

Family, Work and Wages: The Stéphanois Region of France, 1840–1914*

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Exploring issues of the family wage, this paper examines labour markets, family employment patterns and political conflict in France.¹ Up to now, the debate over the family wage has centred mainly on analysing British trade unions and the development of an ideal of domesticity among the British working classes, more or less taking for granted the declining women's labour force participation rate and the configuration of state/trade union relations prevailing in Great Britain.² Shifting the debate across the Channel, scholars such as Laura Frader and Susan Pedersen have suggested that different attitudes to the family wage prevailed.³ In France, demands for the exclusion of women from industry were extremely rare because women's participation in industry was taken for granted. But a gendered division of labour and ideals of domesticity remained and made themselves felt in both workforce and labour movement.

In France, conditions of labour supply contrasted sharply with the UK, for it was far more difficult to recruit factory labour in France than in Britain. As a result of the difficulty of recruiting males, many of whom remained in peasant agriculture, female participation in the French labour force grew rapidly at a time when it was declining in England; in France, even a significant number of married women with children worked in factories. Censuses indicate that 24.7 per cent of the total female population of France was economically active in 1866, compared with 27.2 per cent in Great Britain in 1871, and 9.7 per cent in the US in 1870. However, forty or more years later, France had 38.7 per cent in 1911, Britain 25.7 per cent in 1911 and the US 16.7 per cent in 1910.⁴ With female labour

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¹ Derived from Seecombe, the definition of the "family wage" employed here is the "notion that the wage earned by a husband ought to be sufficient to support his family without his wife and young children having to work for pay": see Wally Seecombe, "Patriarchy Stabilized: The Construction of the Male Breadwinner Wage Norm in Nineteenth-Century Britain", *Social History*, 1, 11 (1986), pp. 53–76, esp. p. 54. Seecombe prefers the term "male breadwinner norm" to "family wage", but the concept of "norm", as we shall see, has its own problems.

² C. Creighton, "The Rise of the Male Breadwinner Family: A Reappraisal", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 38 (1996), pp. 310–337, esp. p. 330.

³ Laura Frader, "Engendering Work and Wages: The French Labour Movement and the Family Wage", in Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose (eds), *Gender and Class in Modern Europe* (Ithaca, 1996), pp. 141–164 and Susan Pedersen, *Family Dependence and the Origin of the Welfare State* (New York, 1993).

⁴ P. Bairoch, *The Working Population and Its Structure*, vol. 1 (Brussels, 1968). It is very likely that French female labour force participation is underestimated because the

force participation in France high and growing in the second half of the nineteenth century, it was much harder to foster an image of “domesticity” as a “norm” for working-class women.

French labour unions were also generally less formally organized than their British counterparts and less able to carry out exclusionary practices had they so desired. In France, even in the 1900s, such flourishing British institutions as collective bargaining and strongly-organized national craft unions were almost non-existent – with one exception. By far the best-known case of the exclusion of women from the trade unions was the Couriau affair of 1913 and, in this case, the printers’ union’s effort to exclude women from skilled work was not upheld by the French national trade union, the CGT.⁵ But the affair really underscores the irrelevance of craft; the French printers’ union was explicitly modelled on craft unions of the American and British types, with relatively high dues, strike funds and mutual aid functions, but it was practically the only French trade union so organized. Highly paid skilled workers might laud the benefits of domesticity, but the structure of French unionism with its fluctuating duespayers, its weak national federations, and its unpaid local officials whose participation was based on political zeal, was unsuited to exclusionary policies.⁶

Finally, the relationship between the French labour movement and the state was fundamentally different from that in the UK. In both countries, the labour movement had long made itself a champion of universal manhood suffrage. Opposed by their own peers, manhood suffrage and the long sought republic were achieved in the 1870s, but republican triumph had seriously divided French elites, influential segments of which were firmly anti-republican. As a result, French republicans had to acknowledge their dependence on the working classes in a manner different from that of British Liberal reformers. Republicans could not afford to see reactionary anti-republican industrialists carry out massive repression of workers; sustained working-class defeats in a region sooner or later meant the advent of an anti-republican deputy. French labour organizations could remain decentralized and radical because, despite their weak national organization and their radicalism, they could count on a measure of government support.

This paper focuses on a single region of France and looks at the context for the emergence of demands for a “family wage”. Unlike studies that seek to support their argument by searching for cases which illustrate it,

participation of women in peasant agriculture is not fully incorporated into census estimates.

⁵ Charles Sowerwine, “Workers and Women in France Before 1914: The Debate Over the Couriau Affair”, *Journal of Modern History*, 55 (1983), pp. 411–441.

⁶ Michelle Perrot, “L’éloge de la ménagère dans le discours ouvrier français au XIXe siècle”, *Romantisme*, 13–14 (1976), pp. 105–122; Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly, *Strikes in France, 1830–1968* (Cambridge, 1974); and Gerald Friedman, “The State and the Making of the Working Class”, *Theory and Society*, 17 (1988), pp. 403–430.

this study selects an area and surveys the ways in which workers used the demand for a family wage. Unlike artisanal and craft workers, many workers in large-scale or heavy industry were still illiterate in late nineteenth-century France. Industrial workers were usually consigned to the periphery of those reading circles, debating societies and independent newspapers that enthralled more prosperous and better educated artisans – and little written record remains of their beliefs. To gauge industrial workers' opinions, a variety of sources and contexts must be examined. The region chosen is the area around Saint-Etienne in south-eastern France, the so-called Stéphanais region, one of the earliest centres of the Industrial Revolution in France, an important site for the growth of French heavy industry, but also an old ribbonweaving centre possessing thriving garment industries.

BEYOND THE FAMILY WAGE DEMAND: RHETORIC AND DAILY LIFE – THE PRE-INDUSTRIAL EXPERIENCE

In the Stéphanais the idea that wife and young children of “respectable” workers should belong to a household that was a refuge for weary male workers had weak roots. To understand the perspective of Stéphanais working-class families on the place of work and family in daily life between 1840 and 1914, account must be taken of the experiences that migrants brought with them to the industrial city or acquired growing up in the city before the advent of heavy industry in the 1840s. First, rural dwellers were committed to economic diversification; second, they were accustomed to a gendered division of labour; and third, they were reared in a culture in which the role of the male as household head was at least publicly acknowledged.

Economic diversification was characteristic of pre-industrial labour in the Stéphanais. Conscious of economic frailty, peasants planted a variety of secondary crops in case a main crop would fail, so wherever possible, rural families in the migrant-sending regions combined waged work and farming or one type of domestic industry with another.⁷ Students of “proto-industry” have described it as the royal road to proletarianization because, by investing all their resources in domestic industry, producers could be swept away by a downturn in demand or by technological obsolescence. Families engaging in rural domestic industry seem to have been at least dimly aware of this danger because, when they could, they avoided concentrating in a single industry.⁸ The rich diversity of rural industries

⁷ This kind of division of labour seems to have been quite general: Harriet Bradley, *Men's Work, Women's Work: A Sociological History of the Sexual Division of Labour in Employment* (Minneapolis, 1989).

