

CELEBRATING OUR URBAN HERITAGE

CITIES AND INSURRECTIONS

Eric J. Hobsbawm

Whatever else a city may be, it is at the same time a place inhabited by a concentration of poor people and, in most cases, the locus of political power which affects their lives. Historically, one of the things city populations have done about this is to demonstrate, make riots or insurrections, or otherwise exert direct pressure on the authorities who happen to operate within their range. It does not much matter to the ordinary townsman that city power is sometimes only local, whereas at other times it may also be regional, national, or even global. However, it does affect the calculations both of the authorities and of political movements designed to overthrow governments, whether or not the cities are capitals (or what amounts to the same thing, independent city-states) or the headquarters of giant national or international corporations, for if they are, urban riots and insurrections can obviously have much wider implications than if the city authority is purely local.

The subject of this article is how the structure of cities has affected popular movements of this sort, and conversely, what effect the fear of such movements has had on urban structure. The first point is of much more general significance than the second. Popular riot, insurrection, or demonstration is an almost universal urban phenomenon, and as we now know, it occurs even today in the affluent megalopolis of the developed world. On the other hand the fear of such riot is intermittent. It may be taken for granted as a fact of urban existence, as in most pre-industrial cities, or as the kind of unrest which periodically flares up and subsides without producing any major effect on the structure of power. It may be underestimated, because there have not been any riots or insurrections for a long time, or because there are institutional alternatives to them, such as systems of local government by popular election. There are, after all, few continuously riotous cities. Even Palermo, which probably holds the European record with 12 insurrections between 1512 and 1866, has had very long periods when its populace was relatively quiet. On the other hand, once the authorities decide to alter the urban structure because of political nervousness, the results are likely to be substantial and lasting, like the boulevards of Paris.

The effectiveness of riot or insurrection depends on three aspects of urban structure: how easily the poor can be mobilized, how vulnerable the centers of authority are to them, and how easily they may be suppressed. These are determined partly by sociological, partly by urbanistic, partly by technological factors, though the three cannot always be kept apart. For instance, experience shows that among forms of urban transport, tramways, whether in Calcutta or Barcelona, are unusually convenient for rioters; partly because the raising of fares, which tends to affect all the poor simultaneously, is a very natural precipitant of trouble, partly because these large and track-bound vehicles, when burned or overturned, can block streets and disrupt traffic very easily. Buses do not seem to have played anything like as important a part in riots, underground railways appear to be entirely irrelevant to them (except for transporting rioters) and automobiles can at best be used as improvised road blocks or barricades, and, to judge by modern experience in Paris, not very effective ones. Here the difference is purely technological.

On the other hand, universities in the center of cities are evidently more dangerous centers of potential riot than universities on the outskirts of towns or behind some green belt, a fact which is well known to Latin American governments. Concentrations of the poor are more dangerous when they occur in or near city centers, like the 20th-century ethnic ghettos in many North American cities, than when they occur in some relatively remote suburb, as in 19th-century Vienna. Here the difference is urbanistic and depends on the size of the city and the pattern of functional specialization within it. However, a center of potential student unrest on the outskirts of

town, like Nanterre in Paris, is nevertheless far more likely to create trouble in the central city than the Algerian shanty towns in the same suburb, because students are more mobile and their social universe is more metropolitan than immigrant laborers. Here the difference is primarily sociological.

Suppose, then, we construct the ideal city for riot and insurrection. What will it be like? It ought to be densely populated and not too large in area. Essentially it should still be possible to traverse it on foot, though greater experience of rioting in fully motorized societies might modify this judgment. It should perhaps not be divided by a large river, not only because bridges are easily held by the police, but also because it is a familiar fact of geography or social psychology that the two banks of a river look away from each other, as anyone living in south London or on the Paris left bank can verify.

