

PASSIVE CITIZENS OR THE REASONLESS POOR DURING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, 1789-1791

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The bi-centenary of the French Revolution is drawing near, reviving old issues which have never really been settled. 1989 will be the year when the past, which every now and then takes over the present, will be dug up once more and embers which have never grown cold will be re-fanned into life. Polemics and passions are already rising, and the Revolution that seemed over is becoming a political game for the stakes of the Left and Right. Our aim in this paper is not to join in these sham battles, seeking justification for the present in the past. Our more modest objective is to re-examine the question of citizenship in that year of 1789 and to try to understand in what light it was held by the Constituent Assembly.

Citizenship was defined by the law of 22 December 1789, which established a progressive qualifying suffrage, fixing citizens' rights on the basis of their direct taxation. At the lower end of the scale were the passive citizens who could not pay the minimum tax equivalent to three days' work, and who were therefore excluded from any political activity. Then came the active citizens who took part in primary assemblies where town councils and electors were elected. But they were also deprived of civic rights since only those citizens paying the equivalent of ten days' work could take part in the electoral assemblies whose function was to elect the deputies, judges and members of the departmental administrations.

At this level a new distinction was drawn. The electors became in their turn passive in the higher political sphere, to which were eligible only those landowners who paid a silver mark. They alone had the right to discuss and draw up national policies. Thouret's opinion, when he stated that it was « right that those who contributed the most to the needs and maintenance of public institutions should have a proportional share in its government »¹, was whole-heartedly agreed with.

Taxation thus acted as the basic regulator of political activity and clearly determined the citizens' prerogatives.

¹ *Archives parlementaires*, Collection of legislative and political debates in the French Chambers, edited by J. Madival and E. Laurent, Paris, tome X, 29 Sept., 1789, p. 202.

Citizenship, far from being homogenous and egalitarian, was in fact sharply divided up and tiered in distinct subgroups within which holders of different rights played their parts. On the lowest level there was local administration life, the most restricted sphere to which active citizens were bound. In the middle, was the departmental area to which the electors were restricted, and finally, the most important and widest sphere, that of the national Assembly and its Deputies. This quite unique organisation of citizenship was based on a fundamental concept of Constituent thought of the age: being a man did not automatically entitle one to political activity; this would be the reward for a complex process of self-making and education through which a rational virtuous citizen should emerge.

Civic rights were therefore in no way included in human rights. They were no part of man's prerogatives just because he existed as a member of the human race, but on the contrary were a concession depending on a certain number of anthropological, intellectual and moral criteria. Citizenship, in as far as political access was concerned, did not apply to men as such; only those possessing particular qualities could penetrate into this exclusive area of society.

Larochefoucauld-Liancourt in fact stated quite clearly: « political capacity is not a natural right, but a right granted by society for its greater benefit »², thus expressing the conviction that man is not born *homo politicus*, but becomes one after acquiring and building up certain attributes.

Setting aside the immediate legislative elements and their consequences, it is necessary to examine the speeches of the first constitutionalists to discover the political and philosophical bases for this practical right. Only the words from the heart of the very institutions can unravel the numerous threads of thought entangled in this multiple concept of citizenship.

Beneath the property qualification, in fact, emerges a conception of property and work on which was grafted a particular anthropological vision. This is the meeting-point of those elements which will allow us to fully comprehend the legislation adopted. As H. Arendt has pointed out, possession was seen to signify « certain qualifications, which, although belonging to the private domain, have always been accepted as fundamental for the political sphere »³. What we are concerned with here are the specific effects and attributes attached to it. We will be dealing with property as a pure sign endowing the holder with particular characteristics.

At the time of the Constitutional debate⁴, Sieyès argued: « legitimate property ensures independence. He who exists at the expense of the property of others, is a slave »⁵. Property is thus the essential material element which objectifies a situation of autonomy from which those without it are excluded.

² *Arch. Parl.*, 24 Sept., 1791, tome XXI, p. 292.

³ Hannah Arendt, *La condition de l'homme moderne*, Calmann-Levy, Paris, 1961, p. 72.

⁴ The first debate, obviously.

⁵ *Arch. Parl.*, 27 August, 1789, tome VIII, p. 503.

