
H-France Review Vol. 17 (October 2017), No. 181

Mathilde Larrère, *L'urne et le fusil: La garde nationale parisienne de 1830 à 1848*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2016. 328 pp. Tables, notes, and bibliography. \$31.00 U.S. €27.00 (pb). ISBN 978-2-1306-2168-3.

Review by Jill Harsin, Colgate University.

The National Guard, an organization created by the Parisian middle and upper classes in 1789 and abolished by the post-Commune government in 1871, often played a key role in events during the tumultuous years of its existence. Most major studies of the institution have been focused on the Paris National Guard because of its clear political impact on the capital, and thus on the nation. Unfortunately, the scattered and sparse nature of its archives—indeed, their partial destruction in the famous Commune fire and the less famous pillaging of the headquarters in February 1848—has made the study of the Paris National Guard very challenging. The first major monographs are thus relatively recent: the 1964 study by Louis Girard, *La Garde nationale (1814-1871)*, followed by Georges Carrot, *La Garde nationale 1789-1871: une force publique ambiguë* (2001), and most recently by Roger Dupuy, *La Garde nationale, 1789-1872* (2010). Each is an important work with different strengths (Girard, who focuses on the period from 1814 to 1852; Dupuy, with a comprehensive 600 pages, much of it on the revolutionary founding period; Carrot, on the legal and reglementary aspects).

As Mathilde Larrère shows in her useful new study, it was only the July Monarchy, from 1830 to 1848, that fully embraced the National Guard and made extensive use of it, for reasons both pragmatic and symbolic. In practical terms, the guards were inexpensive: though the city of Paris provided some funding for administration, the guards themselves served without pay and even supplied their own uniforms. The symbolism of the national guard was more difficult to manage. The regime often seemed to favor, or wished to be seen as favoring, an image of citizen-soldiers with volition and free will, “non comme des soldats faisant leur devoir, obéissants aux ordres, mais comme des citoyens choisissant de risquer leur vie pour défendre le régime” (p. 207). With perhaps more frankness, Casimir Périer, the conservative chief minister of Louis-Philippe’s first two years who set the tone for the rest of the regime, described it as a “grande armée de l’ordre public,” implicitly setting as its function the repression of disorder from below (p. 58). And yet, despite the guards’ acknowledged utility, the July regime stubbornly refused to give the right of suffrage to national guards who did not otherwise qualify for that guarantee of citizenship, and their reluctance to do so ultimately proved fatal.

Larrère’s substantial opening chapter provides a solid survey of the earliest years and 1789 origin as a spontaneous citizens’ militia to protect against growing threats from above (Louis XVI’s gathering of troops around the city) and from the working-class insurgents below. Lafayette, chosen as commandant, attempted to prevent it from falling prey to factionalism, refusing to allow units to be set up on the basis of political affiliation. By 1793, Lafayette had been replaced by the *montagnard* François Hanriot, who led his troops in the expulsion of the Girondin opposition from the National Convention. And while the organization soon stepped back from this extreme politicization (and with many of its members absorbed into the wars), Napoleon showed little interest in calling upon them, except at occasional

ceremonial events. With Napoleon's defeat they proved their usefulness, and gained a new reputation as a fighting force, in their heroic 1814 defense of Paris.

At the beginning of the Restoration, the future Charles X hoped, through his control of appointments of its chiefs, to mold the force into a guard favorable to his Ultra conservative vision. The Chamber of Deputies put obstacles in his way, and the Bourbons lost interest, allowing the National Guard to dwindle. After some years of benign neglect, Charles X was persuaded to stage a major review in 1827, witnessed by a large crowd. The king thought the day had gone off well until he was told of a few voices of dissent (generally lost in the enthusiasm) and, in a fit of anger, he dissolved the Paris legions. His action gave rise to a wave of indignation as well as a spate of pamphlets and histories celebrating the organization as a unique citizens' institution. The dissolution also, as it happened, freed the national guardsmen from being called out to duty in July 1830.

Larrère provides extended and valuable coverage of the July revolution and the troubles of the first two years of the new regime. In July, at the earliest signs of trouble, some former guards ventured out individually or in small groups. No doubt many were motivated by patriotism and their concern for the rule of law, now under threat from Charles X's attempt to subvert the constitution. They also came out to protect their property, as shown in a placard posted on the rue Montmartre on July 28, signed by the self-described former commander who summoned his former comrades, promising that, "nous veillerons ensemble à la conservation de nos familles et de nos propriétés" (p. 41).

The guards' symbolic role as embodiments of the citizenry made them indispensable during the unstable period before Louis-Philippe's position was solidified. Perhaps their greatest symbolic duty was in legitimizing the new king, who would cultivate his relationship with the National Guard by wearing the uniform in portraits and at official events, by enrolling his two oldest sons in the force's artillery, by putting in appearances at legion banquets, and by issuing invitations to the Palace. The king used the review of August 29, 1830 as a sanction of his appropriation of the monarchy, an event that effectively combined an impressive show of national unity with the king's informality, as he moved through the ranks chatting easily with the men. As Louis-Philippe said to Lafayette, who once again held the rank of commandant (and in a remark that somehow reached the press), "Cela vaut mieux pour moi que le sacre de Reims" (pp. 54-55), in reference to the traditional place of coronation for French kings.

The initial questions around the organization of the National Guard paralleled liberal anxieties about the commitment to reform on the part of the new regime itself. Should the National Guard be opened to all, or should it remain a bastion of the nobles and high bourgeoisie, leavened with a few respectable shopkeepers and artisans? The question of the vote--whether bestowed on officers only, or on the entire rank and file--occasioned a split on the left, between the monarchical left, who called for a National Guard suffrage that would provide the vote to some or all of its members, and the republican left, who demanded universal manhood suffrage.

