I. Lous Seignous

Published by

Higgs, David.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/67840
The ultraroyalists of 1815 were those who, like Joseph de Villèle, hoped to see a return to what had existed in France before the Revolution of 1789, or rather to their idealised memory of it. The complexity of their feelings about the past becomes apparent when compared with the reality. Much of their ambivalence towards the repressive post-revolutionary state—its army, judicial system, bureaucracy—paralleled their moral attitudes toward religion, education, and the family. Ultraroyalism was basically an interpretation of the past applied to the present, but an overview of the social situation of pre-revolutionary Toulouse is necessary for a full understanding of the forms taken by that reaction. Toulouse provided an urban focus for the wealthy nobility with country interests to an extent unusual for cities of its size in the Old Regime. In their rosy recollection of the past the local ultras found ample ammunition for their attack on egalitarianism, urbanisation, technology, intellectualism, and almost every other component of what is often called by sociologists “modernization.” The difficulty of their position came from the contrast between what they wished the past to be and what it was, and the social consequences of that opposition.

No single feature of pre-revolutionary Toulouse compared in importance with the existence of the Parlement, founded within its walls in 1443 as the second sovereign court of France. It was an appeal court for fourteen seneschalsies, seigneurial and other lesser courts. It drew litigants to the city from the three million inhabi-
Lous Seignous
tants of Languedoc, Rouergue, and parts of Gascony and Quercy which were its jurisdictional area. It included the following courts: the plenary Grand’chambre, a criminal court called the Tournelle, the first and the second chambre des enquêtes and one chambre des requêtes. There was also a court which sat during the judicial holidays, called the chambre des vacations. The chancellery had thirty-three places which conferred ennoblement through the office of secrétaire du roi.¹

Even more impressive than the rambling intricacies of the organisational structure of the Parlement was the local power of the parlementary families. First President Jean-Louis-Augustin-Emmanuel de Cambon, swathed in his vermillion robes of office, surrounded by the councilors who judged cases in the various chambres, seemed like a prince in the company of so many vassals. The parlementarians were easily the wealthiest group in the city and they led dignified and comfortable lives between their estates and townhouses. United by professional experience, by a common educational background, and in large measure a common political viewpoint, they were further united by frequent intermarriage until they became almost a caste. Councilor Jean-François-Denis d’Albis de Belbèze, for example, had a councilor for maternal grandfather. His father was a councilor (son of a secrétaire du roi), and he himself married into a parlementary family in which a brother-in-law became avocat-général. The robe nobility was a more tightly unified and interwoven group than their peers in the second estate at large.

The Parlement of Toulouse was one of the most disobedient of the sovereign courts that existed in France in 1789. As a result of its resistance to the fiscal edicts of 1763, the lieutenant-général of Languedoc duc de Fitz-James was forced to go back to Paris. Subsequently the Parlement humiliated its First President for his cooperation with the Duke and caused his resignation in 1768. In the remonstrances sent to the King, the Parlement struck out at ministerial “despotism” and invoked a kind of baroque federalism in which it depicted itself as guardian of provincial rights which were enshrined in antique precedents. Simultaneously and perversely, the Parlement was hostile to the provincial Estates, which met

¹ Axel Duboul, La fin du parlement de Toulouse (Toulouse, 1890), pp. 41–42.
annually at Montpellier, on the Mediterranean coast. These Estates were, in the view of one young councilor, “a body composed of bishops of no interest, of barons of no credit, and of municipal officials with no liberty.” On the other hand, Bishop Beausset of Alais described the Estates in 1786: “Defenders of the peoples confided to our care, we seek to conciliate their interests with the needs of the state of which we are members, and with the requests of the prince of whom we are subjects.” The parlementary opposition to this body which might have been an ally in the continuing struggle against royal authority derived from more than mere jealousy. It came from the rivalry, so acute in the south generally, between urban centers. Montpellier was the seat of the Estates, the Intendant, a university, an Academy of Sciences, a cour des aides which heard appeals on matters of indirect taxation, a présidial-sénéchaussée (a lower court hearing both criminal and civil cases), and had a more flourishing commerce than was to be found in Toulouse.

