



VMUN 2024

# Cabinet Crisis Committee

BACKGROUND GUIDE



# VANCOUVER MODEL UNITED NATIONS

The Twenty-Third Annual Session | January 26–28, 2024

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Dear Delegates,

My name is Calvin Liu, and I am honoured to serve as your Director of the Cabinet Crisis Committee for Vancouver Model United Nations 2024. Working alongside your dais team, I hope to provide a unique, memorable, and unforgettable experience over the weekend, exploring the rise and governance of the Paris Commune.

When I entered my first committee session four and a half years ago, I didn't know what to expect—maybe the odd interjection in debate. Since then, I have not only come to love the heated debates and passionate discussions, but fondly reminisce about some of my favorite memories in conferences, cherishing many friendships that I have made. Crisis committees have always been the heart of my fascination with Model UN, where there is not a single dull moment which could not be filled with discussions of plans or solutions. Just as they are challenging, they are insightful and rewarding, and the experience could not be replicated anywhere else.

This year, delegates will explore and manage the internal logistics and governance of the Paris Commune, a revolutionary socialist government resulting from France's loss in the Franco-Prussian War and the collapse of Napoleon III's 2nd French Empire. Delegates will face crisis from both outside Paris' fortifications and within, as the Third Republic stationed just 9 miles away bombards the troops and attempts to cut off their supply lines, while citizens inside the city grow increasingly discontent. Destroy, or be destroyed.

Note that Cabinet requires a significant amount of preparation, as understanding of not only the historical event, but also the motivations and political tensions of the period is key. If you have any further questions or concerns, do not hesitate to email [cabinet@vmun.com](mailto:cabinet@vmun.com). I wish you the best of luck in establishing and sustaining the first strong and united socialist government on earth.

Sincerely,

Calvin Liu  
Cabinet Director

# Position Paper Policy

## What is a Position Paper?

A position paper is a brief overview of a country's stance on the topics being discussed by a particular committee. Though there is no specific format the position paper must follow, it should include a description of your positions your country holds on the issues on the agenda, relevant actions that your country has taken, and potential solutions that your country would support.

At Vancouver Model United Nations, delegates should write a position paper for each of the committee's topics. Each position paper should not exceed one page and should all be combined into a single document per delegate.

For the Cabinet Crisis Committee, position papers are mandatory.

## Formatting

Position papers should:

- Include the name of the delegate, their country, and the committee
- Be in a standard font (e.g. Times New Roman) with a 12-point font size and 1-inch document margins
- Not include illustrations, diagrams, decorations, national symbols, watermarks, or page borders
- Include citations and a bibliography, in any format, giving due credit to the sources used in research (not included in the 1-page limit)

## Due Dates and Submission Procedure

Position papers for this committee must be submitted by **11:59 PM PT on January 22, 2024**. Once your position paper is complete, please save the file as your last name, your first name and send it as an attachment in an email to your committee's email address, with the subject heading as "[last name] [first name] — Position Paper". Please do not add any other attachments to the email.

Both your position papers should be combined into a single PDF or Word document file; position papers submitted in another format will not be accepted.

Each position paper will be manually reviewed and considered for the Best Researched award.

The email address for this committee is *cabinet@vmun.com*.

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# Paris Commune, 1871

## Overview

Emperor Napoleon III, in a panic over the developing ideas of collective power, declared that the Paris Commune was merely "a rebellion of the working classes." His commentary was not unfounded; after the Franco-Prussian War, France fell into social and political disarray, with the workers and artisans of Paris rising to what would become known as the Paris Commune—a radical, socialist, and revolutionary government. Following the defeat of France and the subsequent Siege of Paris in 1870, the city was steeped in economic despair, rendering the livelihoods of its working population vulnerable. The will for change grew, and the workers' demands for a more representative government could no longer be disregarded. Thus, the Paris Commune was established in March 1871.

The year is 1871, and Paris is in turmoil. With the newly established French Third Republic government under Adolphe Thiers relocating to Versailles, the Paris Commune became revolutionary in a region of conservative governance. Free of the hierarchy of presidency, the working class elected Commune's council represents a broad spectrum of radical ideologies, from Jacobin republicanism to Proudhonian mutualism and Marxian communism. Amid this upheaval, proletariat theorist Karl Marx proclaimed the Commune a harbinger of the worldwide workers' movement. It stands as a beacon of hope for the oppressed working classes—a testament to their ability to seize control of their destiny and an experiment in democratic and socialist principles never before seen.

The Paris Commune, defying the French state and bourgeois order, stands against formidable odds. Its strength lies in the committed participation of the workers, their radical council, and the National Guard units loyal to the cause. Yet, delegates of the Commune face insurmountable domestic and international hurdles, such as the Versailles government's military superiority and the French provinces' conservative sentiments. Despite controlling Paris, the Commune lacks widespread support, as the French rural populace remains unresponsive or even hostile to its radical socialist agenda.

Even if the Commune manages to hold Paris against the Versailles onslaught, the challenge remains in rallying nationwide support for their radical project and creating a sustainable administrative model that upholds their ideals. With these challenges, delegates must determine whether the radical vision of the Paris Commune will stand against the strong currents of conservative order or be swept away as a fleeting experiment in the annals of the city's tumultuous history. No matter the outcome, the Paris Commune stands as a powerful testament to the working class for self-governance and radical change, as the echo of the Commune continues to resonate across the centuries.

## Timeline

**August 23, 1866** — The Seven Weeks War concludes. The war started when Prussia launched an attack on Austria to obtain full control over Schleswig and Holstein in order to assert supremacy in the German Confederation. The war was primarily orchestrated by Otto von Bismark and Helmuth von Moltke.<sup>1</sup> The influence within German affairs was the envy of Napoleon III.<sup>2</sup>

**July 19, 1870** — The Franco-Prussian War begins. France's eventual defeat in this war sets the stage for unrest, rebellions within the nation, and the establishment of communes in some of the largest cities, including Paris.<sup>3</sup>

**August 6, 1870** — Prussian forces, led by Crown Prince Frederick III, invade France. Strasbourg is surrounded, and French Marshal MacMahon is defeated at Worth and Weissenburg and driven out of Northeastern France.<sup>4</sup>

**September 1, 1870** — In the Battle of Sedan, French Marshal MacMahon and Napoleon III are defeated at the fortress of Sedan on the Meuse River by Helmuth von Moltke. French forces are outnumbered three to five, and as a result, Napoleon III surrenders.<sup>5</sup>

**September 4, 1870** — The Third Republic is established after the capture of Napoleon III and the dissolution of the Second French Empire.<sup>6</sup> The new change to a more democratic government alters the political landscape of France.

