

ARTICLES

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UNFULFILLED DREAMS? THE FINANCIAL SITUATION OF WORKERS IN PARIS AND THE DEPARTMENT OF LOIR-ET-CHER BETWEEN 1789 AND 1795

Abstract: The convening of the Estates General in France in 1789 raised high hopes in French society for change. The economic demands written down in the ledgers of complaints, such as the abolition of the guild system, the unification of taxes and their more equitable distribution, the abolition of customs duties and fees within the kingdom, can be categorized as *inclusive economic institutions*. Their introduction in France during the Revolution was expected to translate into an improvement in the financial conditions of the population. The purpose of this article is to present the changing financial situation of workers in Paris and the department of Loir-et-Cher between 1789 and 1795 in the context of the aforementioned institutions. Data from a survey of prices and wages conducted at the behest of the Committee of Public Safety, Paris police reports of 1795 and depreciation tables were used to show the change in the financial position of working families during the French Revolution. Demands from the ledgers of complaints against the Estates General of 1789 were used to determine the title workers' "dreams." Assessing the change in the financial situation of workers required calculations that took into account, among other things, the size of the average working family's demand for foodstuffs or the change in France regarding the number of working days per year after the elimination of the old holidays and the introduction of the republican calendar. During the period under review, the financial situation of workers in the Loir-et-Cher department worsened due to high inflation – turning at times into hyperinflation – despite the implementation of most of the demands of the ledgers of complaints by the revolutionary authorities. In the case of Paris, the assessment is not so clear-cut. Thanks to the rationing of bread and meat in the capital, and their sale at a discounted price by the authorities, the living conditions of working families in 1795 were better or comparable to those at the beginning of the revolution. The article sheds new light on the changing financial situation of workers in Paris and the department of Loir-et-Cher in the context of the implementation of workers' demands recorded during the revolution in the ledgers of complaints to the Estates General of 1789, thus filling a gap in historiography.



Keywords: workers, wages and prices, inflation, French Revolution, *Cahiers de doléances* (the ledgers of complaints), inclusive economic institutions

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INTRODUCTION

The idea to write this article emerged after reading an article by Paul R. Sharp and Jacob L. Weisdorf on the evolution of prices and wages of construction workers in Paris and London up until 1800 (Sharp and Weisdorf, 2012). The authors, due to lack of data for Paris, did not include the French Revolutionary period in their study (Sharp and Weisdorf, 2012: 83–84). The omission of the years 1789–1799 is not unusual in the literature. Due to the dynamics of economic and social change during the Revolution and the lack of uniform data, this period is often omitted by researchers. Some of the statistical data, particularly the F²° series of the National Archives, was destroyed during the Paris Commune of 1871. This forces researchers to use a variety of data sources, which are often incomplete and sometimes even incomparable, due to their different methodologies. Their lack of continuity after the collapse of the ancien régime is also problematic. Central authorities during the revolutionary years often had trouble obtaining reliable data from local administrations (Perrot and Woolf, 1984: 99–101). For example, in the work of Jean Marczewski and Tihomir Markovitch (1965: XIII, XX, XXVIII, 38–41), data on French production are given for the years 1781–1790 and 1803–1812. Similarly, David Weir’s article, which presents real wages in Paris and London from 1726 to 1869 on a graph, omits the years of the French Revolution (Weir, 1991: 921). Even the classic works of Ernest Labrousse, a pioneer of quantitative history (Grabski, 2003: 775, 777), do not cover the years 1792–1799 (Labrousse, 1933; 1990).¹ George Rudé (1954) attempted to address this gap in his article on prices, wages, and popular movements in Paris during the Revolution. Like his work, the present article does not claim to fill this gap in its entirety. The research purpose of this article is to present the changing financial situation of workers during the period under study.

¹ The chronological scope of the first work ends in 1789, and the second in 1791.

The starting point for consideration is the material situation of workers on the eve and at beginning of the French Revolution, as well as the workers' demands recorded in the ledger of complaints (*cahiers des doléances*) to the States General of 1789 – referred to as “dreams”. The chronological framework closes with 1795 when, at the behest of the Committee of Public Safety in France, a survey was conducted on the levels of prices and wages in all departments. The data made it possible to evaluate the financial situation of workers in the Loir-et-Cher department during the period under study. Additionally, numerous strikes occurred in Paris in 1795, indicating growing discontent over deteriorating material conditions. Special attention in the text is given to the events of 1793, when the National Convention introduced the Law of the Maximum on both goods and wages, which significantly affected the financial situation of workers.

The title of the article needs to be clarified, as it is incredibly difficult to define the word “worker” (*ouvrier*) in the context of pre-Industrial Revolution France. In 1789, France had only 6 mechanical spinning machines, by 1795 the number had increased to 17 units (Guicheteau, 2014: 164). The symbols of the first industrialization in Paris at the beginning of the French Revolution were: assortments of cotton filling at the Château de La Muette and steam engines at Chaillot (Belhoste and Woronoff, 2008: 81). A French dictionary from the late 18th century gives a very broad definition of “worker”: “*Celui, celle qui travaille de la main, et qui fait quelque ouvrage* [One who works by hand and performs a certain work].” (Sélis, 1798: 208) which can be supplemented by the words of Nobel laureate John Hicks (2000: 143): “The characteristic of the worker or labourer in the most narrow sense, which we have come to, is that he works for someone else. He is (let’s not be afraid to say it) a servant”. Accordingly, for the purposes of this article, we will consider workers to be both master craftsmen, journeymen, apprentices, and people doing various jobs – whether at home, in a workshop, in a manufactory, in a factory or on a construction site – including women, men, and children, both in the city and in the countryside, who work for someone else.

Another issue is the spatial scope of the article. To limit the length of the text, the analysis is narrowed to the workers of the Paris district and the cities and towns of the Loir-et-Cher department. This choice is not accidental – the events unfolding in Paris were crucial to the revolutionary process and significantly impacted the legal and financial situation of workers throughout France. Additionally, this article aims to show

how the lives of workers in the province changed during the period under study. The department of Loir-et-Cher was chosen because of the preserved price and wage data from 1790 and 1795 across all districts (the districts mentioned are: Blois, Carismont, Mer, Mondoubleau, Romorantin and Vendôme, the Carismont district was originally called Saint-Aignan; Caron, 1910a: 308–333; Bonin and Langlois, 1989b: 77; Figuères, 1901: 34). Data from the aforementioned survey by the Committee of Public Safety, the 1795 Paris police reports, depreciation tables (*tableaux de dépréciation*), and relevant literature were used to depict the changes in the financial position of working families during the period under study. The creation of depreciation tables by the authorities of each department was mandated by Law 5 of Messidor Year V (June 23, 1797). The tables contained information on the fall or rise in the exchange rate of assignats, and later territorial mandates, against bullion money between 1791 and 1796. Among other things, they allowed debtors and creditors to calculate the size of repayments in times of paper money depreciation (White, 1991: 246–247).

The struggle of French workers for their rights, which had already been intense since 1789, continued to escalate until the spring of 1791. The weakening of the labor movement was brought about by Le Chapelier Law, passed by the Constituent Assembly on June 14 and 17, 1791, which prohibited the formation of workers' associations. The guild system had already been abolished by d'Allarde's decree voted on March 2, 1791 (Guicheteau, 2014: 136, 138, 152). In all likelihood, the abolition of guilds dampened workers' enthusiasm for taking action in workers' associations (*compagnonnages*: workers' associations formed to defend themselves against the demands of patrons and mutual aid; they were also involved in organizing strikes; due to their illegal nature, they were usually secret; Godechot, 1968: 208; 1977: 51). This does not mean, of course, that workers did not fight for their rights between 1792 and 1794. During this period, there were labor protests. The strikers mainly demanded the regulation of grain prices and an increase in wages. There were also protests against receiving payment in assignats (Guicheteau, 2014: 150–152). As Henri Sée (1951: 60–61) notes, workers (master craftsmen and journeymen) played a significant role in key moments of the revolution (*les journées révolutionnaires*) in July and August 1789. On August 10, 1792, they ensured the victory of the democratic cause, and on May 31 and June 2, 1793, they secured the victory of the Mountain (*La Montagne*) over the Gironde (*La Gironde*). However, they participated in all these events more as proletarians threatened by hunger than as workers.

The situation changed during the Directory era. Strikes intensified, especially in Year IV (it began on September 23, 1795, and ended on September 21, 1796; Caron, 1912: 222), when inflation was at its highest and the real value of workers' wages was at its lowest (Godechot, 1977: 51–52, 56). Phillip Cagan's proposed criterion for hyperinflation – an increase in prices of at least 50% within one month – was met in November and December 1795, among other times (Cagan, 1956: 25; Aubin, 1991: 749–750). On November 25, 1795 (4th frimaire of the year IV; in the cited work by Jacques Godechot, there are errors in the agreements of dates from the Republican calendar with the Gregorian calendar; the corrected dates for the frimaire month in the article are from: Caron, 1912: 230); there was a strike in many Parisian workshops; on December 6, 1795 (15th frimaire), a strike of workers producing assignats; and on December 10, 1795 (19th frimaire), a strike of the typographers (Godechot, 1968: 521–522).

