

Armed citizens and defence of public order: the National Guard of Rennes during the July Monarchy in France

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During the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, France was swept by a popular movement that saw citizens of almost every town or village take up arms and gathered to protect the public order, threatened by massive uprisings, revolts and violence.¹ In Paris, the local administration rapidly recognised the newly created units, which became known as the National Guard, and appointed the famous General Lafayette commander-in-chief. For both the local administration as well as the revolutionary government, the armed citizens were an essential force for public order, since the army remained under the direct command of the King. In 1791, the National Assembly voted to include the National Guard in the constitution and adopted a law on its organisation.² The parliament's deputies maintained certain rules and customs, which had become an important part of the National Guard since 1789. These included the election of the officers by the soldiers and universal service: every man in the town or village was called to serve.

The new law applied only to residents paying direct taxes. The legislation of the first constitutional monarchy therefore restricted access to the armed forces significantly, excluding an important part of the local bourgeoisie and entrusting only those persons who, in the eyes of the parliament, had a special interest in the protection of order and private property.³ Nevertheless, the creation of the National Guard in Europe was revolutionary for its time. The state called upon its citizens to guarantee the public monopoly on the legitimate use of force.⁴ For this reason, the French National Guard presents an original and also contradictory case of popular policing. The principle of the citizen's service remained in place even during the Restoration and the return of the Bourbons in 1814. King Louis XVIII reorganised the National Guard, since he did not trust the army. He needed an armed force to protect his own regime and to assure the continuity of his reign.⁵ He followed up on the security politics of the Revolution and called only direct tax payers to maintain public order.

¹ Dupuy, *La Garde nationale*, p. 41.

² *Ibid.*, p. 142.

³ Carrot, *La Garde Nationale*, p. 119.

⁴ Larrère, *L'urne et le fusil*, p. 5.

⁵ Girard, *La garde nationale*, p. 21.

The following study focuses on this period of post-revolutionary monarchy.⁶ It analyses the history of the National Guard of Rennes following the Restoration era as well as during the July Monarchy.⁷ It reconsiders the role of the armed bourgeoisie within the revolution of 1830, the so-called *Trois Glorieuses*, and the first years of King Louis-Philippe's reign. On the one hand, the Orleanist regime pushed the idea of popular participation in public order service and used the National Guard as its primary security force, seeking to demonstrate its commitment to the French Revolution. In 1831, the government passed a new law on the organisation of the National Guard, the first one since 1791. On the other hand, Rennes looked back on an eventful history since January 1789 when the first conflicts between royalists and Jacobins broke out in the city.⁸ The need for a public force was most urgently felt by the local population. The first guard included every male resident, before the application of the law of 1791 resulted in a significant restriction of its troops. Only the *citoyens actifs* continued to serve public order, excluding all male residents who did not pay direct taxes. During the *Trois Glorieuses* of 1830, the inhabitants proved their commitment to the new regime and went deliberately against the old administration. Contemporaries observed how the armed citizens sought to restore customs and traditions dating from the French Revolution. They took control of the public space by arguing that the Guard, since 1789, was in charge of public order.

The term 'popular' is used analytically in order to describe the influence and relevance of the revolutionary tradition as well as the identity of the armed bourgeoisie. It serves to examine the rapid resurrection of Rennes' National Guard during the outbreak of the *Trois Glorieuses* and its service during the first months. In the first instance, popular characterises views and visions of how the guardsmen understood their roles as a part of their community and how they defined the armed bourgeoisie as an organisation called to protect public security and private property. At the same time, public declarations made by the King directly after his accession to the throne can also be defined as popular: Louis-Philippe underlined the loyalty of the guardsmen and described their service as a sign of the wide support his reign enjoyed amongst the French population. Finally, the government and the local administration reflected of how the participation of the local population could improve the armed forces— as long as those citizens were part of the bourgeoisie and enjoyed a solid reputation in the town. Here, of course, 'popular' meant quite the opposite of its original meaning, leading the political actors to limit the access to the ranks of the National Guard.

The study comprises three points. The first examines the reorganisation of the local bourgeoisie, questions the legitimacy that the armed citizens thought to hold and retraces the first months of military service in Rennes. The second section considers at the national level the institutionalisation of the National Guard by the government under Prime Minister Jacques Laffitte and later Casimir Perier as well as the instrumentalization of

⁶ The term is borrowed from Goujon, *Monarchies postrévolutionnaires*, see in particular p 13.

⁷ For an outlook on the National Guard during the Restoration, see: Dröber, 'Verweigerung und Autonomie'.

⁸ Dupuy, *La Garde Nationale et les débuts de la révolution*, p. 50.

the armed bourgeoisie within royalist propaganda. The third and last point is about how the 1831-law was adopted at the local level. This part looks at guardsmen seeking to influence the organisation of the armed forces, to change certain terms of national legislation as well as to re-establish essential provisions of the French Revolution and the law of 1791.

