The Third Republic in France *1870 - 1940*

Conflicts and Continuities

William Fortescue

Routledge Sources in History

The Third Republic in France 1870–1940

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The Third Republic in France 1870–1940

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Series editor's preface

Sources in History is a new series responding to the continued shift of emphasis in the teaching of history in schools and universities towards the use of primary sources and the testing of historical skills. By using documentary evidence, the series is intended to reflect the skills historians have to master when challenged by problems of evidence, interpretation and presentation.

A distinctive feature of *Sources in History* will be the manner in which the content, style and significance of documents is analysed. The commentary and the sources are not discrete, but rather merge to become part of a continuous and integrated narrative. After reading each volume a student should be well versed in the historiographical problems which sources present. In short, the series aims to provide texts which will allow students to achieve facility in 'thinking historically' and place them in a stronger position to test their historical skills. Wherever possible the intention has been to retain the integrity of a document and not simply to present a 'gobbet', which can be misleading. Documentary evidence thus forces the student to confront a series of questions with which professional historians also have to grapple. Such questions can be summarized as follows:

1 *What* type of source is the document?
- Is it a written source or an oral or visual source?
- What, in your estimation, is its importance?
- Did it, for example, have an effect on events or the decision-making process?

2 *Who* wrote the document?
- A person, a group, or a government?
- If it was a person, what was their position?
- What basic attitudes might have affected the nature of the information and language used?

3 *When* was the document written?
- The date, and even the time, might be significant.
- You may need to understand when the document was written in order to understand its context.
- Are there any special problems in understanding the document as contemporaries would have understood it?

4 *Why* was the document written?
- For what purpose(s) did the document come into existence, and for *whom* was it intended?

- Was the document 'author-initiated' or was it commissioned for somebody? If the document was ordered by someone, the author could possibly have 'tailored' his piece.

5 *What* was written?

- This is the obvious question, but never be afraid to state the obvious.
- Remember, it may prove more revealing to ask the question: what was *not* written?
- That is, read between the lines. In order to do this you will need to ask what other references (to persons, events, other documents, etc.) need to be explained before the document can be fully understood.

Sources in History is intended to reflect the individual voice of the volume author(s) with the aim of bringing the central themes of specific topics into sharper focus. Each volume will consist of an authoritative introduction to the topic and chapters will discuss the historical significance of the sources. Authors will also provide an annotated bibliography and suggestions for further reading. These books will become contributions to the historical debate in their own right.

In *The Third Republic in France, 1870–1940: Conflicts and Continuities*, William Fortescue has produced an introduction to the history of the Third Republic from the German invasion of 1870 to the German invasion of 1940. Set within a chronological framework, Dr Fortescue's emphasis on major political and social themes provides a revealing overview of French history during a period of troubled national identity. This work also offers trenchant insights into the historiographical debates on numerous aspects of the Third Republic. Dr Fortescue's penetrating analysis of a rich variety of sources (including many translated into English for the first time) presents a cogent exposition of events and developments and of contemporary attitudes and mentalities. He reveals a society divided by conflict over a range of key issues, conflicts which often continued throughout (and beyond) the life of the Third Republic. This study will be widely welcomed by students and teachers of French and European history.

Preface

The aim of this book is to introduce readers, through texts from primary sources and accompanying commentaries, to eight topics that are central to the history of the Third Republic in France. Each section covering a topic is designed to be self-contained, with its individual chronology and bibliography, so that it can be used as the reading for a seminar or an essay. The book does not attempt to provide a comprehensive treatment of the history of the Third Republic – there is little, for instance, on economic or cultural history or on the French peasantry. Instead, the focus is on the major political problems, debates and conflicts, particularly those related to Franco-German relations, the defence of France against Germany, the character of the French Republic and of French Republicanism, Church–state relations, the role of the French army, anti-Semitism, Anglo-French relations, the role of women and the importance of the national birth rate, and the character of the French Right and of French fascism. The Third Republic was not just a regime; it formed a distinct period in French history. Apart from a brief experiment during the Second Republic (1848–50), it was the first parliamentary regime in France based on manhood suffrage. It was also a regime characterized by continuing political conflicts, which contribute much to the regime's lasting fascination and to its enduring significance.

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I would like to thank Professor David Welch for commissioning this book, Mr David Ward for his encouragement at an early stage of my academic career, Mr Antony Copley for his loyal support, Trish Hatton for her unfailingly cheerful and helpful assistance with my computer, Dr Julian Jackson for allowing me to use his flat in Paris, Dr Graham Thomas for advice on sources and for the loan of books, and my wife Clare for her continuing efforts to improve my literary style.

Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own.

The emergence of the Third Republic, 1870–1

The Third Republic in France emerged in the most unfavourable circumstances – military defeat, revolution, further military defeats, civil war and a humiliating peace treaty. These circumstances profoundly influenced nearly all aspects of French life, particularly during the first decades of the Third Republic.