Within this objective limit begins the realm of servitude; beyond it that of total freedom. Its first effect is therefore to confer on its owner a free will that others will not have.

Later, on the presentation of a report on begging, Pétion the Younger was to declare:

It seems that nakedness everywhere announces the loss of virtue. Caught between necessity and the oppressor, the poor man falls under the heavy yoke of need, and the safest guarantee of public educations lies ... in property⁶.

Here property is the bearer of moral and educational qualities, and defines the limits of the sphere of morality. Outside its limits, and the metaphor used by the deputy is significant, the subject « falls » and is entirely swallowed up by the system of needs, the domain of passion and immorality: the place where human nature, as yet untouched by education, has a free rein.

Ownership means not only avoiding the radical and exclusive heteronomy of the rights of citizenship, but affirming at the same time that one is a virtuous and rational being. The right of political participation falls to him because he is in contact with this particular fetish⁷, a series of qualities which distinguish him from the rest of society and thus legitimize his privilege of progressing alone in this sphere.

Possession draws the decisive boundary line which separates two opposing worlds: two worlds in which radically different people dwell. In the first, that of the owners, everything is reason, independence and virtue. The second, on the contrary, groups together people who are the fringes of mankind and lack intellect. As such, they regress endlessly, to find themselves relegated to the bottom of the human scale.

Sieyès writes:

The wretched, bowed under heavy labour, producers of the pleasure of others, who barely receive subsistence for their suffering, needful bodies, in this immense crowd of two-legged implements, without freedom or morality, ... who have nothing but their hands capable of earning very little and a dulled soul ... is that what you call men? One calls them civilised! Is there one of them capable of entering society?⁸

The society in question is obviously the political one, and the answer, as we have seen, is clearly negative. The social division of labour and property are for Sieyès a given that nothing can really modify. These are the facts that structure citizenship and determine each man's place in that particular sphere of citizenship (la Cité). Property entitled a man to conduct public affairs. To those without, victims of a process of reification and bestialisation, this

⁶ *Arch. Parl.*, 31 Jan., 1791, tome XXII, p. 642.

⁷ In the true sense of the word [*fétiche*], since property was not only invested with these virtues but also, as Larochevoucauld-Liancourt and others said: « The sacred duty of laws is to make a religious cult of them », *Arch. Parl.*, 31 August, 1971, tome XVIII, p. 438.

⁸ Sieyès, Emmanuel, *Textes, choix et présentation de Roberto Zapperi*, Editions des Archives contemporaines, Paris, 1985, « La Nation », p. 89.

field was completely out of reach. Who were then these strange beings who seem to linger stagnating on the frontiers of humanity? What were the causes of their disgrace? These questions will concern us now. We shall be analysing the different social categories of passive citizenship as well as the numerous patterns of thought relating to poverty, work and to human nature in general.

We would go so far to say that need arising from unemployment in a man who has not looked for or tried to find work, which is doubtless an affliction for the compassionate human heart, for the State, where a quantity of active work exists, is a useful punishment and a salutary example⁹,

said Larochevoucauld-Liancourt in a debate on the problems arising from the existence of numerous beggars and tramps.

Some months later, Savary-Lancosme, on presenting a bill on the same problem, stated the need to distinguish between the false and the real poor: the former were those who, « accostumed to this kind of life by its attraction of idleness, would like to remain in it forever »¹⁰.

These two quotations are interesting in that they highlight several concepts. Firstly, the origins of poverty and begging are, in their opinion, to be found in the lack of will power on the part of those in this state (they don't look for or think of work), or in their submission to a condemnable vice: laziness. In both cases the individual is the only one to blame for his situation. « A man is not poor because he has nothing, but because he does not work »¹¹, wrote Montesquieu, whose thought on this subject can be summed up in this quotation. Poverty was not thus defined by objective material criteria, but in terms of a subjective attitude to the fundamental activity of work. The more so in that, and this is the second point, society was supposed to possess the necessary means to reduce this great indigence. Work in fact was supposed to exist permanently and in abundance. Therefore, nothing except personal faults could prevent anyone from having work to ensure himself a decent living. Even more so now that the rules of the Old Régime which hindered the free circulation of men and goods had been destroyed. There were no more obstacles to the expansion of society where each man, provided he had the will and desire, was sure not only of catering for his needs, but also of rising above his social condition.

