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ABSTRACT

In France, May Day has been festive since it was first celebrated in 1890. As opposed to other histories of May Day in France which concentrate on militant resistance, this article examines two departments (the Loire and Maine-et-Loire) with a wide variety of socialist movements to argue that most socialist organizers mobilized joy to create a positive image of socialism that resisted capitalist oppression. This article demonstrates this through the use of police reports and the local press between 1890–1914, showing that the average May Day in France was a festive and joyful affair that promoted the spread of socialist identities and the day's principal demand for the eight-hour day. This reality is contrasted with the mythmaking of contemporary and later anti-festive socialists who saw joyful May Days as a symptom of decline rather than a thriving socialist culture. By demonstrating that May Day was a joyful affair this article opposes the false dichotomy that May Days were either joyful or militant because it was May Day's festivities that made it a fundamental part of a growing socialist culture seeking the transform the world for the better.

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Is May Day a day of joy or of protest? In France, this question is raised by the struggle over the day's competing names: Is May Day the "reformist" *fête du travail* (Labor Day) or the "revolutionary" *fête des travailleurs* (Workers' Day)? In choosing a name, one also chooses the greater "meaning of May Day" and whether it should be spent as part of a gleeful celebration or a militant march. This debate has persisted since the first May Day in 1890 when participants, officially striking for the eight-hour day, chose festivities over insurrection. May Day, this article argues, was festive from the beginning. In France, socialist activists did not expect a one-day strike, which had been decided by the Second International without local involvement, to be embraced so wholeheartedly by working people. Pleasantly surprised by the festivities of 1 May 1890, these activists embraced the day's joyful atmosphere and organized future May Days along similar lines, contributing to the spread of the observance and with it a positive vision of a socialist future. This does not mean that every May Day was joyful. Over time, joyful May Days in France have been confronted by the state and militant socialists who rejected May Day's festivities as simultaneously threatening and not threatening enough. The minority of socialist organizers who rejected the idea of May Day festivities would go on to create and deploy the myth of a militant and insurrectionary May Day tradition to compete with the success of the day's festivities. Drawing from a rich historiography and sources in two French administrative divisions (departments) with diverse socialist movements, this article reconstructs twenty-five years of May Day history from 1890 to 1914 to show that these anti-festive arguments were little more than radical mythmaking that flew in the face of the long history of joy in the French socialist movement.[1]

Studies of joy and happiness and in nineteenth-century France are not new but have mostly centered on the country's ruling Parisian bourgeoisie, often because it was these elites who wrote about happiness and where to find it.[2] While the advice they gave was always interesting, joy was not exclusive to Parisian salons or a middle-class lifestyle, even if the world of the working class, in both nineteenth-century France and beyond, was not inherently joyful. Littered with gray factories and inhabited by broken bodies, the invocation of our fellow "brothers in misery," as one anarcho-syndicalist May Day poster put it, seems appropriate.[3] Despite these conditions, joyful activities were still a part of working-class experience: music, dancing, drinking, and festivals all found a place in the life of the average French worker. Often, these activities took place at cafés, which became central locations to have a drink and discuss politics throughout France.[4]

Beside these familiar escapes from daily sufferings, the May Days organized by most French socialists offered another form of joy as well. One historian of nineteenth-century France has argued that "there are two opposing sides of happiness, the kind which comes from security, acceptance and conformity, and that which represents liberation from the constraints of daily life."[5] We will see that May Day fits the latter definition nicely with its subversion of the world that is. That subversion, from dancing (where we move in a way that is uncommon to our everyday motions) to the millenarian revelation that "the weak will become the strong" (present in both Christianity and Marxism), creates an immense but ephemeral happiness called joy.

1. By doing so, this study follows in the footsteps of Miguel Rodríguez, *Le 1er mai*, Édition revue et agumentée (Gallimard, 2013), ebook in attempting to reconstruct a typical May Day for the period.

2. For an excellent example see Theodore Zeldin, *France, 1848–1945*, vol. 2 of 2, *Intellect, Taste and Anxiety*, Oxford History of Modern Europe (Clarendon Press, 1977), 349–762.

3. La Revanche des Mineurs, "Vive la Grève Générale," n.d., 1M 543, 1894, AD42.

4. Michael P. Hanagan, *The Logic of Solidarity: Artisans and Industrial Workers in Three French Towns, 1871–1914,* The Working Class in European History (University of Illinois Press, 1980), 76–77.

5. Zeldin, *France, 1848–1945*, 2:656..

Among the nineteenth-century working class, joy and happiness were often created through a sense of belonging, which we can summarize as "the joy of shared ideologies."[6] These shared ideologies were critical in creating a joy that opposed the atomization of industrial capitalism. The collective experience of coming together as part of a project for societal change was a major animating source of joy in nineteenth-century Europe, especially in France, where the century saw no shortage of utopian dreams and revolutionary demands.[7] May Day allowed for joy to flourish throughout France's working-class communities and ensured May Day's success as a fundamental part of the socialist calendar.

May Day was never meant to be a holiday, but quickly after its birth it became the cornerstone of a new socialist tradition and identity separate from the republican traditions and identities of earlier socialist movements. May Day became an icon of international socialist unity, replacing previously sacred but nationally oriented dates like 18 March (the beginning of the 1848 Revolution in Germany and the 1871 Paris Commune) and 14 July (Bastille Day). The latter date was also important because, in France, May Day represented a break with the now-conservative republicans who came to power in the 1870s and underscored an identification with a new international and internationalist socialist culture.[8] May Day was also a way to spread that culture. In France and across the world, May Day quickly became the universal symbol of all socialist movements, an annual day to unfurl the red banner, sing the "Internationale," and show the world the organized working class, no matter what.[9] Since the beginning, May Day has been immensely successful in spreading its message, especially in France, where this success was made possible by organizers' use of festivities and joy.

This joy, seen by some militants and historians as the opposite of protest, has been accused of causing the "decline" of May Day. In a typology of protests created by the Communist historian Danielle Tartakowsky, May Day transformed from a "petition-protest," formally submitting demands in the French revolutionary tradition, to a "procession-protest" to affirm a group identity rather than undermine the existing order, an important example of May Day's decline in Tartakowsky's latter studies of the holiday.[10] But as the sociologist Abby Peterson and historian Herbert Reiter have observed, May Day has always been seen as an event in decline.[11] Already in 1893, Frederich Engels wrote in a letter that the event "is already becoming somewhat of an everyday or rather an annual matter; the first fresh bloom is gone;" in 1895 one frustrated French commentator reiterated this view by claiming that "yesterday we made revolutions, today processions."[12] The shared assumption of Tartakowsky, Engels, and other commentators is that as May Day became more joyful, it was simultaneously less revolutionary, but these joyless observations conflict with the reality of the holiday in France, where joyful festivities were not a symptom of May Day's decline, but a fundamental part of its growth and success.

