfalla ed.,1991) takes stock of several important aspects of the situation and also the major debates on this topic. As regards demographic factors, Volume 3 of *Histoire de la population française* (Dupâquier ed.,1988), provided new information in 1988 which has confirmed, and at times amended, the contribution of earlier works on this period covered in this chapter.

[2] Regarding the historical background of the question, Levasseur's *Histoire des classes ouvrières en France* (1859) provides useful information.

[3] We will use the following initials to denote the above publications: *Jde*, *Rddm*, *Ef*, *Sep*, *Asmp*, *Le*, *JSsP, Dep (Dictionnaire de l'économie politique).*

Y. Charbit, *Economic, Social and Demographic Thought in the XIXth Century*,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4020-9960-1_3,

in free trade witnessed the success of their ideas after 1860 following the signature of several trade treaties, particularly with England. The period between 1840 and 1870 marked the height of their glory. But this period should be studied for another reason. Unlike in the previous decades, their traditional adversaries, the protectionists who were influenced by neo-mercantilism, were first and foremost industrialists and no front-ranking figure had yet formulated a social doctrine or even taken part in the debate on the population question. As for the Social Catholics, closely studied by Duroselle (1951), they dealt only incidentally with the population question and mostly in relation to the problems of charity and abandoned children. Finally, except for Proudhon, the Utopian Socialists, who were violently anti-Malthusian, were reduced to silence during the Second Empire by means of severe police repression.

In two papers published in 1936, Spengler has firmly established the contribution of French economists to the demographic theory and more precisely to the inclusion of population as one of the factors of production in the framework of classical economics.[4] Spengler however stresses on its purely theoretical aspect and consequently neglects two important dimensions of the ideas on population. In the nineteenth century, these ideas were derived as much from the social doctrine as from economic theory and constituted a very effective ideological weapon, as proved by the success of the first edition of Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population*. Further, like Malthus, the French economists were extremely interested in demographic facts and their ideas on population were based, at least partially, on an empirical approach. Since one of the rigid criteria for membership of the group was belief in the free-trade doctrine, it was possible for them to adopt much more flexible positions on the population question without facing the risk of being excommunicated by the group. Hence they were able to readjust their population doctrine constantly according to the ongoing structural and short-term changes. This is reflected in the topics chosen for the after-dinner debates of the *Société économie politique de Paris* between the years 1842 and 1870, which were regularly reproduced in the *Journal des économistes*. These reports constitute a most valuable record of the evolution of ideas.

The period 1840–1870, which would give them the opportunity to compare their ideas with facts, was marked by radical changes. Firstly, there were demographic changes: in a situation where the total population grew at a slow pace as a result of a regular fall in the birth rate since the beginning of the century, in 1853–1854 there was such a steep rise in the death-rate that for the first time a natural deficit was recorded. On the other hand, France was going through an unprecedented phase of urbanisation as a direct result of the growing need of labour for its industries. This demographic change took place at a time when the economic, social and political situation was particularly favourable. The July Monarchy was swept away by the severe economic, social and political crisis of 1845–1848. The short-lived Second Republic (1848–1851) which followed was swept away in its turn by the coup d'état

[4] Titled "French Population Theory since 1800". Also see Spengler's *France Faces Depopulation* (1938), particularly Chapters V, VI, VII and VIII.

carried out by Prince President Louis Napoleon Bonaparte in 1851. The Second Empire (1851–1870), on the contrary, seemed to be a period of economic expansion, rising prices and comparative social peace, at least till the mid-1860s. It was also under the Second Empire that the building of the French colonial empire began. But after 1860, social and political problems obliged the government to become less authoritarian as it was facing a series of setbacks at the international level. Let us mention these problems briefly. At the domestic level, the right of coalition, which was recognised in 1864, gave a new impetus to social unrest while free trade, established in 1861, was opposed by industrial circles who favoured protectionism; finally, the Catholics withdrew their support while the Republican opposition became more powerful. At the international level, the disastrous Mexican expedition from 1861 to 1867, the Polish question as well as those of the Danish duchies of Schleswig, Holstein and Lauenbourg from 1863 onwards, the Roman problems in 1867 and the failure of the compensation policy in 1867 due to Prussia's claims proved to be serious disappointments or blunders. It was in these circumstances that a radical about-face occurred a few years later in both the population theory and doctrine of the free-trade economists.

While Malthusianism won unanimous support from 1840 to 1850, several well-known Malthusians clearly became populationists during the 1860s. First, it appears that such a change could only be the result of the pressure exerted by circumstances, because no theoretical work capable of bringing about such a drastic change in ideas was published during this period. Secondly, when the comments provoked by the results of two censuses (1856 and 1866) are compared, it is impossible to claim that the change in ideas on population was caused solely by demographic factors. If, on the contrary, the totality of social, economic and political changes are taken into account, it is easier to understand why Malthusianism occupied a central position in the social doctrine and also why it was *progressively* abandoned. Although, Malthusianism was the principal doctrine behind the refutation of socialistic ideas during the 1848 revolution, under the Second Empire a powerful synthesis of urban and industrial changes partially questioned the Malthusian doctrine. After 1864, this synthesis in its turn weakened under the pressure of facts and there was a decisive doctrinal upheaval as a result of which Malthusianism was abandoned in favour of populationism.

A Double Paradox

The censuses of 1856 and 1866 led to the publication of a large number of articles and books by members the group. Comparing the changing demographic facts with the evolution of ideas reveals a double paradox: the objectively disquieting demographic situation between 1851 and 1856 did not seem to perturb these specialists. The 1866 census did not raise any serious problems and yet they were admittedly pessimistic.

The 1856 Census: Demographic Crisis and Economic Prosperity

The 1856 census recorded a very low rate of annual population growth: 0.14% between 1851 and 1856 (against 0.22% between 1846 and 1851), resulting from a deficit of births as compared to deaths in 1854 (−69, 318) and 1855 (−35, 606). The continuation of a long-term fall in the birth rate was confirmed (26.1 per thousand between 1851 and 1855 as compared to 30.5 per thousand between 1826 and 1830). The census also revealed a steep growth of the urban population, which rose between 1851 and 1856 from 25.5% to 27.3% of the total population. The average annual growth rate in the intercensal period (1.52% from 1851 to 1856 and 1.59% between 1856 and 1861) is the highest recorded in the nineteenth century. The growth was particularly high in the industrial suburbs of the major industrial and commercial centres like Paris, Lyon, Le Havre and Lille: in Paris it went up by 13.5%, but in the suburbs of Montrouge, La Chapelle and Belleville it rose respectively by 122%, 78% and 66%; in Lille it rose by 4% against 39.5% in Wazemmes. These facts should have been considered disturbing as this conjunction between the concentration of population in urban areas and a high death rate gave rise in the first half of the nineteenth century to the theme of "working classes, dangerous classes" as shown by Chevalier (1958) in the case of Paris. With just one exception, the members of the group were almost unanimously satisfied by the demographic changes and particularly by the exodus from rural areas. The problem then is to explain the reasons for this surprising optimism going against the traditional analyses and the pessimism that reigned around 1848, as we shall see later.

The reasons for the exceptionally high death rate in 1854 and 1855 were the high price of cereals in 1853 following a poor harvest, the cholera epidemic in 1854 and the Crimean War in 1854–1855. The cholera epidemic in 1854, which caused some 150,000 deaths, was even more severe than the ones in 1849 (110,000 deaths) and in 1832 (102,700 deaths). However, the former head of the Statistical Bureau, Moreau de Jonnes, did not hesitate to write that "public health has not been affected by the cholera epidemic". This declaration and the underestimation by all economists of the seriousness of the epidemic are explained by the second component of the demographic crisis of 1854–1855, viz. the rise in the price of wheat in 1853. However, this was nothing compared to the serious food crisis during the period 1846–1848, some aspects of which were reminiscent of the crises during the Ancien Régime. But generally speaking, the economic context was different: France had developed remarkably due to the influx of gold and silver from California and Australia since 1850 and the economic policy adopted by the Second Empire (building of public works and development of railways). In these conditions, it is not surprising that Wolowski should have claimed that "the economic fact that strikes us in France is the increase of wealth and the means of subsistence".[5] And according to the economists,

[5] Moreau de Jonnes (*Jde*, T. 18, 1858: 230). Chevalier (1958) has brought out the social significance of the 1832 epidemic, which created havoc in districts crowded with a poor and itinerant population. This led to a wave of panic among the bourgeois population. See the opinions of Wolowski (*Jde*, T. 13, 1857: 331) and Legoyt (*Jde*, T. 18, 1858: 361). Wolowski was a professor

the rural exodus was the logical result of the need for labour in industries and for major public works.

Some economists called for the use of Malthusian adjustment mechanisms. In the absence of major destructive checks – a position which was easily justified by underestimating the gravity of the cholera epidemic and by the fact that the high price of wheat did not lead to a famine – a low demographic growth proved that preventive checks had effectively prevented the principle of population from producing all its effects: "it is quite possible that this fact coincided (. . .) with a more definite and better regulated tendency in the birth rate, that is to say in the management of pressing interests which determine this rate". According to Villermé, author of *Tableau de l'état physique et moral des ouvriers*, the fall in the number of births reflected a decrease in fertility among the working classes who were traditionally supposed to be more fertile. This change, he felt, was very satisfactory because it resulted in a lower infant mortality. In all, economists based their optimism on non-demographic considerations by laying stress on the overall economic situation and by minimising the importance of the crisis of 1854–1855.[6]

The 1866 Census: The Decreasing Fertility and International Outlook

According to the official commentator of the census, the rural exodus was less severe than in earlier times and the short-term economic crises did not slow down demographic growth. But there was no mention of the long-term decrease in the birth rate.

Slow Growth and Low Fertility

Economists were interested above all in the long-term decrease in the birth rate, while in 1856 they were more concerned about the rural exodus. However, all said and done, opinions on the rural exodus were by and large positive and reflected the awareness of the need for change as a result of industrial development. But when the rural exodus slowed down, the fall in fertility became inevitable. It became clear that there was no more hope of a demographic revival after the disappearance of the temporary causes of the slowdown because the extraordinary reasons for mortality had almost disappeared after 1856: there was no food-shortage despite poor harvests and

---

of political economy and industrial law in the *Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers* from 1839 and a member of the *Académie des sciences morales et politiques* from 1855. He was also a member of the National Assembly from 1848 to 1851 and again from 1871 to 1875.

[6] Quotation from Dunoyer (*Jde*, T. 13, 1857: 229). A native of the Lot department Dunoyer was one of the most important liberals during the Restoration; his newspapers, *Le Censeur* and *Le Censeur Européen*, were taken to court. He became interested in political economy after 1825 and was appointed Prefect from 1830 to 1837 and then member of the *Conseil d'Etat* (1838–1851). Villermé, in Fayet (1858: 42).

the 1865 cholera epidemic was not very serious as compared to previous epidemics. Hence it was the low fertility that was slowing down demographic growth, and that too excessively, considering the economic and political needs of the time. This was the conclusion drawn by the statistician Block after studying the departments in which population had decreased between 1836 and 1866: the reason was the fall in the number of births and not the high rate of deaths caused by epidemics. Better still, the wealthiest departments had experienced the heaviest losses. Normandy was a perfect example of this, observed Hippolyte Passy and his nephew Louis Passy, who claimed that the reason for the drop in the population of Normandy was not the rural exodus but the low fertility of married couples in rural areas, and only in rural areas. Given the economic situation, this observation could not be explained by the traditional Malthusian models: "What makes it remarkable is that it happened at a time of great prosperity and showed to what extent Malthus's doctrine is baseless." This statement takes us back to the first edition of the *Essay* in which only mortality (the destructive check) plays a role in population control. But by ignoring the possible role of preventive checks, it reduced Malthus's theory to the first model, thus revealing that the Malthusian system was no longer regarded as relevant to France under the Second Empire. Hippolyte Passy's opinion suggests that traditional Malthusianism was on the decline as the dominant tone of the article is one of pessimism resulting from the consequences of demographic changes: "If the population continues to decrease, it will ultimately lead to (. . .) a reduction of the forces required by nations to increase their power and industrial activities."[7]

International Stakes

Unlike the preceding period, fertility in France was seen from an international viewpoint: "The average annual growth for thirty years is only 0.43%, lower than in most other European states."[8] This change of view can be explained in the first place by Prussia's unexpected victory over Austria at Sadowa on 3 July 1866, which rudely revealed the existence of a new, well-organised and well-armed European power on France's doorstep. While public opinion suddenly became aware of the military handicap represented by a low demographic growth, economists were caught in a contradiction: for these free-traders, the safety of international trade was crucial; but as pacifists, they could not recommend an increase in the size of the army to safeguard it. They therefore had no choice but to denounce the disastrous economic consequences of wars while stressing anxiously that fertility in France was

---

[7] Block (*Jde*, T. 7, 1867: 423–427); L. Passy (*Jde*, T. 36, 1862: 421–427); H. Passy (*Jde*, T. 5, 1867: 314–315). The reason for the fall in fertility was, according to Passy, the fear of having too many children. H. Passy, deputy from Louviers from 1830 and a Peer of France from 1843, was a friend of Thiers. Considered as a financial expert, he joined the government in 1848 but he resigned in 1851 after the *coup d'état* of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte.

