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# Engels' Revolutionary Accounts of the 1848 June Days in Paris

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## Abstract

The 1848 June Days workers' uprising in Paris and the brutal response by the government of the French Second Republic led, argued Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, to the reversal of the revolutionary gains made across the European continent in that revolutionary year. Engels covered the events of the June Days in vivid articles for Marx's Cologne-based newspaper, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, although it has long been assumed that he had little information about the events unfolding in Paris and was largely reliant upon sources hostile to the insurrection. This piece identifies Engels' sources and, by re-reading his articles in their original context within the wider content of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, it shows that he drew upon first-hand testimony from the perspective of the Parisian insurgents. It proves that Engels' journalism on the June Days provides an unparalleled, revolutionary insight into this suppressed workers' uprising.

**Key words:** Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx, June Days 1848, Paris, revolution, journalism, *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, barricades

‘How can you take as a whole a thing whose essence consists in a split?’  
Leon Trotsky, 1930.<sup>1</sup>

Between 25 June and 2 July 1848, Friedrich Engels wrote a series of vivid articles describing the June Days uprising (23-26 June 1848) in Paris, which soared from panoramic views of troop movements to vignettes capturing fleeting moments on the barricade. These writings influenced his closest collaborator Karl Marx, as both reshaped their ideas about proletarian revolution. Engels' lengthy reports, at least nine in total, were published in the Cologne-based newspaper, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, which was edited by Marx. The figure is

approximate, because many of the newspaper's articles were and remain unattributed; recently the editors of the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (Marx Engels Completed Works, begun in 1975) have discovered that three June Days articles not previously included in the past *Marx/Engels Collected Works* were in fact authored by Engels.<sup>2</sup> Although surprisingly little attention has been devoted to these writings, some questions have been raised about how accurately Engels could have described the situation unfolding over two hundred miles away in Paris.

This piece explores that question by re-reading Engels' journalism in its original context. Engels' newspaper articles were not, of course, written with a view to their later inclusion in a volume of collected works; he wrote them in dialogue with the wider content in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. That Engels' articles are now primarily encountered in collected works has divorced them, and many discussions of them, from the wider editorial content. This article contends that a recontextualization of Engels' journalism reveals that his writings on the June Days have been seriously underestimated. Engels was well-informed about events in Paris and, almost uniquely, had access to the perspective of the insurgents through the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung's* Paris correspondents. Engels used the experience of revolutionaries to revolutionise the coverage of the June Days insurrection. A reappraisal is long overdue.

### **The *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* on the June Days**

The June Days uprising erupted in a year of revolutionary turmoil, now called the 1848 revolutions. In the late 1840s Europe was plunged into an economic crisis, increasing widespread social distress and intensifying demands for political change. In what became known as the 'springtime of the peoples', revolutions broke out across the European continent including in France, where Louis-Philippe the last French king was deposed, the kingdom of Prussia, the Austrian Empire and the kingdom of Hungary. Although the British ruling class managed to neutralise the challenge from the domestic, democratic working-class Chartist movement, there was an uprising in Ireland against British imperial rule. In his recent, extensive study, Christopher Clark has shown that the European revolutions of 1848 also affected parts of Latin America and territories of the British and French empires in the Caribbean, Australia, southern Africa and south Asia.<sup>3</sup> Marx and Engels described the 1848 revolutions as bourgeois revolutions not because most of the revolutionaries were bourgeois but because the changes realised by these uprisings were shaped by

liberal, bourgeois ideology. Europe's autocracies were challenged with calls for representative institutions and constitutions to enshrine individual freedoms.

In France, however, the revolution of February 1848 revealed serious tensions between the bourgeois republicans and the socialist workers. Alphonse de Lamartine, the most influential member of France's new provisional government, successfully advocated for the adoption of the language and symbols of class unity, championing *fraternité* (brotherhood) and rejecting the socialist red flag for the republican tricolour. However, the provisional government was forced to concede the workers' class-specific demand to recognise the 'right to work' (*droit du travail*). Accordingly, national workshops (*ateliers nationaux*) were established to provide work to those thrown out of employment by the prevailing economic depression. Far from the socialist experiment envisaged by their longstanding champion Louis Blanc, these national workshops, which were swiftly oversubscribed, organised their workers on military lines and proved erratic generators of poorly paid, menial work which offended the unemployed skilled artisans they employed.<sup>4</sup>

Marx and Engels, who had moved to Paris in March 1848 at the invitation of the provisional government, witnessed the social tensions after the February revolution. Engels, for example, wrote to his brother-in-law from Paris observing the apparent class hostility in a state funeral for the fallen in the revolutionary fighting, supposedly a spectacle of unity.

