The Making of the Citizen-Worker

Labour and the Borders of Politics in Post-revolutionary France

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Introduction

Introduction

Over the course of the 19th century, European societies started thinking of themselves as "civilisations of work." In the wake of the political and industrial revolutions, labour as a human activity and condition gradually came to embody a general principle of order, progress, and governance. It became a cornerstone for further advancements in terms of citizenship rights and social welfare, whereas growing movements and parties came to envisage work as the main pivot for political subjectivation and social transformation. The democratic constitutions sprung from the ashes of the Second World War (WWII) crystallised such developments by acknowledging labour as a crucial right and duty for all members of the national community. "Today all workers are citizens, and we have come to expect that all citizens should be workers," wrote one of the most influential theorists of citizenship, Thomas H. Marshall (1964, p. 233). His words bear witness to the fact that labour and citizenship became intertwined institutional areas because the former came to represent the main avenue for the substantial inclusion of citizens in the political community. Furthermore, modern systems of "social recognition" identify work and employment as the most prominent domain in which individuals can search for and measure their self-realisation and public appreciation. By investigating the political meanings of these trends, Hannah Arendt (1958, p. 4) argued that "the modern age has carried with it a theoretical glorification of labor and has resulted in a factual transformation of the whole of society into a laboring society."

The present volume aims to reconstruct some of the processes which have determined this political and social centrality of labour. It deploys a genealogical approach to explore the intellectual and political *genesis* of those principles that have made labour a central dimension for thinking of the modern subject. The idea of undertaking a study of this kind first arose from the debates sparked by the thesis on *The End of Work* and a coming era of jobless societies in the Western world (Rifkin, 1995). Such debates have contributed to the growing perception that a series of major phenomena characterising our century – such as technological change, globalisation, and neoliberal economic governance – have eroded the nexus between labour and citizenship marking mature industrial societies and their architecture of rights. This points to "the prospect of a society of laborers without labor" (Arendt, 1958, p. 4), or to the coming aporia inherent in a social order that becomes incapable of ensuring the kind of support which it had established as a

privileged avenue for social and political inclusion. This scenario does not simply concern the quantitative decline of work as full-time and long-term paid employment in Western societies, but also the transformation of the experience and meaning of labour in the public sphere. The present book aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of this contemporary crisis by retracing the way in which labour acquired its modern social and political meaning in the 19th century.

Especially in Mediterranean Europe, two generations by now would appear to have experienced the effects of the crisis or decline of labour compared the previous scenario of the "century of work" (Accornero, 2000). It is this generational experience that has inspired me to conduct political-historical research on the *beginning of work*, that is, on why the latter has become a linchpin of our systems of citizenship rights and social recognition. The objective is not to outline a possible return to the past, but to help envisage a kind of society in which labour as paid employment has a different role and diminished relevance.

This volume will explore the origins of our concept of labour and how it became the basis to claim citizenship rights by focusing on post-revolutionary France in the first half of the 19th century. This introduction justifies the choice of such a historical context (§ 1), outlines the volume's theoretical aims and points of reference (§ 2), and describes its structure (§ 3).

1   1848 and the meaning of labour

Calls to recognise the ethical value and political meaning of work, with the aim of affirming its social centrality, emerged slowly and relatively late in the European consciousness. Ancient thought assigned primacy to the contemplative life over the active, thereby stressing the intellectual significance of "idleness" over the industriousness of work, which was regarded as a marker of the condition of slavery or servitude. In Roman civilisation, the term *labor* meant "toil" and in medieval Christendom work preserved this character as a mere immanent necessity. It was mostly perceived as forced activity marked by the sufferings consequent upon man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, devoid of any significance beyond the concepts of expiation and sacrifice, and lacking the kind of recognition that was instead granted to warrior or religious virtues. It was only in the early modern era that these representations gradually started changing and work began to be charged with an ethical significance for the first time, particularly in the wake of the Reformation and among Calvinist communities (Weber, 1930, 1978). In 1690, Locke's *Treatises on Government* identified work as the only legitimate source of property, and in 1759 Voltaire's *Candide* described it as "the only way to make life endurable" and to escape "the convulsions of restlessness" or "the lethargy of boredom," thereby anticipating the consecration of the citizen-worker by the French Revolution.[1] In 1789, Sieyès' pamphlet *What is the Third Estate?* fostered the revolutionary process by stating that private works (*travail particuliers*) and public services (*fonctions publiques*) are all that a nation needs to exist and prosper (Sieyès, 1997). Thus, it denounced the inactive condition of privileged orders as a burden for the social body and announced that in the coming society of civil equality, there was