[8] *Jde*, T. 5, 1867: 423.

insufficient to face such dangers.[9] On the other hand, the rivalry with England in the colonies inevitably led to the problem of having adequate human reserves to populate the territories controlled by France. In fact, for the first time it was recognized that the colonial question was explicitly linked to demographic changes. Due to the low demographic pressure, it was difficult to encourage emigration and therefore colonisation, which explains why France lagged behind other European countries in the race for colonies: "These emigrants, these colonisers are either large families moving out together or youngsters. It is they who have been pioneers in America and populated Australia and, what a miracle, these people grow and multiply much faster than us who send abroad only a few representatives of our nationality." At the time these lines were written, England could support its industrial development with its vast Empire on which the sun never set.[10]

A comparison of the reactions to the results of the censuses in 1856 and 1866 leads to an epistemological problem: it is impossible to explain the shift in ideas on population by simple demographic facts and it is necessary to widen this analysis and relocate it in the overall context of France during the Second Empire, also keeping in mind the ideological corpus of liberalism. As we shall see later, the economists succeeded in maintaining the coherence of their economic doctrine (that free trade is necessary for economic prosperity) as well as social doctrine (social peace is possible in France) by taking into account the demographic and socio-economic changes which they had closely followed. And since demographic facts were obviously not properly analysed, it is necessary to deduce that scientific discipline in terms of ideas on population was subordinated to maintain this coherence. In other words, it remains to be shown that the contradictions noted so far on the objective level are only apparent contradictions and that they conceal a strong ideological coherence.

Poverty of the Working Class and the Dangers of the Revolution

The 1840s were a period of intense ideological activity because the beginning of industrialisation and the birth of a working class seriously raised the problem of social peace. However, the figures do not justify the shift in ideas because industrial growth under the July Monarchy (1830–1848) was very modest as compared to the following decades. But it must be remembered that France was essentially rural during the reign of Louis-Philippe: in 1836, the population of two of the largest cities, Lyon and Lille, was respectively only 150,814 and 72,005. Unlike in England, the rural areas had not changed much as neither the agricultural revolution nor any "enclosures movement" had given rise to a rural proletariat. On the other hand, the geographical concentration of a few hundred thousand workers constituting the first industrial force did not fail to strike such sharp observers as the economists,

[9] For example H. Passy (*Jde*, T. 5, 1867: 317); F. Passy (s.d.). F. Passy received the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1901; Block, Bénard and Lavergne also adopted this position, (Ibid.: 309, 310, 429).

[10] Block (*Jde*, T. 5, 1867: 426); Duval (*Jde*, T. 5, 1867: 318–319).

especially since England had shown to what extent industrialisation could spread: would Lille become another Manchester? Would the proletarianisation of the English working classes with its attendant troubles and agitations also occur in France?

It is in this context that the 1845–1850 crisis broke out. It started with a disease which affected the potato crop: attacked by phytophtora, the crop was as poor as in 1832. In 1846 again, the wheat crop was poor in the whole of France. The price of wheat, which had reached its maximum in February 1847, was the highest recorded in the nineteenth century except for 1812 and 1817. As it often happens, it fell drastically later on, bringing down the farmers' purchasing power. In 1847, the crisis reached the industrial sector. With the skyrocketing of the stock market due to heavy speculation on the railway, a one-point increase in the interest rate by the Banque de France immediately put the banking sector in a precarious position leading to the collapse of the largest private bank, *Caisse du Commerce et de l'Industrie*. In 1848 and 1849, the crisis was certainly an industrial and commercial crisis affecting the whole of France, except for Marseille and the Var region. In Paris, production collapsed and unemployment ranged between 50 and 75%; in Rouen, port activity came down by one third; in Lille, Roubaix and Tourcoing, the situation was disastrous: of the 50 cotton-spinning mills that existed in 1832 only 34 remained in 1848 and 27 in 1849. After a partial revival in 1849, the economy collapsed again in 1850–1851. The crisis would end only during the Second Empire. The population suffered a great deal and poverty was particularly severe in the countryside. In the West, the government had to take action against troops of beggars and trouble broke out all over France. The reduction of the peasants' purchasing power affected the demand for industrial goods. In Northern France, for example, where the crisis affected the textile sector in 1846, unemployment grew severely while wages fell drastically: in Roubaix, among the weavers living outside the city walls, 4,800 were unemployed in February 1847, 6,000 in mid-March and 7,000 at the beginning of May. In the Calvados region, lace-makers, who earned 1 franc per day in 1845, earned no more than 0.10–0.30 franc in 1848–1849.[11]

Industrialisation and Its Demographic Implications

The interest shown in the 1840s in analysing the social differentials in fertility and mortality corresponded, as in England, to the need to understand the working class population created by industrialisation. Their harsh living conditions were in sharp contrast with the relative prosperity of the majority of the population and average figures could not evidently serve as a satisfactory statistical tool: "This contrast between the constant increase in the life span of the overall population and the bleeding wounds of poverty can have but one explanation. It must be concluded that the average figures expressing general facts are high due to the exceptional

[11] This information has been taken from various contributions to Labrousse ed., (1976). Also see: Markovitch (1965).

prosperity of the bourgeois classes, a prosperity which is quite noticeable as it compensates for the misery of the proletariat." Detailed demographic data was therefore necessary to combat poverty and social suffering and the economists could, in fact, base their analyses of the extent and gravity of the economic and social situation on the remarkable differential statistics that they had sometimes helped to collect. As was the case in Paris, working classes were formed in towns by the immigration of the rural population attracted by industrial jobs and generally speaking, the growth of the Seine department and the city of Paris can only be explained by immigration.[12] The economists, who were fully aware that this rapid movement did not allow for a proper assimilation of the immigrants, connected the demographic growth with the rural exodus and social problems. And when the revolution broke out in 1848, the problem assumed political tones: "It is desirable more than ever before that the urban population should not increase at the cost of the rural population. Anything that encourages the concentration of a large number of workers at a particular point is not only bad for public order but also worsens the workers' condition."[13]

Even though some of the analyses deal with the food shortage between 1846 and 1848, most articles and books published before and after the 1848 revolution deal with the growth of the factory system and its consequences, which were very lucidly analysed: the technical and capitalistic concentration of labour, chronic crises of overproduction and their disastrous human consequences. In Lower Normandy, wrote Jérôme-Adolphe Blanqui, the brother of the famous revolutionary, "This is the novelty and the crux of the present manufacturing system: wherever a big factory comes up, a population of labourers gathers around it and grows in a disorderly fashion; it is badly housed, badly fed and is subjected to every likelihood of instability of profits and wages." Even after the turmoil of 1848, he was pessimistic about the future of social peace – "The centres of sedition have not been wiped out" – and cities like Lyon and Paris still contained many young and unstable people, who became trouble-makers and disturbers of the social order. This bourgeois notion of danger related to the age structure of the working class population has been stressed by Chevalier in relation to crime in Paris in the first half of the nineteenth century. His book stops before the 1848 Revolution: it is clear that when the revolution broke out, the social problem assumed a political colour. According to Villermé, for example, working-class housing projects, often built by employers, were likely to aggravate social antagonisms by giving rise to social segregation.[14]

---

[12] Chevalier, 1950. Also see Le Bras and Garden (1988: 142).

[13] Faucher (*Rddm*, novembre-décembre 1843: 794). The quotation is taken from Léonce de Lavergne (*Rddm*, April 1849: 55).

[14] Quotations from Blanqui (*Mémoires de l'Asmp*, T. 7, 1850: 743 and 730. Also see: 730, 743, 769, 805, 821); Villerme (1850: 9).

Responses to the Problem of Poverty

Despite the social evils ingrained in industrial cities, none of the economists advocated that the "excessive" urban working-class population should return to the countryside. This solution went against all their analyses of mechanisation, which required a large labour force: in a country where the population increased very little and where deaths exceeded births in the cities, the industrial labour force could be strengthened only by immigration from the rural areas. Further, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, landowners had joined hands with the owners of ironworks and textile mills to enforce protectionist barriers. In these conditions, these economists who favoured free trade were not in the least interested in advocating a return to the land for the benefit of the landowners who complained about a shortage of labour in the agricultural sector. Charity too was condemened as an inadequate solution to the problem of poverty. Private charity, often advocated by Social Catholics, had a major disadvantage in that it weakened the sense of responsibility among individuals and hence "foresightedness" and favoured in the long run an inordinate increase of the poor population and, therefore, misery. As for assistance to the unemployed, characteristically described as "public charity", it was associated with the unfortunate experience of the *Ateliers nationaux*, the useless public works undertaken to reduce unemployment. The right to work, inspired by the socialist doctrine (the decree of 15 February 1848 was issued under the influence of Louis Blanc) was vigorously opposed by the economists during debates in the National Assembly. In the first place, it violated the sacrosanct right to work and consequently the right to property. In the same vein, they rejected Proudhon's thesis: though it was true that the right to property and the right to work were contradictory and hence could not coexist, it was wrong to claim, as Proudhon did, that going beyond this contradiction would ensure progress. Further, the right to work, like the English Poor Laws, led to an increase in the number of poor under the guise of alleviating poverty. Finally, it was refuted with reference to the wage-fund theory: since it was impossible to increase the overall remuneration of labour, what was given as aid to unemployed workers was actually taken from the wages of the employed ones. These are in fact traditional Malthusian arguments. Having rejected these solutions, how did they propose to solve the problem of poverty?[15]

The Malthusian Weapon

Demographic arguments were advanced to solve the social and political problems created by the 1848 revolution. They were reduced by de Colmont to a pithy formula at the height of the revolutionary turmoil: "One of the principal causes of the poverty of the working classes is that they have too many children", and this was due to two reasons. Workers as consumers could escape poverty and even starvation only if they

[15] The speeches were immediately compiled by Garnier in *Le droit au travail à l'Assemblée nationale*, published in 1848.

reduced their fertility; as producers, their excessive fertility increased the supply of labour and brought down wages. The Malthusian argument was thus used to ignore the social problem of poverty and bring the debate down to the individual and biological level. But it had a much more interesting ideological function according to Garnier, an orthodox Malthusian and chief editor of the *Journal des Economistes*, "Malthus was content to recommend moral restraint and he only asked the poor classes to imitate the affluent classes who always abide by it." Since they had thoroughly analysed the social differences responsible for fertility and mortality, writing that workers could avoid their sad fate by adopting a prudent and therefore bourgeois type of behaviour amounted to denying the fundamental difference between social classes. In 1848, when an open class struggle was in progress, this argument proved to be extremely important: to restore social peace, it was necessary that everybody became bourgeois and that was possible only if the workers reduced their fertility by following Malthus's advice. The generous socialist claims for equality were caught in the Malthusian trap.[16]

Protectionism and Free Trade

The existence of conflicts was also denied at the economic level. At the height of the social and political crisis, Horace Say proclaimed the solidarity of labour and capital: "We should stop considering the interests of capital and labour as being opposed because they are really identical. Capital, which is formed by the savings of workers, becomes the most useful instrument for production; its destruction would be a public calamity." This delightful statement could simply mean that capital is created only by workers' savings. Though it is true that savings banks were a great success, it is surprising that Jean-Baptiste Say's own son should believe that all the capital invested in France came from them. Even more important, it has a bearing on the significance of the ideological legacy of the 1789 revolution according to which capital is accumulated labour and capitalists are also workers and members of the Third Estate like all workers.[17]

The economists cleverly used another argument: those responsible for the workers' poverty were the protectionists who, by defending the privileges of industrialists, increased the cost of living for the masses. Frédéric Bastiat, chief editor of the weekly *Le Libre-échange*, combined Malthusianism with free trade: "Ultimately, Death takes care, after much suffering, to bring the population down to a level that can be supported by the reduced wages and combined with the high cost of living." The free-trade argument had a dual purpose. First, by rising to the defence of consumers, they identified their cause with the general interest and set themselves

---

[16] Quotations: De Colmont (*Jde*, T. 20, 1848: 197); Garnier (*Jde*, T. 23, 1848: 151). Chevalier claimed that foresightedness would spread among the people when reason gained an upper hand over instinct (*Jde*, T. 22, 1849: 352); du Puynode (*Jde*, T. 23, 1849: 149); Garnier (*Jde*, T. 15, 1846: 127, 129); Chevalier (*Jde*, T. 16, 1847: 221); Reybaud (*Rddm*, April 1846: 56).

[17] Horace Say (*Jde*, T. 20, 1848: 23).

up as defenders of the masses and hence of the workers. On reading the weekly *Le Libre-échange*, it is seen to what point they believed – or wanted to show that they believed – that the Republic would adopt their doctrine for the good of the people. But between February and April 1848, when the last issue of *Le Libre-échange* was published, the disillusionment increased week after week because instead of supporting free trade, the Republic became socialistic and they denounced its folly. The second purpose of the free trade argument was to blame protectionism for the economic and social crisis as if the customs regime were solely responsible for the workers' misery: "The restrictive system is one of the most direct causes of the excessive competition, of the concentration of workers in cities and of pauperism which worries and troubles them. When the storm broke out over our country in February, we saw how fragile and inadequate the protective edifice was."[18] In his well-informed report on the working classes, Blanqui systematically opposed the industries in the North, in the East and in Normandy, which were the strongholds of protectionism, to the social stability in Marseille, Bordeaux, Dunkirk and in ports as a whole. It is worth noting that Blanqui was one of the members of the national legislature representing Bordeaux, a city which supported free trade. In short, by turning the protectionist industrialists into scapegoats, it was possible to exonerate the bourgeoisie as a whole from the evils created by the anarchic capitalism which prevailed in the early years of industrialisation.