⁸ A point well made for the commune of Marlihes by James Lehning, “Nuptuality and Rural Industry: Families and Labour in the French Countryside”, *Journal of Family History*, 8, 4 (1983), pp. 333–345.

present in the Stéphanais in the first half of the nineteenth century made this possible.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, between 1806 and 1856, the cities almost continuously lining the valleys to the north-east and south-west of the city of Saint-Etienne on the eastern edge of the Massif Central grew rapidly: Rive-de-Gier's population increased almost three times to around 15,000, and neighbouring Saint-Etienne grew at the same rate to 180,000. The population of the Stéphanais valleys were largely migrants from the nearby mountainous countryside to the west, south and north-west. Before 1840, tens of thousands of households of the *arrondissement* of Saint-Etienne in the *département* of the Loire, the *arrondissements* of Yssingeaux and Le Puy in the Haute-Loire, and the *arrondissement* of Ambert in the Puy-de-Dôme had participated in a regional economy that combined the cultivation of rye, domestic industry and seasonal labour. Indeed, agricultural and industrial work long remained complementary even as industrial work moved from countryside to city. The manpower requirements of the harvest season in rye were concentrated in July, August and September when the water-powered mills of the mountain hamlets and the cities in the valley, consumers of rye bread, slowed to a trickle due to seasonal drought; the long winters provided plenty of time for agriculturalists to participate in industry – at least as long as the cold did not freeze the mountain streams.⁹

These mountainous areas were poor agricultural terrain, but the opportunities for seasonal labour and domestic industry promoted population growth. Incredible as it may seem for someone who visits this terrain today, in the 1840s the *arrondissement* of Ambert in the Puy-de-Dôme was one of the fifteen most populous *arrondissements* in all of France – rural or urban. This population was no stranger to industry. For at least a century before 1840, the current generation, their parents and their parents' parents had engaged in industrial labour. Countrymen and women had pursued silkweaving, lacemaking, or ironmongering in their own rural environment, while others, mainly men but sometimes women, had taken the road down to the valley to market their farm goods, to bring their loads of bolts, scythes or knife blades to the urban merchant, to obtain seasonal work in urban construction or as industrial day labourers, or to work as domestics in ribbonweavers' households. In the city, migrants prepared their return to rural life, women worked for their dowry, men to round off the piece of land they expected to inherit.¹⁰

⁹ The importance of looking at the ecological relationship between proto-industrialization and industrialization is stressed by Joyce M. Mastboom, "Protoindustrialization and Agriculture in the Eastern Netherlands", *Social Science History*, 20, 2 (Summer 1996), pp. 235–258.

¹⁰ Michael Hanagan, *Nascent Proletarians: Class Formation in Post-Revolutionary France, 1840–1880* (Oxford, 1989). On seasonal migration, Jan Lucassen, *Migrant Labour in Europe 1600–1900: The Drift to the North Sea* (London, 1987).

Second, while migrants from these regions were utterly familiar with a gendered division of labour and an individual wage, they were unaccustomed to a division between men working for wages and women performing exclusively unwaged work outside of markets. Commonly, men and women performed different types of labour, but even when they performed the same basic type of labour, there was almost always some distinction between the work performed by women and that performed by men. Later on, we shall look more closely at ribbonweaving, but a gendered division of labour can be seen in the mills and factories, generally located in the countryside, both up- and downstream of the weaving process; in the preparatory stages, the reelers (*dévideuses*), the warpers (*ourdisseuses*), and the silkthrowers (*moulineuses*) were all women, while the dyers (*teinturiers*) were male. In the finishing stage the dressers (*dresseurs*) were male and the folders (*plieuses*), female.

Many combinations of wage work and market participation were common. In an area like Saint-Amant-Roche-Savine, a small commune in the *arrondissement* of Ambert, north of the Stéphanois, that contributed many migrants to the industrialized region, the economy was based on seasonally-migrant male “sawyers” who travelled down the mountainside together in bands offering their collective services to farmers or builders. Their mothers, wives and sisters tended the farm. Women, sometimes supervised by fathers or fathers-in-law, were in charge of hiring labour and managing the farm between the planting and harvest periods and marketing. At times, men’s seasonal absence could extend to several years, and women’s responsibilities multiplied.

In areas of the mountainous Haute-Loire, due east of Saint-Etienne and a prodigious population donor to the Stéphanois, a gendered division of labour followed the rule “The exterior to the men, the interior to women”:

This great distinction, general in the region, dominates everything: working the land, cultivation, is reserved for men: never, except for haymaking do the women intervene: their role, along with domestic responsibilities, is butter and cheesemaking, strongly reduced by the export of milk, wetnursing [. . .] and ribbonweaving.¹¹

Concentration on domestic activity often meant that women organized and supervised textile production. In 1867 Jules Vallès wrote that: “the women of the Haute Loire reveal themselves as energetic. They are small businesswomen, small farmers’ wives, or important tradeswomen who are the head, soul and sometimes the arms of the house.” He explained that “the country lives by lacemaking and as the workers are young and fresh peasant girls who embroider the lace [. . .] the wives prefer not to let their husbands talk with the embroiderers or tradeswomen”.¹² In the wintertime,

¹¹ Pierre du Maroussem, “Fermiers Montagnards du Haut-Forez”, in *Les Ouvriers des Deux Mondes*, vol. 4, Deuxième Serie (Paris, 1892), p. 421.

¹² Jules Vallès, “La Situation, 22 septembre 1867”, in Roger Bellet (ed.), *Oeuvres* (Paris, 1975), p. 979.

with agricultural work reduced, husbands could be found spending entire days in nearby cafés while their wives supervised work in the household.

Finally, despite female participation in wage work and markets, men still asserted their role as household head and the particular responsibility of women for domestic affairs. Peasant customs insisted on this point. For example, in Forez, the mountainous region of the Loire *département* west of the Loire river, when the young bride returned to her home from the church, she often found a broom across the door and was expected to sweep with it to demonstrate her mastery of household tasks and responsibility for its chores.¹³ In one Forézien village, during the marriage banquet, a chorus lectured the groom about the dangers of marital relationships. The groom responded with his own song including the lines, "I wish to be always master of the house".¹⁴ All such rituals, as Martine Segalen reminds us, are polysemic and subject to different interpretations, and other customs suggest that, even after marriage, questions of familial authority were not entirely closed, but the public facade of male household headship and female domesticity was at least maintained.¹⁵

Migrating to the urban centres of the industrial valley, rural dwellers found continuity with rural divisions of labour as well as important differences. In some communities, such as Firminy, on the north-eastern edge of the industrial valley, urban life in the first half of the nineteenth century was not so different from rural. One of the Stéphanois industrial cities, which would soon become a largely coalmining town, Firminy was dominated by nailmaking and silkweaving. In domestic workshops, men and boys heated iron ingots and shaped them on an anvil into nails. Meanwhile, above the smithy, women wove plain silk fabrics.¹⁶

In Saint-Etienne and Saint-Chamond, centres of skilled silk production, a true "family economy" prevailed. Workshops in which the household was both the unit of production and reproduction were more likely to be found in cities. Saint-Etienne was the predominant French centre for the production of silk ribbons. Ribbonweaving was a fashion industry, tied closely to the rhythm of Parisian garments, and skilled weavers congregated together to keep abreast of fashion trends and to learn the new techniques they required.