Its poor ought to be relatively homogenous socially or racially, though of course we must remember that in pre-industrial cities or in the giant areas of under-employment in the developing world today, what at first sight looks like a very heterogeneous population may have a considerable unity, as witness such familiar terms in history as 'the laboring poor', 'le menu peuple', or 'the mob'. It ought to be centripetal, that is to say, its various parts ought to be naturally oriented towards the central institutions of the city, the more centralized the better. The medieval city republic that was designed on a system of flows towards and away from the main assembly space, which might also be the main ritual center (cathedral), the main market, and the location of the government, was ideally suited to insurrection for this reason. The pattern of functional specialization and residential segregation ought to be fairly tight. Thus the pre-industrial pattern of suburbs, which was based on the exclusion from a sharply defined city of various undesirables — often necessary to city life — such as non-citizen immigrants, outcast occupations or groups, did not greatly disrupt the cohesion of the urban complex: Triana was entangled with Seville, as Shoreditch was with the City of London.

On the other hand the 19th-century pattern of suburbs, which surrounded an urban core with middle-class residential suburbs and industrial quarters, generally developing at opposite ends of town from one another, affects urban cohesion very substantially. 'East End' and 'West End' are both physically and spiritually remote from each other. Those who live west of the Concorde in Paris belong to a different world from those who live east of the Republique. To go a little farther out, the famous 'red belt' of working-class suburbs which surround Paris was politically significant, but had no discernible insurrectionary importance. It simply did not belong to Paris any longer, nor indeed did it form a whole, except for geographers.^[1]

All these are considerations affecting the mobilization of the city poor, but not their political effectiveness. This naturally depends on the ease with which rioters and insurrectionaries can get close to the authorities, and how easily they can be dispersed. In the ideal insurrectionary city the authorities — the rich, the aristocracy, the government, or local administration — will therefore be as intermingled with the central concentration of the poor as possible. The French king will reside in the Palais Royal or Louvre and not at Versailles, the Austrian emperor in the Hofburg and not at Schoenbrunn. Preferably the authorities will be vulnerable. Rulers who brood over a hostile city from some isolated stronghold, like the fortress-prison of Montjuich over Barcelona, may intensify popular hostility, but are technically designed to withstand it. After all, the Bastille could almost certainly have held out if anyone in July 1789 had really thought that it would be attacked. Civic authorities are of course vulnerable almost by definition, since their political success depends on the belief that they represent the citizens and not some outside government or its agents. Hence perhaps the classical French tradition by which insurrectionaries make for the city hall rather than the royal or imperial palace and, as in 1848 and 1871, proclaim the provisional government there.

Local authorities therefore create relatively few problems for insurrectionaries (at least until they begin to practice urban planning). Of course, city development may shift the town hall from a central to a rather more remote location: nowadays it is a long way from the outer neighborhoods

of Brooklyn to New York's City Hall. On the other hand in capital cities the presence of governments, which tends to make riots effective, is offset by the special characteristics of towns in which princes or other self-important rulers are resident, and which have a built-in counter-insurgent bias. This arises both from the needs of state public relations and, perhaps to a lesser extent, of security.

Broadly speaking, in a civic town the role of the inhabitants in public activities is that of participants, in princely or government towns, of an admiring and applauding audience. The wide straight processional ways with their vistas of palace, cathedral, or government building, the vast square in front of the official facade, preferably with a suitable balcony from which the multitudes may be blessed or addressed, perhaps the parade ground or arena: these make up the ceremonial furniture of an imperial city. Since the Renaissance, major western capitals and residences have been constructed or modified accordingly. The greater the desire of the ruler to impress or the greater his *folie de grandeur*, the wider, straighter, more symmetrical his preferred layout. Few less suitable locations for spontaneous riot can be imagined than New Delhi, Washington, DC, Saint Petersburg, or for that matter, the Mall and Buckingham Palace in London. It is not merely the division between a popular east and middle-class and official west in Paris which has made the Champs Elysees the place where the official and military parade is held on July 14, whereas the unofficial mass demonstration belongs to the triangle Bastille-Republique-Nation.