**September 1870–January 1871** — The Siege of Paris, a set of prolonged military blockades by the Prussian government, leads to hardship and shortages of supplies by Parisians.<sup>7</sup> This dissatisfaction with their government's lack of action contributes significantly to the unrest which led to the establishment of the Paris Commune.

**January 28, 1871** — The armistice between France and Prussia is met with outrage by many Parisians for its lack of tangible results for France, contributing to the social tensions that led to the Paris Commune.<sup>8</sup>

**March 1871** — The government transfers from Paris to nearby Versailles, following the trend of discontent from Parisians. This transfer creates a power vacuum which had been occupied by the central government, in the old capital Paris.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Seven Weeks War," Encyclopedia Britannica, August 16, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Seven-Weeks-War>

<sup>2</sup> The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Helmuth von Moltke," Encyclopedia Britannica, October 22, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Helmuth-von-Moltke>.

<sup>3</sup> The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Franco-German War," Encyclopedia Britannica, April 3, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Franco-German-War>.

<sup>4</sup> Corrie Glanville, "A Paris Commune Timeline," ArtsEmerson, August 15, 2012, <https://artsemerson.org/2012/08/15/a-paris-commune-timeline/>

<sup>5</sup> The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "The Battle of Sedan," Encyclopedia Britannica, August 25, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Sedan>

<sup>6</sup> The Writers of Château de Versailles, "Birth of the Third Republic, 1875," Palace of Versailles, November 22, 2016, <https://en.chateauversailles.fr/discover/history/key-dates/birth-third-republic-1875>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Irène Delage and Marie de Bruchard, "The Franco-German War of 1870-1871: 1. The March to War," napoleon.org, February 2020. <https://www.napoleon.org/en/history-of-the-two-empires/timelines/the-franco-german-war-of-1870-1871-1-the-march-to-war/>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

**March 18, 1871** — Parisians seize artillery cannons within the city and refuse to return them to the French Army. This act of defiance for self-governance later establishes the roots of the Paris Commune.<sup>10</sup>

**March 26, 1871 (Crisis Initiation)** — The Paris Commune is established after elections in Paris, marking the beginning of a revolutionary socialist government.<sup>11</sup>

## Historical Analysis

### The Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871)

The Franco-Prussian War, from July 19, 1870 to May 10, 1871, was a pivotal conflict that reshaped the political landscape of Europe. This war ended French dominance in continental Europe and unified Germany.

The war was the culmination of long-standing tensions between France and Prussia—the most powerful of the German states. The immediate cause of the war was a diplomatic crisis over the Spanish throne. The candidacy of Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen for the Spanish throne was perceived as a threat by France, which feared encirclement by a Prussian-Spanish alliance. This crisis, known as the Ems Dispatch, led to the declaration of war by French Emperor Napoleon III on July 19, 1870.

The French, confident in their military prowess, believed they would quickly defeat the Prussian forces. However, the Prussian army proved to be a formidable adversary under the leadership of Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke. The Prussians had a well-organized military system, superior artillery, and a strategic railway network that allowed for rapid mobilization and deployment of their forces.

The Franco-Prussian War was, in all respects, a disaster for France. The French army, despite its initial confidence, was ill-prepared for the Prussian forces' tactical superiority. The Battle of Sedan resulted in a crushing defeat for the French and the capture of Napoleon III. This defeat led to the collapse of the Second French Empire and the proclamation of the Third Republic.

The Prussian forces continued their advance after the capture of Napoleon III, winning a series of victories against the French army. The war finally ended with the Treaty of Frankfurt on May 10, 1871. The peace terms were harsh for France, which had to cede the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine to Germany and pay a large war indemnity.

The Franco-Prussian War had far-reaching consequences for the balance of the continent established in the Concert of Europe half a century earlier by Klemens von Metternich. It led to the establishment of the German Empire, with Prussian King Wilhelm I proclaimed as the German Emperor in the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles. The war also resulted in a significant shift in the balance of power in Europe, with Germany emerging as the dominant power on the continent.

The war also had profound implications for France. The defeat shattered French confidence and prestige, leading to political strife and social unrest. The loss of Alsace and Lorraine deeply fueled a desire for revenge, setting the

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<sup>10</sup> The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Commune of Paris | 1871,” Encyclopedia Britannica, March 11, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Commune-of-Paris-1871>.

<sup>11</sup> Oxford University Press, “Paris Commune Formed,” Oxford University Press Blog, March 26, 2012, <https://blog.oup.com/2012/03/paris-commune-formed/>.

stage for future conflicts. The war was a testament to the strategic genius of Otto von Bismarck and the military prowess of the Prussian forces, highlighting the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of the French Second Empire.

## Paris Under the Second Empire

Under Napoleon III's reign, Paris underwent a significant change. The city, which was the largest in continental Europe at the time, became a leading centre of finance, commerce, fashion, and the arts.<sup>12</sup> The population of Paris doubled to two million, partly due to the city's expansion to its present boundaries through the annexation of eleven surrounding communes, leading to the creation of eight new arrondissements.