During the 1860s the diplomatic situation in Europe was transformed by the rise of Prussia under Otto von Bismarck and the policies that he successfully pursued to create a united Germany. After military victories against Denmark (1864) and Austria (1866), Bismarck had in 1866 formed the North German Confederation, dominated by a greatly extended Prussia, but excluding the South German States. Bismarck then decided to persuade the South German States to join a united Germany by provoking a confrontation with France. His first attempt, the Luxembourg Affair (1867), failed, but his second, the Hohenzollern candidacy to the Spanish throne, succeeded. After the Spanish throne had become vacant in September 1868, Bismarck pressed the candidacy of Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen (a junior member of the Prussian royal family) and, on 2 July 1870, several Parisian newspapers reported that the Spanish crown had been offered to a Hohenzollern prince. Napoleon III and his government reacted to this news in a belligerent manner for several reasons.

Throughout the 1860s the Second Empire had been losing popularity, particularly among the French urban working class. In response, a series of liberal reforms had been introduced, but these had done more to help the opposition than to win popular support for the imperial regime. In a national plebiscite held in May 1870 a significant majority voted in favour of accepting a new constitution, but this probably indicated support for liberal reform rather than for Napoleon III, and in any case it made the regime more susceptible to public opinion.

Foreign policy reverses had also contributed to Napoleon III's unpopularity. French military intervention in Italy (1859) had alienated Catholics because it led to the absorption of the Papal States into a new Kingdom of Italy, while republicans considered that Napoleon III had betrayed the cause of the Risorgimento by not fighting on until Venetia had been liberated from Austrian rule and by maintaining a French garrison in Rome to defend what remained of the Papal States. During the 1860s, while the balance of power in Europe was increasingly threatened by the aggrandizement of Prussia and the prospect of a united Germany, Napoleon III in various ways alienated the other main European powers and wasted French resources on a costly and disastrous military intervention in Mexico (1861–7).

Faced with these weaknesses and failures, the Emperor, along with the Duc de Gramont (the Foreign Minister) and Emile Ollivier (the Prime Minister), decided to restore his fortunes by threatening the use of force unless the Hohenzollern candidacy was withdrawn. Initially, this policy succeeded: as a result of pressure from the French government on King William of Prussia, the Hohenzollern candidature was withdrawn on 12 July 1870. However, Gramont instructed Benedetti, the French ambassador in Berlin, to extract from William, as King of Prussia, an assurance that the candidacy would never again be authorized. In response, William refused to make what he regarded as a humiliating and unnecessary declaration, and from Bad Ems informed Bismarck of his decision. The famous Ems Telegram (13 July 1870) was not edited but completely redrafted by Bismarck so as to give the misleading impression that Bismarck had dismissed the French ambassador. In order to influence public opinion, Bismarck's version was communicated to the press (Carr, 1991, pp. 196–8).

Egged on by an outburst of chauvinism in Paris, by the bellicose enthusiasm of the Empress Eugénie (who was Spanish by origin), by unfounded confidence in the French army, and by equally unfounded hopes of support from Italy and Austria-Hungary, the French government decided to declare war on 15 July (although Bismarck did not formally receive the French declaration of war until 19 July). Hopelessly unprepared for the magnitude of the task confronting it, the French army lost a series of engagements at Wissembourg (4 August), Forbach and Froeschwiller (6 August). Marshal MacMahon, the senior French commander, decided to concentrate most of his forces, known as the Army of Châlons, in and around the small town of Sedan, where almost immediately on 31 August they were encircled by superior German forces. Outnumbered, lacking adequate supplies of ammunition and food, burdened with large numbers of wounded, and almost entirely within range of German artillery fire, the French position was hopeless. After a day's fighting, Napoleon III, who had unwisely left Saint Cloud to join his army on 28 July, decided to surrender.

Document 1.1 The French Defeat at Sedan (1 September 1870)

The interior of Sedan and the approaches to the town were in an indescribable state: the gates of the town were obstructed with carts, waggons, cannon and all the 'impedimenta' and débris of a routed army. Bands of soldiers, without rifles or equipment, constantly rushed forward, throwing themselves into the town. At the drawbridges the congestion was terrible, with some unfortunate soldiers being crushed to death. Cavalrymen were dragged by their horses through the crowd with their stomachs on the ground. Ammunition carts passed by at the gallop, cutting a path through the panic-stricken masses. The few soldiers who had retained some reserve of energy seemed to use it only to accuse and to curse: 'We have been betrayed!', they cried: 'We have been sold out by traitors and cowards!'

Source: E.F. de Wimpffen, La Bataille de Sedan. *Paris: A. Le Chevalier. 1872, p. 57*

General de Wimpffen had been recalled from Algeria, where he had been serving as governor of Oran, to replace the general commanding the French troops defeated at Froeschwiller. He joined the Army of Châlons on 30 August with instructions from the Minister of War in Paris to take command if Marshal MacMahon should be incapacitated. Around six in the morning of 1 September MacMahon was severely wounded, but he passed his command to General Ducrot, and it was not until approximately four hours later that Wimpffen was confirmed in his command. He tried to organize break-outs without success, and then offered his resignation to Napoleon III. The Emperor declined it and instead insisted that Wimpffen should negotiate the surrender of the army to the Germans.

In the passage quoted, Wimpffen was obviously anxious to confirm that the situation at Sedan was hopeless. He was also anxious to attribute blame for the disaster, and he pointed the finger at Napoleon III as '*le grand coupable*' (Wimpffen, 1872, p. 44). As active head of the regime, as ultimately responsible for the French declaration of war and as an interfering presence on the battlefield at Sedan, Napoleon III must bear a heavy responsibility for the catastrophe. However, the Franco-Prussian War also revealed major deficiencies in the French army.