Going past at this very moment, to the strains of the *Marseillaise*, is the funeral cortège of a working man who died of his wounds. Escorting him are National Guards and armed populace at least 10,000 strong, and young toffs from the Chaussée d'Antin [a wealthy neighbourhood], have to escort the procession as mounted National Guards. The bourgeois are enraged at seeing a working man thus given the last honours.<sup>5</sup>

A few days after Engels wrote these words, he and Marx left Paris for Cologne to participate in the revolution which had broken out in their Prussian homeland. There, they positioned themselves on the far left of the revolutionary movement aiming, as Terrell Carver expressed it, 'to threaten and cajole the middle classes into action against the old régime.'<sup>6</sup> On 1 June 1848 they founded a daily newspaper, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, with Marx as editor-in-chief and Engels as the foreign correspondent.

On 24 June Marx and Engels received the news of the June Days uprising in Paris, which had begun with the building of barricades on the evening of 22 June. The uprising had been triggered by the announcement of the newly elected government of France (now called the Second Republic) to terminate

the national workshops, informing its former employees to prepare to enlist in the army or be deported for work outside of Paris. This news radically altered the political position of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* which regarded the June Days as the beginning of independent, revolutionary proletarian action.<sup>7</sup> Jürgen Herres and François Melis, the editors of the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* volume covering this period, state that in the wake of the June Days at least half of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung's* content was dedicated to French news.<sup>8</sup> Marx wrote one lengthy analysis titled 'The June Revolution', which was published on 29 June, but of the two it was Engels, as the newspaper's foreign correspondent, who wrote the bulk of the coverage, with extensive reports detailing developments on every day of the fighting.

The *Neue Rheinische Zeitung's* unequivocal and wholehearted support for the insurgents ostracised it from middle class opinion in the Prussian revolution. Engels later recalled that the June Days coverage frightened off the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung's* last remaining shareholders and that it was 'the only paper in Germany, and almost in Europe' to defend the June insurgents.<sup>9</sup> Another exception was the English Chartists' *Northern Star*, edited by Marx and Engels' friend George Julian Harney, although it did not match the intensity and breadth of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung's* June Days' coverage. In France, newspapers suspected of sympathising with the insurgents were closed down by General Cavaignac's military dictatorship, which was imposed at the start of the uprising. Otherwise, conservative and radical newspapers alike condemned the June Days as an illegitimate, subaltern challenge to civilised society.

For Marx and Engels, the brutal crushing of the June Days afforded it a new significance. Thousands of barricade fighters were killed in action and subsequent military reprisals, while working-class quarters of Paris were subjected to collective punishment as homes were indiscriminately shelled. In the aftermath, thousands more insurgents were deported from France. The June Days, Marx and Engels argued, marked the turning point in the 1848 revolutions since it proved that the revolutionary bourgeoisie were more afraid of combative workers than they were of the authoritarian right. Henceforward, counter-revolutionaries used the 'red spectre' of June to haunt the bourgeois revolutions into retreat. In France, this culminated in Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte's *coup d'état* on 2 December 1851, which annihilated the French Second Republic. In Prussia, the defeat of the revolution forced the closure of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* and drove Marx and Engels into exile. In the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung's* final issue, printed entirely in communist-red ink, Marx declared that the June Days uprising was 'the essence of our paper'.<sup>10</sup>

## Questions of accuracy: Engels' sources

Marx and Engels regarded the June Days as central to their own political identity and to understanding the trajectory of the 1848 revolutions. Establishing what they understood about the June Days and how they interpreted, or reinterpreted, that information in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* therefore reveals insights into their understanding of contemporary political developments and the nature of proletarian revolution.

Some accounts emphasise that Engels' physical distance from Paris necessarily placed considerable limitations on the information available to him. For example, Tristram Hunt described Engels as 'stuck in Cologne' with only 'second-hand sources' and implied that he substituted for his lack of first-hand experience with imaginative prose: 'such geographical difficulties were not going to interfere with his breathless reports on events in Paris for the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, as if the bullets were whizzing past him.'<sup>11</sup>

In a fascinating study titled 'The Enigma of Kersausie: Engels in June 1848', Ian Birchall railed against the *Marx/Engels Collected Works* and the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* for uncritically and dogmatically reproducing as fact Engels' claim in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* that the enigmatic radical Joachim René Théophile Guillard de Kersausie had devised the military strategy for the June Days. Birchall's research showed that Kersausie was not the mastermind of the struggle and, further, he was not arrested and shot as Engels had also presumed. Birchall speculated that the source of Engels' misinformation was 'private correspondence' from Paris.<sup>12</sup>

