observed, for many poor wretches in Catholic Brittany the prayer "Give us this day our daily bread" came "from the heart, for bread was by no means guaranteed." On the other hand, while bread accounted for nearly one-fifth of an average household budget in 1850, it had dropped to less than one-tenth by the end of the century. This shift reflects both improvements in the functioning of the marketplace and a decline in the size of the average French family. Diets slowly became more diverse as the rail system connected cities and countryside; previously rare items like meat became more common.

The steady gait of the civilizing process also reflected the so-called democratization of luxury. This process was spurred by a French invention, the department store. Though the first stores were established in Paris during the waning years of the Second Empire, by the early 1880s they rivaled traditional historical sites like the Louvre and Notre Dame. Contemporaries described department stores such as Le Bon Marché and Le Printemps as cathedrals of the new religion of consumerism. Their monumental façades, great cupolas, and sweeping display windows mirrored the architectural logic of medieval cathedrals. At the same time, the theatrical arrangement of goods—from sheets and umbrellas to delicacies, undergarments, and ready-made clothing, all of which had once been the reserve of artisans but now staggered the senses of visitors—transformed basic needs into flights of desire and imagination.

While workers were still initially untouched by this phenomenon—the stores were located in the bourgeois heart of the city and Haussmannization had forced workers to the outskirts—the growing lower middle classes, or petty bourgeoisie, were lastingly affected. Not only did the stores' vast bureaucracies help create a new class of white-collar workers, but the creation of affordable ready-made clothing allowed the new working classes to dress the bourgeois roles they aspired to assume. As we will see in Chapter 4, the great Paris Expositions brought the provinces to Paris, where visitors became consumers of the Republic. But the department stores instead brought Paris to the provinces through the mailing of millions of catalogues and almanacs. Just as school texts taught the values of the Republic, store catalogues also conveyed a national culture. The illustrations seduced the reader not only to buy material goods, but also to identify them with social and political goods. The Bon Marché, no less than Le tour de la France par deux enfants, the institutrice, and the rail and postal systems, helped form a new national, middle-class, and republican culture.

By 1885, Victor Hugo had been reduced to near silence by illness. Yet France's greatest writer had also become the living symbol of the Republic: a man whose life had spanned the better part of the century, a politician who had served as deputy and senator, a poet and novelist who had consecrated his art to the ideals of the revolution. His contradictions were no less symbolic. While his writings made him wealthy, Hugo bequeathed little of it to the working class whose lot he depicted so movingly in his books. The works themselves, monuments of high romanticism, were out of fashion by the time of his death on May 22, 1885, when realists, naturalism, and symbolism reigned.

The commemoration of Hugo's life rivaled the same romantic excesses of his writings. On May 31, Hugo's coffin was placed under the Arc de Triomphe. As night fell, great lights were turned on, illuminating the grand catafalque. A wave of humanity swept around the coffin, while souvenir stands did a brisk business in Hugo memorabilia.

The funeral cortège lurched early the next morning down the Champs-Élysées, across the Place de la Concorde and over the Seine to the Left Bank, an itinerary that avoided eastern and working-class Paris. Nearly eight hours after it started, the coffin—placed, as Hugo directed, in a pauper's hearse—reached its final resting place, the Pantheon, followed by a crowd that numbered 2 million. Scarred by Hugo as a "great sponge cake," the Pantheon was originally the Saint-Genève Church. Ever since the 1789 Revolution, the building's name and purpose had alternated between the Pantheon, symbol of a secular nation, and Saint-Genève, place of worship for a Catholic nation. With Hugo's death, the pendulum came to a rest. The Republic reclaimed the site for France as the Pantheon once again, and redevoted it to be the final resting place for the Republic's "great men." (The first and only woman honored with a place in the Pantheon for her own accomplish-
mments was Marie Curie, and that only in 1995, 61 years after her death.) Hugo was the Third Republic's first official tenant.
The funeral pageantry failed to conceal the many tensions that characterized France in this period referred to as the fin-de-siècle, or end-of-the-century—a term coined by contemporaries who experienced the period of the 1880s and 1890s as one of great transition and change. Always a double-edged phenomenon, change was a source of despair as well as hope. Frenchmen and Frenchwomen at the end of the nineteenth century celebrated dramatic material progress while also experiencing an elusive sense of anguish and uncertainty. Everything, the literary review *Bou de siècle* announced in 1891, "is upset, confused, hurled, and reshuffled in a kaleidoscopic vision." A sign of the hopes and uncertainty of the times was the birth of new political configurations on the Right and the Left, both of which challenged the increasingly complacent Opportunism Republic.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC UPEHAVALS

As we saw in the previous chapter, one change starting in the middle of the nineteenth century became a source of widespread anxiety among elites by the 1870s: France's population growth rate began to slow. In the eighteenth century, France had a rapidly growing population, reaching about 26 million on the eve of the 1789 Revolution. But 25 years of bloodshed during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars had killed over 1 million men. The resulting drop in the birthrate proved temporary, however, and France's birthrate recovered quickly. By 1850 the French population stood at some 36 million.

Many French leaders associated a large and growing population with power and prosperity. Alarms were first raised when census data revealed that in 1854 and 1855, the total number of people who died exceeded the number of births. While this trend did not continue, France's population growth rate had slowed definitively. The ignominious defeat in 1870 only confirmed some observers' worst fears about the negative effects of the declining birthrate, or dénatalité. Adding to the anxiety, the defeat also resulted in a threatening, newly unified Germany whose population greatly exceeded that of France. And things got worse. Between 1871 and 1911, France's population grew 8.6 percent, reaching about 39 million, while Germany's population increased 60 percent to a total of 65 million.

In the 1880s, a growing number of people in France—especially political and religious leaders—continued to worry and to speculate about why the birthrate was slowing. One thing was clear: French people were having fewer babies, and everyone from doctors, scientists, and Catholic moralists to social reformers and even feminists began to advocate state policies to reverse the trend. In 1896, Jacques Bertillon, a statistician, together with several doctors and social scientists, founded the Alliance for the Growth of the French Population to push for such reforms.

In the short term, however, perhaps the most important consequence of dénatalité was a labor shortage; here, the easiest remedy for employers struggling to keep down their costs was to find workers outside of France. As a result, for the first time in modern history, immigration began to reshape France's political landscape.

On the issue of immigration, silence speaks louder than words. Until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the very words "immigration" and "immigrant" did not figure in French sociological or legal studies. Only after the shocks of 1870–1871, coupled with growing uneasiness over France's stagnant birthrate, did the phenomenon of "immigration" claim the nation's attention. Waves of foreign workers started arriving in France, particularly Paris and the industrialized regions in the north and east, to work on the development of urban, industrial, and railway infrastructure. Immigration peaked between 1876 and 1886, when foreigners made up 2.96 percent of the total population and 7–8 percent of the working population. The main immigrant groups were Italians and Belgians, who alone accounted for 61 percent of the total immigrant workforce from 1872 to 1911. Other groups included Germans and Spaniards, and there was an important influx of Central and Eastern European Jews as well after 1881, fleeing pogroms, anti-Jewish riots, in their homelands (1.7 percent in 1872, 4.5 percent in 1911). These burgeoning "guest worker" populations, particularly those from Italy and Germany, bred anxiety and resentment, encouraging the growth of xenophobia, or hatred of outsiders, among French workers and small shopkeepers. At the same time and somewhat paradoxically, the growing press occupation with immigration prompted the state in 1889 to revise the canons of citizenship. No longer willing to deny foreign workers' male offspring the "odious privilege" of military service, France shifted the basis of citizenship from the parent's nationality to the place where the child was born. Henceforth immigrants' children born in metropolitan France could acquire French citizenship upon reaching adulthood.