1789 fundamentally re-invented the myth of social mobility which the 18th Century had never ceased to idealise and exalt. The previous hundred years in France in particular had witnessed the development of an important literary production where this theme of rapid social improvement had played a central role¹². Existing largely in imagination previously, the Revolution

⁹ *Arch. Parl.*, 31 August, 1790, tome XVIII, p. 454.

¹⁰ *Arch. Parl.*, 27 Oct., 1790, tome XX, p. 50.

¹¹ Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des Lois*, Garnier-Flammarion, Paris, 1979, tome II, Book XXIII, Chapter XXIX, p. 134.

¹² Cf. the study of Marie-Hélène Huet, *Le Héros et son double: Essai sur le roman de l'ascension sociale au XVIII siècle*, Librairie J. Corti, Paris, 1975, p. 171.

seemed to confer a degree of reality on this social theme. What had previously been part of the plot of a novel then became the statement of power; it was society's view of itself. Social mobility seemed an acquisition never to be lost, and success was no longer a matter of birth but of will power and opportunity. Wholly free and liberated from traditional hierarchies a man could now make his own destiny by dint of his hard work and ambition.

The same was true of active citizenship, which was then among other things considered within the horizons of this movement. Its present limit to a restricted group was not considered absolute and definitive. « Let the doors of good citizenship be always open to those men whom nature or circumstances make into real citizens, to set them apart from those that nature and circumstances mark with the brand of nonentity »¹³, wrote Sieyès.

After centuries of Christian thought where God had raised man up or set him down, had availed himself of a series of earthly discriminations to mark each man in his rightful place, everything was happening as if work and will power had replaced divine power. Thanks to these, people could break away from their immediate social condition. The last would be the first by the sweat of their brows, and even the first were not sure of protection from an abrupt fall. Lack of foresight, laziness or an unlucky accident could deprive them at any moment of what they had achieved with such hard work. Rise and fall was still an important factor, but in a secular version; they were basic ups and downs in a society where individuals, in a sort of social weightlessness, could progress or regress according to their personal aptitudes. Now achievement depended entirely on will.

Exactly the same kind of reasoning can be found in Kant, whose closeness of thought to that of Sieyès is at times astonishing. In *Theory and Practice* he condemned inherited privilege and argued for the equality of civil rights. But equally in no way excluded disparity of wealth and fortune. To justify them, the author declares that « no obstacle should hinder men from being able to raise themselves to comparable conditions if their talents, their hard work and luck permit them to do so »¹⁴. Further on he adds, « One may admit that in any social state man is happy on condition that he is aware that it depends on him (on his power or express will) or on circumstances which he cannot blame on anyone else, to rise to the same level as other men... »¹⁵.

At this point it is only a question of courage. Perseverance will open all those previously closed doors to the upper circles of society. Later in the *Doctrine of Law* this same notion allows Kant to justify social distinctions between citizens. Natural laws (liberty and equality), he wrote, allow all people « to work to raise themselves from the passive to the active state »¹⁶. So from now onwards, nothing would be given for all eternity, social ranks

¹³ Sieyès, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

¹⁴ E. Kant, *Theory and Practice*, French edition, Paris, 1984, p. 3.

¹⁵ *Idem*, p. 35.

¹⁶ E. Kant, *Doctrine of Law*, Vrin, Paris, 1979, p. 195.

would lose their fixedness to the benefit of a society where flexibility would authorise rapid social rise.

This radical individualism weighed down the real man, who was the sole cause and origin of his present situation. It placed him in a sort of solitary confrontation with himself, leaving him with nothing to fall back on but his own person. The « I » becomes all-powerful, and, if willing to, could completely transform his own place. History was no longer interpreted as the fulfilment of the Creator's design, but as the product of will and perseverance of the individual on himself and on his environment.

The merciless conclusion of this logic was perfectly expressed in the Heading I of the Law on begging, which stipulated: « No man may be considered a pauper and in need of the help of his fellow-citizens as long as he is able to work and work can support him »¹⁷. Poor people no longer existed, there were only good-for-nothings, refusing to work. They alone were responsible for their misery and only they could bring about their own redemption and entry into the political sphere. They were victims of their own faults, and even worse, a threat to society. When Larochevoucault-Liancourt presented the fourth report on begging, among the reasons he listed to justify legislation, the first mentioned was that of the risks the social body was exposed to by the existence of « a class of men without means of support »¹⁸. He went on:

It is in the public interest to prevent disorders and evils, arising from the great number of men of no resources, who cursing the laws whose benefits they may never feel, could by the excess of their misery be carried away at any moment to serve the enterprises of the enemies of public order¹⁹.