Archbishop Dillon spoke of Languedoc as “forming a second motherland in the breast of the common motherland.” The parliamentarians applauded the sentiment of the president of the Estates but they had no intention of allowing any other institution to gain a paramount position in provincial affairs. The Parlement played a more important role than the Estates in contesting the financial policy of the monarchy, fighting administrative reorganization of local government, and defending the interests of landowners and merchants. The parliamentarians of Toulouse were as suspicious of Montpellier’s pretensions as they were of those of Versailles. They thought of themselves as the champions of local interests, and accepted the “exile” to their country estates caused by their struggle with the ministers of Louis XVI. Their return, significantly, provided their fellow citizens an opportunity to display affection for their foremost champions; when the “exiles” entered the city walls, the townspeople, municipal officials, and members of the thousand-strong university roared their approval of the “Fathers of the People.”

4 Ibid., p. 212.
The second major presence in Toulouse was the Church, boasting fifty-two religious houses. The inhabitants of its ten parishes were proud of the famous relics to be found in the romanesque basilica of Saint Sernin, of the Black Madonna of La Daurade, and of the numerous chapters and the wealth of the cathedral of Saint Etienne. A good third of the urban property in Toulouse belonged to the churches, convents, and monasteries of the city. At the end of the seventeenth century, the Intendant said that half the city was filled with convents. The Church was not a great landowner in the countryside: it owned less than seven per cent of the Toulousain.

The Church was more than a religious and economic fact, it was a focus of loyalties and an object of social ambitions. Lay confraternities of penitents, known as blue, white, black, or grey penitents according to the color of their ceremonial costumes, provided festive occasions and an opportunity to engage in processions and good works. There were also confraternities of artisans, joiners, wig-makers, porters, and tailors that provided mutual aid to members. Toulouse was described by contemporaries as positively Spanish in its taste for elaborate ceremonies in which these associations played conspicuous parts. On more than one occasion a confraternity was reprimanded for prolonging a feast-day banquet until a scandalously late hour. Besides these lay associations, there were the seminaries which made it possible for the sons of artisans and lesser officials to rise in the world by becoming a curé; the sons of parlementarians, like Philippe Dubourg, looked forward to a possible bishopric.

The municipal government, the capitoulat of Toulouse, was the third most prominent institution in the city. The reforms of 1778 distinguished three classes among the eight capitouls: nobles, those who had already served as capitouls, and notable citizens. Each capitoul, of whatever class, had to be born in Toulouse and domiciled there for at least ten years, as well as to have some practical experience of local government as a member in a subsidiary municipal council. The capitouls controlled the city budget (although the permission of the Intendant was needed for major expenditures), rendered justice in civil and criminal cases (although the présidial-sénéchaussée disputed the limits of their jurisdiction), and directed eleven police commissioners, four hundred dizeniers or police auxiliaries, and the men of the Watch. They were able to call on thirty companies of the garde bourgeoise.
The capitoul was a man of importance. The office was very attractive to many of the lesser notables of the city, both because of the esteem which was attached to it and, more especially, because it was ennobling. Many local families owed the origin of their nobility to the capitoulat, subsequently polished by other respectable offices and the purchase of seigneuries. The merchant Joseph-François Gounon-Loubens, for example, the only businessman to become capitoul between 1778 and 1789, was involved in charity work and had purchased a seigneurie. Many advocates and notaries, even doctors, came to rise in local society through municipal office.

The regional capital had other important offices, especially those of the lower courts of justice. The présidial-sénéchaussée, the office of the Eaux et Forêts, the trésorerie particulière, and the offices of the various receveurs provided employment for over two hundred and fifty men. Minor posts of huissier, greffier, and octroi collectors at the gates of the city, together with copy-clerks and office boys, multiplied the number of menial jobs.