Ribbons produced in family workshops on large silk looms were expensive and required substantial skills. The master/father directed the labour of his wife and children, although in many households where wives had grown up in the silk trade they were as knowledgeable as their husbands. In more prosperous households, masters were assisted by young

¹³ Marguerite Gonon, *Coutumes de mariage en Forez* (Lyon, 1979), pp. 67–68.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 98–99.

¹⁵ On the ambiguities within the rituals, James R. Lehning, *Peasant and French: Cultural Contact in Rural France during the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1995).

¹⁶ Albert Boissier, "Essai sur l'histoire et sur les Origines de l'Industries du Clou Forgé dans la Région de Firminy", *Revue de Folklore Français*, 12, 2 (1941), pp. 63–109.

apprentices and journeymen learning the trade. The fluctuating demands of fashion led to rapid changes in the requirements for silk goods. The contractors (*commis de barre*) who were the intermediaries between the *fabricants*, who took orders from Paris, and the master silkweavers, generally arranged production so as to preserve their relationship with highly skilled masters who might be needed in the next fashion swing.

In one city in the industrial valley, Rive-de-Gier, almost alone in the Stéphanois, an industrial economy developed in which women were not expected to engage in wage labour. The idea that women would not engage in wage labour was so remarkable that it was enshrined in a proverb. The saying went: “Rive-de-Gier is hell for horses, purgatory for men, and heaven for women.”¹⁷ The logic of this saying was that: horses were lowered into the mines, never to see the light of day; men working in the glassworks were in contact with fire much of the day and miners descended into the ground for most of the daylight hours; and women were in paradise because they did not work for wages.

Because early coalminers came from the countryside around Rive-de-Gier and possessed land for farming or gardening, the only conspicuous group of workers with wives involved in unwaged work were the glassworkers. Theirs was a well-paid elite whose standard of living was celebrated in song and story, and stories convey perhaps better than anything how unusual these workers’ families were, not only at the time but in succeeding decades. Forty years after the glassworkers’ trade union had been broken and twenty years after the disappearance of most glassworking from the Stéphanois, a local storyteller told of glassworker improvisation. “What stories did they not tell of the glassworkers whose wives went to the countryside with aprons heavy with ecus? Certain of them, for dinner, ate only chicken filets and threw the carcasses out the window to the family’s dog pack, waiting in the street, which fought over the pieces.”¹⁸ In the 1920s, this cuisine of dainty worker housewives partook of the fabulous.

BEYOND THE FAMILY WAGE DEMAND: RHETORIC AND DAILY LIFE – THE INDUSTRIAL EXPERIENCE

The new working-class families developing in the Stéphanois came from backgrounds where female domesticity was exceptional and, given the miserable conditions confronting early urban proletarians, had no incentive to demand the exclusion of women from industry. After 1848, Stéphanois workers, particularly miners, rhetorically, demanded a “family wage” and,

¹⁷ The saying probably originated in a description of Paris. Louis-Sebastien Mercier referred to survival rates of women, men and horses in urban environment of the capital, quoted in Jeffrey Kaplow (ed.), *Le Tableau de Paris* (Paris, 1982), p. 31.

¹⁸ M. Fournier, *La vie d'une cité: Impressions de Rive-de-Gier* (Saint-Etienne, 1936), pp. 8–9.

publicly, lamented the heavy responsibilities of supporting an entire family. At the same time, in everyday life they sought, through the employment of family members, to avoid the burden that they bore so publicly. Workers' demands for a family wage were not inconsistent with sending very young children, daughters, and even wives to work. But it was not always possible to find employment for many family members. Except for a reticence to send married women to work outside the home, and this was often overcome, family employment patterns ultimately depended not on workers' fancied respectability or aggrieved masculinity but on the availability of jobs. While the industrial transformation of the Stéphanais began in the 1810s and the region was a principal centre of the first Industrial Revolution in the European continent, it was the second Industrial Revolution, after 1840, that really threatened to transform the character of popular life. Over the next seventy-five years, however, Stéphanais workers held fast to multi-stranded ties to wage work, a gendered division of labour, and male household headship and feminine domesticity – all legacies of their proto-industrial past.

The great change in the everyday conditions of workers' lives began in coalmining and built on proto-industrial traditions while reshaping them in significant ways. In the 1840s, the newly established coal monopoly completely reorganized the Stéphanais mines, ending the small-scale exploitation whose unsystematic character had led to a dangerous proximity of pits and to the flooding of poorly maintained mines. The monopoly invested large sums of capital, consolidated production into a few newly excavated mines and restructured the labour force. Between 1846 and 1854, coal production doubled, and the workforce more than doubled from about 3,200 to a little under 8,000.¹⁹ No longer recruited exclusively from among the older miners' kin, management officials now hired the workforce. The result of the reorganization was the appearance of a new kind of worker. The large-scale exploitation of the mines made possible by greater capital investment required a larger number of miners who would work on a year-round basis. As the opportunity for year-round work became available in quantity, working-class mining families sprang up in the urban industrial valley drawn from landless agricultural migrants and workers in declining domestic industries.

As the mines expanded rapidly, they recruited far beyond the region in which peasants or tenant farmers could walk to the mine, and the urban population grew. In Rive-de-Gier, many miners' wives became primarily housekeepers, although many also became coal sorters working above ground sorting the coal, separating out rock and washing it down (these were the women celebrated in the song, "The Carbon Flower"). They

¹⁹ Pierre Guillaume, "La situation économique et sociale du département de la Loire d'après l'Enquête sur le travail agricole et industriel du 25 mai 1848", *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporain*, 10 (1963), pp. 5–34.

were temporary workers, hired by the day. But the importance of shiftwork in the mines and, later, in metalworking, created new connections between work and households. If a household was old enough to have sons working in the mines then the responsibility devolved upon mothers and daughters to make sure that food, clothing and bed were ready for workers toiling at very different times. Some Stéphanois women worked at home in domestic industry, while others laboured as less skilled machine tenders in machine construction, but the rapid growth of a mining population produced a less skilled or unskilled urban labour force in which women's waged work (both mothers' and daughters') played a peripheral or even non-existent role.