It is important to demonstrate that joy was not a symptom of "reformism." To show this, the departments selected for this study, the Loire and Maine-et-Loire, represent a wide diversity of socialist movements whose use of festive May Day activities had nothing to do with parties' preferences for reform over revolution. The Loire—headquartered since 1855 in Saint-Étienne—has been a focus of French labor history for decades thanks to the dominance of Marxists in the department's socialist politics.[13] The Maine-et-Loire—headquartered in Angers—has received significantly less attention thanks to the department's status on the border with the "reactionary west" and the presence of strong Catholic movements. These right-wing movements have distracted historians from the existence of working-class movements in

6. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, "Joy: An Integrative Theory," *Journal of Positive Psychology* 18, no. 1 (2023): 1–14.

7. For Europe and the rest of the world, see Darrin M. McMahon, *Happiness: A History* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006), 365–405; and Peter N. Stearns, *Happiness in World History*, Themes in World History (Routledge, 2021), 103–4. For nineteenth-century France specifically see Jacques Rancière, *The Nights of Labor: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, trans. John Drury (Fayard, 1981; Temple University Press, 1989) ; and Michèle Riot-Sarcey, *Le Réel de l'utopie* (Albin Michel, 1998).

8. This break with the past was also represented by the day's agnostic French name "the first of May" as opposed to the common English name of "May Day," which refers back to the pre-industrial springtime holiday. For an explanation of the international and internationalist socialist culture in France see Kevin J. Callahan, "The 'True' French Worker Party: The Problem of French Sectarianism and Identity Politics in the Second International, 1889–1900," in *Views from the Margins: Creating Identities in Modern France*, ed. Kevin J. Callahan and Sarah A. Curtis (University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 158–88.

9. On the red flag see Hanno Balz, "'Hostile Take-Over': A Political History of the Red Flag," *Socialist History* 2021, no. 59 (Spring 2021): 8–30. The "Internationale" and other revolutionary music will be discussed below.

10. Danielle Tartakowsky, *Le pouvoir est dans la rue : Crises politiques et manifestations en France*, Collection historique (Aubier, 1998), 41–45. For a summary and exploration of Tartakowsky's typology see Kevin J. Callahan, *Demonstration Culture: European Socialism and the Second International, 1889–1914* (Troubador, 2010), xxi–xxiv.

11. Abby Peterson and Herbert Reiter, eds., *The Ritual of May Day in Western Europe: Past, Present and Future*, The Mobilization Series of Social Movements, Protest, and Culture (Routledge, 2016), 8–9.

12. Frederich Engels, "Engels to Sorge," May 17, 1893, Marxist Internet Archive; and quoted in Maurice Dommanget, *Histoire du premier Mai* (1953; repr., Le mot et le reste, 2006), 15–16.

13. How "revolutionary" the Marxist Parti ouvrier français (POF) really was can often be overstated; see Julien Chuzeville, *Brève histoire des socialismes en France* (Libertalia, 2025), 29–32 and 92–106. The rich

Angers and in smaller communities like the slate-mining town of Trélazé and textile town of Cholet. Maine-et-Loire's socialist movement has also gone relatively unnoticed because it lacked a dominant socialist tendency as opposed to the Marxist-dominated Loire. In Angers and Cholet the socialist movement revolved around reformist and independently minded socialists who often collaborated with Radicals (left-wing republicans) in defense of the republic against the department's reactionary forces.[14] In Trélazé, it was anarchists who dominated among the already radical slate miners.[15] These two departments offer a small sample of how May Day was celebrated by almost all of the French socialist factions with joy and festivities. This article purposefully sidesteps Parisian May Days in favor of a view from the provinces with the goal of understanding May Day across metropolitan France, away from stereotypes about the famously militant capital.[16]

To reconstruct these May Days, this article relies on sources hostile to the workers' movement. French labor history has long benefited from critically reading the bourgeois press and police reports preserved in departmental archives, which provide a predictably biased view. Although the National Archives have a rich collection of police reports on May Day throughout the whole of France, they can be less reliable and contain fewer details than the internal reports housed in departmental archives. Police chiefs and departmental prefects needed accurate and detailed information, while the reports sent to the Ministry of the Interior in Paris and later to the National Archives were summaries and carried a greater risk of exaggeration, either to advance one's career or to achieve a political aim through the use of state power. Departmental archives also contain a rich collection of sources not available in the National Archives: speeches. Although police spies at socialist meetings were easily identified by those in the crowd, they recorded many speeches that offer a window into meetings that were not otherwise public or recorded. The other major set of traditional sources, local newspapers, offers another biased angle from which one can observe May Day.[17] By critically examining both sets of sources, I argue that even though the forces of order wanted to see May Day as exclusively militant and "traditionally threatening," the day was a festive one that challenged the existing social order through positive emotions. These positive emotions were crucial to May Day's long-term success in France and emphasize its importance to the larger field of protest studies in its turn toward the emotions of protest and other political actions.[18]

Planning Resistance and Embracing Joy

The competing conceptions of May Day as a day of joy versus a day of protest were not just found in the contemporary press but are also fundamental to its hagiography and historiography. In France, May Day's militant hagiographers return to the day's origins at the 1889 Marxist congress of the Second International, which declared that 1 May 1890 would be a protest for the eight-hour day. This original declaration has become the unassailable "proof" that May Day was—and still is—a protest. That it was a protest for the eight-hour day allowed militant activists to build the myth of the 1886 Haymarket Massacre in Chicago as the "true" origin of May Day, which it is not.[19] Instead, the origins of May Day can be traced to the American Federation of Labor's (AFL) 1888 convention, when the union organized a second, limited, strike for the eight-hour day after the failure of the famous 1886 strike. The AFL's decision to organize a strike on 1 May 1890 was then embraced by participants at the Paris conference of the Second International hoping to integrate the American organization into the new international structure.[20] In France, May Day hagiographies are the preserve of writers and historians affiliated with the French Communist

bibliography compiled in Micheal P. Hanagan's *Logic of Solidarity* is now forty-five years old but effectively demonstrates the central place of the POF in histories of the department and French socialism generally.