The royal authorities were not particularly prominent in the city. The governor of Languedoc had his official headquarters and a small staff there, but was rarely resident. Toulouse enjoyed the privilege of not lodging soldiers within the walls of the city. In 1746, when troops had been billeted, a protest was sent to the king pointing out that the soldiers, far from keeping the peace, in fact caused fires and brawls, and frightened off the university students which caused a decline in wheat sales normally consumed by the scholars. The capitouls, together with nobles and others who possessed noble fiefs, were perfectly capable of maintaining order:

Toulouse, large as she is, is filled only with monasteries or judicial officials exempt from billeting. The remainder of her citizens are merchants or artisans. Does Your Majesty find it just to subject city merchants needlessly to lodge soldiers? Is it not to be feared their commerce will be disrupted? Few artisans can provide billets: the majority have only sufficient beds for themselves. The remainder of the people is in such misery that they are reduced to sleeping on straw.


Lous Seignous

The complaint had been heard, so that the capitouls and the parliament remained the most visible authorities in the city.

The local nobility was very punctilious in exacting respect for its titles; the famous "cascade of disdain" was, as one noble put it, the city's moral flaw.7 Disputes over precedence took place among clergy, officers, capitouls, and parlementarians. It was a fine art of the salons to evaluate the social standing of the nobility, although standards were hard to set after centuries of intermarriage between robe and sword families. Even thoroughbreds, presumably like the pamphleteer who denounced the mercenary, vulgar origins of the robe nobility, ruefully admitted that "mulatto (mulâtres) nobles prevail by their number."8 The forty-two member conseil politique which discussed municipal matters was dominated by the nobles who owned approximately forty-four percent of the land area of the Toulousain, including the best land. Although the nobility was the richest group in local society, seigneurial rights made only eight percent of the average revenue of a noble estate.9 Since the Province of Languedoc was an area of taille réelle (where commoners could own privileged "noble" land, and nobles held "common" land, and tax was levied on land rather than the privileged status of the owner), there was less psychological friction over the issue of noble fiscal privilege.10 The nobility placed its offspring in buttressing positions: President Dubourg, for example, had one son who was a vicar-general, another one in the navy, and a third one in the Parlement. Few, if any, other areas of France showed such a clear socio-economic primacy of the nobility in urban and rural society.

The parlementarians were not menaced in their ascendancy by the city merchants, whom they had superseded by the end of the

7 J.-B. d'Aldéguier, Histoire de Toulouse (Toulouse, 1834), IV, 291.
8 Dénomination d'un Languedocien à sa province (Toulouse, 1789), p. 4; Alphonse Brémond, Nobiliaire toulousaine, 2 vols. (Toulouse, 1863); Louis de Laroque, Catalogue des gentilshommes en 1789 (Paris, 1866), vol. I, Généralité de Toulouse; Jules Villain, La France moderne... Haute-Garonne et Ariège (Montpellier, 1911-13).
The woad industry that had produced a number of local fortunes collapsed when cheaper imported dye became available. Lamoignon de Baville, intendant of the province at the end of the seventeenth century, thought that the people of Toulouse were unsuccessful in commerce because they were hostile to strangers. Perhaps a kind of regional xenophobia was one of the reasons for the failure of new commercial ideas to establish themselves. Many pre-industrial French cities with similar institutions had more flourishing commercial and artisanal alternatives. Whatever the causes—undoubtedly complex, as Arthur Young pointed out—industrial and commercial activity was scarce in the city in June, 1787.

