

SHOPKEEPERS AND MASTER ARTISANS IN NINETEENTH- CENTURY EUROPE

Edited by
Geoffrey Crossick and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt

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Shopkeepers and Master Artisans in Nineteenth-Century Europe

edited by

GEOFFREY CROSSICK

and

HEINZ-GERHARD HAUPT

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GEOFFREY CROSSICK
HEINZ-GERHARD HAUPT
Colchester and Bremen, June 1983

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Introduction

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1 Shopkeepers, master artisans and the historian: the petite bourgeoisie in comparative focus

GEOFFREY CROSSICK AND
HEINZ-GERHARD HAUPT

THE SUBJECT¹

The 'petit-bourgeois International', it must be admitted, never achieved very much. In the fifteen years that preceded the outbreak of war in 1914, however, representatives of shopkeepers, master artisans, peasant farmers and their organizations gathered in international congresses to debate and, if at all possible, to assure their future. Congresses of various kinds at Anvers, Namur, Munich and elsewhere² testified to a growing consciousness amongst small shopkeepers and small producers in much of Europe, but these congresses were even more emphatically proof of the discovery of this class as a potential political force by others – conservatives, social Catholics, and le Playists amongst them. The petite bourgeoisie³ was in fashion, but the conjuncture of circumstances changed, politics changed, the petite bourgeoisie itself changed, and a collection of essays on this subject can now be presented as innovatory in a way that would have surprised those convinced of its importance eighty years ago. The angry agitations of the *petit patronat* in France at the very time that this introduction is being written, however, remind us that an understanding of that social group is of more than historical relevance.

The essays in this book testify to a renewed interest in the shopkeepers and master artisans of nineteenth-century Europe. This has partly derived from economic history's reluctant disenchantment with growth, which has stimulated a revisionist approach to the whole process of European industrialization, a concern to deflect attention from the dazzling but untypical manifestations of scale, factories and sophisticated technology and look instead at the industrialization process as one within which the less obvious transformations of small-scale production, urban services and commercial operations should be given greater prominence. The major consequence of this has been a new respect for French industrialization, but the ramifications have been far more widespread,⁴ and in Britain at least have

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received their main stimulus from social historians who came to understand the impact of merchant capital on older and by no means displaced systems of production as central rather than peripheral to working-class formation.⁵ The result has been to expose for attention the fate of these owners of small enterprises whose economic persistence was so striking and whose place in the world of popular politics and culture was so intriguing.

The attraction to the petite bourgeoisie felt by social theorists at the turn of the century is testimony to the ideological importance of this group within capitalist society.⁶ The very language with which it was described emphasized its role in the middle, as mediator, as the embodiment of those qualities that were less commonly found as the social polarities were explored. Thus could the petite bourgeoisie appear not so much as the conciliator of class conflict but as its living denial. Its implied role in the process of social mobility was but one element in that conception of the petite bourgeoisie that was almost always expressed in metaphor – social bridge, *classe tampon*, and so on – as if the social reality was less capable of sustaining the ideological weight placed upon it. Yet the objective significance survives in a way that this book hopes to demonstrate.

In the most limited sense, it must be stressed that in any nineteenth-century society resting on private property, most owners of such property were small and thus arguably described as petit-bourgeois. As such, the defence of private property required attention to their interests – there is a real basis to their ideological importance in capitalist society. The implications for social relations are many. The most important is the most obvious: shopkeepers were that section of the propertied classes with whom working-class men and women came into the most regular and daily contact. They employed them, they sold bread and meat and clothing to them, they often rented housing accommodation to them. More than that, the commonplace necessities of family ties (not just marriage, but the occupations of brothers and sisters, of sons and daughters), personal mobility, and the flow of individuals between wage employment and independent enterprise, meant that the relationship between working class and petite bourgeoisie was a real and lived aspect of both daily and lifetime experience for much of the urban population of nineteenth-century Europe. Less attention has been given to the social relations between such small property owners and the larger bourgeoisie, even though these were fundamental to the question of social stability. The detachment of small shopkeepers and small producers from the world of popular radicalism by the middle decades of the nineteenth century, for example, may be central to the stabilization of British society in those years. This drawing of urban petits bourgeois into a larger bourgeois universe involved active construction that makes the study of voluntary associations so important.