I. THE LEGITIMACY OF TAKING UP ARMS: THE REORGANISATION OF THE RENNES NATIONAL GUARD AT THE BEGINNING OF THE JULY MONARCHY

When in July 1830, a massive uprising took place in Paris against the policies of the regime of Charles X and the first riots broke out,⁹ the inhabitants of Rennes were worried about public order and took the initiative to reform the National Guard. A report by the Provisional Commander of the National Guard refers to a delegation of bourgeois infantry who went to the Prefect's house to ask for the reorganization of the National Guard.¹⁰ The magistrate refused the request and ordered them to return home. However, the delegation did not accept this setback: on the same day, armed citizens in uniform met at the Champ de Mars to find their former units and proceed with the election of their officers. In the following days, the newly formed troops improvised a parade on the square in front of the prefecture and the courthouse, after having prepared the ground: on the pediment of the two buildings, the national guards removed the white flag, symbol of the reign of Charles X, and replaced it with the tricolour flag, a direct reference to the revolutionary origins of their institution. At the end of the parade, they went to the military garrison and forced the commander to deliver 400 guns, showing their determination to ensure public order themselves.

The reorganisation of Rennes' National Guard was therefore carried out spontaneously, a phenomenon that can also be observed in other cities in the country, such as Lyon.¹¹ However, the case of Paris is different since only a few inhabitants took up arms during the *Trois Glorieuses* and the first companies came together only when the provisional government officially convened them.¹² In the Rennes' Commander's report, the bourgeois appear to be the actors of the revolution and regime change since they took up arms autonomously and found their former troops who had not gathered since the mid-1820s. They took control of the city's public space, organized a military parade and imposed the insignia of the new power. In addition, the national guards requisitioned weapons at the garrison depot and obtained supplies at the expense of the regular army, the purpose of this operation being to impose the citizens as the only armed force and to prevent the army from mobilizing. The latter, often deployed by Charles X's power for the

⁹ Pinkney, *The French Revolution*, p. 109.

¹⁰ Archives départementales (thereafter AD) Illes-et-Vilaine, 4 R 88, report of the provisional commander of the National Guard, Laguistière, addressed to the inspector of Ille-et-Vilaine, 15 September 1830.

¹¹ Trolliet, *Lettres historiques*, p. 25.

¹² Larrère, *L'urne et de la fusil*, p. 40.

repression of demonstrations, had acquired a reputation for brutality and complete submission to the monarchical regime.¹³

The Commander's report is of course to be placed in the historical context. Rendered in September 1830, when Louis-Philippe came to power, the reading of the events in Rennes is in line with the official version of the revolution. The King had indeed affirmed the previous month that the armed bourgeoisie had played a decisive role during the *Trois Glorieuses* and ensured the victory of the insurgents.¹⁴ At the same time, the meeting of the National Guard on the *Champ de Mars* in Rennes is well confirmed by other administrative sources and by the local press,¹⁵ but these sources do not establish the identity of the members of the delegation who came to address the prefect. Perhaps they were former officers who had ceased their activity during the reign of Charles X. Their initiative shows that with the fall of the king in 1830, the reorganisation of the National Guard became a matter of course for its members.

From an analytical point of view, the question arises as to what legitimacy the bourgeoisie thought it had in order to take up arms, despite the prefect's refusal. The Commander's report is enlightening on this point, emphasizing the replacement of the flag. The tricolour was abolished at the time of the Restoration in 1814 and replaced by the royalist white flag.¹⁶ By floating it above their parade, the bourgeois of Rennes did not only support the change of regime, since the new one had just restored the tricolour flag, but they recalled the tradition of the National Guard, created in 1789 to maintain order in the commune. During the French Revolution, the Parisian Military Committee, under the command of Lafayette, ordered the guardsmen to wear the tricoloured cockade as the symbol of the revolutionary nation.¹⁷ Only armed citizens enlisted in one of the local companies were permitted to adopt the new emblem, thereby being identified as agents of the city's police forces. Unlike the uniform, which was not compulsory in the 19th century, the guardsmen were obliged to wear the tricolour. Failure to do so carried a heavy punishment.

The tricolour was hence the symbol of membership to the National Guard. It permitted members to carry weapons and obliged them to maintain public order. It was an essential feature of the identity of the armed citizen and the role that he played within his home town or village. During the Revolution, guardsmen throughout France followed the example of the capital, adding the new cockade to their dress and taking up arms to defend the revolution's achievements.¹⁸ This was also the case in Rennes where members of the '*milice nationale*' wore the tricoloured cockade even before news of the formation of the Parisian National Guard under Lafayette reached the town.¹⁹ At the time of the

¹³ Carrot, *Le maintien de l'ordre*, vol. 1, p. 397.

¹⁴ *Journal des Débats*, 23. December 1830.

¹⁵ *L'Auxiliaire Breton*, 1 August 1830.

¹⁶ Scholz, *Die imaginierte Restauration*, p. 60. Girard, *La garde nationale*, p. 23.

¹⁷ Liris, '*Iconographie et épigraphie*', p. 283.

¹⁸ Dupuy, *La Garde nationale*, p. 66.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

fall of Charles X in 1830, the resurrection of the tricolour embodied the citizens of Rennes expectations of regime change: they sought to re-establish the National Guard and to preserve their right to participate in public policing in service of the city.