In this context, it is possible to assert that **the financial situation of workers deteriorated between 1789 and 1795**. The thesis partly addresses the question posed by Alfred Cobban (1999: 68) quote: "Who in fact gained, and who lost, by this final abolition of obsolete and anachronistic institutions." Proving this requires answering the following questions: What was the situation of workers on the eve and at the beginning of the French Revolution? What were their "dreams" in 1789? What changes occurred between 1789 and 1795? And what was the financial situation of workers in 1795.

The layout of the article, based on research objective and thesis, is chronological. The first part of the paper examines the situation of workers on the eve and at the beginning of the French Revolution. The second part presents the "dreams" of the workers, as recorded in the ledger of complaints against the Estates General of 1789. The final part describes the changes in the financial situation of workers between 1789 and 1795.

The article sheds new light on the changing material conditions of workers in Paris and the department of Loir-et-Cher during the revolution in the context of the implementation of workers' demands recorded in the ledger of complaints against the Estates General of 1789, thus filling a gap in historiography.

THE SITUATION OF WORKERS ON THE EVE AND AT THE BEGINNING OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

During the ancien régime, workers in France were most often associated in guilds, which comprised apprentices (*apprentis*), journeymen (*compagnons*) and masters (*maîtres*). It should be noted that not every city had guilds and not every profession had a guild. Apprentices became journeymen after years of apprenticeship. The promotion of a journeyman to master was problematic. It depended not only on a vacancy, but also on the journeyman's performance under a master's apprenticeship and the payment for the right to become a master, which was often very expensive (sons and sons-in-law of masters were entitled to a discount). The functioning of guilds was regulated by detailed regulations specifying, among other things, production conditions or working hours of guild members. Assemblies composed of elected masters (*jurands* – the body that exercises supreme authority in the guild; Marion, 1923: 313) were responsible for enforcing these regulations, managing the guild's finances and representing it in lawsuits (Godechot, 1977: 49–50).

Some laborers worked at home and were called *chambrelans* or *chambellans*. This was often clandestine work, competing with guild production. Before 1791, when the guild system was abolished in France, homeworkers were vulnerable to lawsuits from guilds. Additionally, some of them worked at home on behalf of a capitalist (*impositor*), who supplied them with the necessary tools and raw materials. This is how the canuts, silk workers in Lyon, among others, worked. Unlike rural weavers, who could also engage in agriculture, canuts were solely engaged in weaving silk (Godechot, 1977: 52). The example of Pierre Sochard, a poor weaver near Cholet (department of Maine-et-Loire), shows that not all rural workers had land to cultivate, other than a vegetable garden (Petitfrère, 1988: 122).

Another group consisted of workers employed in "great industry" [*"grande industrie"* – the word "industry" (*industrie*) in the 18th century had very little contemporary meaning except for its use by economists and philosophers. Most often it meant an activity, a skill. A word better suited to the modern meaning of the word "industry" is manufacture (*manufacture*), crafts (*arts et métiers*) or trade (*commerce*); Goubert and Denis, 1973: 244], which included royal manufactories and factories established

in France since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. The former were established as early as the time of Jean-Baptiste Colbert and often focused on the production of luxury goods, such as tapestries or weapons (e.g., the Ruelle manufactory). In these manufactories, workers were commonly housed with their families in barracks and subjected to semi-military discipline. Their work was relatively well-paid and reasonably stable. Of course, it happened that workers in the “grande industrie” earned extra money during workshop shutdowns as the abovementioned *chambrelans*. In the case of the second group of factories, workers lived in “towns” hastily erected near mines, such as Anzin in the Nord department; steel plants, such as Le Creusot; and the first large cotton or cloth factories, such as in Lille or Elbeuf. This organization of French industry lasted until the French Revolution, when it was joined by a hastily organized war industry (Godechot, 1977: 52–53).

In the final years of the ancien régime, workers in France faced two unfavorable trends – rising bread prices and rising unemployment. Between 1726 and 1789, the average annual price of wheat in France increased. Compared to the previous year, however, price increases never exceeded 100%, the exception to this rule was 1789. While in August 1788 a 4-pound loaf of bread in Paris cost 9 solids, in February 1789 the loaf cost 14.5 solids. Bread at market price should have cost 16.33 solids, but thanks to government supplies and subsidies (18,000 livres a day) its price was lowered (Biollay, 1886: 103; Harris, 1930: 133; Hincker, 1989: 39). The disastrous harvest following the floods of 1787 and the spring rains and hail in western France in 1788 were responsible for the rise in bread prices. The provisions of the 1786 trade treaty (Eden-Rayneval), which increased competition from England (Tulard, 1989: 28; Martin, 2004: 63–64), were mainly responsible for the rise in unemployment, particularly in textiles. In exchange for England’s lowering of tariffs on wine and other spirits (this was to counter the wine crisis in France), France pledged to lower tariffs on English textiles and ironmongery. French textile production was hit hard, falling by more than half between 1786 and 1789. The increase in bread prices also led to a decline in demand for manufactured products. Additionally, the decline in income from rents and seigneurial rights reduced the consumption of luxury goods in France. All this contributed to a crisis that affected artisanal (i.e., handicraft) production, factory production, and even Réveillon’s Parisian wallpaper factory. Unemployment rose in both cities and villages, causing workers’ incomes to fall. At the same time, bread prices rose sharply (Hincker, 1989:

59–61). It should be noted that bread expenses in 18th-century France were the most important item in the budget of a wage earner. As Ernest Labrousse calculated, between 1726 and 1791, they averaged 50% of his budget, between 1788 and 1789 they rose to 58%, and in the months of 1789, when bread prices were at their highest level, they consumed as much as 88% of the budget (Rudé, 1954: 247). The dramatic financial situation of Parisian construction workers on the eve of the French Revolution is highlighted in the article by Paul R. Sharp and Jacob L. Weisdorf (2012: 82–84), mentioned in the introduction. A worker in Paris was scarcely able to support his family, working more than 300 days a year, whereas his counterpart in London had to work less than 200 days a year. The authors of the article used the family's consumption basket, which included bread, beans, peas, meat, butter, cheese, eggs, beer, soap, linen, candles, lamp oil and fuel. They also assumed that a representative household consists of two adults and two and a half children, and that children consume half as much as adults, meaning that household consumption is equal to that of 3.25 adults. The household's annual consumption expenditures were then contrasted with the daily wages of construction workers.

The financial situation of workers in France at the dawn of the Revolution was determined by their wages and food price levels, especially bread as previously mentioned. Table 1 presents the wage rates of workers in Paris and bread expenses in 1789. Due to gaps in the available data, some of the wages reported are from 1790, but as G. Rudé notes, the differences between wages in 1789 and 1790 were very small (Rudé, 1954: 248). For purposes of comparison, all values have been converted into livres. Prices and wages were expressed in livres in those days; a livre was worth 20 solids, while a solid was worth 12 denarii. The last column of the table calculates what percentage of a working family's actual income was spent on bread. In his article, G. Rudé pointed out the numerous days off (111 days a year) during the ancien régime and the days on which workers did not work due to potential illness. Recent studies of the French Revolution have placed great emphasis on women's work, which until now has been largely underestimated. The fact is that women worked at home much more often than men. However, there were workshops employing over 100 women. Most often they were employed as seamstresses, lace makers, hosiery makers (Belhoste and Woronoff, 2008: 82–83). The fact that women's income is not included in the family budget in the analysis below is solely due to the lack of sufficient data

on their earnings that would allow drawing conclusions. The income of working children is also not taken into account. Throughout the article, the income of a working-class family comes down only to the earnings of the father of the family.

Therefore, when calculating daily real income, he multiplied the daily wages of workers by 0.6. This conversion factor was also used in this article, but a different bread requirement of the average working family was assumed. In the case of some professions, one should remember about the seasonal nature of the work. For example, the construction industry was characterized by a lack of continuity of work and was closely correlated with weather conditions. G. Rudé (1954: 248) assumed a bread consumption of 4 pounds per family per day (a family of two adults and two children). In the text, the annual consumption of bread was based on Robert C. Allen's estimate of 182 kilograms per person (Allen, 2001: 421) whereas, assuming a working family size of two adults and two and a half children, as per Paul Sharp and Jacob Weisdorf. By performing the operation:

$$\frac{3,25 \times 182}{365}$$

we get 1.62 kilograms of bread of daily requirements, which is less than a 4-pound bread (1.814 kilograms). At a price of 0.725 livres for 4-pound bread in 1789, the average family's daily bread expenditure was 0.647 livres. In 1789, the price of bread dropped, initially costing 14.5 solids (this price was used in table 1 to calculate the percentage of bread expenses of an average working family due to its validity at the time the ledgers of complaints against the States General, which included workers' demands, were written). On June 22, 1789, the price was reduced to 13.5 solids, and on August 8 to 12 solids (Rudé, 1954: 250).

As shown in the table 1, in 1789, when the price of bread was at its highest, the average family's daily expenditure on bread consumed more than half of the worker's actual income for several occupations; in extreme cases it was 93.8%. This expenditure did not include costs for wine, other food products, textiles, candles, firewood, and housing. To achieve the annual meat consumption from Allen's basket (26 kg per person), a working family had to spend an additional 91.4 livres per year (the cheapest meat from a cow, at 0.49 livres per pound, was chosen for the calculation). The annual cost of butter consumption (5.2 kg per person) was 37.3 livres (Allen, 2001: 421; Biollay, 1886: 161, 166). Table 2 shows the prices of selected foodstuffs in Paris. As with table 1, due to lack of data, some

of the prices are from 1790. Available data on the prices of the same products in 1789 and 1790 allow us to conclude that the prices of the other items did not change significantly.

