Factors in the 1832 June Rebellion

by Jay Crow

Summary

A research paper detailing events before, during, and after the 1832 June Rebellion. If you don't feel like doing copious amounts of research in order to make your canon-era Les Mis fic historically accurate, you might find this useful!

The June Rebellion is an often-forgotten part of France’s extensive history of revolution. This is mostly because, despite its promising start, the June Rebellion ended approximately 24 hours after it first began. In this paper, the various political and social ideologies will be explored, as well as the events of those two days in June 1832, and their repercussions afterward. The goal of this paper is to investigate the motivations behind the ill-fated rebellion, and why the June Rebellion failed.

In order to understand the climate during which the June Rebellion took place, the July Revolution, the social atmosphere, and some key events must be explained. For some people, life may have gotten better, but for others, the status quo was the same as it had always been. The July Revolution was not quite the victory the people of France had hoped it would be. There had been high hopes that the situations of the poor and disenfranchised would improve. Instead, the July Revolution ended up being more a triumph for the wealthy elite. In fact, most of the combatants in the Revolution were excluded from taking part in the ‘new’ government. Louis Philippe was a breath of fresh air at first, until it turned out that nothing was to be done to help those who truly needed it.

The gap between the rich and the poor only widened. There were major food shortages, and bread prices soared. The price of living rose even higher. It was estimated that “of 224,000 households in Paris, 136,000 must be described as poor, and a further 32,00 households as living on the brink of poverty,” in a report by the département of the Seine. About 64,000 Parisians had no stable employment, which meant that they were dependent on either charity or crime. Working and living conditions rapidly deteriorated. The July Monarchy did almost nothing to combat this.

In the spring of 1832, an outbreak of cholera ravaged France in general, and Paris in particular. This only worsened the economic crisis, and the poor were affected the most out of anyone.
Overcrowding and lack of hygiene in the city were both factors in how quickly and decisively the disease spread. During the reign of Louis Philippe and the time of the Restoration, hygiene and health in Paris had lagged behind pitifully, even with the impressive sewer system. This only helped the disease along. Those who could afford to left, and by the 5th of April, there were 503 confirmed cases; by the 12th, approximately 1,020. The Pont Neuf was covered with the dead and the dying. By the end of it, 18,402 people were dead. One of the last victims of the cholera epidemic was General Jean Maximilien Lamarque.

General Jean Maximilien Lamarque was considered a champion of the poor and disenfranchised. Originally a fervent supporter of Louis Philippe, he became one of his most ardent opponents, maintaining that Louis Philippe’s system of constitutional monarchy was an insult to civil rights and political liberty. He contracted cholera during the epidemic mentioned previously, and died on the 2nd of June. His funeral was the straw that broke the camel’s back in terms of revolution.

There were four main political ideologies at play during the time of the June Rebellion. These were the republicans, the liberals, the Orleanists, and the Legitimists. All of these beliefs had their own ideas on how the government should be run, though some were more similar than they liked to believe, only differing on technicalities.

The Parisian republicans of the 1830s were mostly working-class young people, very civil rights-minded, and believed in the civil liberties of speech, press, conscience, and assembly. In this, they were very similar to the liberals of the time, but disagreed on two main points: economic models, and the uses of government. Economically, republicans tended towards a more socialist view, and in terms of government, they liked the idea of a strong, centralized state with no king. Republicans also disapproved of Louis Philippe’s foreign policy, which they viewed as bland and cowardly. The Orleanists were much more conservative. Created through a blending of two liberal political tendencies during the Restoration, Orleanism was mainly focused on individual freedom and a smaller, more controlled government. Louis Philippe, the king of France during this time period, was Orleanist, which explains why his policies were so offensive to the republicans. Their beliefs in individual liberty, in practice, allowed them to promote a noninterventionist economic approach, which benefited the already wealthy, rather than those at the bottom of the social ladder. The Orleanist approach to government, meanwhile, contributed to their lack of action in foreign policy. The liberals, during the period in which the June Rebellion took place, were associated with both the republicans and the Orleanists. The points on which liberalism and republicanism agree upon have already been touched upon, but the intersection of liberalism and Orleanism is more intrinsic. Liberalism in general and the Doctrinals in specific were the main guiding philosophies of Orleanism. Liberalism contributed the belief in individual liberty and a more limited government, while the Doctrinals saw themselves as keeping the ‘middle ground’ between the ancien regime and modern democracy, but really only made it so that the chambers stopped representing the people, and only represented those who already had power.