In this context, the inhabitants of Rennes also re-appropriated revolutionary feasts and rites. A police report of July 1831, a year after the *Trois Glorieuses*, notes that a group of ‘jeunes gens’ of the National Guard planted a tree of liberty in the city’s main square to celebrate the anniversary of the capture of the Bastille in 1789.²⁰ To the sound of a marching band, they praised the King, General Lafayette and proclaimed their liberty. The term ‘young people’ designated a certain social group among the wealthy bourgeoisie in Rennes that had played an important role in public life since the French Revolution. In 1789, young men, including students of the local law faculty, had created armed units to combat the aristocracy and representatives of the Old Regime.²¹

The police officer reporting the demonstration in the square of arms used the same term to identify the group of persons celebrating the 14th July. In his eyes, the demonstration was a sign of the lack of discipline of the armed citizens of the National Guard, who had gathered in uniform but whose feast had by no means been ordered by the authorities. The fact that the police were concerned about public security in light of the National Guard’s poor discipline must also be seen in connection with the unrest that still shook the country one year after the July Revolution. In Rennes, too, there were repeated riots among workers and craftsmen, protesting their poor living conditions and growing poverty.²² The republican opposition encouraged protest against the government of the conservative Casimir Perier, calling for political and social reforms.²³

It is questionable, however, whether the term ‘young people’ was not simply a foreign description, or whether the national guards in question actually sought to continue the revolution. There is no doubt that the young guardsmen remembered the Federation Day of 14 July 1790, when 15,000 national guards from the whole of France gathered in Paris, drawing some 300,000 spectators.²⁴ The armed citizens swore allegiance to the King and the constitution, and pledged obedience to the laws of their country. The intention of General Lafayette, who initiated the Parisian gathering, was to celebrate the unity of the nation and to demonstrate the strength and the discipline of the French National Guard.²⁵ It was therefore a ceremony to legitimize the monarchy and the new state, not a demonstration against the King or a call for political reform.

As a matter of fact, the Federation Day rapidly became part of the myth of the armed bourgeoisie, symbolising the emancipation of the third estate, the foundation of the National Guard as a driving force of the Revolution and the achievement of political liber-

²⁰ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 M 33, report of the Central Commissioner, 14-15 July 1831.

²¹ Dupuy, *La Garde Nationale et les débuts de la révolution*, p. 64.

²² AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 1 M 23, letter from Mayor Lorgeril to Prefect Leroy, 12 December 1831.

²³ *Le National*, 18 June 1831. *La Tribune*, 6 May/12 May 1831.

²⁴ Carrot, *La Garde Nationale*, p. 86.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

ty.²⁶ The example from Rennes in 1831 shows the transmission of the legacy of the French Revolution to the next generation. These 'young people' did not experience the fall of the Old Regime forty years before and only took up arms in 1830. At the time of the July Monarchy, they turned out to be devoted supporters of Louis-Philippe, a veteran of the Great Revolution and of the battle of Valmy in 1792. This demonstrated publicly his commitment to the legacy of 1789.²⁷ The national guards in Rennes fiercely protected the new regime against its reactionary enemies, who were most often loyal to the old King. Their main target was the local clergy. The Bishop of Rennes was a regular guest at the Jesuit seminary in Vitré, a town near Rennes, where he made harsh critics against the July Monarchy and the constitutional regime.²⁸ Some armed citizens, having heard of these speeches, tried to disrupt the religious ceremonies organized by the bishop in Rennes.

For the Corpus Christi procession of June 1831, gendarmerie officers supervised the ceremony so that the faithful could march through the streets of Rennes.²⁹ Their report records the presence of young people, recognizable as members of the National Guard from their uniforms, in a café on the route of the procession. As the procession passed the café, the group noisily began the Marseillaise, seeking to drown out the religious songs. The gendarmerie did not intervene, noting that the Marseillaise was no longer defended, as it had been the case during the reign of Charles X, and that the young people were cheering for the King at the same time. This incident was not escalated and the members of the National Guard in the café were not arrested. The following year, the entire National Guard refused to participate in the Corpus Christi, following the young bourgeoisie in their aversion to the clergy.³⁰ They consented to contribute to the maintenance of public order but declined to take part in the religious ceremony itself as it had been previously the custom of the local bourgeoisie.

By demonstrating a virulent anticlericalism, the armed citizens showed that, from their point of view, the service of the local population was linked to a mission that went beyond the maintenance of public order. At the time of the young men's protest, there was still a threat emanating from the members of the elder branch of the Bourbons, who had been overthrown in 1830, and their supporters. In May 1832, the region of upper Brittany around the city of Nantes was the theatre of a royalist upheaval, conducted by the duchesse de Berry, who had entered France some months earlier in order to overthrow Louis-Philippe.³¹ The Chouan troops then fought in some minor battles against the regular army and quickly lost ground. The great revolt that the Duchesse and her brother in arms had hoped for did not take place. Nevertheless, the event galvanised the national guards' determination to counter the influence of the clergy. In this case, popu-

²⁶ Many of the Parisian companies during the Revolution adopted the Phrygian bonnet as new symbol, representing the liberty, see: Liris, 'Iconographie et épigraphie', p. 287.