Table 1. Workers' earnings (in livres) and bread expenditure (in %) in Paris in 1789

Work performed	Daily wages ²	Daily real income	Bread spending as % of real income
Worker at the Réveillon factory	1.25	0.75	86.27
Construction worker	1.50	0.90	71.89
Master bricklayer	3.00	1.80	35.90
Apprentice bricklayer	2–2.25	1.2–1.35	53.92–47.93
Apprentice locksmith	2.50	1.50	43.13
Sculptor, goldsmith	5.00	3.00	21.57
Baker*	1.40	0.84	77.02
Baker's assistant*	1.15	0.69	93.77
Head of carpentry workshop	3.00	1.80	35.94
Apprentice carpenter	2.25	1.35	47.93
Master roofer	3.50	2.10	30.81
Roofer's apprentice	2.5–3.25	1.5–1.95	43.13–33.18

* data for 1 class (9–10 baked goods)

Source: own study. Cf: Rudé, 1954: 248; Biollay, 1886: 15, 17, 18, 19, 22–23.

² Due to lack of data, some of the wages given are from 1790, but as G. Rudé notes, the differences between salaries in 1789 and 1790 were very small (Rudé, 1954: 248).

Table 2. Prices of foodstuffs in Paris in 1789 (in livres)

Good item	Price
Bread (4 pounds)	0.725
Wheat (quintal)	10.73
Rye (quintal)	7.56
Barley (quintal)	8.67
Oats (quintal)	7.15*
Potatoes (quintal)	5
Butter (pound)	1
Beef from a bull (pound)	0.53
Beef from a cow (pound)	0.49
Veal (pound)	0.56
Lamb (pound)	0.56
Pork (pound)	0.56
Ox	336**
Ox weighing 600 pounds, excluding hide, tallow and offal	270***
Cow	202**
A pig weighing 200 pounds	128***
Calf	73**
A calf weighing 100 pounds	60***
Sheep	22**
A pair of sheep weighing 40 pounds each	42***
A bottle of wine (pint – 930 ml)	0.225****

* average price in the department of Seine-et-Oise

** average purchase price by Parisian butchers

*** the price from the Saint-Germain district of Paris, most likely determined from average prices from the Poissy market in 1790

**** the 1789 price reported by Arthur Young

Source: own study. Cf: Biollay, 1886: 89, 103, 117, 120, 161, 166, 248, 262.

Table 3. Workers' earnings (in livres) and bread expenditure (in %) in the department of Loir-et-Cher in 1790

Work performed	Daily wages	Daily real income	Bread spending as % of real income
Unskilled worker	1.2	0.72	83.33
Apprentice blacksmith	1.02*	0.61	98.36
Apprentice locksmith	1.41*	0.85	70.59
Apprentice carpenter	1.14*	0.68	88.23
Apprentice bricklayer	1.175*	0.70	85.71
Apprentice weaver (flax)	1.47*	0.88	68.18
Apprentice weaver (wool)	1.25* **	0.75	80.00
Lumberjack	1.33*	0.80	75.00
River sailor	4.08***	2.45	24.49

* surveys from some districts mentioned that in addition to wages, viand was also provided

** due to lack of data, average wages only from 4 districts

*** due to lack of data average salary only from 3 districts

Source: own study. Cf: Caron, 1910a: 308, 312, 317, 321, 325, 329.

As stated in the introduction, tables 3 and 4 present the wage rates and prices of selected goods in the department of Loir-et-Cher in 1790. A different selection of occupations and foodstuffs than in Paris is evident from the data the author was able to access. The average of the 6 districts of the department was used to determine wage rates and prices: Blois, Carismont, Mer, Mondoubleau, Romorantin and Vendôme. Unfortunately, the survey conducted at the behest of the Committee of Public Safety did not include the price of bread. Léon Biollay approximated it based on Turgot's rule of thumb for the relationship between the price of bread and the price of grain. In the department of Loir-et-Cher, part of the Central Region, the average price of a pound of bread was 2 solids and 6 denarii [Biollay, 1886: 101–102], which amounts to 0.5 livres for a 4-pound loaf. A different price is obtained by comparing the price of wheat in Paris (10.73 livres per quintal) and the price of bread (0.725 livres per 4-pound loaf) with the average price of wheat in Loir-et-Cher (9.9 livres per quintal) (Caron, 1910a: 308, 312, 318, 322,

326, 330). Keeping the proportions, bread in the department should cost about 0.67 livres for a 4-pound loaf. The same price is derived when considering both the price of wheat and rye. Due to the doubts raised by Biollay himself – namely, whether Turgot’s rule was still applicable after 14 years (Biollay, 1886: 102) – the following table uses the price of 0.67 livres for a 4-pound bread to calculate bread expenditure as a percentage of real income. At this price, the daily bread expenditure of an average working-class family was 0.6 livres.

Table 4. Prices of foodstuffs in the department of Loir-et-Cher in 1790 (in livres)

Good item	Price
Bread (4 pounds)	0.670
Wheat (quintal)	9.900
Rye (quintal)	7.025
Barley (quintal)	6.580
Oats (quintal)	5.300
Butter (pound)	0.610
Beef (pound)	0.360
Ox	260.000
Cow	79.200
A pair of sheep (20 pounds)	20.800
Honey (pound)	0.420
Bottle of wine (medium quality)	0.240

Source: own study. Cf. Caron, 1910a: 308–310, 312–314, 318–319, 322–323, 326–327, 330–331; Biollay, 1886: 111, 122.

Analyzing the data in the above tables, it can be assumed that, overall, the financial situation of workers in the Loir-et-Cher department was considerably worse than in Paris. It should be remembered that due to the lack of data, a comparison was made between the expenses of selected professions on bread as a percentage of real income in Paris in 1789 and in the department of Loir-et-Cher in 1790. Available data on prices

and wages between 1789 and 1790 does not confirm significant differences between the two.

Despite the lower price of bread in the department (the price of bread in Loir-et-Cher was lower despite the administrative regulation of its price in Paris; price undercutting the market price), it did not offset the significantly lower wages received by workers. For instance, a journeyman locksmith in Paris spent 43.13% of his wages per day on bread, whereas his fellow journeyman in Loir-et-Cher spent as much as 70.59%. A journeyman mason faced an even more dire situation, having to spend as much as 85.71% of his actual income on daily bread purchases in the department, while his Parisian counterpart spent between 47.93 and 53.92%. Additionally, workers in Loir-et-Cher in some cases could rely on "viand", which was crucial given their low incomes and high food costs. Thus, despite the apparent disparities in the data presented, the differences in the financial situations of workers in Paris and Loir-et-Cher were less pronounced.

In conclusion, the prices and wages presented in the tables for Paris and the department of Loir-et-Cher highlight the poor financial situation of French workers on the eve and at the beginning of the French Revolution. Therefore, the economic demands articulated by workers in the complaints lodged against the Estates General, as detailed in the next section of this article, should not be surprising.

WORKERS' ISSUE IN THE LEDGER OF COMPLAINTS

To understand the "dreams" of the workers at the onset of the revolution, it is necessary to examine the demands recorded in the ledgers of complaints to the Estates General of 1789. These surviving texts provide a window into the economic aspirations of the French populace of that era. Central to this article are the demands of the Third Estate, particularly those directly impacting the financial situation of workers. It should be noted that workers belonging to guilds took part in the initial phase of the elections and prepared ledgers of complaints, workers employed in the "grande industrie" generally did not have this opportunity. In addition, the third state's ledgers of complaints often presented the views of the bourgeoisie about the workers, rather than the demands of the latter (Godechot, 1968: 210).

Regarding the contentious issue of the guild system in France, the Third Estate (*tiers état*) was divided. Some complaints advocated for its preservation, arguing that it protected the interest of workers. Conversely, others called for its abolition, viewing it as archaic and obstructive to progress. Support for guilds was strong in cities like Pont-à-Mousson, Dijon, Marseille, Reims, Rouen, Lille, and Nancy. However, those residing in the Paris suburbs often opposed guilds. According to Jacques Godechot (1968: 210–211), of 40 complaints from urban centers addressing the guild system, 26 were in favor while 14 were against. In contrast, among the ledgers of complaints from the rural jurisdictions (*bailliages*), 51 criticized the guilds while 30 defended them. Regions like Lorraine and the future Nord department showed significant support for the guild system, whereas smaller towns and villages more often criticized them. It was in these locales—among villagers, the proletarianized urban artisans, and residents of the Paris suburbs—that the clearest voices of workers' demands sounded (Guicheteau, 2014: 128).

In the examined ledgers of complaints from the Paris district and Loir-et-Cher department (the department of Loir-et-Cher – included the bailiwicks (*bailliages*): Montrichard, Blois, Mondoubleau, Romorantin and Vendôme; Bonin and Langlois, 1989a: 78), there was relatively little emphasis on issues directly affecting workers. This is not surprising, considering that on the eve of the revolution, about 85% of the French population relied on agriculture for their livelihoods (Bodinier et al., 2012: 11). Nevertheless, an analysis of these complaints revealed four key categories of demands, the fulfillment of which aimed to enhance the economic conditions of workers. These encompassed concerns about guilds, taxes, food prices, and trade policy.