Yet if France's new immigrants were looked down upon by French workers, it was not simply because of a traditional fear of "outsiders." The presence of foreign workers was symptomatic of larger structural changes in the economy that were deeply destabilizing to France's older skilled working class. For much of the nineteenth century, France's traditional skilled trades had developed alongside more industrialized economies like Great Britain's. Leather-and furniture-making, hat- and glove-making, silk and fine linens, glass-blowing, jewelry, and clothing remained vital not just for France's trade balance, but also for its self-identity. These so-called articles de Paris were, in a way, so many articles of faith in the abiding value of French craftsmanship.

By the early 1880s, though, technological innovations from abroad laid siege to this economic model based on luxury and hand-crafted goods. From across the Atlantic came mass-produced shoes made by Goodyear, while from across the Rhine German factories were now shipping new fabrics made from cheaper materials. A traditional culture based on well-built and long-lasting products increasingly gave way to one founded on quick made and easily replaced goods. As much as French traditionalists on both sides of the ideological spectrum wrung their hands over these socioeconomic changes, the great majority of French consumers welcomed them. Just as French political leaders had to adjust to the process of democratization, so too did French business have to adapt to a democratization of luxury.
BOULANGER'S RISE AND FALL

The "decomposition" of the small workshops had great political and cultural consequences. Many critics worried about the rise of impersonal factories, along with their anonymous, unskilled, and uprooted workers. In the crucible of these real changes and perceived threats, in the fin-de-siècle France, people became increasingly sensitive and concerned about a social phenomenon: the crowd. Few observers better reflected this pervasive anxiety than Gustave Le Bon. Trained as a medical doctor, Le Bon lived through the Paris Commune and witnessed first-hand the collision between urban and rural France. In 1895, he published *The Psychology of Crowds*, baptizing his age as the "ERA OF CROWDS." When people are pulled from their rural roots and thrown into cities, he argued, the framework of traditional beliefs and social hierarchy collapses. Closely knit communities decompose into crowds, a mass galvanized by simple ideas. As a result, the "people"—the central republican item of faith—easily becomes the "crowd," the nation's greatest menace. The ultimate justification of a Republic, the people thus also potentially threatened the bourgeois social order.

Le Bon noted that charismatic leaders skilled at using the tools of modern public relations could manipulate crowds to achieve their own ends. Undoubtedly, he had in mind the political turmoil of the 1880s, which climaxed with the meteoric rise and fall of General Boulanger. Between 1879 and 1885, a succession of Opportunist ministries held power. A short-lived "Great Ministry," from November 1881 to January 1882, dominated by the man about whom few French felt neutral, Léon Gambetta, briefly interrupted the Opportunists' reign. However Gambetta's attempt to revive the electoral system failed and Gambetta resigned after two difficult months. His brief ministry aroused fear in his enemies both among moderate republicans on the Left and the extreme Right, but before he could return to the political fray, Gambetta died prematurely.

Some viewed Gambetta as the last of the great republican heroes. The decidedly unheroic Jules Ferry dominated the ministries during the first half of the 1880s, either as prime minister or minister of national education. Dull and colorless, Ferry's methodical and prudent ways helped solidify many of the Republic's original gains. When Ferry stepped down for the last time in 1885, the Third Republic was as secure as the reputation of Hugo, who would be embalmed and immortalized scarcely two months later.

No sooner secured, the Republic found itself sorely tested in the late 1880s, in the form of a charismatic hero on horseback. General Georges Boulanger. Named minister of war in 1886, Boulanger represented all things to all people. Opportunists favored Boulanger because he had true republican credentials—or so it seemed; nationalists flocked to him because of his declarations of revenge against Germany for the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, and workers focused on his expressions of sympathy for the strikes at Deauville. On the extreme Left, the former Commander Henri Rochefort's newspaper *L'intransigeant* saw in Boulanger the return of Jacobins authority and purity. Yet many on the extreme Right embraced Boulanger's emphasis on military glory. This was especially the case with nationalismists like Paul Désiré, whose League of Patriots (La Ligue des Patriotes) founded in 1881 showcased the anti-liberal and violent tendencies that heralded twentieth-century fascist movements.
It so happened that Boulanger cut a brilliant figure. During the military parade at the Longchamp racetrack in Paris' Bois de Boulogne in 1886, the dashing general thrilled the crowd. Such popularity made many Opportunist republicans uneasy; the specter of Bonapartists seemed alive and well. Opportunists were so uneasy that they forced Prime Minister Freycinet, who had appointed Boulanger minister of war, to resign in May 1886. Boulanger was packed off to a provincial military command, but not without a frenzied send-off at the train station, where the crowd chanted "La Marseillaise" and cheered "General Revenge."

At the end of 1887, a scandal ensnared the government. President Jules Grévy's son-in-law, Daniel Wilson, was caught selling government decorations, including the Legion of Honor (Légion d'honneur), by law awarded only for " eminent merit," to the highest bidders from an office inside the presidential palace. The affair rocked the political establishment. Disenchantment voters turned to Boulanger, who had recently been forced to retire from the army, as a cure for the rash of corruption. Under Clemenceau's leadership, some so-called Radicals—the name taken by republicans just to the left of the Opportunists—distanced themselves from Boulanger, increasingly worried about the specter of military dictatorship. Yet other Radicals, as well as socialists and nationalists, hitched themselves to Boulanger's star: Apart from hostility to the perceived arrogance and corruption of republican politicians then in power, Boulanger's supporters had little in common.

Yet a debate still continues over the movement's nature and significance. One school of historians, led by René Remond, sees Boulangerism as an expression of Bonaparism. Little distinguishes it, they claim, from this well-worn and fundamentally conservative ideological strand on the Right. Other historians, however, like Zeve Sternhell, insist that Boulangerism was the symptom of a new and more menacing movement on the Right taking root in the wake of the 1870 defeat and made possible by the advent of mass politics and further industrialization. For example, the movement had anti-capitalist and anti-Semitic aspects that were alien to Bonaparism. No less importantly, Boulangerism trumpeted a fervent nationalism that celebrated an irrational attachment to the nation (and, at the same time, scorned the role of reason in politics). All of these aspects point to an early form of fascism, making it a movement with little in common with the traditional Right.4

Another new element of Boulangerism that fascists would later emulate was the use of elections to gain power. The Third Republic allowed politicians to run in more than one district. Starting in 1888, Boulanger's name was entered in a series of local elections across the country, all of which he easily won: Peasants, workers, and white-collar workers rallied to his banner. The most dramatic electoral victory was the January 1889 by-election in Paris. The government pulled out all the stops in support of the republican candidate, but Boulanger decisively defeated him on January 27. For French republicans and followers of Boulanger alike, this was the decisive moment. Would the ex-general try to overthrow the Republic?