The art of warfare had recently been revolutionized by the development of breech-loading rifles and artillery and by the possibilities provided by railways for the rapid concentration and supply of mass armies. Prussia had already demonstrated this in the war against Austria of 1866. The French army had benefited from reforms and improvements: a law of January 1868 introduced a five-year term of military service, followed by a further five years in the reserve; plans were drawn up for a new militia (*garde mobile*), but were not implemented outside the Paris region for political and financial reasons; and new weapons were brought into service, the *chassepot* (a breech-loading rifle) and the *mitrailleuse* (an early form of machine-gun). However, the French had not mastered the military use of railways and their mobilization was a shambles; the standard of education and training of most officers and men was well below that of their German counterparts; the German artillery and supply services were better than those of the French; and, unlike the Prussians, the French had no general staff to keep commanders in the field supplied with a regular flow of information and advice. The failure at Sedan was not just that of an army, but of a whole system.

Document 1.2 The French Surrender at Sedan (2 September 1870)

General de Wimpffen began by presenting to General von Moltke the Emperor's letter which empowered him to negotiate the terms of the surrender. General Moltke spoke first and, while acknowledging the bravery with which the French army had fought during the day, he stated that, since the war threatened to continue, the King of Prussia had considered it necessary to reduce as much as possible the forces with which France could oppose him. Consequently, he insisted as a condition for the surrender that the French

troops should hand over their arms, and that the entire army should become prisoners of war, with only the officers being allowed to retain their swords, horses and personal possessions. General de Wimpffen observed that these terms seemed very severe, that they would humiliate the army and France, and that, instead of leading towards the peace treaty which everyone wanted signed as soon as possible, they could result only in prolonging the war and in pushing France towards more obstinate resistance. He requested that the French army should be allowed to leave Sedan with its weapons and equipment, and that the officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers should be free to return to France while promising on their word of honour not to bear arms against Germany again as long as the war lasted.

Count von Bismarck then intervened. He said that the King of Prussia had too much esteem for the French nation to think of humiliating the French army; that there was nothing humiliating in the terms presented; that French ill-will towards Germany had been known for a long time and that it had erupted in the present circumstances in the most unfortunate manner for his country; that Germany had been provoked in this war; that it had unsuccessfully attempted to avoid the war by making all the concessions consistent with the maintenance of its dignity; that for two centuries the aggressive character of the French had disturbed the peace of Europe; that Germany had to protect herself against similar aggression in the future; that, in order to sustain the current war, Germany had had to shoulder the heaviest sacrifices, which it would be impossible for Germany to repeat often, and that, consequently, it was necessary for Germany to acquire material guarantees for peace in the future; that these guarantees would be found by making it impossible for France to start the war again easily; that he did not doubt that all the officers would faithfully observe any engagement which they might make, but that he could not have the same confidence in the word of non-commissioned officers and soldiers; that once they had returned home, their promises would be circumvented; that it would be said that they had been disposed of without their consent; that they were not obliged to keep a promise which they had not given, which they certainly would not have given, etc.; and that even if the French government had the scruples not to reintegrate them in the army, they could not remain inactive in the midst of a movement of national defence, and that they would form an excellent nucleus or at least instructors for the organization of the military forces of the country.

General de Wimpffen replied. He said that he had the highest opinion of the French soldier's respect for an engagement taken either by himself, or on his behalf by his commanders; that no nation was more appreciative than the French of noble sentiments and distinguished conduct; that Prussia, in showing herself to be generous in the present situation where it was the stronger, would do more for the maintenance of peace in the future, for the appeasing of old grudges and the establishment of a genuine regard for two neighbours which were made to respect each other, than in being excessively preoccupied in

searching for material guarantees. He then based his argument on the past, maintaining that France had always treated Prussia generously, and that France had a right to expect a certain reciprocity of goodwill.

Source: 'Sedan et Wilhelmshöhe', La Revue de Paris*, 15 October 1929, pp. 857–9*

This is a record made of the exchanges between General de Wimpffen (the French army commander), General von Moltke (the German army commander) and Count von Bismarck (Chancellor of the North German Confederation) when they first met late in the evening of 1 September 1870 to begin negotiations for a French surrender. One of the French negotiators, General de Castelnau, recorded what was said.

The exchanges are interesting for what they reveal about French and German attitudes at this crucial moment and, in particular, about Bismarck's intentions towards France. The German terms of surrender were no less severe than might reasonably have been expected, and, indeed, for Napoleon III (honourable confinement in the German palace of Wilhelmshöhe for six and a half months) and for French officers (allowed to retain their personal weapons, horses and possessions), they were arguably quite generous. In contrast, the French proposal, that the French forces in Sedan should be allowed to leave with their weapons and equipment and just a promise not to rejoin the war against Germany, was quite unrealistic and unacceptable. As Moltke pointed out, the conditions of surrender had been set by the King of Prussia, not by Bismarck or himself, and the French were not in a position to bargain – 82,000 exhausted, demoralized and ill-equipped French troops were trapped in Sedan by a formidable German army approximately 230,000 strong. In arguing that generous treatment of defeated France by Germany was the best long-term basis for peaceful and cordial relations between the two countries, Wimpffen was on firmer ground. However, as this text illustrates, Bismarck regarded France as an inherently aggressive power from which Germany would need protection in the future. Hence his insistence on material guarantees, which would soon be translated into demands for territorial concessions.