Guilds

In their complaints, the Parisians, as outlined in Article 12 of their ledgers of complaints, demanded that the Paris administration review the continuation, reform, or abolition of guilds and jurands (AP, T5, 1879: 289). This demand underscores the earlier noted ambivalence of the Third Estate regarding the future of France's guild system. In the same supplement and under the section on rights, the people of Paris demanded the universal access to all professions, estates and dignities (AP, T5, 1879: 282). For workers, the primary concern was unrestricted access to all trades, a goal that necessitated the abolition of the

guild system. In the department of Loir-et-Cher, the subject of the guild system was taken up by the citizens of Vendôme. In Article 40 (AP, T6, 1879: 123) of their ledgers of complaints, alongside trade freedom, amendment of the trade treaty with England, and abolition of privileges, they demanded the elimination of the titles and functions associated with guild masters (*maîtrises*, is the title a craftsman acquires when he becomes a master in the craftsmen's guild; Mousnier, 2005: 361). Similarly, residents of Mer echoed these sentiments, arguing that the *maîtrises* hindered the development of individual talent (Lesueur and Cauchie, 1907: 95).

Taxes

The residents of Blois (Loir-et-Cher), in Article 3 of their cahiers, proposed replacing head taxes (*capitation*) and the twentieth tax levied on "industry" (*vingtième d'industrie* – a tax levied on income from industry and commerce at a rate of 5% (1/20); it should be noted that cities and communities had to tax themselves by arbitrarily setting the amount of the tax, thus the tax was not too onerous; this is confirmed by the fact that in 1790 the *vingtième* brought the monarchy revenues of 56,996,077 livres, of which only 1,092,927 livres went to the *vingtième d'industrie*; Marion, 1923: 556) with a single personal tax to be paid by all city dwellers, nobles, clergy, both privileged and underprivileged, as well as villagers (AP, T2, 1879: 390). Parishioners from Angervilliers near Paris had a similar demand. In their ledgers of complaints, they proposed abolishing direct taxes (*taille*, *capitation*, *vingtièmes*) and replacing them with a tax on land and property, distributed proportionally to all classes of citizens without distinction. For citizens without property, an industrial tax proportional to their capacity and income was envisaged (AP, T4, 1879: 296).

Parisians of the Théatins church district, in Article 15 of their ledgers of complaints, demanded that those without property pay no tax at all (AP, T5, 1879: 316). This sentiment was echoed by residents of the sub-parish of Arcueil and the settlement of Cachan, who asked the king to relieve the poor and laborers who subsist solely on their handwork of all personal burdens (AP, T4, 1879: 310). Residents of the town of Mer (Loir-et-Cher) demanded the abolition of the tax on industry, arguing it destroyed competition and likening it to the hated *taille* tax, but even worse, as it affected all workers whose labor was essential to their live-

lihoods (Lesueur and Cauchie, 1907: 93]. Ablon parishioners,³ in Article 18 of their cahiers, also demanded the abolition of taxes imposed on industry (AP, T4, 1879: 290).

Residents of Saint-Aignac (Loir-et-Cher), detailing the dire conditions at two manufactories located in their town, pointed to the taxes that adversely affected workers. They noted that the cloth manufactory, which once employed 80 foremen, now employed only 30, leading to poverty for the displaced workers and condemning them to reliance on wealthier residents. They also mentioned a tax on production at the tannery (3 livres per pound of goods produced) which prevented business growth and the hiring of new workers. In conclusion, the residents of Saint-Aignac begged the king to abolish all taxes and replace them with just two – taxes on industry and on property, which were to be proportional (Lesueur and Cauchie, 1908: 219–220).

Implementation of these demands would undoubtedly improve the financial situation of workers. A more equitable distribution of taxes among all estates would reduce the tax burden for workers, and for the poorest, a complete exemption from paying taxes. More income for workers would strengthen domestic demand for goods and services in France. Although the increased tax burden on the privileged estates might decrease their demand, it is important to keep in mind the marginal propensity to consume, which is higher for those with lower incomes. Increased production, further stimulated by reductions or even eliminations of the tax on industry (as proposed in the cahiers), would response to the rise in aggregate demand in France. Increased production would lead to decreased unemployment, also improving the financial situation of workers. While an increase in prices might result from increased production and lower unemployment, workers would ultimately benefit from the proposed changes.

³ The parish, counted as part of the Paris district in 1789, was located outside the walls of Paris.

Food prices

The residents of Paris, in Article 5 of their ledgers of complaints, demanded that precautions be taken to prevent grain prices from becoming too high (AP, T5, 1879: 285). They were echoed by another Parisian supplication, which allowed the export of grain and flour only after ensuring sufficient supplies within the kingdom and preventing “overpricing.” Additionally, they demanded the introduction of penalties for hoarding grain and other necessities (AP, T5, 1879: 302).

As early as the time of Louis XV, the legend of the *pacte de famine* (“famine pact”), a supposed conspiracy by traders supplying Paris with grain, was born. According to this legend, speculation by these traders would cause a famine to drive up bread prices (Braudel, 1992: 113). The issue of grain supply in 1789 was pressing, hence the rather radical demand from the Théatins church district. Article 5 demanded that the Estates General ascertain the amount of grain found in France, open closed stores, punish speculators with death, and promote grain imports in every possible way (AP, T5, 1879: 316).

Other regions proposed different solutions to the supply problem. Residents of Vendôme (Loir-et-Cher) suggested establishing public granaries in selected towns to prevent high grain prices, ensuring affordable grain during times of scarcity (AP, T6, 1879: 124). The price of bread could also be lowered by exempting bakers and merchants on market days, as demanded by residents of Saint-Dyé-sur-Loire (Lesueur and Cauchie, 1907: 136–137).

Some ledgers of complaint addressed the issue of meat prices. One from the Third Estate of Paris demanded limits on the “illegal” profits of butchers, whose wives supposedly had diamonds: *Mettre des bornes aux gains illicites des bouchers, dont les femmes ont des diamants, qui entretiennent des filles* [Restrict the illegal profits of butchers whose wives own diamonds, who have mistresses; own translation] (AP, T5, 1879: 296). Another cahier from Paris proposed, in Article 43, to regulate the sale and taxation of meat and allow merchants from the Paris area to trade in beef, veal, mutton, etc. (AP, T5, 1879: 317). In Loir-et-Cher, the residents of Mer asked for the abolition of inspection fees for butcher stores in towns with fewer than 500 houses (Lesueur and Cauchie, 1907: 97).

These demands confirm earlier findings that high prices, particularly for grain, bread and meat, were a significant problem for the Third Estate – including workers – in 1789. Unlike modern times, workers were primarily concerned with stabilizing the prices of basic foodstuffs rather than wage increases.

Trade policy

The material situation of the workers was indirectly affected by France's trade policy, which received considerable attention in the ledgers of complaints of the Third Estate. In their cahier, Parisians demanded the abolition of tariffs on goods exported from France and the imposition of duties on goods from foreign factories. They called for limiting exports of raw materials used by domestic industry from France while abolishing tariffs on imported raw materials needed by French industry. They also demanded the promotion of exports of goods from French factories (AP, T5, 1879: 285). The above demands relate directly to mercantilist thinking.

The demand for the protection of domestic trade also appeared in the Parisian ledger of complaints prepared at the Sorbonne (*l'Église de la Sorbonne*), which demanded the transfer of all duties that applied within the kingdom to its external borders (AP, T5, 1879: 302). Residents of Vendôme, meanwhile, in their ledgers of complaints, demanded the abolition of all fees levied when bringing goods into the city from the countryside (AP, T6, 1879: 123). The above demands foreshadowed the creation of a single internal market by the Constituency (Braudel and Labrousse, 1976: 12–13).

An interesting request relating to trade was made by Parisians. In Article 2 of their ledger of complaints, they demanded the establishment of a chamber of commerce in the largest cities of France, which would consist of twenty negotiators, merchants, factory owners, master engineers, and the most recommended craftsmen. All the laws, regulations, statutes, and tariffs of France and other countries would be kept in the chamber's secretariat (AP, T5, 1879: 285). Article 8 of this supplication asked the Estates General to consider whether it is advisable to maintain strict adherence to the regulations issued for manufactures, to modify them, or perhaps to grant unlimited freedom to manufacturers. In the event of a decision to retain the existing regulations, it was postulated that inspectors and sub-inspectors should be elected by a majority vote of the chambers of commerce, with their visits' being reported (AP, T5, 1879: 285).

The authors of the demands relating to guilds, taxes, prices of foodstuffs, and trade policy hoped that the implementation of their ideas would translate into an improvement in the financial situation of laborers, on the one hand, and the elimination of unemployment, on the other. The latter issue was raised by Parisians who proposed solving the prob-

lem of begging by opening public workshops where people of all ages, genders, healthy and disabled could get jobs at any time. Control of the workshops was to be exercised by provincial and municipal assemblies (AP, T5, 1879: 287).

Undoubtedly, the convening of the Estates General raised great hopes for change. Some of the demands outlined above, such as the total or partial abolition of the guild system, the unification of taxes and their more equitable distribution, the elimination of customs duties and fees within the kingdom, and the establishment of a chamber of commerce composed of representatives of all interested social groups, are nothing more than inclusive economic institutions (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012: 74–75).