One of the most significant transformations of Paris during this period was the ambitious urban renewal project led by Napoleon III and his Prefect of the Seine Georges-Eugène Haussmann.<sup>13</sup> Inspired by the cityscape of London, where Napoleon III had spent years in exile, the Emperor sought to modernize Paris. Haussmann's renovation project, often referred to as Haussmannization, involved the demolition of many of the city's old, cramped neighbourhoods, and their replacement with wide, straight boulevards, squares, parks, and new buildings.<sup>14</sup>

The city was completely redesigned and improved by Baron Georges Haussmann. Haussmann dismantled poor neighbourhoods, replacing them with museums, apartments for the bourgeoisie, brownstones, architectural wonders, wide and straight boulevards, and more. This transformation turned Paris into the envy of the entire world. This turned the previously most radical and volatile of European capitals a more conservative bend. Policing was easier; the bourgeoisie pushed the workers to the surrounding suburbs, and the rich came in droves to the centre.<sup>15</sup>

Napoleon III's success in transforming Paris is partly due to his understanding of the modern politician, his role in public opinion, and his skill in the management of information and outward appearances.<sup>16</sup> Part of the image of modernity in politics came with the enactment of modern policies. Napoleon III began his public works project to make Paris a livable place and, more importantly, show France's success and wealth to the world. He wanted Paris to be the center of world culture and politics as he was fiercely patriotic and recognized this would garner him more votes. Such international prestige would aid in maintaining his political regime.<sup>17</sup>

The rest of France's success, based primarily on the economic boom in Europe at the time, was not Napoleon III's doing.<sup>18</sup> Years of stable, dictatorial rule in Paris brought international investment back into France, resulting in a period of sustained economic growth and a steady period of wages increasing faster than prices. The rich did get richer, but abject poverty in the cities also diminished.

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<sup>12</sup> Emily Drumsta, "Paris: Capital of the 19th Century," library.brown.edu. Brown University Library, 2006, <https://library.brown.edu/cds/paris/Drumsta.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, "France - the Second Empire, 1852–70," Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/place/France/The-Second-Empire-1852-70>.

<sup>14</sup> The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Georges-Eugène, Baron Haussmann | French Civil Servant," Encyclopedia Britannica, March 23, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Georges-Eugene-Baron-Haussmann>.

<sup>15</sup> Stovall, Tyler, "The Rise of the Paris Red Belt." publishing.cdlib.org. University of California Press, 1990, <https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft5r29n9vt&chunk.id=d0e288&toc.depth=1&toc.id=d0e151&brand=ucpress>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



## Founding Ideologies of the Paris Commune

The ideological underpinnings that led to the establishment of the Paris Commune in 1871 were significantly influenced by Enlightenment ideals and the burgeoning socialist movement.<sup>19</sup> The Enlightenment, with its emphasis on reason, individualism, and skepticism of traditional institutions, had a profound impact on French society. It fostered a climate of intellectual and political agitation, which was instrumental in shaping the revolutionary fervour that would eventually lead to the Paris Commune.<sup>20</sup>

The Enlightenment's ideals of the rights of individuals in democratic governance were at the heart of the founding of the commune.<sup>21</sup> These ideas were particularly influential among the working class and the bourgeoisie, who were increasingly dissatisfied with the existing socio-political order. The Enlightenment's emphasis on the power of reason and the potential for human progress resonated deeply with these groups, which, in these ideas, saw the potential for a more equitable and just society.

In addition to the Enlightenment, the socialist movement also played a crucial role in shaping the ideological landscape that led to the Paris Commune. With its emphasis on social equality and its critique of capitalism, socialism appealed to many within the French working class.<sup>22</sup> The works of early socialist thinkers such as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Louis Auguste Blanqui were particularly influential.<sup>23</sup> Proudhon's brand of socialism, known as mutualism, advocated for workers' self-management and the abolition of wage labour; whereas, Blanqui's approach was more revolutionary, advocating for a working-class uprising to overthrow the existing order.<sup>24</sup>

These socialist ideas were not just theoretical constructs; they were actively discussed among the working class through workers' associations and clubs, newspapers, and public meetings.<sup>25</sup> This active engagement with socialist ideas helped to politicize the working class and foster a sense of class consciousness, which was crucial in the lead-up to the Paris Commune.

Additionally, the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War and the subsequent political instability played a significant role in the establishment of the Paris Commune. The war had disastrous effects on France's economy, leading to widespread hardship among the working class.<sup>26</sup> The newly established Third Republic was seen as ineffectual and out of touch with the needs of the people, further fueling discontent.

In this context, the ideas of the Enlightenment and socialism provided a powerful alternative vision of society.<sup>27</sup> The Paris Commune, emphasizing direct democracy, workers' self-management, and social equality, was seen as a practical manifestation of these ideas. The Commune was not just a political entity, but also a social experiment—an attempt to create a society based on equality, solidarity, and mutual aid.

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<sup>19</sup> Allan Potofsky, "French Lumières and American Enlightenment during the Atlantic Revolution," *Cairn* 92, no. 2 (2002).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Henri Lefebvre, "Henri Lefebvre: The Proclamation of the Commune 26th March 1871," *Verso*, March 26, 2021, <https://www.versobooks.com/en-ca/blogs/news/5037-henri-lefebvre-the-proclamation-of-the-commune-26th-march-1871>.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Saba, "The Paris Commune: First Proletarian Dictatorship," *www.marxists.org* 3, no. 6 (March 1978), <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-5/rcp-paris-commune.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Emily Jones, "The Political Nature of the Paris Commune of 1871 and Manifestations of Marxist Ideology in the Official Publications of the Central Committee," *Graduate Dissertation*, 2018, <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6513&context=etd>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

The Paris Commune was a radical departure from the existing socio-political order. It challenged the traditional notions of authority and hierarchy and sought to create a society where power was vested in the hands of the people. The Commune's emphasis on direct democracy attempts to implement social and economic reforms, and its commitment to secularism were all deeply influenced by the Enlightenment and socialist ideals. These ideas, coupled with the socio-political upheaval caused by the Franco-Prussian War, created a fertile ground for the emergence of the Paris Commune.