Sedan was a watershed. It represented a colossal military defeat for France. For the loss of 9,000 officers and men, the Germans captured 104,000 French soldiers, 419 cannon and all the equipment of an army after just one day's serious fighting (Howard, 1968, pp. 222–3). This confirmed Germany as the dominant military power in Europe. With the German capture of Napoleon III, Sedan also meant the end of the Second Empire. However, Napoleon III surrendered on behalf of himself and his army, not of France, so the Franco-Prussian War continued.

Document 1.3 The Proclamation of the Third Republic (4 September 1870)

Leaving the Chamber [the Legislative Body, the lower house of the French parliament], we went at once to the Hôtel de Ville. The number of people assembled there was enormous, and we found the same fraternization existing

between them and the National Guard as elsewhere. The building had been invaded by the people, and all the windows fronting on the square were filled with rough and dirty-looking men and boys. Soon we heard a terrific shout go up. Rochefort was being pulled in a cab through the crowd by a multitude. He was ghastly pale; he stood up in the vehicle, covered with sashes of red, white and blue, waving his hat in answer to the acclamations. As he was slowly hauled through the crowd to the main door of the Hôtel de Ville, the delirium seemed to have reached its height, and it is impossible to describe the frantic acclamations which were heard. At precisely four o'clock and forty-five minutes in the afternoon, as I marked it by the great clock in the tower of the Hôtel de Ville, at one of the windows appeared Gambetta; a little behind him stood Jules Favre and Emmanuel Arago; and then and there, on that historic spot, I heard Gambetta proclaim the Republic of France. That proclamation was received with every possible demonstration of enthusiasm. Lists were thrown out of the window, containing the names of the members of the provisional government. Ten minutes afterwards, Raspail and Rochefort appeared at another window and embraced each other, while the crowd loudly applauded them.

During this time the public were occupying the Tuileries, from which the Empress had just escaped. Sixty thousand human beings had rolled toward the palace, completely levelling all obstacles; the vestibule was invaded, and in the court-yard, on the other side of the Place du Carrousel, were to be seen soldiers of every arm, who, in the presence of the people, removed the cartridges from their guns, and who were greeted by the cries, 'Long live the nation!' 'Down with the Bonapartes!' 'To Berlin!' etc. During all of this time there was no pillage, no havoc, no destruction of property, and the crowd soon retired, leaving the palace under the protection of the National Guard.

Source: E.B.Washburne, Recollections of a Minister to France, 1869–1877. *New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1887, I, pp. 107–9*

The news of the surrender at Sedan reached Paris during the night of 3–4 September 1870. Large crowds began to gather, particularly around the Palais Bourbon where the Legislative Body met. During the morning of 4 September Adolphe Thiers, an opposition Paris deputy, proposed that the Legislative Body should declare the throne vacant, dismiss the existing government, form a new government commission, attempt to secure an armistice from the Germans, and convoke a new national parliament. However, a crowd invasion of the Palais Bourbon suspended parliamentary debates, whereupon a group of republican deputies headed by Jules Favre and Jules Simon led the crowd to the Hôtel de Ville (the Paris town hall), where in the afternoon of Sunday, 4 September the Third Republic was proclaimed. At the same time, a crowd invaded the Tuileries Palace, compelling the Empress Eugénie (Napoleon III's wife, who was acting as regent) to flee to England.

Washburne was the American Minister at Paris, representing both a republic and an administration which had recently won a civil war. With an American friend, he

personally and favourably observed the events he described. The huge size of the crowds was an indication of the unpopularity of the Second Empire among most Parisians, which the results of the general parliamentary election of May 1869 had already demonstrated. This hostile attitude to the Empire was shared by most members of the Paris National Guard, a part-time civilian militia responsible for maintaining order in Paris. This helps to explain why the 'revolution' of 4 September was achieved with virtually no violence to life or property.

After the demise of the Second Republic (1848–52), republicanism had gradually re-emerged in France from the late 1850s, and by 1870 approximately thirty republicans sat in the Legislative Body, representing Paris and other large cities. This group of republican deputies, particularly those representing Paris, seized the initiative in proclaiming the Third Republic.

The republican deputies, though, were divided: some belonged to the 1848 generation (Emmanuel Arago, Jules Favre, François Raspail), while Léon Gambetta and Henri Rochefort (just released from prison by the crowd, hence his pallor) were younger and, together with Raspail, more radical. In the Government of National Defence, which was formed late in the afternoon of 4 September, Gambetta became Minister of the Interior, but moderate republicans predominated – Jules Favre (Foreign Affairs), Adolphe Crémieux (Justice), Ernest Picard (Finance) and Jules Simon (Education and Religion) – and another moderate republican, Etienne Arago, was appointed mayor of Paris.

Document 1.4 Gambetta and National Defence

PROCLAMATION TO THE ARMY

Tours, 9 October 1870

Soldiers,

I have left Paris to be your Minister of War. In the circumstances in which we find ourselves, I have decided to abandon usual procedures. I want to give you army commanders who are young, active, capable, intelligent and vigorous, so as to repeat the prodigious achievements of 1792. To achieve this, I unhesitatingly break with customary administrative traditions.