The last significant political group of the time was Legitimism. The Legitimists believed that the line of succession must be kept intact in terms of the Salic law. They rejected revolutionary ideals and principles, becoming one of the most far-right groups of that time period. During the July Monarchy, which lasted from 1830 until 1848, the Legitimists were not particularly active politically, but were still noteworthy due to their fringe views on monarchy and government.

On the 5th of June, 1832, everything came to a head. Tensions had been mounting for years, ever since the July Revolution. The poor and disenfranchised were angry and tired of not getting what they were promised, and at this point, outright rebellion seemed like the only option.

The funeral of General Jean Maximilien Lamarque took place three days after his death. Lamarque’s last words are perhaps the spark that ignited the flame of rebellion. He said, reportedly, “I die regretting not having avenged France for the infamous treaties of 1815.” On the morning of the 5th of June, crowds of students, workers, and those mourning gathered in the streets, who numbered in the thousands. Several witnesses claimed that it grew to be closer to 100,000. Some of those with a
political agenda were reported to be wearing weaponry provocatively. The gathering had hoped to escort General Jean Maximilien Lamarque’s hearse on its route through the city, before it would be taken to his home district in the southwest of France. At first the situation was tense, but nonviolent. Then, a member of the crowd held up a red and black banner, which had emblazoned on it the words, “Liberty or Death”. It was at this point that cries of ‘Aux armes! Aux barricades!’ went out, a shot was fired, and the fighting began.

Dozens of barricades had been constructed on both sides of the Seine from 5:00 p.m. until 6:30 p.m., some taking 15 minutes or less to erect. They were made from saplings, scrap materials in nearby construction sites, and paving stones from the very streets of Paris. Barricades had been a staple of revolution in France. They had been used in the July Revolution, and would be used again in the 1848 Revolution.

In under two hours, part of central Paris, between the Châtelet, the arsenal, and the Fauborg Saint-Antoinette. Rifles were the weapon of choice, and more than 4,000 rifles and muskets had been taken from guard posts and gun shops. In the beginning, these revolutionaries were much better prepared than those on the 27th of July 1830. The insurrection was much more aggressive than the July Revolution. The rebellion affected both the left and right sides of the Seine, and the fighting was so ferocious, some thought that the revolutionaries might win. However, on the other side, the National Guard and the army were both much better prepared as well.

On the 6th of June 1832, everything started to go downhill. Though the June Rebellion had a promising start, the revolutionaries’ numbers couldn’t compare to those sent to quell the rebellion. The main problem of the June Rebellion was numbers. Though it was planned well, and executed soundly, there simply weren’t enough people fighting on the side of the revolutionaries. There were around 40,000 soldiers and 20,000 National Guards patrolling the streets. Though it had seemed as though the National Guard might join the rebellion, they were ultimately, ‘totally against the republicans.’ The citizens of Paris were also more reluctant to join in the fighting than they were to enter General Jean Maximilien Lamarque’s funeral procession on the previous day. In addition, Paris was placed under a state of siege. By midnight, the insurgents were holed up in only a couple places in the east. The passage du Saumon, which had been fiercely defended, was taken before dawn, and the barricade that sealed off the Fauborg Saint-Antoine was finally captured sometime midmorning, under an artillery barrage. The revolutionaries pleaded for help, but nobody came.