Here a focus on the small industrial towns that followed the industrial valleys on either side of Saint-Etienne is invaluable. The wide variety of employment combinations that emerged in different towns shows how Stéphanois male workers and their families responded to different employment opportunities. If employment patterns in the three Stéphanois industrial towns are compared in 1876, at the highpoint of rapid growth during the second Industrial Revolution, the variation in women's employment is striking. In 1876, the refined activity rate for men, standardized for age, runs from 0.776 in Le Chambon Feugerolles to 0.856 in Rive-de-Gier, a difference of about one-tenth (0.103); for women it runs from 0.152 in Rive-de-Gier to 0.423 in Saint-Chamond, a factor of about one and three-quarter times (1.782), more than seventeen times the discrepancy for males.²⁰

While much was new, old employment patterns also recapitulated themselves. As in pre-industrial labour, women's work experience in industrial labour was fundamentally different from men's. Garmentmaking and other cottage industry employed women and young girls, while metalworking and mining employed men and boys. Because garments and domestic labour employed younger children, girls typically began to work for wages a year earlier than boys. Young girls were also likely to be kept at home to help their mother in her domestic chores, but only after more essential family needs were fulfilled. Logistic regression of the determinants of child employment in the three towns in 1876 shows that girls were likely to be kept at home where there were young siblings needing care, where boarders needed service, or where the presence of older employed siblings provided sufficient income to allow mothers to recruit helpers.²¹ None of these considerations affected the employment of young boys.

While there was nothing new about the employment of men and women, boys and girls in different industries or the involvement of girls and married women in industry, the growth of a non-working female population among the wives of less skilled workers is worth remarking. To understand

²⁰ Hanagan, *Nascent Proletarians*, p. 160.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 142–143.

this development, it is necessary to explore mining and metalworking. The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the growth of a true industrial proletariat in the Stéphanois. Metalworking plants and mines offered wages above those of casual day labourers, and the huge investment in machinery required that these plants run continually on a year-round basis – usually for twenty-four hours a day. These newly reorganized industries employed males almost exclusively. In part, Stéphanois workers were not tempted to demand the exclusion of women from industry because employers in heavy industry had already excluded them. There were a number of obvious reasons for this, not least of which was that tradition played a decisive role. Metalworking in the Stéphanois, even in domestic industry, had generally been male dominated, although not exclusively so, and mining had never employed women in underground labour. Male bias may play a partial role here because all the metal and mining employers were male.²²

But an equally important explanation for the exclusivity of the male presence is due to the scarcity of year-round, long-term labour and the assumption, correct enough, that year-round, long-term labour was most likely to be male. In times of rapid expansion, Stéphanois employers urgently sought to recruit workers from other regions and were horrified by rumours that employers from other regions had sent recruiters to the Stéphanois. Employers were not interested in temporary workers – these they had in abundance. In the winter, they were besieged by job-seekers, and they were frustrated when reliable workers disappeared for good to the countryside after only a few years. What Stéphanois employers required were continual, long-term workers. Given their assumptions that male household heads were less mobile than single males, married women should and would be consigned to childcare, and working-class families should bear the entire cost of childrearing, married male workers were the ideal labour force.²³

The overwhelming predominance of adult males in large-scale heavy industry created new employment problems for their family members. Heavy industry employing male heads of household paid the highest wages and called the tune; families formed alongside factories and mines; if domestic industry or light industry was inadequate, than families were unable to earn supplementary income. In fact, such problems were inevitable, because small-scale industry was always subject to greater fluctuations than heavy industry. Indeed the major appeal of such industry was its low capital requirements which accounted for its flexibility and adaptability; labour bore the brunt of seasonality and fluctuating demand.

²² Samuel Cohn, *The Process of Occupational Sex-Typing: The Feminization of Clerical Labour in Great Britain* (Philadelphia, 1985).

²³ Johanna Brenner and Maria Ramas, "Rethinking Women's Oppression", *New Left Review*, 144 (1984), pp. 33–71.

The point is well illustrated by the case of Le Chambon Feugerolles. Between 1840 and 1880, Le Chambon underwent a transition from multi-stranded family labour to dependence on a male wage. If we look at employment patterns in Le Chambon in 1856 we find that most adult males were miners or metalworkers. Many of these male workers had daughters and wives who worked at home as ribbonweavers. Alongside these workers, a minority of the working population was engaged in knifemaking in family workshops. By 1876, hardware manufacturing still survived, but mining and metalworking had grown and loomed even larger in the city's economy, for ribbonweaving had almost entirely disappeared – a victim of economic contraction and changing taste. But perhaps the contraction in ribbonweaving was only a fortunate coincidence, a pretext that allowed adult male workers to withdraw their wives and daughters from a domestic industry that threatened a growing sense of respectability?

Such an interpretation makes no sense at all of Le Chambon in 1900. Domestic industry and women working in factories had returned to the city with a vengeance, employing more women and children workers than formerly, and many daughters were employed in the small factories that had grown up in the interstices between domestic industry and heavy industry. The dynamic force in the city's evolution was the relationship between filemakers in medium-sized factories and filecutters in domestic industry. These had evolved out of the pre-existing blademakers who had switched their attention to files and spread their skills to other sections of the population. Their presence had enabled the town to take advantage of a new need for industrial tools such as files and for industrial products such as bolts. Adult male miners and metalworkers allowed their wives and children to work in domestic and in light industry with alacrity. The metalworkers' daughters, returning home from bolt factories, their clothes covered with grease, reveal how easy it is to confuse changing employment opportunities with the growth of respectability.²⁴

A very different pattern emerged in Saint-Chamond. As ribbonweaving declined in the 1850s, it was replaced by the manufacture of braided trimmings – a textile industry that employed large numbers of women. Given the opportunity to send their daughters to work, metalworkers and miners sent them in large numbers as Elinor Accampo has shown.²⁵ In Saint-Chamond, some workers' wives also found work in the mills. Because censuses underestimate women's work, it is difficult to get a good idea of the extent of women's, particularly married women's, participation in the

²⁴ The infiltration of a miners' quarter of Saint-Etienne, Côte Chaude, by ribbonweaving is another example of this process. On domestic work in another Stéphanois miners' community, see Jean-Paul Burdy, *Le Soleil noir: Un quartier de Saint-Etienne, 1840–1940* (Lyon, 1989).

²⁵ Elinor Accampo, *Industrialization, Family Life, and Class Relations: Saint-Chamond, 1815–1914* (Berkeley, 1989).

labour force; in 1876, the manuscript census showed that about 8 per cent of wives were employed.²⁶ In 1911, metalworkers in the large *Acières de la Marine* in Saint-Chamond petitioned their employer to change the time of their midday break. The midday break had changed to noon in the braidmaking factories and workers wanted their employer to adjust his schedule similarly so that they could dine *en famille*.²⁷

The braiders of Saint-Chamond were extremely poorly paid; their wages clearly provided only a meagre supplement to family income. Dormitories operated by the larger textile companies provided supervision for young girls from the countryside who also worked in the mills, and also three servings of broth per day. The girls were expected to bring their own meat and vegetables to give the broth substance, and usually brought these stores back when they returned from their visits to the countryside.