On your part, soldiers, I have an imperious duty to demand of you. There is no need to ask the sons of France to be courageous and determined; but if you are the bravest soldiers in the world, you must also be the most disciplined! This is the price of victory! It is therefore for the salvation of everybody that I order corps commanders to punish with the utmost rigour all infractions of regulations. You will know, I am sure, how to spare the councils of war their painful duties.

Soldiers, national guardsmen, irregular forces, and all of you who have taken up arms for the honour of France, forget the diversity of your origins and the differences in your status which tend to undermine your solidarity. You belong to one and the same army, the army of France, and you will march in step towards victory together!

Firmly banish the weaknesses which have been able, at certain moments, to affect your spirits, and loudly repeat that, defended by your heroism, the Republic is invincible!

Member of the Government of National Defence and Minister of War,
Léon Gambetta

Source: J. Reinach (ed.), Dépêches, circulaires, décrets, proclamations et discours de Léon Gambetta. *Paris: G. Charpentier. 1886 and 1891, I, pp. 45–6*

After Sedan, German forces advanced on Paris, encountering little resistance, and by 20 September they had encircled the French capital. Meanwhile, on 18 September Jules Favre had met Bismarck in the hope of securing at least an armistice, if not a peace treaty, only to discover the material guarantees on which Bismarck was now insisting – the surrender of several fortresses in return for an armistice and the surrender of the provinces of Alsace and German Lorraine in return for peace. Instead of attempting to negotiate, Favre rejected these terms outright, so the siege of Paris began. The Government of National Defence now found itself trapped in Paris with the tasks of defending the capital, maintaining its authority and directing the war effort in the provinces.

The son of an immigrant from Genoa, Léon Gambetta had become a radical lawyer and in the general parliamentary elections of May 1869 had been elected in constituencies in both Paris and Marseilles. As Minister of the Interior in the Government of National Defence he quickly emerged as one of the most determined proponents of continuing the war against the Germans. On 7 October he escaped from Paris in a balloon and managed to reach Tours, then the government's provincial headquarters, where he assumed the additional powers of Minister of Defence. Appealing to the precedent of 1792–3, when a vigorous attempt had been made to mobilize the entire human and material resources of the nation for the revolutionary war effort, Gambetta hoped to win the Franco-Prussian War through a movement of popular and national resistance rather than through the exclusive efforts of France's professional army, which had become tainted by its record of incompetence and defeat and by its allegiance to Napoleon III. Such a policy, however, required massive and sustained popular support for the war effort, which was not forthcoming.

Document 1.5 Bazaine and the Capitulation of Metz (27 October 1870)

Ban-Saint-Martin, 7 October 1870

The time approaches when the Army of the Rhine will find itself in a position more difficult perhaps than that which any French army has had to suffer. The serious military and political events, which have occurred far away from us and which have painful consequences for us, have shaken neither our morale nor

our courage as an army. But you are not unaware that complications of another order add daily to those which external developments create for us.

Food supplies are beginning to run out, and, within only too short a period, they will be absolutely exhausted. Fodder for our cavalry and draught horses has become a problem, which as every day passes becomes more difficult to solve; once our resources are exhausted, our horses will wither away and die.

In these serious circumstances, I have summoned you to explain the situation and to share with you my feelings. The duty of a commanding officer, in such circumstances, is not to leave the corps commanders placed under his orders in ignorance of anything, but rather to benefit from their opinions and advice.

Source: F.-A. Bazaine, Capitulation de Metz: rapport officiel du maréchal Bazaine. *Lyon: Lapierre-Brille. 1871, pp. 19–20*

A veteran of campaigns in North Africa, the Crimea, Italy and Mexico, Marshal Bazaine was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the Rhine on 12 August 1870, by which time German armies had successfully invaded France. Aiming for the fortified city of Verdun, Bazaine was checked in the engagements of Rezonville (16 August) and Saint-Privat (18 August), compelling him to withdraw to the less well-fortified city of Metz (19 August), where he was rapidly besieged by German forces. Attempts to effect a break-out were not pursued effectively by Bazaine. The surrender at Sedan ended any hope of the siege being relieved, while the capitulation of Strasbourg (28 September) came as another blow. Cut off from orders and supplies, the Army of the Rhine was soon reduced to eating their own horses. The overthrow of the Empire and the proclamation of the Third Republic further demoralized Bazaine, who considered that he owed his allegiance to Napoleon III.

In these circumstances, on 7 October Bazaine ordered his corps commanders and commanders of special forces to attend a council of war on 10 October. The tone of the letter was defeatist, and the council of war duly concluded that the Army of the Rhine could not last much beyond 20 October. In finally surrendering on 27 October, Bazaine arguably was simply acknowledging the reality of his situation. On the other hand, he surrendered approximately 155,000 men, many of whom had scarcely fought, together with large supplies of ammunition and equipment; and Bazaine never showed much determination to fight.

Document 1.6 Gambetta and the Capitulation at Metz

Tours, 30 October 1870

Metz capitulated on 27 October. For a long time Bazaine was involved in intrigues, as the missions of General Boyer to Bismarck and to the Empress in England testify. Bazaine concluded these intrigues with betrayal. He has given away everything. His capitulation is as shameful as that of Sedan, and the consequences are even more terrible than those of Sedan. All the army are now prisoners of war; all the equipment has been abandoned. This appalling

catastrophe has produced in France feelings of rage and exasperation, but also of resolution and energy. The country wants vengeance at any price. The country today feels itself to be liberated from traitors; it wants to go forward. I believe that it will be difficult to keep control of the situation if satisfaction is not given to this patriotic fever.