## Current Situation

### The Siege of Paris (1870–1871)

The Siege of Paris, a significant episode during the Franco-Prussian War, spans from September 19, 1870 to January 28, 1871. This event was a strategic maneuver by the Prussian forces, which after having a resounding victory at the Battle of Sedan, advanced swiftly towards Paris.<sup>28</sup> The Prussian forces, under the leadership of King Wilhelm I and his Chief of Staff Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke, encountered minimal resistance and began to encircle the city, thereby initiating a siege.<sup>29</sup>

Under the governorship of General Louis Jules Trochu, Paris amassed an army of approximately 400,000 soldiers; however, half of these are untested National Guardsmen.<sup>30</sup> As the Prussian forces closed in, a French force under General Joseph Vinoy launched a counter-attack south of the city at Villeneuve Saint Georges on September 17. Despite their efforts, Vinoy's men were driven back by mass artillery fire. By September 19, the Prussians completely encircled the city and effectively began the siege.<sup>31</sup>

Inside the city, Trochu initially remained on the defensive, hoping that the Prussians would attack and allow his men to fight from within the city's defences. However, as it becomes clear that the Prussians were not going to storm the city, Trochu was forced to reconsider his plans.<sup>32</sup> He ordered several sorties to try and break the siege, but they achieved little. The Prussians, losing patience, finally began to shell the city in January 1871, firing 12,000 shells for three weeks. However, they had yet to move heavy siege guns into position, so the shelling resulted in fewer than one hundred Parisian casualties, having little impact on Parisian morale.

As the city stood on the verge of starvation, morale plummeted.<sup>33</sup> Many Parisians, especially the working classes, felt deserted by France. On January 28, 1871, the city finally capitulated. Regular troops were taken prisoner, and the city suffered the humiliation of a triumphal German march through its streets. The fall of Paris effectively ended the Franco-Prussian War, as French forces were ordered to cease fighting following the city's surrender.<sup>34</sup>

The Siege of Paris is a gruelling and devastating event with the French suffering 24,000 dead or wounded, 146,000 captured, and approximately 47,000 civilian casualties, whereas Prussian losses were around 12,000 dead and

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<sup>28</sup> Roberto Naranj, "The Siege of Paris during the Franco-Prussian War | EHISTORY," ehistory.osu.edu, 2023, <https://ehistory.osu.edu/articles/siege-paris-during-franco-prussian-war>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> John Lienhard, "No. 1132: The Siege of Paris," www.uh.edu. Engines of Our Ingenuity, 1988, <https://www.uh.edu/engines/epi1132.htm>.

<sup>31</sup> Editors of Brown University Library Center for Digital Scholarship, "Paris: Capital of the 19th Century," Brown University Library, 2011, <https://library.brown.edu/cds/paris/chronology7.html>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

wounded.<sup>35</sup> The fall of Paris marked the end of the Franco-Prussian War. For the Prussians, the war itself completed the unification of Germany and resulted in the transfer of Alsace and Lorraine to Germany. The Siege of Paris exemplified the ruthlessness of warfare and the resilience of a city under duress.

### Founding of the Third Republic

The Franco-Prussian War is a devastating conflict for France; the Second French Empire, led by Napoleon III, was ill-prepared for the war.<sup>36</sup> The war resulted in the capture of Napoleon III during the Battle of Sedan in September 1870, marking the complete collapse of the Second French Empire.<sup>37, 38</sup> The defeat against Prussia is a significant loss to France, both in terms of national pride and territorial loss.<sup>39</sup>

In the wake of the empire's fall, the Third French Republic was proclaimed on September 4, 1870.<sup>40</sup> The early days of the republic were marked by political disruptions caused by the war and its aftermath. The harsh reparations imposed by the Prussians lead to social upheaval, including the eventual establishment of the current Paris Commune, a radical socialist and revolutionary government.

The formation of the Third French Republic was not a smooth process. Initially, there were considerations to re-establish the monarchy; however, disagreements over the nature of the monarchy and the rightful heir to the throne were unable to be resolved.<sup>41</sup> As a result, the Third Republic, which was initially envisioned as a provisional government, became the permanent form of France's government.

The French Constitutional Laws of 1875 officially defined the composition of the Third Republic, though these systems were in place largely at the founding in 1870. It consists of a Chamber of Deputies and a Senate, forming the legislative branch of government.<sup>42</sup> The Third Republic is characterized by its parliamentary republic system, where the President of the Republic is the head of state and the President of the Council, or Prime Minister, is the head of government. The Prime Minister answers to both the President of the Republic and the legislature.<sup>43</sup>

### Initiating Crisis

Due to the newly established Third Republic sharing many conservative similarities with its Second Empire predecessor, the citizens of Paris, struggling from the aftermath of the Prussian siege on the city, denied the new government the right to set up the capital in its grounds. Thus, the government was subsequently moved to King Louis XVI's Palace of Versailles.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> John Swift, "Battle of Sedan | Summary," Encyclopedia Britannica, August 25, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Sedan>.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ilyas Benabdeljalil, "Napoleon III: The Second French Empire (Part II)," The Collector, May 6, 2022, <https://www.thecollector.com/napoleon-iii-second-french-empire/>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> James R. Lehning, *To Be a Citizen: The Political Culture of the Early French Third Republic*, Cornell University Press, 2001, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctv5rf1q8>.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

The previous government, especially towards the conclusion of the Franco-Prussian War and the Siege of Paris, turned to the local National Guard or fédéré instead of the French Army. Consisting of over 400,000 members, they were formed of Parisian citizens and others from surrounding areas. However, the conclusion of the war led to the disbanding of most of the National Guard.<sup>45</sup> Adolphe Thiers, who had helped Napoleon III come to power but was later exiled, was elected the President of the newly formed National Assembly of the Third Republic. His first action following the Franco-Prussian war was to abolish the army, leaving many families out of jobs.<sup>46</sup>

Following the war, military supplies, notably bronze cannons which were used in defence of the city during the siege, were left scattered across the streets. In an act of defiance, many members of the National Guard moved the cannons to the neighbourhoods of Montmartre, Belleville and Buttes-Chaumont.<sup>47</sup> As veterans of a siege, the citizens believed that the cannons were rightfully theirs to defend them from further attacks. Furthermore, it allowed for better distribution of weaponry in cases of attack.