The concept of the family wage had an impact on these young women; following the model of a gendered division of labour in which males were responsible for supporting families, the women and young girls did not demand a family wage, but simply a wage adequate to support a single woman. This demand won wide support in Saint-Chamond and provoked the biggest strike of women workers in the town's history. In 1877, the advent of the republic temporarily shook the political order of conservative Saint-Chamond. Male workers played an important role in initiating and supporting the strike; skilled male dyers had been challenging their employers and, working together with a group of braiders, encouraged the growth of unionism among the braiders.²⁸ As part of their campaign, in 1878, they brought a union organizer from Lyon, Marie Finet, labelled the "*Grande Emancipatrice Lyonnaise*", who helped form a local branch of *Chambre syndicale des dames*, an organization then spreading throughout the south of France. The organizing committee of this union produced a poster which contained an address, "To the Working-Women of Saint-Chamond". One of its demands ran: "It is time, Citoyennes, that an end may be put to this barbarous exploitation, worthy of ancient times. Let us unite [. . .] to demand our right to live, a right contained in work detached from all arbitrariness, pay sufficient to permit a working women to live honestly, by the sweat of her brow."²⁹

The evolution of the demand for a "living wage" in braiding was a shrewd strategy designed to promote solidarity among a disparate labour force. Without reliance on paternalistic housing, heating and some food, women did not receive and could not earn a wage that would enable them to live independently in the city. Only a few unmarried women spent their

²⁶ Hanagan, *Nascent Proletarians*, p. 141.

²⁷ "Rapport n. 240, commissariat de police de Saint-Chamond au préfet", 27 March 1911, ADL 93/M/11.

²⁸ On alliances, Carol E. Morgan, "Women, Work, and Consciousness in the Mid-Nineteenth Century English Cotton Industry", *Social History*, 17, 1 (1992), pp. 23–41.

²⁹ Archives de le Prefecture de Police, 4 juillet 1878, no. 47, Ba 171.

entire lives in braiding, but these were a strategically important group who were loyal to the employers who granted pensions to those of them who were diligent and submissive. The demand for a living wage might appeal to these women while it would also have greatly benefited the mass of young female workers who did not expect to spend their lives in the industry.

At the same time that the wives and daughters of metalworkers and miners worked in domestic industry and in factories in Le Chambon Feu-gerolles and in Saint-Chamond, they continued to concentrate in unwaged labour in Rive-de-Gier. Lacking any ties to domestic industry, Rive-de-Gier found it impossible to develop new ones; new domestic industry seems to have evolved through channels created by old domestic industry. In Rive-de-Gier there was very little in the way of wage work for the daughters of metalworkers and miners, and here the adult male's wage truly had to be a family wage, supplemented mainly by the work of sons when they grew old enough to work in the factory or the small sums earned by sending boys off to the countryside to tend cattle.³⁰

Rive-de-Gier illustrates another aspect of the demand for a "family wage"; it was a political issue with a strong resonance in public opinion, and it unified miners and metalworkers across the Stéphanois who participated in very different types of family economies.³¹ Napoleon III had broken up the coal monopoly in 1854, but Stéphanois employers had transformed themselves into an oligopoly with five major employers in the region; the same companies which ran mines in Rive-de-Gier and paid wages to many male miners who might be the sole support of their families, also ran mines in Saint-Etienne and Saint-Chamond where female employment was possible.

The defence of the "family wage" was a powerful rejoinder to attempted wage reductions precisely because it drew miners together throughout the region. Striking workers demanded that employers pay the same wages in all the mines that they operated, and the large size of the mining companies meant that most mining companies employed both large numbers of workers belonging to families with working dependants and also workers whose families depended solely on the wages of the male head. Workers' leaders quickly realized the advantage of framing strike demands in terms of the situation of workers with non-labouring dependants; they were the most impoverished and pitiful section of the workforce, yet orienting strikes towards winning a basic wage sufficient for them would benefit all workers. The defence of the "family wage" rallied the poorest miners and metalworkers to the union banner, and the power of the appeal to the family wage against company attacks could only

³⁰ Hanagan, *Nascent Proletarians*, pp. 98–101.

³¹ Marcel van der Linden, "Connecting Household History and Labour History", *International Review of Social History*, 38 (1993), Supplement 1, pp. 163–173.

benefit workers in the other towns – workers who did not rely solely on the wage of a male household head.

THE DISCOURSE OF WORKING-CLASS FAMILISM

The French discourse on working-class familism differed markedly from that of Britain, where it is claimed that wives and young children of “respectable” workers did not perform waged work. To understand the evolution of the demand for a family wage in France, it is important to understand this context. By 1900, whether they called for social revolution or mild reform, French working-class leaders and middle-class social reformers more or less took for granted the presence of working married women. This assumption was shared by employers and governments who sought to recruit and govern a stable working-class population. Male workers were not slow to adopt the language of familism to raise demands and make claims on the state, the local middle class, and their employers but, as workers applied it, familism also took on working-class associations.

This new discourse arose to interpret and to deal with the emergence of a new type of working-class family – and the Stéphanois region was one of the earliest sites of its development. The growth of a mining monopoly between 1836 and 1846 was crucial; the dilemmas of working-class familism were first represented in reformist discourse by the image of the coalminer and his family. When social reformers first raised the issue of the “working-class family”, they did not have in mind such families as those of the skilled silkweavers, long established in Stéphanois cities, or the families of casual labourers, temporary migrants, who often returned to rural families; rather they imagined the families of the mining proletarian, and later the less skilled factory worker.

The Catholic church was first to locate the working-class family as a key point of intervention; it laid little emphasis on the fact of female employment but stressed the disorganization and degradation of working-class life and the need to moralize it by promoting marriage and religious observance. In 1844, Cardinal de Bonald, the powerful conservative leader of the Lyonnais church, whose see included the *département* of the Loire, refused to condemn a miners’ strike, and wrote a letter to the curé of Notre Dame in Rive-de-Gier inquiring whether the families of workers injured in a confrontation with French troops needed aid.³² In 1844, also, the *Société charitable de St-Jean-François-Régis* was formed in Saint-Etienne to promote the marriage of the working-class couples and the legitimation of their children.³³ The society lamented that:

³² Paul Droulers, “Le Cardinal de Bonald et la grève des mineurs de Rive-de-Gier en 1844”, *Cahiers d’histoire*, 3, 6 (1961), pp. 265–285.

³³ For a discussion of the origin of the society and its Parisian operations see Barrie M. Ratcliffe, “Popular Classes and Cohabitation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Paris”, *Journal of Family History*, 21, 3 (July 1996), pp. 316–350.

In the frame of mind where they find themselves, they are ready to welcome avidly all the doctrines, which may, for a time at least, get rid of their inquietude, their doubts, and their remorse for their circumstances. Ideas of order, the love of property, the desire of acquiring and transmitting which doubles the force of the hardworking labourer, has nearly no influence on their spirits.³⁴

Governments also began to concern themselves with these workers. The Labour Committee of the Luxembourg Commission, set up in the early days of the 1848 revolution and containing many socialists and trade unionists, prepared a questionnaire (*l'Enquête sur le travail agricole et industriel*) to be filled out in each canton. The decree was approved on 25 April 1848 and much of it was carried out in the Loire in late May.³⁵ The questionnaire inquired about the number of men, women and children under sixteen employed in industry, requested that respondents compile an annual budget for a working-class family of four (“at the average price of consumer goods”) and wanted as well a report about the condition of housing, nourishment and clothing.