Shopkeepers and master artisans have been most visible in politics. They have perhaps been too visible, for it has led to an excessively political focus that this book hopes to broaden. Their political importance is no illusion, not just in the later decades of the nineteenth century when they received most attention, but earlier

too. They are there firstly in *events*, above all in the German and French revolutions of 1848. The place of these *petits bourgeois* in the events of that year emerges only as an incidental theme in the literature, which is sad because not only the movements, but also their social and ideological fragmentations, revolve in part around the social complexities of the popular tradition within which the *petite bourgeoisie* was embedded.⁷ It was a position expressed repeatedly in the great *événements* of French history – from the *sans culottes* of the first revolution to the communes in Paris and Lyons. We find them secondly in *organizations*, for they formed a creative element in the popular radical movements of early nineteenth-century Britain, the equivalent popular republican organizations of France, and to a lesser degree the resistance to absolutism in Vormärz Germany. One might see the summer and autumn of 1848 as the moment when the *petits bourgeois* of Europe abandoned their popular democratic faith and their part in the forces of progress, and turned instead to the defence of property and fear of a dangerous working class. The evidence is there, but the real shift to the right was a longer process that required the problems and the conjunctures of the later nineteenth century to provide organizational expression. As the national studies in this book make clear, there was an upsurge of professional and trade organizations and pressure groups amongst shopkeepers and, to a lesser degree, master artisans. With it went a new political orientation whose exploration forms the partial concern of several of these essays. The organizational expression of interests and of politics was weakest in Britain, but striking elsewhere, whether we look at the mass of Belgian *petit-bourgeois* organizations, the Ligue Syndicale and the broader shopkeepers' movement in France, or the organizations of the *Mittelstand* in Germany.⁸ To see these organizations simply as part of the pre-history of European fascism is to misunderstand the character of this shift to the right, but it also ignores a real *petit-bourgeois* involvement with the labour movement and socialism at the end of the century in France, Germany, Denmark and elsewhere.⁹ As important as personal involvement is the fact that early socialist ideas throughout Europe were strongly influenced by those continuities from an older republican and popular radicalism that had been shaped and maintained by *petit-bourgeois* involvement.

The third area of political significance is as a *political factor* in the struggle between parties and in the construction of political ideologies. From the closing decades of the century, many politicians struggled to redefine the character of class society and to reshape the political system that it produced in such a way as to put at its centre a policy to incorporate the *Mittelstand* or *classes moyennes*. This development required parties that saw the *petite bourgeoisie* as an important part of their constituencies in a rapidly changing political situation (the Centre Party in Germany, the Catholic Party in Belgium, the Radical Party in France). Parties need supporters. More than that, parties that in one way or another represented the existing order came to discover in the *petite bourgeoisie* a basis for social stability. With the politics came those ideologies of class denial – social Catholicism and its conception of moral fusion in Belgium, which in France mixed uneasily with the

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increasingly conservative syntheses of a populist republicanism, and the idealization of the *Mittelstand* in Germany.¹⁰

Shopkeepers and master artisans may have failed in their attempts between the 1880s and the First World War to create a world more congenial to them, but their long-term historical significance remains in need of exploration. This book is constructed to further our understanding of such themes. The intention is to provide both discursive assessments of the petit-bourgeois experience in the four main European industrial societies of the period – the national perspectives essays – and analytical insights into specific areas of that petit-bourgeois experience. These essays reflect the state of research in a still young subject, but we have tried to balance the book away from what seems to us the most regrettable aspect of that state of research: that the main work is political, and all too often the economic and social situation of shopkeepers and master artisans has been simply deduced from their political behaviour. Political ideology and phenomena are of course examined – centrally in Nord's essay, as well as in the national studies – but we have tried to mark out new areas and new questions. In other ways the balance of the book reflects the state of research: for example, the petite bourgeoisie appears all too often here as a large city phenomenon, though it may well be true that they were most at home and most significant in small towns on which little work has been done.¹¹ Farcy's study of a rural milieu constitutes an important corrective. Overall, though, the research essays are intended to open up new analytical themes, rather than simply to add detail to the national essays.

How far do the master artisans and shopkeepers who are the subject of this book constitute a single social group, perhaps a class? The question is not an easy one, not least because of the way in which studies little concerned with the finer details of social reality happily throw together the owners of small retail and craft enterprises, as part of a general petite bourgeoisie. Such an allocation has its problems, though. If by social class we imply a social group which can be distinguished from others by its specific productive relations, close social contacts, distinctive social characteristics, and a sense of class identity,¹² then the economic heterogeneity, social instability, and lack of political unity of craftsmen and small shopkeepers all caution against the automatic use of the term in studies referring to these groups.

One might almost see the two groups involved in different modes of production. For if craft production is the dominant characteristic of the simple form of the production of goods, distribution, on the other hand, is on the small scale a reflection of a type of economy which did not appear until the capitalist relations of production were developed and self-sufficiency came to an end. Marxist theory distinguishes even more precisely between the two. Whereas master craftsmen are involved in producing surplus value, in so far as they employ labour, small shopkeepers can only convert surplus value which has been created elsewhere.¹³ Alongside this fundamental point of distinction lies the not completely unconnected issue of the different extent to which the two elements were drawn into the capitalist

process, for, as research in this book and elsewhere makes clear, the artisanat was caught up far earlier and more intensively within the capitalist system, whereas the small shopkeepers resisted for longer and with greater success.