The crowds milling in Paris soon had their answer. Whether restrained by republican scruples or sheer indecision, Boulanger did not take to the streets.

Instead, he decided to enter additional by-elections in the evident hope that he would be carried to power by a river of ballots, not blood. His decision proved fatal to his ambitions. The minister of the interior, announcing his intention to arrest Boulanger for treasonous activity, had taken the measure of his man. Rather than facing charges or attempting a coup, Boulanger crossed the Belgian border in flight from the warrant. The country seemed to forget him as quickly as it had discovered him. Two years later, when Boulanger committed suicide next to his mistress' grave in Brussels, he had become a comic figure. Still, at the time Boulanger seemed to pose a real threat to the new Republic, and the nationalist forces and sentiments that his brief ride to power unveiled were not so easily dispelled.

CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS

The years 1888–1889 marked not only the fall of Boulanger but also the rise of the Eiffel Tower, the great emblem of the World Exposition in Paris. During the previous Paris fair, in 1878, the Republic had just emerged from the May 16 crisis that ended MacMahon's presidency. By 1889, 11 years later, the Republic's political and social foundations were solid and it was prepared to throw itself a party. But the event would also be instructive. It was not accidental that the Exposition dovetailed with the centenary of the 1879 Revolution.

The 1889 Exposition perfectly reflected the republican credo of science and progress. The Gallery of Machines, a vast iron and glass exhibition hall housing 16,000 machines, was one sign of this secular faith, but the Eiffel Tower was, and remains, its most potent symbol. Chosen after a competition, the Eiffel Tower was controversial from the start. Given its tremendous height, some reviewers worried that a strong wind might topple the structure. Other observers had aesthetic objections. A committee of 300 artists and writers, led by Alexandre Dumas and Guy de Maupassant, examined Gustave Eiffel's design, describing it as an "odious column of tin." Yet the tower was a great popular success.13 Edouard Lockroy, the chairman of the organizing committee, compared the structure to the great Enlightenment project, the Encyclopédia: both served as monuments to intellectual ambition, technological skill, and collective effort—a noble sentiment, though one wonders how many of the more than 3 million tourists who visited the tower during the Exposition, gazing at the thousand-foot high elegant arc of iron lattice from below or the great maze of Paris from above, thought of their experience in these terms. Or perhaps they did marvel at the technology that would form the basis for the modern skyscraper, made possible by a metal frame undergirding the structure.

The 1889 Exposition aimed both to cultivate civic virtues and to entertain. One of the pavilions, a re-creation of the Bastille, the prison and armoury destroyed in 1789, served as home to a rollercoaster, music hall, mock medieval souvenir shops, and a theater that staged a show called "Escape of the Prisoners from the Bastille." Equally impressive was "Cairo Street," a Disney-like Main Street lined with "authentic" Arab cafés, souks, and belly dancers where spectators could "see" the new empire up close. Although such exhibits pretended to a educational function,
they blurred the lines between edification and titillation, between the virtues of the citizen and the desires of the consumer, like the wax figures at Musée Grévin, which had sensationalist tableaux of human sacrifice in Africa and state executions in France but also a scene of Eiffel and Lockroy inspecting the Eiffel Tower. The exhibits were also a source of anxiety for conservative observers. Edmond de Goncourt worried that "While looking at the Exposition and on everyone's face the coarse bestial joy which twists up even the gray moustaches of old women, I think of the ennui of next year for these people who have taken the habit of partying, and I fear that from this ennui there will emerge a revolution." Goncourt need not have worried. The memory of revolution had turned, quite literally, into a souvenir. Fittingly, Montmartre, the revolutionary district that gave rise to the Commune, in the 1880s became a magnet for tourists seeking forms of popular and high art that mocked bourgeois virtues. Since 1881, the Chat Noir (Black Cat) cabaret had been the flagship of fumisme—the term given to the art of practiced disdain for bourgeois values. Failed painter Rodolphe Salis, who ran the Chat Noir café, claimed it had been founded under Julius Caesar and frequented by Charlemagne and Rabelais. Waiters dressed in the uniform of the Académie française—France's preeminent learned body whose forty elected lifetime members, known as the Immortals, were in charge of keeping the French language pure—served drinks while Salis lavished insults on his guests. The bourgeois clientele loved it.

One of the café's most famous performers, singer Aristide Bruant, opened his own café in 1885 called Le Mirliton. Like Salis, Bruant specialized in hurling scorn at his bourgeois fans—a remarkably profitable activity. Bruant's rancor, sharp but calculated, allowed his audience to shed their bourgeois identities for the night. And though he sang sympathetically of the working class, Bruant tended to idealize them as the "down and out." His true genius lay in using the argot of working-class Paris—he even published a dictionary of Paris slang—creating a way that his bourgeois clientele had never experienced. Reflecting the trend in entertainment in fin-de-siècle Montmartre, Bruant packaged a safe form of slumming for middle-class consumption. At establishments like the Chat Noir and Le Mirliton, the goal was to provoke in its guests a "release of feelings and emotions that were repressed or restricted in everyday bourgeois life." Men and women found a space "where the increasingly organized and regulated life of the modern city could be left behind for an evening by those unable to escape it for longer."  

The transformation of Montmartre into a refuge from middle-class respectability was in part a legacy of Hausmann's rebuilding of Paris under the Second Empire, which had dramatically expanded the city's bourgeois neighborhoods in the first place. Haussmann's changes to Paris' urban landscape had another unintended effect. The new arcades, exhibition halls, cafés, squares, parks, and big boulevards that he created provided a venue for people to see and be seen. Paris in the fin-de-siècle became, in the words of German critic Walter Benjamin, the "capital of the nineteenth century." Its streets provided entertainment for many young middle- and working-class men, often referred to as bohemians or, from the verb flâner, which means to stroll, flâneurs, the term poet Charles Baudelaire preferred. No novel better captured this world than Guy de Maupassant's Bel Ami (1885), set in the heart of Paris, which followed the rags-to-riches saga of Georges Duroy—a man on the make who receives his big break when he runs into an old schoolmate in a café on one of the city's teeming boulevards. This bohemian street culture also provided the context in which a homosexual subculture could and did develop. Gay men "used the urban spaces available to them to create for themselves a unique geography of sexual pleasures throughout the city." As a result Paris became something of a haven for homosexuals, where Oscar Wilde, after his release from prison and fleeing the more repressive climate of Great Britain, spent the last years of his life.

Alongside the commercialized middle-class cafés and tourist establishments in places like Montmartre, Paris and other cities large and small also had authentic working-class cafés. Reflecting a democratization of leisure (if not luxury), such cafés became extensions of the home for many working men and a small but, as time went on, increasing number of women. Private lives were lived out in public, partly created by the endemic housing crisis in Paris and the cramped living quarters and lack of domestic privacy in all industrial centers. Cafés also functioned as extensions of the workplace. In the café, deals were made and jobs could be found. Artisans periodically broke off from their work in order to hoist a glass. Alcohol was widely believed to energize the body; no less importantly, through rounds and toasting, drinking represented a social rite for working-class men that underscored the virtues of equality. In fact, one of the great bones of contention between employers and skilled workers was the issue of café breaks—an intolerable practice for employers who wanted both to maintain a 10 or 11 hour workday and to increase productivity.