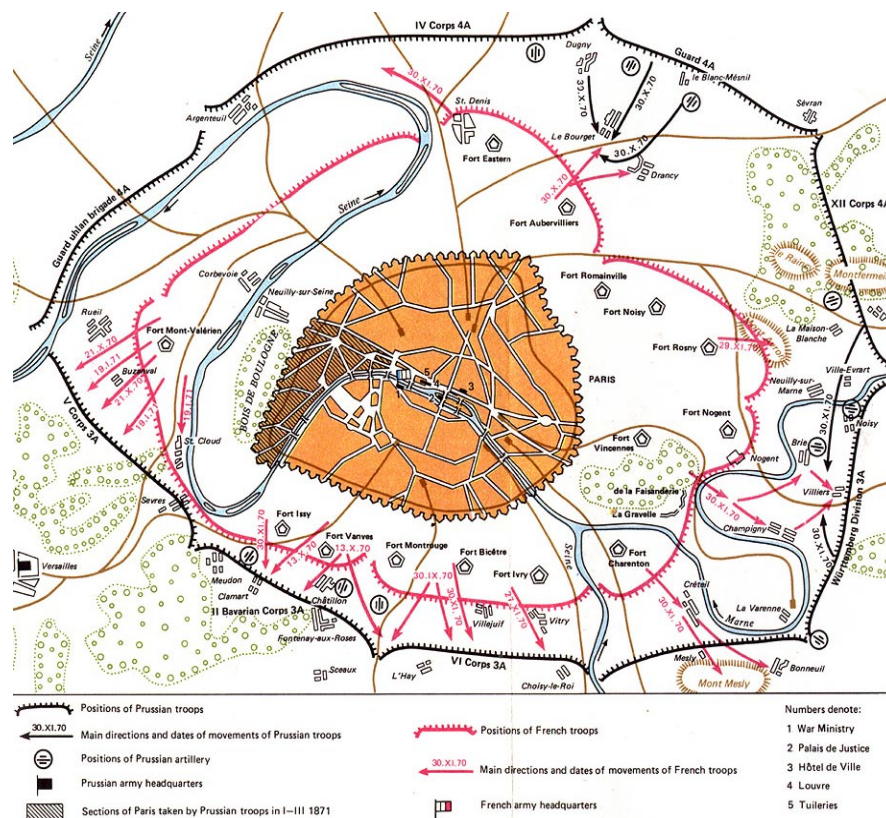


Figure 1: Map of the Battle of Montmartre, March 18, 1871.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> David A. Bell, "The Life and Afterlife of the Paris Commune," [www.thenation.com](http://www.thenation.com), November 15, 2022, <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/paris-commune/>.

<sup>46</sup> Valerie Lannon, "The Paris Commune of 1871: Why It Still Matters - Spring," [springmag.ca](http://springmag.ca), March 18, 2021, <https://springmag.ca/the-paris-commune-of-1871-why-it-still-matters>.

<sup>47</sup> Montmartre Artists' Studios, "The Paris Commune 1871: Cannon, the Red Flag and Balloons over Montmartre," Montmartre Artists' Studios, 2023, <https://montmartrefootsteps.com/the-paris-commune-and-montmartre/>.

<sup>48</sup> Mark Jacobsen, "The War of the Paris Commune, 1871," The Clausewitz, 2019, <https://clausewitz.com/readings/Jacobsen-TheWarOfTheCommune14.htm>.

On the morning of March 18, 1871, General Claude Lecomte commands troops from the French government in Versailles, to return cannons into the possessions of the Third Republic.<sup>49</sup> However, when the army approached the neighbourhood of Montmartre, they were met with angry citizens and soldiers from the National Guard commanding the cannons, unwilling to return them to the government.

Battles began and continued throughout the day, with many soldiers from Versailles switching to the side of the Parisians, unwilling to kill citizens. Casualties were limited in the skirmish, but the Parisians were victorious in defending their cannons. By afternoon, both Lecomte and General Jacques Clément-Thomas were captured and executed by the National Guard, Parisians, and deserters from Versailles. Just 10 days following the skirmish, the Paris Commune was established and headquartered at the Hôtel de Ville.<sup>50</sup> The Commune was named in remembrance of the commune which was established in Paris during the French Revolution.

The Paris Commune commands a force of 300,000 soldiers armed with Chassepot rifles, cannons, and other firearms before the establishment of the Commune.<sup>51</sup> While conscription is abolished, all able-bodied workers, regardless of their primary profession, are enrolled in the National Guard. Over 400,000 soldiers are split into 260 different regiments to defend the city's 1.6 million other civilians.<sup>52</sup> During this time, the Commune also maintains relationships with other Communes around France, most of which were less prominent, which arose during the collapse of the Second Empire and are able to contact them for aid in the case of an attack from the government in Versailles.

## Commune Commissions

The Commune is governed by the Central Committee, which is elected by universal suffrage—a system not implemented in most electoral systems in Europe.<sup>53</sup> The Central Committee is composed of delegates from each of the 20 arrondissements of Paris. Each delegate is subject to recall at any time if the citizens of their arrondissement are dissatisfied with their performance and representation.<sup>54</sup> This is a significant departure from the representative democracy model, where elected officials typically serve for a fixed term. It allows the delegate to be held responsible at all times.

The Central Committee is responsible for the overall administration of the Commune. It is divided into nine commissions, each responsible for a specific area of governance: Executive, Military, Finance, Justice, Safety, Work and Exchange, Subsistence, Public Services, and Education.<sup>55</sup> Each commission is composed of members elected from the Central Committee.

The Executive Commission is the central governing body of the Paris Commune. It is responsible for the overall administration and governance of the Commune, coordinating the activities of the other commissions, and making key decisions on policy and strategy. Moreover, the Executive Commission is tasked with implementing the decisions of the Commune's Council and ensuring the smooth operation of the Commune's various functions.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Samuel Bernstein, "The Paris Commune," *Science & Society* 5, no. 2 (1941): 117–47, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40399385>.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

The Military Commission is in charge of the defence of the Commune, organizing and overseeing the National Guard, which is the primary military force of the Commune.