no longer any room for – or even political acknowledgement of – those who did not work.

It is necessary, however, to pay attention to the concept of work celebrated by the Revolution, which also includes the idea of "entrepreneurship" or "economic activity," encompassing both the employees' manual labour and the use of capital and title deeds for productive purposes. This notion did not yet distinguish between those selling their own labour force and business owners, who were often directly involved in the manufacturing process. Both figures made up the Third Estate, whose redemption was sealed in the summer of 1789 by celebrating the virtue of work, even though this did not involve the awarding of any political meaning to the condition of the supplier of manual labour designated by the term "worker." On the contrary, by abolishing craft guilds, the Revolution radically undermined the political significance which had been directly attached to one's professional condition within the corporative system.[2]

It was not until the political revolution had fully merged with the industrial one that a clear-cut semantic distinction came to be drawn between entrepreneurs and workers, employers and employees. It was only through the division of labour promoted by capital investments in mechanised production that the notion of workers – or of "working classes" – acquired a meaning close to the contemporary one, ultimately coming to designate a specific condition, primarily defined by a relationship of employment and subordination. This semantic change also reflected the development of an increasing social rift between the bourgeoisie and the workers. This growing opposition – that contrasted with the French Revolution's aims and principles – shaped the whole course of the 19th century in Europe, permeating it with an undercurrent of social conflict. It contributed to fostering the new revolutionary break of 1848, which split the century in half and marked the moment when the opposition in question exploded, establishing – especially in France – the condition of wage labour as a matter of political contention (cf. De Boni, 2002; Scotto, 2021, and the Conclusion to the present volume). This development led to the gradual emergence of the "citizen-worker" as a central subject of rights and to a transformation of the very idea of labour, which came to be identified with that of paid employment (Tomasello, 2022).

The genesis of the process that this book aims to retrace can thus be identified in the decades between the watershed moment of 1789 and the new revolutionary turning point of 1848, when the question of wage labour acquired full political significance for the first time. Within this long period of transition, the present book focuses in particular on the phase which followed the July 1830 revolution and the Orléanist regime's establishment, when the first attempt was made to convert the principles of liberalism into actual policies and governance practices. It was in those years that the "social question" emerged in France and came to be referred to as such for the first time (Castel, 2003); and it was at this moment that the first real workers' mobilisations occurred.

Compared to the better-established readings that identify 1848 as the symbolic point of emergence of the constituent power and political meaning of wage labour, exploring this emergence through a focus on the 1830s makes it possible to

encompass a more profound set of problems and a broader range of actors. It enables us to retrace those processes by which, from the wider field of issues brought together under the label "social question," wage labour emerged in its specificity and gradually became established at the centre both of liberal strategies to deal with pauperism and of those emancipation projects by which a socialist discourse took shape. Within the vast literature on these topics, little attention has been paid so far to the mutual interactions between these two sides. The present book aims to offer a contribution in this direction by considering both political institutions and social subjectivities; both the emergence of institutional measures designed to make wage labourers the focus of public policies and the development of emancipation projects focusing on the condition of the working class and thus influencing the nascent socialist movement. By intertwining these dimensions, the present volume combines different topics that have been largely studied in their specificity but not significantly analysed in their mutual relationship. Although most of the literature on early-19th-century France has stressed the growing opposition between liberal and socialist discourses, this book points to their convergence in promoting the social and political significance of work. To do so, it explores the parallel geneses of the labour movement and of new institutional practices aimed at governing urban pauperism through the discipline of wage labour.