This quotation deserves further attention, as its argument is on two levels, both make the equation poor classes equal dangerous classes, indicating however different factors. The first points essentially to the potential danger that poor people constituted for the existing order by adding to its turbulent tendencies and thereby threatening its existence. The second point takes up this idea, but adds a completely different one to it: their liability to become pawns in the hands of those opposing the New Régime. The terms used, « carried away » and « serve », give the idea of a mass of people both malleable and impervious to reason, suggesting an independence of spirit they clearly totally lack.

« "Minority" is the incapacity to use one's reason without being guided by others »²⁰, wrote Kant. This also applied to the excluded who formed a heteronomous group since they were first and foremost considered as objects

¹⁷ *Arch. Parl.*, 27 Oct., 1790, tome XX, p. 50.

¹⁸ *Arch. Parl.*, 31 August, 1790, tome XVIII, p. 48.

¹⁹ *Idem*.

²⁰ E. Kant, *Reply to the Question: What is Enlightenment?*, *Philosophical Works*, Gallimard, Paris, 1985, tome II, p. 209.

progress on the way to redemption, but more essentially because he was perceived as the incarnation of Christ. It seemed a sign of his ever-visible presence. The pauper was meant to inspire, wrote Lamourette²⁴

a sort of religious cult, the most respectable and sacred object on the face of the earth ... Yes, the pauper is another Christ, son of God²⁴.

Vested with a divine dignity, those who would later be called the wretched poor were then the subject of particular attention. An order founded on a theological Beyond would not be overturned; they had a select place in the Christian hierarchy of values. Met neither with scorn nor rejection, this social category was both accepted and exalted.

So true was this fact that it played its part in the most critical and important moment of the Monarchy: the death of the King. And in fact the great funeral processions of the XV and XVI centuries were led by a considerable number of paupers. As torch bearers, they walked immediately after the parish clergy. As many as 4000 of them gathered on occasion, flanked on both sides by mendicant orders. All were therefore integrated in the very sophisticated proceedings of the burial of a monarch²⁵. As an object on exposition, they seemed to be there to declare the goodness of the deceased king. Publicly exposed to the sight and opinion of the whole population, they testified to the potency of power. Theirs was no disgrace. They were not shameful symptoms of human laziness or the visible expression of the deficiencies of the system; on the contrary, they were the tangible sign of royal authority, of its largesse and magnificence.

At a few centuries distance, we can see that an enormous inversion of values has taken place. Ostentatious show has been followed by concealment and repression. The idea of associating the pauper class with ceremonies to demonstrate the grandeur of the State would seem scandalous and absurd. The poor man and the beggar have lost all the positive charge which they earlier carried. Their state has become the infamous proof of moral degradation, the confession of a perverse relationship of the individual to himself, completely dominated by unresisting submission to the vilest passions. With the de-Christianising process of society, these people became the living image of an evil which had to be treated and uprooted. Man's original fall seemed to give way to another anthropological one, which deprived paupers of all the enhancing images they had previously enjoyed.

If imprisonment was the new answer suited to this modern attitude, it was not in itself sufficient. Its penalised population also had to be set to work. The sixth report on begging in fact laid down that « the taste for and the habit of application should be the aim of these establishments »²⁶. Further

²⁴ Lamourette, *Considerations on the Spirit and Duties of a Religious Life*, quoted by B. Groethuysen, *Origines de l'esprit bourgeois en France*, Gallimard, Paris, 1977, p. 170.

²⁵ Cf. Giesey, Ralph, *Le roi ne meurt jamais*, Flammarion, Paris, 1987, p. 350.

²⁶ *Arch. Parl.*, 27 Oct., 1790, tome XX, p. 57. They are, obviously, dealing with the houses of correction.

on one reads that they must become « the means of softening and severing ... those ties of servitude which their vices have led them to, and to put them in the way of knowing, desiring and finding the joys of property and freedom »²⁷. Labour was thus the second means to make moral beings of them, allowing them to achieve property which was the final goal, because it made the liberty necessary to enter the political sphere an objective reality.