Such ceremonial sites imply a certain separation between rulers and subjects, a confrontation between a remote and awful majesty and pomp on one side, and an applauding public on the other. It is the urban equivalent of the picture-frame stage; or better still, the opera, that characteristic invention of western absolute monarchy. Fortunately, for potential rioters, this is or was not the only relationship between rulers and subjects in capital cities. Often, indeed, it was the capital city itself which demonstrated the ruler's greatness, while its inhabitants, including the poorest, enjoyed a modest share of the benefits of its majesty. Rulers and ruled lived in a sort of symbiosis. In such circumstances the great ceremonial routes led through the middle of the towns as in Edinburgh or Prague. Palaces had no need to cut themselves off from slums. The Vienna Hofburg, which presents a wide ceremonial space to the outside world, including the Viennese suburbs, has barely a yard or two of urban street or square between it and the older Inner City, to which it visibly belongs.

This kind of town, combining as it did the patterns of civic and princely cities, was a standing invitation to riot, for here palaces and town houses of great nobles, markets, cathedrals, public squares, and slums were intermingled, the rulers at the mercy of the mob. In time of trouble they could withdraw into their country residences, but that was all. Their only safeguard was to mobilize the respectable poor against the unrespectable after a successful insurrection, e.g. the artisans guilds against the 'mob', or the National Guard against the propertyless. Their one comfort was the knowledge that uncontrolled riot and insurrection rarely lasted long, and were even more rarely directed against the structure of established wealth and power. Still this was a substantial comfort. The King of Naples or the Duchess of Parma, not to mention the Pope, knew that if their subjects rioted, it was because they were unduly hungry and as a reminder to prince and nobility to do their duty, i.e. to provide enough food at fair prices on the market, enough jobs, handouts, and public entertainment for their excessively modest needs. Their loyalty and piety scarcely wavered, and indeed when they made genuine revolutions (as in Naples in 1799) they were more likely to be in defense of Church and King against foreigners and the godless middle classes.

Hence the crucial importance in the history of urban public order, of the French Revolution of 1789-99, which established the modern equation between insurrection and social revolution. Any government naturally prefers to avoid riot and insurrection, as it prefers to keep the murder rate down, but in the absence of genuine revolutionary danger the authorities are not likely to lose their cool about it. Eighteenth-century England was a notoriously riotous nation, with a notoriously

sketchy apparatus for maintaining public order. Not only smaller cities like Liverpool and Newcastle, but large parts of London itself might be in the hands of the riotous populace for days on end. Since nothing was at stake in such disorders except a certain amount of property, which a wealthy country could well afford to replace, the general view among the upper classes was unconcerned, and even satisfied. Whig noblemen took pride in the state of liberty which deprived potential tyrants of the troops with which to suppress their subjects and the police with which to harry them. It was not until the French Revolution that a taste for multiplying barracks in towns developed, and not until the Radicals and Chartists of the first half of the 19th century that the virtues of a police force outweighed those of English freedom. (Since grass-roots democracy could not always be relied on, the Metropolitan Police was put directly under the Home Office in the national government, where it still remains.)

Indeed, three main administrative methods of countering riot and insurrection suggested themselves: systematic arrangements for deploying troops, the development of police forces (which barely existed in the modern form before the 19th century), and the rebuilding of cities in such ways as to minimize the chances of revolt. The first two of these had no major influence on the actual shape and structure of cities, though a study of the building and location of urban barracks in the 19th century might provide some interesting results, and so might a study of the distribution of police stations in urban neighborhoods. The third affected the townscape very fundamentally, as in Paris and Vienna, cities in which it is known that the needs of counterinsurgency influenced urban reconstruction after the 1848 revolutions. In Paris the main military aim of this reconstruction seems to have been to open wide and straight boulevards along which artillery could fire, and troops advance, while at the same time — presumably — breaking up the main concentrations of potential insurgents in the popular quarters. In Vienna the reconstruction took the form mainly of two wide concentric ring roads, the inner ring (broadened by a belt of open spaces, parks, and widely spaced public buildings) isolated the old city and palace from the (mainly middle-class) inner suburbs, the outer ring isolating both from the (increasingly working-class) outer suburbs.