The Finance Commission manages the finances of the Commune and is responsible for budgeting, taxation, and the allocation of funds.

The Justice Commission is responsible for the legal and judicial affairs of the Commune. It oversees the courts and law enforcement agencies, and is tasked with the enforcement of the Commune's laws, the administration of justice, and the protection of the rights and freedoms of the citizens.

The Safety Commission is in charge of public safety, mirroring the First French Republic's Committee on Public Safety. It coordinates the police force and other security agencies, maintaining order and preventing crime within the Commune.

The Work and Exchange Commission is responsible for labour and economic affairs, such as implementing labour laws, promoting workers' rights, and overseeing the economic activities within the Commune. The Commission ensures fair labour practices, promotes economic development, and manages the economic activities and resources of the Commune.

The Subsistence Commission is in charge of ensuring the provision of necessities to the citizens of the Commune. The Commission ensures the provision of necessities, manages the food supply, and coordinates public health and other social services.

The Public Services Commission manages the public services of the Commune such as transportation, utilities, and public works. It ensures the provision of public services, manages the city's infrastructure, and coordinates the maintenance and improvement of public facilities and utilities.

The Education Commission is responsible for the education system, overseeing schools and other educational institutions, and implementing educational policies and programs. The Commission ensures the provision of quality education.

## Portfolio Overviews

### Gustave Courbet

Gustave Courbet, a renowned French painter, is instrumental in protecting the city's artwork during the Commune's rule. Courbet is a member of the Federation of Artists—a group established during the Commune to democratize art and culture.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, he chairs the Art Commission and is responsible for the city's museums and other cultural institutions where he is also responsible for protecting artworks and art galleries from looting mobs. Courbet is extremely vigilant in utilizing art as a symbol for change in the Commune, especially in removing artworks of different past ruling governments.<sup>57</sup> Notably, he successfully proposed the dismantling of the Vendôme Column, a symbol of Napoleon's imperialism. His powers in the Commune largely include the ability to influence different museums and art galleries—some of the main entertainment avenues of

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<sup>56</sup> Rute Ferreira, "What Art Has to Do with Politics: Gustave Courbet and the Paris Commune," DailyArtMagazine.com - Art History Stories, April 16, 2018, <https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/courbet-and-the-paris-commune/>.

<sup>57</sup> The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Gustave Courbet - Political Activities," Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gustave-Courbet/Political-activities>.

the Commune. He is also able to influence the education system within the Commune, allowing for incredible influence on a younger generation of revolutionaries.

### **Louise Michel**

Louis Michel, often known as “The Red Virgin of Montmartre,” is a prominent figure of education within the Commune. A schoolteacher by profession, Michel became an influential member of the Montmartre Women’s Vigilance Committee during the siege of Paris.<sup>58</sup> Her active participation in the Commune is notable, often seen guarding or defending the barricades, or advocating for radical social reforms. Michel is deeply involved in feminist and anarchist movements, pushing for women's rights and equality. She is also a member of the National Guard under the conviction of carrying out the assassination of Adolphe Thiers in Versailles.<sup>59</sup> Her position, in many issues, aligns with Raoul Rigault and Théophile Ferré, who is her lover. Michel wields significant influence in the education system of the Commune as well as the women’s groups.

### **Jules Vallès**

Jules Vallès is an important journalist and author who used his writing to advocate for the rights of the working class and to challenge the established order. During the Paris Commune, he is elected as a member of the council and is nominated as a delegate of the Council of Public Education.<sup>60</sup> He is particularly active in media, working in the *Affiche Rouge* newspaper during this time. He also served on the initiative “Comité Central Républicain des Vingt Arrondissements,” the first call for the formation of the Commune. In the Commune’s government, he participates in the dissemination of its ideals and policies through his work for the radical newspaper *Le Cri du Peuple*, one of the most famous in the city. Vallès’ writings play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and rallying support for the Commune. Most of his power derives from his role in the newspaper, helping create especially powerful press releases to influence public opinion.

### **Léo Frankel**

Léo Frankel, a Hungarian-born labour leader, is elected to the Commune and serves as the Minister of Labor. In this capacity, he is responsible for implementing labour reforms that aimed to improve the working conditions and rights of the labour class.<sup>61</sup> One of his notable reforms included the abolition of night work in bakeries, which is a significant step towards ensuring the health and well-being of workers.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, he regulated pawn shops, which were often exploitative towards the working class by taking advantage of their poverty and need to sell favoured possessions for petty cash. Frankel's role in the Paris Commune is characterized by his commitment to workers' rights and social justice. His efforts during this period made a lasting impact on labour movements and

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<sup>58</sup> The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Louise Michel | French Revolutionary,” Encyclopedia Britannica, May 25, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Louise-Michel>.

<sup>59</sup> Alison Hird, “Louise Michel: A Leading Light and Feminist Figure in the Paris Commune,” Radio France Internationale, March 18, 2021, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20210318-louise-michel-a-leading-light-and-feminist-figure-in-the-paris-commune>.

<sup>60</sup> The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Jules Vallès | Paris Commune, Socialism, Prose Fiction | Britannica,” [www.britannica.com](https://www.britannica.com), June 6, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jules-Valles>.

<sup>61</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, “Frankel, Leo,” The Gale Group, 2008, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/frankel-leo>.

<sup>62</sup> Matthieu Boisdron, “Léo Frankel, Un Hongrois Au Cœur de La Commune de Paris,” *Le Courrier d'Europe centrale*, March 13, 2021, <https://courrierdeuropecentrale.fr/leo-frankel-un-hongrois-au-coeur-de-la-commune-de-paris/>.



set a precedent for future labour reforms. Frankel is also a friend of Karl Marx, communicating with him and Friedrich Engels during his time in the Paris Commune. Frankel has significant power in influencing worker unions.