²⁷ Franconie, 'Louis-Philippe', p. 105.

²⁸ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 1 M 120, letter from Military Governor Bigarrés to Prefect Leroy, 12 December 1830.

²⁹ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 M 89, report of the departmental gendarmerie, 5 – 6 June 1831.

³⁰ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 1 M 120, letter from Military Governor Bigarrés to Prefect Leroy, 8 June 1830.

³¹ Pinkney, *The French Revolution*, p. 311.

lar policing meant defending the revolutionary institutions that were considered to guarantee political liberty.

Indeed, many citizens were ready to take up arms and to participate in combat against the royalist insurgents. At the Military Governor's request, a troupe of 200 volunteers was mobilized by the major.³² General Bigarrés wanted to lead the train himself. He ordered the troops to report the prefecture square at four in the morning and asked the guards to provide two days' bread and ammunition. The Governor praised the guardsmen for their honourable and brave service the following month.³³

II. APPROPRIATING THE MONOPOLY OF VIOLENCE: THE LAW OF THE NATIONAL GUARD OF 1831 AND ITS APPLICATION IN RENNES

In August 1830, Louis-Philippe held a parade on the Mars field in Paris.³⁴ On this occasion, all of the thirteen legions of Paris marched to pay tribute to the new King. The National Guard's support for the new monarchy seemed certain and Louis-Philippe was able to present himself as a sovereign close to the people.³⁵ The references to the 1789 Revolution were unmistakable. The presence of Lafayette, who handed out the new flags of the National Guard in the tribune in front of the military school, recalled the Federation Day of 1790, which had also taken place on the Mars field under the command of the General. Contemporary observers referred to the parade as a moment of unity between the bourgeoisie and the sovereign, describing the scene as the coronation of the King and the final act of his accession to the throne.³⁶ The August parade was the first chapter in a long and complicated history of instrumentalisation, resulting in a change of monarchical legitimacy which was no longer based upon divine grace, but popular sovereignty.³⁷

Meanwhile, the government undertook the large task of reorganising the Nation's armed forces. One year after the *Trois Glorieuses* and the spontaneous reorganization of the National Guard, government passed a law to regulate the armament of the bourgeoisie and making it a reliable institution.³⁸ The text stipulated that all Frenchmen aged between 20 and 60 were to be part of the National Guard. It also provided for active service and a reserve force. The recruitment councils in the cities across the kingdom were responsible for distributing recruits on both lists. The law also restored the election of officers by the troupe. However, the election did not concern the senior posts of the battalion such as commander or legion colonel, which remained appointed by the King. The

³² AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 1 M 112, letter from Bigarrés to Prefect Leroy, 29 May 1832.

³³ *Ibid.*, 8 June 1832.

³⁴ Larrère, 'Ainsi paradait le roi', p. 11.

³⁵ Larrère, *L'urne et le fusil*, p. 54.

³⁶ So the journalist Cuvillier-Fleury. Alfred-Auguste Cuvillier-Fleury, *Journal intime de Cuvillier-Fleury*, vol. 1: *La famille d'Orléans au Palais-Royal, 1828-1831* (Paris, 1900-1903), p. 272.

³⁷ Franconie, 'Louis-Philippe', p. 97.

³⁸ Girard, *La garde nationale*, p. 196.

text contained many provisions concerning discipline, anticipating different cases of disobedience.

The law allowed for greater control of the institution, starting with the composition of the active troops, the appointment of high-ranking officers and the stipulation of a whole series of punishments in the event of insubordination. The aim was to recruit only the wealthy part of the population, which was deemed safe and invested in a quick return to order. This law must be placed in the tense context of the early years of the monarchy when riots and revolts, such as the Canuts revolt in Lyon in November of the same year, regularly shook the country.³⁹ By reorganising the National Guard, the regime was seeking to increase its means of defence and to establish a monopoly on violence.

Thus, in Rennes, the recruitment council, chaired by the Mayor of the city, called about 1000 men for active service, representing 25% of all recruits. Compare this to an average of 18% for the country and 20% for Paris in 1831.⁴⁰ It is worth noting the continuity in relation to the Restoration, during which the same number of men were called upon to provide regular service.⁴¹ It is the case, therefore, that only a small proportion of recruits actually did their military service despite the obligation of all citizens to serve in the National Guard as provided for by the new law. The criterion for active duty was the uniform, which was very expensive and had to be paid for by the citizens themselves.⁴² From the perspective of local administration and the general staff, it was a useful instrument for maintaining a certain social exclusivity: the National Guard, far from being a truly popular militia, then represented a bourgeois elite and excluded an important part of the population.

Yet, the government and local administration maintained the public narrative of a popular armed force. In their view, this legitimized the Perier government's policy of public order and often harsh action against the opposition. Moreover, the authorities considered the National Guard's performance to be excellent. For this reason, the military authorities called upon its service at critical times to ensure public safety. In January 1831, Governor Bigarré sent a letter to the Prefect informing him of the desertion of several soldiers from the garrison in Vitré.⁴³ The Sub-Prefect in charge had already sent a Gendarmerie brigade and a line detachment to look for the deserters. The Governor approved this measure because he feared the beginning of a rebellion caused by the harmful influence of the Jesuit seminary that might affect the inhabitants of Vitré. For him, the agitation led by the Rennes bishop against the July regime had borne fruit, pushing recruits to insubordination and reviving ideological conflicts in the city.