We must add to difficulties such as these the profound social heterogeneity within the world of small enterprise. As many of the articles here show, there was an irreconcilable gap between men and women out of work, who sought to survive by opening a small shop or a workshop, and the well-established traders and master craftsmen of a town. Lack of training, lack of capital, and the rapidity with which most closed down, all mean that the former group were faced with a constant struggle to survive and to maintain what independence they had. The experience, income and ability to plan ahead that characterized the more substantial small businessmen, on the other hand, allowed them to seek a bourgeois life-style and opportunities for social advancement for their children. Between the two lay the myriad of positions that could pull small enterprises and their owners in either direction, according to their trade, their situation, their location, even the period in which they operated.

The high rate of social mobility – or at least instability – which research indicates for this group must also have served to hinder the development of anything comparable with common class relationships. It is clear that, in comparison with other classes, a greater proportion of the petite bourgeoisie was born in another class; a greater proportion spent only a period of their lives as master craftsmen or shopkeepers; and a greater proportion sent their children, willingly or not, into other trades and, more importantly, other classes.¹⁴ This could not have encouraged the development of a sense of common experience, which we can see to have been equally limited by the distinctive position of the petite bourgeoisie within the overall structure of class relations. Structural definitions of the petite bourgeoisie are not symmetrical with those of the working class or the bourgeoisie, for whereas these last two take definition from their relation to each other, craftsmen and small shopkeepers, by reason of their relations to the means of production and the multi-directional character of their social relations, are orientated towards both bourgeois and proletarian positions and values. See, to take one precise example, the dual orientation that flowed from sources of finance and relationship with customers. While merchant and wholesaler credit drew them into contact with the bourgeoisie and its business imperatives,¹⁵ and many of the essays in this book indicate that, workshops and small shops were also plunged into a daily contact with working-class customers. As a result of all these internal ambiguities, there was little expression of a consciousness of class identity of the kind which arises from common economic interests, socially reinforced, and defined in opposition to those of other classes. Here, in the petite bourgeoisie, we seem to find a social group that hints at a class character only at times of crisis, when its very existence seems under threat. The contrast with working class and bourgeoisie, which continue to exist for historical analysis even when not active in a class-conscious way, is fundamental. For reasons explored here and in the rest of this book, its existence as a class

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'in itself' is very problematic. Massive barriers inevitably stood in the way, then, of its development as a class 'for itself'.

Nevertheless, the essays in this book and a wider historical literature suggest that there existed, within the nineteenth-century petite bourgeoisie of western European societies, a social phenomenon that was real, and, if not a class, something which seems at times to have behaved and acted as a class; and to be helpfully analysed in terms of class relations. Jürgen Kocka has developed a comparable argument in connection with the early nineteenth-century German working class and, in a way which has some relationship to E. P. Thompson's justification for the application of class analysis to eighteenth-century English society, we would suggest that the concept of class relationships has more to offer in the analysis of the petite bourgeoisie than does that of class identity.¹⁶

In many ways, the answer to the reservations outlined above lies in a reading of the essays in this book, but we would offer a number of points which weaken the power of these objections to the notion of a petite bourgeoisie. First of all, the question of heterogeneity. David Blackbourn, both in this book and elsewhere, has quite correctly presented the German *Mittelstand* as a congerie of often conflicting groups which could not simply be made one by the idealizing words of political social commentators.¹⁷ This need to counter the mystifications of the *Mittelstand* ideal, however, may have led historians to over-emphasize the differences that separated master artisans from small shopkeepers. The boundary between the two groups was both indistinct and often crossed. It was not only the craftsmen-retailers (such as bakers and butchers) who occupied an intermediate position, but also those craftsmen who opened a retail enterprise in addition to their workshop, or went over entirely to trading. The last often included many displaced artisans seeking to maintain some economic independence. There were thus overlaps of functions and movements between the two, but even more important is the way in which historians have exaggerated the different relationships to industrialization of the craft and retail sectors of small enterprise. It is simply not true that capitalist industrialization threatened the existence of craftsmen while it encouraged that of small retailers.¹⁸ The effect was far more selective, for while the consequence for some types of craft work and small shops was an improvement in business, prosperity and chances of survival, for others it was a far more precarious future.