As H. Arendt has shown, we are dealing with a formidable rehabilitation²⁸ of work in society, which from being held in lowest esteem in Ancient times, now holds the place of honour in the Modern age, an age which gives the highest consideration to this particular form of human activity.

Although the long-term reversal of value is undeniable, some clarification must be made. The above quotation is significant in that it was not so much work in itself to which redeeming virtues were attributed, but the influence it was supposed to exert on those engaged in it. It was not, therefore, so much activity in itself which was of positive value, but its potentiality, its final goals and the results it was due to bring about.

This point is highly relevant as it had important consequences for another excluded category: domestic and hired servants, who were directly affected by the law of 22 December 1789 and the 1791 Constitution. The paragraph dealing with this category shows a specific conception of labour at work. In fact, by the very reason of their condition, they fulfilled the first qualification for active citizens, that of residence. Moreover, some of them must have been able to pay the required tax, since otherwise the section regarding them in the law would not have been written. Barère was clear on this point when he stated:

The position of hired servants clearly and precisely includes the class of persons who must be excluded from political representation because servants ... have no freedom or independence of will, which are essential for the exercise of the rights of citizenship²⁹.

Against domestic servants there was a strong, old bias which placed them in a trouble zone (from a social point of view) which was not far removed from that slavery which had been abolished in France. Tocqueville reports that Madame Duchâtelet by no means took it for granted that servants belonged to the human race³⁰. This illustrates the consideration in which those engaged in this kind of work were held.

They were emblematic figures of a radical heteronomy. The *Encyclopédie* sees them only from this point of view and states that they owe « their master submission, respect and great fidelity »³¹. Before the revolution they had no

²⁷ *Arch. Parl.*, 31 Jan., 1791, tome XXII, p. 598.

²⁸ Cf. Arendt, *op. cit.*

²⁹ *Arch. Parl.*, 27 Oct., 1789, tome X, p. 590.

³⁰ Tocqueville, Alexis, *L'Ancient Régime et la Révolution*, Gallimard, Paris, 1985, p. 286.

³¹ *Encyclopédie et Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des arts et des métiers*, Diderot, d'Alembert, tome V, p. 29.

legal status of their own. They were not civically responsible for acts committed during the exercise of their function, and could neither bear witness nor form corporations. They had no possessions, accommodation, food or clothing. They were a sort of living projection of the will of those they served. Lackeys³² were, in the 18th century, people who were despised by all levels of society. They were despised by the journeymen who, at least, possessed a particular ability which entitled them to legal recognition. The condition of serving was seen as a radical disqualification from every point of view. The feeling was so strong that in 1746 some locksmiths organised themselves and went on strike so as not to be registered as servants³³. It was ignominious to belong to this category, for it meant being relegated to the lowest ranks of society.

They were also despised by those who employed them. The domestic servant was not only totally dependent on his master, he was also the only person before whom behaviour forbidden elsewhere became possible. Customary rules of modesty did not apply in his presence. Dressing and undressing, even intimate functions, were not considered immoral before a servant. Actions which would be unthinkable in the presence of any other person were permitted. This shows the complete lack of consideration in which servants were held, treated as mere instruments. Tools in private, in public they were used as external signs of wealth. Their presence testified to their master's social situation, and they became part of that ostentation of power and social success. As a mere instrument of show, the servant counted for nothing because he transformed and produced nothing. No product or possession came from his labour to give value to his activity and personality. He left no signs behind him because he dealt with no material thing; no mark on nature, as in the case of peasants; nor on objects, as for the artisans, testified the victorious confrontation of man and his environment. Adding nothing to the world, he was left out of the process of formation of the subject who perfects himself in building what is around him. In fact, work for him could never be liberating. On the contrary, it plunged him deeper and deeper into a mutilating and degrading submission.