After its consecration by the state itself, it is no wonder that discussions of family budgets and concerns with child and female employment show up in subsequent protests! To answer the question concerning family needs, miners from Rive-de-Gier drew up a family budget demonstrating that, for many categories of workers, their own wages were inadequate to support a family. The mining companies made their own budget estimate which, when compared with the wages they paid their miners, revealed that workers could easily support a two-child family.³⁶ Although the assumption was not explicit, the joint response to the inquiry conveyed the impression that a miners' wage *should* support a family of four people.

An early theorist who helped set French government policy was Frédéric Le Play who stressed the instability of working-class life due to the absence of elders in the household and the prevalence of partible inheritance. Deprived of those ties of property or skill that had attached earlier generations to their parents, working-class children would, he feared, “leave their parental firesides as soon as they gained any confidence in themselves”. Even in good times, Le Play asserted, such conduct could not preserve either the individual's welfare or the moral order, but his crowning argument was that such selfish individualism turned to despair when faced with industrial downturns and the loss of employment that could produce only “destitution and misery”.³⁷ In England, industrial conditions had created a new type of “unstable” working-class family such as the miners, where employers “unscrupulously drew the workmen from

³⁴ ADL 28/M/1.

³⁵ Hilde Rigaudias-Weiss, *Les Enquêtes Ouvrières en France entre 1830 and 1848* (Paris, 1936), pp. 184–203.

³⁶ “Enquête de 1848 – mineurs de Rive-de-Gier”, AN C956.

³⁷ Frédéric Le Play, *The Organization of Labor in Accordance with Custom and the Law of the Decalogue* (Philadelphia, 1872), pp. 41 and 167.

all rural employments by offer of the most tempting wages without giving them any guarantees of security".³⁸

Le Play was consulted by Napoleon III on issues of social policy regarding families and his influence can be seen in some important imperial projects for dealing with the working class. Napoleon III attempted to build a reputation as a friend of the worker; one of his leaflets assured workers that he was interested in their fate from the "cradle to the grave".³⁹ Much of Napoleon's policy focused on establishing savings banks for workers and encouraging the development of government-controlled mutual aid societies to tide workers over periods of unemployment and to provide for their old age. Such public concern for the working-class family encouraged workers to couch appeals in familist terms.

Workers' interpretation of industrialization and its effect on family life was strongly influenced by the desperate visions of working-class family life advanced by Social Catholics and Le Play, lingering memories of the controversies of 1848, as well as by their own too evident difficulties in making ends meet. The repression of trade unions – reduced briefly in the final years of Louis Napoleon's reign – intensified again after the Commune and continued through the early Third Republic, gave workers relatively limited experience with trade unionism and encouraged the spread of revolutionary alternatives. In turn, socialist revolutionaries were hardly inclined to paint a rosy vision of collective bargaining; they portrayed strikes in the manner of Zola's *Germinal* (1885) as the despairing actions of hungry and cruelly oppressed workers. Throughout the whole of the nineteenth century, the major currents of French socialists, including syndicalists such as Fernand Pelloutier, but particularly the Marxist Guesdists, accepted the idea, put forward by the German economist Karl Rodbertus (1805–1875), of the "Iron Law of Wages". With the inevitable and irresistible force of economic law, Rodbertus argued, workers' wages must decline to a "survival wage", the sum necessary to reproduce himself and his family.⁴⁰ In 1878, Jules Guesde wrote of working-class families:

To get by they must have more children, but while the small excess of their wages or of subsistence will permit them to snatch a greater number of their children from death, workers will soon see their wages reduced to the last degree by the appearance on the market of these children become men.⁴¹

The widespread acceptance of the "Iron Law of Wages" tended to conflate workers' demands for a "family wage" with the idea of a "survival wage".

³⁸ Le Play, *The Organization of Labor*, p. 155.

³⁹ David Kulstein, *Napoleon III and the Working Class: A Study of Government Propaganda under the Second Empire* (Los Angeles, 1969).

⁴⁰ For Pelloutier's defence of the "Iron Law of Wages", see *L'ouvrier des deux mondes*, 1 February 1898.

⁴¹ Jules Guesde, "La Loi des Salaires et ses consequences", *Collectivisme et révolution* (Paris, 1945; 1st pub. 1878), pp. 43–44.

Although Guesde's basic position on pauperization grew more sophisticated with time, it did not change fundamentally in the pre-World War I period. A study of Guesdist ideology has commented on the degree to which "The theory of pauperization, often in its most simplistic form, dominated the Guesdist conception of the revolutionary class interest."⁴² However dogmatic and inflexible we might regard such talk, it was hardly the kind of rhetoric that would justify a cult of respectability among French workers or encourage feelings that married women belonged at home.

Guesde's *Parti ouvrier français* (POF) was strong in the Stéphanais, but its local leaders were not as intransigent as Guesde. Nevertheless, the idea of pauperization found its Stéphanais supporters. In 1893, a metalworker from Rive-de-Gier wrote to the Guesdist newspaper, *Le Socialiste*, documenting the decline of metalworkers' wages relative to "the time of my father" and, by means of detailed budgetary comparisons, showed how his father had been able to provide for his children, concluding that now one can hardly "make ends meet".⁴³ This article provoked considerable discussion in the local press and even stirred a local administrative inquiry.

Guesdist assertions of a declining or stagnating standard of living were wrong and by the 1890s their inaccuracy was increasingly apparent, but French workers still refused to acknowledge their rising living standards publicly and so the familism of the French labour movement differed from that of British workers and white American workers who were then embracing the ideal of the non-working wife.⁴⁴ In France, as in the US and Great Britain, there was a growing concern with the condition of childhood.⁴⁵ French reformers too, particularly dissatisfied with that country's unusually high infant and child mortality rates, reinforced the importance of childhood by glorifying it, but however much they urged increased care for children, they also assumed that many working-class wives would

⁴² Robert Stuart, *Marxism at Work: Ideology, Class and French Socialism During the Third Republic* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 466. For the Guesdist attitude towards women workers, see Patricia Hilden, *Working Women and Socialist Politics in France, 180-1914, A Regional Study* (Oxford, 1986).

⁴³ *Le Socialiste*, 5 March 1893.

⁴⁴ For US studies which suggest that appeals to a domestic ideal had little purchase among African-American women who had high labour force participation rates, see Eileen Boris, "The Power of Motherhood: Black and White Activist Women Redefine the Political", in Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (eds), *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (New York, 1993), pp. 213–245 and Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (New York, 1994), pp. 112–114. On poor women in London's East End, see Andrew August, "How Separate a Sphere? Poor Women and Paid Work in Late-Victorian London", *Journal of Family History*, 19, 3 (1996), pp. 285–309.