Structural differences between master artisans and small shopkeepers thus need to be qualified, but the argument over social instability as an obstacle to petit-bourgeois identity remains an important one. No social group, of course, is ever homogeneous, least of all classes,¹⁹ but this does not in itself resolve the problem of whether a group marked by a considerably fluctuating membership can be seen as a coherent social entity. This is a major area where more research is needed, and not research that merely measures movement rather than interpreting its consequences. The question of mobility – whether geographical or social – has been too little considered in the historical analysis of class relations and class formation, and the case of the petite bourgeoisie presents it particularly forcibly. Common

characteristics surface above the social fluctuations, suggesting that much of the instability, both within and between generations, involved movement inside the world of small enterprise, of *l'atelier et la boutique*, and even more so inside the larger lower middle-class world that embraced white-collar employees. There is, for example, clear evidence of vigorous inter-generational movement between craft enterprise and shopkeeping in Bremen in the quarter century before the First World War;²⁰ much career instability among artisans took them into retailing, especially, but by no means exclusively, in old age; and, as some of the essays below indicate, it became increasingly common for shopkeepers and master artisans to seek white-collar careers for their children in order to keep them within an occupational group of comparable status. Indeed, anxiety about education, for which facilities and access were often inadequate, provided a common concern of the petite bourgeoisie in many countries.²¹

It is in turning to structural characteristics that the distinctiveness of the petite bourgeoisie, ambiguous in terms of productive and class relationships, becomes clearer. We find the unique feature of the petite bourgeoisie in the fact that its livelihood is derived from both its capital and its own labour. In the view of Bechhofer and Elliott it is the former that sets it apart from the proletariat, the latter from the bourgeoisie.²² Its roots lie in a petty property that it works itself, with the consequence that any labour it hires is on a very limited scale. One cannot fix this quantitatively, but a unifying and typical feature of the petit-bourgeois business is its low level of capital and the limited – in some trades infrequent – use of labour from outside the family. From the consequences of this specific, and in definitional terms fundamental, mix of labour and capital flows a further source of identity between master artisans and retail traders. Theirs was a particular form of enterprise, and a particular form of running the enterprise, which placed the family at the centre of economic activity, even in cases where some wage labour was employed.

This particular form of enterprise – and not just its family aspect – structured petit-bourgeois consciousness in relation to the wider society within which they lived, and developed social and ideological forces of integration within the petite bourgeoisie that surface at times, with different results, in all the societies under focus here. For petits bourgeois everywhere – shopkeepers and craftsmen alike – independence together with a tenacious concern for small property were the most powerful values, and they were often defended more against the ravages of the rich and powerful than against the threat from the propertyless. In most cases the petit-bourgeois way of life was an introspective and family-centred one that concentrated on the limited and immediate world around them. From this came their characteristic suspicion of the outside world, of the assumed hostility of the unknown, that turned them against the state as much as against the forces of banking and high finance. In a particular way, to which we shall return in this essay, it kept them radical, but it also flowed into irrational reactions that drew some of them late in the century to anti-semitism.

These points of contact with regard to structure, relationships, and social values

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serve to focus our attention on some of the special features of the petite bourgeoisie. And they do at times – above all in crises such as that of the 1890s – seem to act as a class. It is certainly true that only the organized were active, and that they formed a small section of the petite bourgeoisie. But is that not true of all social classes? What is most striking for us is the increasingly joint action of craftsmen and shopkeepers on the continent. The more we learn of this action – and it is frequently discussed in this book – the more we see the need to revise the traditional Marxist view of the petite bourgeoisie as an irresolute social formation, swinging backwards and forwards under outside manipulation and in the service of whatever political forces required it.²³ Its political position may have been awkward, even ambivalent, but in its pattern of development and political trajectory we see, in spite of the real qualifications outlined above, more evidence of petit-bourgeois identity.

THEMATIC PROBLEMS

In this central section of the introduction, it is not our intention to discuss all of the problems which are important for an analysis of the petite bourgeoisie and its place in nineteenth-century European societies. The most significant themes will, in any case, emerge in the essays that follow. In these pages we shall isolate several themes which offer a particularly fruitful way into understanding the complexities of the petite bourgeoisie, and the potential for new ideas.

The *economic* history of the petite bourgeoisie and of small enterprise is the area about which we know least, and yet it is in many ways the most important. The numerical expansion of small enterprise that accompanied both industrialization and urbanization is well-established, but economic history's fixation on the larger aspects of capitalist development means that we know little about the inner workings of this expansion. Growth in numbers does not establish the importance of the petite bourgeoisie, it merely poses more questions about it, above all when we remember the remarkably high turnover rate amongst small enterprises, the growing specialization and interdependence within the urban economy, and so on. Nor do we know much at all about the profits made by craftsmen and small shopkeepers, the amount of capital they invested, the income they earned.²⁴ Indeed, how clear was the conception of profit anyway, and did it develop differently in differing sectors, leaving many small owners to conceive of their return more as income, almost as wages for effort, than as profits as such?²⁵ There is much to be explored in terms of economic variables, but a valuable way into what characterized the economic development of the petite bourgeoisie, and the differentiation within it, is through the two themes of dependency and crisis.