Nor was the new regime entirely certain the National Guards could be trusted. The December 1830 trial of four of Charles X's ministers (blamed for the policies that had circumvented the Charter and brought on the revolution) created a crisis, with many Parisians hoping for a sentence of death. The regular army, the municipal guards, and the gendarmerie were too tainted by their recent (and unsuccessful) repression of the July insurgents; the government had to call out the National Guard and put their trust in Lafayette. Though the guards loyally kept order in the streets after the disappointing verdict (life sentences, instead of death), they were increasingly disillusioned, as shown in the petition from the guards of the Tenth Legion, who no doubt spoke for many: "La garde nationale vient d'accomplir un pénible devoir, elle a repoussé ses concitoyens dans les rangs desquels elle comptait des compagnons de la victoire de Juillet. Leur faute était d'exprimer tumultueusement des opinions qui sont les nôtres. ...[S]upplions sa majesté de lever les obstacles qui, depuis quatre mois, s'opposent au développement de nos institutions"(p. 95)--an indication that the problem was not simply the trial

verdict, but the growing questions surrounding how much further the regime's constitutional reforms of press, association, and suffrage would be allowed to go.

The 1831 law essentially defined the National Guard for the rest of the reign, opting for a purely local sedentary guard that would be used to keep order in their respective areas rather than a national reserve army. Lafayette's position as national commandant was suppressed. Though National Guard service was theoretically required of all men between the ages of twenty and sixty, those for whom the loss of time and wages would make service too onerous--the working classes--were to be kept in a fictitious (and never called) "reserve." The broader suffrage issue was diverted into allowing a vote for the colonels of the legions, and, by the 1840s, these elections featured a high turnout and attracted more interest from the left than even the municipal elections.

The National Guard forces in most of the country were allowed to fall into decline, but the regime was determined that the Paris Guards would remain as a visible force. Sometimes their role required the repression of riots or insurgencies, but most often it meant patrolling and forming a reserve at the guard posts. The duty was dull and often unpleasant, and the guard posts were in appalling shape (one guard apparently died of asphyxiation in a windowless closet). They served four to five tours of duty per year, the summons to report always coming without any kind of preliminary warning or schedule. The legions were organized on the basis of *arrondissements*, and social segregation led to distinct class differences among them (visible, for example, in the cost of the dress of the conspicuous *tambour-major*). While many Parisians attempted to avoid their service, for others it became a center of male sociability, to the point that some remained with their old units even when they moved from the area.

The Fieschi assassination attempt during the 1835 review (by means of an "infernal machine" that inflicted multiple casualties though it left the king untouched) led to the September Laws that imposed harsh penalties on the press. From 1837 on, the annual reviews were held on the palace grounds, a restricted area that could accommodate only a few thousand invited guests--thus not the popular parades of the earlier years that had brought the king literally close to his subjects. The last review of the July Monarchy occurred in 1840, with the return of Napoleon's ashes from Saint Helena. Many National Guards stayed away, the gaps in the line all too evident, and many of those who did appear shouted slogans for suffrage reform. This was to be the last major review; though Louis Philippe did not dissolve the Paris National Guard, as Charles X had in 1827, he nevertheless cut himself off from them.

The National Guards continued to do their duty, but were also capable of interpreting that duty, as they did in February 1848. In the midst of the three days of the revolution that founded the Second Republic, members of the Fourth Legion posted the following placard, noting that "nous, protecteurs de l'ordre, nous allons nous rendre où nous serons dirigés pour empêcher ou arrêter l'effusion de sang. Mais en même temps, protecteurs de la liberté, nous déclarons que notre réunion n'a aucunement pour objet d'approuver la politique ministérielle au dedans ou au dehors, ni de donner un appui quelconque à un ministère que nous blâmons avec toute l'énergie de bons citoyens" (p. 286). The study concludes with the revolution of February 1848.

Larrère has made the curious choice to forswear coverage of the major insurrections: the insurgencies of 1832, 1834, 1839, and even February 1848 receive only brief and cursory attention. This has led her also to forgo the various judicial investigations of these episodes, which include numerous depositions by and about the guards who participated, and who were sometimes wounded and killed. Certainly, there was persistent criticism by various generals who praised the National Guard in public but often groused about their indiscipline and lack of skill in more private reports. It should be noted that the assignments often handed to the guards, as listed by Larrère--protecting public monuments, keeping communications open, holding areas just taken, and keeping order in the areas as yet unaffected by uprisings (p. 199)--were by no means negligible.

Larrère herself notes, however, that most previous studies have in fact been attracted to these *journées*, these highly atypical moments of change; in contrast, she wished to study the *quotidien*, the daily functioning as well as the survival (and evolution) of an institution founded in revolution: “Je voulais, à rebours et en complément, l’étudier entre deux révolutions, dans le creux de la vague, pour justement questionner le maintien des institutions révolutionnaires, avec tout ce qu’elles charrient de symboles, de lieux de mémoire, quand les régimes cherchent pourtant à achever la révolution” (p. 9). The title of the work, which suggests a deeper discussion of the debates on voting than the work provides, is also somewhat puzzling. But taking into account her stated purpose and approach, Mathilde Larrère has provided a valuable contribution to the study of this most important organization.

Jill Harsin
Colgate University
jharsin@colgate.edu

Copyright © 2017 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of *H-France Review* nor republication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on *H-France Review* are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172