### **Élisabeth Dmitrieff**

Élisabeth Dmitrieff, a Russian revolutionary and feminist, is a representative of Karl Marx's International Workingmen's Association, who arrived in Paris shortly after the Commune's establishment.<sup>63</sup> Dmitrieff co-founded the Women's Union for the Defence of Paris and Care of the Wounded—one of the first women's organizations in France. The union advocated for gender and wage equality, the right to divorce for women, and the right to secular and professional education for girls. Dmitrieff is instrumental in organizing women workers into cooperatives to ensure their economic independence. She also pushed for the union's recognition by the Commune and succeeded in getting financial support for the organization.<sup>64</sup> Despite the competition to her union from higher-paying industries, she focused on the creation of “cooperative workshops” where women could take control of their labour. Her influence mainly focuses on the female labour sector.

### **Charles Delescluze**

Charles Delescluze is a seasoned journalist and member of the International Workingmen's Association.<sup>65</sup> He was elected to the Paris Commune and took on the role of delegate for war. In this capacity, he is responsible for the defence of the city—a task of immense importance given the hostile political climate of France during the Commune. His powers include the ability to mobilize the entire National Guard, as well as utilize weaponry within the Commune. Delescluze's leadership is marked by his commitment to the Commune's socialist ideals and his determination to resist the French government's attempts to reclaim control of Paris. He also serves on most of the committees in the Commune, including the Executive Commission, the Commission on Public Safety, and the Commission on Foreign Affairs. Delescluze is able to dismantle or decrease the influence of opposing news sources and call for the arrest of opposing leaders under his role within Public Safety.

### **Théophile Ferré**

Théophile Ferré was elected to the Montmartre Committee of Vigilance during the Siege of Paris and later served on the Commune's Committee of Public Safety—a body given extensive powers to hunt down enemies of the Commune.<sup>66</sup> Ferré is also in charge of the internal revolutionary police force. He is often vocal about using strong measures to ensure the safety of Parisian citizens, large-scale arrests, and executions notwithstanding. Ferré's powers and responsibilities on the Commission of Public Safety granted him the ability to make radical decisions

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<sup>63</sup> Eva Wuchold, “Élisabeth Dmitrieff: A Passionate Communard,” Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Geneva, April 27, 2021, <https://rosalux-geneva.org/elisabeth-dmitrieff-a-passionate-communard/>.

<sup>64</sup> Anthony Chapman, “European Studies Blog,” European Studies. British Library, November 1, 2021, <https://blogs.bl.uk/european/2021/11/red->.

<sup>65</sup> The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Charles Delescluze | Paris Commune Leader, Journalist, Soldier | Britannica,” [www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-Delescluze](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-Delescluze), May 21, 2023.

<sup>66</sup> Le Maitron, “FERRÉ Théophile, Charles, Gilles,” Le Maitron. Paris: Maitron/Éditions de l'Atelier, April 14, 2021, <https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article59042>.



in holding any member of the Versailles government hostage to negotiate for peace with Adolphe Thiers. His values align with Raoul Rigault, as both share a similar position in the Committee of Public Safety.

### **Raoul Rigault**

Raoul Rigault, characterized by his Jacobin-style approach to Public Safety and his unrelenting hatred of religion, is a journalist and French Socialist revolutionary.<sup>67</sup> Rigault is the head of the Commune's police force, often using strict security and conducting mass arrests to enforce safety. He is responsible for freeing those imprisoned by the imperial French government, including revolutionaries, Anarchists, and Blanquists. His usage of the police force is marked by his violent anticlericalism: notably, investigating churches for evidence of sympathy with Versailles.<sup>68</sup> He shares his position with Théophile Ferré, and will similarly represent a radical use of security to enforce the Paris Commune. Rigault's powers include his command of the police, alongside influencing the general public sentiments of the commune.

### **Nathalie Lemel**

Nathalie Lemel was a participant in the Parisian labour movement and is a member of the First International Workers Association.<sup>69</sup> She is a delegate for the First International—a rare position to be held by a female. Her main contribution was in her Union of Women for the Defence of Paris and Aid to the Wounded. Lemel used her skills as a bookbinder to contribute to strikes and protests held by the union. For the Commune in particular, the union worked at the barricades and helped manage ambulance stations and canteens.<sup>70</sup> She hopes to create socialist measures that would emancipate working women from exploitation and wishes to increase the participation of females within the key industries of the Commune. Lemel holds power over female labour unions and can influence the strikes and protests that are held.

### **Paschal Grousset**

Paschal Grousset is a French politician, journalist, translator, and science fiction writer. He engages in writing pro-revolutionary articles for the weekly newspaper *La Marseillaise*, culminating in him challenging Napoleon's nephew Pierre Napoleon Bonaparte to a duel.<sup>71</sup>

Grousset was elected a member of the Executive Commission and serves as the Delegate for External Affairs. In this role, he is responsible for managing the Commune's relations with external entities, including working with foreign nations and other Communes within France. Grousset's role is imperative and allows for the Commune to expand its position as a center of socialism. He holds the power to communicate and interact with potential external allies.

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<sup>67</sup> Maxime Vuillaume, and Mitchell Abidor, "The Commune and the French Revolution by Maxime Vuillaume," [www.marxists.org](https://www.marxists.org/history/france/paris-commune/vuillaume/commune-revolution.htm), 2011, <https://www.marxists.org/history/france/paris-commune/vuillaume/commune-revolution.htm>.

<sup>68</sup> The New York Times, "RAOUL RIGAUULT, COMMUNIST," *The New York Times*, March 16, 1884, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1884/03/16/archives/raoul-rigault-communist.html>.

<sup>69</sup> Descaves, Lucien, "Remembering Nathalie Lemel – Revolutionary Communeard," Robert Graham's Anarchism Weblog, January 6, 2018. <https://robertgraham.wordpress.com/2018/01/06/remembering-nathalie-lemel-revolutionary-communeard/>.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

## Édouard Vaillant

Édouard Vaillant was elected to the Commune and served on the Committee for Education. Vaillant is instrumental in implementing educational reforms which aim to democratize education and make it accessible to all.<sup>72</sup> He is a strong advocate for non-religious education and works tirelessly to establish free and compulsory education in Paris. Vaillant also plays a key role in the Commune's efforts to establish a secular state, separating the Church from the State.<sup>73</sup> His influence extended to the Commission of Services and Public Works, where he advocates for the rights of workers. He maintains a position of increasing education, especially public schools to all, including girls. He has tremendous power over the education system.