While patterns of sociability changed in Paris and the large provincial cities with the development of new forms of consumption, slowly, rural France was also changing. Many of the traditions that marked village life were quietly disintegrating under the forces of modernization. Better communication and transportation systems and the didactic efforts of the Republic undermined the celebration of Carnival and midsummer bonfires, as well as annual religious events like the pardons in Brittany, in which great pilgrimages unfolded on the feast days of patron saints. By 1889, national celebrations encouraged by Paris, most importantly July 14, the national holiday, were pushing aside older local traditions. Efforts to outlaw cockfights and bearbaiting, led by the recently created Society for the Protection of Animals, were spurred as much by concern with the moral well-being of the spectators as the physical well-being of the animals. At the same time, the growth in literacy and domestic comforts assured the decline of communal practices like the veillée, a long-standing rural tradition of neighbors gathering during the long winter nights to share the warmth and light of a single hearth and pass the time with storytelling and song. As with blood sports and Carnival, republican authorities considered the veillée a primitive activity unworthy of citizens.

Yet the impact of the Republic's continuing "civilizing mission" at home was more uneven and ambiguous than it might appear from the vantage point of Paris
and national policy. Far from being passive, regions responded in creative ways to the government’s efforts to create a unified nation. For example, the Félibrige, a literary movement founded in 1854 to preserve the southern region’s Provencal language and culture, and other similar regional associations mobilized against Paris pressures. Also, in Languedoc, a traditional southern province, a great groundswell of resistance emerged against Paris’ attempts to outlaw the corrida, or bullfight. Even though the corrida was a recent import from Spain, Félibrige writers like Frédéric Mistral, Charles Maurras, and Léon Daudet defended it as a “native” tradition. In 1894, the Republic backed down from its efforts to suppress it. Still more local or regional “traditions” were tweaked to make them suitable, or quite simply invented. The fête arlésienne in Provence was a “ritual” sprung directly from Mistral’s imagination, in which women paraded in “time-honored” costumes. So, too, for the Basse-Bretiz, a collection of what were claimed to be Breton folksongs. In fact, the song collector, Theodore de la Villemarquè, largely invented the Basse-Bretiz to celebrate a way of life that never was.

In the realm of high culture, institutions like the Paris Opéra and École des Beaux Arts lost their commanding presence in the face of serious attempts to make the traditional arts more democratic. Musical entrepreneurs like Jules Pasdeloup popularized “serious” music through Sunday concerts. In a telling sign of how much popular opinion had changed since the Franco-Prussian War, Pasdeloup also reintroduced Parisians to the work of Richard Wagner, so closely associated with German nationalism, yet who had already won highbrow critics in France.16

The Impressionist movement reflected a similar process of popularization. From its beginnings in the early 1860s in the work of Édouard Manet through its official birth in 1874, when Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir, and Paul Cézanne exhibited their work together, the Impressionist movement scandalized the artistic establishment. Many critics found their emphasis on light, surface, and fleeting “impressions” dubious. Beyond that, established artistic elites were also bothered by their choice of subjects. Rather than treating mythology and history, the Impressionists instead depicted the everyday tasks and scenes of ordinary men and women, from middle-class families on a Sunday walk in the park to working men and maids in cafés and cabarets. However, from rebels the Impressionists eventually became the new establishment—an ironic shift, given their subject matter. Poet and critic Stéphane Mallarmé dwelt, with forgivable exaggeration, on the tremendous social and political implications of this change: Whereas the artist had previously been a reclus “to whom was given the genius of a dominion over an ignorant multitude . . . today the multitude demands to see with its own eyes.”

**CHURCH VS. REPUBLIC? FEARS OF DEGENERACY**

While Impressionists grew defiant toward the artistic establishment at the end of the century, relations that had earlier been strained between the French Catholic hierarchy, the Vatican, and the Republic initially grew more accommodating. In the 1890s, Pope Leo XIII moved the Church away from the reactionary policies of his predecessor Pius IX and prodded the French Catholic hierarchy to reach a truce with the Republic. He met with resistance, as several high members of the French clergy turned down the pope’s request to serve as the French Church’s public voice for this new policy. Finally, in late 1890, Cardinal Lavigerie, Archbishop of Algiers, launched a policy of reconciliation between the Church and the Republic. Lavigerie declared that as long as the Republic did not pose a threat to Catholic principles, the Church should accept it. He urged the creation of a conservative party within the framework of the Republic.

Against this background, in 1892, Pope Leo XIII took the exceptional step of publishing an encyclical in French, titled *Au milieu des sollicitudes (Among the Concerns)*, that explicitly accepted the French Republic’s legitimacy. This document represented a dramatic reversal of papal policy. Nevertheless, while the Ralliement initially caught the public’s attention, it failed to create an enduring political movement. The Ralliement supporters hoped to create an electoral coalition
of politicians who shared a desire to reconcile the Church and the Republic. But in
the elections of 1896, only 38 representatives linked to the Ralliement won, while
the socialists continued to grow in strength. The Ralliement itself represented an
uneasy alliance of Catholics who shared a religion but varied greatly in their atti-
dudes toward politics and social change. Some Catholic leaders, like the
conservative Jacques Piot, were dedicated to preserving the established social
order, while others, like the Legislateur Albert de Mun, wanted to address its
inequalities. The latter maintained that they were following an encyclical the pope
had issued in 1891, Rerum novarum (Of New Things), which recognized the exist-
ence of social injustice and exhorted Catholics to care for the underprivileged.
The Ralliement also alienated some French Catholics who continued to oppose
Ferry's Republic. Yet for many French Catholics, the debate about the Republic
was academic: They had long since come to terms with the Republic while holding
onto their religious faith.

It is difficult to generalize about the extent and significance of religious prac-
tice in fin-de-siècle France. In the southwest and Massif Central, as well as the
Paris basin, church attendance had dropped to single digits. In western regions
like Brittany and the Vendée, however, approximately half of the population still
trooped to Sunday services. But it is not clear whether strong church attendance
signified active faith or attachment to tradition. Attendance was also gendered.
Most girls attended Catholic primary schools, given gender norms that defined
women's roles in terms of their domestic, educational, and nurturing roles, the
Church and its charitable activities provided one of the few outlets for middle-
class women wanting to expand their social horizons.24 The Church continued to
provide charitable assistance particularly for young working-class women down
on their luck. Thus for cultural, social, and economic reasons, women were far
more closely tied to the Church than were men. Married couples often reflected
this divide. The anti-clericalist socialist leader Jean Jaures' wife was deeply devout.
Claude Monet's mistress, Alice Hoschedé, waited until her husband, from whom
she had long been separated, died before marrying the painter. The Provencal
writer Alphonse Daudet had fierce debates with his observant wife, Julia, over the
Republic's removal of crucifixes from classrooms.