CHANGE IN THE FINANCIAL SITUATION OF WORKERS BETWEEN 1789 AND 1795

The demand to abolish the guild system in France, raised by some workers in ledgers of complaints, was met on March 2, 1791, by the National Assembly. The Law d'Allarde, passed then, abolished guilds, jurands and masters (*maîtrises*), introducing total freedom in crafts and industry (Godechot, 1988: 84). Henceforth, workers could produce the goods they wanted and how they wanted. As was pointed out earlier, not all workers in France demanded such a solution, but the Parisian workers and residents of the Loir-et-Cher department, to which this article is devoted, were generally in favor of liberalizing economic life.

In the early years of the Revolution, workers benefited from the changes in taxation. On the night of August 4, 1789, the Constitution abolished the privileges of the nobility and the clergy, including tax privileges (Hirsch, 1978: 220–222). A more proportional distribution of taxes among all citizens in terms of income and property, combined with the fact that tax revenues in 1790–1791 and 1793 were lower than in 1789 (table 5), resulted in an improvement in the financial situation of workers, *ceteris paribus*.

Table 5. Tax revenue of France from 1789 to 1795 (in millions of livres)

Year	Taxes
1789	396
1790	160
1791	234
1792	412
1793	341
1794	490
1795	1416

Source: Brezis and Crouzet, 1995: 25.

It should be mentioned that the extraordinary tax introduced by Jacques Necker in October 1789, the patriotic tribute (*contribution patriotique*), excluded French people with an income of less than 400 livres a year (an amount higher than the annual earnings of a day laborer). This amount was determined by declaration under oath, without investigation. By March 1790, it was already decided to make the tribute completely compulsory; every citizen, under threat of being taxed by the authorities, had to make a declaration of his income. However, those earning less than 400 livres annually were still exempt (Crouzet, 1993: 98). Thus, the demand from the ledgers of complaint that the poorest French people should be exempt from paying taxes was fulfilled.

The tax system developed in 1790 and 1791, which consisted of 3 direct taxes: *contribution foncière*, *contribution mobilière* and *patente*, was initially inoperative. The first of these, charging land revenue (in the physiocrats' thought that was the most important tax), introduced on November 23, 1790, required the creation of a national cadastre. The next tax, instituted on January 13, 1791, was based on the rent or rental value of a dwelling. The last one on March 2, 1791, was levied on income from trade and industry. Most indirect taxes were abolished.⁴ This simple and transparent tax system, which was demanded by the third state in the ledgers of complaints in the early years of the Revolution, was only just taking shape and

⁴ Among other things, the hated salt tax – the *gabelle* – was abolished (Briaïs, 1984: 277).

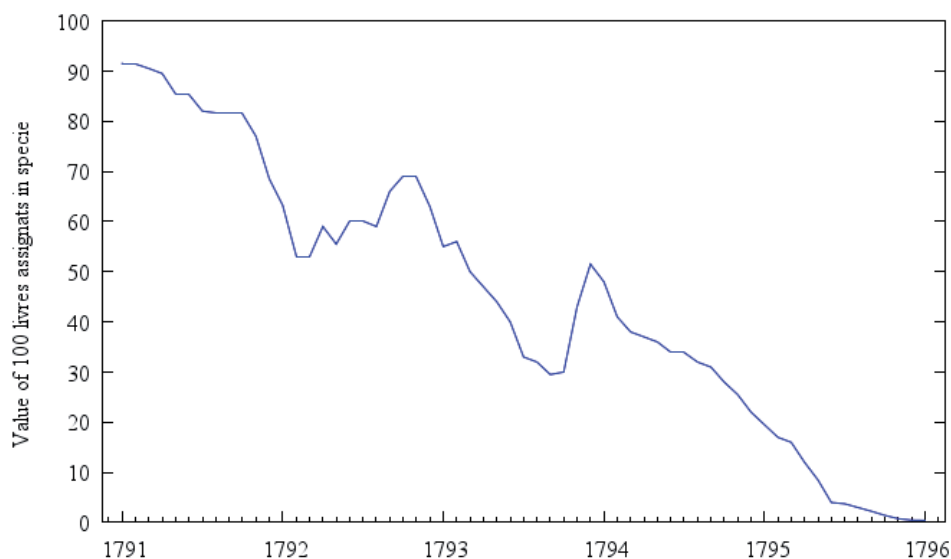
was unable to provide sufficient resources to the Constituency (Braudel and Labrousse, 1976: 15–16; Soboul, 2003: 205–206). It was only during the Republican period that the state's tax revenues increased significantly (the exception was 1793, when France was engulfed in a civil war). This meant that in the first years of the revolution, workers paid less taxes than before the revolution, but later the tax burden increased.

Of course, one cannot forget inflation—a hidden tax. Its dynamics, in a certain simplification, is reflected in the decline in the exchange rate of French assignats. We have data on the exchange rate of assignat against bullion money thanks to the surviving depreciation tables (*tableaux de dépréciation*), published by each department authority to enable debtors and creditors to calculate repayments in times of paper money depreciation (Marion, 1929: 141; White, 1991: 246). The rate of the assignats was determined by comparing the paper money exchange rate notes maintained by the Treasury with the notes of trading establishments, the market value of real estate, groceries, and other goods in each department (*Loi relative aux...*, 1797). The inclusion of real estate prices, groceries, and other commodities in the assignat rate prompted Christian Aubin to use depreciation tables to measure inflation (Aubin, 1991). Such an approach is not entirely correct, after all, in determining the rate of the assignat against paper money, the creators of depreciation tables took into account the rate of assignat against bullion money in addition to prices.

This rate was determined based on: private notes for the period from August 1789 to June 1791, prices of bullion purchases made by the Treasury for the period from July 1791 to December 1792, “paper negotiations” conducted by the Treasury from January 1793 to February 1794, private notes from March 1794 to May 2, 1795 (13 floréal of year III), data provided by bankers appointed by the Committee of Public Safety from May 3, 1795 (14 floréal of year III) to October 13, 1795 (21 vendémiaire of year IV) and certificates provided by exchange agents for the period from October 14, 1795 (22 vendémiaire of year IV) to March 20, 1796 (30 ventôse of year IV) (Caron, 1909: LII; White, 1991: 249). Nevertheless, in the absence of sufficiently detailed information about the evolution of prices during the revolutionary period, the use of depreciation tables to measure inflation seems justified.

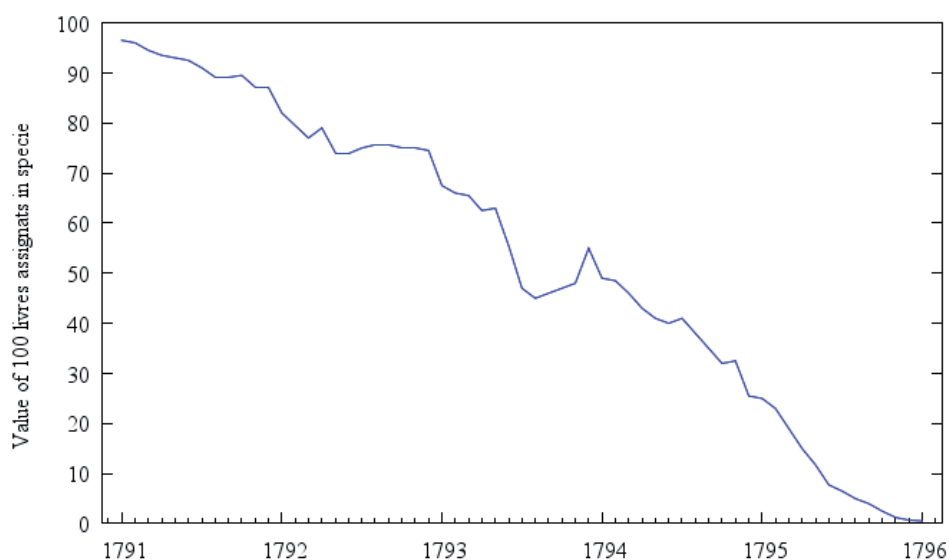
The increase in prices during the period translated into a decrease in the purchasing value of workers. In the following charts showing the exchange rate of assignats in Paris (Seine department) and Loir-et-Cher department, it is shown using data from depreciation tables.

Figure 1. Assignat rate in the Seine department from 1791 to 1795



Source: own study. Cf: Caron, 1909: 386–389.

Figure 2. Assignat rate in the department of Loir-et-Cher between 1791 and 1795



Source: own study. Cf: Caron, 1909: 208–210.

The charts 1 and 2 show the rate at which French assignats were losing value. Those receiving a paycheck or having savings in “paper” were subject to pauperization overnight, especially at the end of 1795, when inflation, as measured by depreciation tables, reached hyperinflationary levels. A more accurate idea of the changing financial situation of workers during the period under study will be provided by comparing the prices of foodstuff and workers’ wages in 1795 with those at the beginning of the French Revolution later in this article.

In the analyzed ledgers of complaints, the Third Estate demanded measures to keep the prices of grain, flour, bread, and meat low. From the end of 1789 to September 1791, economic prosperity in France was good, and wages and prices were fairly stable (assignats during this period in Paris lost 18.5% of their initial value and in the Loir-et-Cher department, 11%). Unemployment persisted in industries producing luxury goods, most affected by the emigration of most of its clients (aristocracy and nobility) after the outbreak of the revolution (Belhoste and Woronoff, 2008: 83). However, for the average working-class family in Paris, the price of 4-pound bread, initially stabilized at 12 solids, was reduced to 11 solids in June 1790. In the fall of 1790, it further dropped to 9 solids and then to 8 solids, remaining at this price for most of 1791. With workers’ wages, this brought a significant improvement in their financial situation, as bread expenses were the most important item in their budgets. Additionally, in 1791, the prices of wine (abolition of customs duties), firewood, butter and sugar fell.