How and what, then, did Engels know about developments in Paris? On 25 June, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* published Engels' report which explained that on 24 June the '[l]etters of the 23<sup>rd</sup> from Paris have failed to arrive.' Those letters had been delayed by the uprising, which Engels first heard about on the 24 June from a courier passing through Cologne who 'told us that when he left fighting had broken out in Paris between the people and the national guard, and that he had heard heavy cannon-fire at some distance from Paris.'<sup>13</sup> Perhaps this courier brought the 23 June issue of the French *Journal des Débats* from which Engels quoted in his article 'News from Paris. Reason for the Uprising' which was also published in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* on 25 June.<sup>14</sup>

The following day, 26 June, Engels explained to the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung's* readers that:

Letters from Paris have again failed to arrive; the Paris newspapers which came today are those of the 23<sup>rd</sup> and in the regular course of the postal service they should have arrived already yesterday evening. In these cir-

cumstances, the only sources at our disposal are the confused and contradictory reports of Belgian newspapers and our own knowledge of Paris. Accordingly we have tried to give our readers as accurate a picture as possible of the uprising of June 23.<sup>15</sup>

Engels' journalism was strikingly accountable: he noted his sources and their limitations whilst informing his readers how he analysed the information he received. The *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* also publicly acknowledged when it received new information that contradicted its earlier claims. Incidentally, it corrected Engels' claim that Kersausie had been arrested, telling readers on 3 July that this information could not be confirmed.<sup>16</sup> The *Neue Rheinische Zeitung's* candour about its sources allows for an examination, in the spirit of Birchall's plea for critical enquiry, of the ways in which Engels interpreted and represented the June Days.

For the duration of the uprising, Engels was reliant upon two sources: the uniformly hostile Belgian press (his articles referenced *Indépendance belge*) and his own knowledge of Paris. As previously stated, Engels had lived in Paris only three months before, arriving shortly after the February revolution. Prior to that, Engels had lived intermittently in Paris from the summer of 1846 until the beginning of 1848 during which time he participated in meetings with radical German cabinet-makers from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine in the east of the city.<sup>17</sup> Engels therefore had some first-hand knowledge of the very area which proved a stronghold in the June Days insurrection.

After the crushing of the insurrection on 26 June, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* began to receive the delayed 'letters from Paris': the reports from the newspaper's Paris correspondents. These correspondents were Ferdinand Wolf, who left Paris around this period, Sebastian Seiler, a stenographer who sent verbatim reports of the debates from the French National Assembly, and Hermann Ewerbeck, a doctor and translator who was friendly with, and had connected Engels to, the German cabinet makers in Paris.<sup>18</sup>

The work of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung's* Paris correspondents has been overlooked by historians of the June Days and yet they provide an unparalleled insight into the insurrection. In his capacity as a doctor in Paris Ewerbeck stood out because he treated the wounded insurgents, something that other doctors refused to do.<sup>19</sup> As a bilingual, communist journalist working for a foreign publication, Ewerbeck had both the political will and capacity to publish what the wounded insurgents told him. Whereas most accounts of the insurgents' experiences have been mediated through hostile forces, including the reports of police and the courts, Ewerbeck was uniquely able to convey the words of barricade fighters as told to a comrade. The Paris reporters

wrote vividly on the atmosphere of the city's streets, relaying gossip overheard from a nearby café table and the sounds of the battle. In an article written in the Café d'Orfan, on the Pont National, the reporter (probably Ewerbeck) recorded hearing 'heavy shell crashes against the cobblestones of the Cité and the rue Saint Jacques'.<sup>20</sup> The following day, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* published an article written on the boulevard du Temple 'in all haste under the sound of the fusillade'.<sup>21</sup> If Engels' articles read as though the bullets were 'whizzing past' (as Hunt would have it), it was not because he was making it up, but because he was relying heavily on reports written literally in the middle of urban warfare.

Having established Engels' three major sources – his own knowledge of the city, other newspapers and letters from the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung's* Paris correspondents – it now remains to be seen how Engels used them to understand and write about the June Days. This article does so by examining three substantial and striking features of Engels' articles. First, it examines how he depicted a widely-discussed episode involving women in the street fighting. Second, it analyses his statements on class in the uprising. Finally, it turns to his influential depiction of the aesthetics of the June Days.