³⁹ Moissonnier, *Les Canuts*, p. 52. See also for an contemporary interpretation of the events: *Journal des débats*, 8 December 1831.

⁴⁰ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 R 118, number or summary of National Guard census lists, 7 September 1831. Larrière, *L'urne et le fusil*, p. 130.

⁴¹ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 R 87, letter from Mayor Grenédan to General Secretary Kentzinger, 29 March 1816.

⁴² Archives municipales de Rennes (thereafter AmR), H 21, National Guard of Rennes, control over the officers, 1 September 1821.

⁴³ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 1 M 120, letter from Bigarrés, 10 January 1831.

He therefore wanted to convene the National Guard. He informed the prefect of the Ministry of War's instructions not to put line troops in contact with the civilian population without the presence of the armed bourgeoisie.⁴⁴ The company of national guards not only increased the number of troops but gave legitimacy to repression. The armed citizens represented the nation and the Guard made it possible to show the loyalty of the bourgeoisie towards the regime. This allowed the government of Louis-Philippe to distinguish itself from the regime of Charles X, who at the end of his reign had used the regular army and royal troops excessively to repress demonstrations. By contrast, the National Guard had played a diminishing role and had almost completely disappeared from the public arena.⁴⁵

The combined use of the regular Army and the National Guard in order to repress demonstrations and uprisings was accompanied by local ceremonies in which both soldiers and national guards were the main actors. In April 1831, Governor Bigarrés asked the prefect to clear the Champ de Mars, the site of major military deployments.⁴⁶ He planned a joint parade of troops from the National Guard and the garrison for the King's Day the following month. The aim was to highlight the participation of the bourgeoisie in the maintenance of order, to underline the fraternity between the two forces, and to show their support for the July Monarchy. The participation of the armed citizens at the King's feast served to affirm the unity of the nation, a sign of the political crisis into which the government, strongly contested by the opposition and by mass movements, had fallen.⁴⁷

Subsequently, the armed bourgeoisie were mobilized more systematically. In April 1831, Bigarrés commanded a 60-man patrol to support the garrison troops whose infantry regiment had just left the town for another mission.⁴⁸ Two years later there was a large protest led by the republican opposition in Rennes. In order to maintain public security, the Gendarmerie and National Guard were mobilized to patrol the area around the Palace of Justice until midnight in order to prevent riots and disperse the crowd.⁴⁹ The rally likely took place in memory of the Parisian upheaval during June of the previous year. During General Lamargue's funeral there had been violent riots; the army and the National Guard were mobilized to fight the insurgents.⁵⁰ This resulted in injuries and deaths on both sides, including members of the National Guard who had fallen in battle. The regime later used the outcome of these riots to emphasize the strict discipline of the National Guard and the loyalty of the armed citizens to the monarchy.⁵¹

The events had a lasting impact on public opinion in Rennes, as the following year a large crowd gathered to protest in the city's main square. The protest was peaceful but a

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 R 87, letter from Mayor Lorgeril to Prefect Villegontier, 4 December 1821.

⁴⁶ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 1 M 120, letter from Military Governor Bigarrés, 11 April 1831.

⁴⁷ Gießelmann, *Die 'Manie der Revolte'*, vol. 1, p. 105.

⁴⁸ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 1 M 120, letter to Prefect Leroy, 4 April 1831.

⁴⁹ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 M 91, report of the departmental gendarmerie, 12-13 June 1833.

⁵⁰ Bouchet, *Le Roi et les barricades*, p. 50.

⁵¹ Ibid.

local Gendarmerie officer claimed to observe that the individuals 'ayant de mauvaises intentions'.⁵² After all, some of the demonstrators were most likely armed. The officer expressly praised the members of the National Guard, who had reliably protected order by preventing riots. Their good discipline was a sign of commitment to the Orleanist regime and showed that the armed citizens were ready to cooperate with other armed forces in cases of imminent danger. This was also a result of their integration into a ceremony propagandising the unity of soldiers from all forces. That guardsmen and soldiers saw themselves as brothers in arms was further evidenced by societal rites such as banquets at which both the National Guard and units from the Army celebrated together.⁵³

III. HOW TO INFLUENCE PUBLIC ORDER POLICY? THE REVOLUTIONARY TRADITION OF THE NATIONAL GUARD AND ITS PLACE WITHIN THE LOCAL SOCIETY OF RENNES

The deployment of the armed bourgeois did not always earn public recognition. During Louis-Philippe's reign, members of the National Guard in Rennes were often threatened, insulted, attacked and seriously injured. These incidents showed that the armed bourgeoisie had rapidly lost its unifying force. Once perceived as a civic force and champion of the *Trois Glorieuses*, as had been the case at the beginning of the July Monarchy, the National Guard was increasingly assimilated into the Orleanist regime and perceived as a monarchist institution, rather than a popular force. Immediately after the July Revolution, armed citizens were attacked in public. In October 1830, a national guard, wearing the tricolour, was insulted by three passers-by who chanted '[...] ceux qui portent la cocarde tricolore sont de la canaille'.⁵⁴ The motif of the group was not clearly established, although the gendarmerie suspected the men to be supporters of the old King.