However, from August 1791, due to a poor harvest and a shortage of flour, bread prices began to rise, reaching 12 solids per loaf by September (Rudé, 1954: 250–251). The increase in the number of bakers in Paris from 600 in 1788 to 700 in 1793, resulting of the abolition of the guild system, did not improve the situation (Tulard, 1989: 340–341). From the autumn of 1791, the prices of other commodities also began to rise (in particular, sugar, coffee, and cotton prices were rising due to the outbreak of the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue on the night of August 22–23, 1791; Crouzet, 1993: 190), evidenced by the sharply declining rate of assignats in the Seine (Paris) department and a softer rate in Loir-et-Cher. By March 1793, assignats in Paris had lost 50% of their initial value, and Loir-et-Cher, 34.5%. On March 4, 1793, the authorities set the price of bread in Paris at an undervalued 12 solids per 4-pound loaf. Despite increases in the prices of other goods (from June 1790 to June 1793, the price of eggs

in Paris rose by 31%, sugar by 300%, wine by 60%, meat by 77%, butter by 90%, coffee by 135%, candles by 167% (Crouzet, 1993: 227–228); between 1791 and 1793, meat prices in Paris rose from 6–7 solids per pound to almost 30 solids; Szulman, 2008: 118) and wages, this price was maintained thanks to compensation paid to bakers, granted on March 7, 1793 (Caron, 1910b: 9; Tulard, 1989: 341). This had a fundamental impact on the financial situation of workers in Paris, who were not affected by rising bread prices (bread shortages in Paris, which occurred several times during the period under review, were a separate issue (Rudé, 1954: 253). The residents Loir-et-Cher were not as fortunate, severely affected by increases in the price of grain, flour and bread.

The Convention's introduction of maximum prices for grain throughout France on May 4, 1793, partially fulfilled the demands recorded in the ledgers of complaints relating to the prices of basic necessities. The law prohibited the sale of grain outside the market and required citizens to declare their grain and flour stocks, subject to home inspections. Failure to declare stocks resulted in their confiscation for the benefit of the poorest citizens in the municipality. Maximum prices in each department were based on the average market price of grain from January 1, 1793, to May 1, 1793 (Article 25). On September 11, 1793, it was decided to introduce a single price for grain throughout France. It was to cost 14 livres per quintal, the price could be increased by transportation costs (Bourne, 1919: 193–194). The maximum price was scheduled to decrease by $\frac{1}{10}$ on June 1, by $\frac{1}{20}$ on July 1, by $\frac{1}{30}$ on August 1 and by $\frac{1}{40}$ on September 1 (AP, T64, 1903: 55–56). This incentivized grain holders to sell their grain immediately to avoid losses.

In July 1793, the maximum price of grain was supported by a decree targeting speculators. Article 1 of the decree enacted on July 26 made it a crime to make purchases for speculative purposes, punishable by death and confiscation of goods, with the denouncers rewarded with $\frac{1}{3}$ of the confiscated foodstuffs and goods (Caron, 1930: 27–29). The Convention's August 19 decree authorized departmental authorities to set and impose a maximum price on firewood, peat, charcoal, and stone (Caron, 1930: 29–30). These measures proved insufficient as workers in Paris, on September 4 and 5, demanded bread and higher wages, and the introduction of maximum prices for all products. The Convention responded on September 29, 1793, by adopting the Law of the Maximum (*maximum général*; Rudé, 1982: 148–149).

Article 1 of the decree listed all “necessities” whose maximum prices were to be officially set. The presence of wine, vodka, beer, cider, and tobacco on this list gives an idea of what people needed to survive in those days. The prices of the items listed in Article 1 of the September 29 decree were to be based on their 1790 prices in all districts, plus $\frac{1}{3}$. The Law of the Maximum also regulated workers’ wages, which could not exceed 150% of those in 1790 (*Décret de la Convention Nationale...*, 1793). In theory, the law should have improved the financial situation of workers compared to 1790, but in practice, it caused anger among some workers who were already earning much more.

The wars fought by France since 1792 reduced the supply of labor but increased the demand for everything the French army needed. Workers took advantage of the situation and received raises. In June 1793, three months before the adoption of the Law of the Maximum, their wages were possibly double what they had been in 1790. For this reason, the authorities in many municipalities, particularly in Paris, delayed the publication of maximum wages, but the September 29 law went into effect immediately in state-owned manufactories (Braudel and Labrousse, 1976: 40). Moreover, the law resulted in a flow of goods to districts with higher prices, causing market shortages in those areas where maximum prices were lower (Shepard, 1953: 14). This resulted in the deterioration of living conditions for many working families due to problems with provisions.

The attitude of the population to the Law of the Maximum depended on many factors, including time, place, profession, and individual creativity or entrepreneurship. Over time, support for the law waned. Just four days before the fall of Maximilien Robespierre, on July 23, 1793, the Paris Commune adopted a significant reduction in wages under the Law of the Maximum. This caused protests of bricklayers and stonemasons in front of City Hall on 9 Thermidor (Baszkiewicz and Meller, 1983: 251–252). A day later, when Maximilian Robespierre and his companions were taken to the guillotine, on July 28, 1794, the crowd shouted: “*foutu maximum*”, meaning “down with the maximum” (Tulard, 1989: 281; Sargent and Velde, 1995: 507–508; Dupuy, 2005: 281).

The Decree of December 24, 1794, abolished the the Law of the Maximum (*Décret relatif...*, 1794). During its 15 months of operation, 180 legislative and administrative texts, decrees, and ordinances were issued to regulate its operation in detail (Caron, 1930: 39–124). Importantly, in the context of food prices, the Decree of December 24, 1794, also abolished the grain maximum of May 4, 1793, replacing it with limited rationing, which

was maintained until Year V (year V began on September 22, 1796, and ended on September 21, 1797; Caron 1912: 222–223; 1930: 1).

The abolition of the Law of the Maximum led to a spectacular rise in prices. Parisians complained that within 10 days of its abolition, food-stuff prices doubled. Surviving data confirm that market prices in the last week of December 1794 were close to black market prices in Paris during the final weeks of the Law of the Maximum. The year 1795 went down in French history as the year of hyperinflation (Crouzet, 1993: 338–339). S.E. Harris (1930: 107) constructed an index of the cost of living in Paris for 1795 and the first quarter of 1796 (table 6), using the prices of eggs, potatoes, butter, meat (beef, veal, pork), soap, fuel, and bread, giving the latter a triple weighting.

Table 6. Cost of living index in Paris from January 1795 to March 1796

Month	Price index for a basket of goods – 1790 = 100
January	580
February	510
March	720
April	900
May	Incomplete data
June	1310
July	2180
August	2710
September	3100
October	Incomplete data
November	5340
December	12990
January	11320
February	19100
March	38850

Source: Harris, 1930: 108.

Prices of necessities from the Harris basket rose by an average of 32% month after month in 1795. In selected months, prices rose at a rate of more than 50%, thus meeting Cagan's criterion for hyperinflation. The accuracy of the Harris basket is confirmed by a table of prices for 24 items published by *La Gazette Française* on September 24, 1795. The basket of goods, which cost 164 livres and 17 solids in 1790, cost 5642 livres in September 1795 (a 3420% increase), included one bushel each of flour, barley, oats, beans, peas and coal, 200 liters of Orleans wine, one pound each of butter, olive oil, sugar, coffee, soap from Marseilles, candles, unbleached sugar, and a bunch of turnips/ carrots, cabbage, shoes, clogs, stockings, a hat, a cubit of linen, a cubit of Elbeuf cloth, 25 eggs and floated wood (Aulard, 1899: 271). The Harris index was 3100 in September 1795 (Crouzet, 1993: 340). The dynamic increase in prices in 1795, which outpaced wages, led to the impoverishment of working families.

It should be noted that in Paris, after the abolition of the Law of the Maximum, the price of rationed bread was maintained at 12 solids per 4-pound and meat at 21 solids per pound (the ration was 0.5 pounds for five days) thanks to government subsidies. This saved Parisians from the poverty experienced by many throughout France, as government subsidies were not introduced in the Loir-et-Cher department. However, the rations given were insufficient, and Parisian workers had to buy bread and meat on the open market, where prices were soaring. Based on the size of bread rationing in Paris (1,300 bags per day) and daily consumption (2,150 bags), George Rudé (1954: 262) estimates that in 1795 Parisians were forced to buy about 40% of the bread consumed on the open market. He points out, however, that in reality it may have been more, due to a faulty distribution system, as evidenced by numerous complaints sent by citizens at the time.

The market price of bread in Paris rose from 5 livres for a 4-pound loaf on March 27, 1795, to 13 livres on April 12, 1795, and to 24 livres on April 21, 1795 (Rudé, 1954: 261–262). George Rudé got the dates wrong in his article; the information about bread being sold at 25 solids per pound is from the 7th germinal, or March 27, 1795, not March 28 (Aulard, 1898: 610; Caron, 1912: 246).