## **The women at the rue de Cléry**

On 27 June, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* published Engels' article 'The 23<sup>rd</sup> of June'. Now in possession of 'inexhaustible' and 'numerous new facts' about the first day of the insurrection, as he told his readers, Engels included only 'what is most important and characteristic'.<sup>22</sup> This included an account of the encounter between National Guards and the defenders of a barricade on the rue de Cléry, which intersected with the large boulevard Saint Denis in the north of the city.

Engels' main source for this account was the report that had appeared in *L'Indépendance belge* the day before, on 26 June, which was itself a reprint from the 24 June edition of the French conservative newspaper *Le Constitutionnel*. According to this account, a 'large and beautiful' young woman had climbed over the barricade, advanced on the troops waving a flag and, 'with her voice and gestures, provoked the National Guard.' The troops fired and killed her only for another young woman to take up the flag who, seeing her dead companion, furiously threw stones at the troops until they fired and killed her too. When reinforcements arrived, the troops stormed the barricade whose last surviving defender saved his life by surrendering. This account contrasts the supposedly restrained behaviour of the National Guard with that of the wom-

en on the barricade who are depicted as provocative, not least sexually. The *Constitutionnel* reported on the bared parts of the first woman's body: 'bare-headed' and 'bare arms'. Her clothing, described as a lace mantilla and a striped light woollen dress, is rather too flashy for barricade fighting. The observation that this attire 'seemed to belong to the class of shop girls' identified her as a working woman in the business of dealing with customers, presumably also invoking contemporary social anxieties about working women's sexual independence.<sup>23</sup> Her death is described like rape, which the *Constitutionnel* claimed she provoked: the National Guard only fire after 'finding this young woman at the point of their rifles'.<sup>24</sup> The insinuations in the *Constitutionnel* were made explicit in *l'Indépendance belge* which stated that '[t]he two women killed on the barricade of the rue Saint-Denis are two prostitutes [*filles publiques*] from the rue de Cléry'.<sup>25</sup>

This encounter at the rue de Cléry, argued art historian T. J. Clark, epitomised the 'art of June': a widespread aesthetic rendering of the conflict as 'vacuous, hysterical, vile, inflated.' Contrasted, necessarily, with the revolutionary fighting that founded the Second Republic, the art of June deprived this struggle of similar legitimacy by representing it as a 'parody of the old heroic forms'.<sup>26</sup> The rue de Cléry barricade seemingly parodied Eugène Delacroix's iconic painting of the 1830 revolution, *La Liberté guidant le peuple* (Liberty leading the people), in which the female, bare-breasted *Liberté*, holding aloft the French tricolour, leads the charge over a barricade. By contrast with the depiction of the rue de Cléry in June 1848, which depicted a conflict between the forces of order and those on the margins of society, Delacroix's painting described social unity. Delacroix did not paint fellow Frenchmen defending the old order, instead he depicted the victory of 'the people': a cross-class collection of bourgeois, worker, École Polytechnique student and *gamin* (or street urchin). Crucially, the bare-breasted woman was apart from, not of, the people; larger than the other figures, she is allegorical, the embodiment of an ideal: *Liberté*. Her semi-nude body invokes the conventions of classical sculpture. There was nothing classical, however, about the bare flesh of the undeniably mortal women at the rue de Cléry. The historian Maurice Agulhon has shown that attempts to recreate 'live allegories' of Liberty inevitably exposed the living women to the criticism that they failed to live up to the pure, classical ideal, whilst the very act of publicly performing a role led to insinuations of prostitution.<sup>27</sup> Thus, in his 1869 novel *L'Éducation sentimentale* (*Sentimental Education*), Gustave Flaubert imagined during the sacking of the Tuileries palace during the revolution of February 1848 'a prostitute was posing as a statue of Liberty, motionless and terrifying, with her eyes wide open'.<sup>28</sup>



The women at the rue de Cléry barricade were likewise seized upon by contemporaries as examples of June's debased parody of the revolutionary ideal. The British ambassador described one of the women as a 'would-be-heroine'.<sup>29</sup> The writer Marie d'Agoult (using the pseudonym Daniel Stern) echoed the *Constitutionnel's* view of the first woman as socially and sexually transgressive; Stern, who described her with 'dishevelled hair, bare arms, dressed in a brightly coloured dress', claimed the troops called on her to withdraw, but she refused and 'provoked the assailants with her gesture and voice'.<sup>30</sup> The writer Victor Hugo, a conservative member of the National Assembly in 1848, used the term *fille publique* (public prostitute) to describe both the women at the barricade and imagined their provocative behaviour as overtly sexual. According to Hugo, the first woman 'lifted her dress up to the belt and cried to the national guards, in the awful language of the brothel which one is always forced to translate: — Cowards, fire, if you dare into the belly of a woman.' He described the second woman as barely sixteen-years-old 'even younger and more beautiful' than the first. Instead of throwing stones, he claimed 'She lifted her dress, showed her belly and cried: "Fire, brigands!"' The killing of both women is thus rendered a hideous, public sexual act that morally debases everyone involved. For Hugo, the encounter at the rue de Cléry epitomised 'the monstrous and unknown' aesthetics of the June insurrection.<sup>31</sup>