14. Jean-Luc Marais, *Le Maine-et-Loire aux XIXe et XXe siècles*, Histoire de l'Anjou 4 (Picard, 2009), 122–24.

15. Forty years earlier (1855), Trélazé's miners participated in a riot *cum* insurrection organized by a local secret society; see Jacques-Guy Petit, "Marianne en Anjou : l'insurrection des ardoisiers de Trélazé (26-27 août 1855)," *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l'Ouest* 104, no. 3 (1997): 187–200; and Boris Battais, "L'amnistie de 1859 et le retour des mariannistes en Anjou: entre pardon judiciaire et surveillance policière," *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest* 117, no. 2 (2010): 69–83.

16. This goal is in line with the goals of Antoine Prost, who studied May Day at the end of the Third Republic in "Les Premier Mai du Front populaire en province (1936–1939)," *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 27 (September 1990): 61–75. For an example of another non-Parisian study of May Day in France see Thibaut Woestelandt, "Les 1er mai à Lille, 1890–1968," in *Mouvements protestataires et luttes populaires en France (1831–1968)*, ed. Myriam Deniel-Ternant, Marianne Guérin, and Joëlle Alazard (Bréal, 2023), 31–44. For the first of May in Paris, see Guy Cadic, "Les Premiers Ier mai à Paris" (Maîtrise, Université Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne, 1979).

17. Although many newspapers have been digitized and this article uses many of those digitized copies, we should be aware of what newspapers are being selected for digitization and the bias that reflects. For an important discussion on the topic, see Estelle Bunout, Maud Ehrmann, and Frédéric Clavert, eds., *Digitised Newspapers—A New Eldorado for Historians? Reflections on Tools, Methods and Epistemology*, Studies in Digital History and Hermeneutics 3 (De Gruyter, 2022). We should also note that access to digitized newspapers in France is highly unequal between departments.

18. For the "emotional turn" in protest studies, see James M. Jasper, *The Emotions of Protest* (University of Chicago Press, 2018).

19. On the myth of the Haymarket Massacre as the origin of May Day see Herbert Reiter, "The Origins of May Day: History and Memory," in *The Ritual of May Day in Western*

Party and the Confédération générale du travail (CGT, General Confederation of Labor) although academic historians have fallen prey to this narrative as well.[21] The most significant example of this narrative comes from the oppositional Communist Maurice Dommanget, whose 1953 history is the cornerstone of every French study of May Day. Dommanget's narrative is one of an initial militant success that is followed by ten "dull" years (1894–1904) "without any great acts," only for May Day to be reinvigorated by the CGT's militant May Days, beginning in 1905.[22] The belief that May Day is exclusively for protest makes for a compelling narrative but ignores the joy that allowed May Day to thrive during this first, "dull," decade.

Dommanget's joyless narrative has been propagated by a large segment of May Day historiography in France before 1914. Although contemporary historians have done an excellent job tracing May Day's evolution since the collapse of the Second International, Dommanget's narrative of the early years has gone mostly unchallenged. Danielle Tartakowsky, for example, traces the "departure of the dream" to 1936, the year of the "nationalization" of May Day by the Popular Front and the transformation of the CGT into a "reformist" project.[23] This line of thought was summarized by another historian, Vincent Robert, who wrote that "most of the hallmarks of May Day disappeared little by little through annual repetition, making it a holiday rather than a protest."[24] Still other historians, such as Miguel Rodríguez, simply avoid the question altogether by asking whether "it is really necessary to choose between a holiday and a political protest?"[25] Only the French labor and feminist historian Michelle Perrot has fully embraced the joy to be found in May Day before 1914.[26]

Perrot's history of the first May Day in France allows us to see how the day was an explosion of possibilities, hope, and joy. In France, the day belonged to the Marxists of the Parti ouvrier français (POF, French Workers' Party), since there had been no May Day resolution at the rival *Possibiliste* (reformist) congress, also in 1889. In the lead-up to 1 May 1890, regional union congresses called for strikes, and the socialist-controlled city council of Saint-Étienne provided 10,000 francs for the day, roughly equal to the daily wages of 2,500 industrial workers.[27] The army went on high alert in the days leading up to 1 May; near Roanne (Loire) a local colonel ominously confirmed he would follow the instructions given to him by the local subprefect.[28]

On 1 May 1890 there was a general work stoppage in Roanne. There, striking workers proceeded to a public rally at the town's Bourse du Travail—a building purchased by a collection of pro-worker organizations or sometimes the municipality for use by local trade unions—where they heard revolutionary speeches for the eight-hour day and against the bourgeois republic and its institutions.[29] Contrary to police expectations, these revolutionary speeches were not followed by the expected revolution but with thanks, as one speaker told the crowd that "it is thanks to your working-man's calm that this protest has not been designated as a riot."[30] Roanne was one of many May Days in 1890. Miguel Rodríguez estimates that there were between 160 and 200 events in France that day, although the historian admits that "hardly any trace remains of the many anonymous celebrations spread throughout the four corners of France, with a festive atmosphere of singing, dancing, punch and walks."[31]

This outbreak of joy was immense:

> Workers went on strike without any idea when they could go back to work; it was a beginning whose end no one could predict. This was the reason why many workers found it impossible to go back to work after the

Europe: Past, Present and Future, ed. Abby Peterson and Herbert Reiter (Routledge, 2016), 14–30; and Hubert Perrier and Michel Cordillot, "The Origins of May Day: The American Connection," in *Storie e Immagini Del 1° Maggio: Problemi Della Storiografia Italiana Ed Internazionale*, ed. Gianni C. Donno, Biblioteca Di Storia Contemporanea 13 (Piero Lacaita editore, 1990), 445–47.

20. See the AFL's decision in the *Report of the Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor Held at St. Louis, Missouri: December 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 1888* (American Federation of Labor, 1888), 24–26. On the desire among European socialists to integrate the AFL into the Second International see Catherine Collomp, "*L'American Federation of labor* et la IIe Internationale : Vers l'isolement politique et ideologique," *Les Cahiers d'Encrages* I, no. 4 (1988): 29–40.

21. While informative both André Rossel, *Premier mai: 90 ans de lutte populaire dans le monde* (Éditions de la Courtille, 1977) and Georges Séguy, *1er Mai : les 100 printemps* (Messidor/Éditions sociales, 1989) are otherwise great books that unfortunately fall into this catagory.