Exploring both of these dimensions makes it possible to grasp the genesis of the modern political significance and social role of labour in its historically defined character, which stems from the contingent intertwining of a series of events, discourses, and phenomena. In other words, it enables us to appreciate the transient and diverse nature of the determining factors by which the relationship between work, politics, and subjectivity acquired a particular shape, which the events of 1848 crystallised for the first time in a way destined to mark the following 150 years of European history. Focusing the analysis on the two decades preceding the 1848 break means observing the complex field of debates, actors, perspectives, and conflicts that were at stake before such crystallisation. In this sense, the present work is intended to follow in the footsteps of those studies that, over the last few decades, have attempted to free the history of France in the years 1815–48 from that teleological perspective which has long viewed it as merely a phase of "transition" towards the "mature" one of democracy, capitalism, and the labour and socialist movement (Rosanvallon, 1985, 1994).

2 Work and the production of subjectivity

In exploring how labour became a central dimension for thinking of the modern subject and the production of social and political subjectivity, I will be referring to both semantic sides of the term "subject." On the one hand, we have the side of etymology, *sub-jectum*, which corresponds to the investigation of the way in which the figure of the wage worker was placed at the centre of a strategy to integrate the subaltern classes into the State through the founding of a labour-based system of social protections, duties, and rights. On the other hand, we have the side of *agency*, which points to the process of subjectivation that enabled the world of

work to acknowledge itself as a collective subjectivity, to represent itself in a unitary way as a "class," and to develop the kind of initiatives and discourses that were to bring together under the label "labour movement."

Both these sides contributed to making work that experience by which individual subjects could represent themselves as citizens and achieve social recognition. Both led to the progressive emergence of systems of social rights and protections revolving around the figure of the citizen-worker, to the point of establishing the defence of "work" – of the interests and needs of the labour world – as a sort of political imperative for modern democracies (Honneth, 2003). This gradual extension of the sphere of rights and policies to that of work coincides with a redefinition of the very boundaries of the field of politics. What this book aims to retrace is precisely the "invention" of the political significance of labour relationships, the affirmation of the political status of wage labour as a new "regime of truth" that reshaped the borders of politics.[3]

The genesis of this "regime of truth" will be investigated here by emphasising the diverse field of factors that shaped it. Such a field appears irreducible to the mere dynamics of power and knowledge aimed at including subalterns in the sphere of the governed by turning wage labour into a means of governing inequalities. The emergence of the political meaning of labour can only be understood by intertwining the analysis of such dynamics with that of the development of a social movement aimed at representing wage workers as political actors and labour as a condition for claiming new rights. Far from fulfilling a sort of necessity immanent in history, in the development of industrial societies, or in the nature of the modern subject, the new social role and political significance of work stemmed from the changing interplay of these and other factors – among which the present study focuses in particular on pandemic crises and the rise of the social sciences. We must therefore measure the variable impact of such factors in specific contexts and in relation to contingent developments without imposing the determinism of a one-sided interpretation of what is actually a complex process. To grasp this complexity, the present book will pay particular attention to the production of "social representations," which will be investigated by drawing upon the press, publications by social and political movements, parliamentary debates, and all those sources which enable us to study the way in which an unprecedented connection between work and politics came to be established on the level of public debate, political discourse, and public opinion. This process, however, only becomes fully intelligible if we also include the dimension of social history and those materials that reflect the rapid emergence of the social question and of the first struggles of the labour world.