At this moment our country is sublime with grief and courage.

Source: J. Reinach (ed.), Dépêches, circulaires, décrets, proclamations et discours de Léon Gambetta. *Paris: G. Charpentier. 1886 and 1891, 1886, I, pp. 103–4*

In this letter to Jules Favre, Gambetta expressed what became the conventional wisdom, namely that, in surrendering Metz, Bazaine had betrayed France and was therefore a traitor. A military tribunal confirmed this view in 1873 by finding Bazaine guilty of treason and by sentencing him to death and to the loss of all military ranks and honours (a sentence commuted to twenty years' imprisonment, though Bazaine managed to escape in 1874, to live out the rest of his life in exile until his death in Madrid in 1888).

In contrast, Colonel Denfert-Rochereau, who refused to surrender the fortress-city of Belfort, became one of the few French national heroes of the war of 1870–1. While Bazaine had shown both a reluctance and an inability to fight the enemy effectively, and had, on his own initiative, opened negotiations through General Boyer with Bismarck and the Empress (negotiations which turned out to be fruitless), by the end of October the only alternative to capitulation for himself and his army was mass starvation.

Bazaine, therefore, was arguably a realist rather than a traitor and had the misfortune to become a convenient scapegoat. Gambetta's policy of national resistance may have been heroic and the stuff of myth and legend, but it failed at enormous cost. The provincial armies raised by the Government of National Defence were defeated, destroyed and immobilized; Paris was not relieved and eventually capitulated on 28 January 1871; the mood of provincial France became overwhelmingly anti-war and anti-republican; and the peace terms accepted by France in the Treaty of Frankfurt (10 May 1871) were probably worse than those which could have been achieved in September 1870.

Gambetta may have been wrong, but he was consistent and honest – he resigned from the Government of National Defence on 6 February 1871 in protest at the armistice terms.

Document 1.7 The Peace Terms

I trembled to broach the question of the conditions of peace; however, it must be done.

'Let us come now to the great question,' said I to the Count [Bismarck].

'I have already told you my mind on the matter,' he replied. (At these words I hoped he would not ask much more than in November.) 'I do not wish to

jockey you, it would be unbecoming. I might speak of Europe, as they do on your side, and demand in her name that you should give back Savoy and Nice to their rightful owners. I will do nothing of this kind, and will only speak to you of Germany and France. I already asked you for Alsace and certain parts of Lorraine. I will give you back Nancy, though the Minister for War wants to keep it; but we shall keep Metz for our own security. All the rest of French Lorraine will remain yours.'

Count Bismarck looked at me to guess what I was thinking. Mastering my emotion, I answered coldly:

'You had only spoken of the German portion of Lorraine.'

'Certainly, but we must have Metz; we must have it for our own safety.'

'Go on,' I said, waiting to know the whole extent of his exactions before I should answer.

Count Bismarck then opened the question of money.

'When I saw you in November,' he said, 'I mentioned a sum to you. That cannot now be the same figure, for since then we have suffered and spent enormously. I had asked you for four milliards: today we must have six.'

Source: Memoirs of M. Thiers, 1870–1873. *London: Allen & Unwin. 1915, pp. 106–7*

Adolphe Thiers, whose long political career had begun in the 1820s and who, as an opposition Paris deputy, had played a role in the formation of the Government of National Defence on 4 September, was invited by Jules Favre to serve as the government's envoy to London on 9 September. Convinced that the Franco-Prussian War should be ended as soon as possible to avoid further useless suffering and the possibility of revolution, Thiers persuaded the government to authorize him to tour the capitals of Europe so as to secure international support for the negotiation of an immediate armistice. During September and October Thiers visited London, St Petersburg, Vienna and Florence, duly securing the international backing he requested. However, Favre had already discovered at his meeting with Bismarck at Ferrières on 18 September that the price of an armistice would be the cession of Alsace and German Lorraine, terms which Favre had indignantly rejected, refusing to concede 'a stone of our fortresses or an inch of our territory'; and the military situation had continued to deteriorate from France's point of view. Thiers nevertheless had a series of meetings with Bismarck at Versailles between 1 and 4 November 1870. Bismarck repeated his demands and insisted that, if Paris were to be resupplied during an armistice (as the French requested), one of the forts defending Paris would have to be surrendered. This was rejected and the siege continued.

The exhaustion of food supplies in Paris, the collapse of serious provincial resistance, the beginning of a German bombardment on 5 January and the failure of a final *sortie* on 19 January all finally convinced the Government of National Defence that they had to accept an armistice on Bismarck's terms. The armistice, signed on 28 January, provided for national parliamentary elections. Rapidly held on 8 February,

these elections produced a National Assembly with an overwhelmingly conservative and pro-peace majority. On 17 February the National Assembly, meeting at Bordeaux, chose Thiers as head of the executive. Having formed his government, Thiers met Bismarck on 21 February to discuss the peace terms. In the exchanges recorded by Thiers, Bismarck repeated his territorial demands and claimed an indemnity of six milliard francs. He also revealed his irritation at references Thiers made to 'Europe', and reminded Thiers that after the Italian campaign of 1859 the French had had no scruples in annexing Nice and Savoy.