Independence has been seen both by contemporary and later observers as the hallmark of small shopkeepers and master artisans. Their self-identity and so many of their social values revolved around that notion, yet closer economic analysis reveals the mechanisms that set limits to the independence of the owners of small enterprises, and it is in the ambiguities of independence and dependence that the

economic realities of petit-bourgeois business life can be valuably explored. All the national studies below have much to say on this, as does Behagg's essay on the small masters of Birmingham. Independence was undermined most of all by the forces of credit and contract. During the second half of the century – earlier in Britain, and in specific metropolitan trades like tailoring everywhere – independent producers became increasingly dependent on the merchant capitalists from whom they bought raw materials or to whom they sold their product, who might be the same person and who would all too often advance credit, even cash, for wage payments. In some areas of manufacturing the small craft business could resist, but in others it was reduced to little more than an outwork enterprise. Some trades (e.g. weaving, nail-making) suffered everywhere, but the size of town and the integration into a transportation and merchanting system that collapsed the effects of distance, seems particularly important within each trade. The rural artisanat might be relatively untouched by these problems, at least in those rural areas far from large manufacturing and urban centres, which explains the more rapid decline in Britain than France.²⁶ On the whole, though, it was hard to resist the competition that expressed itself through merchant controls and undermined independence. Small producers became increasingly dependent on supplying one or two merchants. From the 1850s onwards, more and more of Cologne's notionally independent masters were producing on contract for a single merchant (notably amongst tailors and eau-de-Cologne bottle case-makers), and in the eyes of Jeanne Gaillard the cabinet-makers of Paris came to look increasingly like *façonniers*.²⁷ Behagg's essay in this book shows a parallel process in the 'classic' small-producer town of Birmingham. Then, as large manufacturers grew, the small became suppliers to them, especially in boom periods.²⁸

In by no means uniform ways, then, small producers became dependent first on commercial and then industrial capital, tied by the superior competitive, financial and distributive resources of the larger firms. Small shopkeepers, on the other hand, saw their freedom of action limited essentially by merchants and wholesalers alone, who advanced credit and loans, often on condition that the retailer bought goods only from them. This was especially true in the setting up of enterprises – as the essay on Britain shows – but it was more pervasive in the supply of continuing stock. Credit and dependency – those were the methods many a shopkeeper used to trap his proletarian clientele. They are illuminating forces through which to analyse petit-bourgeois economic experience. The essential conclusion is that their enmeshing in the structures of larger capitalist business through financial dependence produced drastic consequences for both sections of small enterprise.

If 'independence' means that members of the petite bourgeoisie were not constrained by unequal relationships with larger capitalists for either the purchase or sale of their goods, and in which no creditor held a monopoly position, then very few craftsmen and small shopkeepers were genuinely independent as the nineteenth century progressed – less than 5 per cent of master craftsmen in Paris during the second half of the century, according to Alain Cottureau's calculations.²⁹

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The result was great vulnerability in times of economic depression or crisis. Large manufacturers chose to transfer a portion of their orders to workshops in boom, precisely because they could pull back into their own factories in depression. So these small producers were the first to be affected by cuts in production. The high debts owed by (as well as to) shopkeepers is a primary reason for the fact that their finances lacked the flexibility to cope with business decline or even one miscalculated transaction. Fluctuations were high, as a result. Indeed, what do the notions of independence or dependence mean at a time of high mortality of enterprise? We clearly need to distinguish between layers of small enterprise, but 80 per cent of all businesses run by women failed in Bremen in the last decade of the century.³⁰ Many an enterprise could seek to escape the consequences of dependence – though in reality they might only intensify them – by turning increasingly in on family labour. This was true of a substantial section of the petite bourgeoisie, especially when shifting conditions in an industry led to increasing price competition and the need to control costs. The self-exploitation of the family is well-known in shopkeeping, but we shall see later in this introduction the way that it became an important strategy for survival in threatened artisanal trades.