Overly schematic accounts of Church-State divisions obscure a number of inter-
ests—or, more accurately, fears—the two institutions held in common. Most
important, both Church and State worried over maintaining social order. The
Church's hold over its flock reassured conservative republicans. Like Napoleon,
they saw social control in the mystery of the Trinity—or, more prosaically, in the
practices of communion and confession. Fear of Boulangism on the Right and
socialism on the Left—in 1896 the socialists swept to victory in several cities—
helped unite Catholics and conservative republicans who also shared fears about
a perceived decay in public and private morals. This perception was reflected in
a rash of articles and books expressing concern about France's physical and moral
degeneration, which Catholics blamed on the decline of religion. Tellingly, repub-
lican freethinkers, who pointed to a different list of suspects—immigration,
re-creating the Olympics than with introducing educational reform in France. The Olympics were reborn in 1896, but only after World War II did the French school system take outdoor play seriously.

Elite observers’ worries about the degeneration of French men were further magnified by another new development: the first appearance of what contemporaries called the “new woman,” who seemingly rejected traditional bourgeois values. From the 1890s on, a small but visible group of middle-class women began to dress, behave, and live in ways that challenged gender norms. They remained single or entered nontraditional relationships; took up “male” professions like law, medicine, or journalism; and some became feminist activists. Many of the new women were associated with a journal Marguerite Durand created in 1897, *La Fronde*, which was entirely produced, written, edited, and even typeset by women. Unlike other journals directed at women, rather than clothing and homemaking *La Fronde* covered politics, international affairs, sports, and the stock market. Moderate feminists like Léon Richer and Maria Desraismes, who dominated the 1879 feminist congress, began to decline in the 1880s as the more radical Hubertine Auclert pressed demands for the vote in more militant and challenging ways. While very few women lived the new woman lifestyle much less joined feminist groups, the phenomenon attracted attention and aroused fear far beyond their numbers. Many of the major newspapers included daily articles on the new woman, who also became the subject of novels and plays. The new woman’s unconventional lifestyle, along with feminists’ demand for equal rights, linked up with broader social anxieties about the declining birthrate and degeneracy. The new woman, many believed, rejected maternity and further emasculated France’s men.21

**CIVILIZING OVERSEAS**

Such concerns provided one impetus for continuing imperial expansion under the Third Republic. Many observers, hoping to counter the signs of degeneracy and lack of masculine vigor, advocated “manly” empire-building as essential for re-invigorating the nation. Yet as the Third Republic pursued further conquests beyond France’s older colonies in the Caribbean, Algeria, the South Pacific, and coastal Senegal in the 1890s, its pro-imperial lobbyists and policy-makers soon confronted a dilemma. On the one hand, they invoked France’s special republican mission civilisatrice—inherited from its revolutionary past—to help prod their ambivalent fellow citizens to support new colonies in Southeast Asia, Central and West Africa and Madagascar, and Polynesia. This mission, and the ostensible inability of the so-called inferior races to improve on their own, justified imperialism in the first place. On the other hand, no one in France wished to pay for programs to improve the livelihoods of the desperately poor native peoples inhabiting the colonies.

The government resolved this dilemma not by ignoring its promises (although there was plenty of that), but by often turning to the most convenient and inexpensive alternative available for implementing their civilizing programs: Catholic missionaries.22 Indeed, France’s empire seemed to be one project upon which republicans and Catholics could agree from the outset. One of the most popular republican dictums of the 1880s—uttered by none other than Gambetta himself—was that “anticolonialism is not an item for export.” Yet far from always getting along, secular administrators and missionaries routinely fought each other for “the hearts and minds” of their colonial subjects, in ways that echoed the divide in France between many Catholics devoted to their faith and anticolonialists determined to cleanse the nation—and particularly its public schools—of the Church’s influence.

By the early 1890s the era of new conquests was beginning to wind down, except in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, where the French had started later than in North Africa and Southeast Asia. In 1893, Laos was officially added to France’s Indochinese territories. In 1893 French Colonel Louis Archambaud captured and defeated the Sultan Ahmadu, heir to the Sokoto commercial state in West Africa. Further west, in Western Sudan (present-day Mali), the brilliant Muslim empire builder and rival of Abubakar, Sayyid Moussa—like the great Algerian Amir Abd el-Kader before him in the 1840s—successfully resisted the French military for thirteen years until his final capture in 1898. The Merina Kingdom of Madagascar, too, was only pacified—that is to say not only conquered but also dissolved—in the late 1890s under General Joseph Gallieni and his military collaborator, the young Louis Hubert Lyautey.

Wherever it could the French government began shifting from military to civil administration, in the hope that these territories would start yielding the
promised economic dividends. Governments General were set up in Indochina (a federation eventually composed of five territories: Tonkin, Annam, Cochinchina, Cambodia, and Laos) in 1887, (see Map 10.1, p. 268), French West Africa (a federation made up of seven territories: Senegal, Ivory Coast, Dahomey, Guinea, the French Soudan, Mauritania, and Niger) in 1895, Madagascar in 1896, and French Equatorial Africa (a federation made up of four territories: Gabon, Middle Congo, Oubangui Chari, and Chad) in 1910. Imperial pro-consuls embarked upon ambitious programs of port and rail construction across the empire.

The Third Republic’s new empire was ruled along very different lines than the tiny villes colonies, or old colonies, of Guadeloupe, Martinique, Réunion, and coastal Senegal, where the citizenship and the suffrage rights of all males regardless of race had been recognized in 1848, and then again in 1870. After 1900, all of France’s new colonies were expected to be self-financing. Each territory was subdivided into districts headed by a French commandant (a civilian administrator despite the military ring of his name). Commandants were responsible in their districts for gathering taxes, building roads, overseeing the administration of justice, and providing—in theory at least—both a school for teaching local children French and a local clinic. In G. Bruno’s Le tour de la France par deux enfants, children in what was now referred to as the metropole—that is to say France within its traditional European boundaries—could read about how free vaccinations were given in Indochina because “France, always generous, extends to all...its benefits and its aid.” Another part of France’s mission civilisatrice was to eradicate “feudal” vestiges deemed incompatible with modern civilized behavior: slavery where it still existed, trial by ordeal, cannibalism, and superstition generally.

In the new colonies, the native populations were legally subjects of the Republic, rather than citizens; those few subjects who acquired French language and culture could apply to become citizens, but in practice few naturalizations were granted. Commandants had extraordinary powers at their disposal to keep their subjects in line. The special penal code known as the Indigénat already in force in Algeria was extended to Africans, Asians, and Pacific Islanders, allowing administrators to impose fines and jail individuals for up to 15 days without appeal for a whole host of infractions (including insufficient deference to French administrators). While in theory abolishing slavery and local forms of feudalism, French colonial administrators imposed on colonial populations a certain number of days of free labor working on local public works projects for the colonial administration, a system that easily lent itself to abuse. Both the crusading spirit of the new republican regime and the intensifying biological racism of the era infused all of these policies: for contemporaries it made perfect sense to bring liberty and fraternity at gunpoint, with equality and democracy postponed to some indefinite future when supposedly inferior colonial peoples would “mature enough” to deserve them. Meanwhile these same colonial subjects were expected to pay taxes and to serve under French colors should their new French fatherland—la patrie—need them.