Thiers was in no position to bargain, though he managed to retain Belfort in return for a token German military occupation of central Paris (until the National Assembly had ratified the peace preliminaries) and to reduce the indemnity from six to five milliards. The peace terms, known as the Treaty of Frankfurt, were finally signed on 10 May 1871. As early as 1873 the indemnity had been paid off, resulting in the withdrawal of the last German troops from French terrritory, but the loss of Alsace and much of Lorraine prevented any permanent reconciliation between France and the German Empire formed by Bismarck in 1871.

Document 1.8 The Proclamation of the Paris Commune (28 March 1871)

The proclamation of the Commune was splendid; it was not the celebration of power but the pomp of sacrifice: one felt that those who had been elected were ready for death.

The afternoon of 28 March, in clear sunlight recalling the dawn of 18 March, on 7 Germinal Year 79 [according to the revolutionary calendar of 1793], the people of Paris inaugurated the entry into the Hôtel de Ville of their Commune, which they had elected on 26 March.

A human ocean under arms, bayonets as thick as the ears of corn in a field, brass bands rending the air, the sound of muffled drums, and among it all the unmistakable beat of the two great drums of Montmartre. These were the self-same drums which, the night of the entry of the Prussians [into Paris on 1 March] and the morning of 18 March, had awoken Parisians from their meagre breakfasts, with strange sounds produced by steel drumsticks.

This time the bells were silent. At regular intervals, the deep rumbling of cannon saluted the revolution.

The bayonets were dipped in front of the red flags, which draped the statue of the Republic.

Above the statue there was an immense red flag. The National Guard battalions of Montmartre, Belleville and La Chapelle had their flags surmounted with a Phrygian cap [a traditional revolutionary emblem, symbolizing a freed slave], recalling the sections [Paris administrative districts] of 1793.

There were ranks of soldiers representing all the elements of the army which had remained in Paris, regiments of the line, the marines, the artillery and

zouaves [colonial troops]. The ever-thickening mass of bayonets spread into neighbouring streets as the square in front of the Hôtel de Ville filled up. It was just like a field of corn. What will be the harvest?

The whole of Paris was there, with the cannon thundering at intervals.

The members of the central committee [of the Paris National Guard] were on a dais, with the members of the Council of the Commune, each wearing a red sash, in front of them.

There were few speeches in the intervals between the artillery salutes. The central committee declared that its mandate had expired and that it was transferring its powers to the Commune.

A roll call of names was held and then a great shout went up: 'Vive la Commune!' The drums sounded a general salute, the artillery shook the ground.

'In the name of the people,' declared Ranvier [Gabriel Ranvier, mayor of Belleville and member of the central committee of the Paris National Guard and of the Council of the Commune], 'the Commune is proclaimed.'

Every aspect was imposing of this inauguration of the Commune, the climax of which was to be death.

No speeches, just one immense shout: 'Vive la Commune!'

All the bands played 'La Marseillaise' and the 'Chant du départ'. A multitude of voices took up the words of the songs.

Source: L. Michel, La Commune. *Paris: P.V. Stock. 1898, pp. 163–4.*

Since 1789, Paris had had a revolutionary tradition, which had resurfaced in 1830 and 1848. The military suppression of a workers' rising in Paris in June 1848, the subsequent repression of the Left, and the military *coup d'état* of December 1851 which led to the authoritarian and imperialistic regime of the Second Empire, all represented severe setbacks for the Left. However, the lack of effective democracy and of civil and trade union rights, the expansion of the urban working class, due partly to Napoleon III's policies of economic modernization, and the rebuilding of Paris to the advantage of the wealthy rather than the poor all helped to produce a resurgence of working-class consciousness and militancy when the regime liberalized during the 1860s, especially in Paris. Hence the spontaneous popular revolutionary movement which swept away the Second Empire and proclaimed the Third Republic in Paris on 4 September. However, apart from Gambetta, the Government of National Defence was composed essentially of middle-class moderate republicans who were unenthusiastic about continuing the war and who wanted to avoid a social revolution.

In opposition, during the siege of Paris a radical popular movement developed demanding a vigorous prosecution of the war, reliance on mass conscription rather than on the regular army and elected Paris municipal councillors and National Guard officers. With the founding of numerous popular clubs and left-wing newspapers, and with the establishment of central committees for both the National Guard and the twenty *arrondissements* (Paris administrative districts), this radical popular movement acquired influence and organization.

However, the Government of National Defence retained power, overcoming attempted radical coups on 31 October and 22 January, refusing to introduce radical measures (even the introduction of bread-rationing was delayed until 18 January), and agreeing to an armistice on 28 January. One of the conditions of the armistice was the holding of elections for a National Assembly. The elections, which took place on 8 February, resulted in a massive right-wing victory, except in Paris and a few other cities. Consequently, a National Assembly with a large conservative majority and a new government headed by Thiers faced a militantly radicalized Paris with a greatly expanded and radicalized National Guard that had not been disarmed. In various ways the National Assembly and the Thiers government, both based in Versailles, alienated the radical popular movement of Paris, the final straw being an attempt to remove cannon parked in the working-class strongholds of Belleville and Montmartre on 18 March. This provoked spontaneous popular resistance and the lynching of two generals, whereupon Thiers ordered all military and civilian personnel of the Versailles government to withdraw from Paris.