Another incident confirmed this assumption. In December of the following year, the guard at the town hall was verbally attacked, and the delinquent, a member of the municipal administration, loudly insulted the tricolour flag raised on the top of the guard tower.⁵⁵ The Central Commissioner expressed his particular concern to the prefect as he was in the process of evaluating a secret letter to the Countess of Berry. The address had been signed by numerous locally well-known personalities, including a prefectural office administrator. The letter assured the countess, who had arrived in upper Brittany in the summer of that year, of support for the overthrow of Louis Philippe's regime. The involvement of local government officials in this affair demonstrated the extent of the Carlists' influence, preparing the ground for a return of the elder Bourbons.

Of course, the Carlists were a minority in Rennes. But the repeated attacks on national guards were a sign of the conflicts that shook local society. They showed that despite the official propaganda, the inhabitants of the city never reached consensus around poli-

⁵² AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 M 91, report of the departmental gendarmerie, 12-13 June 1833.

⁵³ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 M 33, police report, 22-23 September 1831.

⁵⁴ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 M 89, report of the departmental gendarmerie, 24-25 October 1830.

⁵⁵ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 M 90, letter from Commissioner Couarez to Prefect Leroy, 4 December 1832.

tical questions. On the contrary, the members of the reactionary opposition targeted the National Guard to express their protest against the rule of Louis-Philippe. In their eyes, the armed citizens stood for the downfall of the hereditary monarchy and the overthrow of the rightful heir to the throne. In addition, the armed citizens had repeatedly distinguished themselves by their aversion to the clergy and their refusal to take part in religious festivals.

Physical and violent attacks showed that the armed citizens had lost public prestige. Some were even victims of attempted murder: for example, the hunter Delibon was seriously injured.⁵⁶ In June 1831, he was attacked by several men, one of whom was armed with a dagger. Delibon received a several stab wounds and was taken to hospital. The search for the assassins was unsuccessful and Delibon was awarded compensation of 200 Francs by the government.⁵⁷ The Minister of the Interior declared that Delibon had been injured in the performance of his duties. In another case, an officer of the National Guard escaped a knife attack thanks only to the help of two comrades who accompanied him on a walk in Rennes.⁵⁸ The Central Commissioner attributed both attacks to workers and day-labourers hired by the Carlistian opposition.

It was therefore only logical that the local administration was keen to avoid any influence of the reactionary opposition within the armed bourgeoisie. While in other towns near Rennes, the National Guard had been infiltrated by supporters of the elder Bourbons and the local clergy⁵⁹, the troops of Rennes remained loyal to the authorities. As a matter of fact, this was the result of measures taken by the recruitment council headed by the towns' Major. After the adoption of the new law in March 1831, the council got to work in order to address the recruitment lists. In June 1831, a group of 360 citizens approached the prefect to protest their exclusion from active service. They explained:

*Un ordre social fondé sur la souveraineté populaire, ne doit admettre qu'une exécution franche et loyale des lois en général et surtout de celles dont l'objet essentiel est de donner le plus grand développement aux libertés publiques; il doit proscrire toute mesure qui tenterait à priver une partie des citoyens de l'exercice d'un droit que la loi garantit également à tous.*⁶⁰

Thus, the signatories of this petition demanded the application of the 1831 law, stipulating the opening of the National Guard for all citizens. In an explanatory note, the mayor told the prefect that he had scrupulously respected the procedure.⁶¹ No complaint had been made within the time limits provided for by law. However, the Prefect maintained the exclusion, following the Mayor's arguments. It is possible and even highly probable that the recruitment intentionally excluded persons who served under the Restorati-

⁵⁶ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 M 502, letter from Major Longénil to Prefect Leroy, 16 June 1831.

⁵⁷ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 R 90, letter from Minister of Interior Perier to Prefect Leroy, 31 August 1831.

⁵⁸ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 M 502, report of Central Commissioner Couraez to Prefect Leroy, 24 June 1831.

⁵⁹ This was the case for Vitré (see: AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 R 88, letter from Sub-prefect Aubin to the Minister of the Interior Périer, 23 May 1831).

⁶⁰ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 R 90, petition to Prefect Leroy, 25 June 1831.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 9 July 1831.

on. Indeed, among the signatories were former officers of the National Guard of Rennes, such as Colonel Duplessis-Grenédan, who had been appointed Commander in 1814.⁶² Moreover, the Mayor noted that all signatories belonged to the Société de l'Amitié, an association known for its reactionary orientation.⁶³

Hence, the signatories used the government's legislation as an argument to claim their right to active service. They invoked the new law obliging every male citizen to perform military service. By insisting on the principle of universal recruitment, they defended the idea that the National Guard should be considered a popular force vital to securing popular sovereignty. Of course, the reactionary opposition used progressive ideas and measures of wider participation as an instrument to achieve its own political goals and to gain influence over the armed forces of Rennes. They demanded to be a part of the armed bourgeoisie, assuring to be all dressed and therefore already suitable to serve.