With its expanded empire, republican France would become by 1914 a nation of close to 100 million French, of whom 60 million were colonial subjects. A corps of about 4,000 French administrators governed these subjects, with the help of numerous auxiliary personnel hired among the local populations: chiefs and traditional elites hoping to preserve some semblance of their former power, former slaves seeking to escape servile status, or ambitious French-educated “new” men and women who believed that their best career chances lay with the colonizers. Only Algeria—no longer a colony since its attachment to the Ministry of the Interior in 1881 made its three northern departments an integral part of France—attracted a significant numbers of settlers, or pieds noirs (black feet—presumably a reference to the black boots they wore) as they came to be called. With its Mediterranean climate and proximity to France, Algeria witnessed a virtual land grab between 1871 and 1898, as a vast new influx of colonists seized the richest territories and reduced the local Arab and Berber populations to landless laborers. By 1900, there were over 600,000 settlers living in Algeria, many of whom had arrived from other impoverished Mediterranean countries, especially Spain, Italy, Portugal, and Malta. French-born colonists who chose to move to Algeria, typically from the Midi or Alsace-Lorraine, looked down upon these poorer foreign settlers.

In 1889, the Republic granted access to citizenship to all settlers in Algeria of European descent regardless of origin, while the local Muslims remained subjects rather than citizens. Set apart by their superior rights and ostensibly superior civilization based on reason and technological prowess, almost all colonists—rich or poor—despised the native Algerians, deemed incapable by virtue of their Muslim religion of assimilation into French culture or of making their country prosperous. By century’s end, Algeria had “become a tale of two economies sitting side by side. On the one side were the rich settlers, whose huge enterprises comprising 2,350,000 hectares of the best land and using the latest agricultural techniques produced food and wine for export; on the other, the Algerian peasantry who were forced to maintain a subsistence economy with archaic techniques.” The six deputés elected by settlers to the three Algerian departments became vociferous supporters of this new colonial lobby in Paris, dedicated to protecting French financial interests throughout the empire. Led by the politically savvy deputy from the department of Oran, Eugène Etienne, this lobby made sure that any pro-Algerian reform in Algeria never passed in the Chamber of Deputies.

Indochina was viewed as France’s most promising new colony in the 1880s, in part because it was seen as a springboard to trade with China. The patchwork of regions that made up the new federation had long attracted French missionaries as well as traders. Episodic violence against republican authoritarian French rule in Indochina only really ended in 1897, at which point plantation owners, merchants and bankers, and petty traders of all sorts found their way to Southeast Asia. This European community always remained tiny relative to the native population and was concentrated in the French quarters of cities like Hanoi or Saigon, where even the most humble European was reputed to live in opulent “Oriental” splendor. Indochina held a special place in the late nineteenth-century public’s imagination as a particularly exotic outpost, but the reality was more prosaic. The military,
shopkeepers, businessmen, missionaries, and administrators who made up the French community were internally stratified according to occupation and income. Yet all colonists viewed the local populations through a prism of racial hierarchies, which tended to make them regard the natives as the "passive yellow races." Sub-Saharan Africa, because of its inhospitable climate and poverty, attracted the fewest number of French. Traders and confraternities built up the port cities of Dakar—capital of French West Africa (Afrique Occidentale Française, or AOF)—and Abidjan in the Ivory Coast, which became entrepots for the African's main exports, such as peanuts (for oil), coffee, and cocoa, all cultivated by African peasants. In the vast tropical forests of French Equatorial Africa (Afrique Equatoriale Française or AEF), whose capital was Brazzaville, the French government leased most of the land to concessionary companies in search of timber, ivory, and rubber. These companies paid a nominal tax to the state to "develop" the colony, then routinely forced locals to work for them. Their scandalous treatment of Africans—similar to the atrocities occurring at the same time in the Belgian Congo—produced a humanitarian backlash in France at the turn of the century; the companies were not, however, dismantled until the interwar years.

In contrast to the small numbers of public servants, planters, merchants, and traders traveling out to Indochina and sub-Saharan Africa at the end of the nineteenth century, approximately 50,000 Catholic religious workers lived abroad—most of them in the French empire (North Africa and parts of West Africa were the exception, since the Catholic Church had little success proselytizing in Muslim states). More than a million French women and children supported their efforts by donating money and prayers. These missionaries tended to live much closer to indigenous populations than the administrators the government sent or the merchants and settlers who came voluntarily. Missionaries might stay in the same village for years at a time, whereas administrators repeatedly moved all around the empire. Wherever they settled, religious workers set up churches, schools, orphanages, segregated colonies for people with leprosy, and hospitals. For many of the colonized, in other words, the first and sometimes only French person they saw was a representative of—at least in theory—the Third Republic's greatest enemy: a Catholic bent on converting them to the one "true" religion. The presence of so many missionaries in the empire was a boon to administrators looking for a cheap way to fulfill the civilizing directives emanating from the Ministry of Colonies in Paris. As a result, in most colonies the administration came to rely on missionaries to staff government schools and hospitals. But conflicts abounded in the empire between religious workers and their secular critics who believed the Catholic Church, allowed to flourish overseas, still posed a threat to the Republic back home.

These conflicts could take a number of different forms. Some colonial administrators and colonists resented religious conversion's disruptive impact on the colonial populations, for it could turn neighbors against each other and split whole villages into feuding clans. They argued that the Church's divisive presence was preventing the colony from developing economically. In Paris, republican deputies excoriated Catholic missionaries in Indochina for teaching Latin in their schools rather than French and questioned whether any Catholic priest could be a good citizen. Petty disputes over material and labor were also the stuff of everyday life in the colonies. In Madagascar an administrator complained bitterly to his superior that a local Jesuit told his converts to steal telegraph poles belonging to the state to use in the construction of his chapel. These conflicts escalated even further by the end of the nineteenth century, when continued labor unrest and escalating nationalism in France represented the fragile truce between republicans and Catholics represented by the Republic.

By the first years of the twentieth century, republican antipathy toward the Catholic Church ran deeper than ever, leading to a renewal of the state's war against the Church that reverberated overseas. For example, in Haiti in French Polynesia, the administration had long relied on a single order of religious sisters to carry the burden of educating the local population. Colonial administrators hoped that missionaries would stem the island's catastrophic population decline by molding "depraved" Tahitian girls into good mothers trained in modern French child-rearing practices. By 1900, however, the government turned against its Catholic allies, now blaming the sisters for failing to stem population decline in a colony devastated by diseases that accompanied French colonization. The administration closed down missionary schools in the name of defending the Republic against theocrasy, but then, hypocritically, failed to create secular ones to replace them.