Within the varied field of the factors that determined the process under investigation, a key role will be assigned here to the nascent social sciences, owing to their capacity to establish new social representations bearing powerful truth effects because of their allegedly scientific nature. Hence, this book also concerns the genesis of modern social sciences. Yet, the latter will not be explored as an independent intellectual development based on the definition of new concepts, models, and theories, but rather as a "political" process responding to a twofold contingent necessity

that emerged over the course of the 19th century: on the one hand, the need to define strategies and tools to deal with the social consequences of the Industrial Revolution and the issue of pauperism; on the other hand, the need to complete the political revolution by overcoming the limits revealed by the previous century's theories (Spaemann, 1959; Karsenti, 2013; Procacci & Szakolczai, 2003). Chapter 1 delves into this double necessity by addressing the field of problems that shaped French political thought in the post-revolutionary climate and the way in which different authors came to focus on the concept of *society* to overcome the previous doctrines of the social contract and of popular sovereignty. As we shall see, the epistemological framework of the modern social sciences emerged from this philosophical shift from the problem of the foundation of sovereignty and the State to that of social relations and the norms governing *society*. The latter concept gained increasing attention and circulation in those years as a means to describe the new kind of social relations that sprung from the demise of the "organic constitution" of the Ancien Régime based on hierarchical orders and intermediate bodies. The rise of sociology then contributed to establishing the idea of society as a sort of "natural" constant feature of the coexistence between human beings (Castoriadis, 1975; Donzelot, 1984; Moscovici, 1996; Foucault, 2004; Latour, 2006; Luhmann, 1997).

The processes by which society came to be conceptualised, produced, and shaped in order to establish within it the means to govern modern liberties in 19th-century France provides the fundamental background to frame the creation of that connection between work, politics, and citizenship which this book aims to explore. Hence, the latter also intends to engage with those studies – mostly inspired by Foucault's genealogical method – which have analysed the 19th-century production of "the social" as an intermediate dimension between the civil and the political and between the State and individuals; a dimension designed to reduce the pressures of political struggles, and paving the way for the rise of both sociology and the ideas of social rights and "welfare State" (Donzelot, 1977, 1984, 1988, 1991; Smart, 1982, 1990; Ewald, 1986; Procacci, 1989, 1993; Rabinow, 1995; Osborn & Rose, 1997; Rose, 1999). However, so far these "genealogical" investigations have never specifically addressed the issue of wage labour.[4] This gap may be explained by the fact that the production of subjectivity in the labour world is a multifaceted process that cannot be reduced to the dimension of governance dispositifs and knowledge-power practices – which is what this kind of literature generally focuses on. Instead, it requires us to combine such a dimension with that of the active political initiative of those actors who fostered the rise of the modern labour movement. The present volume aims to address both these dimensions by combining a "genealogical" approach with recent trends in the historiography of the labour movement.

3　The social sciences and the working classes

The subject of this book is a multifaceted one and its interpretation entails the development of a dynamic intersection of elements pertaining to intellectual, social, and legal history, political and social theory, and the history of the social

sciences. The sources used will therefore include major theoretical-political texts, treaties and investigations on urban pauperism and work conditions, daily news-papers and influential journals, movement booklets and brochures, administrative and government documents, legal texts and the parliamentary debates behind them, literary works, and memoirs by leading figures from that period. Intertwining these sources means broadening the range of texts that pertains to the history of ideas and questioning their usual hierarchical divisions, so as to include all elements enabling us to describe the spirit of an epoch and the political cultures that reflect it.

This is the aim of Chapter 1, which introduces the historical climate under investigation by evoking some of the events that punctuated the emergence of the social question. It then sets these events within the framework of the problems that in those years inspired leading authors and doctrines, finally introducing the two currents of political thought that most contributed to shaping the debates on which the following chapters focus: "doctrinaire" liberalism and Saint-Simonian social-ism. This arrangement of the chapter reflects a consolidated tendency within the history of political thought, a tendency to rethink the "textual analysis" of works within a broader interpretation designed to set them within the context in which they operated – that is, within the "political life" of their day – for the purpose of bringing out the connections between political theory and practice (Skinner, 1969, 1974; Rosanvallon, 2003).