As this suggests, for craftsmen the struggle to maintain their economic independence was under way in the first half of the century, but the essays here indicate a later date for small shopkeepers. The tailors' struggle against ready-made clothing and *confection* was well established by the 1830s,³¹ while resistance by French bricklayers and joiners to *marchandage* (subcontracting) was victorious with its abolition by a law of the 1848 revolution. This remained a Pyrrhic victory, for it could not halt the advance of capitalist organization in the trade. Yet, in spite of the threats, it seems likely that before 1848 many craftsmen, at least in France and Germany, would maintain their independence. Once again, though, we ask what is this independence? When more secure, it was the centre of a radical social politics, an optimistic and even utopian insistence on independence. For the social vision of *sans-culottes*, or of Painite radicals, or of the French followers of Proudhon, was based on a general structure of small proprietorship and the guaranteed independence of producers.³² Independence was a positive and assertive part of a radical vision. By the Great Depression it had changed – as had the reality of independence itself – and was now stridently shouted as part of an increasingly defensive and conservative vision that varied with national, regional and occupational conditions. Independence became a homogenizing value to which all sections of the petite bourgeoisie could subscribe in the face of the real or imagined advances of capitalism.

Independence and our second economic theme, crisis, tie closely together. During the *longue durée* of capitalist transformation, periodic crises accelerated the process of change or at least permanently affected the position of small producers and shopkeepers. The effects on the petite bourgeoisie of the crises of 1846 to 1849 and the 1880s and 1890s were particularly serious, and the differences between them revealing. Whereas the Great Depression was the result of simultaneous financial and

structural crises, the middle years of the century might be seen on the continent as 'an Ancien Régime crisis'.³³ The general characteristics of the economic crises at the end of the century are sufficiently well known, and it remains the crisis of the longest-term economic significance for petit-bourgeois enterprise throughout Europe. Falling agricultural and industrial prices, credit restrictions, and increasing unemployment led to the bankruptcy of numerous small firms – but also to the modernization of a lesser number of others.³⁴ Firms able to produce more cheaply had a vital competitive advantage in this situation. While large firms sought to achieve this by intensifying the productivity of labour, such an option was seldom open to small workshops, let alone shops, and all that most of these could do was to resort to increasing self-exploitation. The differing reactions to the crisis can be seen in the at-first-glance paradoxical figures for Baden and Württemberg in the 1880s, where there was an increase in both the average number of people employed by each enterprise and in the number of independent proprietors with no hired labour.³⁵

Concentration of the means of production, mechanization and rationalization of production, combined in the crisis to worsen the situation of most craftsmen. At the same time, however, small-scale production (as did trading) remained a refuge for unemployed workers, who sought a means of subsistence within this precarious 'independence'. Indeed, existing producers then found the competition from large enterprise augmented by growing numbers of marginal producers at the very time of crisis when they were least equipped to cope. We can detect in these diverse relationships – concentration alongside the proliferation of marginal independents – a classic impact of crisis on small enterprise. For the immediate effect of economic depression has often been to increase the numbers of small businesses, with the flight of unemployed workers into independent activity. The expansion of small-scale production and trading in Cologne between 1846 and 1849 rested on this tendency of unemployed journeymen to set up on their own, quite unlike the new, better-placed operations founded with ambition in the more prosperous years between 1835 and 1843.³⁶ Statistics can thus be misleading, for the effect of depression was generally (though not always) less good for the more viable small enterprises, those whose ambitions ran further than the mere provision of a short-term income. Much of this applied equally to retailing, which was jointly affected by economic and structural factors in the late nineteenth-century crisis. The realistic small retail enterprises (again, in contrast to the petty operations set up in despair) were now faced with an increase in large-scale competition, from department stores, chain stores, mail-order operations and consumer co-operation, especially from the 1890s, while wage reductions and unemployment often produced declining sales. Between 1880 and 1881 the number of bankruptcies in the Lyons food trades increased by 63 per cent.³⁷ Indeed, the effects of this crisis seem to have been more severe on the retail trades of Lyons than on its industry.

The Great Depression seems in so many ways to have been a decisive crisis for the petite bourgeoisie, confirming the notion that deflationary crises have the most

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severe impact on existing petit-bourgeois enterprises, and thus perhaps prompt the greatest agitational response. In contrast, the pre-revolutionary crisis of the 1840s on the continent was marked by rising food prices which led to a fall in purchasing power for manufactured goods, most notably textiles, and hence increasing unemployment and intensified poverty.³⁸ Sales by retailers and orders for master artisans both suffered. In Cologne the latter were forced on to poor relief, while in Paris they joined workingmen's associations, if only temporarily.³⁹ We know too little about the impact of this crisis to be sure – it has been too readily disposed of in generalized terms as the background to the events of 1848 – but the contrast with the later crisis seems illuminating, confirming the importance of the coincidence of two kinds of crisis, conjunctural and structural. The combination of the conjunctural crisis of the 1880s and a developing structural crisis in the industrial and retail economy was damaging, and, for French researchers at least, a critical turning point had occurred for the position of small enterprise.⁴⁰