If fraught Church-State relations at home were often refracted overseas, the empire was also a place where some people experimented with new religious and gender identities not possible in France. The most infamous woman of the French empire at the turn of the century, the flamboyant Isabelle Eberhardt, was the illegitimate offspring of an Armenian Orthodox priest turned anarchist and an aristocratic German woman. Eberhardt was raised in a highly orthodox manner outside of Geneva, Switzerland, educated classically and in European languages as well as Arabic, history, geography, and philosophy. From an early age, she wore only men's clothes and learned to ride a horse as vigorously as any man; she also absorbed the ambivalent Orientalism of the era that portrayed all Muslim peoples as sensuous, lazy, and deeply mysterious. Hopelessly out of place in bourgeois society, Eberhardt cultivated ties with the Paris literary avant-garde, then fled Europe at the age of 20 for the French Algerian town of Bône. There she converted to Islam, took on a new name (Mahmoud Saadi), and scandalized colonial society by dressing as an Arab man, imbibing hashish, and wandering through the streets and markets at all hours of the night, either alone or with Algerian male companions. While drugs, alcohol, sexual digressions, and transvestism could be tolerated in fin-de-siècle Paris cabarets, in Algeria Europeans were expected to keep their distance from the indigènes (natives) in order to preserve the myth of French cultural and moral superiority.

By 1899, Eberhardt discovered that life in the Saharan desert was more to her liking than colonial Bône; she cast herself as a nomad, married an Algerian sergeant—who had exceptionally become a French citizen—and deepened her
knowledge of Islam by joining a mystic sufi order, all the while writing about her experiences. As the French military under General Lyautey began encroaching upon southeastern Morocco from Algeria in 1903, Eberhardt agreed to conduct a delicate diplomatic mission for the army, only to die tragically in a flash flood upon her return in 1904. After she was buried in Algeria, her memoirs became a bestseller in France.28

Unified by a common reality of white privilege, the empire taking shape in the waning years of the nineteenth century was nevertheless always a space of many contradictions and fissures. For a handful of disaffected expatriates like Eberhardt seeking freedom from stifling conventions, Algeria represented a kind of theater for acting out fantasies of the Orient and transgressing boundaries. For all her radical behavior, however, only at the very end of her life did Eberhardt see Algerians in terms other than the stereotypes within which she had been raised. For the vast majority of French women, the empire was less a place to try on new identities than one where traditional gender hierarchies were, if anything, more exaggerated than at home. Colonial military and administrative service, as well as settler agriculture, were viewed as quintessentially men’s work—the stuff of which real heroes were made in an increasingly bureaucratic age.29 In contrast, French women who ventured overseas were expected to remain in their “proper” feminine places to better reflect the virility of their husbands and other male colonizers.

MISSIONARIES AND REPUBLICANS SHARED YET ANOTHER CONCEPT OF EMPIRE, ALTHOUGH ONE NO LESS DEFINED BY GENDER OR RACE THAN THE QUEST OF ADVENTURE AND HEROISM THAT MOTIVATED SO MANY YOUNG MEN TO EXILE THEMSELVES TO THE FAR CORNERS OF THE GLOBE. FOR CATHOLICS AND THE ARdent SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF 1789 ALIKE, THE GOAL WAS TO CONVERT COLONIAL “OTHERS” TO THEIR VIEW OF THE WORLD, EVEN IF IT MEANT CARRYING THEIR METROPOLITAN QUARRELS WITH THEM. OTHER FRENCH PEOPLE SIMPLY WENT TO THE COLONIES TO MAKE MONEY. AND DESPITE THE DE FACTO SEGREGATION THAT OBTAINED EVERYWHERE, SYMPATHETIC RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN COLONIZER AND COLONIZED WERE SOMETIMES POSSIBLE. CERTAINLY BEFORE WORLD WAR I MANY FRENCH ADMINISTRATORS AND MERCHANTS LIVED WITH NATIVE WOMEN AND FATHERED CHILDREN WHOSE MOTHERS WERE OCCASIONALLY LEGALLY RECOGNIZED.30

Yet whatever their purpose overseas, their individual prejudices or lack thereof, their class or their status, all French people in the colonies had the weight of the imperial system behind them, often leaving colonial populations little choice but to tolerate their new bickering overlords. The same might be said of workers in France, also subjugated to the civilizing efforts of anxious fin-de-siècle industrialists and legislators. As citizens, however, male workers had the political means to fight back that were denied to the vast majority of France’s colonial subjects.

THE LABOR MOVEMENT AND SOCIALISM

The French working class did not feel particularly privileged in 1880s France. The fear of unemployment, the weight of 12-hour days, and near-total absence of social security were the lot of most working men, women, and children. Only in 1892 did the National Assembly prohibit the employment of children under 13 and limit those under 16 years to no more than 10 hours a day. Despite—or because of—this lack of basic protection, a minority of workers and middle-class sympathizers began using their new rights to fight for improvements. In a country famous for its divisions among and between unionists and socialists, this movement to change the lot of workers achieved an unprecedented degree of organizational unity by the end of the century.

Even in cities, the family remained one of the most important institutions in the life of workers. Urban worker families, not surprisingly, were different from peasant ones; in the city, the nuclear family prevailed, characterized by the absence of the elders and by the early departure of children from home. The number of children tended also to be smaller, due both to space constraints and to the new industrial culture of efficiency being adopted by factory owners. Employers stressed the importance of domestic hygiene and aimed to create a work place of healthy, sober, punctual workers with families only large enough to be an impetus, not a hindrance, to working long hours in a factory.31

In the face of the relentless pressures of employers upon them, at home and in the work-place, workers turned to trade unions and, increasingly, to a particular kind of labor organization known as Bourses du Travail or Labor Exchanges, for solidarity. Bourses du Travail were places where workers could meet and debate
of the French theorist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon for their inspiration, the PO socialists turned to Karl Marx—or, at least, a Marx translated and simplified in French. One of the party’s leaders, Paul Lafargue, happened to be Marx’s son-in-law. But the Gauchistes’ rigid organization and allergy to compromise long undermined attempts by other socialist individuals and groups to achieve unity. Not surprisingly, in 1893, more independent socialists—31—won seats to the National Assembly than did socialists aligned with organized parties, who took only 18 seats.

These independent socialists included Jean Jaures, whose name has been given to so many boulevards and squares in France as his hero and fellow southerner, Leon Gambetta. Born to a provincial and struggling middle-class family in southwestern France, Jaures’ life vindicated the Republic’s belief in the power of education. He won a scholarship to the prestigious Ecole Normale Superieure in Paris, the training ground for the Republic’s vanguard of intellectuals. Graduating in 1881, Jaures returned to the south, where he took the post of philosophy professor at a lycee in the town of Albi. As would be true for many other normaliens (graduates of the Ecole Normale Superieure), Jaures soon made his mark in politics. Taking up the cause of the mine workers in the town of Carmaux, he won the seat representing their district in the parliamentary elections of 1893. Though he had previously identified himself as an independent, Jaures now announced that he was a socialist. But unlike that of Guesde, Jaures’ socialism was broad, flexible, and inclusive; it favored compromise over confrontation and sought to better the condition of the working class before the advent of revolution. Jaures’ idealism and eloquence quickly thrust him to the forefront of the socialist movement. In 1905, he succeeded in weaving the various strands into a unified party, which took the name “the French Section of the Workmen’s International” (Section Francaise de l’Internationale Ouvriere or SFIO). Though Jaures and Guesde shared the leadership, the contrast remained stark between the two socialists. Whereas Guesde’s politics were narrow and severe, Jaures’ worldview was humane, optimistic, and inspired less by Marx than by the values of 1789. The rank and file respected Guesde, but loved Jaures.