22. Dommanget, *Histoire du premier Mai,* 247.

23. Tartakowsky does, it should be noted, trace the origins of this "nationalization" to 1905, but her narrative does not see the day "transform" until the CGT's reformist turn between 1919 and 1936. *La part du rêve : Histoire du 1er Mai en France* (Hachette, 2007), 85–86.

24. Vincent Robert, "Vingt-cinq « premier mai » lyonnais (1889–1914)," in *Les Chemins de la manifestation: 1848–1914,* Collection du centre Pierre Léon (Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1996), para. 1.

25. Rodríguez, *Le 1er mai,* Présentation.

26. Michelle Perrot, "The First of May in France," in *The Power of the Past: Essays for Eric Hobsbawm*, ed. Pat Thane, Geoffrey Crossick, and Roderick Floud, trans. Sian Reynolds (Cambridge University Press, 1984), 143–71.

27. Dommanget, *Histoire du premier Mai,* 154. Wages were highly unequal between regions and professions during this period, with highly skilled laborers earning close to 10 francs a day while "unskilled" laborers could earn as little as 1.25. See Hanagan, *The Logic of Solidarity*, 68–72 for a discussion on wages in the Loire.

> First of May. Like a seismic shock, it triggered off a wave of strikes inspired by a quasi-messianic hope in which the religious expectation of a Coming and the vision of a historical movement were intermingled…. After this intoxicating day of festivities, 'going back to work', returning to the 'slave-drivers', to the bosses, and to the likelihood of reprisals seemed impossible. Many simply did not go.[32]

In the south of France, coal miners struck on May Day and did not return to work until 4 May.[33] Writing a year later, Marx's son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, recalled how "May Day 1890 was celebrated outside Paris with an enthusiasm that cannot be discounted. In Roubaix [near Lille on the border with Belgium], for example, the workers found that protesting for one day was not enough and so they celebrated for three."[34] Back in Roanne, strikers returned to work but the festivities continued; on 4 May a workers' ball was held that lasted until 11:30 p.m. despite the mayor ordering cafés to close at 8:30 p.m.[35]

Throughout these first May Days, there was joy. However, in industrial towns across France like Cholet (Maine-et-Loire) and Saint-Chamond (Loire), the police, who had prepared so carefully for the day, could only report that in their town there were no protests on 1 May 1890. Even in the towns with May Day events, the police and bourgeois press struggled to connect the expected revolution with the reality of joy. Angers (Maine-et-Loire) hosted 10,000 May Dayers out of a population of 70,000, but there was no revolution. These confounded expectations led one conservative newspaper to dismissively ask: "Can we say that there was a May Day in Angers?—No."[36]

The Happy Day

May Day had been a success but with no international socialist conference planned until 1891, national organizations began taking it upon themselves to make the day an annual affair. In France, the *possibilistes* (reformist socialists) who did not participate in the first May Day quickly embraced a second one, while at their Lille conference that summer, the POF made the official decision to organize their own second May Day. In their resolution, the POF incited workers to make the eight-hour day a reality wherever possible, and municipal councilors were called to "transfer to the *fête du travail* [Labor Day] of 1 May those credits that have been made available to the bourgeois holiday of 14 July [Bastille Day]."[37] Already in 1890 the Marxist POF had recognized the joy inherent to May Day and would organize the day as such.

May Day organizers continuously embraced the day's joy over the course of the 1890s. In the Loire, May Day organizers sold copies of a poem by the socialist watchmaker and POF activist Benjamin Ledin that beautifully summarized the joy of May Day, declaring in its first stanza,[38]

Le premier Mai revient, bravo ! c'est l'heureux jour	May Day returns, bravo! it's the happy day
Où, du printemps béni, nous sentons la caresse,	When, from blessed spring, we feel its caress,
Voici les fleurs, les ris, les parfums et l'ivresse,	Here are the flowers, mirth, perfumes, and euphoria,
Phébus avec ses feux, va nous verser l'amour.	Phoebus' fires will pour love over us.

Ledin's poem brings the joy of May Day into the foreground, emphasizing the day's connection with spring but also its celebratory libations. The poem's world is far away from that of the

28. "Confirmation d'un télégramme envoyé le 30 Avril 1890 à 7h45 soir," 30 April 1890, 1M 543, 1890, AD42.

29. Bourses du Travail filled more roles than can be listed here. For a summary see Christopher K. Ansell, *Schism and Solidarity in Social Movements: The Politics of Labor in the French Third Republic*, Structural Analysis in the Social Sciences 20 (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 110–17. For this article's purposes, their most important feature was that they provided a consistent meeting space. For an in-depth study, see Tartakowsky's *Les syndicats en leurs murs : Bourses du travail, maisons du people, maisons de syndicats*, Époques (Champ Vallon, 2024).

30. Commissar of Police in Roanne, "Rapport, Manifestation au 1er mai," 3 May 1890, 1M 543, 1890, AD42.

31. Miguel Rodríguez, "France," in *The Memory of May Day: An Iconographic History of the Origins and Implanting of a Workers' Holiday*, ed. Andrea Panaccione (Marsilio editori, 1989), 113–14. In his monograph on the subject, Rodríguez enumerates 141 municipalities that are known to have had May Day events in 1890. This is complicated by major municipalities like Paris, where we know of multiple events on the same day. The exact number is impossible to know, Rodríguez, *Le 1er mai*, chap. 3.

32. Perrot, "The First of May in France," 162.

33. Jean-Michel Gaillard, "Le 1er mai 1890 dans le bassin houiller du Gard," *Le Mouvement social*, no. 94 (March 1976): 67–68.

34. Paul Lafargue, "Le 1er Mai et le mouvement socialiste en France," *Cahiers du bolchévisme*, April 15, 1933, Marxist Internet Archive.

35. Partially encoded telegram from the subprefect in Roanne to the prefect of the Loire, May 4, 1890, 1M 543, 1890, AD42.

36. Dommanget, *Histoire du premier Mai*, 164. At first glance these numbers seem implausible but Robert, "Vingt-cinq « premier mai » lyonnais," paras. 21–23 has demonstrated that the number of May Dayers in Lyon 1890 was astronomical when compared to the years that followed. Angers' numbers are also significantly modified by the radical slate miners of nearby Trélazé who attended May Day in Angers rather than organize their own. Quote from "Le 1er Mai à Angers," *Le petit courier* (Angers), May 3, 1890, 2, RetroNews.

factory, instead inhabiting an imaginary garden with flowers decorated by the Greek god Apollo (also known as Phoebus) pouring love from a fountain. What matters here is not the content of the poem—beautiful though it is—but that it was distributed by May Day organizers at all. May Day was to be joyful from the ground up.