What manufactures did exist—silk upholstery (employing 260 workers in 1788),

brandy distilling, wallpaper printing, taper-making, and lead work—they looked to the aristocracy and clergy for their best customers. In the eighteenth century, local merchants were dealing primarily in these products. Although there was a constant trade in other articles, especially cloth, to Spain and the Levant, it was of small volume. The four great annual fairs were Jour des Rois (January 6), St. Jean (June 24), St. Barthélemy (August 24), and St. André (November 30). Few of those who did attend stayed in Toulouse to prosper. Colbert established a gunpowder factory there in 1667 and, some ten years later, a tobacco plant to process the crop harvested on the plain of the Garonne. On the Ile de Tounis, a small island in the Garonne River, silk workers from Tours were set up in business to manufacture a cloth of which the warp was silk and the woof was wool. Cheap cloth was produced, and some Toulouse grisettes, ferrandines, and mignonettes were sold as far afield as Italy and South America. These materials were already declining in popularity before the Revolution, outmoded by technical progress. On the eve of the Revolution, some thirty manufactures in the city employed five to six thousand workers. The state monopolies were the largest em-

13 J.-F. Baour, Almanach historique (Toulouse, 1791), AMT.
Very few businessmen had fortunes which equalled those of the average noble, and most of them were very much less wealthy. What money they had amassed through economic activity was often used by them to rise in the social system by the classic method of purchasing a seigneurie or an ennobling office or by contracting an advantageous marriage. Commoners, like nobles, were consumed with a passion for land and invested their capital in it. There was also a substantial local clientele seeking rentes on the Estates of Languedoc or shares in the Bazaale mill, both dependable and secure forms of investment. In consequence, there was no substantial capital concentration in Toulouse, since these funds were quickly channelled into land and safe investments. The only banking house in the city, owned by the Protestant family Courtois, was small and primarily involved with personal loans.

The commoners and nobles who mixed in the twelve masonic lodges of the city and in civic activities shared a similar socio-economic outlook. There was no economic rivalry between the two groups, although differences were plain in their attitudes toward social status. François de Boutaric, one-time professor of French law at the University of Toulouse, published a book on feudal rights and noble privileges, the Traité des droits seigneuriaux et des matières féodales, which went through several editions during the eighteenth century. Members of the Third Estate resented these noble privileges, and showed their vexation in petty disputes over honorifics and matters of precedence, but it was a resentment which sprang from a desire to share these privileges and not from a demand for an alternative social order. Fashionable young lawyers like Mailhé and Barère were typical spokesmen of those in the city who wanted to see the nobility pay a more just portion of taxation and who resented the occasional arrogant slight by the well-born.

14 The four state monopolies in 1866 (tabac, arsenal, cannon foundry, and gunpowder factory) employed more workers than the 2,286 “industriels” of the city combined, including artisans and millers. E. Roschach, Géographie de la Haute-Garonne (Paris, 1866), pp. 135-36.


However, most of the prosperous professional men and merchants had no desire for any radical change in the institutions of Toulouse.\textsuperscript{17} The deputies sent to Versailles were an undistinguished group, with the dubious exception of Roussillou, an assiduous committee man. This befitted a city where the Third Estate endorsed the preservation of urban privileges, the Parlement, and the rejection of the proposed departmental system.\textsuperscript{18}

The “people” of Toulouse—artisans, servants, agricultural laborers—were vivacious and wiry, darker in complexion and hair color than their Parisian counterparts, and also generally shorter. They spoke an occitain \textit{patois}, and were noted for ostentatious, ritualistic piety and a passion for singing. They disliked foreigners—those from outside the city—and had not completely forgotten their historic animus against the local Protestants and Jews. Other prejudices were reflected between the different suburbs, each of which had a special character. Arnaud Bernard, Saint Michel, and Saint Cyprien, all lying on the periphery of the historic core of Toulouse, were considered lower-class areas, more likely to have recently arrived migrants from the countryside. The loyalty of each district (\textit{capitoulat}) was bound up with the parish festivals called \textit{fenértas} and reinforced by the boisterous rivalries of apprentices or street gangs.