Such reconstructions may or may not have made military sense. We do not know, since the kind of revolutions they were intended to dominate virtually died out in western Europe after 1848. (Still, it is a fact that the main centers of popular resistance and barricade fighting in the Paris Commune of 1871, Montmartre-northeast Paris and the Left Bank, were isolated from each other and the rest of the town.) However, they certainly affected the calculations of potential insurrectionaries. In the socialist discussions of the 1880s the consensus of the military experts among revolutionaries, led by Frederick Engels, was that the old type of uprising now stood little chance, though there was some argument among them about the value of new technological devices such as the then rapidly developing high explosives like dynamite. At all events, barricades which had dominated insurrectionary tactics from 1830 to 1871 (they had not been seriously used in the great French Revolution of 1789-99), were now less favored. Conversely, bombs of one kind or another became the favorite device of revolutionaries, though not marxist ones, and not for genuinely insurrectionary purposes.

Urban reconstruction, however, had another and probably unintended effect on potential rebellions, for the new and wide avenues provided an ideal location for what became an increasingly important aspect of popular movements, the mass demonstration, or rather procession. The more systematic these rings and cartwheels of boulevards, the more effectively isolated these were from the surrounding inhabited area, the easier it became to turn such assemblies into ritual marches rather than preliminaries to riot. London, which lacked them, has always had difficulty in avoiding incidental trouble during the concentration, or more usually the dispersal, of mass meetings held in Trafalgar Square. It is too near sensitive spots like Downing Street, or symbols of wealth and power like the Pall Mall clubs, whose windows the unemployed demonstrators smashed in the 1880s.

One can, of course, make too much of such primarily military factors in urban renewal. In any case they cannot be sharply distinguished from other changes in the 19th- and 20th-century city which sharply diminished its riot potential. Three of them are particularly relevant.

The first is sheer size, which reduces the city to an administrative abstraction, and a conglomerate of separate communities or districts. It became simply too big to riot as a unit. London, which until the 21st century still lacked so obvious a symbol of civic unity as the figure of a mayor, is an excellent example. It ceased to be a riotous city roughly between the time it grew from 1 million to 2 million inhabitants, i.e. in the first half of the 19th century. London Chartism, for instance, barely existed as a genuinely metropolitan phenomenon for more than a day or two on end. Its real strength lay in the 'localities' in which it was organized, i.e. in communities and neighborhoods like Lambeth, Woolwich, or Marylebone, whose relations with each other were at the most loosely federal. Similarly, the radicals and activists of the late 19th century were essentially locally based. Their most characteristic organization was the Metropolitan Radical Federation, essentially an alliance of working men's clubs of purely local importance, in such neighborhoods as had a tradition of radicalism — Chelsea, Hackney, Clerkenwell, Woolwich. The familiar London tendency to build low, and therefore to sprawl, made distances between such centers of trouble too great for the spontaneous propagation of riots. How much contact would Battersea or Chelsea (then still a working-class area electing left-wing MPs) have with the turbulent East End of the 1889 dock striker? How much contact, for that matter, would there be between Whitechapel and Canning Town? In the nature of things the shapeless built-up areas which grew either out of the expansion of a big city or the merging of larger and smaller growing communities, and for which artificial names have had to be invented ('conurbation', 'Greater' London, Berlin, or Tokyo) were not towns in the old sense, even when administratively unified from time to time.