Beyond such general discussion of the impact of specific crises, a study of the petite bourgeoisie in economic crisis can take us into the precise inner workings of the world of small enterprise, yielding, for example, information about the chronology of change among craftsmen and small shopkeepers. We know too little about the order in which individual sectors were affected by a crisis, whether producer goods fell victim before the consumer goods sector, and whether in a 'modern' crisis falling agricultural prices and the need to maintain the working population led to the partial protection of businesses concerned with the production and distribution of food.⁴¹ How far did size of enterprise affect ability to cope with difficulties? As some of the national studies below indicate, did small enterprises enjoy a flexibility of response in comparison with large? We are clearly talking here about different industries, and about different types and scale of small enterprise within each. What of geographical differences of the impact of crisis – did place within the urban hierarchy have differentiating effects? A precise study of the chronology of a crisis as it affected craft and retail trades would thus help uncover their internal structure; the degree of resistance offered by various sizes of business, types of activity and geographical location; and the social cost in terms of intensification of labour involved in mastering the crisis. In a variety of ways, then, economic crisis may prove a powerful light by which to illuminate both the structural position and the internal mechanisms of small-scale enterprise.

We know more about the *politics* of the petite bourgeoisie, it would seem, than anything else, and two themes in particular need probing. According to the first of these, the experience of 1848 proved a turning point in petit-bourgeois politics, as a result of which the petite bourgeoisie abandoned its radical past, and had shifted inexorably to the right by some point in the decades before the First World War.⁴² The other theme is itself a revisionist one, explaining this political development less in terms of manipulation by political and social élites and more in the internal and partially autonomous evolution of the petite bourgeoisie itself, and this is an important theme in many of the essays in this book.

As the survey essay on Britain shows, the most significant period of petit-bourgeois political and social action in that country was the first half of the century, and it was precisely then that its presence was least exclusive (compared with continental movements later in the century) and most clearly rooted in a broader popular base. That can be said for most countries before 1848, where petit-bourgeois politics is often hard to separate from that of a wider populace that drew in journeymen and other wage-earners. Here was that *menu peuple* which shaped so much radical politics for the half century or more after 1789, above all in Britain and France. This co-operation often broke down and polarization ensued as the more proletarian, or at least plebeian, section of the populace radicalized in 1848. It is tempting to interpret this as the start of a process by which the petite bourgeoisie increasingly detached itself from democratic politics, but the break should not be exaggerated. There were still bridges that linked masters to journeymen, and, although they swiftly and in rather different ways became unstable in Germany and Britain (where they had been weakened before 1848), they were maintained in France by the radical movement and then party until the end of the century, as the survey essay on France makes clear. Indeed, in the grim years for the popular movement, between the June Days and Louis Napoleon's *coup*, the petit-bourgeois presence within – and frequently leadership of – the struggle for the social and democratic republic is striking.⁴³ From then on, the *petit patronat* defended a political vision that did not just place them on the French left through the nineteenth century, but was a central element in defining what the left actually was for much of that period.

Relics of this radical past – and not only in France – did not even disappear in the 1880s and 1890s when the petite bourgeoisie adopted new forms of economic and occupational organizations in response to economic crisis and political change. The shift to the right that accompanied this response was an ambivalent and distinctively petit-bourgeois one that retained vestiges, at least, of its old radicalism. As will be suggested later in this introduction, and it is confirmed by the essays on Germany and France, the corporatism, the anti-*élitist* and anti-state slogans, the rejection of the rich, the *gros*, and the retreat into local rights and self-administration, all survived to colour the now more fundamentally defensive and conservative politics. The *radicaux* in France continued to defend private property against the socialists, but their criticism of financial monopolies was maintained. Indeed, this over-simplifies the contrast, for that radical tradition of the republican people confronting the rich and powerful was one which fundamentally influenced French socialism, and linked it ideologically and iconographically to the petite bourgeoisie's own traditions.⁴⁴ Was this true only of France, or simply strongest there? Future research needs to give much more attention to the intervening years between 1848 and the 1890s, for explanation of the changing political attitudes, or at least allegiances, of the petite bourgeoisie in France, Belgium, Germany and even Britain requires that the missing links of those years be traced. We must, in any case, ask whether the tendency to drift to 'the right' is a subtle enough categorization. 'The right' meant very different things in different countries – orthodox

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liberalism in Britain, *Poincarism* and nationalism in France, social Catholicism in Belgium or the *Kartell der schaffenden Hände* in Germany.