Despite these joyful intentions, the institutions of the bourgeois-controlled Third Republic were not ready to believe that May Day could be festive. The best example is also the most well known and took place in the town of Fourmies along the Belgian border. It was there in 1891 that POF militants planned to celebrate May Day with "harmony, calm, and dignity." Two plays, a picnic, and a family ball were all planned for the afternoon. Instead, after several POF organizers and striking workers were beaten and arrested that morning, a large crowd began an impromptu march, which eventually ran into a wall of soldiers who had been deployed in the area ahead of May Day. In the resulting chaos, the soldiers shot into the crowd, killing nine and wounding another thirty-five.[39] All of the dead except one were age twenty or younger, and the image of young May Dayers being murdered by the army and the scandal that followed showed that, while socialists had begun organizing festive May Days, the state would not readily accept them as such.

Violent May Days like in Fourmies were, however, the exception. After 1891 the bourgeois press and the police across France increasingly accepted that May Day was a day of festivities, with goals and motivations other than world revolution. May Day 1892 helped prove that. The first of May fell on a Sunday that year, greatly limiting the effects of any strike. Fortunately, 1892's municipal elections also fell on 1 May, and socialists used May Day's mobilizing potential as a get-out-the-vote drive where the scheduled activities would encourage male May Dayers to vote.[40] This decision greatly aided the cause of municipal socialism in France, but the election did not bolster May Day. In Saint-Étienne the post-voting festivities were interrupted by gray skies, a fact that was gleefully reported by the bourgeois *Le Stéphanois*.[41]

By 1893, May Day had found the rhythm that Maurice Dommanget found so "dull." Local police chiefs and prefects summarized the day of joy and festivities by hollowly repeating that it had passed in "complete calm," while the bourgeois press only saw distant May Days in Paris and abroad as threatening, reporting local May Days with other local news and summarizing them by writing, as one typical newspaper did, that "the workers did not want to make any noise and it was in a dignified calm, without ostentation, that they arrived at various points in the city with their families to celebrate the *fête du travail* [Labor Day]."[42] But these summaries are incomplete because outside observers did not comment on the joy found in May Day festivities. What were these May Days like?

First, the question of striking on May Day was not obvious. Sometimes, unions or the local Bourse du Travail would ask factory owners in advance to voluntarily cease work on May Day. Though whether permission was given was usually irrelevant, the "request" was really a warning.[43] The decision to strike was a democratic one. Railroad workers along one section of track in Saint-Étienne put the matter to a vote: 109 for striking against 119 for working.[44] The decision was also highly dependent on the local context, as workers who had recently gone on strike were significantly less likely to participate in May Day. This was why the famously radical and anarchist slate miners of Trélazé did not strike on May Day 1891 despite the anarchist embrace of the occasion.[45] The most active May Day strikers were workers already on strike

37. Dommanget, *Histoire du premier Mai*, 181–82.

38. Benjamin Ledin, "Le premier mai," May 1, 1895, 1M 543, 1895, AD42.

39. A detailed account of the events of the day can be found in Jean-Louis Chappat, "La fusillade de Fourmies," in *Fourmies et les premier mai*, ed. Madeleine Rebérioux (Les éditions de l'ateiler, 1994), 23–38. Another excellent account of the day can be found in André Pierrard and Jean-Louis Chappat, *La fusillade de Fourmies: premier mai 1891* (Éditions Miroirs, 1991).

40. Women were denied the right to vote in France until 1944. Joan W. Scott, "Mayors versus Police Chiefs: Socialist Municipalities Confront the French State," in *French Cities in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. John Merriman, Routledge Revivals (1981; repr., Routledge, 2018), ebook.

41. "Le 1er mai à Saint-Étienne," *Le Stéphanois* (Saint-Étienne), May 2, 1892, LecturaPlus.

42. "Le premier mai," *Le Stéphanois* (Saint-Étienne), May 2, 1893, LecturaPlus.

43. Hanagan, *The Logic of Solidarity*, 92–93; and Leslie A. Schuster, *A Workforce Divided: Community, Labor, and the State in Saint-Nazaire's Shipbuilding Industry, 1880-1910*, Contributions in Labor Studies 58 (Greenwood Press, 2002), 157.

44. Report from the Saint-Étienne chief of police to the departmental prefect, April 30, 1908, 1M 544, 1908, AD42.

who used the day to engage in symbolic acts and win support. In 1911, construction workers in Angers had been on strike for several weeks and used May Day for a five-mile (eight-kilometer) march to Trélazé. Departing at 1:30 PM, they "sang the Internationale down the narrow streets scented with May-trees. At their front was a young man with an improvised red flag: a piece of cloth hanging from a broomstick." When the strikers finally arrived in Trélazé, they were met by a crowd of twelve hundred spectators.[46]

Instead of strikes, public rallies became the primary May Day event for socialist organizers. Usually, these took place inside the local Bourse du Travail, where a local socialist would be elected president of the meeting and a few locally known—or in larger or more militant cities, nationally known—socialists and trade unionists would give speeches on a variety of topics. These topics, as well as any comments by vocal members of the audience, would then be summarized as the order of the day and voted on by the crowd, usually giving its popular assent enthusiastically.