The origins of this particular outlook must be sought in the works of philosophers such as Locke, who was one of the first to make labour a central concept of his thought. In the famous chapter on « The property of things » of the *Second Treaty of Civil Government*, work is in fact always perceived in relation to two elements which give it its importance. The first is nature on which work operated, whether it was to gather or harvest products or

³² « The word lackey was one of strong abuse, failing all others, to represent human lowness. Under the old monarchy, when one wanted to depict a vile and degraded being, one said that he had the soul of a lackey. That alone was enough. The meaning was complete and understood ». Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, Garnier-Flammarion, Paris, 1981, tome II, p. 223.

³³ Cf. Kaplan, St., « Réflexions sur la police du monde du travail, 1700-1815 ». *Revue Historique*, January-March, 1979, pp. 17-77.

then very deeply rooted to resist so long the developments of the Revolution as to require specific discussion.

Admitted briefly to the political area, servants were soon to be excluded from it again. The Constitution of 1795 took the subject up again, decreeing that « the exercise of citizenship rights is suspended for the category of hired domestics, in the service of persons or households »³⁷. The setting up of work contracts, supposedly to bring two equally free parties face to face, did not really alter the social conception of the servant. Even later, Julien Sorel, the hero of *The Red and the Black*, although ready to use any means to raise himself socially, refused to become a tutor because he would have to eat and live with servants. This was too much for him. This says much of the shame attached to this category and the persistence of unfavourable opinions about them.

These facts bear out the thesis we put forward above. If work was to make man free, and there had been a clear break with classical notions, this was only tendentially so, to the extent that it ended up in the ownership of property. Otherwise it was in contradiction with entry into the political sphere. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that when seen in general terms, work was indeed invested with new qualities, but they did not automatically apply to the workers themselves. It was one thing to glorify the abstract notion of work, and make of it a fundamental social value, and another for this process to encompass all those whose work was the only commodity they had to sell. So we can see a double trend in progress: the universal appreciation of work, and the depreciation of certain fields of work, which excluded their members from citizenship.

We have examined the ways in which the first categories of passive citizens were considered and what measures were taken to make the necessary transformations on their entry into political life. We must now analyse the other categories, the only ones unaffected by the exclusion measures, although these were largely used for their legitimisation. It was making reference to them during the debate on the organisation of the National Guard that Dubois-Crancé opposed the integration of passive citizens, declaring:

Both the Committee and the Assembly know well what the people do not know, and that is the only non-active citizens are beggars and tramps, whom society must constantly be on its guard against³⁸.

What is interesting here is not so much the subject of the debate as the basis of the argument, which tends to give credit to the idea that the only passive citizens were to be found in this category. Nothing was more untrue, as we have previously seen. The social levels affected by these measures were

³⁷ *The Constitutions of France after 1789*, Gallimard, Paris, 1970; *The Constitution of 1795*, titre II, paragraph 3, p. 105.

³⁸ *Arch. Parl.*, 28 April, 1791, tome XXV, p. 385.

in fact those people in towns and countryside, the journeymen, day workers, small artisans, shop-keepers and peasants, feared by the overwhelming majority of the Third Estate, who wished to expel them from the political scene.

In this context, the classification of passive citizens as beggars was decisive in forging the image of an immature people, slaves to their passions and impervious to Enlightenment. What was true of the begging classes would then clearly apply to all those excluded categories. In fact, in the discussions on the composition of the national Militia, they were all treated as one general category. The threat represented by the paupers alone gave way to that of all passive citizens. D'Andre argued: « In many places non-active citizens have armed themselves and are stirring up trouble ». In opposition to Robespierre, who was in favor of their integration, he continued: « The bill before you would seem to authorise all those elements which are highly dangerous to public order »³⁹.

The words used in this speech are highly significant. When popular unrest occurs, it is « trouble stirred up », suggesting that the people, composed of « bad elements » act under the sway of almost unhealthy impulses, a far cry from the rational behaviour directed by a conscious will towards a precise goal. On top of this process of denigration, the people were looked on as virtually guilty and potentially reprehensible. Later in the same debate, a deputy proposed a derogation for those passive citizens who had served since the beginning of the Revolution, declaring that: « their past conduct will answer for their future behaviour. The objections against them have been silenced »⁴⁰. Exclusion was in itself an index of inherent defects, the irrefutable proof of intrinsic evil. It was therefore not only the corrupt and idle beggars who had to be corrected and educated, but all of this immature people.