The second is the growing pattern of functional segregation in the 19th- and 20th-century city, that is to say, on the one hand, the development of specialized industrial, business, government, and other centers or open spaces, on the other, the geographical separation of classes. Here again London was the pioneer, being a combination of three separate units — the government center of Westminster, the merchant city of London, and the popular Southwark across the river. Up to a point the growth of this composite metropolis encouraged potential rioters. The northern and eastern edges of the City of London and Southwark where the merchant community bordered on districts of workers, artisans, and the port — all in their way equally disposed to riot, like the Spitalfield weavers or the Clerkenwell radicals — formed natural flash-points. These were the areas where several of the great 18th-century riots broke out. Westminster had its own population of artisans and miscellaneous poor, whom the proximity of king and Parliament and the accident of an unusually democratic franchise in this constituency, turned into a formidable pressure group for several decades of the late 18th and 19th centuries. The area between the City and Westminster, which was filled by an unusually dense accumulation of slums, inhabited by laborers, immigrants, and the socially marginal (Drury Lane, Covent Garden, St. Giles, Holborn), added to the ebullience of metropolitan public life.

However, as time went on the pattern simplified itself. The 19th-century City ceased to be residential, and became increasingly a pure business district, while the port moved downstream, the city middle and lower-middle classes into more or less remote suburbs, leaving the East End an increasingly homogeneous zone of the poor. The northern and western borders of Westminster became increasingly upper- and middle-class settlements largely designed as such by landowners and speculative builders, thus pressing the centers of artisans, laborers, and others inclined to radicalism and riot (Chelsea, Notting Hill, Paddington, Marylebone) on to a periphery increasingly remote from the rest of radical London. The slums between the two cities survived longest but by the early 20th century they had also been broken into small patches by the urban renewal which has given London some of its gloomiest thoroughfares (Shaftesbury Avenue, Roseberry Avenue) as well as some of its most pompous ones (Kingsway, Aldwych), and an impressive accumulation of barrack-like tenements purporting to increase the happiness

of the Drury Lane and Saffron Hill proletariat. Covent Garden and Soho (which elected communist local councillors in 1945) are perhaps the last relic of old-fashioned metropolitan turbulence in the center of the town. By the late 19th century the potentially riotous London had already been broken up into peripheral segments of varying size (the huge and amorphous East End being the largest), surrounding a non-residential City and West End and a solid block of middle-class districts, and surrounded in turn by middle- and lower-middle-class outer suburbs.

Such patterns of segregation developed in most large and growing western cities from the early 19th century, though the parts of their historic centers which were not transformed into business or institutional districts, sometimes retained traces of their old structure, which may still be observed in the red-light quarters, as in Amsterdam. Twentieth-century working-class rehousing and planning for motor transport further disintegrated the city as a potential riot center. (The 19th-century planning for railways had, if anything, the opposite effect, often creating socially mixed and marginal quarters around the new terminals.) The recent tendency to shift major urban services such as central markets from the centers to the outskirts of cities will no doubt disintegrate it further.

Is the urban riot and insurrection therefore doomed to disappear? Evidently not, for we have in recent years seen a marked resurgence of this phenomenon in some of the most modern cities, though also a decline in some of the more traditional centers of such activities. The reasons are mainly social and political, but it may be worth looking briefly at the characteristics of modern urbanism which encourage it.

Modern mass transportation is one. Motor transport has so far contributed chiefly to the mobilization of that normally un-riotous group, the middle class, though such devices as the motorized demonstration (Frenchmen and Algerians still remember the massed horns of reaction hooting *Al-ge-rie francaise*) and that natural device of sabotage and passion, the traffic jam. However, cars have been used by activists in North American riots, and disrupt police action when on the move, while forming temporary barricades when stationary. Moreover, motor transport distributes the news of riots beyond the immediate area affected since both private cars and buses have to be extensively re-routed.