The common people found their livelihood closely connected to the system of land ownership and the social patterns which resulted from the ideas on status.\textsuperscript{19} In eighteenth-century Toulouse, life was hard, assuaged by cheap wine and prostitutes, both readily available. The recent immigrants from the countryside found it difficult to get work in the static guild-dominated artisan sector. One of the peculiarities of the city was the large number of people who still left the city daily to work in the fields of the \textit{gardiage}, the area im-

\textsuperscript{17} Armand Brette, \textit{Recueil de documents relatifs à la convocation des États Généraux de 1789} (Paris, 1894–1915), I, 167, n. 2.


\textsuperscript{19} Godechot and Moncassin, “Structures et relations sociales,” p. 152. In 1787, 7 percent of the population were servants, a decline from the 11 percent of the late 17th century.
Lous Seignous

mediately outside the walls. Many residents inside the city walls kept pigs and poultry in the gardens that remained from an earlier, more spacious city. There was a wide range of artisan activities since it was characteristic of local villages to have few craftsmen. When villagers went to market in Toulouse, they took not only produce to sell, but also the old tools and furnishing which needed repair or which they exchanged. Most of the local corporations had been founded in the sixteenth century and the rivalries between them were long established. A number of them were in financial difficulties before the Revolution. Group interests were only dimly perceived among the city workers.

There was scant change in this economic and social situation during the eighteenth century, save in the vital respect of the constant population influx, a result of the population increase in the countryside. The migration to Toulouse was drawn from overcrowded rural areas, especially from the Lauragais with its great estates owned by parlementarians and its peasantry living in wretched conditions, and from the poor mountain villages in the Pyrenees and as far off as the Massif Central. It provided a supply of agricultural laborers who lived inside the city but worked in the market-gardens which surrounded it, of maidservants and menials, porters, prostitutes, and beggars. The individual often experienced a range of situations depending on circumstance. These people were unable to demand better wages or living conditions since the refusal of one was easily repaired by the use of another candidate for each position. Less than twenty-three percent of the Toulousain belonged to the peasantry at mid-century, and this property was in land parcels which did not support substantial living for the average family.

The consequence of this situation was pervasive poverty. The inquiry of 1763 showed that, of fifty-seven rural parishes in the Toulouse diocese, twenty-three were without any charitable institutions, while fourteen of the remainder had the use of completely inadequate revenues of less than one hundred livres. The local curés saw the establishment of industry as the only answer to this

20 The gardiage was land surrounding the city suburbs of St. Michel, St. Etienne, Arnaud Bernard, and St. Cyprien; it included several villages, hamlets, and isolated farm houses, but was within the municipal jurisdiction.

rural poverty, but this was as absent in the country as it was in the towns.

In Toulouse, forty religious institutions provided assistance to the indigent.\textsuperscript{22} They tried to deal with problems of beggary, prostitution, and unemployment. Their efforts were supplemented by private charity, much of it provided by the parlementarians and by the penitential confraternities, so typical of the eighteenth-century south.\textsuperscript{23} The common people could not easily conceive of an alternative to traditional patrons for the provision of relief in the form of alms or food. It was popularly believed, probably correctly, that the nobility was more charitable than merchants or professional men. The poor hoped for the maintenance of what has been described in eighteenth-century England as the “moral economy,” since their position was disadvantaged in both town and country. The clerical and parlementary self-congratulation on the mission of mercy carried out by the rich towards the poor was exaggerated; and the indigent, queuing for food and hectored by denunciations of laziness, were, understandably, not always overwhelmed with gratitude. However, when survival is at issue, there is a clear knowledge of dependence. The Declaration of the Rights of Man was not a substitute for distribution of free food or alms. Innovations which disrupted the old system of charity were resented. This was true, for example, in the two major hospitals in the city, the Hôtel Dieu and the Hôpital Saint Joseph de la Grave. Both were located in the working-class suburb of Saint Cyprien across the Garonne, possibly to keep pestilence away from the rich.\textsuperscript{24} The Grave accepted the “deserving” poor, orphans, the senile, lunatics, and sick beggars and thus doubled some functions of the Hôtel Dieu. Both hospitals enjoyed a special local prestige as a place where the poor of Toulouse could find medical care and assistance. During the eighteenth century, the patients’ food was gradually improving, and an effort was being made to mitigate the worst overcrowding in beds and bad sanitation.