A full picture of the change in the financial situation of workers in Paris during the period under study would be provided by a comparison of prices and wages from the beginning of the revolution with those of 1795. Unfortunately, information on prices and wages in Paris in 1795 is selective and comes mainly from police reports. For this reason, table 7

shows the prices of selected items from February to April 1795. Table 8 provides information on workers' wages in April 1795 and the expenses for basic foodstuffs for an average working family.

Table 7. Prices of foodstuffs in Paris in 1795 (in livres)

Food item	Price	Price increase relative to the years 1789–1790 (in %)
Bread (4 pounds) market price	5 (March 28 price) – 13 (April 12 price)	589–1693
Bread (4 pounds) adjustable price	0.6	–
Pork (pound)	5 livres (March 1 price) – 7.5 livres (April 1 price)	525–1239
Meat (pound) adjustable price	1.05 livres	–
Butter (pound)	5.75–6 (March 14 price) – 8 (April 2 price)	487–700
Potatoes (bushel)	10 (March 17 price) – 10–12 (April 2 price)	1329–1471
Eggs (25 pieces)	6.5 (March 14 price) – 7 (April 7 price)	519–567
Bottle of wine (pint – 930 ml)	600 (price as of February 26 barrels of Burgundy wine)	1002 (Assuming that the barrel had a capacity of 225 liters and Arthur Young quoted the price of a bottle of Burgundy wine in 1789)

Source: own study. Cf: Aulard, 1898: 513, 521, 561, 574, 610, 629, 632, 644, 654; Biollay, 1886: 103, 161, 166, 262; Rudé, 1954: 262–263.

Table 8. Workers' earnings (in livres) in Paris and expenditure on foodstuffs (in %) in 1795

Daily wage*	10 livres		12 livres	
Daily real income	8.33 livres**		10 livres	
Wage increase in % relative to wages at the beginning of the revolution (1.5 livres per day)	567		700	
Bread spending as % of real income	59.5***		49.6	
Meat spending at free market price as % of real income	45.9****		38.3	
Expenditure on meat at regulated price as % of real income		21.01*****		17.5
Expenditure on butter as % of real income	9.8*****		8.2	
Spending on eggs as % of real income	1.6*****		1.3	
Σ	116.8	91.91	97.4	76.6

* From April 1795 we have data on the earnings of two laborers, earning 10 and 12 livres a day, who earned 1.5 livres a day at the beginning of the revolution. Unfortunately, the police report does not note exactly what kind of work they did (Aulard, 1898: 658).

** During the Republican period, many of the holidays celebrated during the ancien régime and at the beginning of the Revolution, which had been days off work, were abolished. A revolutionary calendar was also introduced on October 5, 1793, in which the month was divided into three decades (10 days each) – one day per decade was free from work, thereby increasing the annual workday. These changes were taken into account in the calculation of real incomes, the conversion factor being adopted after George Rudé (Rudé, 1954: 260; Furet and Ozouf, 1988: 482–486).

*** The bread requirements of an average working family were set at the same level as the calculations for the beginning of the French Revolution – 1.62 kilograms of bread per day. It was also assumed that 60% of the bread consumed was purchased at a regulated price – 0.6 livres for a 4-pound loaf of bread, and the rest was purchased on the open market at 13 livres per loaf. Thus, daily expenditures on bread on April 12, 1795, amounted to 4.96 livres.

**** The demand for meat was assumed at 26 kilograms per year per person. Thus, the daily expenses of a working family on April 1, 1795, for meat purchased at the free-market price was 3.83 livres (Allen, 2001: 421).

***** In the absence of accurate information on the government's provision of meat supplies to Parisians (0.5 pounds per person for five days at 1.05 livres per pound) as in the case of bread, we assume that 100% of it was provided. This would mean that an average working family in a year would buy 53.73 kilograms of meat at the discounted price and 30.77 kilograms at the free-market price to realize the consumption of meat from Allen's basket. Daily bread expenses would then amount to 1.75 livres.

***** The demand for butter was assumed at 5.2 kilograms per person per year. Thus, the daily expenditure of a working family on April 2, 1795, for butter was 0.82 livres (Allen, 2001: 421).

***** The demand for eggs was assumed at 52 eggs per person per year. Thus, the daily expenses of a working family on April 7, 1795, were 0.13 livres (Allen, 2001: 421).

Source: own study. Cf: Aulard, 1898: 629, 632, 644, 654, 658; Allen, 2001: 421.

From the beginning of the revolution to April 1795, workers' wages rose between 567% and 700% in Paris (earnings were determined from a Paris police report dated April 13, 1795, which noted an interview conducted with two random workers who provided information about their wages (10 and 12 livres a day); Aulard, 1898: 658). During the same period, the prices of necessities mostly saw larger increases. The exceptions include the price of rationed bread, maintained at 12 solids per 4-pound, the price of rationed meat at 21 solids per pound, and the price of eggs. The financial situation of workers largely depended on the supply of bread and meat to Paris. Assuming that the aforementioned supplies covered 60% of bread requirements, working families spent between 49.6% and 59.5% of their wages on bread (compared to 71.89% at the beginning of the revolution). When expenses for meat, butter, and eggs were added, the budget of a laborer earning 10 livres a day was exceeded by 16.8%, while only 2.6% remained from the salary of a laborer earning 12 livres, assuming that all the meat consumed was purchased at market prices. It should be noted that the family budget included only the income of the father of the family, some women and children also worked for pay. If the only breadwinner in the family was the father, then in this case the family either did not meet the level of consumption from the Robert C. Allen's basket of goods or was forced to borrow funds to maintain the level of consumption at the mentioned level.

If the authorities fulfilled their obligation to provide Parisians with meat rations at a discounted price, the family of a laborer earning 10 livres spent 91.91% of his income on bread, meat, butter, and eggs, and that of a laborer earning 12 livres spent 76.6%. Additional expenses remained, including housing, vegetables, cheese, alcohol, soap, cloth, shoes, candles, fuel, etc.

It should be noted that price increases for most items between 1789 and 1795 were greater than wage increases. In addition, police reports from March and April 1795 indicate that supplies of bread sold at 12 solids per loaf were insufficient for Paris, and the same was true for meat. Residents often reported to the authorities that they were receiving insufficient or no rations of subsidized bread. For example, a police report dated March 31, 1795, recorded the words of women who complained that they had not eaten bread for two days and addressed the bakers and commissioners with the following words: "Take a shotgun and kill us, and don't make us suffer from hunger." The next day, the bread allocation per person was only a quart, and yet many people did not receive

it at all (Aulard, 1898: 623, 628). The official bread ration per person set in March 1795 at 500–750 grams fell to 250, then 180, 125, and 65 by May 1795 (Rudé, 1982: 166–167). François Crouzet even considered whether the described food problems that affected poor people – especially women, children, and homeless elderly – were not the last famine in French history. Cases of suicide due to lack of foodstuffs are known from those days, such as the case of the young locksmith who failed to get bread from his baker and jumped from the fourth floor on May 10, 1795, or the father who killed his two children due to hunger on March 29, 1795 (Crouzet, 1993: 347–349).

In this context, it is difficult to speak of an improvement in the financial situation. Workers who earned 10–12 livres a day in April 1795 claimed that they were doing worse than when they earned 30 solids a day (1790) (Aulard, 1898: 658). At that time, due to the shortage of bread and its high price on the free market, the consumption of potatoes increased, with their price also rising rapidly. A statement made by a café waiter on March 18, 1795, who complained that: “It’s terrible to see how the French have to settle for a pound of bread a day and eat potatoes that are only fit for pigs” (quoted after Rudé, 1982: 170), shows that it was hard for the French of the time to change their consumption habits, despite the difficult food situation.

Let’s now look at the situation in the department of Loir-et-Cher, for which we have more data on prices and wages for February and March 1795, thanks to a survey conducted at the behest of the Committee of Public Safety.⁵ Unfortunately, the survey did not include bread prices, so they were estimated for the purposes of this article. Table 9 shows the prices of selected foodstuffs in 1795. Table 10 provides information on the wages of laborers working in various occupations.

⁵ The results of the survey from the Blois district were sent on March 4, 1795, from the Carismont district on February 27, 1795, from the Mer district on February 27, 1795, from the Mondoubleau district on March 27, 1795, from the Romorantin district on March 2, 1795 and from the Vendôme district on March 15, 1795 (Caron, 1910: 308, 312, 317, 321, 325, 329).

Table 9. Prices of foodstuffs in the department of Loire-et-Cher in 1795 (in livres)

Food item	Price	Price increase relative to 1790 in (%)
Wheat (quintal)	86.17	770.40
Rye (quintal)	59.20	742.70
Barley (quintal)	51.30	679.63
Oats (quintal)	63.80	1103.77
Butter (pound)	4.08	568.85
Beef (pound)	2.29	536.11
Cow	716.67	804.88
A pair of sheep	125.00	500.10
Honey (pound)	3.42	714.29
Bottle of wine (medium quality)	1.35	462.50

Source: own study. Cf: Caron, 1910a: 308–310, 312–314, 318–319, 322–323, 326–327, 330–331; Biollay, 1886: 111.