The economists thus waged a dual ideological struggle around 1848 – against the socialists on the one hand and against the protectionists on the other. Demographic arguments played a key role because the Malthusian vulgate suited the situation perfectly, but it was modified to take into account the peculiar nature of French society: the solidarity of the various social classes was stressed much more than in England in conformity with the main principles of 1789 and the urgent need to restore social peace.

The Second Empire: Social Peace

It was under the Second Empire that France stumbled into the modern world: development of the railways (from 3,010 km in 1850 to 17,929 km in 1870) as well as the improvement of the road network and river transport contributed to the "expansion of the national market" characterised by a marked growth in the circulation of coal, raw materials for the textile industry and food products. Generally speaking,

---

[18] Blanqui's report is titled *Classes ouvrières pendant l'année 1848.* Quotation from Bastiat: *Le*, 29 août 1847: 318. Regarding the changes during the Second Republic, compare *Le*, 5 March 1848: "The last revolution, while preparing for an unlimited extension of the electoral base, has greatly facilitated the success of our cause... No one would dare today to proclaim loudly that the high cost of food stuffs is a good thing" (p. 77) and *Le*, 26 March 1848: "The government has undertaken the implementation of this excessively regulatory, anti-liberal and monstrous programme that goes under the name of organisation of labour." (p. 89). Also see Blanqui (*Classes ouvrières*... in *Mémoires de l'Asmp*, T. 7, 1850: 791).

the Saint-Simonians (Talabot, the Péreire brothers, Guéroult, Chevalier) played a decisive role as they convinced the Emperor that the state had to intervene in the business sector. Thus credit was reorganised according to their ideas to support industrialisation and tap savings at a time when there was an influx of precious metals in France from Australia and California which facilitated banking operations while industrialisation, by producing more consumer goods, checked inflation. There is no doubt that Napoleon III's interventionist policy promoted economic growth. His coming into power reassured the ruling classes as pointed out by Labrousse and Marczewski and the overall economic policy, especially at the beginning of the Second Empire, contributed to the economic revival. Demand was sustained by undertaking large-scale public works and the introduction of free trade gave a boost to the economy. It should be remembered that the treaty of 1860, which boosted the economy, was signed against the wishes of the majority of industrialists. The total exports increased from 16 in 1848 to 92 in 1875 (the base being 100 in 1890), almost at the same pace as the imports. As for industrialisation, the movement, which had begun in the 1840s, expanded considerably. A few figures will support this statement: the number of machines operated by steam, which had gone up from 2,591 in 1840 to 5,322 in 1850, reached 27,088 in 1870. The industrial production index calculated by Crouzet, which fluctuated between 5 and 7 in the 1840s (the base being 100 in 1913), shot up from 9.7 to 30.6 between 1851 and 1869. There was progress also in the agricultural sector due to a decrease in the area of fallow lands, better crop rotation and improvement of tools; for example, the number of steam-operated threshing-machines rose from 81 in 1852 to 6,000 in 1873. This led to an increase in the yield of the two major cereals (wheat and rye), sugar-beet and grape-vines in the South of France. There was also an improvement in cattle rearing with a larger number of cattle-heads as well an increase in the yield of milk and meat.[19] The progress in the transport, agricultural and industrial sectors promoted the development of consumption and brought down the prices of cotton and woollen fabrics and also iron and steel goods which benefited the consumers. The diversification of consumption is confirmed by qualitative studies such as Duveau's thesis on the condition of the working class under the Second Empire. Available statistical series show that the nominal wage rose continuously but the real wage suffered during some years, partly because of the sharp rise in house rents in all the cities where large-scale public works were undertaken under Hausman's urban development scheme. Labrousse concludes that the average factory-owner saw his profits double between 1850 and 1880 while it took 60 years for agricultural income to double. As for the workers, it was during the 1860s that "the anxiety about bread" disappeared and consumption became more diverse. In other words, the standard of living improved and changed.[20]

---

[19] National market: Léon (1993: 275–304). Exports: Broder (1993: 311–312. Agriculture: Laurent (1993: 680–685, 698–707). Daumard (1993: 897–929). Industrial production: Crouzet (1970).

[20] Duveau (1946: 333, 336, 363–368); Singer–Kerel (1961); Léon (1993: 275–304, 598). Series of prices and incomes: Bruhat (1993: 797–798). Assessment by Labrousse (1993: 1018–1022).

So this was the economic and social situation observed by the economists and as a rule they all analysed it with considerable insight. Better still, they managed to summarise the demographic, economic and social changes by focusing on two groups – peasants and workers. However, this choice was not objective as it involved essential ideological stakes. When dealing with the "working classes", the economists always looked at them from the viewpoint of the factory system, workers being above all a labour force whose present and future availability was of primary concern to them. However one of the most innovative ideological responses to industrialisation was the "standard of living argument", which cannot be separated from the problem of social peace. And that is precisely what constitutes the profound ideological link between the analyses of the rural masses and the analyses focused on workers. The economists succeeded in putting together an original thesis based on the economic and social changes that took place between 1850 and 1860 and proved that social peace was possible, and had perhaps even been achieved, both in the countryside and in cities.

The Peasants: Small Holdings and Rural Exodus

The Problem of "Parcellisation"

Although the existence of "parcellisation" was proved only in a few regions, it is agreed that there was a progressive fragmentation of land holdings in the first half on the nineteenth century. The reasons for this are quite uncertain and the traditional argument that the law of succession was directly responsible is not very convincing: the fragmentation had started before 1789 and in some regions local customs and practices just managed to circumvent the law.[21] Nonetheless, the problem of fragmentation had demographic implications: if the property was divided with each successive generation, the same area had to support a larger number of families and the small size of the holding hindered agricultural development. In this way, a whole argument could be built on the relationship between the laws of succession, small land holdings and overpopulation. Malthus claimed that the predominance of small land holdings in France encouraged the growth of population, refusing to admit that the system of equal distribution of property introduced by the Napoleonic Code was really responsible for the fragmentation of land holdings and that this fragmentation was the principal cause of poverty and impeded any improvement in agricultural practices.[22] Several writers (Clément, Léonce de Lavergne, F. Passy,

[21] The best proof of fragmentation is provided by Vigier with reference to the Alpine region. Vigier then extends it to the whole of France (1963: 172–178). Barral, who deals with the Isère region, is more ambiguous (1962: 89). Corbin gives more importance to temporary migrations in the Limousin saying the introduction of paper currency permitted the purchase of lands (1975, I: 606–615). Regarding fragmentation in Alsace before 1789, see Leuillot (1959, I: 44).

[22] "In France, there have always been a lot of small farms and small landowners. This state of affairs is not very favourable to the increase of the net product or the available national wealth,

Legoyt and Levasseur) misunderstood Malthus and remarked that since fragmentation had started well before 1789, the Napoleonic Code could not be considered as its cause. Malthus's refutation was also based on a comparison between the changes in the number of *cotes foncières*[23] and the total size of the population. Since the two were not comparable, the economists deduced that the growth of population had nothing to do with the fragmentation of land holdings and that Malthus was wrong. Actually their painstaking calculations are not of much interest because they ignored other factors. For example, the fragmentation of land holdings can occur simply as a result of the urbanisation of rural areas. Further, since each *cote foncière* corresponds to the totality of pieces of land owned in a particular commune, if the same landowner acquires small holdings in another commune, the number of *cotes* will increase. Generally, properties can be sold or bought (and consequently the number of *cotes* can increase) with a total absence of demographic growth. When reference is made today to the fragmentation of land holdings, it is to explain the decreasing fertility towards the end of the nineteenth century – a causal relationship not yet proved; the peasants are supposed to have offset the harmful effects of the equal distribution of inherited lands by reducing their fertility and by marrying their only son to the neighbour's only daughter in order to combine the two properties in the next generation. This is just the opposite risk that preoccupied the economists, but no more than today, they could not explain the real relationship between land and fertility with reference to fragmentation. On the other hand, looking at it from the angle of the liberal ideology, the problem turns out to be particularly heuristic, as we shall now see.

Foresightedness

The economists unanimously rejected Malthus's opinion about the demographic consequences of small land holdings having partly misunderstood, as we have pointed out, Malthus's thinking: "The event has proved that in France the inheritance law does not have the disastrous consequences foreseen by Malthus and it does not in particular discourage prudential restraint with regard to population." In support of their defence of the French inheritance laws, they analysed at length the ways in which small land holdings slowed down demographic growth. They encouraged foresightedness and a sense of responsibility precisely because the inheritance law demanded the equal distribution of the inherited property: it encouraged the peasant to limit the number of children in order to avoid the fragmentation of his land after

---

but sometimes it increases the gross product and it always has a strong tendency to encourage population growth." *Essay*, 7th edition, I: 219. Similarly, the equal distribution of land among the heirs tended to encourage the growth of population among the Greeks and the Romans (*Essay*, 7th edition, I: 139).

[23] Each landlord has one *cote foncière* in a given commune, whatever be the number and the type of property or the pieces of land: e.g. his house, a separate barn, one or more pieces of land, a wood, etc. However he would have another *cote foncière* for his properties located in another commune.

his death.[24] At a time when the Malthusian doctrine was still predominant in their group, the economists were against Malthus only on the question of the inheritance law. How can this tough stand be explained? They believed that Malthus was a staunch supporter of big landowners and of the "aristocratic" English inheritance laws, while the right to property and its corollary, the law of succession, were praised as the most important achievement of the revolution of 1789. The bourgeois social order rested on these two pillars as Lavollée openly declared in 1861: "The law of succession, as established by the Civil Code, rests on principles that cannot be easily undermined and which will be defended, should the need arise, by the strongest forces of democracy and French society." To understand the solemnity of this warning, we must go back to the late 1840s. The 1848 revolution, which disrupted the social order, also established universal suffrage and it was obvious that the bourgeoisie faced imminent danger as the lower classes could seize power democratically. Nevertheless, the peasants, who voted for the first time in 1849, proved to be overwhelmingly conservative. So there was no more risk on that account and it was even proved that the French succession law constituted a major political advantage: by averting the creation of a rural proletariat (because each child inherited a part of the father's land), it ensured the continuance of political conservatism. Moreau de Jonnes could thus write in 1851 that the number of small holdings multiplied: "The number of citizens, defenders of the motherland and of the social order, [who] rose above the level of the proletariat because of their purer mores and their attachment to their father's land; and it is there, much more than in the cities, that the nation lies."[25]

The Underestimation of Push Factors in the Rural Exodus

Almost all the authors referred to here studied the causes of the rural exodus without concerning themselves too much about the scale of the phenomenon. The most noteworthy exception is the book by A. Legoyt, *Du progrès des agglomérations urbaines et de l'exode rural* (1867). But the purely statistical research covers only 70 of the book's 260 pages. A possible explanation is that the rural exodus was a well recognised fact, which the figures published in various volumes of *Statistique Générale de la France* made it possible to analyse it satisfactorily.[26] As for value

---

[24] Quotation: de Molinari (s.d: XXXVIII). As early as 1846, when the first French edition of *Principles of Political Economy* was published, the translator pointed out Malthus's mistake in a note. Also see H. Passy's demonstration (1853: 184–193, 213) which concluded: He is thrifty, he is foresighted: "He simultaneously suffers from the fear of becoming poor by producing an excessively large family and the desire to leave a larger inheritance for his children." The very same opinion was stated by Baudrillart (*Jde*, T. 13, 1857: 27), who was a journalist and a member of *Asmp* as well as a professor in the Collège de France.

[25] Moreau de Jonnes (*Rddm*, January 1861: 79); de Parieu, article titled "Succession" (*Dep,* 1853, II: 676). Also see Rossi (1865, II: 49, 55); Moreau de Jonnes (*Jde*, T. 23, 1851: 321).

[26] See in particular the following volumes of *Statistique Générale de la France*: *Résultats généraux du dénombrement de 1861* (p. XIII) and *Résultats généraux du dénombrement de 1872* (pp. XV–XXI) for the general results of the censuses of 1861 and 1872.

judgements on the rural exodus, they were the exact opposite of those pronounced at the time of the 1848 revolution. Urbanisation, which was considered socially and politically harmful, became normal and even desirable after 1850: "The increased movement of workers, their tendency to emigrate and gather in large numbers in big production centres [are] inevitable consequences and according to us beneficial for industrial progress."[27] In fact, industrial expansion under the Second Empire resulted in intense urbanisation and when France opened its doors to international competition, these semi-official ideologues could not denounce the growth of cities because of the dire need for labour. But more than anything else, the political climate had changed and during the Second Empire, police repression was used to maintain public order under the pretext of keeping the "socialist threat" at bay.