Thus a virtual anthropology was established which disqualified and discriminated against all sections of passive citizens and justified their inferior political status. If they were excluded from the political sphere, it was because they were globally lacking in the necessary enlightenment to take part. They were lacking in the double meaning of the word, both because they lacked this quality and because consequently they were « without the rank and employment which would include them in public affairs »⁴¹.

In this teleological vision of history leading mankind from the state of nature to the full possession of reason, the passive citizen was half-way along. He was no longer a natural man, but neither was he completely a rational subject. He still bore the stigmatae of his original state, of which the most significant symptom was undeniably his giving way to passion. Whether passion drove him to idleness or to the afore-mentioned trouble, it

³⁹ *Arch. Parl.*, 6 Dec., 1790, tome XXI, p. 253.

⁴⁰ *Idem*.

⁴¹ Littré's definition, Initial sense of the term.

was the clear demonstration that he was still under its sway. He was therefore in the main a person who did not wholly belong to himself, because he was still dependent on passion which obscured his reason. He still had not learned to sublimate his emotions and free himself of their influence by submitting them to the yoke of reason.

It is important to remember [here] the specifically modern distrust towards the capacities to perceive the truth, the mistrust for that which is given and confidence in action and introspection⁴².

This is true of our understanding of the attitude then held towards the politically excluded. The importance of work in society will be better understood if we see that its purpose was to make a moral being of the passive citizen, to set him on the road which would give access to citizenship, as he in his turn became a property owner, but this is not all. As work meant the domination of external nature so it was the means to master that inner nature which was still too strong in each member of this category of society. In order to fully understand the scope of this function, we must here examine one of the dominating notions of the time, that of nature as a chaos antithetical to the social sphere, which must be subdued by the political sphere in order to ensure its survival. If the first should triumph, the second would perish, men would be dashed into a destructive state of radical anomie. The passive citizen was indeed suffering⁴³ from a lack, and it was only after a de-naturing process that he would become a new man, capable of evolving in the constructed sphere of political life.

This vision of a people not yet able to take part in the *Res publica* because of its economic and social situation was to continue to make its effects felt for a long time to come. The first half of the 19th century was to turn to the same source to exclude the poorer classes from civic rights. Benjamin Constant, in his *Principles of Politics* was inspired to the point of plagiarism by these notions. On this question the closeness of his thinking to that of Sieyès, for example, is extremely striking. Among other things, he shared the Abbé's idea of the immaturity of the people, which excluded them from political life, and his system was also based on the concept of property.

He wrote:

Those whose poverty binds them to perpetual dependency and condemns to working for a daily wage, are no more enlightened on public affairs than children, no more interested than foreigners in that national prosperity whose elements they do not know and in whose advantages they only indirectly share⁴⁴.

⁴² Arendt H., *op. cit.*, p. 335.

⁴³ We should bear in mind the origin of the term « passive » from the Latin « passivus » which meant « suffering ».

⁴⁴ Constant, Benjamin, *Principes de politique applicables à tous les gouvernements représentatifs et particulièrement à la Constitution actuelle de la France*, in *De la liberté chez les modernes*, Le Livre de Poche, Paris, 1980, p. 316.

He went on to indicate the conditions necessary to the function of a citizen. Among them we find, « the measure indispensable for the acquisition of Enlightenment, for upright judgement » and of course the sacrosanctity of property which « alone makes men capable of exercise of political rights »⁴⁵.

The situation of this people of minors was in fact surprisingly similar to that of children. Like children, they had to learn to submit to discipline their rebellious nature tended to make them flee from. This idea of discipline, as has been seen, underlying the measures for controlling beggars and vagabonds. But they were not the only ones to be affected, since the urban masses were also to be controlled. Politically we find them in that initial phase of education described by Kant in his *Thoughts on Education*, where the pupil « must give proof of submission and passive obedience »⁴⁶. Incapable of judgement, this turbulent multitude must first undergo an apprenticeship in an order whose existence and necessity they are totally ignorant of. The parallel does not end here. The German philosopher states: « It is of the utmost importance that children should learn to work. Man is the only animal that has to work »⁴⁷, and his opinion seems to have been shared. It was labour, as we have seen, that must not only discipline the people but also offer them political access in the long run.