Table 10. Laborers' earnings in the Loir-et-Cher department in 1795 (in livres)

Work performed	Daily wage (in livres)	Wage growth relative to 1790 in (%)
Unskilled laborer	5.330	344.17
Apprentice blacksmith	5,230.	412.74
Apprentice locksmith	5.625	298.94
Apprentice carpenter	5.080	345.61
Apprentice bricklayer	5.420	361.28
Apprentice weaver (linen)	6.420	336.73
Apprentice weaver (wool)	5.750	360.00
Lumberjack	6.875	416.92
River sailor	8.670	112.50

Source: own study. Cf: Caron, 1910a: 308, 312, 317, 321, 325, 329.

The price increases for all articles from the beginning of the revolution until 1795, calculated based on average prices from the six districts of the Loir-et-Cher department, are much greater than the increases in workers' wages. This indicates a deterioration in the financial situation of working families during this period, *ceteris paribus*. Unfortunately, the price of bread, which was a key item in the household budget in Paris at that time, is missing from the above list. The example of Loir-et-Cher's neighboring department of Indre-et-Loire shows that its price was yet very high. On March 5, 1795, a 4-pound loaf cost 4 livres in that department (the authors of the survey from the Indre-et-Loire department annotated the price of cereals with a comment on the price of bread; Caron, 1910a: 130, 133); in Paris, by comparison, the regulated price was 0.6 livres, while the market price was 5 livres (as of March 28, 1795). Additionally, wages in the provinces were about half those in the capital. This suggests that workers in Loir-et-Cher allocated a larger share of the family budget to buying bread than Parisians did. Although we do not have data on the price elasticity of demand for bread during the French Revolution, we can assume that it was inelastic.

Assuming the same demand for necessities as for Paris, and the same number of days worked per year, the expenses of an unskilled laborer and a woodcutter for selected necessities were calculated (table 11).

Table 11. Unskilled laborers and woodcutter's expenditures on foodstuffs in the department of Loir-et-Cher in 1795 (in %)

Daily salary (in livres)	Unskilled laborer	Lumberjack
	5.33	6.875
Daily real income (in livres)	4.44	5.730
Spending on meat (beef) as % of real income	26.35	20.420
Expenditure on butter as % of actual income	9.39	7.280
Bread spending as % of real income	80.40*	62.300
Σ	116.14	90.000

* Due to the lack of data on the price of bread in the department of Loir-et-Cher, the price from the neighboring department of Indre-et-Loire (1 livre per pound of bread on March 5, 1795) was used

for the calculations. This is supported by the fact that grain prices in one department and the other were similar. For example: in Indre-et-Loire on March 5, 1795, wheat cost 78 livres per quintal, while in Loir-et-Cher in February/March it cost 86.17 livres (average of 6 districts). It can thus be assumed that the price of bread derived from the price of grain was similar in the two departments, and it can even be assumed with a high degree of probability that the price of bread in Loir-et-Cher was higher, which means that workers spent an even higher proportion of their income on bread than shown in table 11 (Caron, 1910a: 130).

Source: own study. Cf: Caron, 1910a: 133, 308–309, 312–313, 317–318, 321–322, 325–326, 329–330; Allen, 2001: 421.

Bread expenses in the Loir-et-Cher department consumed a larger share of a working family's budget than in Paris. This was due to the government's provision of bread to Parisians at a subsidized price compared to market rates. The same applied to meat – assuming that Parisian workers could buy 0.5 pounds of meat every five days at the regulated price of 21 solids per pound, and the remainder at market prices, they spent a smaller portion of their wages on meat than did residents of Loir-et-Cher. Without government assistance, Parisians would have had to spend a much larger portion of their budget on meat compared to provincial residents. Food was more expensive in Paris than in Loir-et-Cher, primarily due to the higher cost of transportation to the capital.

To verify the thesis that the financial situation of workers deteriorated between 1789 and 1795, we should examine the percentage of bread expenses in the budget of a working family at the beginning and end of the period under study in Paris and Loir-et-Cher. At the beginning of the revolution, bread expenses consumed 71.89% of a construction worker's salary in Paris. By April 1795, Parisian workers spent between 49.6% and 59.5% of their income on bread, depending on their earnings. In contrast, in Loir-et-Cher in 1790, an unskilled laborer spent 83.33% of his wages on bread, which decreased to 80.4% by early March 1795. A lumberjack in Loir-et-Cher spent 75% of his wages on bread in 1790, decreasing to 62.3% by early March 1795.

Although the percentage of income spent on bread improved in both Paris and Loir-et-Cher, the situation is more complex than these figures suggest. The comparison is based on data from the beginning of the revolution and from February, March and April 1795, a period that marked the start of rapid price increases, which peaked at the end of 1795, leading to hyperinflation that outpaced wage growth. Evidence of this inflation can be found in the rate of the assignat in the Seine (Paris) and Loir-et-Cher departments (Charts 1 and 2) and the cost-of-living index in Paris (table 6).

By the beginning of 1795, the financial situation of workers in Loir-et-Cher had already begun to deteriorate compared to the start of the revolution, and it worsened significantly in the subsequent months. Additionally, while bread expenses in February and March 1795 were a smaller portion of the household budget compared to the beginning of the revolution, the prices of all other necessities in the Loir-et-Cher had risen much more than wages during the period from 1790 to March 1795 (tables 9 and 10).

In Paris, the situation was more nuanced. Parisian workers who could purchase most of their bread (at a subsidized price of 0.6 livres for 4 pounds) and meat (at 1.05 livres per pound), had a better or comparable financial situation to that at the beginning of the revolution. However, market prices for most necessities, with the exception of eggs (table 7), had risen much more than wages by April 1795 (table 8). Furthermore, police reports indicate that the rationed bread and meat were often insufficient, with some workers receiving none at all, even in Paris. The financial situation of those workers deteriorated catastrophically, as evidenced by suicides due to starvation. The negative impact on Parisian workers is further corroborated by the increased number of strikes in the latter half of 1795, during a period of peak inflation and lowest real wages.

Another argument for the worsened financial situation of workers in 1795, which the results may not fully reflect, is related to the method used for calculating daily real income. Initially, a conversion factor of 0.6 was applied to convert daily wages into real income at the beginning of the French Revolution. For 1795, a conversion factor of 0.83 was used. This adjustment accounts for the change in the number of working days per year due to the introduction of the republican calendar and the elimination of many former holidays, which increased the number of working days. As a result, workers' nominal real incomes appeared to increase, this was partly offset by the fact that they were working more. Increased workdays led to higher caloric expenditures and greater food consumption. This potentially diminished the improvement in their financial situation.

It should also be noted that the above considerations and calculations apply only to workers who were employed. The issue of unemployment during the period under study remains a significant and distinct issue. Between 1789 and 1791, unemployment was a widespread phenomenon throughout France. For example, in Paris alone, charity workshops

(*ateliers de charité*) were established to support over 20,000 unemployed individuals in 1790 and 1791. These workers performed public duties, often involving earthworks. Additionally, a decree of May 30, 1790, established spinning workshops for women and children (Sée, 1951: 58). By June 1791, the *ateliers de charité* had employed approximately 31,000 people (Rudé, 1954: 250, 252). However, from May 1791, the Constituency decided to close these workshops, a process that concluded in June 1791 (Guicheteau, 2014: 137).

The situation for the unemployed began to improve after the outbreak of war in April 1792. Increasing numbers of men joined the army, and many workers found employment in armaments production. In August 1793, special workshops were established in Paris for manufacturing rifle parts, concentrating thousands of workers in the capital, and making Paris the most crucial arms manufacturing center in France, with 700 to 800 rifles produced daily (Burstin, 1977: 665; Belhoste and Woronoff, 2008: 87). The Parisian arms industry comprised numerous small workshops spread across every neighborhood and public squares.

However, by 1795, the republic's armies were being reduced (from 1,000,000 to 400,000 men), and many regions in conquered territories (Belgium, the Rhine area) became more industrialized than France. This led to the closure of armaments factories in France and a reduction in production elsewhere (Godechot, 1977: 53), resulting in an overall increase in unemployment in 1795. This rise in unemployment, and the consequent deterioration in the financial situation of workers, was not accounted for in the above analysis.

CONCLUSION

The inclusive institutions introduced in France between 1789 and 1795, largely driven by the demands of the Third Estate and established through the work of the Constituent Assembly, did contribute to improving the material situation of workers. However, their positive effects became more pronounced over the long term, beyond the chronological limits of this study. During the examined period, the negative factors affecting workers' financial situations were substantial and, in some

cases, even more severe for Parisians and residents of the Loir-et-Cher department. These adverse factors included: first, the costly *sensu largo* wars waged by France between 1792 and 1795 against both external enemies (the First Anti-French Coalition) and internal enemies (Vendée insurgents, Chouans, and the Federalists); second, the widespread uncertainty accompanying a period of profound socio-economic change and war, which affected economic decisions; third, the decision of the revolutionary authorities to introduce the Law of the Maximum in September 1793, which, on the one hand, halted the rise in prices and wages, but on the other hand, destroyed the market, especially for necessities; last, the revolutionary government's issuance of assignats, not backed by national goods (*biens nationaux*), contributed to inflation, where wage increases failed to keep pace with rising costs.

In summary, despite the revolutionary authorities addressing many of the demands from the ledgers of complaints, the financial situation of many workers did not see substantial improvement during the period from 1789 to 1795. In many cases, like that in the Loir-et-Cher department, their economic conditions worsened significantly, leaving them to continue see their demands as a dream.

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