Surprisingly, the economists were unanimous about the causes of the rural exodus. They all agreed that pull factors were responsible for the massive movement from the rural areas to the cities: industrial wages were higher, life in the cities was more attractive and the need for labour in the cities increased after the adoption of the policy of building large public works and the development of communication networks. But no one suggested that there could also be push factors in the countryside: miserable living conditions, low wages, partial or total unemployment, absence of relief in times of difficulty, etc. The official agricultural survey conducted in 1866 clearly described the technical progress in the agricultural sector and it was well known as seen, for example, in this extract of the report of the agricultural survey of 1866: "One factor beyond all doubt, already observed for several years and most positively confirmed by all the results of the survey, is that the progress made by agriculture since the last thirty years or so is extremely significant. . . The improvement of cultivation methods, the progressive decrease of fallow lands, the intelligent modification of cropping patterns, the spread of fodder crops, increasing improvements in the production of cattle and manure and the introduction of industrial crops have had the effect of giving a strong impetus to our trade by creating elements conducive to it and whether within the country or in relation to foreign countries, and finally, as a natural result of all these factors, of increasing in a large measure the legitimate benefits and the well-being of our agriculture."[28] What do we know today? There were significant increases in productivity, which freed rural labour for good, as indicated by the figures calculated by Toutain: the final product per active agricultural male worker increased faster than the number of active male workers, the number of persons dependent on agriculture for a living and the final product itself (Table 3.1).

It is impossible here to go beyond this initial observation and, to be more precise, to contextualise these data by assimilating in a comprehensive model the numerous factors likely to have contributed to the transformation into permanent migration of what had earlier been seasonal or temporary migrations. In the case

---

[27] De Molinari, Article titled "Emigration" (*Dep*, I: 676).

[28] Known as *Enquête agricole de 1866*. Ministère de l'Agriculture, du Commerce et des Travaux publics, 1869: 1ère série, I: 223.

Table 3.1 Indicators of progress of agriculture

Period	Final agricultural product*					
	Total product		Per person dependent on agriculture		Per active male farmer	
	Francs*	%	Francs	%	Francs	%
1815–24	5152	0.2	275	0	1120	10
1825–34	5805	12.6	305	11	1209	8
1835–44	6719	15.7	348	14	1344	11
1845–54	7475	11.2	381	9	1410	5
1855–64	8586	14.8	432	13	1608	14
1865–74	9312	8.4	503	16	1764	10
1875–84	9267	0.5	508	1	1694	4

Source: Toutain, 1961: tables 138, 139 and 140.
*: Final product and not gross product, to account for self-consumption of agricultural products.
*: In francs 1905–1914.

of agriculture, it is necessary to take into account the improvement of agricultural techniques and productivity, the size of agricultural holdings, the microeconomic logic of family holdings, the absence of a rural proletariat and regional specialisation in agricultural production. Other contextual factors are the slow demographic growth and the elimination of rural craftsmen by the crisis of 1846; and among the pull factors, the development of the railways, the demand for labour in industries and in cities, and last the exogenous impact of the introduction of free trade in 1860. These different factors and their possible interactions are discussed at length in the annex, but given the prevailing state of knowledge, to put it briefly, it was the push factors that played a decisive role in the depopulation of rural areas.

Considering this situation, it is truly astonishing that almost none of the economists, who were the best specialists of their time and also the most informed, expressed the opinion that push factors could explain the rural exodus. Consequently, we must necessarily look for ideological reasons for this "error" of analysis. The two apparently distinct issues of small holdings and the exodus are actually complementary. The economists were not prepared to admit the existence of push factors because it implied that small holdings were the cause of latent overpopulation and disguised unemployment from which the French countryside suffered. And if this were the case, there is no doubt that this objective data confirmed Malthus's opinion and weakened their defence of the right to property. The only problem would be that the rural exodus posed a challenge to social peace, in which case there would have been a contradiction at the ideological level. But as we have seen, the economists, unlike earlier, were happy about the rural exodus. In these conditions, there was total ideological coherence and the general situation in the countryside was clearly regarded as satisfactory. But from the viewpoint of the history of ideas, one observation is necessary: when they contradict the very basis of the bourgeois

ideology, and particularly the right to property, ideas on population are necessarily sacrificed to maintain coherence because of their secondary position in the ideology.

The Urban Working Classes

Considering that in the 1840s factory workers were the main threat to social peace, the industrialisation of France under the Second Empire should have been a source of even greater anxiety because urbanisation increased throughout the two Bonapartist decades. Let us quickly recapitulate the facts as they appeared to the economists. Between 1851 and 1872, the urban population rose from 25.5% to 31.1% of the total population, the main contribution to the overall urban growth being that of towns with a population of over 50,000 and those with over 100,000 which more than doubled in size.[29] However, a closer look at the results reveals that contrary to the statement of the commentator of the 1861 census, the pace of growth did not depend on the size of the town but on the degree of industrialisation. For example, there was a sharp increase in the population of the Pas-de-Calais department following the discovery of coal deposits and it rose by 19.8% between 1851 and 1856 as compared to 2.7% between 1841 and 1846. Also, between 1856 and 1861, industrial towns grew much faster than others: Le Creusot (18.2%), Montluçon (8.9%), Saint-Nazaire (7.7%) and Mulhouse (6.8%). Finally, growth was highest in the suburbs with Paris, Lyon and Lille (though limited by its walls) being the most striking examples (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Growth of cities and their suburbs

	% of growth between 1856 and 1861	
	City	Suburbs
Paris	1.5	19.3
Lyon	1.1	5.1
Lille	0.4	8.2

Source: *Résultats généraux du dénombrement de 1861* (p. XV).

At the end of the Second Empire, the most urbanised departments (Seine, Bouches-du-Rhône, Rhône, Nord, Seine-Inférieure, Loire and Pas-de-Calais) were also the most industrialised except for some departments in the South (Var, Hérault and Vaucluse) where the traditional concentration of population increased the rate of urbanisation.[30] There was a close relation between urbanisation and industrialisation because the two principal industrial sectors, viz. metallurgy and textiles, experienced an unprecedented financial, technical and geographical concentration. Gille, who has studied the process in the metallurgy sector, points out that the 1848

[29] From 5.4% to 11.6% and from 4.1% to 9.1% respectively. Source: Toutain, 1963: Tables 16 and 17. For the figures for 1872, see *Statistique de la France*, 1873: 7.

[30] Source: *Résultats généraux du dénombrement de 1872* (p. 21).

crisis was an important landmark and in 1869 large-scale enterprises had superseded smaller ones once and for all. This is confirmed by Léon in his thesis on the Dauphiné where industrial growth kept pace after 1848–1852 with the concentration of production. The effects of the treaty of 1860 were treated as favourable or unfavourable according to the degree of modernisation.[31] The textile industry, studied by Fohlen, clearly reveals the influence of the factors mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, viz. development of transport, introduction of free trade and reorganisation of the financial structure after 1848. However, unlike the other sectors, one crisis followed another, encouraging technical and financial concentration in the spinning sector (Normandy, the North, the East and isolated areas such as the Aube department or the town of Cholet) and to a lesser degree in the weaving sector (persistence of hand looms due to the lack of technical progress).[32] Local studies such as Léon's study of the Dauphiné or Pierrard's study of Lille confirm Fohlen's opinion. In Lille, for instance, the concentration and modernisation of cotton and linen spinning and the manufacture of yarn sustained the economic growth.[33]

The social consequences of this technical and geographical concentration have been analysed by Duveau. Though the tendency to increase the working hours was not observed during the Second Empire, workers were subjected to a strict discipline under the factory system due to the new working conditions. Even in Lille, the solidarity between employers and workers disappeared in spite of a long tradition of charity and paternalism. This change in working conditions was accompanied by changes in urbanism. We have taken note of the growth of industrial towns and the creation or increase of working-class suburbs, sometimes because of the large public works undertaken by the Empire and certainly because of the rise in the price of land in the cities. Paris is the best known example, but Lille, Saint-Quentin, Rouen, Lyon, Elbeuf and Roubaix went through the same changes. The day-to-day interaction and the solidarity between the different social classes disappeared.[34] The

---

[31] Iron and steel industry: Gille, 1968: 67–71, 118,169–194, 198; Léon, 1993: 484–489. Regarding the Dauphiné see Léon, 1954: II, 658–662, 680–683 (the same changes took place in the mines). Regarding the Treaty of 1860 see Dunham 1930: 177; Vial, 1968: II, 209–220; Thuillier, 1966: 310–312; Léon states that the 1860 treaty did not have a harmful effect on the Dauphiné (1954: II, 814–817), nor in France as a whole (1993: 334). Fourchambault should be considered separately: the decline started in the 1860s, but it cannot be attributed to causes that are traditionally considered fatal. Neither the treaty of 1860 and international competition, nor the lack of a spirit of enterprise, nor an unfavourable geographical position were responsible for the decline, but an unfortunate investment policy. Regarding Fourchambault see Thuillier, 1959: 93–94, 103, 106–107, 117, 167–170.

[32] See Fohlen, 1956: 139–142 (transport), 292 and 442–444 (free trade), 125 (financial aspects). Regarding the consequences of free trade, also see Dunham, 1930, 213–214, 235, 251 and 275. Regarding the impact of these factors on an enterprise (Méquillet-Noblot), see Fohlen, 1955: 69–92. For the entire sector, see Fohlen, 1956:253–268 (crises), and 445–449; Léon, 1993: 484–563.

[33] Léon, 1954: 501–507, 667–670, 663–664 (on Dauphiné). Pierrard, 1965: 65–75 (on Lille).

[34] Duveau, 1946: 246, 258. Regarding the increased working hours, see Pierrard, 1965: 163–164, 167. Tradition of charity and paternalism: Pierrard, 1965: 181–191. Regarding the suburbs of Paris, see Chevalier, 1950: 243, 248, 259; Pinkney, 1958: 165–166. Lille: Pierrard, 1965: 56–65,

change in the working and living conditions strengthened the feeling of being a separate group among the workers. Blanchard and Thompson have maintained that the Emperor's policy was responsible for the new awareness of the working class, but these factors undoubtedly played a much more decisive role. And as we shall see, contemporaries, or at least the economists, were perfectly aware of this situation.[35] Since urbanisation, industrialisation and social change cannot be dissociated from the Second Empire, we may expect ideological answers comparable to those formulated during the July Monarchy, if not even more pessimistic analyses, due to the severe destabilisation of society. But far from ignoring industrialisation, the economists included it in their analyses of social changes and succeeded in developing an optimistic synthesis at the end of which it was shown that social peace was possible thanks to industrialisation.

The Industrial Labour Force

The economists described with great precision the replacement of rural crafts and scattered small industries by the large mechanised units of the factory system and correctly analysed some of the consequences for the labour force: mechanization, far from doing away with jobs, created new ones and machines reduced physical labour. Feeling obliged to apologise for the factory system, they concluded that the machine "freed" the worker; however, they kept silent about the greater economic dependence that it led to. Anticipating criticism, Baudrillart talked of the general interest, embodied as usual by consumers. The majority of the nation would benefit by mechanisation: "Manufacturing produces more and it produces at a lower cost. It is protected by the spirit of democracy though it may appear aristocratic due to the accumulation of capital that it requires and the type of powerful and centralized government in the hands of a single leader." The change in the attitude towards the factory system was brought about by the introduction of free trade after 1860. Earlier, the major industrial sectors, particularly the textile industry, were protectionist; after 1860, since the main reason for the industrialists' hostility had disappeared, the economists could extol the merits of the factory system, which alone was capable of facing competition from England. Also, they did not fail to emphasise the improvement in the working conditions in factories.[36]

It was equally necessary to raise the workers' level of education, not to promote social peace, as during the 1848 revolution, but because of international competition: "If we want all the French factories to bravely face foreign competition, we must remember that we will always be beaten on account of raw materials and coal

---

102–107. Saint-Quentin, Rouen, Lyon, Elbeuf, Roubaix: Duveau, 1946: 219–221, 225, 349, 351. Interaction between social classes: Chevalier, 1950: 240–241; Duveau, 1946: 207.

[35] Blanchard, 1950: 150. Thompson, 1954: 237–238.

[36] Creation of jobs: F. Passy (1866: 74); Reybaud (1867: 117); Garnier, article titled "Machines" (*Dep*: 119–122). Regarding the "freeing" of workers: Reybaud, in his study of the silk industry (*Mémoire de l'Asmp,* T. 10, 1860: 894–895); Baudrillart (1860: 559; quotation: 552).