At the lowest levels, the line between the worker and the beggar

\textsuperscript{24} François Buchalet, \textit{L’assistance publique à Toulouse au dix-huitième siècle} (Toulouse, 1904).
was often hard to establish among the population of Toulouse. In wheat-growing areas, a number of seasonal migrant workers moved about, looking for harvest and other seasonal jobs, but not assured of any permanent employment. At a time of high bread prices, as in 1788 and 1789, this group relied on begging. Their wages in any event were wretched: the Parlement fixed maximum wages in 1715, 1721, and 1762, with enforcement by flogging and imprisonment. In 1773 it was reported that “an unfortunate who has a family earns only fifteen sols daily and consequently he cannot get bread to nourish them.”

The local diet was not particularly good. In 1783, the subdelegate of the intendant in the généralité of Toulouse said that little wheat was eaten by the common people of his jurisdiction, although rye and various kinds of mixtures of maize and other coarse cereals were used. Drink offered a release from daily problems: wine was cheap in a time of over-production. The subdelegate thought people drank in order to forget the misery which burdened them on all sides.

The reliance of the poor on the traditional sources of charity was as marked in Toulouse as in many other French towns. The city curés petitioned in 1788 for an improvement in the parish welfare system. They pointed out how acute was the need at the time when the parlementarians were exiled for their resistance to the judicial reforms enacted in May, 1788:

We come to implore your goodwill and the paternal sentiments of your heart in favor of a multitude of our parishioners who are plunged by the present misfortunes into the abyss of the deepest indigence. We cannot, without becoming overcome and shedding tears, present the fearful picture which is offered to us daily by whole families, burdened with children whose support and nourishment they cannot provide because of the present revolution, or the distress of some of those who find work in defending legal cases, and especially of the large numbers of co-workers they employ; of artisans without work, laborers of all sorts without bread or aid. If, before these changes came about, we used to be hardly able to assist those unfortunate of whom this large city offers so touching a

27 Buchalet, L’assistance publique à Toulouse, p. 27.
spectacle, and to whom we are by our calling pastors and fathers, we now find ourselves absolutely unable to meet their pressing needs because of the exile of those whose charity offered us assured resources.28

The clergy saw the importance of the parlementarians as a source of work and charity for the city poor. Food riots, quite frequent in times of shortage, showed that a hungry populace would not suffer quietly for ever. The charity system was a means of social control as much as it was a fulfillment of traditional catholic charitable injunctions. The point was nicely expressed by the apostrophe in the city curés' petition cited above; their double meaning was clear enough to the city notable:

Of all the virtues, none is better suited to persons of consequence than charity [bienfaisance]; by it they approach in some sort of the Divinity; only by it do they raise themselves above the remainder of men.29

The idealized memories of the independent traditions of the Parlement, the splendors of the churches, the piety of the religious houses, the social welfare system, the capitoulat, the network of ceremonial, and the guild loyalties were to be constantly invoked by the ultras after 1815. Memories are notoriously short in popular politics. Once a myth has gained currency, at the same time, it becomes persistent. In a later chapter the main characteristics of this nostalgia for the Old Regime are discussed at greater length. Then it will become evident how the social characteristics of Toulouse prior to 1789 remained typical of its inhabitants long after the revolutionary decade.

28 Très humbles et très-respectueuses supplications de messieurs les curés de Toulouse à M. le comte de Périgord, commandant en chef pour le Roi... en Languedoc (Toulouse, 1788), pp. 3–4.
29 Ibid., p. 2.