After this introductory chapter, the volume is divided into two parts, which dis-play two different perspectives on the book's topic. We might label these view-points as the *objectivation* and the *subjectivation* of work, that is the shaping of the labour world as an "object" of governance and scientific investigation, and as a collective political "subject." On the basis of this distinction, the *first part* of the volume considers institutional practices aimed at integrating the subaltern classes into the State by establishing wage labour as a means of governing poverty and social inequality. This analytical dimension includes the development of liberal theory into a doctrine of governance, the birth of labour law, and the genesis of the modern social sciences as an attempt to systematically understand pauperism to better govern it. The *second part* then retraces the rise of social movements that assumed labour conditions as the main platform for claiming new rights. This ana-lytical dimension deals with the emergence of the modern workers' movement and the development of socialism as a political discourse based on labour emancipation.

In the first part of the volume, Chapter 2 addresses the interpretations of the emerging social question in the field of post-revolutionary French liberalism. It focuses on the cholera outbreak of 1832 to describe how it fostered unprecedented and dramatic representations of urban pauperism chiefly marked by feelings of panic and distress with respect to the new "dangerous classes" brought into being by the Industrial Revolution. By analysing the pandemic crisis, the chapter shows that these subjects were initially perceived not merely as a different social class, but also – and especially – as a different "race," according to a conception exemplified by the metaphor of "new barbarians" invading the manufacturing cities. Yet, we shall also see how the pandemic crisis stimulated the rise of social research on the subaltern classes aimed at elaborating pioneering welfare policies as risk reduction strategies.

Chapter 3 focuses on the genesis of the modern social sciences, which took industrial urban pauperism as their first object of investigation. It considers the first social enquires on the subaltern classes undertaken in the aftermath of the pandemic crisis and the representations of post-revolutionary industrial society produced by these treatises. The latter are analysed to single out the transformation of the initial image of the "dangerous classes" and "new barbarians" into that of the poor yet decent and virtuous working class. In such a way, the chapter describes how the "social question" gradually evolved into a "labour question" and a mighty project of social integration centred on wage labour.

Chapter 4 addresses the effects of these social enquiries on French policy and legislation by focusing on two subjects in particular: the employment record book as a crucial tool for the governance of manpower in the 19th century and the 1841 law on child labour as the first legislative intervention in the field of employment relations. These matters are analysed to describe the genesis of modern labour law as a process of juridical codification of wage work conditions and the rise of social security measures centred on the worker as an emerging subject of rights. Then, the chapter considers how initiatives of social inquiry were also adopted in the field of socialist and workers' movements, so as to introduce a shift from the sphere of governance to that of social subjectivities, which is the focus of the following chapters.

The second part of the volume focuses on the process of political subjectivation that took the name of "labour movement" and on the formation of the "collective singular" *working class* as the pivotal condition for the rise of such a movement (Koselleck, 1975, 1979). In other words, it retraces the way in which the *working class* became a single consistent category able to encompass and include the various representations hitherto associated with the complex universe of the subaltern classes. Chapter 5 sets out from the Lyonnais weavers' insurrection of November 1831, which historians have generally envisaged as marking the "birth" – or the symbolic point of origin – of the modern labour movement in Europe. It retraces different historical readings of this event to show how they have nurtured different conceptions of the idea of workers' movement and of the very notion of working class. To single out these concepts, the chapter delves into the traditional Marxist interpretation of the Lyon insurrection and analyses how this was debated and reframed by the "new social history" school and subsequently by the impact of the so-called "linguistic turn" on labour history research.