What Engels could not have known, because it was not reported at the time, was that at least one of the women at the rue de Cléry barricade survived. Maïté Bouyssy and Christine Fauré's research has shown that one of the women at the rue de Cléry barricade was twenty-year-old Adèle Françoise Guerre, a wood-gilder in the furniture industry, who brought the flag of the 41<sup>st</sup> brigade of the national workshops.<sup>32</sup> She was arrested and sentenced to transportation, which she avoided because of a pardon.<sup>33</sup> The man at the barricade may have been her brother who was later sentenced to five years imprisonment.<sup>34</sup> In the absence of this information, the way that the sympathisers of the insurgents reinterpreted conservative newspaper reports provides an instructive insight into their politics.

Marx and Engels' friend, the Chartist Ernest Jones, wrote in the *Northern Star* that 'a strong body of National Guards when attacking a barricade defended by two young women and a boy, deliberately *shot the women*, and not till then ventured to scale the barricade.' Jones' account thereby removed all references to prostitution and provocative behaviour by the women. According to Jones, the women were not in the morally questionable company of seven men, instead they were with a boy, which placed them in a more protective, maternal role and highlighted their vulnerability. These representational choices underpinned Jones' characterisation of the June Days as a conflict between

the workers who ‘fought with fair and honourable weapons’ and ‘the ruthless government’.<sup>35</sup>

Engels adopted a different approach. Unlike Jones, he did not provide a summarised account simply showing that the government forces shot women. His account was closer in its detail to those found in the *Constitutionnel* and other hostile commentaries. Engels changed two substantial details. First, he did not describe the women as prostitutes but instead as *grisettes*. In this he was following the account by the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*'s Paris reporter (probably Ewerbeck) published the day before; but whereas the Paris reporter simply stated that ‘Grisettes climbed onto the barricade and met their deaths from the bullets of the National Guard’, Engels retold the details of the encounter with *grisette* substituted for *fille publique*.<sup>36</sup> Although also subject to accusations of sexual immorality, *grisettes* were not prostitutes. The term *grisette* was applied to young seamstresses who formed faithful, romantic relationships outside of marriage.<sup>37</sup> Engels and Marx were well acquainted with this type of Parisian woman. In late 1846, whilst he was living in Paris, Engels told Marx that he had ‘some delicious encounters with *grisettes*’.<sup>38</sup> In *The Holy Family* (1845), the book Marx and Engels co-authored, Marx criticised Eugène Sue’s portrayal of a *grisette* in his sprawling serialised novel *Les Mystères de Paris* (*The Mysteries of Paris*) which, Marx argued, avoided ‘the essential point of her situation’ and thus her humanity:

her disregard for the form of marriage, her naïve attachment to the Etudiant [student] or the Ouvrier [worker]. It is precisely in that attachment that she constitutes a really human contrast to the hypocritical, narrow-headed, self-seeking wife of the bourgeois, to the whole circle of the bourgeoisie, that is, to the official circle.<sup>39</sup>

Describing the women at the rue de Cléry as *grisettes* rather than prostitutes transforms their presence among the men at the barricade from something illicit into an act of devotion. Engels reinforced this by omitting any references to the women provoking the guard through voice or gesture. In place of the ostentatious dress, is a description that invokes the *grisettes*’ famed concern for their personal appearance and needlework skills; Engels described the first woman as ‘a tall, beautiful, neatly-dressed girl with bare arms’.<sup>40</sup>

Like Ernest Jones, Engels’ version revolutionised the anti-socialist discourse about the encounter at the rue de Cléry. In place of restrained troops faced with provocative women, Engels and Jones revealed that what actually took place was a completely disproportionate use of force by armed troops against a tiny number of workers including two women armed only with a

flag, as Engels emphasised in his concluding, sarcastic sentence: ‘The lions and stock exchange wolves of the second legion [of the National Guard] have carried out this heroic deed against the seven workers and two *grisettes*.’<sup>41</sup> However, whilst Jones drained the account of the other details rendering it simply as an example of dishonourable violence, Engels retained almost all the illustrative details of the hostile commentators. Engels’ story of *grisettes* at the barricade narrated the destruction of an alternative Parisian society, one defined by working-class love and solidarity, not the cold, brutal judgements of the bourgeoisie.