⁴⁵ Carolyn Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan, 1860–1913* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1990).

remain at work.⁴⁶ French intellectuals such as Jules Simon might lament female labour in factories and hope that it could be confined to homework, but the distinctively French contributions to social policy ameliorated working mothers' plight without prohibiting mothers' working. For example, in the 1880s, government-sponsored child care, the *crèches*, provided invaluable aid for working mothers as did the maternity leave bills of 1909 and 1912 which forbade employers from dismissing mothers for a two-month absence from work and provided assistance to needy working mothers.⁴⁷

Although male workers articulated their own familistic demands, women were absent from the dialogue; while they may have supported and even died in defence of male workers' demands, women remained, by and large, on the periphery of the labour movement and never came to identify themselves fully as workers. Lacking the vote, Stéphanois women workers were concentrated in industries that were low paid, temporary and notoriously difficult to organize. While evidence is more fragmentary than for males, women workers often seemed interested in combining domestic and wage labour, frequently expressing their preference for cottage industries because "one works in one's own home". An old Stéphanois woman interviewed by Jean Burdy indicated that as a mother she had worked "to keep the pot boiling" and suggesting an association of work with household responsibilities. Perhaps Burdy's most interesting finding concerns what he labels the "obscuring" of women's work. Reminiscing about their past, many women initially identified themselves as "housewives", yet as the reminiscences lengthened, so did memories of participation in the labour force; few women participated continuously but many had participated irregularly over many years.⁴⁸ None the less, their years of work had not given them a sense of themselves as "workers", and the Stéphanois labour movement had done nothing to deepen their sense of identity.

EVOLUTION OF THE FAMILY WAGE DEMAND

In the Stéphanois region, the presence of working women did not affect the development of demands for a "family wage". Increasingly male workers who led local trade unions and political parties asserted that men were responsible for their families' welfare and that the male wage should be sufficient to provide for the existence of their family. Strike demands, songs and speeches conjured up an image of a working-class family whose existence depended solely on adult male earnings.

⁴⁶ See Alicia C. Klaus, "Babies All the Rage: The Movement to Prevent Infant Mortality in the United States and France, 190–1920" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1986). See also, Elinor A. Accampo, Rachel B. Fuchs and Mary Lynn Stewart (eds), *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform* (Baltimore, 1995).

⁴⁷ Klaus, "Babies All the Rage".

⁴⁸ Burdy, *Le Soleil noir*, pp. 133–154.

The miners played the key role in introducing the concept of the family wage in the Stéphanois. They viewed a family wage as a minimum survival wage necessary to keep the family together and to provide for the rearing of young children. In May of 1848, the miners of Saint-Etienne composed a petition complaining of wage cuts that they attributed to the coal monopoly asserting that “The consequences of these arbitrary measures have been misery for the miners and their families”.⁴⁹ The miners’ response to the government questionnaire stressed their plight as fathers. They pleaded for support “for the household where there are 4, 5, and 6 children who are not able to work [. . .] These poor children are covered with rags and sometimes go barefoot for lack of money to buy clothes”. The miners lamented the deprivation that forced them to send their children to work at an early age: “education among the miners is totally neglected because the miners who are fathers of families are forced to make their children work because their own wages are insufficient to support an education”. And they reported that “fathers of families are obliged to impose upon themselves rigorous privations”.⁵⁰ By mid-June the tone of the miners in the western part of the coal basin, around Le Chambon Feugerolles, became urgent: “We are devoted to the republic [. . .] we are men of order and of labour, but our children ask us for bread, and the best sentiments must give way to necessity in order that our families do not die of hunger.”⁵¹

Despite the threat, the miners as well as most Stéphanois workers remained loyal to the republic supporting it through repression and *coup d'état*; the rate of abstentions in the 1851 plebiscite ratifying Louis-Napoleon’s coup was among the highest in the nation.⁵² In an effort to win the support of Stéphanois workers who remained committed to republicanism, the imperial government transferred to Saint-Etienne a prefect known in the north for establishing a working-class mutual aid society. Encouraged by the government in 1866, a miner who had been on the committee that responded to the 1848 questionnaire started a mutual aid society, *La Fraternelle*. Workers responded enthusiastically to a society that would insure them against accidents and provide for their families in case of their death or incapacity. The administration sought to use the society’s popularity and its leaders’ prestige to win electoral support. But the victory of the imperial candidates in the 1869 elections was put in doubt by rumours of a miners’ strike. The strike itself threatened because company efforts to keep nearly exhausted mines in production lowered wages, and workers also wanted some say in the compulsory company-run insurance programmes maintained by the mining companies.⁵³ The prefect

⁴⁹ *Le Mercure ségusien*, 21 May 1848.

⁵⁰ “Enquête de 1848 – mineurs de Rive-de-Gier”, AN C956.

⁵¹ *Le Mercure ségusien*, 16 June 1848.

⁵² Hanagan, *Nascent Proletarians*, p. 21.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 191–196.

called in representatives of *La Fraternelle* and at least hinted that after the election he would intervene in their favour with the companies. As a result miners' leaders lobbied their members passionately to vote for the imperial candidate. At stake, the leaders insisted in highly gendered rhetoric, was the fate of the family:

Long live the miners! Long live the brave and honest fathers of families who, in peril of their lives, painfully tear each day from the bowels of the earth the daily bread of industry [. . .] LONG LIVE LIBERTY WITH THE EMPEROR.⁵⁴

Unfortunately, after the imperial victory, the coal companies refused to make the concessions suggested by the prefect and a long and bitter strike ensued that resulted in the "Massacre of the Ricamerie" in which soldiers fired into a crowd and killed fourteen people. The massacre ended whatever chance the Empire had of securing the loyalties of local workers.

The image of the adult male wage earner as crushed by his responsibility for the economic well-being of his family spread quickly. By 1868 it was already incorporated into the Stéphanois ditty entitled "The Worker":

He marries and soon becomes a father
And must provide bread for his children.
Then he bows under labour and age;
At fifty years old, he holds out his hand,
Somber, ashamed, his face blushing.
for the worker, this is the real road.⁵⁵

While the inadequacy of the adult male household head's wages for his family was highlighted in such stories, the inadequacy of his family's pension (and the need to make it adequate) was underlined by a Stéphanois coalminer delegate to the Marseilles Congress in 1879:

If the widow's pension was brought to 1 franc, and that of the orphan to fifty centimes per day, one would see fewer prostitutes among the widows, and the children would be able to learn a little morality; in place of becoming vagabonds, they would be honest citizens who would be able to serve the republic with honor and fidelity instead of peopling the prisons.

By 1891 even proud glassworkers reinforced their wage claims by familist appeals:

There is a heart which beats in the great family of labour [. . .] Don't be insensible to those who call for help, for aid, let your contributions come to help us, let the women think of her sisters, the child break his piggy bank to help his brother glassworkers, let mothers think of the enfants who, themselves innocents, will themselves suffer from the inhuman conduct of capital *vis-à-vis* the producers.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *L'Eclairer*, 4 June 1869.