As a result, this established a political dimension to the National Guard: the notion of popular policing as source of popular sovereignty, a connection which the leftist opposition also made. The newspaper *La Tribune* explained that the armed bourgeoisie was a political institution and a new power within the state.⁶⁴ At the same time, Auguste Fabre claimed that every guardsman should have the right to take part in the elections for Parliament as a voter.⁶⁵ Hence, at the very beginning of the July Monarchy, the National Guard became the framework for political reform and the further democratisation of French society. The argument of the left was that the National Guard, through sacrifice for the community, proved its commitment to the nation and its ability to participate in political matters.

Three years after the first petition, another reached the authorities in Rennes. In January 1834, the Central Police Commissioner informed the Prefect that the officers François Hamelin and François-Adrien Blin, both respectively book dealers and commander of one of the hunter companies, had launched a petition in which they requested a reduction in service.⁶⁶ They argued that it had become too restrictive for armed citizens who pursued a regular profession. The Commissioner noted that the petition, open at the two officers' bookstore, was signed by 200 national guards, including members of the Hamelin and Blin companies. At the same time, the signatories called for the lowering of the electoral censuses, thus advocating for a reform of the electoral system which, to their view, should include all armed citizens.

The signatories were opposed to the unequal distribution of service charges among companies. Specifically, this request insisted on an opening of political participation, however limited. Note that the census for Parliamentary and regional elections had bare-

⁶² AmR, H 21, National Guard of Rennes, control over the officers, 1815.

⁶³ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 R 90, letter to Prefect Leroy, 9 July 1831.

⁶⁴ *La Tribune*, 1 October 1830.

⁶⁵ *La Tribune*, 2 September 1830.

⁶⁶ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 1 M 123, letter from Central Commissioner de Miniiau to Prefect Leroy, 26 February 1834.

ly decreased since the Restoration.⁶⁷ Moreover, some years later, the French government was confronted with a broad movement in favour of abolishing the census for all members of the National Guard. Launched by left-wing deputies in 1837 under the slogan ‘tout garde national doit être électeur’, the demand for political reforms had been very successful across the country.⁶⁸ Hamelin and Blin’s petition showed that at the local level, the bourgeoisie called upon to maintain order and insisted on the civic dimension of service in the political sense.

Hamelin and Blin were among the city’s leading figures and both voted for the Chamber of Deputies. They acted as advocates for those comrades who did not have the same privilege. The petition earned Hamelin the respect of the other citizens and afforded him a rapid rise in the National Guard’s ranks. In 1831, he was elected head of his company.⁶⁹ He was notorious for his involvement in the *Trois Glorieuses* for which he had received the July cross, a medal awarded to all combatants of the revolution.⁷⁰ He later succeeded in running for the position of battalion Commander in the 1834 election; five years later, he was proposed as a candidate for the position of legion Colonel, a position chosen by the King.⁷¹ In 1839, the outgoing colonel was reappointed but the very nomination was a victory for an officer considered close to the opposition. The Minister of the Interior, Thiers, criticized the Prefect for failing to prevent Hamelin’s appointment.⁷²

Studies of Paris have shown the local units support for political reform.⁷³ Contemporary sources revealed at the same time that the members of the hunter companies were particularly active in participating in public protest and pushing for the right to vote.⁷⁴ This was due to the social background of the guardsmen: the men serving in those companies belonged to the *petit bourgeoisie* and had insufficient income to fulfil the requirement of the census. It is more than likely that the situation in Rennes was similar to that in Paris. For the hunters, the National Guard was the only place where they could express their views and elect the officers.⁷⁵ In this respect, the notion of a popular force for public order took on its full meaning. This explains why the petition for the lowering of the census also contained demands for a change in the way that the service was distributed between the units. From the point of view of the signatories, service in the National Guard should be accompanied by political rights and the participation in national and regional elections.

⁶⁷ Goujon, *Monarchies postrévolutionnaires*, p. 230.

⁶⁸ Gourvitch, ‘Le mouvement pour la réforme électorale’.

⁶⁹ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 R 119, minutes of the officers’ election of the first hunter company of the second battalion, 26 June 1831.

⁷⁰ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 M 33, police report, 17-18 August 1831.

⁷¹ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 R 150, minutes of the officers’ election of the second battalion, 31 January 1831.

⁷² AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 R 90, letter from the Minister of the Interior Thiers, 19 June 1834.

⁷³ Larrère, *L’urne et le fusil*, p. 265.

⁷⁴ *Le Constitutionnel*, 13 January 1840.

⁷⁵ Larrère, ‘Les élections des officiers’, p. 464.