A revisionist literature, above all on Germany, has refused to see this new level of petit-bourgeois right-wing mobilization on the continent as the result of manipulation from above,⁴⁵ and Blackbourn has much to say on this. The degree of ideological and organizational self-momentum of this awakening has rightly been stressed. While accepting this argument, we want to stress something different here, and that is the way that the petite bourgeoisie, easing itself from its radical past, became an object of official and bourgeois concern in all these countries from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Indeed, the concern for detaching the petite bourgeoisie from its popular politics did not need the stimulus of 1848. Two years earlier, in the French woollen town of Lodève, an application for a *Société des arts* for shopkeepers and artisans was well received by the prefect, who hoped that it might help develop a social distance between them and the town's workers.⁴⁶ As the century progressed, both the state and the bourgeoisie sought partially to satisfy the demands of master artisans and small shopkeepers, while also integrating them in official or bourgeois structures, attaching them to the defence of the social order, or to support for its adaptation. The motives varied, but the countries that introduced a *weighted* universal male suffrage (Germany in 1848, Belgium in 1893) found the petite bourgeoisie to be the literally crucial element. The liberal bourgeoisie in Germany saw the integration of these groups as essential to their struggle against the old regime, at least until after unification, while in Second Empire France attempts were made to recruit them to the side of the industrial bourgeoisie in the struggle against the older Napoleonic élite. The process in Britain involved a more general social concern to attach them to the liberal social order.

These attempts to reshape and influence the petite bourgeoisie had a variety of tools available. Beyond the economic pressures that we shall read about in some of the essays,⁴⁷ there stood the institutions of sociability in all those countries – the choirs, the ex-servicemen's clubs, the charitable associations, the *cercles*, all of which drew in shopkeepers and masters.⁴⁸ Industrial and trade associations could be further means of integrating them, with chambers of commerce bearing on the continent a quasi-official status that helped the process, although tensions within them over representation of small-scale interests might create strains. Only on the continent was the extension of the right to vote in chambers of commerce to small masters and retailers seen to be a means of obtaining their acceptance for the decisions made, though it was significantly the 'healthy' sections of the petite bourgeoisie that were wooed in this way.⁴⁹ Finally, political parties might also be used, seeking to unite bourgeois and petit bourgeois under a common banner. This met with a degree of success in Germany, at least for as long as the liberal movement could restrain its economic policies and focus more closely on resistance to authoritarian politics, but the strategy achieved even more success in Britain, where petits bourgeois became the work-horses of local political parties. Such institutional efforts were in all probability a symptom of a much larger process of cultural and

ideological diffusion than we know about at the moment, seeking to draw the petite bourgeoisie towards a more orthodox acceptance of a particular version of the social order. Education was an important element in this, and the article on Britain indicates a great deal of concern to use it for that purpose. The success of such efforts has been little explored – they were almost certainly more directly effective than simultaneous projects directed at the working class – but the increasing petit-bourgeois acceptance of the ideology of domesticity in Britain,⁵⁰ and Ehmer's argument about the artisan ideal of the family in his essay here, both constitute a beginning.

The state itself had to act in relation to such initiatives – over education, over chamber of commerce reform, and so on. More important was the increasing way in which the state, everywhere but in Britain, felt the necessity of responding to petit-bourgeois concerns and anxieties, or at least, as we shall argue below, of seeming to respond. In part this was a result of petit-bourgeois organizational reactions to states increasingly intervening over income and trading taxes, over worker protection, over social legislation, over compulsory weekly rest days. An exact analysis of the effects of fiscal, social and trade policies on petit-bourgeois orientation is still at an early stage – though the essay on shopkeepers and the state in Britain has a good deal to say on the theme – but we know that the state was rarely absent from the demands of Belgian, German and French organizations, whether as a force to be resisted or as a source of assistance: often both. The reasons for state responses are complex, and we shall have more to say at the end of our introduction about the comparative explanations for the way various states strove to appear, at least, to be helping small enterprise.

After all this, could it be that the unity and identity of the petite bourgeoisie was the result of external forces, as if it owed its existence to the solicitous attentions of a bourgeoisie and (perhaps 'or') a state concerned to find allies in the struggle against the working class? In this perspective, is the petite bourgeoisie what Bourdieu calls *une classe objet*, one that takes its identity and almost its very existence from the cultural and ideological definitions of them imposed by another, dominant class?⁵¹ Bourdieu's conception is an interesting one, but that is not our intention. Our concern is to raise the theme of the tension between some supposedly autonomous process of petit-bourgeois social and ideological development on the one hand, and on the other, the manipulative efforts of bourgeois and at times aristocratic élites to draw the petite bourgeoisie into a greater conformity with the norms or aspirations of the social order that they sought to defend. It is to the interaction of the two, so little explored, to the generation but also the construction of the more socially and then politically conservative petite bourgeoisie, that our comments are directed, for it seems to us to be there that so many of the essays in this book are pointing.

The construction and social existence of the petite bourgeoisie do not, of course, derive exclusively from such political considerations. Nor do they flow simply (or even primarily, perhaps) from relations with a larger bourgeoisie. An exploration of