Beyond these public rallies at the Bourse du Travail, one of the favorite activities among May Dayers was the family ball (*fête familiale*). These festivals were usually held in sympathetic cafés where a small fee would cover the cost of the space and featured choral concerts or guest lectures from the socialist organizers who had participated in the public rally earlier that day. Normally, these lectures were more intimate affairs, with the organizer speaking at length about an issue directly related to attendees' everyday lives. On occasion, family balls could even replace the public rally altogether. This was the case in 1913 when the Roanne's Bourse du Travail only held a family ball on 30 April because May Day fell once again on a Sunday.[47] This happened outside of France as well; in Strasbourg (annexed by Germany in 1871), Social Democrats organized festivities with choral concerts that attracted upwards of eight hundred participants, as in 1905.[48] In France and Germany, family balls were especially popular because there was always something to drink. In 1893, two hundred out of three hundred May Dayers in Angers attended a festival with free punch while in nearby Saumur (Maine-et-Loire), local organizers encouraged attendance with the call to "come to claim your right to exist, come to celebrate May Day . . . with a fraternal punch in the name of all the workers of the universe."[49]

It was these festivities that made May Day successful. Beyond any specific demands, May Day came to symbolize workers' identification with the socialist movement. In towns like the POF-dominated Troyes in Champagne, May Day promoted Marxism specifically, while in Angers no single socialist group dominated, so the message was one of socialism so broadly defined that it included anarchists like Ludovic Ménard from Trélazé.[50] The festivities also succeeded in promoting socialist internationalism. The Saint-Étienne socialist Laurent Crozier used his speech to give local May Dayers the sense that they were part of a larger movement that was spreading across France and the globe.[51]

One of the most important ways that May Day organizers combined political messages with joy was through music. The historian Robert Brécy's work on May Day and revolutionary music in France provides us with the songs and their variations sung by May Dayers to create a lively atmosphere and a sense of collective harmony.[52] In collective song, "we" is not imposed from beyond but declared from within. It is an act of communion with other participants and an act of radical solidarity in which the tone-deaf participant and the opera singer are equals as their voices carry through space.[53] Organizers at this time understood music's power to create

45. Report from the director of general security to the minister of the interior, May 2, 1891, 4 M 6 / 76, 1er Mai 91, AD49.

46. "Le 1er Mai à Angers," *Le patriote de l'ouest* (Angers), May 3, 1911, 2, RetroNews.

47. "Le premier mai 1913," *Le Roannais socialiste* (Roanne), April 26, 1913, PER 38, AD42.

48. Report "die sozialdemokratische Maifeier" from the police president to the district president of Strasbourg, May 2, 1905, 27 AL 226, AD67.

49. 4ème Bureau du sûreté générale au ministre de l'intérieur, May 4, 1893, 4 M 6 / 76, AD49; and "À l'occasion du 1er mai," *L'Écho saumurois* (Saumur), May 2, 1891, AMS.

50. Helen Harden Chenut, *The Fabric of Gender: Working-Class Culture in the Third Republic* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 123–31. For the life of Ménard, see his entry in *Le Maitron: Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier français*, version uploaded November 30, 2010, last updated June 17, 2024.

51. "Réunion publique aux Champs-Élysées – discours de M.M. Croizier et Chapertier," May 1, 1894, 1M 543, 1894, AD42.

52. Robert Brécy, "Les chansons du premier mai," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 28, no. 3 (September 1981): 393–432; and *Florilège de la chanson révolutionnaire de 1789 au front populaire*, Édition revue et corrigée (Les Éditions Ouvrières, 1990), 152–56. On collective harmony see Barbara Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* (Picador, 2006), 21–41.

collective identities.[54] In the freedom to sing and dance away from gray factories, there was fun to be had.

The songs chosen by organizers were deliberate. Sometimes participants would be given new lyrics for already popular tunes, reimagining them to create new political music. The popular May Day song "We Need Eight Hours" (*C'est huit heures qu'il nous faut*), whose refrain insists that "It's eight hours that we need!" is based on the even more popular drinking song "We Need a Drink" (*C'est à Boire*).[55] Following the Fusillade de Fourmies, activists rewrote the "Marseillaise" to contain an anti-militarist and socialist message. This new "Marseillaise fourmisienne," like the German "Arbeiter-Marseillaise," synthesized the music of the French Revolution with contemporary socialist goals, although the music of May Day did not have to be explicitly socialist.[56] Before 1914, May Day had not yet fully divorced socialism from the French republican tradition and so May Day participants and striking workers generally would sing republican tunes from the French Revolution that had not yet lost their revolutionary bite.[57] The best example of this was the "Carmagnole," a popular song associated with the sans-culottes, the famous Parisian radicals from the French Revolution. In yearly reports about May Day in their towns, the police often singled out the "Carmagnole" alongside the general comment that music was sung. It could be sung cheerfully at family balls (Angers, 1897) or drunkenly by a dozen May Dayers at midnight (Saumur, 1894).[58] So popular was the "Carmagnole" in fact that it was also singled out by the CGT's denunciations of festive May Days. In 1901, CGT activists wrote that "meetings and family balls replaced the arousing [*troublant*] street demonstrations. Later, these meetings and parties were held after work…. May Day protests became May Day celebrations. Let us be content with singing the revolution and dancing the "Carmagnole" to the sound of the piano no more…. Let us unite and fight."[59]

Resistance to Joy

On the left, the CGT was the primary enemy of a festive May Day throughout this period. Militant to a fault, the union is the best example of "the ideologically purer revolutionaries [who] were actually suspicious of merrymaking as politically diversionary, and of the folklore practices as a concession to the spirit of superstition."[60] Founded in 1895 by 207 unions, Bourses du Travail, and other labor organizations, the CGT was a syndicalist organization, believing among other things that capitalism would not be ended through a political revolution or reforms but by the organized working class engaged in a general strike.[61] Within the CGT, the position became unassailable after the 1906 Charter of Amiens although the organization had already been publishing its anti-festive declarations for some time. These declarations were not opposed to May Day altogether; instead, the union saw it as preparation for the general strike.[62] Since revolutions are not dinner parties, preparations for the revolution could not be festive. This is why the CGT's 1909 May Day manifesto, summarized by Dommanget, "reminded readers that May Day is not a *fête* but a hate-filled protest against bourgeois society."[63]

Beyond words, the union would also intervene to stop or at least interfere with May Day festivities. Michelle Perrot recounts how

> in 1905, the militants of the Basse-Loire hired a steamboat—the Basse Indre—which sailed, all decked in red, down the Loire from Saint-Nazaire to Nantes, at every halt taking on board workers' delegations with their banners, marking each stop like the stations of the cross—but this was a joyful occasion, in which laughter

53. For a theory of protest music see John Street, *Music and Politics* (Polity, 2012), 62–78; and James Garratt, *Music and Politics: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 127–35.

54. See Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (University of California Press, 2009) for a study of the power of music in politics during this period. Pages 517–18 include an excellent example of how the French socialists of this period understood music's social nature.

55. For more on "We Need Eight Hours" see Chenut, *Fabric of Gender*, 128–31.

56. On the long use of the "Marseillaise" in socialist movements see Bernard Richard, *La Marseillaise : Une histoire dans le monde* (CNRS Éditions, 2023), 62–63 and 139–42.