In June 1834, the High Command responded to the petitioners' complaint. Colonel Rubillon suspended daytime service.⁷⁶ From then on, the National Guard was only called for night duty. This decision followed the decline of discipline observed by the General Staff; recruitment had been less stringent for several years, which posed a serious risk to public order. Rubillon's intention was to prevent this phenomenon from worsening and to stop the National Guard service from becoming irrelevant. As far as political reform was concerned, the refusal to abolish electoral census led to a considerable increase in the protest movements throughout France and the fall of Louis-Philippe and his government in 1848.⁷⁷

IV. CONCLUSION

The previous chapters have shown to what extent contemporaries perceived the National Guard as a power close to the people. The study focused on aspects and characteristics that turned the institution into a popular force of order in the eyes of citizens, armed citizens, local administration and regime. During the reign of the July Monarchy, the armed citizens came together spontaneously, took control of the public space and abolished the insignias of the old regime. They expressed their loyalty to the new King Louis-Philippe by adopting the tricolour flag, a direct reference to the tradition of the armed bourgeoisie and the establishment of the National Guard in 1789. In July 1830, the citizens understood the revival of revolutionary symbols as a prerogative to take up arms in order to guarantee security in the town and prevent unrest. At the same time, it expressed the citizens' expectations of the new regime to preserve revolutionary institutions and to participate in securing the public order.

Rites and feasts held in public were further evidence of this and showed that the younger generation among the National Guard, who had not experienced the French Revolution in their lifetime, was particularly active in celebrating the revolutionary legacy. They resumed the feast of the Federation in 1791 and recalled the unity of the free nation and the loyalty of the armed bourgeoisie to the King. In doing so, they demonstrated their autonomous understanding of the role of the armed bourgeoisie as pioneers of liberal achievements. This was accompanied by the revival conflicts previously overcome since the French Revolution. By taking action against members of the local clergy and by engaging in hostilities against the faithful, the National Guards showed their willingness to defend the legacy of 1789 with weapons if necessary. This attitude was further confirmed by the volunteers the Military Governor recruited in order to fight royalist troops in May 1832.

At the same time, the myth of the armed citizens was a source of political capital: Louis-Philippe recognized in the National Guard a source of monarchical legitimacy. He interpreted the gathering of units both in Paris and in the provinces as a sign of the great

⁷⁶ AD Ille-et-Vilaine, 4 R 88, agenda, 23 June 1834.

⁷⁷ Goujon, *Monarchies postrévolutionnaires*, p. 391.

support the throne received from the centre of society. The march of armed citizens on the occasion of official celebrations and military parades not only expressed their loyalty to the July regime, but was also intended to seal the glorious end of the 1789-Revolution. This had created the conditions for the bourgeoisie to serve the throne and for the constitutional monarchy to triumph over the reactionary powers in 1830.

The government adopted the same strategy of instrumentalization. The Minister instructed the prefects to use the regular forces in conjunction with the National Guard to repress demonstrations and uprisings. The participation of the armed citizens, highly regarded by the public in the early years of the monarchy, should justify the suppression of the unrest that flared up repeatedly throughout the country. Since the reign of Charles X, the army had a reputation for taking particularly brutal action against any opposition and demonstration, while the National Guard was perceived to protect the local population. As a result, the Rennes National Guard was regularly despatched to counter protesters and insurgents, proving to be well disciplined troops in the eyes of the military and police.

The commitment to the monarchy led the public to perceive the National Guard as a representative of the Orleanist regime. This resulted in hostilities towards the National Guard, attacked and sometimes seriously injured. The fact that these attacks were mostly perpetrated by members of the ultra-royalist opposition was partly due to the fact that the young national guards had distinguished themselves as virulent opponents of the clergy. On the other hand, these incidents proved that the armed bourgeoisie did not play a unifying role in society, rather they intensified political conflicts and thus deepened the division of the country. This was further encouraged by the law of March 1831 that allowed only wealthy citizens to enlist in the service, thus aggravating social tensions.

Against this backdrop, there was resistance to the implementation of the law at the local level. Armed and uniformed citizens were arbitrarily banned from active service lists and placed in reserve by the city's recruitment council. The persons concerned had served as officers under the rule of Charles X and were members of an ultra-royalist association in Rennes. They expressed their complaint in a petition addressed to the Prefect that insisted on the principles of popular sovereignty. In doing so, they carefully avoided reference to the revolutionary nation. Instead, they insisted that participation in the police service was a right of the entire local population, some of which could not be excluded arbitrarily.

Further petitions showed that the notion of popular sovereignty had been reinterpreted in political terms. In view of the conditions during the census monarchy, the left voiced criticism of the exclusion of the majority of society from political participation. In Rennes, members of the hunting companies supported claims by their officers to extend the right to vote to all guards. Even before the left-wing opposition launched a nationwide campaign in 1837 based on the same demand, the armed citizens of Rennes adopted this idea. Service in the National Guard was supposed to enable them to assert their own

interests with regard to the government of the country and the administration of their home town. The pioneer was the active citizen, as provided for in the Law of 1791, which in principle was extended to all armed citizens, regardless of their income or wealth. Admittedly, by ostentatiously attaching to the revolutionary legacy, the regime itself had provided the model for this historical recourse. The fact that, in reality, it lagged behind the claim of a popular and politically responsible form of order represented a dilemma, leading to the deadlock and overthrow of Louis-Philippe's rule in 1848.

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