### ‘Purely a workers’ uprising’?

Most of the criticism of Marxist writing on the June Days has focussed on Marx’s retrospective writings, and particularly on his claim that it represented the emergence of a struggle between capital and labour. Marx’s retrospective observations about the June Days were contained in articles titled ‘1848-1849’ which appeared in 1850 in a re-established *Neue Rheinische Zeitung: Politisch-ökonomische Revue* (published in 1895 by Engels as a book titled *The Class Struggles in France*) and in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (first serialised in 1852). These were prefigured by Engels’ contemporaneous reports in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. There, Engels insisted that ‘[t]he insurrection is purely a workers’ uprising’, maintaining that ‘[t]he decidedly proletarian nature of the insurrection emerges from all the details.’<sup>42</sup>

Engels’ view of the June Days as a class struggle was hardly distinctive, as Engels himself acknowledged when he quoted Britain’s impeccably establishment *Telegraph* newspaper reporting the uprising as ‘an insurrection of the workmen against the government they believed themselves to have created’ and ‘a complete battle between classes.’<sup>43</sup> Nor was Engels particularly original in his now controversial description of the Mobile Guards who fought the insurgents as the ‘Paris lumpenproletariat’, comprising ‘former beggars, vagabonds, rogues, gutter-snipes and small-time thieves.’<sup>44</sup> Prior to the June Days, the Mobiles were widely described as unruly *gamins* (street urchins) and Engels’ initial but misplaced hope that they would join the insurgents was also regarded as a realistic, if terrifying, prospect by the government and its adherents.<sup>45</sup> It was only after the Mobiles proved themselves among the most ferocious of the insurgents’ adversaries that the government championed them as loyal children of the Republic.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the historian Oscar J. Hammen concluded that in June 1848 there was a remarkable consensus about the nature of the

conflict, with Marx and Engels 'saying what nearly everybody else was saying, with some variation in vocabulary'.<sup>47</sup>

Modern scholarship, however, has generally objected to reading the June Days in these terms, implying that in the polarised atmosphere of June 1848 contemporaries perceived the conflict in binary terms which failed to reflect a more complicated reality. In the 1980s, Mark Traugott's studies into the social backgrounds of national workshop members and Mobile Guards showed there was no significant social differentiation between them, leading to his conclusion that Marx and Engels developed a 'post hoc' interpretation to fit their schema of class struggle.<sup>48</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones concurs; in his biography of Marx he draws on Traugott's research to argue that there was 'no meaningful social difference' between the insurgents and Mobiles, whilst also noting that the insurgents were not ranged against 'employers, industrial or otherwise' but instead against the government of the Second Republic: 'What caused the rebellion was not the action of the employing class, but the decisions of members of the National Assembly'.<sup>49</sup> A recent defence of Marx's class struggle thesis by Bruno Leipold nevertheless concedes that Marx mischaracterised the insurgents as proletarian, when they would be better described as artisans.<sup>50</sup>

By contrast, I have argued elsewhere that it is a mistake to assume Marx and Engels' characterisation of the Mobiles as lumpenproletarian aimed at sociological categorisation. Instead, I proposed that it was a satirical exposure of the establishment's subjectivity, which transformed the rascally *gamin* into a model citizen at exactly the same time as the Mobiles were behaving most like a violent underclass and committing the most brutally violent acts often against wounded and defenceless insurgents.<sup>51</sup> Marx's acknowledgement that the Mobiles were drawn from the 'midst' of the 'Paris proletariat' pointed to their militarisation by the government as the force which 'bought them', transforming them from 'young, strong, foolhardy men' into 'the bribed tool of reactionary intrigue', as the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* described the lumpenproletariat.<sup>52</sup> Ironically, then, whilst conservative narratives routinely described the insurgents as a bribed, criminal underclass this, Marx and Engels charged, was precisely what the Republic itself had created in the Mobiles.

The *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* also insisted that the obverse was true about the insurgents. Contrary to the assumptions of some modern scholarship, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung's* insistence that the insurgents were not a socially marginal, criminal class involved explicit recognition of their artisanal backgrounds. Engels attacked the liberal *Kölnische Zeitung*, also a Cologne-based newspaper, for following France's conservative newspaper, the *Constitutionnel*, in depicting the insurgents as 'rogues' and 'a "wild horde" of "cannibals, rob-

bers and murderers.”” In his riposte, Engels cited his knowledge of the skilled fabric workers who inhabited the eastern faubourgs of Paris.