By this point, there were only a few places in Paris that had not been retaken by soldiers and the National Guard. One of these places was Église Saint-Méry, a 16th century church in the heart of the district where the fiercest fighting took place. It was here that the insurgents put on a last stand fueled by desperation and vain hope. By noon, The National Guard and the soldiers were prepared to take this last holdout of revolt. However, the fighting had to be stopped for two hours to protect Louis-Philippe, who thought that it was a great idea to ride around Paris during a state of siege. Sometime around 3:00 in the afternoon, permission was given to resume. Most barricades around the area had already been abandoned, as the insurgents retreated. Those who either couldn’t or wouldn’t make their escape ended up within a multi-sided barricade that blocked the intersection of Saint-Méry and Saint-Martin. It required heavy artillery to defeat them, and most laid down their lives for their cause. Nonetheless, by 6:00 p.m. that evening, the fighting was over only twenty-four hours after it had first begun.

The ramifications of the June Rebellion were more severe than anticipated. There were high casualties on both sides, and for those insurgents who did live, the future was uncertain. The future of revolution in France in general was also ambiguous.

The casualties on both sides of the conflict amounted to approximately 150 dead and 500 injured. Most of those either dead or wounded were revolutionaries, though it is impossible to tell how many. However, some contemporary estimates suggest that about 80-100 died, and 200-300 were injured in some way or another, though other approximations put it at over 800 dead or injured. The cost may not have been this heavy if the insurgents had been able to get help from the people of Paris. Without
their support, the most committed rebels were left to pay with their lives or freedom. Over 1,500 were taken prisoner.

It had been feared that military law would be put in place, due to the truly massive number of weapons confiscated in raids after peace was restored. This was recognized as causing some problems with having fair trials in the legal system, especially in the case of Michael Geoffroy, who was convicted of displaying the red and black flag at General Jean Maximilien Lamarque’s funeral. He was originally given a death sentence, but his attorney, Odilon Barrot appealed the Cour du Cassation, which declared the state of siege to be in violation of the Charter. Michael Geoffroy’s sentence was much reduced. When the actual flag-bearer was found some weeks later, he was sentenced to only a month in prison due to obvious mental instability. Meanwhile, the government tried to distance itself from its own revolutionary past, going so far as to take down the famous painting Liberty Leading the People, for fear of setting a bad example. There were also a few other notable trials of those captured during the June Rebellion. One of these people, Lepage, was a 24-year-old porter, and was accused of having stolen an iron bar from a shopkeeper in order to rip up cobblestones from the street. He was only found guilty of one of the charges, inciting citizens to arm themselves. This alone was enough to get him the death penalty. The jurors, who were utterly shocked to hear this, immediately started drafting a petition for clemency. Another case was that of Cuny, a cook who was found with a stolen weapon in his possession. He claimed that it had been forced on him, and denied that he even fired the darn thing, but the court wasn’t buying it. After hearing his death sentence, he shouted, “Vive la République!” This made his case rather controversial, causing it to be picked up by a well-known republican newspaper, the National, which declared that he would be the regime’s first execution for political beliefs. Cuny’s lawyer, Adolphe Crémieux, successfully managed to have clemency granted for his client. In total, eighty-two people were convicted, and of those eighty-two, seven were sentenced to death. Those death sentences were then commuted to deportation, which really meant serving a term in one of the state fortresses. In the end, the insurgents had been painted as an extremist minority, and revolution fell out of favor.

There were many factors in the failure of the June Rebellion of 1832. The people were ready for a revolution, and the social climate was just waiting for a spark. Much of the city’s youth was republican, or held ideas of social change. Even some governmental institutions had been swayed, however momentarily. Despite all this, the June Rebellion failed, and mostly faded from the collective memory of history. In the aftermath, not much changed, and those who fought, fought in vain.

Even though the June Rebellion ended in nigh-unmitigated disaster, there are still things that should be taken away from its defeat. It’s never wrong to fight for what’s right, and for those who cannot defend themselves. If you fail, it doesn’t mean you were wrong. The June Rebellion may have succeeded with more manpower, and a public more willing to fight alongside.

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