(. . .) let us prepare in advance strong and educated workers." This argument implied that the workers had given up political agitations or that the government was capable of controlling them. It is significant that Reybaud in his detailed survey of the woollen industry quoted the notables of Reims who were convinced that "The workers are very calm being under the control of a strong and respected government." Last but not least, the workers were not fundamentally opposed to the bourgeois social order, but they had been "corrupted" by external agitators and their strikes certainly were not of a political nature.[37]

Marginal and Temporary Suffering

Under the Second Empire, even the demographic arguments were different. Rather than study the characteristics peculiar to workers, the economists gave up their differential analyses in favour of arguments pertaining to the bulk of the French population, such as the average life span. Baudrillart interpreted the observed increase in life expectancy as follows: "The increase of life expectancy is the result of better nourishment, healthier lodgings, more hygienic clothing, the practice of temperance, a more reasonable behaviour, higher savings and greater order. The increase in life expectancy is the result of the fact that more persons are free from poverty and more souls have been weaned away from crime and vice; it is a guarantee for the state of assured security, more charity, a widespread feeling of responsibility and a more equality." This lyrical insistence on average characteristics is not accidental; it refers to the liberal credo that the consumer personifies general interest because, according to the economists, the increase in life expectancy corresponded to the greater well-being of the masses. It followed that the workers' suffering and poverty would only be marginal and temporary because the average living conditions were better on the whole. A major debate took place on this issue in early 1851 in the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, after a meeting of the Legislative Assembly during which a member wrongly quoted Blanqui's figures on juvenile mortality in Lille. In the course of the discussion, Blanqui himself and Faucher drew attention to the improvements that had occurred in Rouen and Lille since the survey conducted by Blanqui in 1848. As for Villermé, he remarked that the mortality of abandoned children was unprecedented while Faucher, Villermé and Moreau de Jonnes observed that in 1848 the situation was quite abnormal amounting to a state of crisis. In short, one of the eminent Academicians suggested that Blanqui had undoubtedly allowed

[37] Quotation: Simon (*Rddm*, décembre 1863: 734); to be compared to a more conservative viewpoint like Garnier's: "Education provided by enlightened men to the workers dispels socialistic utopias and prejudices against capital and makes them aware of the eternal laws of political economy." (*Jde*, T. 15, 1846: 127); quotation from Reybaud (1867: 343). Regarding external agitators: Audiganne (*Rddm*, November 1851: 741, February 1852: 693, January 1853: 345); Reybaud (1867: 129–130 and 213), on the non-political nature of strikes.

himself to be carried away by his emotions. Altogether, a fine example of the a posteriori re-interpretation of both qualitative and statistical data.[38]

Well-Being, Free Trade and Malthusianism

It is true that the condition of the working classes improved under the Second Empire, even though inflation created a gap between the monetary wage and the real wage after the 1860s. Nevertheless, a large number of consumer goods became affordable for the masses. In keeping with the populist policy of Napoleon III, the well-being of the masses, and particularly the workers, was considered an important factor for social peace and, during the 1850s and 1860s, a great deal of writing rightly described the improvements in the workers' housing, clothing and food habits. Thus Jules Rapet wrote, "If the worker cannot achieve this well-being, his condition will be lower than that of all his fellow men and his existence will be miserable (...) envy and jealousy will assail him, they will add (...) to his woes caused by the inferiority of his position and will perhaps make him an enemy of a society in which he finds himself badly treated."[39] The subject of housing is particularly interesting because the few cases where workers had access to property, notably in the working-class districts of Mulhouse, acquired a great symbolic value: by owning his house, the worker became more bourgeois and his conduct became more moral.[40] In short, the economics of poverty was replaced by the sociology of well-being.

The introduction of free trade in 1860 came at the right time as a decisive factor allowing people access to a condition of well-being due to the availability of cheaper goods.[41] Garnier developed a very complete analysis which has the advantage of assimilating some Malthusian elements: "Free trade can be practised with a definite advantage if it is done on a sufficiently large scale by increasing its markets, stimulating production and consumption, increasing wages in proportion to the demand for labour or, indirectly, by lowering the price of goods, bringing comforts to the people and, with the coming of comforts, the conditions needed for a feeling of dignity so that foresightedness arises among the poor classes and the preventive check on population and competition maintain them in a situation that is morally and spiritually superior." This model is still Malthusian in the sense that individual responsibility remains indispensable because without it the principle of population would wipe out the benefits of free trade. And, of course, the problem of social

---

[38] Baudrillart (*Jde*, T. 20, 1858: 374). The debate in *Asmp* was reproduced in *JdE* (T. 28, 1851: 281–286).

[39] *Jde*, T. 28, 1851: 378–379.

[40] Regarding housing: Levasseur (*Jde*, T.4, 1866: 230); Simon (*Rddm*, March 1861: 96–105); Reybaud (*Mémoire de l'Asmp,* T. 10, 1860: 943, 1011); Audiganne (1860, II: 308–325). Regarding consumption: Levasseur (*Jde*, T. 4, 1866: 235–236); F. Passy (1868: 28–31). Regarding clothing: Baudrillart (*Jde*, T. 20, 1858: 370); Block (1869: 232).

[41] Baudrillart (*Jde*, T. 20, 1858: 371).

peace was at the heart of the Garnier's argument: according to him, foresightedness and free trade were the only two means of improving the condition of the people.[42] Another step towards the abandonment of Malthusianism was the "standard of living argument".

The Standard of Living Argument

Under the Second Empire, the economists developed a rather original ideological synthesis, in so far as it was based on demo-economic arguments. In substance, the standard of living argument states that the desire for well-being is the principal reason for controlling fertility and it is no longer necessary to practise prudential restraint because an improvement in the standard of living strengthens the individual's desire to better his condition which leads almost automatically to birth-control: "A certain degree of comfort, which absolves a man from worrying about his most immediate needs, makes him think about the future and creates in his mind the fear of demeaning himself in his own eyes and those of his family. Malthus's so-called law is ineffective in such a case." As it was to be expected, the orthodox Malthusians in the group reacted strongly against this fundamental questioning of the Malthusian theory. However, it was widely accepted as it was obviously compatible with the other elements of the social doctrine, particularly free trade and mass production and also with the demographic slow-down observed under the Second Empire. And above all, the standard of living argument allowed a dynamic analysis: following economic progress, luxury goods became comforts and even essentials and their use spread in the different social classes, including the working classes, so that class differences became blurred and society became more homogeneous.[43]

It is here that the socio-demographic implications of the standard of living argument come into play. The economists described the behaviour of the bourgeoisie with regard to fertility and, in accordance with their own ideological models; they claimed that it was a suitable model for all classes. Only the bourgeoisie maintained a satisfactory balance between fertility and the standard of living while aristocratic families were disappearing as a result of excessive sterility and the proletariat, on the contrary, were suffering from an equally excessive fertility as compared to their resources. They also stressed the fact that the working class's access to well-being was turning its members into bourgeois. The fact that the middle classes were becoming more numerous despite the low fertility of the bourgeois and the aristocrats, necessarily implied that more workers were becoming bourgeois. In other words, this upward social mobility was the result of access to well-being as well as of the decline

---

[42] Garnier (1857: 128–133, 206).

[43] The quotation is from Wolowski (*Jde*, T. 37, 1863: 349). See the reaction of the Malthusians during a debate in *Sep* in 1863 (*Jde*, T. 37, 1863: 330–357). Regarding access to new consumer goods, see Dameth (1872: 397, 407). Regarding English nineteenth century writers, see Eversley (1959).

of fertility among the workers.[44] It is necessary to stress the ideological implication of the argument: workers wanted to merge with the middle-class population because they adopted the bourgeois model of maintaining a balance between well-being and fertility. There is no doubt that this involved only a minority, but according to Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, this was the vanguard: "The workers at the top of the scale of well-being and education have (. . .) become bourgeois in this respect. Almost all of them systematically distance themselves from the burden of a large family." Some economists even tried to prove the existence of this upward social mobility: there were many workers who became independent small entrepreneurs thanks to the very bourgeois virtues of perseverance, thrift, hard work and, of course, foresight. For maintaining social peace this was crucial: more than just passive participation in the social order of the Second Empire due to the access to consumption, there was evidence of an active desire to cooperate with this social order and that too at the most basic level of the sexual instinct and procreation. The political importance of the argument can be gauged from the fact that it was taken up word for word by Emile Ollivier when he defended the bill tabled by the government in 1864 which would lead to the right of coalition, itself a prelude to the right to strike recognized twenty years later.[45]

In the case of both peasants and workers, the economists succeeded in assimilating the demographic, economic and social changes in their social doctrine by developing a coherent ideological synthesis, which showed that thenceforth nothing would oppose the permanent establishment of social peace. This explains the optimism expressed in the comments on the 1856 census: more than a simple change of the economic situation, the main factor was the compatibility between the new demographic, social and economic data on the one hand and the ideological stake of social peace on the other.

Towards Populationism

It would be an exaggeration to claim that at the end of the Second Empire there was a unanimous feeling in favour of populationism. However, after the years 1862–1864 a change of direction occurred which would lead to the total abandonment of Malthusianism in the following decades. The fear of depopulation was only partly a result of purely demographic factors: as we have seen, the reactions to the results of the 1866 census suggest that greater anxieties on the domestic and international front were behind the economists' pessimism.

---

[44] Differences in fertility between different classes: Baudrillart (Paris, 1872, II: 440) ; H. Passy (*Jde*, T. 37, 1863: 335); Villiaumé (1867, I: 307, 313).

[45] Leroy-Beaulieu (1868: 101–102). Social mobility: Courcelle-Seneuil (1858, I: 161–169, 367, 378, 383). Le Play stressed the fact in his monographs (1879, IV: 194–195, 339–340, 345–346, 379 and V: 311, 375, 386, 430). According to Chevalier, social mobility was possible among Parisian craftsmen (1950: 224–236). Bruhat and Daumard are more prudent (1993: 807, 905).

The New Socialism

After the 1860s, a series of strikes raised doubts about social peace. The Parisian typographers' trial in 1861–1862 was followed by the carpenters' strike at the end of 1862 and later by the conflict between the bronze-casters and their employers in 1865–1867. In the provinces, in 1867–1868 agitations spread among the miners of Saint-Etienne and Carmaux; strikes broke out in the spinning mills of Elbeuf in September 1869; finally, widespread strikes hit Le Creusot in early 1870. The economists astutely analysed the growing class-consciousness among the workers. Molinari spoke of a revival of socialism and Dameth made a distinction between the "old" socialism, which was bourgeois, and the "new" socialism which was genuinely proletarian. Reybaud's survey of the iron industry, which took him to Le Creusot, Commentry, Fourchambault, the Loire and the Cévennes, contains commentaries that became more and more pessimistic as the years passed: France "was divided into two camps". The economic consequences of the strikes did not escape their notice: by paralysing industrial activity, these strikes caused serious losses because of the large amount of capital invested in big production units and international competition, particularly since the introduction of free trade.[46] Faced with this situation, the economists formulated new ideological answers which opened the way for a new type of labour relations. Paul Leroy-Beaulieu thus developed a productivist theory of wages: when the level of education rises, the per capita productivity also rises, which in its turn leads to a rise in wages. This was in fact the best way to increase wages and reduce working hours. In other words, workers alone could bring about an improvement in their conditions and the capitalist system was not to be blamed.[47] In a more classical fashion, Anselme Batbié, who held the chair in political economy in the Law Faculty in Paris, reaffirmed the importance of education in 1867 in the following words: "The question of education underlies all social problems. This is not surprising because most of the evils arise from ignorance (. . .) If the relationship between capital and labour were understood better, antagonism between the two would be rare because the two adversaries would be separated by enlightenment." This amounted to endorsing the failure of the standard of living argument: social peace was not just a problem of well-being as everything depended of the attitude of workers as producers. Hence it is not surprising that for the first time the subject of the association between labour and capital, in the form of financial interest in the profits or the enterprise's turnover, came up. Three

---

[46] De Molinari (*Jde*, T. 14, 1869: 349); Dameth (1869: 20–21, 97); Reybaud (*Mémoires de l'Asmp*, T. 12, 1872). Comparison of his first impressions of the Creusot region (p. 567), Commentry (p. 604) and Fourchambault (p. 630), to those of the Loire and the Cévennes regions (p. 795), which he visited later. Regarding strikes: see Chevalier (*Jde*, T. 17, 1870: 82); Leroy-Beaulieu (1868: 47).

[47] Leroy-Beaulieu (1868: 37, 189). Regarding this point, see Spengler (1936: 758–759). Wolowski (*Jde*, T. 18, 1868: 127); Simon (1863: 127).

discussions were held in the Society of Political Economy in 1870 and the principle of profit-sharing was discussed from the point of view of social peace[48].