The three largest faubourgs of Paris, the three most industrialised faubourgs of Paris, whose patterns made the muslins of Dacca and the velvet of Spitalfields pale and fade, are supposed to be inhabited by ‘cannibals’, ‘plunderers’, ‘robbers’ and ‘criminals’.<sup>53</sup>

The following day the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* published Engels’ description of the barricades around the Place de la Bastille and the rue Faubourg Saint Antoine which attested to skilled use of wood in the very places that Engels had organised months before with cabinet-makers.

Remarkably strong barricades were set up there, built partly of big flagstones and partly of wooden beams. They were constructed in the form of an angle pointing inward in order partly to weaken the effect of the gunfire, partly to offer a larger defensive front making cross-fire possible. Openings had been made in the fire-proof walls of the houses so that the rows of houses were connected with each other, thus enabling the insurgents to open rifle-fire on the troops or withdraw behind the barricades as circumstances demanded.<sup>54</sup>

This passage closely resembled another by Ewerbeck, published on 29 June, which specifically attributed the skilled barricade construction to artisan experience of woodwork.

Whole rows of houses are transformed into tremendous barracks, the walls have been broken through, so that the proletarians congregate in six to eight buildings. Barricades, of sandstone blocks, are at a short distance and skilfully slanted against each other often up to the first floor, with shooting slits for the artillery of the insurgents. Other barricades are made from the thickest wood from the skilful hand of the faubourg carpenters.<sup>55</sup>

However, it was not only their artisanal backgrounds that contributed to the uprising. In the same way that Marx pointed to a qualitative change in the urban poor after they were organised into the Mobiles, Engels identified a parallel process at work amongst the artisans who enrolled in the national workshops. Alongside the artisanal skill involved in barricade construction, Engels described widespread co-operation inside the insurrection which he attributed to the experience of the national workshops.

It is quite remarkable how quickly the workers mastered the plan of campaign, how well-concerted their actions were and how skilfully they used the difficult terrain. This would be quite inexplicable if in the national workshops the workers had not already been to a certain extent organised on military lines and divided into companies, so that they needed to apply their industrial organisation to their military enterprise in order to constitute immediately a fully organised army.<sup>56</sup>

The artisans and those who enlisted in the national workshops were not two distinct groups, they overlapped. Artisan production predominated in the Parisian working class and artisans suffering the effects of the economic depression turned to the national workshops. They might therefore be said to have possessed a dual identity, as artisans and members of the national workshops. The latter, entailing intermittent manual work under quasi-military supervision was an appreciably and rapidly proletarianising experience. Analyses that focus solely on the *former* occupations or social *backgrounds* of Mobiles and insurgents therefore inadequately account for the transformation of their class positions after the February revolution.

The national workshops were central to the June Days. It was their termination that triggered the uprising and Traugott acknowledges that those enrolled in the workshops played a 'disproportionate role' as the 'leaders and organizers of the insurrection' in which workers fought with and around the flags of their workshop battalion.<sup>57</sup> The June Days was therefore a conflict involving some of Paris' most recently proletarianised workers who were defending their livelihoods and a project originating from socialist ideas about the 'right to work', against a government which was also their employer. In this way the June insurrection was a political, social *and* economic struggle embodying specifically proletarian interests. Indeed, as the Marxist Rosa Luxemburg observed, in proletarian revolutionary struggle, 'the political and the economic struggle are one', the separation between the two exposed as an ideological construction of the bourgeois state.<sup>58</sup> The June Days was manifestly a proletarian struggle, as its contemporaries well understood.

The *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, however, was not simply reiterating what 'everybody else was saying' except with differently aligned sympathies, it was in fact explicitly challenging the representation by 'everybody else'. As with his rewriting of the rue de Cléry encounter, Engels combined his own knowledge of Paris with a critical re-reading of the contemporary press to expose the disparities between establishment discourse and reality. Just as, judged objectively, there was nothing heroic or restrained about shooting two unarmed women, the Guard Mobiles, judged objectively, were a gang of urban thugs.

And, judged objectively, the insurgents were not a criminal underclass, they were proletarianized artisans *resisting* further social debasement. This objective picture was revealed, as Rosa Luxemburg also identified, by a revolutionary, proletarian challenge to the bourgeois state.

## The aesthetics of June

Just as the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* shared a widespread view that the June Days represented a class struggle whilst maintaining a distinctive interpretation of that struggle, it likewise participated in and stood apart from the development of a pathbreaking ‘art of June’.