After this examination of passive citizens, it appears clear that their exclusion from public life was based on a pessimistic conception of man. It was because they were wicked in themselves, entirely governed by their passions and prejudices that they were deprived of political rights. Assigned to a lower level of rationality, they could not immediately make public use of their understanding, but had first of all to be transformed and educated. That particular anthropological vision was therefore fundamental as it determined the concrete modalities of citizenship and representation.

To measure the importance of this substratum and its consequences, we must make a shift in time to the preliminary debate on the 1793 Constitution. Robespierre presented a picture of mankind and more generally of the people, which is the exact opposite of the one which we have just drawn. He declared: « Any institution which does not suppose the people to be good and magistrates corruptible is vitiated »⁴⁸. This is a radical inversion of those terms by which the lowest levels of society were endowed with what had previously been the qualities of the élites, while the latter are invested with permanent suspicion which makes of them all potential traitors.

Later, in his famous speech of 17 Pluviose, Year II, on « The Principles of Moral Policy Which Must Guide the National Convention in the Administration of the Republic », he clearly affirmed that « happily, virtue is natural to the people, despite aristocratic prejudices »⁴⁹.

⁴⁵ *Idem.*

⁴⁶ Kant E., *Réflexion sur l'éducation*, Vrin, Paris, 1966, p. 85.

⁴⁷ *Idem.*, p. 110.

⁴⁸ *Arch. Parl.*, 24 April, 1793, tome LXIII, p. 199.

⁴⁹ Robespierre, Maximilien, *Oeuvres complètes*, PUF, Paris, 1952, vol. X, p. 355.

We are then talking about a very fundamental anthropological debate, focused not only on man's nature but also and perhaps above all on the nature of power and its relationship to civil society. Machiavelli had already pointed out the strength of intricate relations existing between these two fundamental elements. In the *Discourse on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy* he wrote: « All political writers agree in saying that whoever wishes to found a State and give it laws must start from the premise that men are wicked »⁵⁰. A negative conception of man must therefore *a priori* be the indispensable logic behind all thought which sets out to legitimise the existence of a strong power.

After Hobbes, Kant, though naturally with different modalities, tackled the question. If, in his view, man is the only animal who needs a master⁵¹, this is because he is the only animal who behaves badly to his fellows. The domination of some was the practical political solution to the problem of the « unsociable sociability » of people. It had to prevent civilian society from consuming itself in and by war which would be inevitable if the multitude were not contained by the « irresistible » power of the State.

The true subject of the controversy on human nature which continued throughout the Revolution was, in fact, a political one. When the 1793 Constituents stated that man was not a wolf to man, they were putting forward another conception of power. It was the need for « masters » and their legitimate right to dominate that was in doubt. In fact, if only society ceased to be in conflict and torn by the brutal appetites of its members, then the State and its public life could finally enter that sphere from which they had until then been excluded. At that point, and during the historic sequence in which we are interested, the process 1789 had set in motion had not reached the moment in which the political sphere becomes to all effects everyone's commonwealth.

It is then difficult to mark this date as the inauguration of a political freedom which might have developed without impediment. It suffered, as we have seen, fundamental restrictions which made the citizen « a rare being »⁵². This first phase of the Revolution, far from fulfilling the promises of emancipation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, on the contrary heavily mutilated them.

The universality and equality of civic rights were not yet of this world. Many other pages of history were to be turned before they could be established, notably due to the pressure of those trying to win those rights which once again had been denied them. These myths die hard. They are part of the Revolution and its approaching bi-centenary will not fail to revive them.

⁵⁰ Machiavelli, *Oeuvres complètes*, Gallimard, Paris, 1974, p. 388.

⁵¹ Cf. Kant E., *Idée d'une histoire universelle au point de vue cosmopolitique*, Bordas, Paris, 1981, p. 191.

⁵² Robespierre, Maximilien, *Oeuvres complètes*, *op. cit.*, tome VI, p. 202.

It would be wrong to let this anniversary lull us into self-satisfaction. « The French Revolution has no need of true or false apologies, it has filled our century »⁵³, Edgar Quinet wrote long ago. This warning should not go unheeded during the forthcoming event.

⁵³ Quoted by Claude Lefort in *Essais sur le politique des XIX-XX siècles*, Seuil, Paris, 1986, p. 147.