Public transport, and especially underground railways, which are once again being built in several big cities on a large scale, is more directly relevant. There is no better means of transport for moving large numbers of potential rioters rapidly over long distances than trains running at frequent intervals. This is one reason why the West Berlin students have been a rather effective body of rioters: the underground links the Free University set among the remote and spectacularly middle-class villas and gardens of Dahlem, with the town center.

More important than transport are two other factors: the increase in the number of buildings worth rioting against or occupying, and the development in their vicinity of accumulations of potential rioters. For while it is true that the headquarters of central and municipal government are increasingly remote from the riotous quarters, and the rich or noble rarely live in palaces in the town centers (apartments are both less vulnerable and more anonymous), sensitive institutions of other kinds have multiplied. There are the communications centers (telegraph, telephone, radio, television). The least experienced organizer of a military coup or insurrection knows all about their importance. There are the gigantic newspaper offices, fortunately so often concentrated in the older city centers, and providing admirable incidental material for barricades or cover against fire in the form of delivery trucks, newsprint, and packages of papers. They were used for street-fighting purposes as long ago as 1919 in Berlin, though not very much since. There are, as we all know now, the universities. Though the general tendency to move these out of city centers has diminished their riot potential somewhat, there are enough academic precincts left in the middle of big towns to satisfy the activists. Besides, the explosion of higher education has filled the average university to bursting point with thousands, or even tens of thousands, of marchers or fighters. There are, above all, the banks and large corporations, symbols and reality of the power

structure, and increasingly concentrated in those massifs of plate glass and concrete by which the traveler recognizes the centers of a proper 21st-century city.

Theoretically these should be individually as much the object of attack by rioters as city halls or capitols, for IBM, Shell, or General Motors carry at least as much weight as most governments. Banks have long been aware of their vulnerability, and in some Latin countries — Spain is a good example — their combination of symbolic architectural opulence and heavy fortification provides the nearest thing to those town-citadels in which feudal and feuding noblemen barricaded themselves in the middle ages. To see them under heavy police guard in times of tension is an instructive experience, though, in fact, the only champions of direct action who have been systematically attracted by them are unpolitical robbers and revolutionary 'expropriators'. But if we except such politically and economically negligible symbols of the American way of life as Hilton hotels, and the occasional object of specialized hostility such as Dow Chemical, riots have rarely aimed directly at any of the buildings of large corporations. Nor are they very vulnerable. It would take more than a few broken plate-glass windows or even the occupation of a few acres of office space, to disrupt the smooth operations of a modern oil company.

On the other hand, collectively 'downtown' is vulnerable. The disruption of traffic, the closing of banks, the office staffs who cannot or will not turn up for work, the businessmen marooned in hotels with overloaded switchboards, or who cannot reach their destinations: all these can interfere very seriously with the activities of a city. Indeed, this came close to happening during the 1967 riots in Detroit. What is more, in cities developing on the North American pattern it is not unlikely to happen, sooner or later. For it is well known that the central areas of town, and their immediate surroundings, are being filled with the minority poor as the comfortable whites move out. The ghettos lap round the city centers like dark and turbulent seas. It is this concentration of the most discontented and turbulent in the neighborhood of a relatively few unusually sensitive urban centers which gives the militants of a smallish minority the political importance which black riots would certainly not have if the 10 or 15% of the US population who are African-Americans were more evenly distributed throughout the whole of that vast and complex country.

Still, even this revival of rioting in western cities is comparatively modest. An intelligent and cynical police chief would probably regard all the troubles in western cities during recent years as minor disturbances, magnified by the hesitation or incompetence of the authorities and the effect of excessive publicity. With the exception of the Latin Quarter riots of May 1968 in Paris, none of them looked as though they could, or were intended to, shake governments. Anyone who wishes to judge what a genuine old-style insurrection of the urban poor, or a serious armed rising, is and can achieve, must still go to the cities of the developing world: to Naples which rose against the Germans in 1943, to the Algerian Casbah in 1956 (excellent movies have been made about both these insurrections), to Bogota in 1948, perhaps to Caracas, certainly to Santo Domingo in 1965.