The socialists faced opposition not just on the Right, but also on the extreme Left. For a brief and shattering moment between 1892 and 1894, a group of anarchists paralyzed France. For anarchist theorists, the desperate lot of the urban proletariat and indifferent attitude of the bourgeois Republic required radical measures. Working for reforms was useless. Government was not the answer—it was, to the contrary, the problem. Anarchists shared Rousseau’s belief that man, fundamentally good, is corrupted by society. Once the shackles of the state were destroyed, men and women would associate with one another as independent and free individuals. Given their fundamental distrust of any form of government, anarchists were more hostile to Guesde’s dogmatic Marxism than to Jaures’ humanism. As literary critic and practicing anarchist Felix Feneon remarked, “It is well known that the goal of our Marxian functionaries would be a society where each citizen will bear a serial number. They prefer the complexity of a cheek to that of a living body.”

political issues, as well as find libraries and job centers. Labor exchanges multiplied during the last decade of the century, largely owing to the work of Fernand Pelloutier. Journalist by trade, Pelloutier sought—in keeping with certain anarchist ideals of self-government—to maintain the independence of the labor exchanges from political parties. In 1892, Pelloutier helped to create the Federation of Labor Exchanges, with the aim of coordinating strike action nationally. A strike a year earlier that turned, horrifically, to bloodshed, was one of the impetuses behind this move to federate. On May 1, 1891, soldiers fired on demonstrators in Fourmies, a grim textile and metal industrial town in northern France. Nine demonstrators were killed, including a two-year-old child, and more than 30 others were wounded.

In the wake of this massacre, the Federation of Labor Exchanges decided to adopt a revolutionary new weapon in its struggle against employers: the general strike. Rather than agitating for specific improvements in wages, hours, or working conditions, all of which signified accepting the existing system and working to reform it from within, the general strike was a refusal to reform the system—and instead was meant to deal a death blow to the capitalist system. Support for the general strike carried forward to 1895, when a single unified trade union organization, the General Confederation of Labor (Confederation Generale du Travail or CGT), was born, marking the climax of a long effort to overcome divisions amongst stubbornly independent unions. In 1902 the final step unifying the French labor movement occurred when the CGT and the Federation of Labor Exchanges united under the name CGT.

Although the number of trade unionists remained relatively small—less than a half a million in 1895—their influence was significant. The CGT’s aim was not so much to lobby for reform or lay the foundations for a mass political party, but “to build on French society.”22 The CGT adopted the new ideology of revolutionary syndicalism, which was less a doctrine or program than a hodgepodge of ideas and ideals. Revolutionary syndicalists rejected parliamentary politics as working within a system they preferred to overthrow via revolution. Thus rather than strikes aimed at bringing about specific improvements, the CGT espoused action that expressed its rejection of capitalism, including boycotts, industrial sabotage, and, ultimately, the general strike, which, its partisans and theorists fervently believed, would bring society to a halt. The CGT’s disdain for reforms meant that even the growing strength of the labor movement in France did not lead to social reforms through the political system that would have made life easier for the working class.

The socialist parties faced a similar dilemma. Not only did the state mistrust them, but the men they wished to recruit were also wary. Nevertheless, membership in the most important socialist party, Jules Guesde’s Workers’ Party (Parti Ouvrier or PO), grew at a relatively rapid pace, from 2,000 members in 1889 to 16,000 members 10 years later. While the labor movement looked to the writings
Anarchist thought had simmered in Paris since the Commune, but had always remained abstract. In 1892, all of this changed. In March, a series of bombings rocked Paris; although no one was killed, an anarchist named Ravachol was arrested, convicted, and guillotined. His execution transformed him into a martyr and inspired a young student, Emile Henry, to follow Ravachol’s example that same year. The bomb Henry planted at the Paris office of the Société des Mûres de Carmaux killed an office boy and four policemen.

In 1893, a bomb was thrown from the gallery of the France’s lower house, the Chamber of Deputies. Though no one was killed, the incident unnerved Paris by breaching the very center of republican power. The bomb thrower, an impoverished worker named Auguste Vaillant, was caught, convicted, and executed. A week after Vaillant’s execution, Emile Henry (who had gone underground following his earlier “deed” in 1892) set off a bomb at the Café Terminus near the Saint Lazare train station in central Paris. One diner was killed, 20 others injured. An outraged crowd caught Henry and took him to the police. The artisans, white-collar workers, and merchants who frequented the Café Terminus, people who had been sympathetic to the anarchist cause, were stunned.

With fear mounting, in December 1893 the legislature responded to the anarchist attacks by passing a series of laws, known as the “scoundrel laws” (les lois scélérates), that outlawed the encouragement or even approval of past or future attacks and forbade association with individuals who “intended” to be “evil-doers.” Undeterred, anarchist intellectual Félix Fénéon explained his approval of such anarchist acts. Henry’s bomb at the Café Terminus, he argued, rather than killing the innocent, was aimed at “a voting public” as guilty as anyone else for the Republic’s crimes.

Alone among the theorists and intellectuals, Fénéon did not stop at the propaganda of the word. In 1894, he turned to practicing the deed. In April, he ignited a bomb in the restaurant of the fashionable Foyet Hotel. Ironically, the only diner injured was the critic Laurent Tailhade, who had declared after Vaillant’s attack, “What matters the victims if the gesture is beautiful?” Tailhade lost an eye, but not his fervor for the cause. Then, in June 1894 an Italian anarchist, Cesare Salvi, to avenge the refusal to pardon Vaillant for his victimless attack of the Chamber of Deputies, murdered French President Sadi Carnot. The angry public attacked the local Italian Consulate in Lyon where the murder took place and sacked an Italian restaurant. In response, the Republic passed a third “scoundrel law,” prohibiting all expressions of anarchist propaganda, in June 1894. In the subsequent police crackdown, Fénéon, although he had never been charged with his crime, was arrested. He was among 30 suspects brought to trial in the summer of 1894.

The “Trial of the Thirty” quickly became a cause célèbre. Fénéon’s sharp wit turned the trial into a spectacle. For example, when the judge claimed that Fénéon was seen speaking to two other anarchists behind a lamppost, the urbane defendant replied “Can you tell me, your Honor, where behind a lamp-post is?” Ultimately, the jury cleared Fénéon and his fellow defendants. The bombings waned and eventually stopped after the trial’s conclusion, but they reflected the deepening divide between the bourgeois Republic and its critics and created an atmosphere of fear that was slow to dissipate. It is perhaps this fear that accounts for the overheated reaction of the nation to a new scandal that broke out in the fall of 1894, when a spy was discovered in the ranks of the army. An officer named Alfred Dreyfus was promptly arrested and court-martialed—launching what was eventually to become the Republic’s greatest challenge to date: the Dreyfus Affair.