On the basis of these readings, Chapter 6 aims to provide an original interpretation of the rise of the French labour movement and of its historical-political significance by focusing on the way in which the 1831 insurrection was understood and represented by its contemporaries and the actors involved. It draws upon working-class, republican, and socialist sources to retrace the reception of the concept of "class" in these discursive fields and investigate how the latter assigned a new, social meaning to this notion by setting it in relation to other terms such as "people," "proletariat," and "workers." In such a way, the chapter describes the emergence of the "collective singular" *working class* as a unitary representation within which the still heterogeneous universe of the subaltern classes was able to identify and envisage itself as a collective subjectivity. Hence, the rise of the labour

movement is framed as a subjectivation process developed first of all on the level of political discourse (Sewell, 1980; Rancière, 1981; Stedman Jones, 1983; Scott, 1988; Berlanstein, 1993). The main argument is that the genesis of this subjectivity can be understood as a "discursive formation and practice" aimed at redefining the boundaries of the political field and the very meaning of politics. Based on this argument, the conclusion frames the new revolutionary break of 1848 as an initial moment of crystallisation for the processes under consideration. Then, it considers how an architecture of rights revolving around the citizen-worker – that is, a model of citizenship and a system of social recognition based on labour – emerged through the interaction between the processes of "objectivation" and "subjectivation" of labour described in the two parts of the book.

Notes

1 "For when man was put into the Garden of Eden, he was put there *ut operaretur eum*, to work; which proves that man was not born for rest," Voltaire (1963, pp. 295–299).

2 Even the idea of the "right to work" that emerged during the revolutionary process was merely understood as the individual civic right to freely choose one's own occupation under conditions of equal competition with other citizens, without the kind of regulations and hierarchies enforced by guilds. Then, census suffrage systems in the 19th century generally regarded the condition of the manual labourer as the threshold below which people could not enjoy political rights (cf. § 1.4). On the history of the idea of work, see Tilgher (1929), Negri (1981, 2002), Weiss (2009), Theocarakis (2010), Damerow (1996), Lytle (2020), Garver (2020) Montenach and Simonton (2020), Walkowitz (2020), Thompson (2020), Perrotta (2020), Lucassen (2021), Faitini (2023).

3 I am here introducing the concept of "invention," which I will sometimes be resorting to designate the performative effects that certain languages and political discourses produced in the climate under consideration: this is the case, for example, with the syntagm "working class" and with the way in which this "collective singular" (Koselleck, 1975, 1979) would appear to have foreshadowed the composition of a world of labour that was still varied and fragmentary, and closer to the widespread expression "working classes." As for the notion of "regime of truth," I am using it in the sense defined by Michel Foucault (1977a, p. 23, 1977b, p. 13, 2012, pp. 13–14) to indicate the way in which truth is produced, promoted, and regulated through a series of political mechanisms, techniques, and procedures based on the entanglement between social relations of power and the field of knowledge and "scientific" discourse. Furthermore, I will sometimes be resorting to the originally Weberian notion of "world image" (*Weltbild*), understood as a systematic understanding of our position in the world that defines the horizon of our expectations, and the tools needed to achieve them (Weber, 1974, 1978; Kalberg, 2004; D'Andrea, 2011).

4 More specifically, these genealogical investigations on the 19th century have focused on topics such as the family (Donzelot, 1977), the welfare State (Ewald, 1986, 1996), statistical knowledge (Hacking, 1990), poverty (Dean, 1991; Procacci, 1993, 1998), public security and policing (Neocleous, 2000; Napoli, 2003; Campesi, 2016), the free market (Harcourt, 2012), social sciences (Karsenti, 2013), and pandemics (Delaporte, 1986; Aisenberg, 1999). Given the relevance of wage work in the 19th-century social context, it is remarkable that these important studies have not specifically focused on this topic. Two important but partial exceptions are: Castel (2003), which focuses on the *long durée* to retrace the transformations of the social question from the Middle Ages, and Foucault (2015), which is the latest of his Collège de France lecture series to have been published as a volume and devotes several pages to the rise of wage labour.

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