57. For a table of the music sung by striking workers in France between 1871 and 1890 see Michelle Perrot, *Workers on Strike: France, 1871–1890*, trans. Chris Turner with the assistance of Erica Carter and Claire Laudet (Seuil, 1984; Yale University Press, 1987), 161–62.

58. Rapport 4 of the Commissar Centrale," May 2, 1897, 4 M 6 / 76, Premier Mai 1897 – Manifestations, AD49; and "Le 1er mai à Saumur," *L'Écho saumurois* (Saumur), May 3, 1894, AMS.

59. Quoted in Tartakowsky, *La part du rêve*, 71.

60. Eric Hobsbawm, "The Transformation of Labour Rituals," in *Worlds of Labour: Further Studies in the History of Labour* (1982; repr., Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984), 77.

61. To understand the relevance of the general strike as a political tactic among French socialists during this period see Marco Gervasoni, "L'invention du syndicalisme révolutionnaire en France (1903–1907)," *Mil neuf cent. Revue d'histoire intellectuelle* 24, no. 1 (2006): 57–71; and Patrick de Laubier, *1905, mythe et réalité de la grève générale : le mythe français et la réalité russe*, 2e éd. corr. et augm., Sociologie (Éditions universitaires, 1989).

62. See Danielle Tartakowsky, "Le 1er Mai," in *Histoire des mouvements sociaux en France*, ed. Michel Pigenet and Danielle Tartakowsky (La Découverte, 2014), 279; G. D. H. Cole, *The Second International 1889–1914, vol. 1 of A History of Socialist Thought* (Macmillan, 1963), 14–15; and Ansell,

> mingled with the singing of the Internationale and plenty of the local Muscadet was drunk…. At all events, the leadership of the CGT intervened in the name of working-class respectability. 'On 1 May 1907, [a national CGT leader] made it clear at Saint-Nazaire that the First of May was supposed to be a day of protest, not a holiday. No more boat-trips down the Loire.'[64]

Further down the Loire, the CGT again challenged the idea of a festive May Day. In 1911 Dalzant, a glassmaker from the southwest of France, spoke to eight hundred workers in Angers on 30 April 1911, telling them that "May Day … is the *fête des travailleurs* [Workers' Day], always pacifist so that we can sing and dance. Today that changes. We are no longer entertaining ourselves, we protest." Dalzant's speech was challenged by another union activist from the crowd, Peréire, who "gave a history of the festival of May Day which was born in 1885 [*sic*] in America. The workers, he said, want to replace Bastille Day with May Day, the authentic date of May Day. We must celebrate May Day."[65] Despite this disagreement over the future of May Day both Dalzant and Peréire agreed that the occasion had been a joyful one since the beginning. The CGT wanted to change the festive nature of May Day to introduce a renewed revolutionary tactic—the general strike—while workers like Peréire saw no need to change, May Day was a radically festive day.

The CGT was not alone in its criticisms of May Day from the left. Early on, anarchists and Blanquists (insurrectionary socialists) found themselves opposed to the day for a variety of reasons. Already in 1890 speeches by famous anarchists including Louise Michel—member of the Paris Commune—in the town of Vienne gave way to a "riot" which saw the speakers arrested as leaders of an insurrection.[66] The next year, anarchists in the nearby Loire attacked the day's lack of militancy and criticized May Dayers for going "together to triumphantly march in the festive *habits* [a reference to the habits worn by monks but also to the frock coats of the bourgeoisie] of their oppressors [*affameurs*], who are already habituating themselves to this yearly walk."[67] Among Blanquists it was not May Day's militancy but its internationalism that was the problem. Between 1892 and 1894 the Blanquist and former member of the Paris Commune Eugène Protot published several pamphlets accusing the day of being a German plot to destroy French industry and the nation's revolutionary spirit, ending one of these pamphlets with a simple appeal to French workers: "Do not go to German festivals!"[68]

May Day's Defiant Joy

Faced with this opposition to joy, we should ask why May Day still took on a festive form and if it was ever possible for the it to be anything other than joyful. Returning to the debates over its origins, militant May Dayers and their allied historians have argued that it is exclusively a strike for the eight-hour day, but we have already seen that, when May Day did take the form of a strike, it was still used as a day of rest from work, as the Second International's many May Day resolutions demanded.[69] In the towns of Fourmies (1891) and Angers (1911) strikes and festivities were two sides of the same coin. The same was true in Strasbourg, then a part of Germany, where striking May Dayers would march to a nearby forest to picnic as part of their demonstration.[70] We can attribute this fusion of strikes and joy, in part, to the fact that May Day strikes were fundamentally different from the majority of strikes in this period. Between 1871 and 1890 in France, most strikes were defensive in nature, a reaction against employer malfeasance rather than an action for an improvement in conditions. May Day's formal demand for the eight-hour day, by contrast, constituted an offensive.[71] May Dayers were not protecting what little they had but engaging in a struggle for something better. Escaping the factory in favor of better conditions provided May

Schism and Solidarity in Social Movements, 117–22.

63. Dommanget, *Histoire du premier Mai*, 431.

64. Perrot, "The First of May in France," 165, quoting Claude Geslin, "Le syndicalisme ouvrier en Bretagne avant 1914" (Thèse d'Etat, Nanterre, France, Université Paris-X, 1982), 810.

65. "Le 1er Mai à Angers," *Le patriote de l'ouest* (Angers), May 2, 1911, 2, RetroNews.

66. For a discussion of what happened in Vienne on 1 May 1890 and the trial that followed see Claude Rétat, *L'anarchie au prétoire: Vienne, 1er mai 1890. Une insurrection et ses juges*, Grands essais (Bleu autour, 2022).

67. "*L'international*" & "*La Libera Iniziativa,*" "La comédie du 1er mai," n.d., 1M 543, 1891, AD42.

68. For a good laugh read Eugène Protot, *Les manifestes de la commune révolutionnaire contre le premier mai* (A. Hue, 1895), 23. Also see Patrick H. Hutton, *The Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition: The Blanquists in French Politics, 1864–1893* (University of California Press, 1981), 156–60 for the general xenophobia of the late Blanquist movement.

69. An English translation can be found in Mike Taber, ed., *Under the Socialist Banner: Resolutions of the Second International, 1888–1912* (Haymarket Books, 2021), pt. 3, Zurich Congrèss, August 6–12, 1893.