⁵⁵ Eugène Imbert, *Chants, Chansons et poésie de Remy Doure* (Saint-Etienne, 1887), pp. 24–25.

⁵⁶ ADL 92/M/41.

By 1911, metalworkers appealed to soldiers occupying Le Chambon Feugerolles not to fire on: “Workers [who] in order to feed their wife and family demand wage raises.”⁵⁷

Although the demand that large employers pay adult men wages adequate to feed a family was well established in the Stéphanois, it was not associated with demands for the withdrawal of female wage labour. In 1902 grumbling male silkweavers complained that “The grand potentates of industry are destroying the family, for the mother works in their prisons for 1.25 F., while the father, unemployed, goes to the bistro and the unsupervised children run in the streets.” The article concluded that: “the cause of our misery is feminine labour, let us join together to suppress it or at least to prevent its increase”.⁵⁸ But they suggested no concrete measures for action and their resistance died aborning.

A serious demand for female exclusion from industry did not emerge even though Stéphanois working women were, in some respects, better advantaged than many French working women. The dowry contract, general in the countryside, even for poor women, survived transplant to the city. In 1870, in Rive-de-Gier where there was little work for married women and in Saint-Chamond where there was considerable, a correspondent to a local newspaper, Dr Hervier, estimated that about 75 per cent of all marriages involved a dowry contract.⁵⁹ For working women, such a contract meant that they could spend their income as they chose except that they could be legally required to contribute to the maintenance of the household.⁶⁰

Demands for a family wage for miners and for insurance to provide for their families were not the product of trade union organizations divorced from their community and male workers’ demands for a family wage met with widespread popular support in the Stéphanois. Before 1914, the roots of unionism were local, and the growing centrality of labour exchanges controlled by municipalities, the *Bourses du travail*, reinforced the importance of the locality. Before 1914, all the mass strikes in the region were led and initiated by local organizations.

Mass strikes, the most important tool of industrial worker trade unionism in France, depended on the mobilization of the entire working-class community. Large-scale, mass strikes generally took the form of the “turn-out” in which the major social actor was the “crowd”; this crowd marched down what one author called “the great road of uprisings”, passing through the centre of the valleys intersecting Saint-Etienne to the

⁵⁷ Leaflet distributed July 1911, ADL 92/M/185.

⁵⁸ Cited in Mathilde Dubesset and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, *Parcours de femmes: Réalités et représentations, Saint-Etienne 1880–1950* (Lyon, 1993), p. 115.

⁵⁹ *L’Eclairneur*, 23 April 1870.

⁶⁰ Frances Ida Clark, *The Position of Women in Contemporary France* (London, 1937), pp. 165–168.

south-west and north-east.⁶¹ This whole effort depended on a community consensus as to the legitimacy of the cause.

A classic example of the community character of mobilization was the great strike of 1869 – a strike that shook the Empire. In a tense atmosphere caused by rumours of betrayal and high-handedness on the part of authorities and the leaders of the workers' mutual aid society, the strike was begun by an informal clique of workers in Firminy, at the western end of the basin, who stood up on the billiard tables of several cafés and called the miners out to strike. A crowd of miners emerged from the cafés, pouring out into the streets and marching eastward towards the local mines in the direction of Saint-Etienne. Shutting down the mines and factories in its path, the crowd marched through the centre of the adjacent towns and their market-places, picking up the workers, housewives and children who lived along the main road or who attended its markets.⁶²

Women and children participated in strikes hinging on familist demands, such as those of 1869, because these were incorporated into a militant working-class culture that portrayed itself as the defender of the entire local community and appealed to long-held community traditions.⁶³ In the Stéphanois, the demand for a family wage was often equated with a survival wage and was usually a response to a reduction in the wages of adult male workers. In 1848, 1869 and 1893 workers, in reply, claimed that the newly reduced wage was insufficient to support a family, appealing to local public opinion and to elites that the result of a wage decrease would be social catastrophe. Many Stéphanois working women were undoubtedly convinced that they were right. Except when troops were called out against workers, as in Le Chambon in 1911, workers never invoked family issues in strikes that involved proactive demands such as shorter hours, union recognition, or the firing of an unpopular foreman – or to demand the exclusion of women workers. The attempt of the national CGT to do so in the eight-hour campaign of 1906 met with little response although the campaign itself was pursued vigorously in the area. By 1906, the family wage had become a familiar item in the workers' strike repertoire – it was firmly attached to attacks on the status quo.

⁶¹ Léon de Seilhac, *Les Grèves du Chambon* (Paris, 1912), pp. 5–7. On the “turnout” and the “crowd” see Mark Steinberg, “Riding the Black Lad and Other Working-Class Ritualistic Actions: Towards a Spatialized and Gendered Analysis of Nineteenth-Century Repertoires”, in Michael P. Hanagan, Leslie P. Moch and Wayne te Brake (eds), *Challenging Authority: The Historical Study of Contentious Politics* (Minneapolis, forthcoming 1998).

⁶² L.J. Gras, *Histoire économique générale des mines de la Loire*, vol. I (Saint-Etienne, 1910), p. 315.

⁶³ On different framings for gendered protest see “Providers: An Exploration of Gender Ideology”, in Alice Kessler-Harris, *A Woman's Wage: Historical Meanings & Social Consequences* (Lexington, 1990), pp. 57–80.

CONCLUSION

Our survey of work and family in the Stéphanois has shown an extremely wide variety of family strategies in both the countryside surrounding the industrial valley and the valley itself. No simple formula can capture these relations except to note that Stéphanois working families were hungry for wage work and diversified the work which family members performed when they could. The rhetoric of familism spread in the 1840s and even as late as the 1930s French elites became alarmed about the conditions of working-class family life. Workers used this alarm to argue against wage reductions and to forge solidarity among workers belonging to a variety of different family economies. But workers' rhetoric about families was not a fair representation of their family experiences. Workers' concerns about their family circumstances expressed itself in both the rhetoric of the "family wage" and the determination to develop multi-stranded relationships to work.

In the nineteenth century, the situation of working-class families in the Stéphanois was too economically precarious for workers to narrow the scope of wage earning and, thus, enlarge the number of family dependants. For workers, to contemplate withdrawing family members from the labour force required the redefinition of the family wage from a kind of "survival wage", preventing family disintegration, to a more generous standard of living that recognized a wider range of human necessities, including stronger protection against accident, injury and old age.⁶⁴ A fundamental step in this direction was the growth of a welfare state that had hardly existed in France before 1914. Only in the twentieth century, as a welfare system developed based on male wage earning and rights to social security based on male wage earning did such a "family economy" become feasible in the Stéphanois. At the same time, as the family became less indispensable in the battle against risk and uncertainty, other less repressive alternatives to the male-dominated family beckoned.

⁶⁴ See Amartya Sen, "The Standard of Living Lecture 2, Lives and Capabilities", in Geoffrey Hawthorn (ed.), *The Standard of Living* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 20–38.