Demographic Conditions: Infant Mortality and Fertility

Due to unsatisfactory health conditions, infant mortality had not decreased in spite of economic progress. In fact it was considered to be alarming, not because of what it revealed of the health conditions of the working classes but because of the need, according to the head of the Statistics Bureau, to "protect in the country a large number of precious lives which would later add to its strength and security." Simon was even more explicit. Infant mortality was worrisome in view of the observed demographic growth: "everybody is obliged to admit that in England and in Prussia the population increases at a much higher rate than in our country (. . .). M. Brochard is right to warn that mortality among the new-born is one of the most active causes for this inferiority." Similarly, the social consequences of illegitimacy were analysed: due to their illegitimacy, these children were excluded from society and, according to Legoyt, they were turned into "enemies of the state". This moralistic viewpoint becomes meaningful when it is compared with the same author's observation that illegitimate births were particularly high among the working-class population in industrial departments like the Seine, the Rhône and the Bouches-du-Rhône. With the social climate in a state of severe deterioration, the demographic data acquired a very precise meaning for the "demoralisation" of the working classes constituted a social danger. Eighteen years later, Bertillon would be even more categorical: "it is in our interest to watch over the lives of all our children" for military, economic and cultural reasons. When the birth rate was at its lowest, each child became precious.[49]

The results of the 1866 census gave rise to several articles describing the psychosociological consequences of low fertility. Block in particular described brilliantly what Alfred Sauvy would later call the "Malthusian mentality": children in small families, who are sure to inherit a fortune, take pleasure in idleness or lack a spirit of enterprise which means economic stagnation for the country. This analysis was certainly a rationalisation and theorisation based on the counter-example of England where the law of primogeniture forced the younger sons to emigrate or earn their living by some other means. But it was clear that it was no longer possible to confine oneself to the boundaries of France and it was necessary to take into account the international consequences of low fertility. In 1867, Duval affirmed that the practice of coitus interruptus corresponded to the corruption of mores and a decline of society and he became an advocate of an increase in legitimate fertility. But

---

[48] Batbié (*Rddm*, June 1867: 981). The most significant contributions of the debates are in the *Sep (Jde*, T. 18, 1870: 129–136, 292–293, 441–462).

[49] Legoyt (*JSsP*, 1867: 236); Simon (*Mémoire de l'Asmp*, T. 17, 1869: 51). Also see the opinion of Levasseur and Cochin (Ibid.: 61). Brochard was a doctor who wrote a pamphlet to draw attention to the disastrous consequences of the common practice of engaging a wet-nurse for infants. Illegitimacy: Legoyt (*JSsP*, February 1867: 64, 76). (Bertillon, 1885: 26–35, 126).

apart from these moralistic considerations, often supported by economic arguments, the economists' pessimism was caused essentially by the labour-supply problem.[50] Leroy-Beaulieu's analyses are particularly interesting because his book *De l'état moral et intellectuel des populations ouvrières*, written to justify the accumulation of capital at a time when the social climate had deteriorated considerably, studies several economic issues from this angle. For example, he held that an increase in productivity as a means of restoring social peace could also compensate for the insufficient labour force. Leroy-Beaulieu was not unduly worried about the changes in the total population, but he drew an interesting conclusion from the standard of living argument, viz. the striking contrast between the workers who had become bourgeois and those who continued to multiply thoughtlessly. His conclusion deserves to be quoted: "Since the educated and capable workers systematically have no children or only one or two, this class does not increase and it is with difficulty that one can find new recruits among it; as a result of which it cannot meet the needs of artistic production which grows constantly. If this trend continues over a long period, there would be an abundance of labour in the lower levels of production but a lack of skilled workers in the higher levels. This is a step that goes directly against the progress of civilisation."[51] This astonishing remark is interesting for more than one reason. In the first place, Leroy-Beaulieu pointed out that the problem was not necessarily global but sectorial and there could be bottlenecks even if the overall labour supply was sufficient. Secondly, when he talked of "artistic production", he probably referred to the industries manufacturing luxury goods, such as the *articles de Paris*, which were very favourable to free trade. Finally, as we have seen, it was in these industries that there was upward social mobility among workers having few children. Given these conditions, it is easier to understand that Leroy-Beaulieu, as a free-trade economist, expressed his anxiety on this point while remaining optimistic about the overall demographic growth.

The economists' pessimism became even clearer when they compared France to its European neighbours. Between 1800 and 1850, the population of France had grown by 29% (from 27.3 to 35.8 millions), of Great Britain by 47% (from 15.25 to 22.5 millions) and of Germany by 42% (from 24.7 to 35.7 millions). However, it was only in the 1860s that some of them became aware of the relative weakness of the French demographic growth. The most spectacular change that occurred was in Legoyt, the head of the Statistics Bureau. In 1847, he expressed his satisfaction about the low rate of population growth because "the states where population is growing most rapidly, like England, Ireland, Prussia and Saxony are precisely those where poverty is making the most formidable progress." Eighteen years later, in 1865, the same demographic indicator, viz. the average annual growth rate, which had remained unchanged, gave rise to a radically different comment: "France and Austria rank the lowest (. . .). But whatever the reason for the considerable differences that we have just pointed out, they still demand our serious attention because

---

[50] Block (*Jde*, T. 5, 1867: 425–426); Sauvy (1966, II: 171); Duval (*Ef*, 30 May 1867: 168 and 6 June 1867: 211).

[51] 1868: 99–100: "We have no reason to wish that the French population should become much larger." Quotation: 103.

in a span easy to calculate the present ranking and strength of the European states will be seriously disturbed as a result of the inequality (. . .) in the growth rate of their populations." We cannot go into the details of the strictly demographic analysis proposed by Legoyt, whose incoherences indicate a difficulty in assessing the political and socio-economic consequences of demographic data such as the age structure, infant and general mortality and legitimate fertility.[52] How can this complete reversal be explained?

Military Problems and Pacifism

As mentioned above, the moment the results of the 1866 census became known, the victory of Sadowa came as a real psychological shock to the French public. It also affected the group of economists and some of them perspicaciously described the changes in the European equilibrium: a great and powerful nation, so well organised and having a vast scientific and military potential, had just been born, an observation that gave rise to diverse reactions. According to Legoyt, the relatively low fertility in France implied a more favourable age structure from the military viewpoint: with an equivalent population, France could line up more men on the battlefield. This purely static analysis did not take into account the long-term effects: thirty years later, due to the aging of the generations that were meant to bear arms, fewer men would be available for recruitment and, what is even more important, the newer generations would be even less numerous. It is, to say the least, surprising that the head of the Statistical Bureau should not have thought of this argument. He was probably guided by his Bonapartist convictions and his anxiety not to go against the optimism prevalent in official circles. Other opinions were more nuanced. Thus Cochut was pleased about the qualitative improvement of the population: fewer men were exempted for reasons of physical disability, fewer recruits were illiterate; unfortunately "This is the type of progress that was sought twenty years ago; but despite this improvement there is still cause for sorrow and France still lacks the vitality that should have been the normal condition of a great nation." This contradiction could not have been explained more clearly: the optimum well-being had been achieved but not the optimum from the military viewpoint.[53]

---

[52] Legoyt (*Jde*, T. 17, 1847: 174–175). Same opinion expressed by Villermé (*Jde*, T. 14, 1846: 239) and A. Clément (*Jde*, T. 3, 1843: 95); Legoyt (*Jde*, T. 46, 1865: 378). Regarding the incoherences in Legoyt's writings, see the second part of the article which appeared in the *JSsP* (1867: 166, 169–172, 174–179, 221); Cochut (*Rddm*, Februray 1867: 653). Block's writings (1861 and 1869) are characteristic of this awareness; see Lavergne's opinion on Block's writings (*Séances et travaux de l'Asmp,* 1861, T. 5: 275–281).

[53] Sadowa and Prussia (*JSsP*, 1866: 282–284, unsigned article); de Laveleye (*Rddm*, February 1867: 769); Cherbuliez (*Rddm*, November 1869: 263); Cochut (*Rddm*, August 1866: 715); Legoyt (*JSsP*, 1867: 223). Quotation from Cochut (*Rddm*, February 1867: 654).

Faced with this contradiction, a strong pacifist tendency developed within the group. For example, Garnier gave the title "Europe at the Height of Barbarism" to his economic column which appeared on 14 July 1866. A committee was set up on 30 May 1867 to form a "Permanent and International League for Peace". The economists and industrialists who supported free trade such as Jean Dollfus dominated the committee. The pacifism of the economists can be explained by their defence of free-trade interests: war paralysed all trade-related activity, reduced the labour force and destroyed the economic infrastructure. Block believed that nationalism was responsible for all the wars during the preceding fifteen or twenty years. Some economists tried to estimate the economic and demographic consequences of the wars that had been fought since the beginning of the century. The final argument was that France would only benefit from the existence of a great industrial nation. And they had good reasons to put it forward: a free trade treaty had been signed with Zollverein.[54]

Emigration and Colonies

Unlike England, France had few colonies in 1848 apart from Algeria which it controlled only partially. Under the Second Empire, France had an active colonial policy: in 1858 a Ministry for Algeria and the colonies was set up. Faidherbe colonised Senegal, which between 1850 and 1860 became an important colony specialised in the production of groundnuts. In the Far East, Cambodia and Cochin China were conquered between 1859 and 1867. Finally, the island of Madagascar was annexed to France in 1868. This situation explains the revival of interest in the colonies during the 1860s as it was very frequently associated with emigration and consequently with the question of population. The previous generation of economists, under the influence of Jean-Baptiste Say and Rossi, were hostile to both emigration and colonisation for three reasons. The failure of the earlier colonial policy had amply demonstrated that the colonies were more costly than profitable and could not provide markets for France. In addition, colonisation was associated with the Colonial Pact, based on mercantilist principles that went against the very essence of the liberal economic doctrine based on the free circulation of goods and men. Finally, the first popularisers of Malthus in France went back to his argument that colonisation could not solve population problems because the space created by emigrants was filled immediately in accordance with the population principle.[55]

---

[54] Regarding the denunciation of war, see the articles by Reybaud and Block (*Jde*, T. 3, 1866: 5–12 et 249–257); Garnier (ibid.: 167); F. Passy (1869: 53); de Laveleye (*Rddm*, February 1867: 809). Estimates of the cost of war: Courcelle-Seneuil (*Jde*, T. 5, 1867: 185); also see F. Passy (1869: 39) and Block (1869: 73).

[55] Say (1832, III: 411–426); Rossi (lecture given in 1848, published in 1865. See I: 200–256 and II: 206–238).

From Anti-colonialism to Colonialism

Under the Second Empire, the question of colonisation gave rise to spectacular reversals of opinion, especially in the case of Molinari, Pautet, Garnier, Baudrillart and F. Passy. Let us consider the last. In 1855, he was against colonisation because of its demographic consequences for the country of origin and he criticised de Watteville, who claimed that the migrants should be skilled and hard-working: "Such men constitute the wealth of a country and it is difficult to understand the advantage of making them leave the country. As for the poor, it costs more to send them out than to feed them in their own country." This is an allusion to the "disastrous" results of the Decree of 23 September 1848. The Second Republic had spent 50 million francs on transporting colonisers and settling them in Algeria. By the end of the Second Republic, half of the 2,100 emigrants had come back. Passy therefore concluded that it was impossible to solve the social problem by colonisation. In 1867, his opinion was quite different. Though he continued to declare that no country had ever profited by its colonies, he admitted that is was necessary to have reliable markets: "The canon is not the best way of opening up markets. I certainly admit that we should want civilisation to prevail over barbarism; but (. . .) it is not through terror, it is through enlightenment, through capital, through example, that this result must be obtained."[56] These humanitarian justifications are undoubtedly the forerunners of the rhetoric of the white man's burden, but henceforth the very principle of colonisation, whatever its methods, was accepted. F. Passy's about-face can be explained by two factors. In the first place, he had taken part in the debate on the decadence of France, a direct proof of which is a lecture he gave in 1867. But to fully explain his reversal, it is necessary to refer to his deep involvement in the pacifist movement: faced by growing perils, this pacifist, then the Secretary General of the Committee that set up the International League for Peace, did not fail to contrast the advantages of colonisation with the harmful consequences of war: "That is not (. . .) true patriotism, true ambition; that is not how one can occupy a larger part of the globe (. . .). Populating the numerous countries in which the human race has not yet set foot, calling for the flowering of intellectual and moral life of these fellow-beings whom we call barbarians (. . .) these are the victories that remain to be achieved."[57]

Emigration and Colonisation

Quite conceivably, the emigration problem could have been treated *independently* of the colonial question. From the Malthusian viewpoint, for example, emigration is considered to be the wrong solution for relieving the excessive pressure of popula-

---

[56] (1855: 171, note). He referred to Spain and France but was silent about England. Also see (1867: 13).