70. Jean-Pierre Hirsch, "Le 1er Mai strasbourgeois, 1890-1914," in *De l'Allemagne à la France: le mouvement ouvrier en Alsace-Lorraine (1890-1920)*, ed. Françoise Olivier-Utard, Recherches et documents 90 (Éditions de la Société savante d'Alsace, 2018), 83–84.

Day strikes with a uniquely optimistic character. That May Day takes place in spring only made it more hopeful. The return of life from the dead of winter symbolizes youthful rejuvenation, and, in the broader nineteenth-century political context, we have only to look at 1848's popular name, the "springtime of the peoples," to find the hope embodied in this revolutionary tradition.[72]

What is shocking about these May Days is not their joy but how, even in their most festive forms, participants maintained a calm demeanor that was understood and sometimes even respected by middle-class observers. This demeanor formed the basis for later denunciation by the Communist International, which, in 1924, "accused reformists of having perverted May Day from early on, turning it into a 'petit-bourgeois festival without content.'"[73] But we have already seen how there was no purely "militant" May Day to be perverted. Police reports regularly commented that, at the end of the day's speeches and festivities, the town's "habitual calm" returned. When Roanne's May Dayers violated their 1890 curfew, the subprefect still mentioned that, when they did return to their homes, it was "without noise and without disorder."[74] This was the preference of the Second International generally, which sought to create the image of a disciplined army of the proletariat marching together toward a socialist future.[75] May Day celebrations, even when drunken, were minimally disruptive. Saumur's singing May Dayers in 1894 did not continue throughout the night; they eventually went home and allowed "calm to return to the street."[76]

This preference for self-control is what set May Day in France apart from the carnivalesque festive cultures theorized by the Soviet philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin.[77] Instead of exaggeration and profanity, observers at French May Days witnessed a disciplined demonstration organized to prove that the working class could, and would, govern "responsibly." And it worked: bourgeois newspapers were proud of their "well-behaved" workers. For example, *Le Stéphanois* in 1893 paternalistically told its readers that Saint-Étienne's May Dayers had "shown that they are worthy of the trust placed in them."[78] But that "trust" had nothing to do with May Dayers' preferences for reform or revolution; those Saint-Étienne May Dayers were not affiliated with the reformist wing of French socialism but with the Marxist POF. Instead of accommodating bourgeois fears of socialism, organizers were legitimizing an "inevitable" socialist regime before it had even come into existence. This is why, between 1890 and 1914, French May Days partially mirrored the political festivities of the French Revolution; the critical difference was that while those French Revolutionary festivals followed the revolution, May Day was preparing France for the next one.[79] In legitimizing what was to come, these May Days also closely resembled the political banquets used by republicans throughout the nineteenth century in France to undermine various conservative regimes.[80]

But there were limits. May Day festivities were still legible to bourgeois commentators, and the new regime that socialist organizers were legitimizing had much in common with the one they wished to replace: the patriarchal family and the global colonial order, for example, were never challenged on May Day in the Loire and Maine-et-Loire. These limits were never exclusive to joyful May Days because—like other European socialists—French socialists were stymied by petty prejudices and lackluster imaginations.[81] France's May Days between 1890 and 1914 threatened capitalism because organizers could imagine an end to the economic order, but they could not imagine a world without patriarchy or empire.

Joy was a fundamental part of May Day in France between 1890 and 1914. It is what allowed the day to grow and flourish in a working-class world that had been stripped of joy through the

71. Perrot, *Workers on Strike*, 13–24.

72. Peter Linebaugh, *The Incomplete, True, Authentic, and Wonderful History of May Day* (PM Press/Spectre, 2016), chap. 2, ebook offers commentary on springtime's hopeful character. The fact that May Day takes place in the fall in the Southern Hemisphere and that American and Canadian Labor Day is also celebrated in the fall provides the basis for a global comparison of the holiday, the goal of my upcoming research.

73. Quoted in Tartakowsky, *La part du rêve*, 90.

74. Partially encoded telegram from the subprefect in Roanne to the prefect of the Loire, May 4, 1890, 1M 543, 1890, AD42.

75. Callahan, *Demonstration Culture,* 128–41.

76. "Le 1er mai à Saumur," *L'Écho saumurois* (Saumur), May 3, 1894, AMS.

77. For a summary of carnival and its importance to joy, see Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets*, 83–105. The theory of the carnivalesque was originally, and famously, posited by the Soviet philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Khudizhestvennia literatura, 1965; repr., Indiana University Press, 1984), and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson, Theory and History of Literature 8 (Khudizhestvennia literatura, 1963; repr., University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

78. "Le premier mai," *Le Stéphanois* (Saint-Étienne), May 2, 1893, LecturaPlus.

79. Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Gallimard, 1976; repr., Harvard University Press, 1988), 83–105.

80. On banquets at the end of the nineteenth century in France, see Stefan Dmytro Kosovych, "Nourishing the Political Body: Banquets in Early Third Republic France, 1878–1914" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2020).

81. For the limited worldviews of the socialists of the Second International see Sebastian D. Schickl, *Universalismus und Partikularismus: Erfahrungsraum, Erwartungshorizont und Territorialdebatten in der diskursiven Praxis der II. Internationale 1889–1917*, Mannheimer Historische Forschungen 34 (Röhrig, 2012).

process of proletarianization, spreading with it the vision of a socialist future complete with "flowers, mirth, perfumes, and euphoria." The communist historian Eric Hobsbawm argued that May Day's success was because "it was seen as the *only* holiday associated exclusively with the working class."[82] This is true, but we should add that it was only embraced by the working class because festivities made that class identity part of a joyful experience. The speeches and militant marches advocated by anti-festive socialists can be powerful tools of resistance, but they do not exist in a vacuum and the common bonds they create are different than those forged in the shared experience of music, festivals, and drinks. Joy was a critical part of May Day in France between 1890 and 1914 because it allowed individual workers to come together and build a positive identity around their common belief in a better tomorrow.

82. Eric Hobsbawm, "Birth of a Holiday: The First of May," in *On the Move: Essays in Labour and Transport History Presented to Philip Bagwell*, ed. Chris Wrigley and John Shepherd (Hambledon Press, 1991), 117.

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AD42 – Archives départementales de la Loire, Saint-Étienne

AD49 – Archives départementales de Maine-et-Loire, Angers

AD67 – Archives départementales du Bas-Rhin, Strasbourg

AMS – Archives municipales de Saumur, Saumur [all issues of the *L'écho saumurois* cited here have been digitized and can be found online.]

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