## Paul Lafargue

Paul Lafargue, a French revolutionary socialist, is a member of the International Workingmen's Association and was elected to the Executive Committee of the Commune.<sup>74</sup> Lafargue is a strong advocate for workers' rights and played a key role in labour reforms. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Commission on Labor and Exchange, where he works to improve the working conditions and rights of the labour class. As the son-in-law of Karl Marx, Lafargue translated the Communist Manifesto into French, becoming a key leading figure in French Socialism.<sup>75</sup> Lafargue maintains an anarchist stance but focuses on spreading socialism throughout the Paris Commune and the rest of France.

## Jules Andrieu

Jules Louis Andrieu was elected to the Executive Commission and serves as the delegate for the Commission of Public Works.<sup>76</sup> He contributed heavily in his role as a writer, working on "La Tribune Ouvrière," a publication by the International Workers' Association.

Moreover, Andrieu was appointed head of personnel at the Hôtel de Ville in Paris. His responsibilities in the Commune include managing personnel, overseeing public services, and implementing decrees. He is opposed to the radical perspective posed by others in enacting rapid change, instead opting to focus on economics and increasing equality socially. Andrieu is less inclined to violence, choosing instead to negotiate for the abolition of private property and establishing unions.

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<sup>72</sup> Justinien Raymond, "VAILLANT Édouard," *Le Maitron*. Paris: Maitron/Editions de l'Atelier, November 10, 2022, <https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article24386>.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Leslie Derfle, "Paul Lafargue and the Beginnings of Marxism in France," *Biography* 14, no. 1 (1991): 25–38, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23539906>.

<sup>75</sup> Sam Gordon, "Paul Lafargue," [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org), 1971, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/backiss/vol1/no1/lafargue.html>.

<sup>76</sup> Éric Fournier and Robert Tombs, "Notes Pour Servir à l'Histoire de La Commune de Paris (Jules Andrieu) // Les Éditions Libertia," [www.editionslibertalia.com](http://www.editionslibertalia.com), February 18, 2016, <https://www.editionslibertalia.com/catalogue/ceux-d-en-bas/notes-pour-servir-a-l-histoire-de-la-commune-de-paris>.

## Victor Clément

Victor Clément was elected to the Council of the Commune, serving on the Finance Commission. Previously a dyer and married to a tailor, Clément understands the importance of justice, highlighted in his opposition to the Committee of Public Safety, dominated by Jacobin-minded peoples. He is firmly opposed to extreme measures, specifically those taken by policing forces. Clément is also very interested in the system of prisons within the Paris Commune, working with the Justice Commission on establishing increasingly equal trials, and decreasing extrajudicial arrests.<sup>77</sup> He wields significant power in financing internal products as well as appropriating the funds of the state and collecting taxes as a result of his position in managing the finances for the commune. Clément will also be a vocal advocate against extreme societal measures taken.

## Félix Pyat

Félix Pyat is a French journalist and dramatist, who serves as a delegate for the Commission of Public Safety. Having originally studied law, Pyat abandoned the practice to take on radical literature, waging a literary war against Romanticism for being “reactionary.”<sup>78</sup> Similarly, he serves as a Montagnard deputy and is involved in numerous insurrections, writing seditious articles. Pyat is interested in the radical restructuring of French society to align with socialist ideals, and is often unwilling to compromise on his radical aspirations. He is actively involved in the decision-making processes of the Commune and is a key figure in shaping its policies.<sup>79</sup> His influence extends to various aspects of the Commune's governance, from its social policies to its military strategies. Pyat has significant authority within the judicial system, from which he projects his radical socialist principles.

## Emile Victor Duval

Émile Victor Duval is a French socialist and a staunch advocate of Blanquism. He is an active member of the Federal Council of the Paris sections of the First International, where he served as secretary and later President of the Union of Founders.<sup>80</sup> Within the Commune, Duval serves on the Executive and Public Safety Commissions, holding the role of military commandant and also a delegate at the prefecture of police. He is also one of the three commanders of the armed National Guard. His responsibilities are immense, overseeing the defence of the city and maintaining public order during a period of intense political upheaval.<sup>81</sup> Duval's leadership is characterized by his commitment to the socialist ideals of the Commune and his unwavering resistance against the Versailles forces.

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<sup>77</sup> Le Maitron, “ANDRIEU Jules, Louis,” Le Maitron. Paris: Maitron/Editions de l'Atelier, October 22, 2022, <https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article51253>.

<sup>78</sup> Lowell L. Blaisdell, “Félix Pyat, the ‘Evil Genius’ of the Commune of Paris,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 132, no. 4 (1988): 330–70, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/986959>.

<sup>79</sup> The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Félix Pyat | Paris Commune, Radical Republican & Socialist | Britannica,” Encyclopedia Britannica, September 30, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Felix-Pyat>.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Le Maitron. “Duval Émile, Victor.” Le Maitron. Paris: Maitron/Editions de l'Atelier, December 26, 2020. <https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article58558>.

## Discussion Questions

1. How is the Commune able to secure its freedom from the government of the Third Republic? If a peace settlement is established, how is the Commune able to maintain its independence from annexation by the Third Republic in the future? What territorial or sovereign efforts will the Commune need to make?
2. How is the Commune able to further its socialist principles within society? How can the Commune enforce fairness across all of its citizens, creating better labour opportunities and allowing for improved working conditions? What role does the Commune have in increasing gender equality?
3. How is the Commune able to extend its socialist principles outside of the Commune? What role does the Commune have in working alongside regional Communes across France? What objectives can the Paris Commune target to begin Socialist revolutions across Europe?
4. What is the role of government in the Paris Commune? To what extent should the commissions have power over people's lives? Are some of the commissions established to oppress and limit freedoms?
5. To what extent can the differing political and social perspectives in the Commune be reconciled? Will Paris remain forever a melting pot of culturally tumultuous ideas?

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