The power vacuum thus created was quickly filled by the central committee of the National Guard, which assumed all official responsibilities and organized elections on 26 March for an independent municipal administration or Commune in Paris. The central committee of the National Guard formally handed over its powers to the elected members of this Commune at a ceremony in front of the Hôtel de Ville on 28 March.

Louise Michel, the author of this passage, was the illegitimate daughter of an aristocrat and a servant girl. By the end of the 1860s she had become a teacher in a private school and a left-wing activist in Paris. During the siege she continued with her teaching, joined left-wing clubs, and, dressed as a National Guardsman, took part in the attack on the Hôtel de Ville on 22 January 1871. Under the Commune she combined the activities of teacher, ambulance-worker, left-wing propagandist and National Guard. After the fall of the Commune, she was captured and sentenced to deportation to a French Pacific penal colony in New Caledonia. From her return to France in 1880 until her death in 1904 she was a propagandist for left-wing ideas and became a legend of the Left. Her description of the proclamation of the Commune captures the ceremony's popular militarism, republican symbolism, enormous enthusiasm and impending doom.

Document 1.9 The Paris Commune and Popular Democracy

21 March 1871

Paris, since 18 March, has had no government other than that of the people, which is the best form of government.

Never has a revolution been achieved in a situation comparable to ours.

Paris has become a free city.

The centralization of power no longer exists.

The monarchy died through this admission of impotence.

In this free city, everyone has the right to freedom of speech, without claiming any influence whatsoever on the destinies of France.

However, Paris demands:

1 The election of the mayor of Paris;
2 The election of mayors, assistant mayors and municipal councillors of the twenty *arrondissements* of the city of Paris;
3 The election of all officers of the National Guard, from the most junior to the most senior;
4 Paris has no intention of separating herself from the rest of France, far from it; for France, Paris has endured the Empire, the Government of National Defence, and all their acts of treason and cowardice. The intention now is definitely not to abandon France, but only to say to her, as an elder sister: defend yourselves as I am defending myself; oppose oppression as I am opposing oppression!

The delegated commander at the former Prefecture of Police,
E. Duval

Source: Réimpression du Journal officiel de la République française sous la Commune*, pp. 14–15*

Emile Duval, the proclamation's author, is a representative figure of the Paris radical left at this time. He emerged at the end of the Second Empire as a strike leader among Paris metal-workers and as a member of the Socialist International. After 4 September 1870 he became a colonel in the Paris National Guard and an advocate of vigorous and radical measures. He participated in the occupation of the Paris Hôtel de Ville on 31 October and in the anti-government demonstration of 22 January 1871. The central committee of the National Guard, of which he was a member, appointed him on 18 March to take over the Prefecture of Police. He subsequently became one of the three main military commanders of the Commune and an elected member of the Council of the Commune. An advocate of taking the offensive against Versailles, he was captured while leading a *sortie* and executed (4 April 1871). His proclamation emphasizes his commitment to direct popular democracy and his hope that the Paris Commune would inspire the rest of France.

In fact, the need for an effective and centralized command structure led the Commune to form a Committee of Public Safety at the beginning of May, and, despite short-lived communes in Marseilles and some other French cities, the Paris Commune did not serve as an example or inspiration for the rest of France. Nevertheless, a commitment to decentralized power and to popular democracy was one of the most striking early features of the Commune; and only in 1977 was the demand for an elected mayor of Paris finally realized.

Document 1.10 The Paris Commune and Socialism

The Commune of Paris,

Considering that a number of workshops have been abandoned by those who ran them in order to escape their civic obligations, and without any regard for the interests of the workers;

Considering that as a result of this cowardly desertion, numerous activities essential to civic life have been interrupted and the livelihoods of workers compromised,

DECREES:

The workers' federations are summoned to set up a committee of inquiry which will:

1 Draw up a list of abandoned workshops, as well as a precise description of their condition and of the tools and equipment which they contain;
2 Present a report establishing the practical possibilities of immediately putting these workshops into operation, not by those who have abandoned them, but by co-operative associations of the workers who were formerly employed there;
3 Draft a constitution for these workers' co-operative associations;
4 Appoint an arbitration panel which will determine, on the return of the owners of abandoned workshops, the terms whereby the workshops will be permanently ceded to the workers' co-operative associations and the amount of compensation to be paid by the associations to the former owners.

This committee of inquiry will submit its report to the Commune's trade and industry committee, which will be required to present to the Commune as soon as possible a draft decree satisfying the interests of the Commune and of the workers.

Paris, 16 April 1871

Source: Réimpression du Journal officiel de la République française sous la Commune*, p. 286*

The extent to which the Paris Commune was socialist has been a matter of controversy. In the decree on abandoned workshops of 16 April, the Council of the Commune indicated the limits of its socialism. The decree applied just to abandoned workshops, so the taking of all workshops into public ownership was not envisaged. It was planned that such workshops should be handed over to a co-operative association of the workers who had formerly worked there. It was also envisaged that compensation would be paid to the owners of abandoned workshops. In other words, private property rights were being infringed only to a degree and out of necessity, and co-operative associations of workers, rather then publicly owned and directed units of production, were to be the new economic model. Capitalism