The effectiveness of recent western city riots is due not so much to the actual activities of the rioters, as to their political context. In the ghettos of the United States they have demonstrated that black people are no longer prepared to accept their fate passively, and in doing so they have doubtless accelerated the development of black political consciousness and white fear; but they have never looked like a serious immediate threat to even the local power structure. In Paris they demonstrated the instability of an apparently firm and monolithic regime. (The actual fighting capacity of the insurrectionaries was never in fact tested, though their heroism is not in question: no more than two or three people were killed, and those almost certainly by accident.) Elsewhere the demonstrations and riots of students, though very effective inside the universities, have been little more than a routine police problem outside them.

But this, of course may be true of all urban riots, which is why the study of their relation to different types of towns is a comparatively unimportant exercise. Georgian Dublin does not lend itself easily to insurrection, and its population, which does, has not shown a great inclination to initiate or even to participate in uprisings. The Easter Rising took place there because it was a

capital city, where the major national decisions are supposed to be made, and though it failed fairly quickly, it played an important part in the winning of Irish independence, because the nature of the Irish situation in 1917-21 allowed it to. Saint Petersburg, built from scratch on a gigantic and geometrical plan, is singularly ill-suited to barricades or street fighting, but the Russian revolution began and succeeded there. Conversely, the proverbial turbulence of Barcelona, the older parts of which are almost ideally suited to riot, rarely even looked like producing revolution. Catalan anarchism, with all its bomb throwers, pistoleros, and enthusiasm for direct action, was until 1936 never more than a normal problem of public order to the authorities, so modest that the historian is amazed to find how few policemen were actually supposed (rather inefficiently) to ensure its protection.

Revolutions arise out of political situations, not because some cities are structurally suited to insurrection. Still, an urban riot or spontaneous uprising may be the starter which sets the engine of revolution going. That starter is more likely to function in cities which encourage or facilitate insurrection. A friend of mine, who happened to have commanded the 1944 insurrection against the Germans in the Latin Quarter of Paris, walked through the area on the morning after the Night of the Barricades in 1968, touched and moved to see that young adults who had not been born in 1944 had built several of their barricades in the same places as then. Or, the historian might add, the same places that had seen barricades in 1830, 1848, and 1871. It is not every city that lends itself so naturally to this exercise, or where, consequently, each generation of rebels remembers or rediscovers the battlefields of its predecessors. Thus in May 1968 the most serious confrontation occurred across the barricades of the Rue Gay Lussac and behind the Rue Soufflot. Almost a century earlier, in the Commune of 1871, the heroic Raoul Rigault who commanded the barricades in that very area, was taken — in the same month of May — and killed by the Versailles. Not every city is like Paris. Its peculiarity may no longer be enough to revolutionize France, but the tradition and the environment are still strong enough to precipitate the nearest thing to a revolution in a developed western country.

^[i] How far such working-class suburbs can be separated from the central city area and still remain a direct factor in insurrections is an interesting question. Sans in Barcelona, the great bastion of anarchism, played no important part in the revolution of 1936, while Floridsdorf in Vienna, an equally solid bastion of socialism, could do little more than hold out in isolation when the rest of the city's insurrections had already been defeated in 1934.

Eric J. Hobsbawm is Professor Emeritus of Economic and Social History at Birkbeck College in London, UK, and a founding member of the Board of Directors of Global Urban Development. He is the author of many books, including his recently published autobiography, Interesting Times, and his highly acclaimed four-volume history of the world from 1789 to 1991: The Age of Revolution, The Age of Capital, The Age of Empire, and The Age of Extremes. Dr. Hobsbawm's article is an adaptation of a chapter that was originally published in his book Revolutionaries (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973), and is reprinted with the permission of the author.