[57] *Conférence sur la paix et la guerre donnée à l'Ecole de Médecine de Paris* (1867: 47).

tion on resources. However, even an orthodox Malthusian like Garnier justified his hostility to emigration, not in Malthusian terms but by citing the evils of the colonial system inspired by protectionism. But it was more of a rear-guard action because the objection did not have a valid reason any more. The Law of 3 July 1861 abolished the Colonial Pact and the colonies became open markets and a source of raw materials for metropolitan France, while the introduction of free trade made it necessary to think in international terms. As a result, the argument changed as competition in trade became more difficult. Colonisation made it possible to open up privileged markets at a time when colonial politics and expansion gained an unprecedented importance and emigration became the means and colonisation the goal to be attained. And when they were compared to the slow demographic growth, the two intertwined themes of colonisation and emigration inevitably raised questions about the validity of Malthusianism. Due to excessive prudential restraint, the population of France grew too slowly to satisfy the needs of colonisation: "In France, the problem is not one of keeping a better watch on oneself; perhaps it is done excessively, if we take into account the balance to be maintained between the territorial influences (. . .). All things taken into consideration, up to now there has been no shortage of land, but rather a shortage of men, and on this point as in everything else, they must complete their mission within the time assigned to them."[58]

Attention must be drawn to some factors which can explain the revival of colonisation. Reybaud referred to "territorial influences". In his *Histoire de l'émigration européenne, asiatique et africaine au XIXème siècle* Duval, chief editor of the *L'Economiste français* which had taken up the cause of the French settlers in Algeria, was much more explicit: "While France stagnates with its 36 million inhabitants, England is nearing 30 millions, and, advancing at a quick pace, it will have equalled and even overtaken France in a few years whose number can be easily calculated. During this time, it will have populated fifty colonies which will add to its power and the Anglo-Saxon race will have taken possession of half the globe. On the day of the fight, it is inevitable that France will succumb due to a great inequality of forces. Patriotism will therefore suffer due to the stagnation of French population."[59] This fervent populationist analysis focuses attention on the problem that preoccupied the economists who were in favour of colonisation: how to oppose British imperialism, which was far ahead of France in the domain of colonisation? Algeria seemed to be a major asset: situated on the opposite shore of the Mediterranean, it would be an excellent base for extending French influence in the entire Mediterranean basin and counterbalancing England's predominance. In 1867, during a meeting of the Senate, Chevalier declared, "We need to turn Algeria into a warehouse for European and

[58] Quotation: J. Garnier (*Jde*, T. 15, 1869: 131); Reybaud (*Rddm*, April 1868: 987); Chevalier (*Ef*, 5 October 1869: 318).

[59] It appeared in 1862; quotation: 445. The same opinion was expressed by Chevalier (*Annales du Sénat,* 1863, II: 290 and *Ef*, 5 October 1865: 318).

American trade with the rest of the African continent", closely preceding Prévost-Paradol's *La France nouvelle* (1868) and his famous pre-Gaullist view.[60]

It is therefore not very surprising that the question of "acclimatising" Europeans to Algeria was raised quite often. For example, Bertillon observed in 1863 that after a period of thirty-five years of excessive deaths, mortality seemed to go down and more births were being registered.[61] Algeria held out another advantage: the "cotton famine", which followed the American war of secession, made the free-traders aware how dependent French industry was on countries producing various raw materials: "If the cultivation (of cotton) is sufficiently developed in Africa to offer serious competition to America, our colonisation will have done a lot for setting European industry free." Some industrialists in favour of free trade like Jean Dollfus, the leader of the *Société industrielle de Mulhouse*, attempted to spread cotton cultivation in Algeria. Generally speaking, the introduction of free trade and industrial development led the economists to advocate colonial expansion for creating new markets for French manufactures and also as a source of raw materials for French industry. And England, a constant point of reference and the principal rival of France, was often at the centre of the argument: "Has anyone imagined what England would be today if it did not have any colonies (. . .) Great Britain's industrial development and Holland's trade would have been stifled in their early stages if they had not been able to spread beyond the narrow confines of Europe and find inexhaustible resources for expansion in America and Asia."[62]

These circumstances cast light on the reasons why the normal demographic growth recorded by the 1866 census seemed unsatisfactory: the population of France was no longer sufficient to defend the country and satisfy its needs as regards labour and colonial expansion. The peculiarity of the period lies in the growth of a pessimism having two sources, domestic and international: the question of social peace was reopened with the revival of class consciousness among the workers while international problems raised their head suddenly. An optimistic synthesis would be possible only when domestic problems prevailed. And such a synthesis became impossible once the contradiction between various economic, military and colonial needs became apparent.

Malthusianism and the Bourgeois Ideology

Let us cast a quick backward glance at the period from 1840 to 1870 and take a look at the study of ideas on population before coming to a conclusion on the

---

[60] Chevalier (*Annales du Sénat,* 1867: 167); Prévost-Paradol, 1868: 415–416 and 419.

[61] Bertillon (*JSsP*, 1863: 168–180). Legoyt (*JSsP* 1865: 7–13, 93–105). Outside the group: de Quatrefages (*Rddm*, April 1861: 635–731; Boudin, *JSsP*, 1860: 30–50 and 121–131, and his two books (1852: 51–56 and 1860: 33–41).

[62] Batbié (1866, II: 316–317). Regarding Dollfus, see Fohlen (1956: 347–355). Quotations taken from Lavollée (*Rddm*, February 1863: 883, 905).

central place of Malthusianism in the ideology of the French economists and its subsequent decline. The period lends itself particularly to a comparison of facts and ideas, firstly because the writers who have been studied here had at their disposal a large amount of factual demographic data, which gave their doctrine a firm base in reality, unlike the utopian socialists whose writings were not so well documented. Better still, secondary sources enable us to assess to what extent their writings deviate from reality as we have interpreted them on the ideological level. On the other hand, we have to deal with a veritable school of thought and not isolated writers. Consequently, the dynamics of ideas and facts proved to be much more effective than if the intellectual exchanges had depended exclusively on scholarly reviews. In such a lively group, the assimilation of facts into the doctrine and doctrinal modifications under the pressure of facts were naturally much faster. Historically speaking, the period was rich and also conducive to the formulation of doctrines. Industrialisation, though it was on a modest scale as compared to the subsequent decades, caused as profound an upheaval in the social sphere as the revolution of 1789 which brought about a complete transformation in the ideological and political framework. And just as industrialisation under the Second Empire was an integral part of the official social policy and doctrine, it is not surprising that the group's ideological activities regarding the workers' question was stimulated by it. As for free trade which triumphed after 1860 thanks to a series of bilateral treaties, we have seen it being used fruitfully as a social doctrine. But it was abolished once and for all by the Méline Law of 11 January 1892: the free-trade experiment imposed by the imperial power against the wishes of the majority of business circles had lasted for thirty-two years and the economists had lost their *raison d'être.* It is not surprising, therefore, that after 1870 the group weakened and saw its influence waning. Top-level thinkers like Emile Levasseur and Paul Leroy-Beaulieu distanced themselves from the group; other trends appeared, particularly the one which led to the creation of the *Société d'économie sociale* and from 1896 onwards the National Alliance for the Growth of French Population having Bertillon at its helm stood out. Finally, at the end of the 1890s, Gide and Gonnard questioned the pre-eminence of the *Journal des Economistes* through the pages of the *Revue d'économie politique*.

As compared to the following decades, these thirty years lend themselves particularly well to an ideological interpretation of the relationship between facts and ideas regarding population for two final reasons. On the one hand, in the middle of the nineteenth century demography had not yet acquired the status of an independent science and still came under economic theory as well as social doctrine. Facts relating to population were therefore naturally interpreted in economic and social terms. The subsequent progress of statistics, at a time when the populationist ideology established itself with much fanfare, would accelerate the separation of demographic theory from demographic doctrine. Like other social sciences, demography gradually acquired some measure of "scientific" autonomy. Certainly the demographic argument, now considered scientific, would be used in debates on doctrine, but the extraordinary limpidity of the discourse on population disappeared. On the other hand, the mid-nineteenth century is characterised by a rare ideological transparency, which considerably facilitates research. In most cases it is enough to

allow the economists to speak. The trauma caused by the Commune and the rise of the *nouvelles couches sociales* so dear to Gambetta would change the shape of the social discourse: it would become more prudent and therefore more opaque, and the victorious conscience of the liberal bourgeoisie would become more discreet at a time when Marxist criticism would denounce the mechanisms of the dominant ideology.

In a situation so favourable to the formulation of a socio-demographic doctrine solidly rooted in facts, what was the position of Malthusianism in the bourgeois ideology? Even on a strictly demographic level, the economists showed a certain amount of originality in relation to Malthusianism: their arguments were based on a twofold conviction, viz. the scientific validity of their analyses of individual behaviour and their profound belief in the universality of bourgeois values. If individual foresightedness was socially moral and praiseworthy, it was because it was practised by the bourgeoisie. The bourgeois behaved rationally because they managed to maintain a satisfactory balance between their resources and their expenditure by controlling their fertility. This "proof" of the rationality of bourgeois behaviour strengthened in return their belief in the universality of bourgeois values. By making reason triumph over the procreative instinct, bourgeois behaviour conformed to the natural and beneficial order of things which governs the physical world and human society. That is why workers were told in 1848 that foresight was the only way to escape poverty. Formulas and words should not mislead us for, no matter to what class they belonged, the "peasant", the "industrial worker" and the "capitalist" were above all regarded as free and equal citizens and, thanks to the revolution of 1789, privilege could no longer prevent them from pursuing a productive activity. When a social crisis of the magnitude of the one in 1848 broke out, it was essential to reaffirm the solidarity between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and the simplest thing for the economists was to insist on a strictly legalistic argument even though they themselves recognised the economic and social differences between individuals. The same logic underlies the accusation against the protectionists that they were responsible for the workers' sufferings. But this position was ambiguous because it meant identifying the workers with the general interest as opposed to the liberal assumption that consumers embodied the general interest. This ambiguity was soon removed: the revolution of 1848 obliged them to take up the defence of the bourgeoisie and abandon their quarrel with the protectionists. However their belief in free trade led them to put forward an argument that was promising and perfectly coherent with the liberal axiom, namely "cheapness of goods". It reappeared under the Second Empire in a more sophisticated form as the standard of living argument.

Under the Second Empire, the distortion between social facts and ideology was quite striking: industrial labourers gave rise to a literature whose volume does not match up to their number, especially as compared to the rural masses. The new situation created by the development of the factory system inspired such an abundant literature on industrial workers because it was important to assess this major structural change and, even more important, to interpret it. It could be said that the economists concentrated on the workers because social problems had been solved and interpreted satisfactorily. But this is only partly true: for various reasons, the

rural masses inspired a literature that was far from negligible. Firstly, they could not ignore this social group which represented three quarters of the French population. Secondly, the escalation of the rural exodus gave rise to anxiety because it increased the number of industrial labourers while reducing the number of agricultural workers. Thirdly, as a logical outcome of the spread of the communication network, the economists had to consider the possibilities offered by the opening of the national market at a time when traditional small-scale production was swept out by industrialisation. Fourthly, a simple comparison between the living conditions of urban industrial workers and peasants ended in speculation on the social and political stability of the two groups. Finally, universal suffrage was introduced in France for the first time in 1848. It was a new situation which was worth reflecting on even though the 1849 elections brought to light the widespread conservatism of the rural population. It is therefore unrealistic to maintain that the economists concentrated only on industrial labourers in their writings. It would appear instead that the arguments they developed were often quite original because the growth of the factory system was a unique and unprecedented development.

On the contrary, the economists sometimes stressed the ideas developed about peasants during the period prior to the 1840s, as for example in the case of small holdings. But they also strove to integrate some socio-economic factors like the rural exodus whose magnitude was in no way comparable to the growth of the factory system. Nevertheless, these two themes are not independent of each other. The analyses of the causes of the rural exodus present a bias which can be explained only by taking into account the arguments related to property. It is easy to explain why the economists were so determined to refute Malthus on the question of small holdings. These liberal bourgeois were writing at the end of a period marked by a series of attempts to return to the inheritance system of the Ancien Régime as several bills were tabled in the 1820s, during the Restoration, to put an end to the equal division of property. They believed that equal division of property was essentially a victory of the bourgeoisie over the aristocracy and the very symbol of the revolution of 1789. The insistence on the demographic consequences of small land holdings should therefore be interpreted not from the viewpoint of a fertility theory but as an indication of an ideologically fundamental debate: if Malthus was right, then small holdings were a factor of overpopulation that favoured the constitution of a rural proletariat and weakened the possibility of social peace in the rural areas. The defence of this keystone of the bourgeois ideology, therefore took precedence over Malthusianism. In other words, Malthusianism, unlike during the years of the revolutionary turmoil, was no longer indispensable for the bourgeois ideology.

It is indeed surprising that the very specialists who claimed to be orthodox Malthusians should recommend prudential restraint to workers although Malthus had always rejected prudential restraint at the doctrinal level and strongly advocated moral restraint. Actually, it was the anxiety for immediate results that drove the economists, who were fully aware of the contradiction: how to condemn, on the one hand, the excessive fertility of the workers and, on the other, praise moral restraint, that is to say the absence of any control over fertility after marriage? The implications of this doctrinal divergence deserve to be stressed: the main point was that

the workers should control their fertility following the example of the bourgeoisie. When it came to the crunch, the means hardly mattered, they could, if the need arose, be "prudential" and therefore immoral. What was offered to the workers, who were the victims of the social system, was the possibility of escaping their miserable condition by emulating bourgeois behaviour. But there are deeper reasons for the ideological decline of Malthusianism. It was in a way a defensive doctrine because it tirelessly affirmed that the demand for goods could not exceed their supply. During the1850s and 1860s, the economists, under the influence of Saint-Simon, formulated a radically different doctrine based on their belief in industrialisation, which was in perfect accord with the official social doctrine of the Second Empire. Despite the poverty of the working class, the industry held out unlimited possibilities of well-being thanks to mechanisation which permitted low-cost production and mass consumption. The standard of living argument provided the bridge that was missing earlier between demography and economics, but at the cost of giving up the Malthusian dogma of the need for individual responsibility.