Engels’ art of June was developed from the information he received about the nature of the workers’ barricades in Paris. This information underpinned some of Marx and Engels’ earliest writings about the form and culture of proletarian revolution, something they had not addressed, for example, in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.

Before reports were received from the Paris correspondents, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*’s coverage did not emphasise a distinctive aesthetic in the June uprising. Indeed, in his article published on 26 June, Engels pointed to a continuity that seemed to confirm this was a recognisably Parisian insurrection. ‘The gamins of Paris figure as usual among the combatants’, wrote Engels, recalling an archetype of revolutionary street fighting present in countless representations not least Delacroix’s *La Liberté guidant le peuple*.<sup>59</sup>

The receipt of the Paris reports changed Engels’ depiction of the uprising. In an article from Paris published on 27 June, the reporter (probably Ewerbeck) contrasted the barricades of June with those of February.

Nothing is sung now, whereas during the struggle in February the Marseillaise and the Song of the Girardins [sic] were heard everywhere. You choke in silence and with wild rage.<sup>60</sup>

The following day, Engels endorsed this portrait of an uncharacteristically angry silence.

*The June revolution is the revolution of despair* and is fought with silent anger and the gloomy cold-bloodedness of despair. The workers know that they are involved in a *fight to the death* and in the face of the battle’s terrible seriousness, even the cheerful French *esprit* remains silent.<sup>61</sup>

Engels also recalled his Paris reporter's references to the absence of the *Marseillaise*, Rouget de Lisle's revolutionary anthem from 1792, and the *Chant des Girondins*, composed for the 1847 theatrical adaptation of Alexandre Dumas' *Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge* set during the French Revolution. Like Ewerbeck, Engels stated: "The people are not standing on the barricades as in February singing "*Mourir pour la patrie*" ("*Mourir pour la patrie*", taken from another 1792 song by Rouget de Lisle, was the first line of the *Chant des Girondins*). He continued to extrapolate political meaning from the absence of these songs.

The workers of June 23 are fighting for their existence and the fatherland has lost all meaning for them. The *Marseillaise* and all memories of the great Revolution have disappeared.<sup>62</sup>

They had lost all meaning, Engels charged, because they had been proved meaningless:

The unanimity of the February revolution, that poetic unanimity full of dazzling delusions and beautiful lies so appropriately symbolised by that windbag and traitor Lamartine, has disappeared.<sup>63</sup>

The *fraternité* preached by Lamartine had not meant all men were brothers, something Engels had noted in March 1848 when he watched the tense funeral procession to the accompaniment of the *Marseillaise*. Instead, *fraternité* operated to conceal the class oppressions within the new republic. '*Fraternité*', wrote Marx in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*,

the brotherhood of antagonistic classes, one of which exploits the other, this *fraternité* which in February was proclaimed and inscribed in large letters on the façades of Paris, on every prison and every barracks – this *fraternité* found its true, unadulterated and prosaic expression in *civil war*, civil war in its most terrible aspect, the war of labour against capital.<sup>64</sup>

Once again, the ideological and false had been exposed by class struggle.

Marx drew again upon the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*'s Paris reporter's and Engels' writings on June in what is perhaps his most famous description of proletarian revolution. In 1852 Marx observed that whereas past revolutions relied upon recycling the phrases and symbols of past struggles, "[t]he social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. [...] here the content goes beyond the words."<sup>65</sup> Marx, like Engels, learnt that from the barricade fighters in June 1848.



## Revolutionary journalism

In the preface to his history of the Russian Revolution, Leon Trotsky criticised the French historian Louis Madelin's instruction that "the historian ought to stand upon the wall of a threatened city and behold at the same time the besiegers and the besieged". Trotsky responded that 'in a time of revolution standing on the wall involves great danger.' And in climbing the wall to snoop at the insurgents, Madelin became 'a reconnoiterer for the reaction.'<sup>66</sup>

There were plenty of walls in June 1848, constructed by carpenters and cabinet-makers across working-class Paris. Almost all the contemporary written accounts of the June Days were authored by reconnoiters for the reaction, some of whom snooped across the wall and saw exactly what they expected: a provocative, criminal rabble. Engels was one of the very few who wrote from the other side of the barricade. As a revolutionary communist, his politics, his personal knowledge of Paris and his Paris contacts enabled him to revolutionise the dominant accounts of the June Days. Certainly, under the difficult conditions in which he wrote, there were details that were incorrect. But by writing from the other side of the barricade, Engels was able to write a far more objective account of what was taking place in Paris than appeared in the rest of the press. Engels reported the story the French establishment tried by every means to suppress. His writings on the June Days are a masterpiece of revolutionary journalism.

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