Finally, due to new domestic and international preoccupations, the end of the Second Empire can be looked upon as a period characterized by a revival of mercantilism, since the French population ran the risk of being insufficient to satisfy the requirements of labour, the needs of military recruitment and to ensure France's influence in the international domain. Malthusianism certainly had its uses in the debate on social peace. Due to the impossibility of reaching an ideologically satisfactory synthesis of the contradictions mentioned above, and because the problem of social peace ceased to be the driving force behind the evolution of ideas on population after 1870, the decline of Malthusianism was inevitable. The end of the Second Empire was in fact a key period during which several components of the Third Republic's bourgeois ideology came of age. A couple of decades later, when the run on colonies escalated and the colonial policy became a matter of national interest, the ideologues were able to get away from the contradiction which consisted of hoping that a low demographic growth would simultaneously populate the mother country and the colonies by advocating a firmly populationist policy aimed at increasing the birth rate.

Annex: The Causes of the Rural Exodus

All through the nineteenth century, there were a large number of temporary migrations and Chatelain's thesis, published posthumously (1967), describes their extreme diversity. Unfortunately, it is impossible to assess the magnitude of the permanent rural exodus, since the distinction between the rural and urban population appeared only in 1846. It is generally believed that though it was not very common during the first half of the nineteenth century,[63] some French departments

[63] Pouthas (1956) should be used carefully. Chevalier (1950: 23) underlines the weaknesses in the analyses of intercensal periods. Toutain (1963: 53–54), has attempted to establish a complete series

did lose a considerable part of their population. But these departments were situated in mountainous or semi-mountainous regions (Ain, Jura, Basses-Alpes et Hautes-Alpes, Cantal, Lozère, Ariège, Ardèche and Puy-de-Dôme) or in regions where the birth rate was too high as compared to their resources (Bas-Rhin, Meurthe, Moselle, Meuse and Creuse), or, finally, agricultural regions (Haute-Saône, Saône-et-Loire, Aveyron, Lot, Aude and Drôme).[64] Although it is not possible to overlook the migratory movements of a permanent nature which took place in the first half of the century because the towns were growing even as they generally suffered from an excess of deaths as compared to births, the 1850s and 1860s were quite unusual. The rural exodus became a permanent feature under the Second Empire when there was a large-scale decline in the population which cannot be explained by the natural deficit. In fact, the departments which recorded a *decline* in their total population between 1851 and 1872 continued to have a natural *positive* balance. Unfortunately and quite disappointingly, the recent *Histoire de la population française* does not take sides between contemporary specialists on the rural exodus, nor does it propose any conclusive contribution to the debate on the causes of the rural exodus. We may also note the contradictions between the different chapters of volume 3 of this collective work.[65] So what could have been the real causes for the permanent rural exodus?

It appears that the traditional temporary and seasonal migrations became permanent. Chevalier gives the examples of the Cantal, Creuse and Haute-Vienne regions while Chatelain points out that the workers employed for building the railways migrated permanently only after 1848, and he believes that on the whole migrations tended to acquire a permanent nature only after this date. Finally, Armengaud underlines the decisive importance of the crisis that occurred between 1846 and 1851 and reminds us that in spite of an excess of births, the rural population decreased while there was only a slight increase in the total population.[66] Subsequently, rural population continued to decline, going down from 26.7 to 24.8 millions between 1846 and 1872 (Table 3.3).

It is generally agreed that the French countryside was overpopulated.[67] Given these conditions, why is it that the rural population did not decline earlier? How can it be explained that the migrations became permanent only after the middle of the nineteenth century? These questions give rise to others. Rural crafts, which

---

on the basis of various estimates and on the reconstruction of French population by Bourgeois-Pichat.

[64] Pouthas, 1956: 126–128. According to Chatelain, in the Alps and the Massif Central, for example, the high birth rate was responsible for the temporary migrations in the first half of the century (1967: I, 92–95).

[65] Poussou, Lepetit, Courgeau, Dupâquier (1988: 167–227). Regarding the causes of the rural exodus, see p. 184. As for contradictions see for example maps 125 on p. 147 and 79 on p. 191 relating to the natural deficit between 1851 and 1872.

[66] Chevalier, 1951: 217–219; Chatelain, 1967a: 16–17 and 1967b: II, 1105. Armengaud, 1993: 223–224.

[67] Vidalenc, 1970: 38, 44, 139, 184, 293, etc.; Leuillot, 1959: II, 13, 31–32, 44–47; Armengaud 1993: 224–225; Agulhon, 1976: 66–79.

Table 3.3 Evolution of the rural population (1846–1872)

Census year	Population (in thousands)	% of total population
1846	26,750	75.6
1851	26,650	74.5
1856	26,190	72.7
1861	26,600	71.1
1866	26,470	69.5
1872	24,890	68.9

brought in extra earnings for the peasants, had contributed to the overpopulation of the countryside. Their decline began during this period. So was it a cause or a consequence of the rural exodus? Besides, what were the effects of the introduction of free trade in 1860? Finally, in a country with a low demographic growth, agriculture and industry necessarily compete with each other for labour. So what effect did the industrial expansion have on the rural exodus? All these questions are important because they lead to the debate on the "push" and "pull" factors.

It appears that there was an increase in productivity in the agricultural sector on account of technical advances such as the draining of swamps (in Dombes between 1863 and 1867 and in the Landes region thanks to the laws of 1857 and 1860), irrigation (in the South of France), clearing of lands (in Poitou after 1850) or, on the contrary, reforestation (in Sologne and Corbières), replacement of the swing-plough by the Dombasle plough, introduction of threshing-machines run on steam (81 machines in 1852 as opposed to 6,000 in 1873), use of natural phosphates and decrease of fallow lands. The higher yields of wheat, rye, sugar beet and especially the vineyards in the South of France bore witness to the advances in agriculture.[68]

This rise in productivity brought in larger incomes (agricultural rent, profits as well as wages increased under the Second Empire, although with a marked contrast between different regions), which can probably explain the following paradox: there was a continual complaint about the "shortage of hands" even though the figures do not indicate the existence of a bottleneck. If there was a shortage, it may at best have encouraged mechanization. As seen above, the final product rose considerably during the Second Empire and particularly during the years 1855 to 1864 and the final product per living person in the agricultural sector as well as the final product per active farmer increased substantially.[69]

Though agricultural productivity increased substantially during this period, it does not necessarily mean that the rural exodus was triggered by the freeing of labour. If the *same* rural population becomes more efficient and produces more, then the final product increases *faster* than the per capita product without stimulating a

[68] Regarding technical advances, see Specklin, 1976: 194–209; regarding results, Laurent, 1993: 671–697 (the figures given here correspond in most cases to those given by Laurent for the period from 1815 to 1880 and 1840 to 1880). The 1946 *Annuaire statistique* brought out by Insee gives the annual series.

[69] Table 2, based on Toutain, 1961.

rural exodus. A comparison of the growth rates shows that the final product increased faster under the July Monarchy than the two indices of productivity (see Table 3.1 above). On the other hand, under the Second Empire, the difference between growth rates declined initially and was reversed towards its end. This implies that the rural exodus checked the growth of the final product from 1850 onwards while technical progress continued to be translated into substantial productivity gains and freed the labour force suffering from disguised unemployment.

How to assimilate into this analysis the rural crafts which allowed peasants to earn an extra income during the off-season and could have helped to hold back in the countryside the labour that had become redundant due to technical advances? On the one hand, domestic crafts, for example in the Rhone valley, were one of the reasons for chronic overpopulation.[70] On the other hand, the crisis of 1846–1851 was, in Pouthas's words, a "liquidation crisis" which affected both rich and poor regions. In the rich regions, traditional industries, which had been a source of extra income, disappeared (small iron foundries in the South-West and the small-scale textile industry in Normandy) while the progress of communications encouraged regional specialisation (cattle-breeding and monoculture) in Normandy, Midi-Languedoc, Burgundy, etc. In the poor regions (mountainous areas and East Aquitaine), a veritable exodus of people took place because of a permanent breakdown in the demo-economic equilibrium.[71]

Thus under the Second Empire, the rise in agricultural productivity was accompanied by the disappearance of entire sectors of rural crafts. The problem here is one of causality. It can be claimed that the two changes were independent of each other, in which case the free trade treaty with England in 1860 must be regarded as an exogenous shock for the system. It encouraged greater concentration on the metallurgy and the textile industries which directly affected the rural crafts and had nothing to with the advances in agriculture. Conversely, it should be noted that the treaty of 1860 and the following treaties led to greater specialisation in agriculture by creating a new line of exports (sugar, wine and spirits, potatoes, butter, cheese and cattle), generally to Great Britain, and sometimes even by reviving inter-regional trade: the less rich areas supplied products to regions specialising in exports which were in a position to buy them by selling their own products to foreign countries.[72]

So it is doubtful if these two developments were really independent. It could be said that the disappearance of rural crafts was not the consequence but the *cause*

---

[70] Vidalenc, 1970: 299; Laurent explains that they continued till the middle of the nineteenth century due to the density of the population (1993: 746).

[71] Rich regions: Laurent, 1993: 698–712. Poor regions: Pouthas, 1956: 61. Corbin, 1975: I, 580.

[72] Regarding this point, see G. Désert, 1976: 233–234. Thus the export of butter and cheese rose from 25 million francs in 1859 to 78 millions in 1869. On an average, 1,540 hectolitres of wine were exported every year between 1855 and 1859 and 2,940 between 1865 and 1869. The inhabitants of Aveyron were able to sell "more fattened bulls to Languedoc because the prosperity of this region rose due to the growing export of wine. They began to send to the Parisian market 'choice products' from their cattle farms because the pastures of Normandy and the northern departments sold their own products to England." (quote p. 234).

of progress in the agricultural sector since the peasants decided to give up their crafts for good and compensated the loss of extra income resulting from the crisis and the opening of borders by improving their agricultural yield. However, many reasons militate against this viewpoint. Firstly, even if a part of the family labour were available, it would have been possible to increase the productivity of only some types of crops, for instance market gardening. It is in fact difficult to see children contributing effectively to improve the yield of one hectare of wheat. It is also difficult to imagine a peasant giving up his craft to devote all the labour at his disposal (himself, his wife, his children and, in rare cases, a helper) to a purely agricultural activity. In overpopulated regions where peasant families lived on the brink of poverty, this meant the immediate loss of an indispensable resource in the hope of an increase in resources at some future date. Finally, farming and crafts were not practised simultaneously, but they followed each other on a seasonal basis. It is therefore much more likely that agricultural progress was the cause and not the consequence of the decline of rural crafts.

This model is valid only with regard to family holdings where the decision to leave the land for good is determined by both the lack of additional resources and increased productivity. This was the case with small and medium-sized holdings farmed by their owners or through tenant-farmers or sharecroppers, which were predominant under the Second Empire. In 1882, the size of three quarters of the 5.5 million land holdings was between 1 and 10 hectares. Similarly, this model assumes the absence of a rural proletariat, which by itself could have provided the numbers for the rural exodus while the tradition of family crafts would have been maintained. But in 1862 there were hardly 1,400,000 day labourers out of a rural population of 26 millions.

Increases in productivity were therefore obtained by the spread of new agricultural techniques. It should be remembered that these techniques were developed at a time when agricultural prices were rising, when the advance of the means of communication made the marketing of products easier. Thus the possibility of transporting wheat from surplus areas rapidly to those suffering from shortages contributed to the disappearance of traditional reflexes. Thanks to the development of artificial grasslands, the areas devoted to pasture lands kept increasing while the area of fallow lands decreased and the area of ploughed fields remained stagnant.[73] The centuries-old fear of food shortages disappeared because it was now possible to buy food. In these conditions, the increased productivity and the growing demand for agricultural products, both at the national and international levels, brought about the collapse of the rural crafts with the crisis of 1846–1851 with the trade treaties acting as catalysts. It became possible from then on to maintain the family earnings at the same level without having to depend on an extra source of income.

It now remains to define the role of industrialisation. The development of railways or the wages offered by industries in towns and cities could not be considered

[73] Toutain, 1961: 212–215. Sorlin wrote regarding Brittany and the Vendée area: "towards 1860. . . turning fertile land into pasture no longer seemed a heresy" (1969: 33).

as the cause of the rural exodus because, had it been so, the exodus would have been permanent from the time industrialisation started in the 1830s and 1840s. But, as we have already observed, this did not happen. When the land could produce more with fewer hands, it "released" its human reserves and migration, until then temporary, became permanent. The case of the Limousin region is interesting: though the migrations continued to be temporary until 1880, it was so only because of the obsolete economic structures. It is therefore unlikely that the "shortage of hands" caused by the demand for labour in industry led to the mechanisation of agriculture as Désert claims.[74] This claim is not compatible with the existence of rural overpopulation, which this author admits. The socio-economic result of overpopulation is the continuation of disguised unemployment and not mechanisation which, according to contemporary economists, brought down the number of jobs. So it is necessary to admit that industry actually only offered an outlet for the surplus labour which the rural areas could not hold back any longer.

These are the facts that we must keep in mind to appreciate the analyses of the rural exodus by the economists.

[74] 1976: 223–227. On populating land, see Aghulon: 66 and following pages. On the importance of the push factor, see Aghulon: 80–86, who does not explain why temporary migrations became permanent.